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Caseworkers' Perspectives on the Refugee Resettlement Process

I first began this research study through an internship at a Georgia Refugee Services, a refugee resettlement agency in Atlanta. After several weeks of shadowing other caseworkers, I was given the responsibility of accompanying a client on an appointment alone. This first solo endeavor was to take a client named Olivier, a refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to a medical appointment. I leisured my way into the clients' new residence careful to avoid any cavernous potholes. After quickly Google searching some Swahili greetings, I ascended the stairs to the second story apartment. An initial knock yielded no immediate response. I waited a minute and followed it up with another round of thumps. This time, I heard the stirrings of young children. Finally, the door pried open, and a draft of warm, clammy air eagerly greeted me. The door had swung fully undone by the time I noticed a small, unclothed child teetering below me. "Hello, jambo," I managed to squeak out, having forgotten the rest of my brief Swahili lesson. An older boy sitting on the couch, about nine years old, responded in English that he would go wake his father. The boy returned, and a man followed behind him. We exchanged names, and I told him that I was from GRS (Georgia Refugee Services) and here to take him to the doctor. "Ah, GRS," Olivier confirmed in recognition. At the mention of Thomas and Frederick, two social workers he would know, his eyes widened, and his head nodded. He probed the room as if searching for something and signaled a phone to his ear using his hand and said, "Frederick." Understanding his gesture, I called Frederick, a Swahili-speaking caseworker

at GRS, who promptly re-explained the plan. Finally, Olivier and I left his residence and lackadaisically arrived at the appointment twenty minutes late. Upon arrival, I was promptly handed a bulky clipboard of repetitive health forms to fill out on behalf of the client. The receptionist alerted me that the client's Medicaid was inactive, so I had to call the insurance provider to advocate on behalf of the client which revealed to be the most significant obstacle yet. I continuously kept getting dispatched and reconnected to someone who could "better help" Oliver and me. When we finally found someone who could help us, the insurance agent, understandably, demanded that the client speak for himself. Unable to speak English, the agent called a Swahili interpreter and merged all of our phone calls. With the speakerphone on maximum volume in a crowded waiting room, the insurance agent rattled off a plethora of questions while the interpreter tried to keep up. After having the agent and interpreter threaten to hang up several times, Olivier and I finally got everything settled. I trudged my way up to the receptionist, and, with a hefty exhale, handed her the rest of the paperwork, and at only an hour and a half late.

Refugees fleeing the Democratic Republic of the Congo resettle in camps in countries such as Uganda and Tanzania and reside there for anywhere from ten to twenty-five years. Due in part to this extensive stay, resettlement agencies in the U.S. conceptualize Congolese refugees as having often more extensive needs. In Atlanta, this means that the majority of Congolese refugees are assigned to a particular resettlement agency so that they may provide more specified services tailored to the Congolese community. However, the ways that caseworkers understand their clients and their needs and, by extension, the particular methods in which services are administered are not always homogenous. This paper investigates how caseworkers aiding in the resettlement of Congolese refugees understand the challenges faced by their clients when

acclimating to and integrating into American society. The primary obstacles to integration analyzed are the inevitable language barrier, the differing cultural conceptualizations of time, and an inexperience with navigating various bureaucratic systems and institutions within the U.S. Caseworkers target this notion of "learned helplessness" developed in refugee camps and seek to combat this by instilling ideas of self-dependency, self-sufficiency and empowerment. This paper analyzes how these perceptions are furthermore influenced by a neoliberal ideology that is typical of late capitalist American society, and how this affects every facet of the resettlement process through the ways that caseworkers anticipate their client's needs and, in return, the approaches they employ.

Literature Review

There has been relatively little anthropological work done on the challenges of resettling in the second country of asylum for refugees, especially those from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Much work related to my own study, however, is being conducted and published only recently thus making access to these studies difficult at this time. Similar studies that have been published have primarily focused on the first country of asylum in refugee camps in countries such as Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania to name a few (Thomson 2012; Thomson 2018; Ramsay 2016; Lyytinen 2015). Moreover, for research that has focused on the refugees in second countries of asylum, there has either been a spotlight on different aspects surrounding the resettlement process such as case managers securing housing for clients (Abdulrahman and Horton 2018) or, a broader view such as the role NGOs play in shaping refugee experiences and the humanitarian refugee crisis at large in Europe (Manzano, Mishtal, and Harris 2018; Cabot 2014). Studies and analysis similar to this paper have only recently began to emerge concurrently

with the recent Refugee/Migrant Crisis, or Humanitarian Crisis (Cabot 2014), in Europe and

around the world. Furthermore, there has been similar studies to the that which is presented in

this paper in countries outside the United States such as Canada (Goel and Lang 2019; Yoon et

al. 2019; Godin and Renaud 2002) and Denmark (Rytter 2018). In Canada, career development

programs have focused on three key tenants: self-efficacy, career adaptability, and job search

clarity (Yoon et al. 2019). Self-efficacy and career adaptability refer to the program's attempts to

increase their client's odds at reemployment (after resettlement) and foster career growth after

they are no longer able to serve them as clients. This is done by drawing on known experiences

and skills already held by the client and finding a career path that adheres to their particular

skillset. Job search clarity refers to working with the client to discuss and identify the realistic

job possibilities available to them, and furthermore when, where, how, and with whom to search

for a desired job/career opportunity (Yoon et al. 2019). In Denmark, the integration of refugees

has recently, as of 1999, become extensively influenced by neoliberal ideologies due to explicit

policy changes surrounding the resettlement process (see Rytter 2018). By encouraging citizens

to compete on the free market rather than relying on state-based welfare, neoliberal ideology

promotes the belief in "self-reliance over community dependence, intervention over isolation,

and self-discipline over society's regulation," (Ong 2006:27). Once an overwhelmingly welfare

state, Denmark has now transformed into a competitive state (Pedersen 2010 in Rytter 2018).

Rather than introducing this new paradigm, neoliberal reforms of the Danish administrations and

public sector have "only intensified already existing values of independence, responsibility, and

self-sufficiency," (Rytter 2018:12). In addition, the influence of neoliberal ideology on the

approaches and end goals of empowerment, self-sufficiency, and self-reliance as utilized by the

resettlement agency, and by extension caseworkers, are analyzed through Aihwa Ong's works (Ong 2003; Ong 2006).

This paper also draws arguments from Marx's theory of commodity fetishism by which he posits that the consumer dictates the variety and level of jobs available rather than the producer (Marx 1867). Additional inspiration and analysis comes from Michel Foucault and James C. Scott in their discussions of language and time and how they are used to authoritatively control populations under the guise of cohesion and unity (Foucault 1995; Scott 1998). Scott argues that a common language was used in France and throughout Europe to "reward those who complied with its logic and to penalize those who ignored it" (Scott 1998). Similarly, Foucault thoroughly discussed how modernity, and thus modern nations, is obsessed with time, and that timetables, in their traditional sense, had a negative connotation (Foucault 1995). A reconceptualized rigid timetable was implemented in industrialized nations as a way of reducing idleness, time wasting, and "economic dishonesty." Furthermore on this point, Richard Sennett recounts this obsession with rigid timetables as far back as sixth century Europe in the installation and use of church bells which divided time into religious units of the day (Sennett 1998). However, Sennett's account applies more so to a small population (yet still perhaps the origin of the rigid timetable), and not the larger trend of the world. Sennett further connects Marx with Fordism and investigates the distinction between the "employer's time and their 'own' time." Lastly, Orvar Löfgren's discussion on how time plays a significant role in the social organization of cultures greatly influenced the thought and argument behind this paper (Löfgren 1987). He examines the changing role of time throughout Sweden's plunge into industrialization in the 19th and 20th centuries and, in doing so, draw many examples of time disciplining as seen

in the use of scheduled school bells for children, steam whistles or gruel bells for the working class, and the bourgeois' future-oriented conceptualization of time (Löfgren 1987).

Research Methods

In the beginning of this research study, I knew that I wanted to work with refugees in Clarkston, GA. The reason for this was due to the perception of a lack of studies on refugees in the United States and especially the social workers who work arduous hours with their clients throughout the resettlement process. Georgia Refugee Services, or GRS, proved to be the perfect agency to work with. They welcomed my research interests and trusted their interns to do much of the same tasks as the staff; this allowed me to immerse myself into the role of the social worker and begin to understand how and where they gain their insights and perspectives from. I entered the field with an open mind and without a specific research topic outside of the obstacles refugees face when integrating into American society. It quickly became apparent throughout the first days of my internship that Georgia Refugee Services had many Congolese clients. In fact, the majority of their clients are from the Democratic Republic of the Congo because they particularly requested to receive as many Congolese refugees as possible, including large families which are often not preferred by resettlement agencies. In a time when many resettlement agencies were hesitant to take on the extra challenges that come with Congolese clients, Georgia Refugee Services welcomed them so that they could specialize and attend to their specific challenges better.

Edward Said proclaimed that "The Orient is a phrase used to generalize the unfamiliar East and strike down fear of them," (Said 1979). In the same fashion, I do not wish to overgeneralize a diverse status group known as refugees, so I chose to specifically observe

Congolese refugees since this was the population that I found myself working most closely and frequently with. Just as the term "Orient" highly generalized the entire non-West, I will cautiously but deliberately use the term refugee throughout this paper so as not to resort to false reductionism of the refugee experience in America.

Throughout my internship from August to December of 2018, I conducted participant observation at Georgia Refugee Services. My participant observation consisted of holding many of the same responsibilities as the part-time and full-time caseworkers, but to a lesser degree since I was a relatively inexperienced intern. Even still, this included accompanying clients on medical or governmental appointments and guiding them through the various processes and institutions that our government requires of refugees and immigrants. This also often included advocating on their behalf in the event they could not do so themselves. In summary, participant observation was done so by shadowing and accompanying caseworkers on these appointments in the field or, for the most part, acting as a stand-in substitute caseworker for clients during medical or government appointments and processes. All these tasks were common and expected of the internship, but it was done so with an anthropological mindset and framework. Towards the end of my internship in December of 2018, I passed out flyers to the caseworkers and managers in the office and began recruiting participants for interviews. The office was relatively small, and recruitment was limited to those with any amount of experience working with Congolese refugees. All in all, I held seven in-depth interviews with various workers in the refugee services department of the agency. Participants came from a wide variety of backgrounds including former refugees turned caseworkers, academics, U.S. born and non-native citizens, men and women, and from a broad spectrum of socioeconomic and social backgrounds.

Through all of this, the question of why I chose to conduct this study may have come to mind. I am a white, male, native-born U.S. citizen from a middle-class background, so what reason or connection do I have to refugees fleeing to the United States? I have no clear answer to that except that I felt a great affinity with these people, these human beings, who were overwhelmingly similar to me, but happened to be born in unstable political climates and circumstances and are seeking necessary help and safety. At a time of heightened xenophobia and marginalization of non-native born Americans, I intend to instill inclusivity by illuminating the challenges faced during a particularly difficult stage in their lives. Moreover, an overarching reason for this study is to reveal the congruency and likeness between native-born U.S. citizens, immigrants, refugees, and the diverse provision of social workers who tirelessly work to mediate a better life for their clients.

Overcoming Obstacles

It is difficult to regurgitate an example of the average day of a caseworker due to the complex, dynamic, and diverse nature of their work and clientele. However, I am able to break down certain types of days and the difficulties that may arise. Administrative days, which usually take place on Mondays in the downtown Atlanta office, involve staff meetings, weekly planning, filling out and filing paperwork, scheduling appointments, and addressing any immediate issues or disputes that could possibly be resolved with a phone call. All other weekdays usually have caseworkers "in the field" or on site in Clarkston. These days in the field are used in a wide variety of way such as assisting, guiding, and advocating for clients on various appointments and meeting with and within bureaucratic institutions, holding office hours for clients (and often non-client refugees who learn of these services via word of mouth), arranging, securing and setting

up housing for new clients, picking up incoming clients from the airport, leading Extended

Cultural Orientation (ECO) sessions and other briefings, and much more. The number of tasks

that social workers, which includes those in managerial positions, conduct and are held

responsible for are only limited by the range of obstacles refugees face throughout the integration

process. Moreover, the analysis conducted throughout the paper on how caseworkers perceive

their clients' barriers are just that: perceptions. I do not intend to portray their recounts,

judgments, and chosen methods as the absolute guide to resettling refugees, but I do, however,

aim to describe the approaches, frameworks, and methods successful for the caseworkers that I

observed and interacted with. In the end, these caseworkers are only viewing their clients

through their own cultural lenses which are limited by experience, background, and history

working with refugees.

Situating Key Terms

The city of Clarkston has a rich, dynamic history that must be known and understood

before diving further into the paper. Around the mid-nineteenth century, Clarkston became one

of Atlanta's first "suburbs" having railroad tracks running centrally through it that connected it to

Atlanta, Athens, and more (John 2009). Similarly, with the construction and expansion of

MARTA in the 1980s, Clarkston became close to the last stop on the metro train lines. This rapid

metro connection to Atlanta made Clarkston a prime location for the resettlement of refugees and

immigrants beginning in the 1990s. Additionally, Clarkston's relatively small area of only 1.4

square miles made the city attractive to better acclimate immigrants, minimize culture shock and

disorientation, and masterfully integrate non-native U.S. residents (John 2009).

In addition to this brief history lesson, various key terms must be situated within the text. I intentionally employ the use of the term integration over acclimation or inculturation. Integration (into society) is the preferred term to use when discussing the resettlement process because it infers that refugees are "assimilating [to the public sphere] in order to participate in the political cultures of a society, but not being prevented from retaining their diversity at the level of the family, and some parts of civil society," (Parekh 2001 in Meer and Modood 2014). On the other hand, some argue that integration combats this form of multiculturalism (a term that has its own extensive debates) as it only further divides and works against the unity of a nation (see Meer and Modood 2014). Therefore, Georgia Refugee Services understands and this paper utilizes the term of integration as a successful amalgamation of an individual's life with American society while still maintaining past experiences, culture, beliefs, and ways of life. Acclimation, on another note, carries a connotation of merely tolerating American norms and customs while not successfully meshing with it. It creates a bubble and can cause native-born citizens to view refugees as the infamous "Other" (Said 1979; Meer and Modood 2014) . Inculturation is a term I will not use to describe the resettlement process because it connotates a complete loss of distinct individual character and culture. I understand that culture is not static (Murdock 1971), but a substantial abandonment of culture and conversion to American lifeways is not the agency's nor the anthropologist's goal.

Moreover, the terms immigrant, refugee, and client must be situated as they will be used prolifically and seemingly interchangeably throughout the paper. An *immigrant* is an individual who leaves their country for another on their own accord and establishes permanent residency there. A *refugee*, the primary topic of this study, is an individual who has (forcefully) fled their home country due to political circumstances, war, violence, or persecution (United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees 2019). The term *client* is preferred and used by the agencies not only to provide a more empowered title than *refugee*, but also because they are, in fact, their clients. The overuse of the term *refugee* in the public sphere has led to a sense of disempowerment to be associated with the title. Therefore, I will opt to use *client*, where possible, to imitate the caseworkers at GRS. Frederick, a caseworker at GRS, discussed at length the problems with various titles and terms. Frederick himself has a laundry list of identities to choose from: an academic scholar holding two Master's degrees in philosophy and biology, a pastor, a father, a husband, a U.S./Congolese citizen married to a native-born Belgian citizen, a social worker, and, by circumstance, a former refugee. As I learned of his multifaceted identity, I could not help but relate his struggles with that of Diogenes Laertius in ancient Greece. When asked "Where are you from?", Diogenes replied, "I am a citizen of the world" or "*kosmopolites"* (Diogenes Laertius 1965) as he opted out of reducing himself to a single identity. By the same token, Frederick and all other refugees cannot be limited by the label of *refugee*. This notion will be further expounded on through the examination and analysis of common obstacles encountered throughout the resettlement process.

Language Acquisition and its Corollary Effects

It has been less than a week since Olivier and his wife Adama arrived in the United States. In desperate need of supporting their eight children, Adama sets out with two other newly arrived Congolese women in hopes of obtaining a job at the Tyson chicken processing plant. I am the first to hear this news of Adama's eagerness and casually bring it up to Thomas, a native-born U.S. citizen who has been a caseworker working with refugees for about three years. To my surprise, Thomas displays a bit of a defeated look on his face and describes to me the strenuous

working conditions, high turnover rate, and unsustainability of the job. This eagerness to begin working immediately, though perceived as a positive quality, could be utilized in the pursuit of a more sustainable job leading to financial independence and self-sufficiency.

The most salient and initially observable of challenges of integration is the language barrier. Since the majority of the clients I worked with were from the DRC, they, for the most part, did not speak English well enough to advocate for themselves. Or, as will be elucidated later, they also did not know *how* to advocate for themselves within our bureaucratic systems and institutions. However, while some caseworkers immediately brought this impediment up in interviews, many others did not mention it until I did so. Upon mentioning it, the interviewees agreed that it was a prominent obstacle, but one so evident that it was almost not worth noting right off-hand. Thomas stated, "medical offices are required to provide interpretation, which we know more often than not doesn't actually happen, and institutions are usually willing to be patient with non-English speakers." Moreover, clients are signed up for English as a Second Language (ESL) classes upon arrival. With that said, whether they choose to attend the classes is solely the client's decision. However, many refugees, frequently Congolese refugees, decide not to or are unable to attend ESL classes due to logistical inconveniences (e.g., job/scheduling conflicts, lack of childcare). It is not typically due to mere laziness or reluctance to learn English. In addition, Thomas noted that [the caseworkers] cannot force clients to learn English but can only encourage and emphasize the benefits of English language acquisition.

Furthermore, the amount of English language acquisition refugees have inevitably decides the types of jobs they are able to obtain. Refugees are more likely to experience unemployment, obtain precarious jobs and have low job satisfaction than any other immigrants or residency status granted by the government (Yoon et al. 2019), and the lack of language

acquisition only exacerbates this phenomenon. Upon arriving here, Congolese clients are asked what kind of job they would like, and, according to Frederick, the typical response tends to be, "Anything! I will take any job." After a brief explanation of other job availabilities and the client persisting on taking any job, Frederick wittily replies, "Ok, so $1 an hour is ok with you?" to which the client profusely objects. Caseworkers recognize that their clients are desperate to get any job but will furthermore seek to empower them by placing them in jobs that will be better in the long-term. Common entry-level jobs available to limited or non-English speaking clients include working at physically-demanding, high-intensity labor, minimum wage paying jobs such as chicken processing plants, candle crafting facilities, and other similar low-level manufacturing and factory jobs. However, with even a slight grasp on the English language, clients have an abundance of more sustainable, safe, and fulfilling jobs made available to them. I argue that a refugee's job search availability is determined by their English language acquisition and previous translatable work experience. I expound on this primarily through the examination of the Job Readiness Training program for clients at Georgia Refugee Services. Additionally, it is Marx's theory of commodity fetishism that determines the types of jobs available to newly arrived refugees (Marx 1867). By this, I mean that the consumer dictates the variety of low-income, entry-level jobs available rather than the producer (the refugee) deciding the market as Appadurai's fetishism of the consumer argues and retheorizes (Appadurai 1996). These ideas can be examined in the Job Readiness Training Program at Georgia Refugee Services.

Job Readiness Training

Lydia is a native-born U.S. citizen and social worker who has been working with refugees for approximately ten years. She has had direct experience working in resettling

refugees, working in refugee camps in West Africa, and now holds a managerial position at Georgia Refugee Services. In her current role as the Client Empowerment and Stability Manager, a primary responsibility of Lydia is "early self-sufficiency" by facilitating the Job Readiness Training program for clients. She defines the Job Readiness Training program as "preparing clients for employment, self-sufficiency, and financial independence." In a strikingly similar manner, Yoon et al. define career development programs of Canada as being focused on three key tenants: self-efficacy, career adaptability, and job search clarity (Yoon et al. 2019). Self-efficacy and career adaptability refer to the program's attempts to increase their client's reemployment (after resettlement) and foster career growth after they are no longer serving them as clients. This is done by drawing on known experiences and skills already held by the client and finding a career path that adheres to their particular skillset. Job search clarity refers to working with the client to discuss and identify the realistic job possibilities available to them, and furthermore when, where, how, and with whom to search for the job/career opportunity (Yoon et al. 2019).

Abed is a twenty-four-year-old, male Afghani refugee who came to the U.S. through a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) attained by working with the U.S. Armed Forces in Afghanistan. I met Abed prior to having gone through Job Readiness Training, and he discussed at length with me his career aspirations for his new life in America. Abed had realistic dreams of starting out as an Uber driver, then getting a job with local law enforcement with dreams of one day becoming a deputy or sheriff. Abed then went through Job Readiness Training with Lydia, and together they crafted a plan and trajectory for Abed to follow. Furthermore, Abed's firm grasp on English opened up many doors that often remain closed to refugees who struggle with English language acquisition. Unfortunately, other refugees such as Olivier and Adama are not so lucky. With only

oral proficiency in Swahili, Olivier and Adama have much more limited career trajectories. With eight children at home and an eagerness to begin accruing any sort of income, Adama set out to get a job at a Tyson chicken processing plant as discussed previously. Lydia stated that one of her goals of Job Readiness Training is that her clients would never have to resort to working at the chicken processing plant because of the low-wage and excruciatingly strenuous nature of the work. Instead, she uses the Job Readiness Training program to prepare clients to attain better paying and less arduous jobs at places like Marshall's, HomeGoods, and certain warehouses and manufacturing plants.

Some scholars, such as James C. Scott, argue that language is used cohesively to unify and then also authoritatively to maintain control (Scott 1998). Scott argues that a common language was used in France and throughout Europe to "reward those who complied with its logic and to penalize those who ignored it," (Scott 1998). I argue that our nation and society, while not explicitly requiring immigrants and non-native born citizens to speak English, does, in fact, reward those who speak English, and by way of extension, seemingly penalizes those who do not. This further notion labors to disempower refugees in various aspects of their lives. Moreover, language, though a significant challenge, is not seen, by caseworkers, as the paramount obstacle to be overcome. As will be elucidated in the following section, the conceptualization of time plays a much more prominent role in the types of jobs, quality of aid, and level of stability that caseworkers are able to provide to their clients.

Time and the Consequences of Nonconformity

Frederick described how his Congolese clients had great difficulties being ready for appointments on time, so he began telling them to be ready thirty minutes before he was actually

going to arrive, and it worked as intended! Then, Frederick began using this method on all of his clients. However, when this strategy was used with Burmese and Nepali clients, he would get calls at the specified time asking where he was and why he was late, so he limited the use of this 30-minute cushion window to only his Congolese clientele. Though this tactic was successful with Congolese clients, it did not teach them about the rigid expectations of time present in American society. Instead, Frederick prefers to emphasize to the client that he means "American time, not African time." To this specification, many clients respond by saying that they are African and will go by African time as they please. Frederick retorts by explaining, "Yes I understand, but you are in America now and showing up on time is a sign of respect."

As was widely discussed by the caseworkers, the most prominent and easily recognizable challenge in resettling and integrating Congolese clientele is the different conceptualizations of time. By this, it is meant that Americans, and much of the Western, industrialized nations, highly abide by a rigid, strict timetable and society furthermore revolves around it. In many other nations, especially African nations such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the conceptualization of time is much more lenient or "fluid" as one interviewee, Clara, noted. Clara, a U.S.-born native and client services manager at Georgia Refugee Services who has been working with refugees for over ten years, described the culture of time with the Congolese as being "much more fluid and much more time-present" whereas our American society is "more structured, achievement-driven and time sensitive." She went on to note that the Congolese are not ignoring the future, but more so "place an emphasis on where they are in the moment, and are 'present-thinking.'" Similarly, Orvar Löfgren describes the traditional Swedish conceptualization of time during the nineteenth-century industrialization of Sweden as "rhythmic," "cyclical", and being in the present (Löfgren 1987:15–19). Consequentially, modern,

industrialized views of time are thus seen as having a future or goal-oriented framework. It is not

my or the caseworkers' intention to claim Congolese refugees as not being modern and the

subsequent historical colonial ideologies that accompany modernity. Instead, I aim to posit that

caseworkers are merely adhering to Western ideas of modernity whereas the Congolese differ on

a variety of accounts. Furthermore, it is my intention that this "fluid" conceptualization of time

be viewed as simply a different cultural phenomenon, as Frederick elaborated, and not simply

right or wrong.

In a similar manner to James Scott's ideas surrounding language, Michel Foucault

describes how modernity, and thus modern nations, are obsessed with time (Foucault 1995).

Foucault argued that time, and language for that matter, are used to control groups of people and

bring order to society. I argue that this is precisely the framework being utilized by U.S.

institutions, whether they explicitly agree to it or not. Furthermore, he described how these

timetables in their traditional sense were negative; this system was commonly used in

industrialized nations as a way of reducing idleness, time wasting, and "economic dishonesty"

(Foucault 1995). It is not my argument that these institutions are abiding by strict timetables to

explicitly maintain order, but instead, are doing so merely due to the fact that we live in a society

that maintains order largely via time rigidity.

Thomas pointed out that people and institutions are more forgiving and willing to adjust

for a language barrier than for contrasting perceptions of time. Medical offices must provide

language interpretation, but there is no expectation of adjusting to divergent timetables. Simply

put, time is seen as having less flexibility and leniency. Furthermore, this impediment is not

merely about tardiness or missing appointments, as Thomas observed, but has to do more so with

the conflicts involved in navigating institutions, as will be further discussed in the following section.

Clara furthermore described the American conceptualization of time as being more individualistic and time-sensitive. The Congolese perceive time as much more "fluid" and place an emphasis on where they are at in the present (i.e., more "present-sensitive"). As expounded earlier, Clara perceives American culture as being much more achievement driven and goal-oriented, and therefore, looking more to the future requiring a relatively rigid conceptualization of time. This analysis aligns with Löfgren's assessment and conclusions on post-industrial, modern conceptions of time (Löfgren 1987). Further elaborating on that statement, Löfgren remarks on Foucault's theory of time as a disciplinary means by acknowledging the incessant chiming of the steam whistle to keep workers up to par with the factory owner's labor demands. Thus, "the steam whistle consequently became a symbol of the factory owner's power over the workers' time," (Löfgren 1987:25). The parallel I am trying to draw from this is not that the chicken processing and candle crafting factory owners have a personal agenda to set out and discipline newly arrived refugees, but rather that modern American time culture in general will inevitably attempt to reorient refugees, or else suffer its repercussions. The pressure and constant reminder of "the stream whistle" is consequently a symbol of American society's power over a refugee's future.

Institutional Navigation in a Bureaucratic Society

It is a hectic day at the Social Security Administration office—so much so that there is a police officer acting as a bouncer outside to regulate people entering the building. Frederick is inside with a pack of clients, six Congolese and three Afghani. After a two hour wait, Frederick

and his clients are all called at once to file their paperwork to obtain the documentation that is the basis of their lives in America, a social security card. With Frederick interpreting in Swahili and one of the Afghani clients interpreting in Dari, a social security specialist slowly but surely processes the refugees' paperwork. They are informed that it will take about two weeks to fully process and verify their applications.

The obstacle in the integration process termed institutional navigation was a barrier that I did not initially notice throughout my participant observation. Instead, it was overwhelmingly brought up during interviews in different capacities. This specific obstacle is multifaceted and contains prominent challenges such as navigating government institutions themselves, financial budgeting, and general distrust of banks, companies, and systems by refugees. Social workers largely become aware of these problems via experience and try to be preemptive through the use of Extended Cultural Orientation (ECO) training sessions upon arrival. Even still, these challenges persist, and Congolese clients must be continually advised and counseled on them.

The overarching idea of institutional navigation is that the United States has various systems in place to obtain necessities such as I-94s, identification cards, licenses, health care and insurance, government aid (Food stamps and Medicaid), and even seemingly straightforward processes such as finding a house (Ramsay 2016), job, etc. Understandably, refugees are not going to know how to navigate these systems and institutions on their own; therefore, a primary role of the caseworker is to guide clients through these processes and to advocate on their behalf when they cannot do so for themselves. As this paper illuminates, empowerment of refugees throughout the entire resettlement process is the primary goal of caseworkers. The agency is not there to be a crutch of dependency for the client as they have limited time and funding, so empowerment and self-reliance are the end goals for the resettlement process.

Another common obstacle under the umbrella of institutional navigation is a lack of budgeting knowledge and lack of financial prioritization. According to Frederick and confirmed by personal observations, the idea of the "American Dream" to many Congolese includes acquiring items such as a big television and a car. Therefore, these items are often prioritized over more immediate necessities. Moreover, many Congolese refugees are granted resettlement in the United States but left their extended family behind in the refugee camps or the Congo. Therefore, Fredrick discussed that "in order to prove to their family back home that they are truly successful in America, they must send money back to support them." More often than not, Congolese refugees do not have a stable income or excess funds to be doing so and risk suffering harsh consequences from their lack of financial prioritization.

Even systems such as the job hiring process is discriminatory as it fences out many refugees from attaining preferable entry-level jobs such as Marshall's, Homegoods, and local manufacturers that maintain a positive relationship with those at Georgia Refugee Services. Furthermore, these jobs are only disseminated to and attained through social networks which introduces yet another foreign system to refugees (Goel and Lang 2019). Frederick discussed his experiences with a local candle manufacturing factory. Frederick was informed by the hiring manger that he was seeking to hire refugees out of beneficence to the community, as he had done before in the past, and was offering fair, livable wages and a secure position. So, Frederick notified Lydia who quickly set in motion the necessary training on filling out a job application and being interviewed via the Job Readiness Training program discussed previously. Ten clients of Georgia Refugee Services arrived to apply for the job to only be informed by the hiring manger that there were only two spots open for hire. Feeling a bit defeated, Frederick and Lydia nonetheless interpreted the experience as good training in navigating the job hiring process and

system. Furthermore, sources of information throughout the refugee resettlement process widely vary and come from many different authorities including family, community, media, NGOs, etc. (Godin and Renaud 2002). It is for this reason that the caseworkers at Georgia Refugee Services, and other resettlement agencies, aims to be the main voice in guiding their clients.

The incompatible conceptualizations of time, discussed in the previous section, affects refugees' perceptions of the future and, as Thomas defined, "what is possible in a certain period of time." The example of food stamps renewal was brought up multiple times across many interviews. Food stamps must be renewed within a certain window and has a strict deadline. Thomas, and many other caseworkers, frequently described the frustration surrounding food stamps renewal by saying that "Congolese clients often wait until the very last day, or even after the deadline, to notify us that they need to renew their food stamps," but more often than not, lack the knowledge that their food stamps need to be renewed at all. This myriad of differing timetables and institutional navigation often work concurrently against a smooth, facile integration process. This paper identifies these obstacles as seemingly separate entities when in reality, these challenges often overlap and become ambiguous throughout the resettlement process. Therefore, the perceptions and approaches utilized by caseworkers are nuanced in the same manner as the obstacles they confront.

Nuanced Perceptions and Cultural Competency

It was widely observed that each caseworker had their own experiences with clients and had homogenous as well as dissimilar ways of confronting and combating the challenges identified and discussed. This paper argues that further nuanced understandings of challenges faced by refugees, as elucidated by caseworkers, can be associated with better outcomes. For

example, understanding the experiences and effects of spending so much time in a refugee camp, anywhere between 10 to 25 years, dramatically affects the approaches taken to resettlement and integration. It was widely discussed that there is a sense of what social workers call "learned helplessness" due to these extended stays in refugee camps. Frederick explained how refugees often express frustration over the perceived lack of aid given by the agency and government and reiterated the words of Congolese refugees in saying "everything was free in the refugee camp, so why do I have to work and pay for everything now in America." Frederick continued then to describe his method and approach to this by saying, "the fact that they have been in a refugee camp for so long has psychologically disempowered them. There is a sort of psychological dimension. The key is to learn how to empower them." As has been briefly discussed, this empowerment is implemented throughout the entire resettlement process, the main source being through combating and overcoming the obstacle of institutional navigation.

Moreover, caseworkers seek to empower their clients in differing ways. A common trope was to "let them get burnt" so that they may learn from their mistake and grow because of it. This was expressed similarly by Clara who stated that "[case workers] need to give [the clients] space to fail and learn from it." She goes on to discuss how clients are empowered through every process and interaction and states that one should, "never do something for a client that they can do for themselves. In any situation where the client can have power, give it to them." Therefore, teaching them on every appointment and throughout every facet of the resettlement process is crucial to successful integration. Above all, Clara urges that it is important to teach them that they, in fact, have a say in what happens in their life despite what the refugee camps have conditioned them to believe.

From an anthropological perspective, these nuanced understandings of Congolese clients and approaches to confronting challenges boil down to varying levels of cultural competency. Cultural competency has been defined as "a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations," (Cross et al. 1989). This idea has primarily and most widely been applied to public health and medical professions (Betancourt et al. 2003; Kirmayer 2012; Baker and Beagan 2014), but has major obvious applications in social work as well. With cultural competency comes better preemptive actions prepared by caseworkers and the agency and critical reaction responses to the extensive barriers faced by Congolese refugees. As far as I observed, the caseworkers and managers all had high levels of cultural competency of their clients, as they interact with and seek to understand them on a daily basis. The problem, however, is seen much more so with volunteers who may become impatient or upset due to cultural misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Volunteers at Georgia Refugee Services are utilized in programs such as "First Friend" where they are introduced to a client in the hopes of forming a friendship that will help with acclimating to their new surroundings and environment. Therefore, when attempting to meet up with a Congolese refugee, a volunteer may run into many problems. Language is, of course, a foreseeable challenge that volunteers expect. However, the impediment of time discussed at length is quite unknown to or understood by volunteers. Understandably, after multiple failed attempts of trying to meet up with their "first friend," a typical American volunteer will get frustrated and impatient. Cultural competency is therefore rather low among volunteers. Moreover, Clara emphasized the importance of culturally briefing volunteers, who are primarily native-born U.S. citizens living in and around the Atlanta/Clarkston area, so that better connections and

relationships might be made through the "first friends" program. The ultimate goal of this program, along with the rest of the resettlement process, is the idea of empowerment through self-sufficiency and individual independence.

Neoliberal Roots and Influences

This idea of empowerment, self-sufficiency, and self-reliance abides by the tenets of neoliberal ideology. Neoliberalism, on a communal level, is the belief in "self-reliance over community dependence, intervention over isolation, self-discipline over society's regulation, and finding pleasure in work rather than working to find pleasure." It is a realization of circumstances, and a refusal to accept complacency and reliance on anybody other than oneself. This "self-reengineering" and "self-enterprising," as Aihwa Ong states, "challenges conventional thinking about governance and citizenship," (Ong 2006:27). In other words, refugees seeking citizenship status in the United States must reach a certain level of self-sufficiency in order to be deemed *successful*. Even the term *successful* is very nuanced in meaning based on who is defining it. Social workers, case managers, refugees, volunteers, and government agencies are all going to have different versions and definitions of success, as well as self-sufficiency and self-reliability.

Furthermore, the use of these neoliberally charged terms pervaded each interview, and these ideologies have become manifest in the integration process and strategies of the caseworkers and agency. The use of the term *empowerment* within the agency's lexicon is defined by the parameters of self-reliability and self-sufficiency. For refugees arriving with only their immediate nuclear family, the transition to self-reliance can be difficult if they are used to having a larger network to depend on. This neoliberal ideology can be seen in the case workers'

perceptions of their clients' lack of prioritization in budgeting discussed earlier. I challenge that this is not merely a performance to display their success in America, but also a genuine care and recognition of their dependency on family and networks. Case workers' perceptions are often neoliberally influenced which has the ability to affect their view of their client's actions. Furthermore, this neoliberal idea of self-sufficiency as the ultimate goal, though admirable, requires the acceptance of variation to account for differing ideas of success in America. To use a previously discussed example, the Job Readiness Training program emanates this same ideology. It seeks to attain sustainable jobs for their clients that will lead to self-sufficiency because it is the perception of the agency and the case workers and managers that this course of action will lead to the most successful integration into American society. Living in a highly competitive, seemingly free-market, capitalist society following a neoliberal ideology, the goal of empowerment and self-sufficiency are utilized and perceived as the successful underlying principles and ultimate goal of the integration process due to societal circumstances in the United States. This analysis is based on how case workers perceive their clients' barriers. Its objective was not to portray their accounts, judgments, and chosen methodology as the absolute guide to resettling refugees. All caseworkers are merely providing their own personal accounts of the Congolese refugee resettlement experience in the U.S. and how they choose to combat the extensive challenges present. Caseworkers are merely expressing their interpretation of Congolese lifeways, and this interpretation is based on their own beliefs and expectations. Therefore, I do not wish for this study to be an exemplary standard for the Congolese experience. This paper does, however, aim to describe the approaches and framework that were *successful* for the caseworkers whom I observed and interacted with. In the end, caseworkers are bound to

view their clients through their own cultural lenses that are shaped by experience, background, and personal history of working with refugees.

Conclusion

The intention of this paper is to illuminate the resettlement process and to investigate potential approaches to alleviating some of the challenges elucidated. When I asked Clara what sort of contribution she would wish to gain from this study, she stated that she simply wanted a way to identify and explain these common challenges and obstacles to volunteers so that they may be more successful and understanding in their initial interactions.

Furthermore, this concept of integration is sometimes challenged by refugees who fear that they may lose their culture. Frederick told of a story where a Congolese refugee accused him of "not being Congolese anymore" because he had adjusted to the rigid timetable of the United States. However, Frederick viewed this as a small learning curve to overcome so that he could thrive and create a better life for himself in his new country of residence. He chose not to dwell on the past and on what he could not control, choosing instead to adopt a form of integration without acculturation. In doing so, he maintained his diverse background, culture, and identities while arduously laboring to pave and secure a better future for himself and his family.

Georgia Refugee Services perceived that the notion of learned helplessness and disempowerment can be combatted throughout every stage of the three-month-long integration process. The neoliberal idea of self-sufficiency as the ultimate goal, though admirable, requires the acceptance of variation to account for differing ideas of success in America. Each individual develops their own idea of success or a successful integration and it is not only dependent on their current status, but their life history and experiences. Going forward, I hope to see more

extensive studies in refugee resettlement in the United States, especially among Congolese refugees, that work to further empower and embolden refugees as more than mere victims of unfortunate circumstances. Although a language barrier, differing cultural conceptualizations of time, and inexperience navigating bureaucratic institutions seem like formidable barriers to overcome, people like Frederick, Clara, Thomas and Lydia are tirelessly laboring to better serve their clients. By further understanding the underlying ideas of their approaches to resettlement, the refugee service provision can be even better equipped to serve and prepare their clients for this new chapter of their life.

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