

**Making Immigrant Integration Work:
a case study of refugee resettlement in Philadelphia, PA**

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B.A. in Political Science & International Studies
Iowa State University, 2007

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

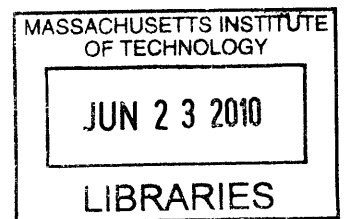
Master in City Planning

at the

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

June 2010

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Abstract

This research seeks to understand what are the conditions under which refugees integrate successfully in urban areas. This question is of particular importance to urban areas despite the fact that refugees account for only 10 percent of total US immigration. Refugee resettlement disproportionately impacts a city's urban fabric and foreign-born profile through the establishment of immigrant enclaves and subsequent chain migration. Moreover, a refugee community's initial resettlement period has long-term effects for integration outcomes. This research examines the institutional development of the refugee resettlement process in the city of Philadelphia, PA and draws on a case study of Liberian refugee resettlement where the presence of an existing community and English language ability did not facilitate integration as would be expected. This research investigates how stakeholders can make integration work for refugee immigrants.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These research questions began three years ago when I arrived in Philadelphia not knowing a single person in the city. By the time I moved to MIT, I left family behind in the city. I am indebted to my friends and former colleagues in Philadelphia, whose wisdom and dedication to immigrant advocacy inspired me to learn more about the relationship between cities and immigrants.

I am thankful to all the individuals who took precious time from their schedules for interviews. I am particularly indebted to Michael Blum and Beverly Mallard for sharing their expertise in multiple interviews and answering my ongoing questions. Thanks also to Ben and Nikkii for sharing their home with me during fieldwork.

I cannot thank enough the immigrants interviewed in this research who shared their stories and perspectives. Their perseverance and impact in Philadelphia motivated this work.

Thanks to the MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning for the Emerson Award Travel Fellowship and the Rodwin International Travel Fellowship that supported my research endeavors.

Many people enhanced this research with edits and feedback. I am grateful to participants at Harvard's Migration and Immigrant Incorporation Workshop for helpful feedback on an earlier draft. My MCP colleague and friend, James Madden, offered criticism, guidance, and support in our 'thesis group'. My thesis advisor, Alice Amsden, challenged my ideas and offered continual encouragement. Tunney Lee, my thesis reader, always grounded me with his historical knowledge of immigration and motivated me with his intellectual curiosity.

Lastly, I give my deepest gratitude to:

Judith Tandler, for your model work and for being more like family than only a professor to me;

Saeed, for giving me confidence, for inspiring me with your vision, and for being my partner;

My family, I thank you for believing in me.

This thesis is dedicated to the Liberian community in Philadelphia.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Approximately 60,000 refugees entered the United States in 2008, many of them arriving to metropolitan areas. Although this population is a relatively small portion of total immigration – 10 percent, resettlement placement decisions disproportionately impact a city’s urban fabric and foreign-born profile. Whereas most migrants move to a city for better job opportunities, refugee migration does not follow market forces. Instead, free case refugees, who arrive without a friend or family member sponsor, have few, if any, social connections and are exogenously placed in new societies by private agencies. Refugee communities face ongoing obstacles to integration in host communities despite their access to temporary social services. The resettlement program designs assistance programs for refugees to achieve the goal of integration, which is understood as economic self-sufficiency, within 4-8 months of arrival.¹ Therefore, the initial integration period is significant in facilitating long-term success for an ethnic community. How do cities make integration work for this particular group of immigrants?

In this thesis research, I examine the institutional development of the refugee resettlement system and how it unfolds in urban areas. I seek to understand the integration experience of refugees, who are often considered low-skilled and low-income, within a city that also has a large low-skilled and low-income population: Philadelphia, PA. I selected Philadelphia as the location for study because it exemplifies the struggles

¹ Federal regulation defines economic self-sufficiency in ORR’s program as “earning a total family income at a level that enables a family unit to support itself without receipt of a cash assistance grant” (See section CFR 45 400.2 of the regulations).

of many cities experiencing economic and population declines. How did the resettlement system and host societies adapt to the needs of both arriving refugees and urban economies? This research asks, what are the conditions under which refugees integrate successfully in urban areas?

I hypothesize that successful refugee resettlement depends in large part on the receiving community into which refugees arrive, in particular upon its employment opportunities. I argue that the receiving city is a significant factor in the trajectory of a community and that refugees' assets are valuable for self-directed integration strategies. To test my hypothesis I conducted formal and informal interviews with 36 individuals to understand the immigrant experience in the city. I met with 11 current and former staff from all three resettlement agencies within Center City Philadelphia to understand the evolution of the resettlement system, its programs, challenges, and successes. To understand the Philadelphia context, I interviewed 4 directors of non-profit organizations whose work relates either to refugees or immigrant employment, 3 city government officials, 3 academic researchers, and 2 immigrant advocates. I used snowballing techniques to interview 13 people from select immigrant communities, 7 Liberians (3 females) and 6 Vietnamese (1 female). All of the refugees interviewed had lived in the US for more than 5 years and all had obtained lawful permanent resident status (green card holder) or naturalized. Although the narratives certainly do not represent the experience of all refugees and service providers in Philadelphia or beyond, the narratives demonstrate the complexity of refugee integration.

My methods choice is purposefully related to the concept of understanding integration from the viewpoint of individuals themselves. Qualitative interviewing offers

fuller accounts of experiences and allows for subjectivity. This is particularly relevant because individuals prioritize employment, education, income, and social status differently for integration. I aim to understand from actors' viewpoints the process of resettlement integration – successes, barriers, and opportunities for improvement. Interviews revealed that actors' stances on what conditions allow for refugee integration depended upon stakeholders' positions. For instance, resettlement workers emphasized service delivery; planners discussed navigable city services; government officials focused on government efforts to change the mind of the receiving community. Significantly, refugees most commonly discussed two key components: initial English language skills upon arrival and education. Quantitative data is not available to measure integration statistics of Philadelphia's refugees several years post-arrival. Agencies' relationships with refugees typically end within six months of arrival. Moreover, as a refugee's legal status adjusts to a naturalized US citizen (approximately four years after arrival) they legally become indistinguishable from other foreign-born residents.

I chose to highlight the particular case of Liberian refugee resettlement in Philadelphia (Chapter 4) for two important reasons. First, Greater Philadelphia is home to the largest Liberian population of US metropolitan areas. The number is estimated between 10-15,000, residing predominately in South and West Philadelphia and Upper Darby. Second, my own observations from previous work at a Philadelphian legal immigration non-profit agency suggested that Liberian resettlement resulted in surprising outcomes. This was reinforced during my initial interviews with frontline workers and immigrant advocates who said that Liberian clients seemingly experienced more hardships finding work and integrating successfully in Philadelphia than other groups.

Thus, I explored this anecdotal understanding through field research in the summer of 2009 and January 2010.

In order to understand the current urban fabric for immigrant integration, I first explain the concept of refugee integration and place refugee resettlement within the historic context of US immigration with attention to urban areas. In chapter 2, I discuss Philadelphia as a city where immigration has changed and continues to change the urban fabric. Chapter 3 examines the US refugee resettlement system from its creation in the 1980s to its current operation in Philadelphia. Chapter 4 provides a case study of the Liberian refugee community in Southwest Philadelphia to illustrate long-term implications of the resettlement experience. Finally, chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of the parameter within which successful urban resettlement occurs.

Refugee Integration

How do places facilitate the settlement of refugees and immigrants in new societies such that their experience and participation is enhanced? This process is described as absorption, acculturation, assimilation, incorporation or integration revealing the complexity and ambiguity associated with the topic. As Robinson states, 'integration' is a chaotic concept: a word used by many but understood differently by most (1998:118). The race relations' literature generally describes integration as a process of change when different cultures co-exist in one society. To this end, identity and belonging are key components in the process of acculturation. In the immigration studies literature, integration is understood in terms of social service provision by the receiving society and access to social services that facilitate settlement (Korac, 2003). Reitz (2002)

discusses four determinants for integration in receiving societies: pre-existing ethnic relations with host populations, labor markets, government policies and programs, and the changing international boundaries. Castles et al. (2001) write that one generally accepted definition or model of refugee and immigrant integration does not exist and the concept will remain 'controversial and hotly debated'.

Although a large literature exists on immigrant integration (Singer et al., 2008; Briggs, 2005; Alba & Nee, 2003; Portes, 1995), relatively little discusses the process for US refugees. More work exists on refugee integration in the European Union (Daley, 2009; Ager, 2008; Castles et al., 2001; Robinson, 1998). This may be because refugee immigration is viewed as a relatively small portion of total US immigration.

Nonetheless, the issue is of increasing importance to host societies with fewer resources. Integration is not a one-way approach for new arrivals to 'conform' or 'fit in' a host society. Rather, my analysis in this research understands the concept of integration as a two-way process in which both parties, immigrants/refugees and receiving societies, contribute to and facilitate mutual inclusion.

Immigrants and refugees share aspects of the integration process, but two distinctions are important. First, refugees are separated from home countries due to fear or threat of persecution. Second, refugee resettlement locations are often exogenously determined, meaning resettlement agencies, rather than market forces, dictate geographic placement when family reunification is not a possibility. These important distinctions reduce transnational networks and compel refugees to recreate social ties in the host society. In this way, refugee integration occurs with a different time horizon compared to that of economic migrants, producing increased investment in human capital and better

economic outcomes for refugees compared to economic immigrants (Cortes, 2004). Particular focus upon refugee integration credits the long-term nature of the process in which a refugee becomes an active member of society through legal, social, economic, educational, and cultural means (ECRE, 1999). For instance, Khan (1997) finds that refugees are more likely to invest in schooling than other foreign-born residents. This literature also describes the importance of safety and the empowerment to benefit from available opportunities (Refugee Council, 1997).

As stated earlier, US refugee resettlement programs understand the concept of integration in terms of economic self-sufficiency. According to the Pennsylvania State Refugee Coordinator, the goal of US resettlement programs is to “help refugees achieve self-sufficiency as fast as possible after arrival” (Rothermel, interview, 2009); and finding a job is the key component. A large body of literature examines employment integration and suggests that employment is the single most important factor in securing migrant integration in a host society (Phillimore and Goodson, 2006; Robinson, 1998). Employment is a key factor in promoting economic independence, increasing interaction with the host society, and language skill development. Additionally, Tomlinson and Egan (2002) suggest that employment plays a critical role for refugees in restoring self-esteem and encouraging reliance. The UK’s Refugee Council views employment as the single most significant barrier to successful integration for refugees (Feeney, 2000). Employment integration is not only a key issue for success but also a historically sensitive issue for refugee immigration in the US.

Refugee Immigration to the US

Immigration to the US began as an open-door policy. All those seeking a better life were welcome to come achieve the “American Dream.” What began as a “give us your poor, huddled masses” stance soon shifted towards a selective process. Now immigration regulations preference higher educated workers and family members of US citizens, while entry of “poor, huddled masses” is reserved for one category – refugees. The regulation on immigrant arrivals began in 1887, which first barred the entry of convicts and prostitutes. Only seven years later, new legislation excluded immigrants based upon national origin under the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The other significant piece of legislation at that time, the 1882 Immigration Act, established a tax of \$0.50 per immigrant and barred the entry of “undesirables,” understood as mental defectives and paupers (Holman, 1996:4). During World War I, legislation added literacy requirements and expanded the Chinese exclusion to include immigration from most Asian countries in an attempt to prevent increased ‘cheap labor’ of Chinese migrants working in jobs centered on the “Gold Rush.”

Separate legislation for refugees was not needed until the quota system began in the 1920s. But the refugee crisis of World War II changed the entry policies. The US first began admitting refugees when 250,000 displaced Europeans arrived following the crisis. President Harry Truman issued an order that 90 percent of the regular quotas for central and eastern Europe were to be used for displaced persons (Holman, 1996: 5); and the US accepted an additional 400,000 of the 1 million refugees who resettled overseas. As such, the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 initiated federal regulation of this refugee resettlement process. The Act gave preference to people who would engage in select

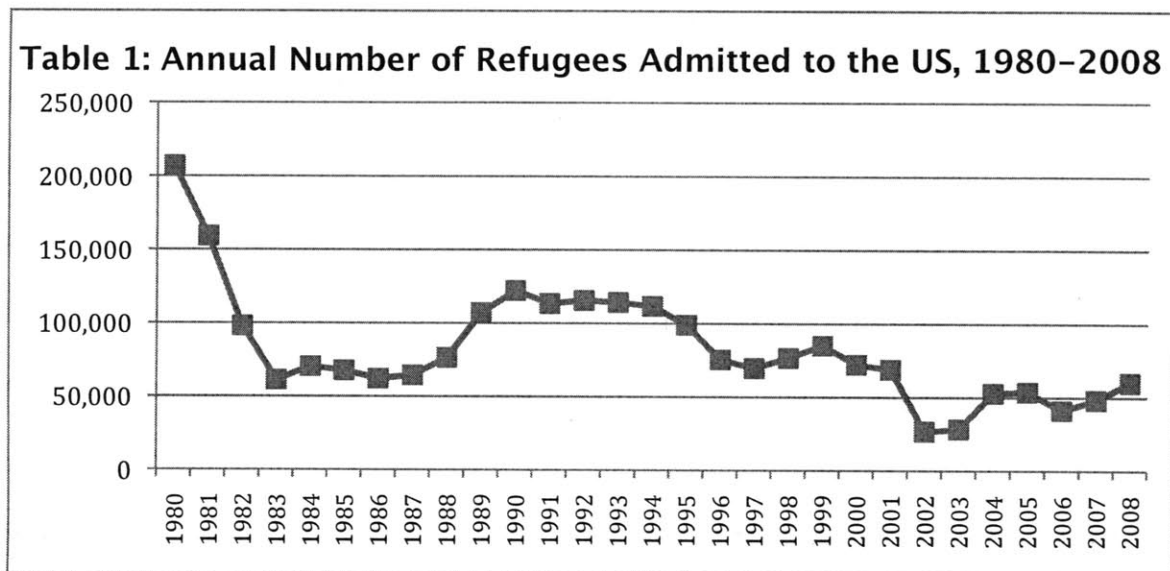
occupations (agriculture, household work, construction and garment trades) and to those with “special educational, scientific, technological or professional qualifications”; most significantly, it required that new immigrants would be suitably employed without displacing others from employment or housing (Gordon, 1996: 350).

Cold War politics began to dictate the admission of refugees fleeing Communist regimes including from China, Cuba, Hungary, Korea, Poland, and Yugoslavia. Private ethnic and religious organizations assisted these waves of refugees. In a political response to Fidel Castro, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and said, “I declare this afternoon to the people of Cuba...that those who seek refuge in America will find it. The dedication of America to our traditions as an asylum for the oppressed is going to be upheld” (Johnson, 1965). Later, the Indochinese Refugee Task Force of 1975 began to resettle hundreds of thousands of persons displaced by the Vietnam War. Since this 1975 period, the US has resettled 2.6 million refugees (ORR, 2008a). The ongoing need for resettlement regulation became apparent shortly after the creation of the 1975 Task Force when large numbers of refugees arrived from the former Soviet Union.

Therefore, the US Refugee Act of 1980 amended the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and prescribed requirements for admission and the duration of assistance. The legislation explicitly states that employable refugees should be placed in jobs as quickly as possible and identifies economic self-sufficiency as one of the most important expectations of the resettlement system (ORR, 2007).

Shortly after the Act passed, the largest influx of Cuban refugees arrived from April to September 1980 during the Mariel Boatlift when nearly 125,000 landed on US

shores, mainly to Miami, Florida. Since the resettlement system's inception, the annual number of US refugees has been as high as 207,116 in 1980 and as low as 26,776 in 2002 (see Table 1). The State Department gives authority to selected private agencies that ultimately decide the resettlement location for refugees. Surprisingly, the role of these private agencies as immigrant intermediaries shaping the foreign-born geography has only recently been given attention. Chapter 3 discusses the refugee resettlement system's origins and further implications of its role as an immigrant intermediary.



Source: US Dept. of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration.

What Does This Mean for Cities?

Immigration in itself is a natural occurrence, not a recent trend. Data indicates that new migrants are following the path of native residents to relocate in urban areas. In the 1990s, 92 percent of immigrants to the United States settled in metropolitan areas,

including 64% in metropolitan areas with populations of at least 2 million (US Census Bureau, 2003). Although refugee resettlement constitutes approximately 10 percent of total immigration, its effects upon the urban fabric and foreign-born profiles of communities are disproportionately large through subsequent chain migration (Brown et al., 2007). Secondary migration of refugees or immigrants of the same ethnic group gradually increases the ethnic population in a receiving city. In the United States, Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN exemplifies how refugee resettlement impacts a city's urban fabric. The Twin Cities area is home to the largest population of Somalis in North America. Only 6,507 Somali refugees initially resettled in the Twin Cities, which is less than 14 percent of total Somali refugees in the US from 1983-2004 (Singer and Wilson, 2006). Now the area's Somali community, an estimated 50-70,000 people, has transformed the Cedar and Riverside Avenues neighborhood with local businesses.

Other refugee gateway cities follow similar geographic patterns to immigrant gateway cities. The map below displays metropolitan areas with the largest refugee populations and their corresponding foreign-born rank. New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago host the three largest refugee communities and also rank high in terms of large foreign-born population: second, first and third, respectively. Data from 1983-2007 shows that New York City and Los Angeles received more refugees than any other city with 12 percent and 7 percent of all arrivals, respectively. More than 30 percent of all former Soviet refugees resettled in New York City. Los Angeles followed with 8 percent and additionally hosts large Vietnamese and Iranian refugee communities. More recently, growing refugee gateways include the cities of Cleveland, OH; Fresno, CA; Jacksonville, FL; and St. Louis, MO. Fresno is home to one of the largest Hmong

refugee populations.²

Table 2: Metropolitan areas with largest refugee populations, 1983–2004



Adapted using data from Singer and Wilson, 2006.

One of the most difficult tasks facing cities is how to integrate refugees and immigrants into communities that have few resources. When businesses cannot find employees and the city tax base declines, officials may look beyond the native population for solutions. Utica, NY is hailed for its urban revitalization from refugee resettlement. The typical “Rust Belt” city saw factories close and residents migrate away. Now the city is anything but typical because 1 out of every 6 residents is a refugee (Wilkinson, 2005). The city’s revitalization is credited to refugees from the former Yugoslavia, former Soviet Union, Vietnam, Cambodia, Burma, Sudan, and Somalia. Refugees

² See [The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down](#) by Anne Fadiman (1997) for a detailed story of refugee resettlement and health care in Fresno.

opened restaurants, salons, grocery stores, and coffee shops. A medical equipment manufacturer, ConMed, also one of the largest employers in the region, has a workforce of which approximately half are refugees (Singer and Wilson, 2006).

Further attention in the literature on refugee integration should be given to this scale of analysis. Currently, most research and reports from the US Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) follow the standard approach to evaluating economic status based on non-controllable variables: household composition, gender, age, education, ethnicity, level of English proficiency; social support from religious, political, and social networks (Halpern, 2008), rather than focusing on a key controllable variable: the receiving society.

Urban societies are more than just at the center of global and nation migration forces; cities are the place that generate inclusive and exclusive responses to diversity (Briggs, 2005). Burayidi (2003) argues that the purpose of planning is to help people reflect on their needs and find creative ways to meet those needs. As cities are increasingly multicultural, planners' roles adjust to incorporate those needs and include more people in the planning process. Refugee integration requires that a host society accept its role to adapt in the integration process.

The following case study shows that cities, particularly post-industrial cities, are aiming to attract immigrants as a means to repopulate. Although more attention is given to high-skilled immigrants, refugees' entrepreneurial skills can be an enormous asset to cities, if utilized. Host societies may find creative ways in which they adapt to the needs of new refugees. For instance, establishing a culturally competent service infrastructure for low-income immigrants – refugees – can better facilitate successful integration and

create long-term benefits to both the receiving society and refugee community.

The next chapter explores how cities attract and utilize the skills of refugees and immigrants in the context of Philadelphia, which historically has benefited from the presence of refugee communities.

CHAPTER 2: PHILADELPHIA

As global migration to urban areas increases, cities benefit from more diverse populations. Immigrants and refugees bring cultural, economic and social assets that impact cities. At the same time, cities' assets attract immigrant communities and evidence suggests that refugees benefit from high-immigration cities. To the extent that cities evolve and migrant demographics shift from that of last century, planners must examine how cities will adapt to integrate the new waves of immigrants and refugees. This section looks specifically at Philadelphia, which was an immigrant gateway in the late 19th century when immigrants arrived for industrial jobs. After the industrial sector's collapse, a different group of immigrants established roots and brought revitalization. Now, new immigrants to the city find a larger socioeconomic gap between the existing populations.

This section examines the refugee immigrant experience in an urban context over time. Importantly, a refugee's legal status adjusts to a lawful permanent resident (green card holder) approximately one year after arrival. From a city's perspective, refugees are quickly grouped with other immigrants, rather than receiving specific treatment for a long period of time. Moreover, an immigrant from Sierra Leone may be in the same social networks and neighborhood as a refugee from the same country of origin. Over time, these individuals become indistinguishable in terms of legal status and social service benefits.

The chapter first discusses urban immigration in the context of Philadelphia, a former immigrant gateway, in particular, its transition as a post-industrial city. The second section explains the significant role immigrants played in Philadelphia's history

and asks why Philadelphia is no longer a high-immigrant city. A discussion of the municipal and non-profit immigrant service agencies follows.

The Transition of “Former” Immigrant Gateways

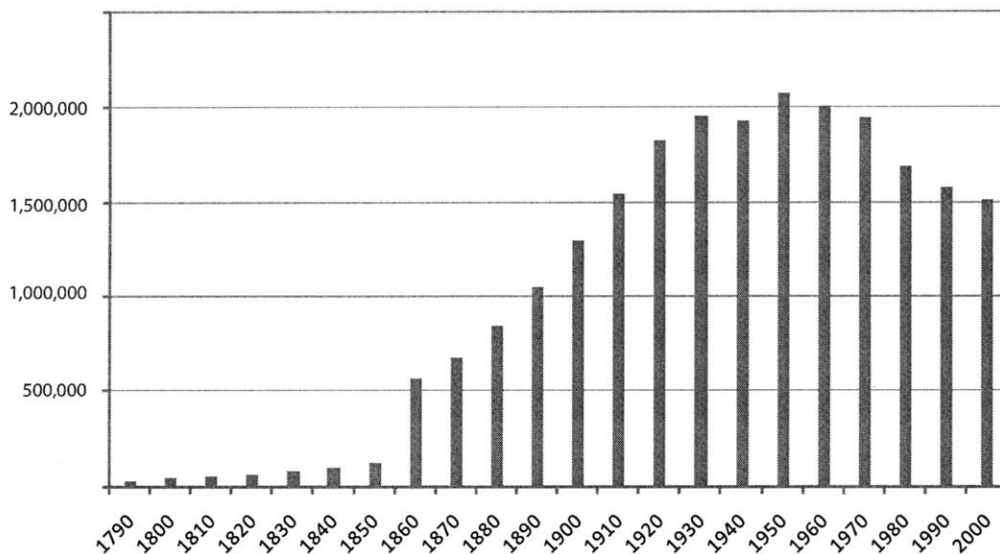
Philadelphia is facing the same dilemma as many other postindustrial cities in the US such as Baltimore, Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis. The Brookings Institute termed this class of cities as “former immigrant gateways” after the flight of industrial jobs and their workers (Singer et al, 2008). These cities attracted immigrants in the early 1900s, but are now trying re-populate. What strategies can cities employ to attract migrants today? To answer the question, I turn to the history to understand the previous growth process and the recent immigration experiences.

Philadelphia’s deindustrialization experience illustrates the economic burden cities face and the revitalization role of recent immigrants. As in other former immigrant gateways, migrants reached Philadelphia seeking employment during the Industrial Revolution. In 1879 the city reached its peak proportion of foreign-born at 27 percent of the total population. Even at that time, the dense spatial layout of the Center City allowed working-class immigrants, particularly the Italians and Polish, access to housing, transportation, and industrial work. The Irish, Russians, and Germans also arrived in high rates to the city and African-Americans migrated from the South during World War I. Textile factories, farms, and local factories such as Camden's Campbell Soup Company recruited workers during the labor shortages of World War II. Puerto Rican migration grew during WWII and by 1970 Philadelphia became home to the third largest Puerto Rican community in the mainland after New York and Chicago. Labor

procurement programs contributed as immigrant intermediaries to the exodus of nearly 400,000 Puerto Ricans to the mainland US between 1940 and 1970.

Beginning in the 1950s, the city's demographics and industry dramatically shifted, leading to an increase in suburban flight of the white, upper-class residents. At the same time, Philadelphia's population dropped from over 2 million residents in 1950 to slightly over 1.5 million in the 1990s (see Table 3). Jobs and industry went south and overseas. The manufacturing sector lost 75 percent of its jobs between 1955 and 1975 (Goode and Schneider, 1994:35). Since the 1960s the rise of jobs and housing opportunities altered suburban demographics. Young, white, educated, and wealthy residents relocated from the city to nearby places such as Montgomery and Bucks counties, leaving a largely minority population in Philadelphia County (Adams et al., 1991: 17).

Table 3: Philadelphia Population, 1790–2000



Adapted from US Census.

In the 1970s Philadelphia fared the worst of the fifty largest US cities in terms of “urban deprivation”; between 1970-1980 significant disparities in the quality of people’s living conditions widened dramatically (Adams et al., 1991: 27). The collapse of the industrial sector led to an increase in the service sector.³ Immigrants opened stores and restaurants and bought abandoned homes. Center City Philadelphia has benefited from the immigrant revitalization of deindustrialization and urban decline that Lin describes through the exchange of labor, capital and culture (1998). Studies show immigrants accounted for approximately 75 percent of Greater Philadelphia's labor force growth since 2000; moreover, the city’s immigrants exhibit higher tendencies towards entrepreneurship with 11 percent of the immigrant population self-employed as compared to 8 percent of the native born (Singer et al, 2008).

In the same way Philadelphia changed, the new generation of immigrants is different and is gradually increasing. Nearly 60 percent of the foreign-born living in metropolitan Philadelphia arrived in the US after 1990 (Singer et al, 2008). From 1990-1999 alone, 18,100 refugees resettled in Philadelphia (Singer and Wilson, 2006). The 2006 American Community Survey estimated that Hispanic residents now comprise approximately 10.5% of the city's population; Asian Americans are approximately 5.3%; and 20% of the city's 5-years and older population speak a language other than English in their home (City of Philadelphia, Mayor’s Office, 2008b). These patterns indicate Philadelphia's immigrant population will continue to grow and impact the urban fabric. The questions for the city are what lessons can be learned from its past experiences as an

³ The transition from manufacturing to service employment also occurred within manufacturing. New technology increased production resulting in a shift to more sales and other non-production workers.

immigrant gateway and how will it integrate new groups of migrants?

The City of Brotherly Love

A home for refugees?

Philadelphia has been a home for people seeking refuge since the 17th century when William Penn established the Quaker colonies for European migrants fleeing religious persecution and famine. In the 1940s, Irish driven from persecution and the potato famine landed at the Delaware River port. Then, the European wars brought large Jewish and Armenian communities to the city in search of safety. Political persecution in Poland and the former Soviet Union also gave rise to these communities in Philadelphia's neighborhoods. From this view, Philadelphia should be an ideal place for refugee integration because of this history, its convenient location between New York City and Washington, DC, and its relatively lower cost of living and affordable housing.

Nonetheless, much work documents Philadelphia's segregation and division (Wolfinger, 2007; Goode and Schneider, 1994; Massey et al., 1987; Warner, 1987). There is no doubt that marginalization of minorities exists; vast socioeconomic differences, often along racial lines, are obvious between neighborhood areas: West Philly and Society Hill, for example. The 1990 census data showed that Philadelphia's African-American population remained highly segregated with 72 percent living in census tracts that were 90 percent or more African American (Goode and Schneider, 1994: 5). The city is also polarized in terms of economic class. Massey et al. (1987) using 1980 data found that Philadelphia's black population lived in neighborhoods with fewer resources and faced stronger barriers to residential mobility than their white

counterparts. A late 1980s study rated Philadelphia as the worst of the 50 largest cities according to the number of census tracts with high concentrations of very poor residents (Goode and Schneider, 1994: 43).

A story that is not as loudly heralded is the spatial role of Center City as an area where people from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds integrate together. One of the most significant spaces of interaction is the Reading Terminal, an indoor marketplace with a wide variety of restaurants, produce stands, and specialty goods. The supply ranges from Pennsylvania Dutch baked goods to Middle Eastern kebabs to Southern food to Nepali curries. Likewise, the customers arrive from a variety of backgrounds but the space creates a safe and respectful environment, what Elijah Anderson refers to as the “cosmopolitan canopy” (2004). In the same way, William Penn’s vision for the city’s parks evolved into open spaces that also gather residents from separate communities. Fairmont Park, the largest municipal park in the nation; Independence National Historical Park; JFK Plaza; and Rittenhouse Square Park are only a handful of the city’s public open spaces but are points of significant interaction.

Immigrant neighborhoods

A closer look at the following neighborhoods continues the more positive outlook and offers a sample of the many communities transformed by immigrants. The neighborhoods highlight the dynamic history of migration and how it affects urban spaces. Lessons from veteran immigrant communities’ experiences and struggles to integrate and negotiate with the host city can inform refugee communities.

CHINATOWN

Philadelphia's Chinatown is considerably smaller than nearby New York City's or Washington, DC's Chinatowns; nevertheless, it has hosted generations of Chinese migrants and other Asian communities. The neighborhood is located in Center City, south of Vine Street and above Race Street, between 8th and 11th Streets. Approximately 3,000 people live in Chinatown making it more than a tourist destination. According to 2000 US Census data, Chinese migrants comprised more than 56 percent of Chinatown's foreign-born, and immigrants from Indonesia, Hong Kong, Vietnam, and Guyana totaled about 5 percent each of the entire neighborhood's foreign-born population (Singer et al., 2008). Despite Chinatown's contribution to Center City, the community has struggled to hold its prime geographic location. In the late 1960s urban renewal period, the neighborhood fought to maintain its presence while some portions were destroyed amidst construction projects including the Independence Mall and Pennsylvania Convention Center. As a result, Chinatown's residents mobilized to form the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation in 1969.

NORTH PHILLY

North Philadelphia is a large and diverse space, ethnically and socioeconomically, but is also commonly known for the prevalence of poverty. Two of its neighborhoods, Olney and Port Richmond, illustrate the immigrant impact in this area.

Olney is one of Philadelphia's most diverse neighborhoods and is located north of Roosevelt Boulevard between Tacony Creek on the east and the railway near Sixth Street on the west. German-Americans settled in the area and it later became a major center for manufacturing. The Broad Street Line transformed Olney station by connecting it to Center City. Nevertheless, suburban flight and the closing of factories particularly

affected this neighborhood during the 1960s-1980s. African-Americans relocated from other areas in the city and new migrants, largely from Korea as well as other Asian and also Latin American countries, filled the vacant homes and restored economic corridors. Today the Korean Community Development Center and the commercial district at 5th and Olney Streets exemplify immigrant revitalization.

Port Richmond is well known for its large Polish community but also has substantial Irish, German, and Italian communities, and more recently an Albanian community. Polish immigrants arrived during peak immigration to Philadelphia in the late 1800s and early 1900s and settled on Port Richmond's farms. Since the Revolutionary War, cargo and military ships arrived at Port Richmond to pick up coal from the Reading Railroad until oil and diesel engines replaced steam engines after WWI. Now the port area functions as Pennsylvania's first urban industrial park. The Polish presence is still represented by a variety of institutions and businesses that cater to the community.

SOUTH PHILADELPHIA

The South Philadelphia neighborhood, located below South Street between the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers, also represents the rich history that immigrant communities bring to neighborhoods. During the Industrial Revolution, Irish immigrants came in large numbers seeking jobs. Eastern European Jews, though nearly gone from the neighborhood, are credited with founding Fabric Row, a textile hub that was originally known as a global clothing center and more recently is filled with tailors and boutiques. Lebanese, Russian Jews, Slovaks, Greeks, and Italians established communities in the late 1800s.

It was not until the mid-1900s that South Philadelphia became known as a predominately Italian neighborhood, hosting the second largest Italian population in the US. When Italians dispersed to suburbs, other immigrant groups flocked to the area making it a “portal neighborhood” for immigrants (Singer et al., 2008). Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Burmese refugees have since resettled in the neighborhood. The Vietnamese, the longest established refugee group in the area, made their presence known with the 2-city block “New World Plaza,” which offers specialty grocery stores, Pho restaurants, Buddhist apothecaries, karaoke bars, salons, banks and other community-run businesses. The recent arrival of Mexican immigrants gave rise to taquerias, soccer games, and specialty stores. Their presence, together with other diverse communities led the “Italian Market” to be rebranded as the “Ninth Street Market.”

Why Philadelphia is no longer a high-immigrant city

Despite its diverse neighborhoods, Philadelphia is not the immigrant gateway as before. Philadelphia is the nation’s 5th largest city, but immigrants represent only 7.9 percent of its population making it a “low-immigrant city” (Card, 2009). Perhaps of more concern is the fact that only 30 percent of the foreign-born population remains in the city (Colon, interview, 2009). Therefore, the question of why Philadelphia is no longer a gateway must be asked.

Quantitative and qualitative information suggest that reception and employment play a key role with respect to maintaining immigrant population. Firstly, regarding the urban reception of immigrants, local advocates assert that the city fails to present itself as more than a black and white city and ignores its rich immigrant history (Cooper,

interview, 2010). Even though the city was built by the work of immigrants and refugees, the city's efforts do not go far enough in pursuing these populations (Glickman, interview, 2010). The efforts by city officials to verbally welcome migrants are negated by incidents that suggest otherwise. For instance, immigrants know they are not welcome when city officials do not address the targeted violence against immigrant youth in public schools (Gammage, 2010).⁴ Secondly, as previous sections indicated, past immigrants historically moved to the city for its employment prospects. Now, economic integration is more difficult for migrants. Low-skilled immigrants entering Philadelphia's labor market find an already large low-skilled population vying for the few available jobs.

According to a labor market expert and non-profit director, Philadelphia's economy, like that of all postindustrial cities, is no longer based upon low-skilled, manufacturing jobs and the city will not return to that period (Glickman, interview, 2010). Similarly, a city official suggested "access to upwardly mobile jobs" is the most critical factor for immigrant integration (Gupta, interview, 2009). A Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board study (2007) reported that 60 percent of the city's adults are considered low-literate; and Philadelphia's labor participation rate is 96th out of the nation's 100 largest cities – 45% of the working age population is not working nor looking for work. Moreover, out of the nation's ten largest cities, Philadelphia ranks first in the percentage of people living in poverty.

⁴ On December 3, 2009, 30 Asian students were assaulted in South Philadelphia High School. The School District of Philadelphia received widespread criticism for its handling of the incident.

Immigrant Services

In recognition of the aforementioned difficulties, a number of organizations strive to provide services for new immigrant communities. Some agencies offer employment counseling or English classes; others specialize in legal services or policy advocacy. Importantly, the agencies' objectives sometimes overlap meaning that they also compete for similar funding. Board members include staff from other 'partner' agencies or city officials. The following descriptions of non-profit organizations and city government agencies are contextualized in the next chapter's case study of systematizing refugee health care.

Non-profit organizations⁵

Service providers in Philadelphia's well-established non-profit structure have worked with numerous waves of immigrant communities. One current immigrant service and refugee resettlement agency dates back to 1921 while more recently established ethnic mutual assistance associations focus on particular communities' needs. For example, the Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Associations Coalition, Inc. (SEAMAAC), established in 1984, provides education, job training, case management and senior services. The Ethiopian Community Association of Greater Philadelphia (ECAGP) also dates back to 1984. The State Department granted both SEAMAAC and ECAGP refugee resettlement approval. But these ethnic agencies are not at the forefront of refugee resettlement and immigrant affairs in Philadelphia. Anecdotal experience

⁵ The next chapter describes refugee resettlement agencies in greater detail.

from an agency director suggests Philadelphia's immigrant communities are not as politically empowered nor unified compared to other immigrant cities such as Los Angeles or New York City (Larin, interview, 2010).

Other non-profits work with the general immigrant population around legal and employment issues. For instance, the Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition (PICC) is the city's central legal mechanism to share information, identify problems, and advocate solutions for immigration issues. Philadelphia's main center for immigrant employment assistance is the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians based in Center City, which was founded in 2003. The Welcoming Center promotes "immigrant participation in the region's economic, political, and social life." A West Philadelphia branch opened in 2006 focused particularly on integrating immigrants into the local economy and building relationships with other West Philadelphia residents. The Welcoming Center's main work entails finding employment for work-authorized immigrants and helping employers find qualified immigrants. Additionally, the Center offers monthly legal clinics, vocational literacy programs, general resource referrals, and plays an important role in public policy.

City government agencies

Ensuring immigrant integration is also an important issue for the city government. The current Mayor, Michael Nutter, first stated his goal to grow the city by 75,000 residents within the next decade in a 2008 address to the City Council (City of Philadelphia, Mayor's Office, 2008a). Additionally, Mayor Nutter's June 2008 Executive Order highlighted the need to retain and attract immigrants calling for stakeholders to

“develop strategies and policy recommendations for improving the integration of immigrants and language and cultural minorities into the social and economic fabric of the city” (City of Philadelphia, Mayor’s Office, 2008b).

Subsequently, the Mayor's Office undertook an effort to provide language access through electronic language interpretation and translation within all city services. The implementation builds upon administration efforts dating back to 2001.⁶ Immigrant advocates interviewed for this research urged that while the city’s language access program is an important step towards increasing access, it must be coupled with a public relations campaign to inform immigrant communities of its existence; and should be in addition to cultural competency across government services at each municipal level – from police officers, school administration to parks and recreation (Cooper, interview, 2010). Furthermore, the city formed the International Philadelphia Work Group in September 2008 to develop a strategic plan “to raise Philadelphia's international profile and its role in the global economy.” At the time of this research, the report of proposed recommendations had not been published by the City of Philadelphia.

These efforts point to the reality that the law of upward mobility ceased to work for immigrants and African Americans in the US system (Vitiello, 2009); thus, urban municipalities have created government offices to assist the integration process. As such, the City of Philadelphia established the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) in 2008 “to promote the full participation of Philadelphia's diverse cultural and linguistic communities in the economic, civic, social, and cultural life of the city” and “to

⁶ In 2001, Mayor John F. Street issued Executive Order No. 4-01, requiring all City agencies to assess their federally funded programs to determine the resources required to make such programs accessible to persons of limited English proficiency and to develop Compliance Plans to ensure the effective participation of such persons in federally assisted programs and activities.

strengthen the relationship between diverse cultural and linguistic communities and the City” (City of Philadelphia, Mayor’s Office, 2008b). One individual staffs the office and acts as a liaison between various ethnic community groups. The OMA exists in few other cities; instead, city governments have immigration offices such as the Office for New Bostonians.

Immigrants and service providers interviewed for this research suggest that an Office for New Philadelphians will provide a centralized place for immigrant services. Refugees can ask where are the English language classes in their neighborhood. Entrepreneurial immigrants can learn how to start a business. Moreover, refugees report that after a few years they have many more questions such as how to apply for credit or buy a home. Concern for creating the office is raised periodically. A 2004 report for the Special Assistant to the Managing Director highlighted the city’s need for an Office for New Philadelphians. However, many of the immigrant service organizations offer portions of this work. A centralized office for new immigrants infringes upon the self-interest of these non-profit organizations.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how immigrants impacted urban society in Philadelphia. The city’s transition to post-industrialism offers lessons for other former immigrant gateways, namely, the important role immigrants play in urban revitalization. Large low-skilled populations and the scarcity of commensurate employment present greater barriers for cities to become immigrant gateways again. Small-scale approaches to attracting immigrants do not go far enough. Non-profit organizations and municipal language

access enhance the services for existing immigrants, but these efforts alone will not offer sufficient opportunities that attract immigrants to Philadelphia. Larger efforts are needed to create more upwardly jobs and address low-literacy issues.

In concluding, it should be noted that cities aim to attract high-skilled immigrants who will positively stimulus to the tax base (Card, 2009). Nonetheless, the long-term gains of investing in newly arrived refugee groups cannot be overlooked. As one city official explained, helping Burmese refugees integrate in South Philadelphia now will help the community achieve success like what we see in the Vietnamese neighborhoods (Gupta, interview, 2009). The next chapter follows this view and discusses the process of refugee resettlement in Philadelphia.

CHAPTER 3: REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

In 2008 the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) reported there were nearly 42 million refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) around the globe (UNHCR, 2008). Refugees represent 15.2 million, more than one-third, of this total population. The international community has agreed that the voluntary and safe repatriation of refugees into their countries of origin is the ideal situation. When this is not an option, integration into the country of asylum is the second durable solution. Only one percent of refugees are referred for resettlement in a third country, the third durable solution, which is considered to be a last resort.

This chapter explores the pathway of a selection of that one percent of refugees, the approximately 60,000 people, who are resettled annually in the United States. In particular, I examine the resettlement process in Philadelphia, PA and its geographic, socioeconomic, and employment implications for integration. The final section looks further into successful examples to understand what are the conditions under which integration occurs.

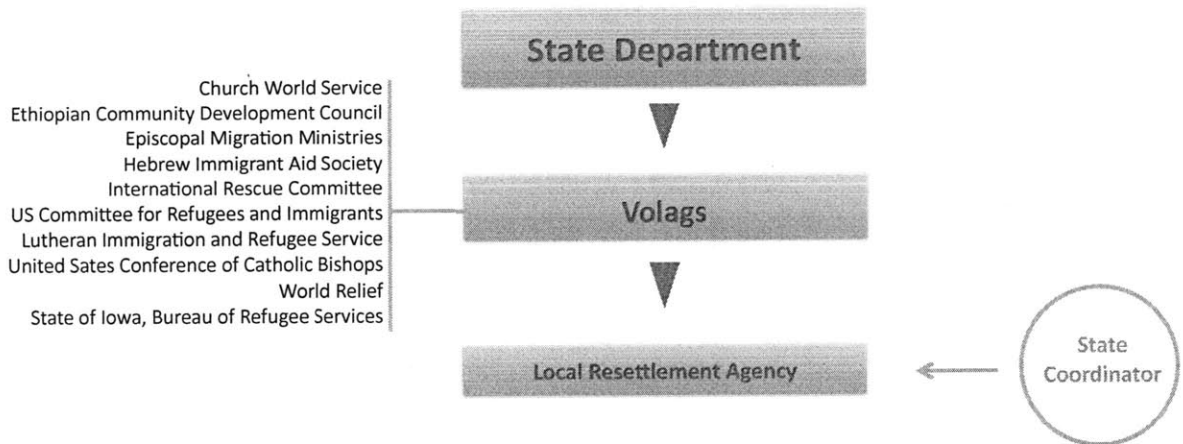
The Resettlement Industry

The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) operates according to the US Refugee Act of 1980, which essentially formalized the existing practice of public-private partnerships by enacting it into law. Agencies such as the International Rescue Committee and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) whose work dated back to World War II became refugee resettlement national voluntary agencies (Volags). The Act mandated that states must have a federally approved plan to provide assistance.

Coordination of US resettlement is based on the public-private partnership administered by the State Department, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). State and DHS manage overseas processing, reception, cultural orientation, and adjudication of cases including security clearance, while the DHHS manages federal funding to US state assistance programs.

Each State Refugee Coordinator oversees the particular state program for a continuum of employment, educational, case management, health, and financial support services to newly arrived refugees. The State Coordinator monitors all of the contractors to ensure compliance with requirements from the Department of Public Welfare, the Bureau of Employment and the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement. The Coordinator's office is available for technical assistance and conducts at least one monitoring visit annually to local agencies. However, the Coordinator is not involved in placement decisions, but rather funnels money from the federal government to local agencies or subcontractors who provide services.

Table 4: US Refugee Resettlement Structure



The State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM) works with Volags who receive funding on a per capita basis for refugee resettlement. Volags include nine national refugee resettlement agencies and one state-sponsored agency (see Table 4 above). Volags meet monthly with the BPRM to accept the approved number of refugees arriving. Then, the Volags send brief descriptions of the arrival's biographic sketch to their local affiliate resettlement agencies requesting the affiliate agency accept the arrival.

The local affiliate agency is responsible for arranging housing, clothing, employment, and medical care for the first 90 days after arrival. Refugees are eligible for public assistance, which includes federal cash assistance (welfare) and medical care (Medicaid) for the first eight months in the US. The specific package of benefits and its duration varies according to each state's policy. The federal refugee program reimburses states for basic needs assistance during the initial period, after which, refugees can apply to public assistance services that are available to other legal residents of the state.

The Refugee Pathway

The pathway for a refugee begins by qualifying for refugee status. This requires a person to meet the definition of a refugee and to be found unable to return to the country of origin or remain in the second country or country of temporary asylum. According to Article 1 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol, a refugee is defined as:

“A person who 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 or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

The Overseas Processing Entity interviews refugee claimants in camps and then makes a determination of refugee status. Each year Congress determines the annual ceiling for refugee admission numbers by nationality based upon the State Department's proposals and testimonies. Nationalities of particular concern for US refugee resettlement fall into three categories:

1. Individuals referred to USRAP by UNHCR, NGOs or an Embassy;
2. Specific groups identified by the State Department according to factors of ethnicity, religion, location, or nationality;
3. Family reunification cases in which an admitted refugee in the US applies for a spouse, unmarried children under 21 years of age and parents that are still abroad who prove that they fall under the US refugee definition and are eligible for USRAP.

Although Congress proposes a refugee admissions ceiling, the actual number of arrivals to the US is typically well below this number (see Table 5). At the peak of resettlement, over 200,000 refugees entered the US in 1980 as part of the Indochinese “boat people” crisis; while the annual number has been as low as 27,000 in 2001 following the 9/11 period.

Table 5: US Refugee Ceiling and Admissions Numbers



Adapted from ORR, 2008.

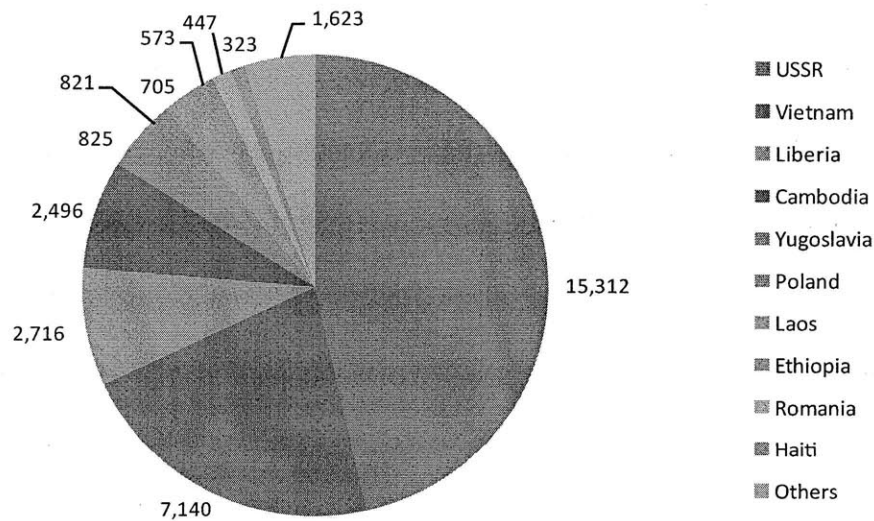
Refugee Resettlement in Philadelphia

According to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR, 2008) more than 600 refugees are resettled annually in the Greater Philadelphia Area. A total of 32,981 refugees arrived to Philadelphia between 1983-2004 (Singer and Wilson, 2006), although this number excludes the large Southeast Asian refugee population that arrived before 1983. Between 1983-2004, the largest groups originated from the former USSR (46.3%), Vietnam (21.6%) and Liberia (8.2%) (See Table 6 below).⁷ At the height of resettlement in the early 1980s, five agencies managed tasks of the response effort. Today, three service providers currently manage the resettlement process – HIAS and Council Migration Service, Lutheran Children and Family Service (LCFS), and Nationalities

⁷ I do not discuss the resettlement experience of former USSR refugees following the advice of veteran resettlement directors who believed the case was in many ways exceptional – the wealth and educational backgrounds of arrivals and the nature of political and religious support associated with their resettlement.

Service Center (NSC). Each agency is affiliated with a separate Volag: HIAS, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, and the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, respectively. According to a former agency director, the resettlement approach began more like a rescue operation with little federal direction and less concern about employment or long-term integration (Blum, interview, 2009). Federal regulations then began to alleviate chaos with defined program goals and directed spending.

Table 6: Metropolitan Philadelphia Top Ten Countries of Origin for the Refugee Population, 1983–2004



Adapted using data from Singer et al, 2008.

Competition and collaboration

Much of the attention in the refugee resettlement literature and advocacy reports focuses less upon resettlement outcomes and more upon the plethora of difficulties resettlement agencies face when strapped with minimal funding. A more nuanced

approach indicates that holding refugee resettlement to higher standards may create additional benefits including better services for other immigrant users. The following section describes both the agencies' competitive funding processes and a case of collaboration to systemize health service for refugees.

Since resettlement began, the organizational structure and funding mechanisms shifted from an ad hoc collaboration to that of a decentralized process. Initially, Philadelphia's five affiliate agencies established a niche in one the program areas: case management, job training, recruitment, and English training. Federal money funneled through states, which then issued requests for proposals (RFPs) for the aforementioned programs. Now, the funding system encourages competition among service providers to be awarded cases, find employers, and secure housing for clients. Funding is based upon previous numbers of resettled refugees, which may create competition for quantity rather than quality.

To increase collaboration, Philadelphia agencies hold joint bi-monthly meetings. Nonetheless, interviews with directors revealed that the competitive atmosphere prevents information from being disclosed. Agencies seemingly distrust one another's intentions and/or ability to resettle refugees adequately. At one meeting, a director told colleagues that the agency was not resettling refugees from Bhutan. Meanwhile, Bhutanese refugees waited in that agency's hallway for case management services. One implication of this distrust is that agencies resettle refugees from the same country of origin in different areas across the city and its suburbs without introducing or connecting them to one another, hindering refugees' social networks.

What does collaboration mean in terms of whom it benefits and who loses?

Agencies that already operate with limited resources and time are not willing to attend more meetings or make efforts to coordinate unless the pool of resources is larger. The core problem preventing collaboration is the competition over limited resources. As one former director reflected, “the industrial collapse diminished agencies' abilities to say that they could meet the criteria of low-skilled jobs...the city had an established social service infrastructure, but their resources tired out” (Blum, interview, 2009). In this way, resettlement and other social service agencies may provide similar services and compete for similar funding.

A recent effort by Philadelphia’s resettlement agencies to enhance refugee health care shows the beneficial spillover effects of agency collaboration. The initiative began in 2007 when agencies pooled grant funding to conduct an assessment that identified refugee health needs and potential health providers. Refugee health needs can be broken into two categories: the initial health screening and continuity of care. Federal and state-level regulations mandate that all refugees must receive a health screening within thirty days of their arrival (ORR, 2008). These screenings look for communicable diseases, mental disorders, and/or drug abuse, and addiction problems. According to Kemp (2006), the most common physical health conditions among resettled refugee populations are various parasitic infections, tuberculosis (TB), and malaria, which many US physicians are not trained to treat. Because some of these diseases have incubation periods, the importance of cultural competency within continuity of care became

evident.⁸ The agencies sought a health center able to meet the above qualifications and be geographically and financially accessible to refugees.

As the partnership moved forward, exogenous events brought new stakeholders and added momentum. First, a Burmese/Karen refugee child became hospitalized in the intensive care unit after what was a preventable tooth infection turned into a staph infection. Nearly losing a child, who already survived living in a refugee camp on the Thailand-Burma border, to a tooth infection alarmed the resettlement agencies and the refugee community. Next, a couple of Burmese/Karen refugees tested positive for tuberculosis. Some refugees were quarantined and subsequently lost employment, putting their entire families in a precarious financial position. From a broader standpoint, the fear of a widespread tuberculosis condition and its transfer alerted the city's Center for Disease Control (CDC) representative. Both of these events, but particularly the latter, signaled resettlement agencies, medical staff, and the CDC representative of the urgency to complete the medical exams. Together, the aforementioned stakeholders formed a Refugee Health Committee with core members representing clinics, government, resettlement agencies, and other service providers.

Within a few months, the committee systemized a partnership with a Center City health provider, Thomas Jefferson University Department of Family and Community Medicine (JFMA). JFMA trained physicians in cultural competency including information of refugee camp environments, potential medical conditions and appropriate interpretation practices. Now there is a better system in place for new refugees to get

⁸ Cultural competency in health care is understood as knowledge of health conditions in developing countries, sensitivity of legal immigration status, language access and interpretation practices.

medical services. Agencies solved a shared problem – together. More importantly, the spillover effects of this action - cultural competency in a Center City medical facility – benefit the wider immigrant community.

Geography of placement

In addition to health care, the importance of the geography of placement as a factor in refugee integration cannot be underestimated. As stated earlier, Volags act as immigrant intermediaries by shaping the foreign-born geography. National Volags select the resettlement city and local affiliate agencies then select the neighborhood level placement. Despite this important role, the decision-making factors for selecting placement locations are not standardized or transparent. National Volags do not follow set guidelines nor do they publish the reasons for why a city is selected for resettlement. The same is true for local agencies selecting neighborhood housing within the city. I return to this issue in this chapter’s conclusion and the following chapter’s case study. First, I explain the background that underpins placement geography.

The initial resettlement placement leaves lasting implications upon the refugee community’s ability to integrate. Oftentimes, placements do not meet refugees’ expectations of American lifestyles or living environments do not reflect the information refugees’ received during overseas processing (Blum, interview, 2009). The reality of urban poverty may create distrust of service providers or even lead to abandonment of their refugee status. For instance, some Iraqis who comprised the early waves of refugees in 2007 found their placements inadequate and even returned to the Middle East (Peter, 2009). In Philadelphia specifically, the Hmong refugee population dropped from several

thousand to less than 250 after encountering several violent attacks against them in low-income, marginalized neighborhoods during the 1980s. Instead, the Hmong community congregated in California, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

In light of these unfavorable integration experiences, some resettlement agencies are transitioning from urban to suburban placements. Philadelphia - Region 3 previously received close to 50 percent of all arrivals to Pennsylvania's five resettlement regions, but now receives only about 34 percent due to the increase of rural and suburban resettlement (Rothermel, interview, 2009). Refugees are not the only immigrants entering these destinations. According to a 2008 Brookings Institute report, immigrants, in general, are bypassing city centers for more affordable housing and service jobs in suburban areas (Singer, Hardwick, & Brettell, 2008). In Greater Philadelphia, these destinations include Bristol, Norristown, and Upper Darby. Resettlement agencies with connections to congregations and synagogues leverage these resources and their growing immigrant neighborhoods to enhance suburban placement. A Liberian argued that refugees deserve a fair chance at opportunities in suburban areas, particularly in better school systems (Forte, interview, 2010). In addition, the spatial transition from a more rural home country may be easier in less dense environments.

In contrast, other providers strongly felt that urban resettlement provides a more appropriate environment. Refugees are able to live within their financial means in the city, whereas a larger socioeconomic gap exists between refugees and suburbanites (Koch, interview, 2009). Moreover, in cities with large foreign-born populations, refugees benefit from the path paved by previous immigrants. Urban areas are experienced with integrating people into schools and the labor force. The city's diverse

community creates a support system for other immigrants. A Vietnamese refugee noted that simply seeing other Asian immigrants in Chinatown, even though they could not communicate, helped his community integrate (Nguyen, interview, 2009). Shortly after arriving in South Philadelphia, Burmese refugees could purchase their specialty spices from Cambodian storeowners tapping into the new market. In West Philadelphia, Liberian Muslims found work in Halal restaurants owned by Arab immigrants.

A common argument for urban resettlement is that refugees ‘revitalize’ the city, meaning that vacant areas will be restored and entrepreneurship will bring economic development. To be sure, refugees bring assets to cities; but placing an additional expectation upon refugees to revitalize rundown urban neighborhoods is overly burdensome. The issue at the core of the geographical debate is how well the community will be able to integrate in that location.

A larger policy shift, stemming from the ORR, is seen in Volags transition from urban to rural resettlement. The data that motivates this shift is unclear. Failures in the urban resettlement experience may not mean that rural resettlement will be more successful. The relative decrease in refugee financial assistance may make rural areas more financially feasible. Some agencies find they can resettle families in suburban and rural areas with more resources, volunteer support systems, better schools and increased safety. However, a much-needed study on long-term secondary migration of refugee communities will enable us to understand what are the host societies’ conditions that refugees find to be successful.

Socioeconomic implications: “we resettle people into poverty”

Today a larger socioeconomic gap exists between newly arrived refugees and the native community. The dominant trend in resettlement assistance since 1986 is the ongoing reductions in federal funding which affect both refugees and their receiving communities (Holman, 1996: 25). In 1980 refugees received 36 months of cash and medical assistance but that amount decreased to only 8 months in 1991 (US CRS, 2006). In contrast to the decline in federal funding, the cost of urban living has increased since the 1980s. Agencies operate under funding and time constraints that forces quick or sometimes hasty decision-making. For instance, agencies typically receive short notice of new arrivals, which makes securing housing an expedited process to find inexpensive rental units rather than a deliberate analysis of access to transportation, services, schools, and safe neighborhoods. Even agencies that search for housing with these optimal conditions, struggle to find clusters of affordable units for incoming communities.

Agencies are under immense pressure to ensure refugees become self-sufficient within months. Typically, refugees first meet resettlement caseworkers at the airport. The caseworker takes the family to their new home and ensures that a first meal is provided. Within the first 30 days, clothing, furniture, language education, school, medical examinations, and employment must be arranged. A program director explained the resettlement “energy on the ground” is a crucial factor in ensuring successful integration (Mallard, interview, 2009). Despite this, the costs of urban housing, providing for children and repaying refugee plane tickets can be overwhelming.⁹

⁹ Refugees finance the cost of airplane tickets to the International Organization of Migration (IOM) or UNHCR through scheduled payment plans after arrival.

According to a frontline worker who described these financial challenges, she summarized, “we resettle people into poverty” (anonymous, interview, 2009).

Employment integration: “we’re not career services”

The only way to escape this poverty is for refugees to become economically self-sufficient within four months of arrival. Thus, social service programs (language training, employment and housing assistance, and cash subsidies) are designed to facilitate the employment goal. Refugees receive immediate employment authorization and, after one year, the right to apply for legal permanent resident status and to apply for naturalization four years after arrival.

The Matching Grant Program serves as the main program for refugee employment. The program aims for refugees of working age to secure a job, as opposed to resorting to public assistance, within 4 months of arrival. The qualifications stipulate that participants are between 18-65 years old, not disabled and are employable. Refugees who enroll in the Matching Grant Program commit to working in a full-time job within that four-month timeline. The program provides financial assistance of 4 months rent and \$200/month in cash assistance to families until employment is secured, essentially an alternative to welfare. Congress established the Matching Grant program in FY1979 with Federal funds of up to \$1,000 per refugee provided on a dollar-for-dollar matching basis to agencies.¹⁰ Agencies need to enroll more clients to cover staff salaries, administration costs and support for clients. Beyond providing program funding, practitioners argue that

¹⁰ At of the time of the Summer 2009 research, agencies reported receiving \$950 per refugee.

rental assistance is invaluable for resettlement and is the only source of homelessness prevention (Bernstein-Baker, interview, 2010).

Successful Matching Grant programs are assessed based upon numbers of participants who complete the program by securing employment. A low number of successful cases negatively impact an agency's ability to obtain federal grants in the future. Agencies hire staff to assist with job searches, resume building and interview preparation. The demands of the 4-month deadline and language and educational barriers create pressure upon both refugee participants and staff to take the first available position rather than to seek a long-term career or intensive English classes or educational training.

As one Matching Grant Counselor reflected, “we are not career services.” Many refugees accept positions with factories, janitorial services or restaurants. Nonetheless, refugee participants navigate the program’s restrictions according to their own survival techniques. A Matching Grant caseworker reported that a recent refugee community had intentionally not followed program guidelines. Participants did not actively seek employment during the 4-month timeline. Rather, they cashed rent checks and then applied for welfare assistance, receiving what they felt was owed to them. Recognizing these problems, all of the interviewed Matching Grant Counselors expressed a need for modification in the program. According to all the counselors, an extended Matching Grant program for career training and/or loans for education or entrepreneurship is needed for continuity. “Finding a short-term first job is key. What is needed is a post-Matching Grant program with long-term goals” (Ramic, interview, 2009).

The inherent problem with the Matching Grant program is not the length of time so much as its compatibility with Philadelphia’s labor market. Economic integration

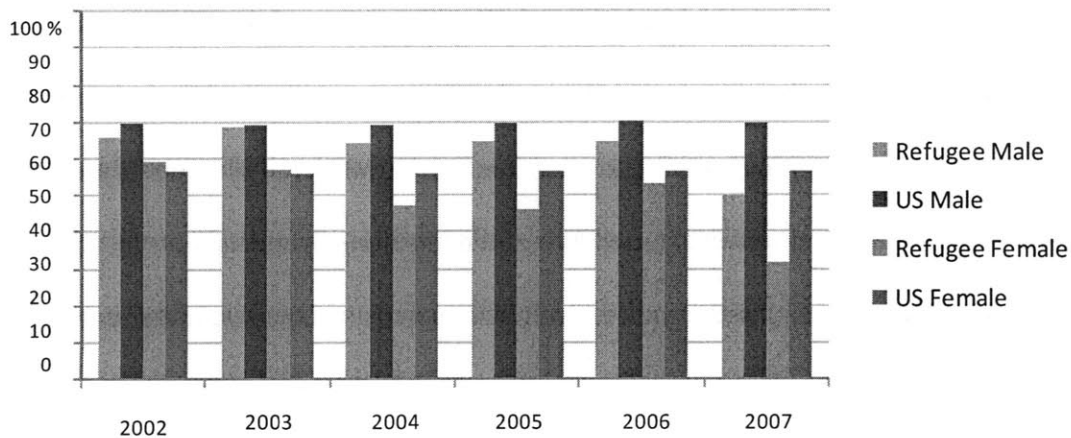
research shows that immigrants generally start at the bottom of the economic hierarchy, below their occupational qualifications (Sassen-Koob, 1980), and refugees are not an exception. The dilemma in Philadelphia is that the city already has an unusually large low-skilled working population. Over 50 percent of Philadelphia's working-age adults compete for one-third of the jobs available in today's economy due to the lack of literacy skills; nearly 550,000 people are qualified for only 211,000 jobs available in the city (PWIB, 2009). Philadelphia is not aiming to be the blue-collar, industrial town of its past. Low-skilled jobs are not being created at the previous rates in urban centers.

The notion that the market will accommodate various skill levels is implicit in the Matching Grant Program. The program is best suited for someone with little to no work experience (Mallard, interview, 2009). At the same time, English is enormously important for finding work (Blum, interview, 2009), but many refugees enter the US with highly educated backgrounds and work experience. How can an Iraqi medical doctor complete the accreditation process, take additional exams for US medical certification and secure a job at a hospital within months? On the other hand, how can a time-strapped employment counselor who builds networks with manufacturing industries and cleaning services switch to calling universities to find employment for a professor from the former Soviet Union?

Some cities partner with agencies to help new refugees over the first hurdle into the labor market. For example, Toronto's city government offers loans for new immigrants to finance the accreditation of their degrees. An expert from Philadelphia's workforce development sector suggests the city invest in job training for targeted positions to support the area's low-skilled population (Chernov, interview, 2009). The

refugee employment problem persists, according to advocates, because no one wants to finance workforce integration – neither the city nor the state. “The overwhelming sense is that refugees were already done a favor” (Bergson-Shilcock, interview, 2009).

Table 7: Refugee and US Employment Rates, 2002–2007



Source: US Census Bureau and ORR, 2008.

Even with the lack of time, experience, and education, refugees do find work (see Table 7). To be sure, employment counselors provide key resources through job training workshops, resume assistance, networking with prospective employers, and encouragement. Refugees also follow networking trends described in immigrant integration literature where established immigrants efficiently share information about employment opportunities to new arrivals (Portes, 1995). Birman and Trickett (2001) studied Vietnamese and former Soviet Union refugee communities, and found that over time, refugees rely less on resettlement agencies and increasingly upon their own capacities and social networks for employment.

Similarly in Philadelphia, an employment counselor described how Burmese/Karen refugees connected subsequent arrivals to positions at the same industrial plant (O'Neil, interview, 2009). In 2009 when jobs were scarce, an unlikely group of Middle Eastern women found work together at a meat shop in their neighborhood. In the Liberian community, women found success in high-wage certified nurse assistant positions, proving that a small investment in job training can go a long way. During the economic crisis in the early 1980s, Vietnamese refugees became frustrated with losing jobs and turned to becoming business owners and employed family members and friends. These Vietnamese entrepreneurs started hair and nail salons, laundromats, and dry cleaners because the businesses require lower start-up costs. One Vietnamese woman reflected that, "even though people knew little English, they had these business skills." Another common strategy is for refugees to work multiple jobs and invest in children's education. A Vietnamese man explained that he did not have time to learn English, but now his children support him and his wife – "the Vietnamese way."

Conclusion

It must be acknowledged that amidst all these obstacles, refugees do achieve self-sufficiency. Local agencies continue to provide the same mandated services for refugees with fewer resources relative to the current economic conditions. The Vietnamese community made their presence known with a large shopping district in South Philadelphia. Ethiopians are known across Philadelphia for their entrepreneurial success in the restaurant businesses. Liberians established an economic corridor in Southwest Philadelphia near 63rd and Woodland Streets.

It is important for policymakers and service providers to understand the refugee resettlement program's development. Past experiences shed light upon approaches to assist incoming groups. Yet, interviews suggest that high rates of staff turnover prevent information sharing within agencies, let alone across agencies. The immediate tasks to resettle incoming families on little notice put vast amounts of pressure on agencies with small budgets. Decisions to hire case managers are made quickly, sometimes hastily. Affordable rental housing is found through networks with landlords, word of mouth, and even Craigslist searches. All of these decisions are made in a short amount of time; yet, the implications upon the trajectory of refugee's experiences in the US are long lasting.

At a policy level, the public-private partnership's practice reveals that the 'partnership' is essentially that local agencies follow tasks assigned by national Volags who receive their marching orders from the State Department. One agency director summarized the relationship by asking, "what is the public offering?" (Blum, interview, 2010). Instead, resettlement agencies build relationships with religious organizations for additional donations, volunteers, and social networks. However, the refugee health screening case shows that city-level actors play an important role in providing effective services for newly arrived refugees. Why was the health department, or other agencies, unaware of the needs (and potential impact upon the existing population) of this new population?

Finally, I return to the geography of placement. The city as a receiver plays a surprisingly overlooked role in refugee resettlement. It is assumed that placement decisions are based upon a number of factors – existing ethnic community, affordable rental housing availability, entry-level job opportunities; but no methodology for or

transparency of placement decisions is published. As such, the Institute for Social and Economic Development (ISED) recently proposed a “Refugee Placement Calculator” to assess cities’ abilities to resettle refugees successfully.¹¹ The formula uses a new equation to evaluate placement including the refugee community case, a community’s suitability for refugee integration, and lastly, the capacity of the local resettlement agency and its partners to facilitate refugee integration. The greatest weight is given to the ‘wage gap’ between a typical refugee wage and a livable wage in that particular community. Significantly, the presence of other immigrants or diversity is not factored into the equation.

Other attempts to address the lack of successful integration include ORR findings that suggest recent decreasing employment and lower self-sufficiency rates are due to refugees’ lower education and inability to speak English or illiteracy (ORR, 2008a). This research disputes this ahistorical, conventional thinking in the next chapter’s case study of Liberians in Philadelphia and highlights the significance of the receiving community in the experience of Liberian refugees in Southwest Philadelphia.

¹¹ See <http://www.ised.us/category/blog-categories/public-policy-dialogue/ised-solutions'-refugee-placement-calculator> for further details.

CHAPTER 4: THE LIBERIAN CASE: WHAT WENT WRONG?

Refugee groups, like other national groups, encompass a range of socioeconomic and educational levels. The Liberian refugee community is not an exception to this pattern. Early arrivals consisted of more educated individuals and subsequent groups tended to originate from rural Liberia and spent more time idle in refugee camps. The following history indicates that socioeconomic differences have been deeply intertwined with race and ethnicity since the beginning of the Liberian state.

This chapter briefly summarizes what may seem to be the persistent abandonment of a national group. To be sure, Liberian refugees endured unthinkable violence; but unfortunately, their experience is not unique from that of other refugee communities. A veteran resettlement director explained that the Liberian story is more current, but still similar to the Hmong and Sudanese cases in Philadelphia (Panning, interview, 2009). The importance of explaining the history of the Liberian resettlement case is two-fold: to highlight the perseverance of refugee communities and, secondly, that the lessons from it will inform better resettlement outcomes in the future.

In this section, I begin the Liberian refugee experience with its underpinnings in the creation of the Liberian state. A brief description of the civil war and displacement follows. Next, the resettlement experience in Philadelphia in the 1990s-2000s and how it unfolded for Liberians is explained. Particular emphasis is given to unexpected challenges and employment integration as told by refugees and resettlement agencies. Finally, a conclusion summarizes the Liberian case as it relates to the refugee resettlement system.

The History of the Liberian State

The *Elizabeth* set sail from New York for what is now Liberia on January 31, 1820. Its eighty-nine passengers formed the first party of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color in the United States, more commonly known as the American Colonization Society (ACS). The black emigrants' journey from the US was the first of many to establish a new commonwealth on the land of their ancestral roots.

ACS's good intentions to 'undo' the wrongs of slavery were confounded with other interests. In particular, the primary force behind the movement, Reverend Robert Finley, identified the "three-fold benefit" that would arise if freed slaves in the US returned to Africa,

“...we should be cleared of them; we should send to Africa a population partially civilized and Christianized for its benefits; our blacks themselves would be in a better situation (Pham, 2004:6).”

Liberia's first census in 1843 indicated that after more than 20 years since the *Elizabeth's* journey, 4,571 settlers arrived, but only 2,388 people still lived in the colony, of which only 1,819 were "repatriates," freed slaves. About 12 percent of the emigrants abandoned the enterprise and either returned to the US or migrated elsewhere, while some even returned to their former slavery to escape the Liberian colonization enterprise (Pham 2004:12).

When ACS sent its first settlers in 1820, approximately 100,000 to 150,000 indigenous people inhabited the subregion. According to Liberia's last systematic census in 1984, out of a population of 3.3 million, only 2.5% descended from ACS settlers, another 2.5% from descendants of captured Africans intercepted and released to the

colony and 95 %from the original inhabitants (CIA 2003). The colony's settlers, the first group of freed blacks and persons of mixed descent, became known as the Americo-Liberian settlers, who then divided themselves according to degree of color. Although Americo-Liberians remained a minority, they maintained control with the support of the US government from the establishment of Liberia until the 1980 overthrow of the Liberian administration.

The 1980 coup occurred when a group of indigenous, non-commissioned army officers led by Master-Sergeant Samuel Doe overtook the Executive Mansion. The coup killed twenty-seven occupants including the disembowelment of President William Tolbert, who was the descendent of freed slaves who left the US for Liberia. From the conflict's beginning, ethnic divisions and their corresponding social inequalities distinguished society and ultimately led to the 14-year civil war (Dunn-Marcos et al., 2005).

Ethnicity and Violence: The Liberian Civil War

At the end of 1989, 168-armed men entered Liberia from Cote d'Ivoire to overthrow President Samuel Doe. Charles Taylor, who was educated in the US and the son of an Americo-Liberian father and Gola mother, led the rebel group. Taylor later assumed control of Liberia with support from Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, and Libya.

Extreme and personal acts of violence characterized the civil war in which the governmental forces and to a lesser degree the main rebel group, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), committed gross abuses including summary executions, widespread rape of girls and women, looting and burning of villages, and

forced conscription of men and boys. A Human Rights Watch report notes that the Liberian government forces carried out these crimes in a widespread and systematic manner (HRW, 2002). The violence held a clear ethnic dimension in which the Charles Taylor government accused ethnic Mandingo, Krahn, and Fbandi citizens of supporting the rebel movement. The targeted groups faced arbitrary arrests and torture based upon their ethnicity.

Liberians who fled east became entangled in a war zone again in 2002 when Cote d'Ivoire erupted in civil war causing refugees to experience the prolonged insecurity of "dual flight," meaning to flee two, three or more times. Cote d'Ivoire's initial acceptance of Liberians by Cote d'Ivoire and subsequent attack upon them created a long-term sense of betrayal. Similarly, in the summer of 2003 three US warships came to the coast of Liberia, but to the disappointment of many Liberians, the 200 Marines on board did not come ashore to stop the siege of Monrovia, despite the effort by civilians to pile dead bodies in front of the US embassy as a plea for help.

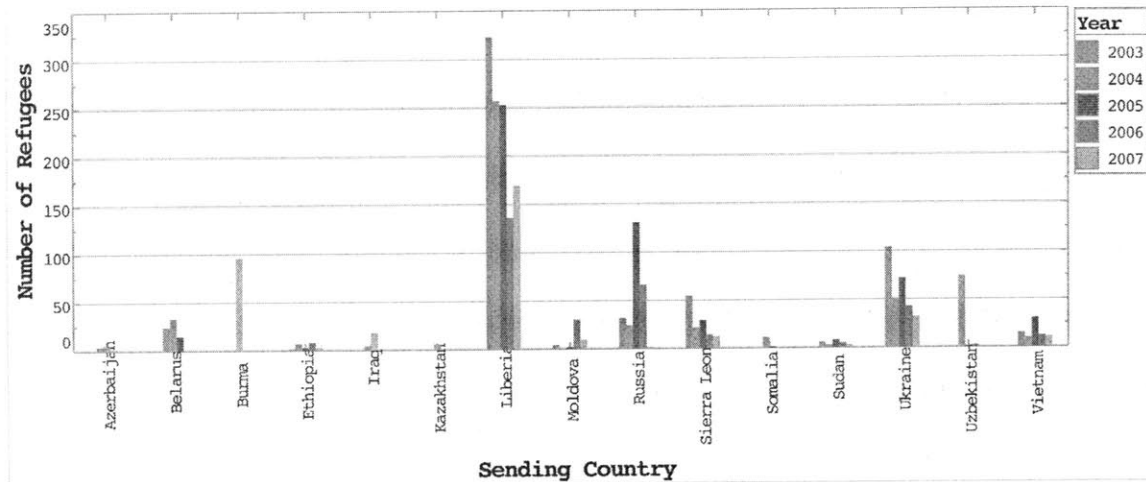
Out of a total population around 3.3 million, an estimated 200,000 Liberians were killed and more than 750,000 fled their homes during the civil war. Many of the displaced stayed in refugee camps for years, some even until now, waiting for resettlement in the US or repatriation to Liberia. The Liberian refugee camps in Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, like in many developing countries, faced the competing problems of providing for the needs of a large, poor native population and hosting a refugee community.

Reconciling the Past in Philadelphia

The nature of the Liberian conflict pitted groups against one another based upon ethnicity, religious or political affiliations, hometown or even more arbitrary conditions. Militia groups overtook towns and randomly conscripted child soldiers. People endured violence from multiple sides, altering affiliations for survival. Resettlement of thousands of people in one city brings these individuals into contact again. Liberians encountered enemies, torturers, and victims in waiting rooms at resettlement agencies and in their neighborhoods. An interviewee explained that the US legal structures created accountability that prevented early tensions between Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups at the Liberian community center from escalating into physical violence or riots (Sylla, interview, 2010.) The Liberian community strove to unite its divided communities through grassroots movements such as the Philadelphia Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Even with ethnically based socioeconomic differences in Philadelphia, one Liberian reflected that the “indigenous are playing catch up and are in a better position to do so here” (Forte, interview, 2010). Refugees find previous differences are minimized in comparison to resettlement in a new city. A communal sense to preserve the culture and integrity of their past stretches beyond ethnic divisions and should be leveraged for community building. ACANA, the African Cultural Alliance of North America (ACANA), is just one example of such work that seeks to build solidarity among Philadelphia’s communities with African heritage.

Table 8: Top 15 Sending Countries of Refugee Arrivals to Philadelphia, 2003–2007



Adapted from ORR, 2008.

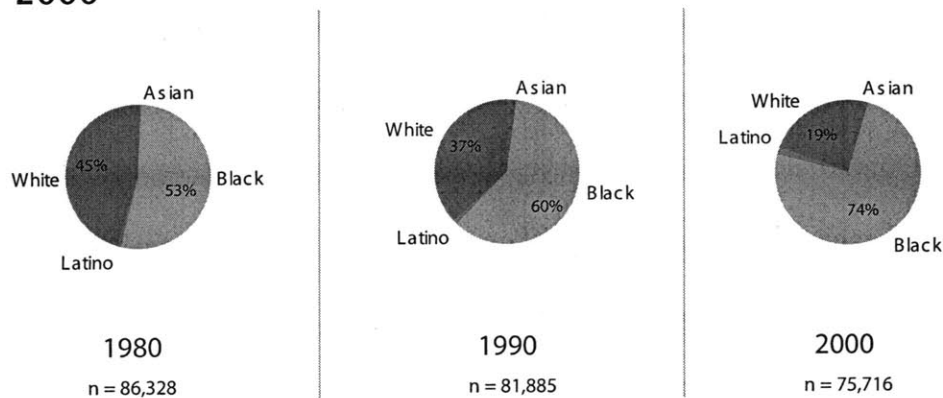
Southwest Philadelphia: The next destination

US refugee resettlement of Liberians occurred between 1983-2004 with most arriving in the late 1990s to early 2000s. Table 8 (above) compares the resettlement numbers to that of other refugee groups from 2003-2007 and indicates that the Liberian population will continue to grow through subsequent chain migration. By 2006 Greater Philadelphia had the largest Liberian population of all metropolitan areas in the US (Singer et al., 2008) and continues to host the community’s summer festivals that are complete with beauty pageants, traditional foods and celebrations. Liberians, who settled in the Minneapolis-St. Paul region, the second-largest host, Washington, DC, and elsewhere, gather in Philadelphia for the events.

The primary neighborhood for Liberian resettlement was Southwest Philadelphia, located west of the Schuylkill River and extending to the city line with a northern border

at Baltimore Avenue. According to the 2000 Census, 80,000 people live in Southwest Philadelphia of which approximately 19 percent are white and 74 percent black (see Table 9).

Table 9: Southwest Philadelphia Population Percentage by Race, 1980–2000



Adapted from US Census Bureau.

Why did so many Liberians make their roots in Philadelphia? The two greatest factors in the geographic placement are available rental housing and existing ethnic community according to resettlement workers. Firstly, agencies reported selecting this geographic location because of the affordable housing stock available. In the 1990s, the South and West Philadelphia area had so many vacant lots and abandoned row homes that a landscapes report termed the patterns as “Swiss cheese” and “missing teeth.”¹² Property values declined and people moved out of the area. The political district desperately needed to increase its constituent numbers and restore the area. Council

¹² See the Spirm and Pollio (1991) report “Vacant Land: a resource for reshaping urban neighborhoods” for maps and images of vacant areas.

Lucian Blackwell squelched opposition to West African refugees moving into available rental housing. Secondly, an existing Liberian community settled in Philadelphia during the 1960s. At that time, wealthy Liberian families, many of whom were Americo-Liberians, sent young adults for education and work in the US. Ensuing tensions in Liberia accelerated this flow and prevented migrants in the US from returning. The resettlement program prioritizes geographic locations with substantial existing communities because their resources make a clear difference in refugee adjustment (Haines, 1996: 36). In the best cases, language services, religious establishments, community organizations and ethnic businesses are already rooted in the city.

Ideally, the existing community and the first wave of refugees pave the way for later refugees to adapt more easily. Liberians followed the pattern of other resettled groups as those with greater wealth or international connections were able to flee earlier than those with fewer assets and connections, who arrived in later waves. A Vietnamese woman noted, “people who came early settled easier” (interview, 2009). Typically, the initial group establishes social networks and gains an understanding of the environment that helps to orient subsequent arrivals more rapidly. Nonetheless, for most refugees coming from camps, life in a western, urban city like Philadelphia poses enormous adaptation issues, ranging from learning public transportation to how basic appliances work to what foods are available in the US to how to handle finances.

The significance of ethnic and socioeconomic differences between the existing Liberian community and later refugee arrivals is unclear. Some Liberian interviewees did not feel the ethnic-class difference presented an issue; others believed the ethnic-class issues between Americo-Liberians and indigenous refugees did indeed exist, though to a

lesser extent than in Liberia.¹³ Agencies find “it’s hard to know all the internal dynamics of ethnicity and class” within an existing community (Mallard, interview, 2010). The diverse ethnicities and intricate socioeconomic statuses within the community mean that selecting representatives – commissioners, resettlement case managers, interpreters, etc. – may create unknown implications. Philadelphia’s Liberians have expressed concern with fractured leadership, evident by the large number of local Liberian associations (Tippens, 2008). Who speaks for the community? Is it other Africans? Is it Americo-Liberians, who formed the existing community before refugee resettlement?

Unexpected challenges

Liberian resettlement in Philadelphia may have seemed easy. Refugees would be geographically close to other African-American Philadelphians. Language issues were not as problematic compared to other groups. The existing Liberian community would facilitate integration more quickly. Yet, in actuality, Liberian resettlement raised unforeseen challenges.

One of the greatest challenges immigrants typically face is the language barrier. The importance of language skills cannot be overstated for immigrants integrating in the US, particularly for entry into the labor force (Rivera-Batiz, 1990; Chiswick, 1991). Veteran refugees from Vietnam attributed employment success to their ability to speak English upon arrival. Similarly, those who remained in low-skilled, labor-intensive jobs (often more than one at a given time) attributed their plight to a lack of time to study

¹³ The importance of ethnic-class issues between the existing community and refugee arrivals requires future research. In practice, decisions to hire case management or language interpreters should be sensitive to this issue.

English in the US. A Vietnamese man explained that he studied English at a church, but “it was difficult with two jobs.” People with English barriers still have jobs in restaurants, hair places or cleaners, explained a Vietnamese woman.

Yet, the puzzle in the Liberian case is that the national language is, in fact, English. Liberian refugees are more exposed to English than their counterparts from other countries. Therefore, given the Matching Grant program's goals – low-skilled employment – Liberian refugees, with greater exposure to English, should be a success story. Despite this, Liberians reported frustration with employment in one agency's needs-based assessment (Tippens, 2008).¹⁴ The most common problems seen by resettlement directors are the large portions of minimum wage earners working multiple jobs, struggling students and general poverty (Mallard, interview, 2010). What explained why Liberians did not thrive in Philadelphia as well as expected? One practitioner reflected that actually, “Liberians would be better off if they didn't speak English” because other service providers (welfare agencies, schools, etc) did not recognize the needs that extended beyond language access (anonymous, interview, 2009). A more frank perspective is that Liberian refugees were grouped figuratively and geographically with marginalized African-Americans.

The rapid transition to life in the US may have masked this reality temporarily. The struggle to acculturate shifted the focus away from prior experiences; regardless, psychological burdens from violence and rape during the war could not be suppressed. The State Department funded mental health services, particularly Post Traumatic Stress

¹⁴ Tippens (2008) reports on the complete findings of the study among Burmese/Karen, Liberian, and Meskhetian Turk refugees resettled by Nationalities Service Center in Philadelphia, PA.

Disorder (PTSD) counseling for West African refugee children and families. Liberians interviewed in field research pointed to the rise of gang violence among youth as direct evidence for needed ongoing services (Forte, interview, 2010; Sylla, interview, 2010; Werner, interview, 2010; Sluwar, interview, 2009).

Education is a key component for refugees' transition, particularly for youth. The educational experience is qualified by one Liberian remarking, "schools in the refugee camp were better than in Southwest Philly" (Forte, interview, 2010). The city's public school system is neighborhood-based and Southwest Philadelphia's schools are well known for outbursts of violence and poor educational performance. Moreover, 2007-2008 data show the Philadelphia Country public school district is highly segregated as white students represent 13.3% of total students and black students represent 62.4% (Brown, 2010). Bartram High School, located at 67th and Elmwood Streets in Southwest Philadelphia, has a student population that is 1.5% white and 74.4% black (Brown, 2010). Instead, of accelerating Liberians' transition, education became an unexpected challenge for the youth. Hence, the Liberian community recommended establishing a charter school for international students to address issues of violence (Tippens, 2008).

Liberians encountered conflict in a variety of ways, including the widely publicized beating of a 13 year-old Liberian child and tense social relations with African-American neighbors and other immigrant groups.¹⁵ This led a group of African leaders to found AFRICOM, the Coalition of African Communities, to build relationships between area groups in 2001. Additionally, former Mayor John Street established a Commission

¹⁵ See Robert Moran, "Residents say beating fits widespread pattern," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 3, 2005.

for African and Caribbean Immigrant Affairs to provide forums for African Americans and Black immigrants to interact and access city services. However, critics view these efforts, at best, as political appeasements.

The most often cited need by Liberians is that integration procedures should be longer. The process only begins in the first six months; questions continue to mount years after resettlement. How does one file legal immigration applications for green cards and naturalization? What scholarships are available for university studies? How can we participate in US politics? What is the process for starting a business in Philadelphia? Interviewees expressed the need for an ongoing resource that answers these questions.

The employment integration process

As previously mentioned, the resettlement system measures a refugee's progress towards integrating into American society by securing employment. In the state's view, refugee employment prevents reliance upon welfare programs. Nevertheless, finding work that is commensurate with one's skills can be a trying experience, particularly for many Liberians who spent years in West African refugee camps. They lack employment experience and may rely upon a generous employer willing to offer refugees their first job. In contrast, more skilled refugees often settle for jobs in which they are overqualified. It is not uncommon for former government officials and doctors to work as taxi drivers or parking attendants. Refugees, especially those with professional degrees, rarely arrive with documentation of certificates and licenses from their country of origin, which poses many problems. The accreditation process for international

degrees is long and expensive. For example, foreign medical doctors are sometimes told to start the accreditation process at the beginning, by applying to enter a US medical school. The realization that life in the US begins at the bottom is difficult to reconcile with previous expectations.

After years of civil war and displacement, Liberians knew they had to catch up in order to compete in the US.

“Many Liberian students did not experience school life or city life because of the war. They came from rural areas and the refugee camps. Some had not seen electricity or school. Everything was changed. They tried to live like the people that live in this country” (Sluwar, interview, 2009).

Surprisingly, many Liberians interviewed for this research cited either the “American Dream” or the “capitalist society” in which education and hard work enables one to succeed. Indeed, Liberians have strived to catch up with education. Young and middle-aged adults acquired certifications, attended community colleges, vocational schools, and prestigious universities. More commonly, Philadelphia’s Liberians work as nurse assistants, residential counselors, and mental health workers. Liberians study and go to school during the day, then work evening shifts in the health fields (Forte, interview, 2010). Juggling jobs and education or working multiple shifts to invest in the future of children is more often the norm, rather than an exception for new refugees.

Refugees overcome the 4-month employment timeline by identifying high paying jobs and utilizing social networks. The Liberian women, in particular, have been very successful in this way by creating a niche in certified nurse assistance (CNA) work. These high-demand jobs can pay upwards of \$20 per hour. Some complete additional

training to be licensed practical nurses (LPNs) or registered nurses (RNs). Strong social networks enable women to break into the field and to locate the high paying positions. The main reason for changing jobs is reportedly based upon word of mouth information about higher wage positions. Social networks helped a Liberian interviewee transition from his first job as ground transportation support at the airport to apply for a higher-wage factory position (Sluwar, interview, 2009).

Entrepreneurs developed a corridor of businesses in Southwest Philadelphia, particularly on Woodland Avenue. The neighborhood's shops and corner stores sell African produce, foodstuffs, clothing, and beauty products. Women own hair-braiding businesses and take-out restaurants that may be based out of their homes. Other widespread entrepreneurial efforts include the rise of non-profits that connect resources in the US to needs in their home country through a variety of educational, medical, and technological programs. These aspiring entrepreneurs recommended that US assistance should focus upon enhancing transnational connections as a more sustainable post-conflict reconstruction approach (Saye, interview, 2010).

Yet many Liberians remain in low-skilled, minimum wage positions. Numerous others are unemployed. There are high rates of unsuccessful students failing to bridge the gap between Liberian schools with those in the US. In particular, the young generation of adults struggles to reconcile the past with the mixed and even opposing norms and expectations between Liberian and US cultures.

Conclusion

In spite of the marginalization described in this chapter, Liberian interviewees remained generally optimistic. Many referred to the US's capitalist system in which "if you work hard you can move up" or, rather, "education makes it more equal." In this regard, perhaps less ethnic and socioeconomic barriers are placed upon Liberians compared to in their home country.

What is surprising is that amidst all the obstacles and difficulties, cities and resettlement agencies do provide services for refugees. But, it truly attests to the perseverance and resilience of refugees who create a better life in urban cities. Compared to fleeing through West African jungles for 10 days and nights, the challenges to integrate in Philadelphia may not appear so difficult. Nonetheless, even though refugees do achieve self-sufficiency, it should not justify a program that after more than 30 years still resettles refugees into poverty. Long-term outcomes will evaluate the 'good intentions' of the US refugee resettlement system.

CHAPTER 5: MOVING FORWARD

This thesis asked the question: under what conditions do refugees successfully integrate into urban areas? I hypothesized that the receiving city, particularly because of its employment opportunities, is a significant factor in the trajectory of a refugee community and that refugees' assets are valuable for self-directed integration strategies. The discussion of the US resettlement system indicates that refugee resettlement does not follow market forces. It is not typical migration. In this sense, finding the balance between providing social services or 'leaving it to the market' varies across and within refugee communities.

The Liberian case study illustrates that a fixed formula for refugee resettlement does not exist. It would be too easy to assert that successful resettlement depends upon a multitude of community factors: assistance from an existing community, language access, public transportation access, quality school systems; or demographic factors: age, education, ethnicity, gender, household composition. In actuality, refugees integrate in host societies with the absence of any of the above community factors and despite purportedly unfavorable demographic factors. English language ability (for example, the Liberian case), education and professional experience (for example, recent Iraqi refugees), or existing community may not lead to integration; rather, the same factors may create the opposite effect leading to frustration and deterring integration. The variations of circumstance within and across groups decrease the viability of a "Refugee Placement Calculator" (ISED, 2009).

What are the bounds within which the formula does work? In moving forward, the parameters, which in successful urban refugee integration occur, are discussed. I

categorize the parameters according to the four levels of stakeholders from macro level policymakers to micro level individual refugees.

The National Resettlement Process

Although the State Department oversees US refugee resettlement, private national Volags play a critical role as immigrant intermediaries shaping the foreign-born profile of urban areas through placement decisions. Despite the importance in selecting geographic placements, the decisions are seemingly arbitrary. As previously discussed, successful integration is a two-way process meaning that cities play a critical role as “receiving communities.” Therefore, more transparency is needed so that further work can better evaluate placement factors such as existing community or employment availability. I echo numerous suggestions in the literature and in practice for longitudinal studies of refugee integration outcomes, with emphasis given to understanding experiences of the second generation. The implications for understanding the conditions under which refugees integrate successfully are increasingly important as geographic policy shifts occur without long-term data backing the change.

Moreover, national Volags should more carefully examine potential resettlement cities’ employment conditions and the role of employment in the integration process. The US Refugee Act clearly states that refugees should be employable as quickly as possible after arrival. To be sure, employment is key, not only because it creates a sense of self-sufficiency but also because finding a job immediately is the only way refugees can escape poverty. In so far as the Matching Grant program connects refugees with jobs

4 months after arrival, it does not address a more pressing issue for employment in cities such as Philadelphia where few low-skilled jobs exist.

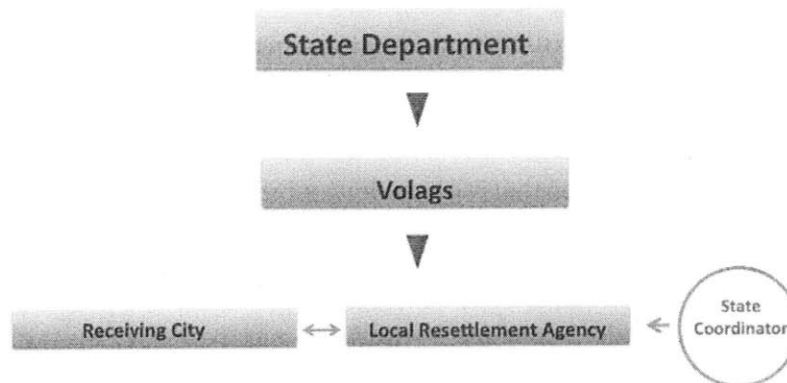
The Refugee Act gave structure to what was a chaotic process, but now the rigid guidelines fail to accommodate diverse refugee groups. For example, large families are rarely equipped to balance finding a job, childcare, rent, and airplane ticket payments. In the same way, educated professionals feel their needs are not in line with expectations of the Matching Grant program. Successful resettlement according to these guidelines is better suited for single males who can begin low-skilled work quickly rather than for families.

At a national level, the resettlement system can enhance refugees' transition by providing technical capacity to assist in bridging social networks once again. This enhances the existing assets' and social networks that facilitate successes, as described in previous chapters, such as sharing advice on high-wage employment positions, educational training, or procedures for starting a new business.

The City as a Receiver

Although some studies argue demographic characteristics (age, education, ethnicity, gender, and household composition) have the most influence on refugee economic status (Potocky-Tripodi, 2003), more attention should be given to enhancing receiving cities' abilities to integrate new refugees.

Table 10: Revised Refugee Resettlement Structure



A more appropriate system is one in which city-level government is further connected to the resettlement process (see Table 10). As one of Philadelphia’s city officials suggested, the city can do more to welcome and integrate newly arrived refugee communities; thus, producing better long-term outcomes. A city’s ability to meet refugees’ needs may be assessed by its non-profit structure and relations with its minority population. Because refugees have particular needs and vulnerabilities, receiving cities should have a non-profit structure in place where refugees can access services. Moreover, systematizing language access and cultural competency in municipal services benefits refugees as well as other immigrant communities. As Reitz (2002) argues, pre-existing ethnic relations with host populations are a critical factor for integration and prove to be a key parameter for successful integration according to the Liberian case study. Volags can assess cities in this respect by examining how well other immigrant groups are integrated in the society.

A historical look at urban immigration patterns demonstrates that employment opportunities influenced those who migrated by choice. In the same way, employment is a crucial component for cities to facilitate refugees’ integration. Card (1990) attributed

Miami's ability to integrate Cubans during the Mariel Boatlift to the growth in the types of industries that absorb low-skilled workers. Similarly, Utica, NY's resettlement experience benefited from local manufacturers employing many refugees. Hence, successful resettlement requires that Volags determine that the placement city has employment opportunities for new arrivals.

The Local Resettlement Agencies

Successful resettlement agencies are dynamic; they access resources and create partnerships when obstacles arise. Service providers establish relationships with other organizations and existing communities to enhance services. Each resettlement group arrives with little notice and agencies must redirect the focus where the needs are the greatest, be it medical care, mental health counseling, or professional accreditation transfers. Because multiple agencies within a city resettle refugees from the same country of origin, these needs extend beyond one agency. This creates opportunities for collaboration, as in the Burmese/Karen case where agencies mobilized to systemize a health screening procedure that provides needed medical services and prevents the spread of communicable diseases. Multiple agencies may collectively organize; however, it should be cautioned that collaboration must "increase the pie" of resources for resettlement agencies (Bernstein-Baker, interview, 2010).

These agencies are at the forefront in facilitating refugee integration and can "make the transition more easy or difficult" (Blum, interview, 2009). They are the first people whom refugees meet at the airport. They provide employment counseling. They select the neighborhood placement for housing, the new environment which refugees

daily encounter. These are enormously important tasks and the ability to complete them effectively strongly impacts a refugee's trajectory to integrate successfully.

Most significantly, urban resettlement geography should leverage spaces of interaction as well as proximity to other immigrant groups and their resources. Refugees rely upon social networks in the immigrant community for various needs. Resettlement can be enhanced in this context, according to how a Vietnamese refugee described the beneficial placement near Chinatown, rather than placement in a resource poor area.

The Refugee Community

Refugees rely upon one another to facilitate the integration process. Ideally, the first group of arrivals in a refugee community quickly establishes networks that facilitate subsequent arrivals. Successful examples include Vietnamese entrepreneurs who opened businesses that provide jobs for other refugees or Ethiopian car parking businesses that provide entry-level work for many other Ethiopians. Because the first group of arrivals typically follows a pattern of representing higher educational and professional status, successful integration of the first group is of critical importance.

Another self-directed strategy is investing in the second generation's education, what one interviewee termed the "Vietnamese way." Refugees also rely upon their counterparts for social networks to share information about employment, as described in the case of Liberian women and CNA positions, or job training. Over time, these networks inform secondary migration patterns where refugees identify optimal communities.

The extent of self-reliance raises the question of whether service provision should be outsourced to the refugee community. For example, in Utica, NY the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees (MVRRCR) employs former refugees who assist new refugee arrivals with everything from English education to job training to advice on buying a new home. MVRRCR also advises community schools, medical centers, employers, and city officials on how to help integrate refugees (Singer and Wilson, 2006). Another example includes the Philadelphia Truth and Reconciliation Commission from within the local Liberian community.

Enhancing integration requires understanding refugees' self-directed strategies that lead to successful cases. Support for long-term integration should examine these strategies to understand how urban agencies and refugees together can fill the gaps that exist after case management ends.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

While this research argues that refugee communities impact cities and the city, therefore, plays an important role in refugee integration, future research should evaluate the role of refugee resettlement upon urban economic development. To what extent do immigrants and refugees revitalize urban areas in decline? What are the spillover effects from building a social service infrastructure and cultural competency that benefit other immigrants? Borjas (2003) argues that immigrants negatively affect native's wages. What is the impact of refugee immigrants, who more commonly find low-skilled work, upon native's wages? In terms of poverty alleviation approaches, what can we learn about structural and place-based characteristics of concentrated poverty in urban areas? Finally, research on refugee integration needs further comparisons across regions to account for variation.

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