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Refugee Reflections: A Focus on the Lived Experiences of African Refugees Resettling in Michigan

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REFUGEE REFLECTIONS: A FOCUS ON THE LIVED
EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN REFUGEES
RESETTLING IN MICHIGAN

by

Diane Roushangar

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
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Diane Roushangar, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2013

Refugee resettlement is often observed by focusing on external indicators of integration such as employment and English proficiency. What is often ignored is the multi-faceted process refugees experience in regard to the emotions that occur during these transitions of resettlement. Emotional stressors include financial concerns, work-related issues, a lack of adequate counseling services and ESL support that can all lead to increased anxiety. This paper examines the process of resettlement that northeast African and sub-Saharan African refugees have experienced including issues of unsafe working conditions, changing gender roles, and a lack of adequate time for adjusting to the culture.

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Diane Roushangar

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	iv
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES	2
III. ETHNOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND	8
IV. IDENTITY	14
Culture, Faith, and Identity	15
Gender and Identity	19
V. FAILURES OF ADJUSTMENT	20
VI. THE MEATPACKING INDUSTRY	32
VII. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO BETTER OUTCOMES	38
VIII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	41
APPENDICES	
A. Research Protocol Approval	45
B. Sample Interview Questions	47
C. Demographic Survey	49
BIBLIOGRAPHY	51

LIST OF TABLES

1. Ethnicity.....	10
2. Demographic Info.....	11
3. Top Emotional Stressor.....	23
4. Employment.....	34

INTRODUCTION

“She cries everyday when she comes home”, a Congolese man in his late 30s tells me describing his wife’s turmoil after her return home from the meatpacking plant every day. “This doesn’t make me feel good to see her working and I’m not”. This poignant statement is one of many examples illustrating the distressing emotional experiences of refugees working in the meatpacking industry in the United States. Refugees resettling in the United States, especially those who come from previous refugee camps or from areas with high conflict and violence, are often faced with the realization shortly after arrival that there is little hope for improvement in living conditions after resettlement. For many refugees resettling in the United States, there is a risk of experiencing secondary trauma when the social structure fails to provide the necessary resources for an improved quality of life.

This research is about revealing the lived experiences of refugees and thus I have intentionally avoided making generalizations about these experiences. Having been through traumatic situations prior to resettling in the United States, refugees experience an internal ebb and flow of emotions that often go unheard by both the resettlement agencies and the general public. Because both public discourse and representations of refugees in the media tend to “serve the interests of the state”, there need to be alternative narratives formed that provide differing perspectives on the experiences of refugees (Daniel 2002:282). Further, refugees are often represented in the media as

“empty vessels” who are in need of American culture to fill the void (Steimel 2010:232), which dangerously assumes the superiority of Western culture. Given these assumptions in the popular media and scholarly literature, where there is a tendency to privilege socio-economic integration over emotional and lived experiences, narrative approaches offer varied refugee perspectives that are needed (Limbu 2009). Unfortunately, in policy arenas, the stories that refugees tell are dismissed while discourse from governmental and non-governmental agencies is seen as authentic and somehow more authoritative (Malkki 1996). Through a focus on the lived experiences of refugees in this essay, I aim to provide an alternative narrative.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This paper focuses on African refugees resettling in a small town in Michigan. The purpose is to illuminate the ways in which stress is exacerbated by the working conditions at local meatpacking companies, the emotional stress of living in poverty, and the hopelessness that exists when individuals realize there is little chance for upward social or economic mobility. Unfortunately, shortly after resettlement many refugees come to realize that they are in a permanent state of economic and emotional despair and this state of despair has the potential to be a source of secondary trauma. Refugees are placed into a system that expects a transformation into self-sufficiency within three to six months, while structural violence from within the system, such as inadequate resettlement time, a lack of ESL services, and poor working conditions, prevents

them from achieving this self-sufficient status. Consequently, the majority of refugees and immigrants experience American culture from poor urban settings (Suarez-Orzoco 2005). Not only do they experience the lower rung of the social and economic ladder, but they may also find that any education or training they had prior to entering the United States is not recognized and thus they are seen as just a refugee (Fangen 2006). For nearly all of my respondents, these problems were their reality. Structural violence is a violence that is enacted upon a certain group of people based on their particular “social order” where the social structure places blame on individuals for not achieving the status quo rather than looking inward at the failure of the structure (Farmer 2004:307). To buffer against structural violence, refugees often employ coping mechanisms in order to manage the stress associated with resettlement. Refugees look to decrease these stressors by seeking out resources that aid in alleviating these burdens (Lindencrona et. al, 2008). In this study, religion is just one platform that provides a forum that enables many individuals to cope with the stressors of resettlement. Some of these coping mechanisms come in the form of social support from within and outside of their ethnic group in addition to maintaining strong religious convictions that they share with their peers.

Traumatic experiences in the past have the potential to be compounded when problems in the new country arise and as a result, post-migration stress has the potential to increase mental and emotional health issues in refugees (Blair 2000). In other words, if refugees experience poor conditions prior to resettlement, such as trauma from violence or poor living conditions in previous

resettlement camps, and then again during resettlement, trauma from the past may be exacerbated by the stressors of the present (Montgomery 2008). Furthermore, trauma doesn't end once resettlement occurs; as a result of ongoing stressors, such as multiple losses in the form of income, vocation, social network, culture, and country, a "reactivat[ion]" of symptoms can occur (Kinzie 2007:197). The extent of trauma experienced prior to resettlement may have an impact on the degree to which post-migration trauma is experienced (Schweitzer et. al, 2006). Therefore, the resettlement environment that refugees are placed in is a key factor in the outcome of refugees' mental and emotional health (Lindencrona et.al, 2008). Consequently, the resettlement agencies play an integral role in the health of refugees during the resettlement phase (Kirmayer et. al, 2010). Additional research suggests that exposure to stress during resettlement, such as short periods of time given to individuals to resettle, can contribute to an increase in psychological issues, thus intensifying emotional trauma during and after the resettlement period (Ellis et.al, 2008). These experienced emotions can be understood better by illuminating the ways in which refugees describe daily struggles. From poor working conditions and financial stresses to anxiety surrounding unfamiliar foods, clothing styles, and language, refugees are experiencing a secondary trauma during resettlement in the United States. A focus on lived experiences has the potential to provide new perspectives through writing about trauma where the purpose is to show that "every day life is not expelled" in the wake of structural violence (Das 2007:215).

The goal of the resettlement organizations is to foster an environment where individuals can be self-sufficient. While some individuals were self-sufficient prior to arriving in their host county, many face difficulty with attaining this goal during and after resettlement because the existing methods for achieving this are failing. Self-sufficiency cannot be measured through acquiring an \$8 an hour job, but rather encompasses a plethora of external and internal changes that take time to work through. Unfortunately, the resettlement agencies most often 1) do not have the government funding to extend services beyond 6 months, and 2) have caseloads too heavy to allocate enough resources into finding better jobs or finding jobs that adequately match the skill levels of their clients.

While the literature on refugees and the integration process is abundant, scholars have given little attention to the political ideologies and the underlying assumptions associated with African refugee resettlement (Shandy & Fennely 2006). Furthermore, the literature that examines the integration process tends to address only socio-economic integration, which is commonly measured through language, education, and occupational factors while it ignores the larger process of cultural attachment that takes place in the host society (Shandy & Fennely, 2006). Thus, refugees are measured by their ability to exhibit socio-economic signs of integration, which disregard all other forms of attachment that may take place internally in the individual. To aid in understanding the complex process of resettlement, recent theorizations in diaspora studies are now looking

to show how migration and the movement of peoples produces a myriad of lived experiences that have been ignored in the past (Brazier and Mannur 2003).

In this essay I draw upon interviews and participant observation in order to write about the lived experiences of individuals. It is my goal to present these experiences as Abu-Lughod (1991) has suggested: from a point where, as anthropologists, we acknowledge our interconnectedness to those with whom we work and research with—which ultimately aids in drawing away from the power structure and hierarchy that is present. It is my intended purpose not to explain and analyze my respondent's experiences as if I were disconnected from them, but to engage with and tell the stories they told me, thus allowing their words to do the explaining. The process of remembering and verbalizing these experiences can cause an "overflowing" of emotions that has the ability to offer "insight into the source of their power" thus providing a potential outlet for their experienced trauma (Daniel 1996:102). Because of the interpretive nature of anthropological research, I have included creative interpretations in the form of poetry throughout the paper in order to capture these lived experiences in multiple registers—poetic and expository.

In order to capture the essence of the traumatic situations that I became privy to during this research, poetry became an outlet that other forms of writing aren't able to capture. The poetic form has the ability to encapsulate emotions where an analysis or narrative would create a loss of potency in the meaning. In other words, writing in the poetic form, using fewer words, provides

a much more robust arrangement of the emotive forces behind my respondents' statements. I chose to write from the refugee's perspective in the poetic sections because it helps more powerfully convey the lived experiences—which written from my perspective would have lost its poignancy.

The reality of this research is that what follows is *my* interpretation of the experiences of my interlocutors. The interpretive power over those about whom I write is evident in what data has been included and what has been excluded. As a result, authority becomes apparent in the writing where the researcher has authority over those s/he writes about (Behar 1996). In E. Valentine Daniel's book about violence enacted upon the marginalized Tamil minority group of Sri Lanka, Daniel elaborates on the extreme difficulty that exists when writing about a violence of the present, lamenting that it's much easier to write about violence that has occurred in the past (Daniel 1996:107). Because of the ongoing experiences of structural violence that my respondents are experiencing, writing about their traumatic experiences is that much more difficult—there is no way to put an immediate end to it. However, the goal is not to cast refugees as “helpless victims”, which they are often portrayed as (Holtzman 2000:14) for this merely reinforces stereotypes as well as the superiority of the West. This “victim characterization” that is placed on refugees has negative consequences as it portrays them as “victims of their culture” and has the problematic effect of framing refugees as needing assistance from privileged western nations in order to save them from their own culture (Steimel 2010:232). Instead, I aim to provide a narrative that shows how my interlocutors navigate through the

challenges of resettlement whilst dealing with emotional and economic insecurities.

My place as both a researcher and friend was intertwined with the lives of the respondents and often put me in positions where empathy played a major role in how I interacted with my respondents. Empathy provided a way for me to show genuine concern about the trauma of resettlement that these individuals experienced and expressed. Because empathy is a way for humans to understand our fellow human beings' trauma (Straight 2013), it is also what provided a way for me to cope with suffering that my respondents experienced over the course of this research. Empathy offered a means to manage my own emotions in situations where I often felt utterly helpless. While the interpretation of emotion shown through empathy may or may not be accurate per se, the role that empathy can play in understanding the emotions and dilemmas of others is significant (Straight 2013).

ETHNOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

In this study, I used qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The population in focus was northeast and sub-Saharan African refugees living in a small town in Michigan. In order to follow the guidelines for protecting vulnerable groups, such as refugees, my study was submitted and approved by the Human Subjects Internal Review Board at Western Michigan University prior to commencing research. The respondents who participated were placed into three groups according to

resettlement time: newly resettled within 0-6 months, post-resettled within 7-12 months, and those already established for more than one year. I completed a total of 18 interviews: 15 were refugee interviews; three were staff/volunteer interviews from the resettlement organizations. To supplement my research, the interviews from staff were used to provide valuable information about the ways in which they view the effects of the resettlement process on refugees.

Comparing staff observations of refugee experiences to that of individual refugee experiences has provided contrasting views of the ways staff and refugees experience the process, including implicit assumptions.

The interviews took between 40 and 60 minutes to complete and were digitally recorded for later analysis. Participants were selected based on snowball sampling and examples of interview questions include: 1) What have been the most easy/difficult things to learn about American culture? 2) Can you talk about your experiences during the first few months of resettlement? 3) Do you have any suggestions to make resettlement easier? A full list of interview questions can be found in Appendix B. Because this research began by looking at experiences of resettlement and assimilation, the questions I asked during interviews were framed in such a way as to focus on the relationship between the individuals and the resettlement agency. Thus, the common theme of trauma that came out of the interviews was something I had not anticipated. As a result of the answers surrounding the struggles of resettlement, during my analysis I shifted away from a research focus on assimilation to that of experiences of

secondary trauma and how structural violence has the potential to exacerbate past trauma during resettlement for many refugees.

Additionally, I completed participant observation over the course of seven months while I was conducting the interviews. Participant observation entailed attending family gatherings and outings as well as interaction with individuals requesting emotional assistance during stressful times. I was fortunate that I had the ability to establish an extremely good rapport with my participants and I believe this opened the door for easy and open communication. Because I spent, on average, five to six hours per week with many of the families, I was able to strengthen these relationships. Because of the consistency in my weekly visits over the course of seven months, this aided in further developing close relationships with many of the participants. I intentionally spent several weeks getting acquainted with most of my interlocutors in hopes that when I inquired about interviewing them they would perceive me less as a stranger and more as a friend. Additionally, I vocalized my position separated from the resettlement organizations, conducting independent research for my graduate degree at Western Michigan University. By including participant observation in my research, I was able to witness a wider spectrum of information about the lived experiences of each individual. Even though my research is completed, I have maintained close friendships with several families and continue to see many of them on a weekly basis.

The ethnicities of my respondents included Congolese, Rwandan, Somali, and Southern Sudanese. These ethnicities were determined based on a demographic survey obtained after permission to interview was granted by the participating individual. To maintain anonymity, all names that appear in this paper have been changed.

Table 1 - Ethnicity

Self-Identified Ethnicity	No.	%
Congolese	11	(73)
Rwandan (Hutu)	1	(7)
Somali	1	(7)
Sudanese (Nuer)	2	(13)
Total	15	100

The demographic survey included questions regarding age, gender, ethnicity, years since first becoming a refugee, and length of time in the resettlement program. The purpose of the demographic data is to provide general background information for each person, which has helped to contextualize the information collected in the interviews.

Table 2 - Demographic Information

	No.	%
English Ability—Spoken		
None	4	(27)
Little	4	(27)
Good	3	(20)

Fluent	4	(27)
Total	15	100
Married		%
Yes	9	(60)
No	6	(40)
Total	15	100
Time in US		%
0-6 months	5	(33)
7-12 months	2	(13)
12-24 months	5	(33)
> 2 years	3	(20)
Total	15	100
Religion		%
Muslim	1	(7)
Catholic	0	(0)
Lutheran	12	(80)
Baha'i	1	(7)
Other*	1	(7)
Total	15	100

*Self-identified as Christian - no denomination declared

During my research, I worked with refugees from three organizations in Michigan. The names of the organizations have also been changed in this paper to maintain anonymity. All three organizations are religiously affiliated with Christianity and all are non-profit organizations. The first organization that gave me permission to work with their clients was Provisions, which operates out of a

church and provides assistance for refugees who have gone through the initial 3-6 month resettlement process, but are still in need of assistance with resettlement. Provisions is primarily a volunteer based social work program, employing only one part-time staff person, that offers select transportation services, cultural brokerage, and ESL support both in home and on site. As of 2013, Provisions was assisting approximately 15 families. The second organization, Refugee Protection Services, offers the initial resettlement services for newly arrived refugees through the first six months by assisting with immediate needs, ESL, and assistance with attaining necessary documents and health screenings. The third organization, Refugee Cultural Services, also offers services for newly arrived individuals through the initial six months of resettlement by providing services in the form of transportation to and from appointments, legal documentation, employment services and training, ESL services, and basic material items.

Refugee Protection Services is the largest private refugee resettlement organization in the area and offers sponsorship, immigration assistance, and legal services for resettlement and acculturation. It also assists in employment services (job skills training and social adjustment) and language services (translation and interpretation). Because the organization is federally funded there are limitations to the length of the assistance offered and thus six months is the approximate cut-off for resettlement assistance. Refugee Protection Services' resettlement program is sectioned roughly into three parts with the initial 30 days offering the most intense core services to refugees. Following the

initial 30 days is a period of 60 days of case management, which includes primarily financial assistance. The final 90 days is an extension of the middle phase of case management and is available for those who are in need of additional assistance including employment services training. They also offer a refugee youth foster care program and a refugee-mentoring program.

Refugee Cultural Services was the third organization I worked with and is the second largest refugee assistance program in the area. Some of their programs include refugee adjustment services, home placement services (including a refugee foster care program and a transitional living center) and counseling and employment services. Refugee Cultural Services provides language skills, cultural education, financial, social, and health information. Additionally, local churches aid in supplementing assistance for the refugees in the program.

IDENTITY

The term refugee has been defined by many organizations. The official 1951 United Nations Human Rights Council definition of a refugee is someone: "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (UNHRC 2013). The word is not only enshrined with bureaucratic notions of western dominance, but also elicits images of a "racialized other" while also being a term that holds

“connotations bequeathed by Western history and civilization” (Daniel 2002:273). The category of refugee, how the term is perceived, and the emotions that accompany the term remain a struggle for many. Because the concept of refugee has been defined by many organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, these varied definitions can often lead to confusion (Blavo 1999). Zuberi, my Congolese respondent who gave the opening statement in this paper, provides this statement regarding refugees:

This word ‘refugee’, if you try to see this definition of refugee...it’s many, many things... .. Because we, sometimes we have a problem mentally, sometimes we have a problem like stress, emotional depression, trauma... many things. So, you have people like refugees, you must have a strong heart—to help refugees and learn about refugees. Sometimes, I say [to myself], why do I decide to come into this country?...sometimes... because it’s very, very difficult to live in this condition and you are very afraid and you are very alone. It’s like my trauma was at 50% [prior to resettling] so you need assistance, you expect to decrease your trauma. Yes, my trauma has increased. I’m expecting help and they didn’t give counseling or training about the life in America. They [resettlement agency] say: “No, you are now American, so try to be open...try to figure it out.”

Culture, Faith, and Identity

Throughout my research I encountered recurring discussions about difficulties adjusting to the culture: the food, weather, finding jobs, receiving adequate language support, experiences of discrimination, financial stress, issues surrounding transportation, differing parenting styles, and not having enough time to adjust before being expected to be independent and self-sufficient. I also witnessed these individuals coping with the uncertainty surrounding the abandonment of some of their own cultural customs. This cultural loss may be

the result of feeling pressure to integrate into American culture. For instance, during an evening visit with one of my respondents, Zuberi asked if he should have his wife discontinue a traditional custom of kneeling and reciting a Swahili word that is the equivalent of “let’s eat”, to summon guests to gather for dinner. At another time he commented on the fact that he must let certain aspects of his culture go and do what is culturally expected of him here, asking me again for my opinion. I found myself not agreeing because suppression of any part of one’s ethnicity is not advantageous: it too closely resembles that of assimilation—where the notion of success entails hiding particular ethnic traits that aren’t parallel with the dominant culture (Radhakrishnan 2003, see also Rumbaut and Portes 2006).

Another respondent, Kibwe, a Rwandan man in his forties, commented on the lack of counseling services, “You learn how to cope with your own problems the hard way. I don’t have anyone to talk to... you just try hard to deal with it. There must be change from the government. We refugees find ourselves here being slaves”. The use of the term ‘slave’ is important to note as it implies a comprehension of his position as an African man in the United States. Kibwe, being well aware of the history of slavery in the United States, was expressing his sensitivity to his new racialized identity. The result being that the emotions that arise in relation to not being seen as a social equal may have traumatic psychological effects on individuals (Fangen 2006). Zuberi experienced this trauma first hand when Joe, a friend of Zuberi’s, was asked by one of the organization’s staff members to discontinue contact with Zuberi because Joe had

stopped volunteering for this particular organization. Upon hearing the news from Joe, Zuberi became extremely angry and agitated with the staff person told me: "I'm an adult. I'm a leader. This is very bad, he cannot tell me who to see. He is not my father, or my God, or my pastor. He does not own me. He can't tell my friend to stop seeing me. Why does he say this? I don't understand? Does he say this because I am a refugee?" While the staff person at the organization may have been aware of the cultural importance that relationships serve for the Congolese, he possibly did not realize the level of support this friendship was providing this family. By asking Joe to discontinue the contact, and consequently the friendship, this staff person was indirectly harming the family who had come to rely on the social and emotional support that the friendship provided—effectively creating new trauma. This incident still remains troubling to me, as I do not fully understand the reasoning behind the staff person asking a volunteer to sever his relationship with a friend. What this circumstance does show is the troubling effect it had on Zuberi's state of mind and how he perceived his "refugee" status within this organization as being lesser than the staff.

Family and friendships are a way the Congolese community provides support to one another. Maintaining strong ties with other Congolese in the area is a technique this community has been able to utilize in order to cope with the difficulties of resettlement. Of the many times I visited with Zuberi, there were nearly always one to two other families visiting with children from other families as well. They relied on each other for social support and cultural familiarity, but also maintained deep connections with each other through

religious commitment. In addition to their weekly Sunday services, Zuberi started a bible study in his home where they met one to two times per week for about an hour. I was able to attend several bible studies where three to four other families and their children studied passages from Swahili Bibles. They focused on passages that helped teach how and where to pray and also on letting God take care of the troubles they were experiencing. “We study how to pray today... because knowing how to pray brings us closer to him [God]”, Zuberi said switching from Swahili to English, “to know how to speak to God [gives] you peace inside”. Music and dancing were also incorporated into the study sessions following Zuberi’s initial speech. Following this, several women and children sang Swahili prayers, often dancing or swaying in unison while they sang. During this study session, after passages were read in Swahili, I was asked to read the same passage from the English bible and Zuberi then translated his message from Swahili into English for me. At the end of the study session, a group prayer was recited. According to Boehnlein (2007:263), group rituals have the potential to offer “a collective efficacy that goes beyond the individual” thus allowing individuals to cope with loss more effectively. Religious commitment, in this instance, can significantly alter the way in which refugees cope with their trauma.

An aspect that remains a struggle with many refugees concerns how the church operates in the United States when compared to Africa. There were many individuals who felt confusion and frustration with these differences and several individuals expressed a sense of suffering and abandonment regarding

their relationship with the churches and congregations in Michigan. They voiced concerns that the church was not helping especially when individuals were struggling with the basic necessities, such as keeping a roof over their heads or food in their homes. I wrote this poem following a discussion with an individual who was feeling particularly neglected by the church she was attending.

My Church

Pastor, do you care?
I am here, under your roof.
You turn.
Do you see?
Do you see I am hungry?
Do you see I have nothing?
Why don't you care?
Pastor, you tell me to have faith.
Just pray...you say.
Pray for food,
Or pray for money?
Will words feed my children, pastor?
Will these words give them clothes?
Will they make my landlord go away?
Pastor, you are a servant of God.
You tell me this on Sunday.
But I am hungry today.

Gender and Identity

During a conversation one Saturday afternoon in Zuberi's kitchen, the roles of men's and women's gender roles arose. I was sitting with a group of about eight Congolese men and women when domestic chores, such as cooking and cleaning, became the topic of conversation. The comments from the men highlighted the notion of shame that is associated with doing women's work such as cooking and cleaning in their home countries in Africa. This

conversation arose out of Zuberi's feelings about having to contribute to household work in the United States. While he admitted to the group standing in the kitchen that he has done dishes and cleaning and also had his son doing dishes, the other men at the table seemed reluctant to embrace these new roles. Zuberi said, "We are in a new country and sometimes we need to change." The women in the room appeared skeptically amused by the discussion of crossing gender roles, which was noticeable by their smirks. Zuberi's wife, Asha, was the only one who commented that it is good to have her husband helping with household labor. It was at that moment that I became the topic of conversation when two of the men in the room commented that I would fit in very well in Africa because I had participated, several times, in gendered-domestic labor activities such as preparing and serving tea, cooking, and doing dishes. Based on these activities Zuberi and his male friends perceived that I was a "good wife".

At one point during this research all the wives I knew worked, while only two of the husbands had employment. During this period Asha (Zuberi's wife) worked at the meatpacking company where she worked ten hours a day and was in a position where she desperately needed help with household labor. Zuberi wasn't working at that time and if Asha was unable to recruit one of her daughters for assistance, she would be in charge of domestic chores after coming home. A predicament faced by many women who work and whose husbands cannot find employment is being the sole economic provider while also having to fulfill the expected domestic labor roles, a dilemma that compounds the daily workload. At the same time, I listened to a statement about the difficulty Zuberi

was having in dealing with the shame of not being able to find work while his wife worked. He said to me, “I feel so bad that [my wife] works so hard and I don’t.” He continued to share his feelings of inferiority for not being an economic provider: “It is not good. I can’t find work. I am a husband and I can’t work.” In this case it was apparent that he viewed paid-labor as “real work”. The distress from not being able to find a job was clearly articulated as he told me he struggles with the shame of not having the ability to provide economically for his family.

FAILURES OF ADJUSTMENT

The secondary trauma associated with resettlement arose in nearly all of the interviews I conducted. All of the respondents described similar emotional struggles in working with the resettlement organizations. They described the inadequate amount of time for adjusting to the area before being pushed into work. They discussed the lack of ESL support, lack of adequate financial support during the first months, and hazardous working conditions in the meatpacking companies that employ them. Because of the focus on external and socio-economic signs of integration, the emotions and feelings of refugees can easily be minimized or dismissed by others. It is because refugees experience and interpret these emotions as damaging or difficult that they become just that—traumatic (Fangen 2006).

While all my respondents expressed gratitude for the resettlement organizations that offered the initial assistance with paperwork, healthcare

visits, and basic housing necessities, this gratitude was always followed by frustration over the insufficiencies. All of the Congolese respondents voiced that they needed more time to adjust and learn about their new environment before being sent into the work force. Learning about the culture and grasping English takes more than three to six months, but most refugees weren't given the economic or social support beyond three to four months. After working 40-60 hours per week in physically exhausting jobs, my respondents expressed frustration with the fact that they had no energy or time to work on improving their English, especially those with children.

Kibwe, who came from South Africa prior to resettling in the U.S., was vehemently disturbed by the conundrum that refugees are placed in when faced with the expectation of being self-sufficient without being given the tools to do so. Of all my respondents, Kibwe was the most outspoken and upset with his situation and with the resettlement organization. Kibwe described this situation that he and other refugees experience upon coming to the United States with the following metaphor: "It's like a woman [who] is pregnant, bearing a child, and the woman walking away", pointing to refugees as the abandoned child and the resettlement organization as the mother who walks away.

Kibwe followed his mother/child resettlement metaphor with a statement about attaining self-sufficiency:

[If] I'm new in USA, maybe you'll teach me how to speak English, you'll teach me about the culture of the country, then ask me what can I do for work? If I don't have skills how am I going to be self-sufficient? Yes, they

are entry-level jobs we know that. But if I don't have any skills how am I going to be self-sufficient? They [the resettlement organizations] don't care about us... they want us to be self-sufficient by suffering. If anyone wants to empower their future – it's education. So, if there is no education, then how are you empowering me? How am I going to be self-sufficient?

Kibwe, completely aware of the fact that resettlement is difficult, had the following to say about the difficulty experienced as a refugee: “Life is not going to be easy, life is very difficult, I'm not saying life should be easy, but living in a [refugee] camp-life was difficult, but not expensive. If you bring that person to an expensive life [in America] it makes life harder for that person.” Kibwe then asked me, “What would you do if you didn't have the tools to succeed?” Uncomfortable with the thought of being in his position, I told him, “I would struggle and be stressed and quite unhappy.” When another respondent, Kwoth, discussed his interactions with the resettlement organization he said, “Three percent were helpful, the rest were not. I only have one person I still talk to and she was a volunteer. No one [at the resettlement agency] asks about my culture. Maybe they don't care, maybe it's a lack of interest”.

Kwoth, a Southern Sudanese man in his early 30s with a family and the highest level of education as a graduate student, described his struggles with the resettlement organizations and felt that the two areas in which they could have improved was with education and jobs. Kwoth resettled in Michigan 12 years ago, at the age of 20, and reminisced during the interview about the struggles he encountered—especially in the first two years of

resettling. “There is not enough education”, he explained, “and the jobs are not good...you cannot have a baby today and tomorrow you are on your own”. This metaphor, similar to Kibwe’s, illustrates his frustration and feelings of abandonment from the resettlement agency. “Most people were almost into homelessness because they [the resettlement agency] did not do a good part of offering them where to go...most people don’t get acquainted to what they are supposed to do” Kwoth explained. “In two months, if you don’t find a job you are on your own... you have to be independent”, he laughed, “they expected us to be independent within two months” he scoffed and shook his head.

Table 3 – Top Emotional Stressors Reported

	No.	Incident Report Rate (%)
Financial Stress	9	(60)
Jobs: poor working conditions	8	(53)
Cultural Stress: weather, food, clothing, etc.	8	(53)
Lack of ESL support/education	7	(47)
Lack of adequate resettlement time	7	(47)
Lack of communication with caseworker	5	(33)
Lack of transportation	4	(27)
Discrimination	2	(13)
Lacking necessary documents	2	(13)

The reported stresses from resettlement were often accompanied by bitterness towards the agencies and government for not providing the path to a

better life. The expectation of an improved life was often met with the realization that there was no feasible way to reach it as Lamia pointed out, “Poof! You bring me into this country...like that...how am I supposed to manage when you abandon me?”

An additional source of stress for many of the refugees relates to the rate at which the Department of Human Services cuts off or drastically reduces food assistance. For not producing a laundry list of necessary documents within a short period of time—sometimes less than a week—assistance was cut. Even those fluent in English needed help understanding the requirements. Zuberi voiced indignity when discussing how DHS made him feel, “They require so much, all the time. I give them the papers, and they ask for more.” Zuberi’s food assistance had been cut off twice in the previous six months and he had difficulty containing his frustration when I attempted to explain the next steps he had to take in order to get the food assistance reinstated. He told me, “I am fortunate that my neighbor had food to give to me”. With a family of six, no food in the house, and assistance cut, he was put in a desperate position.

Difficulty with DHS was just one example of the problems that accompany adjusting to and understanding American culture. Other issues ranged from issues of identity to discrimination to feelings of hopelessness due to severe poverty. Sefu revealed his anxiety with his current financial situation being that he had physically been in Michigan for less than two weeks when the resettlement agency thrust him into working for a meatpacking company:

To push the refugees after one week or one month is not good. They cut the assistance and when [I am] a newcomer it's not good. It is like the same – life in the African camp and here... it can be trouble for refugees. It can be better to be in Africa than to be here because it's like the same. Because in Africa the life is very bad and today we come here and the life is still being very hard.

At the time of this interview Sefu had no way to make the rent payment and had no food in the house. Fortunately, their mailperson came that afternoon and informed Sefu and his wife she would take them to the church food pantry nearby to get them food. Because of the job Sefu had started at one of the area meatpacking companies, RBC (name has been changed), the Department of Human Services cut off food assistance. Two days prior to our interview, Sefu left this job at RBC because of the pain and swelling that had developed in his right hand. Sefu's wife, Nysse, said they were told they would be assisted for three months by the resettlement agency, but they were only assisted for one month and during this first month her husband was pushed into a job. Nysse explained, "I am feeling bad, and I am afraid. It would be good if they could help. But when my husband started working at RBC they reduced the [length] of assistance". Zuberi, who was my interpreter during this interview commented, "The condition in Africa was bad. The process they are doing to help a refugee is not good because 6 months and to live here alone, it's not enough time". Zuberi lamented on the resettlement organization, "'We need to teach you how to be self sufficient' ...they say, [the resettlement agency] but how can I if you don't show me? Even to take the bus...there are many things I never saw in my life."

Zuberi's statement further reinforces the fact that an increase in the time and assistance is required in order for refugees to reduce the trauma of resettlement.

Zuberi and Sefu were not the only ones facing the challenges of hunger and poverty as one morning in April, Zuberi, stopped for a visit with his friend, Nuptia, at my home. I met Nuptia several times beforehand, but had not developed a close relationship with her yet, in part because of communication limitations and in part because her personality projected caution and uncertainty of those who were not Congolese. There in my living room, Nuptia sat: visibly sick from the stress of her situation as she hunched to one side lying sideways on my couch. She transitioned in and out of crying for the few hours she was there. She handed me a letter from the court that explained her pending eviction. I explained to Zuberi, who translated to Nuptia, that the letter was the first stage, that she would be given a date to appear. Nuptia began crying again. I told her that it would be okay, not knowing if it really would.

Fortunately the Congolese community in the area is well connected and families are constantly helping each other out. Zuberi told me Nuptia had stayed with his family several nights because of her stress-induced sickness. As I tried to explain the events that would take place after her upcoming court date, I felt utterly helpless. She had no food assistance and was being evicted from her apartment. All I was able to do was collect food from a church pantry to give to her. Fortunately, two months after this meeting she was able to find a job as a housekeeper; a job that held much better working conditions than the

meatpacking company. However, the implications from the eviction were apparent when, several months later, Nuptia was denied occupancy by several apartment complexes she had applied for. I was summoned for advice shortly after Nuptia was denied, and I tried to provide information that would comfort her. Regardless of the comfort I tried to give, Nuptia's distress returned because she was now deemed a bad renter with bad "rental credit".

A recurring theme that arose during my interviews and participant observations was that refugees were feeling that the resettlement agencies were doing the bare minimum with the services they offered to their clients. "I think I learned more about America through my volunteers than the caseworkers – those who work in the office. They [caseworkers] didn't value immigrants or refugees as they would like to be valued", Kwoth told me; as he proceeded to comment on his feelings about the caseworkers. "I don't think they considered [us] very important, they are like: 'I have the power I can do what ever I want and who are you?' Instead they should bring somebody [that is] like: 'I'm here for you; I can do this for you if you need help call me I'll do whatever I can for you'. Kwoth continued, "Nobody taught us how to do basic things. Imagine you are from here and you know how to turn the light on and off. Then you are taken to the jungle in Africa and you have to cook your own food [by] using firewood— none of them have come to show us how to [use firewood]", Kwoth said referring to the caseworkers at the resettlement agency.

Kwoth, understanding the power dynamic between the agency and the refugees, felt there was a need to balance the power difference by making caseworkers aware that refugees are people and should be treated as such. He also articulated that providing improved educational services in the form of English courses and post-secondary education would help even the power imbalance. Zuberi, commenting on the resettlement agency's knowledge, suggested, "I don't know if the social services have knowledge about refugees. I don't. I think the problem [with the resettlement agency] is they don't have any knowledge about refugees. But, the program is not bad, the program is good; maybe the policies are bad. The problem is 'how to help the refugees' ...here [there is] something is wrong in the agency".

Sometimes the resettlement agencies don't have the tools to help as is seen in Lamia's situation. Lamia is a middle-age man with three children who has been in the United States with his wife since March 2012. He lamented on his position in the United States as being very difficult: "I am an electrical engineer from Africa, but here I can't work in the U.S. as an engineer because I need my papers. I need to go to school here to get papers. What I'm doing now is another thing... I'm working in a factory.....in Africa we work with people from the U.S. - we don't ask about certified papers [educational credentials]. Are we incompetent to do the job or what? Because we do the same job. I don't feel okay about that, but what can I do?" Lamia continued, "I thought it would be better [in the U.S.], but it's worse. I used to work in Africa, I used to have money and a house in Uganda and [I was] an electrical engineer. What is here now? Nothing.

Do you understand?” Realizing, after a brief silence, that he was not asking a rhetorical question, I somberly answered, “I do, I completely do. I understand. It’s a terrible position to be put in and that’s why I want to ask these questions. I want to understand”.

While I told Lamia I understood his position, in truth, I did not because I have never been put in his position. Empathy was all I was able to provide. “We used to have a life, you know”, Lamia continued, “So, when we came here we knew it was not going to be bad, it’s going to be better. But, they have to start with education. They have to have a transition place where refugees can adjust”, Lamia, re-emphasizing the importance of education, finished his statement with the following: “So, education. That is the key…… Nothing else”.

Lamia, while quite troubled by the types of jobs available to him given his level of education, was actually in more distress due to the fact that his wife, Makemba, had been sick since before they came to the United States and was still dealing with extreme pain and weekly doctor visits. Taking me off guard, Lamia told me the following about their situation:

Me, as a husband, I feel bad about what my wife is going through because the first thing is her health. Let me give you an example. In Congo – she was raped. After that she went through surgery in Uganda. So, it’s bad. So, from that day to here (now) we thought she will get better because there are doctors and up to now she is still going through that pain. If I told you now – three months [have gone by] and all [her] periods are stopped now. She’s not bleeding – there are complications. We see the gynecologist every week. What is going on, I wonder? Nothing is good. Our case was supposed to be special because she was raped and they [people in Congo] took her two daughters and she was separated from her two daughters. Since we got communication [with them] last month, we [just found out]

they were still alive. Can you imagine that was the situation she was in? Crying everyday.

During this conversation, I was nearly paralyzed in hearing his emotional distress. I swallowed back tears as he discussed his wife's pain, both physical and emotional, as a result of the rape. After 16 months of residing in the U.S. he expected her to be better. He expected life would be better. This was by far the most difficult interview because of the trauma that they had experienced prior to resettling. The troubles with Makemba's health were compounded by Lamia's employment in an unskilled factory position and then again when she went into the emergency room several days after our interview; Makemba was subsequently scheduled for surgery a few days later. The doctor told her that she would not be able to work for a period of six months to a year in order to recover. This news gave her additional distress because she was now taken out of the workforce. I saw Makemba some several weeks following her surgery and when I asked her how she was doing, she immediately explained her situation: "It's very hard. I am not working now. The doctor told me I can't work for nine months. I don't have enough food. [My husband] he applied for food stamps, but they denied us. We don't have enough food."

When I asked Lamia what the most difficult adjustment has been since coming to the United States, he replied: "It's everything, you know – the culture. You know, for you maybe if you are born here, maybe you feel like it's okay. But, in Africa... for someone coming from Africa – it's not okay. It's not okay", he said

while he laughed. "You have to adjust." I asked Lamia, "Why is it not okay?" He replied, "The way of seeing things, community, church, whatever. No, somebody has to prepare us for those things [here]. Like, you know, for us in Africa... [we see] there is a lot of crime here. Watch the TV here and crime everyday.

Somebody comes from Africa can get sick from seeing all the crime. They say: 'No, this is not a good country. I think I'll go back to Africa'. There are drugs and alcohol, and crime. No, this is not our country. It's better to go back to Africa", he said as he nervously laughed. Dealing with these immense changes is an area that resettlement agencies and caseworkers must be sensitive to. This is where theorizing diaspora has allowed for the possibility to understand that ethnicity, identities, the self, and traditions do not change with travel (Radhakrishnan 2003). Rather, they stay firmly in place.

The following poem is a creative interpretation of the structural violence that prevents refugees from attaining the expected 'self-sufficiency' in order to become a "good refugee".

On Being Self-Sufficient

Self-Sufficiency.
What does that mean,
 To be self-sufficient?
 That I have a painful job?

I see my breath as it escapes my lips.
My body convulses from a shiver.
There is swelling in my arms,
in my hands.
I tell my thumb to move,
but they don't listen.

They tell me "Congratulations!"
"You are self-sufficient, you have a job".

I make eight dollars.
It's dark when I get there.
It's dark when I come home.
I can't move my fingers.
I can't pay my rent.
I can't.

My wife says, "It will get better".
But I can't fathom.
It was better back home.
Where I was self-sufficient.

THE MEATPACKING INDUSTRY

The meatpacking industry often actively targets immigrant and refugee groups because it is unskilled immigrant and refugee laborers who are often put in the position of having to take hazardous and low paying positions. Additionally, meatpacking has extremely high injury rates and high turnover rates. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) the meatpacking industries are the most hazardous jobs in the United States (Griffith, et al, 1995). Nearly half of the individuals I interviewed were given meatpacking jobs as their first form of income within the first six months of residence in Michigan. Because the meatpacking industry has a very low profit margin, they target refugees and immigrant minorities who will work in hazardous conditions with very little pay; the companies then use the excess money saved from hiring minority groups to reinvest in the "privileged" positions in the companies, in the form of higher management salaries or bonuses (Griffith et. al, 1995). This method of reinvestment is referred to as the

split labor market theory, which helps explain the reasoning behind compartmentalizing laborers to increase profits where the hiring of minority groups—such as refugees—is essential to continue the exploitative nature of meatpacking.

In order to compensate for low profit margins, the meatpacking industry is constantly employing new ways to increase profits and as a result, there has been an increase in the intensity of production (Bjerklie 1995). Consequently, the high turnover rates that exist within these meatpacking companies reflect the focus that is placed on management positions (Hall 1995). Because of the heavy focus on management within the industry, there is little to no attention given to the line workers, and this is evident by the working conditions that have been described by my respondents.

Furthermore, the meatpacking industry employs strategies to reduce the reporting of injuries so as to not draw unwanted attention from the government or the general public. While the meatpacking industry is the second most regulated industry in the nation, these regulations haven't changed in over 90 years (Bjerklie 1995). Further, Bjerklie (1995) suggests these regulations tend to focus on the actual meat product and ignore employee working conditions as well as safety issues. All of my respondents who worked in the local meatpacking companies explained these same issues with the work environment being unsafe, hazardous, repetitive, cold, and wholly miserable.

Out of the 15 interviews conducted, over half the individuals had worked at one of these two meatpacking companies at some point during their resettlement. Of those who had worked at these companies all were Congolese or Rwandan. English levels varied from being fluent to having minimal English comprehension.

Table 4 - Employment

	No.	%
Gender		
Female	6	(43)
Male	9	(57)
Total	15	(100)
Employed		
Yes	12	(79)
No	3	(21)
Total	15	(100)
Ever Employed in Meatpacking		
Yes	8	(57)
No	7	(43)
Total	15	(100)

In this study, as is seen in the table above, gender does not affect the chance of being included or excluded from the meatpacking plant. Skill level also does not affect the employment rates at these companies as several interlocutors were placed into these positions when they were actually skilled laborers.

The two major meatpacking companies in the area are Michigan Meatpacking and RBC (names have been changed). During one of my participant observation encounters, one of my respondents, Kibwe, described RBC as a place “no human should work”. He revealed that some of his Sudanese friends who

had worked at RBC and Michigan Meatpacking for years are now permanently injured to the point of not being able to close their hands because of the repetitiveness of the work. Kibwe also described how other refugees, including himself, had requested rotating to different positions so as to reduce injuries. Kibwe explained that the response from management was: "You can do it, you'll be all right. You are strong". Kibwe's voice was fraught as I sensed his irritation and sadness while he described the management's response to position transfer requests. Kibwe had worked at RBC for less than a month before having to quit because of pain in his hand. Likewise, Sefu, a Congolese father of two who came from a refugee camp in Mozambique, was placed into Michigan Meatpacking within the first few weeks of his arrival and subsequently quit the job within two weeks because of the pain and swelling in his left hand. Sefu held up his hand during our interview; he showed me his swollen thumb and fingers and attempted to close his fist, which he failed to do as he looked at me. He said he wouldn't go back to that type of work again. He then got up and retrieved a letter from a drawer in the table across the room that had recently come in the mail. He handed the letter to me to read. It was a letter from the resettlement organization congratulating him on his success in becoming self-sufficient since he had gotten a job at Michigan Meatpacking.

Zuberi, who had worked for RBC, gave his summation of these types of companies: "How do they value the workers? They don't value workers. But they value the product. I don't know, in Africa, it's not like that. Even in poor countries, they don't do that to workers like they do [here]." Asha told me, "The kind of

jobs they are looking for us are bad. You can work almost two weeks and you quit because of the conditions of the job—the job is very hard and very cold. If you want a good job you must speak English, but they don't give you the time to go to [an] ESL program. They take you and say: 'No you must work.'”

Unfortunately, factors such as lack of English fluency, education, and experience contribute to many refugees being unable to maintain employment (Holtzman 2000).

While these meatpacking companies are highly exploitative, they may also provide a necessary step that can lead to other employment opportunities (Shandy 2007). For five of my respondents, over the course of this research, this may have been the case. Three Congolese women found work as housekeepers in a hotel and two men found employment in a non-meatpacking factory. It's hard to say whether the work at the meatpacking company directly aided in the men and women acquiring jobs elsewhere, but it may have provided some assistance in obtaining new employment by showing a work history. At the same time, Zuberi found his new job at an automotive factory to be nearly as difficult as the meatpacking factory because it was still extremely intensive labor. In addition, he was put on 3rd shift and was also required to work seven days a week. At the meatpacking company he was at least given Sunday off and random Saturdays. Similarly, Asha complained of not being given even one day off a week from her new housekeeping job. She said she has to sometimes beg for a day off, and even then her requests are not always granted. When I asked Mayifa, a Congolese mother of two, how she liked her job in housekeeping she said, “It's

good. It's still hard work, but it's good and better than Michigan Meatpacking". I then asked her if she could have a job she loved, what would it be? Her face softened and she replied with a grin: "I want to sew. I love sewing".

Anguish

She cries... she cries every night
She cries to me...
Her hands,
Her arms,
Her body,
It hurts.

My wife, she works,
But I am damaged too.

My insides hurt,
hands,
lungs,
heart.

My wife, she works
In the cold steel walls
The room, it breathes ice
She cries.

But I stay home,
Too damaged.

Metal hooks pierce flesh.
On the conveyer belt,
Carcasses pass.
She bends, she stoops,
She rips skin from flesh.

On my chest,
Heavy lays her head.
Anguish passes through my lips
As my shirt becomes wet.

Stuck

Forget about school.
Forget about money.

My new country gives me pain.
Forget about school,
He says tapping his pen on the desk –
 You need to work.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO BETTER OUTCOMES

Secondary trauma is experienced when past trauma multiplies the effects of present circumstances (Blair 2000), thus having the potential to compound the trauma of the past can significantly alter the mental and emotional health of the individual (Lindencrona, et. al, 2008). However, there are circumstances where some individuals resettling have an easier time adjusting. Individuals coming to the United States as minors tend to be given more assistance—usually until the age of twenty-one. For one of my respondents, who came as a 17 year old single person, resettling was easier as he was able to take the necessary ESL classes, get a job much easier, and enroll in higher education without the worry of trying to support a family. He also reported being very satisfied with the resettlement organization’s assistance (except in the area of foster placement). Because greater financial assistance is provided for minors in the resettlement program, this allowed Joseph the ability to work part-time and go to school full-time. Incidentally, Joseph was concerned at the time of our interview because he was one week away from turning 21 and knew that the financial assistance

provided by the agency that he used for rent would be discontinued and he would most likely have to find full-time work, which meant he would have to transition to a half-time school schedule.

While Kwoth, the southern Sudanese man, didn't arrive as a minor, he did arrive as a young single man—something to which he attributes his ability to succeed more easily than others. Individuals arriving without families were more likely to be able to attend ESL courses for an extended period of time and enroll in higher education. Additionally, having a working knowledge of English prior to arrival was a strong indicator of the ability to find better paying employment and enter into higher education. All of the individuals who came married or with children had different stories. Coming as a family unit often leaves the household in greater poverty and emotional stress due to the increased financial need in order to support the higher number of individuals in a household. English fluency is more difficult to achieve because of the amount of time spent working and raising the family. Consequently, working conditions and jobs cannot improve if English comprehension does not improve. This puts many individuals into a vicious cycle of despair. Many refugees verbalized a desire to “go back home” because there was no improvement in the quality of life. The desire to “go back home” is a strong indicator that refugees are experiencing high levels of stress and trauma while attempting to resettle.

In hopes of having these messages heard by the resettlement agencies, all my respondents provided suggestions for improving the conditions of their own

resettlement, which would also aid in the resettlement process for future refugees. The suggestions encompass ways to remedy the anguish they have experienced. For refugees coming as minors, attempts to place individuals in foster homes should be done with more care. A more thorough check of the foster parents including their levels of cultural sensitivity would be highly beneficial. Joseph recounts, "I was like a prisoner. Just give me a ticket, I want[ed] to go back to Africa". He said that the resettlement agency always believed the foster parent over the child. For Kibwe, his suggestion to remedy the struggles with financial and emotional stress from resettlement was to change things at the government level. Until that can be done, he said, "We refugees [will] find ourselves here suffering".

Asha and her husband Zuberi both had extremely high levels of frustration with the meatpacking jobs that had initially been given to them. They suggested a change in the companies that resettlement organizations send refugees to for employment would be the first step. They also suggested that learning about the refugee, his or her situation, and their culture would provide a better resettlement experience. Asha suggested that the agencies need to give more opportunities to attend ESL classes for extended periods of time, stating if refugees can learn English they can get better jobs, not just *any* job. Sefu strongly suggested that resettlement agencies not push individuals into work when they have been in the United States for mere weeks. Additionally, the support needs to be extended beyond 1-2 months even when individuals have found jobs. A meatpacking salary of \$7.40-8.50 per hour merely compounds the secondary

trauma when economic distress is added to the equation, especially for families with children. Kwoth pointed to two areas that need an overhaul: the education provided to refugees and the jobs they place these individuals in. Oudry suggested that the resettlement agencies need to hire more caseworkers in order to properly assist their client load so that caseworkers are not overloaded with too much work. A final theme that recurred consistently was the unrealistic expectation of adjustment and self-sufficiency in mere months.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Resettlement for many refugees is often laden with poverty and emotional despair. It was through my respondent's poignant statements that I was able to outline these uncertainties. Secondary trauma associated with resettlement results in part from structural violence in the form of inadequate resettlement time and in part from the expectation of self-sufficiency in a matter of months that ultimately becomes unachievable because of the placement of refugees into unskilled and exploitative jobs. As a result, resettlement becomes a source of immense stress, which may ultimately provoke a traumatic awakening of past suffering. In order to cope with the secondary trauma experienced by my respondents, an empathic response was called for. It was my ability to rely on

empathy that aided in coping with my respondent's resettlement trauma that they revealed to me.

While many of the structural changes need to be made at the government level in order to remedy a number of the problems refugees face, the resettlement agencies can still play an integral role in better assisting their clients better. Matching skill levels to appropriate jobs is one way to help improve the physical and psychological, health and wellness of refugees. Additionally, finding alternative employment outside of the meatpacking industry is also imperative. Finding ways to provide extended ESL services and bus passes is a second area that will enhance services. A third area of improvement surrounds the fact that refugees need to feel connected to those with whom they interact. There is a desire to interact on a much more personal level. Understandably, not all caseworkers have enough time due to heavy caseloads. However, during lighter caseloads, there should be an emphasis placed on "getting to know" their clients beyond acting as their chauffeur. At the same time, the distance that exists between the caseworker and client may be in place as a coping mechanism for the caseworker to prevent becoming emotionally attached.

In writing this essay, I found the traumatic emotions experienced by my respondents compounding in ways that had a profound impact on my own emotions. I often experienced depression after completing the interviews. I didn't know how to deal with the emotive material that was handed to me. I still

don't. However, the sadness that accompanied me throughout the research is also what drove me to continue writing. As Ruth Behar (1996:177) suggests, "anthropology that doesn't break your heart just isn't worth doing". While the intent of this paper is not necessarily to leave one heartbroken, it is to draw out an emotional response from the reader as a result of empathizing with the lived experiences of a population that are unheard and ignored. My goal is to move my readers. As a reader, empathy plays a role in helping understand the plight of refugees and is a natural response to some of the circumstances described above. If in reading this essay an empathetic reaction was reached, I feel this paper was effective.

APPENDIX A –RESEARCH PROTOCOL APPROVAL

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: December 4, 2012

To: Bilinda Straight, Principal Investigator
Diane Roushangar, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Christopher Cheatham, Ph.D., Vice Chair

Handwritten signature of Christopher Cheatham in black ink.

Re: HSIRB Project 12-11-01

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Refugee Reflections: Experiences of Refugee Resettlement and Assimilation in West Michigan" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., *you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under "Number of subjects you want to complete the study."*) Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: December 4, 2013

Walwood Hall, Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5456
PHONE: (269) 387-8293 FAX: (269) 387-8276

APPENDIX B—SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was your experience like working with the resettlement agency? Positive, negative? Can you give some examples?
2. Can you describe the most positive memory/event with the organization?
3. Can you describe the most difficult memory/event with the organization?
4. How prepared did you feel when you left the organization?
5. What did the organization do well? What didn't they do well?
6. What types of assistance did you receive during resettlement?
7. How easy was it to learn English? What types of classes were offered to you for English?
8. Can you talk a little about what it was like during the first few months after arriving in the United States?
9. What was your experience like with the staff/volunteers of the organization?
10. How long did it find to take a job?
11. Can you explain how people in the community treated you?
12. What have been the easiest things to learn about American culture?
13. What have been the most difficult things to learn about American culture?
14. Can you talk about your experiences during the first few months of resettlement?
15. What types of assistance were available to you after you finished the 3-6 month resettlement program?
16. How has your family adjusted to the new culture? If there are difficulties, what are they and how do you cope with them?
17. What are some of the similarities between your culture and the American culture?
18. What was your experience like with the staff at the resettlement organization?
19. Are conversations easy and open with the caseworkers?
20. What did the resettlement organization do well?
21. What could the resettlement organization improve upon?
22. Do you feel the resettlement organization understands your culture?
23. Do you have any suggestions to make resettlement easier?
24. Do you have any suggestions for the resettlement organization?

APPENDIX C –Demographic Survey

_____ Age

_____ Gender

_____ Ethnicity

_____ Years Since Becoming a Refugee

_____ Years at Previous Refugee Camp(s)

_____ Location of Previous Refugee Camp(s)

_____ Length of time in Resettlement Program

_____ Country of Origin

_____ Marital Status

_____ Currently Employed?

_____ If Yes, How Full-Time or Part-Time?

_____ Do You Have Children?

_____ If Yes, How Many?

_____ How Many Family Members are with you in the
US?

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