

*Exploring Adjustment among Refugees in the Roanoke Valley:
A Critical Perspective on Durkheim's Concept of Anomie*

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Abstract

This paper uses data from nineteen semi-structured interviews to examine the lives of local refugees. The difficulties that refugees face when trying to come to America, and after they arrive, are also considered. The study examines the expectations the refugees had before arrival and whether and how their expectations are being met. Durkheim's theory of anomie from a critical perspective and concepts of assimilation and acculturation are applied to examine the findings. While some participants discussed expectations, many refugees had none. This can be explained by the fact that they come from societies with little to no opportunity for upward social mobility. The anomie experienced by some of the subjects is mainly a result of unmatched expectations in the United States, due to the structural barriers they face after migration. This study thus adds to current research on refugees' experiences of acculturation and also benefits local agencies working with refugee and immigration populations.

Literature Review

Introduction:

A refugee is defined as a person who has a "well-rounded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (Hanna, 2011:193; McDonald, 2013:96; Steimel, 2010:219). A refugee must apply and register with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in order to be accepted for resettlement. Throughout the world, there are over 15 million refugees (U.S.

Department of State 2015). The United States resettled about 70,000 refugees in 2014 (Immigration, 2014). Approximately 200 refugees are resettled each year in Roanoke, Virginia (according to the staff of Commonwealth Catholic Charities). A majority of refugees live in asylum in the other countries with the intention of returning to their home countries, and only very few end up becoming citizens in their host countries (U.S. Department of State 2015). The UNHCR decides whether to send refugee applications to the United States, and these applications are then sent to the Resettlement Support Center (RSC). The applications that make it through the RSC are then sent to Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The USCIS then conducts interviews with the refugees in order to determine if they will be accepted into the United States (U.S. Department of State 2015). The refugees are given a health screening, a location for resettlement, and they then undergo cultural orientation before finally being sent to the United States. All of these processes, including the transportation, are paid for by the United States government as a loan to the refugees. The refugees must pay the loans back once they are settled in the United States, which is typically after six months. While the Department of State's Reception and Placement Program provides these refugees assistance, local resettlement agencies are very critical to the success of the resettlement program. This entire process typically takes 18 to 24 months (U.S. Department of State 2015).

There are nine national resettlement agencies that work together with the RSC to decide where to locate newly arrived refugees in the United States. They make sure that the resettlement location that is chosen best matches the needs of each refugee. There are approximately 190 areas that refugees can be sent for resettlement. Once the refugee arrives in their assigned community, they are picked up from the airport and taken to their apartment where they already

have basic appliances, food, and clothing. The local resettlement agencies assist the refugees in adjusting to American culture and becoming self-sufficient, such as by helping them get their Social Security cards, learn English, obtain employment, register children for school, and make medical appointments (U.S. Department of State 2015). Since the Department of State's Reception and Placement program only provides financial assistance for three months, other state and local programs are included in the resettlement process so that the refugees are not completely cut off after three months. After living in the United States for one year, refugees must apply for permanent residence. They are able to become citizens after living in the United States for five years (U.S. Department of State 2015).

Thus, after refugees endure the hardships of their old life, they are then thrust into a new life where they must adapt to a different culture and society. Refugees must go through resettlement processes, find ways to adjust to a new way of life, find employment, and in some cases learn a completely new language. This process of resettlement is shaped not just by the efforts of the refugees themselves, but also by the resources made available to them. Moreover, the existing socio-economic conditions and ethnic hierarchies prevalent in the United States shape the long-term opportunities available to the new arrivals and the extent to which they are accepted by the dominant population (Zhou, 1997).

Ives (2007, 56) cites research on refugees to identify three levels of factors that shape the process of refugee resettlement and integration¹:

Micro factors shaping integration include acculturation and culture (including language and religion), employment, social support, and political perspectives. On the meso level, institutional settings such as resettlement and public welfare agencies, ethnic community organizations, religious congregations, and private for-profit entities provide formal

¹ Ives (2007, 54) defines integration as "a refugee's social, economic, cultural and political participation in a host country while maintaining a relationship with the country of origin."

resettlement assistance and resources. On a macro level, inherent in the refugee experience are systemic issues of discrimination and host-country context.

This paper examines some of the micro, meso, and macro factors that influence the lives of locally-settled refugees once they arrive in the United States. The next section examines the literature on the integration of refugees and immigrants.

Assimilation and Acculturation:

Assimilation: Sociological research on immigrants indicates that there are three broad patterns of integration that refugees and immigrants can follow in the United States: assimilation, amalgamation, and accommodation/equalitarian pluralism (Marger, 2006). One outcome for immigrants is assimilation, which would occur if they adopted the cultural traits of the dominant group, participated actively in the existing social institutions, and *were accepted by the majority*. Alba and Nee defined assimilation as “the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences” (cited in Gans, 2007: 153). Amalgamation is another option that could occur if intermarriage occurred between the newcomers and the established groups so “that there is a biological merging of formerly distinct groups,” (Marger, 2006:104) thus creating the celebrated melting pot.

In the early to mid-twentieth century, the predominant view about the path of immigrants and refugees in the United States, as per the assimilationist model, was that they would eventually assimilate into middle class white America (for example in the work of Park [1928] cited in Zhou 1997). This assumption was built on the experiences of European immigrants who had been entering the United States. Despite significant religious and ethnic diversity among these immigrants, they were fairly similar to the dominant group in that they were predominantly white (as eventually defined in the U.S.). This certainty about eventual assimilation was put in

doubt later, especially as the regions of the world that migrants were coming from changed. As a result of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, the number of immigrants from Latin America and Asia increased significantly. For this newest group of immigrants, assimilating into or melting with the white middle class was no longer inevitable (Warner 2007; Zhou 1997).

Several factors such as the extent of cultural and religious differences (between the new arrival and the dominant group), differences in skin color, the extent of economic opportunities, the availability of opportunity for upward mobility, the extent of contact with the home country, the presence of co-ethnics etc. played an important role in the eventual outcome with regard to assimilation (Zhou 1997). Nor would these groups of immigrants practice accommodation or equalitarian pluralism, that is, coexist on an *equal footing* with other groups, and especially the dominant group (Marger, 2006: 114-115) practicing their own customs, as the multicultural model suggested (Zhou 1997). Instead, as the structural perspective points out:

...immigrants and ethnic minorities are constrained by the ethnic hierarchy that systematically limits their access to social resources, such as opportunities for jobs, housing, and education, resulting in persistent racial/ethnic disparities in levels of income, educational attainment, and occupational achievement (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Portes and Borocz, 1989). Consequently, the benefits of “becoming American” depend largely on what stratum of American society absorbs the new immigrants (Zhou 1997, 983).

Therefore, due to their racial/ethnic differences from the dominant group, many post-1965 immigrants and refugees are unable to completely assimilate. Factors such as their race, social class, level of education, English speaking ability, etc. prevent them from being able to completely adapt to all of the norms of the mainstream society because they are powerless in determining whether or not the dominant group in society will accept them (Zhou, 1997).

Assimilation is not primarily their decision, but is in the hands of the members of the host society as to whether to include them as members of the American culture. It doesn't matter how the

refugees identify themselves, but “how the larger society treats them” (Zhou, 1997: 994). If the refugees are too different from the American mainstream, “these traits will be combined with the race/ethnic factor and seen as ‘deficient’ cultural characteristics and thus stigmatized” (Zhou, 1997: 994). Post-1965 immigrants and refugees therefore end up identifying more with other minority groups of their host society who also experience inequalities.

Acculturation: In his work on the newest immigrants, Gans (2007) makes a distinction between cultural assimilation, which he defines as acculturation, and social assimilation. “Acculturation is largely up to the immigrants..., happens virtually automatically and is usually unintentional ... [while]... assimilation is often impossible without the immigrants being formally or informally accepted by the non-immigrants whom they seek to join.” (Gans, 2007: 153). Acculturation is necessary for any refugee or immigrant to survive in another country, due to their need to find employment, medical care, housing, and nutrition.

There are different types of acculturation that result in different directions of social mobility. *Selective acculturation* results in upward social mobility because it allows the migrants and their children to adopt American customs in order to prosper, while also maintaining aspects of their own cultures. This sometimes requires children to act as intermediaries between their parents and the host society (Warner, 2007). It is easier for individuals to undergo upward social mobility when they come from backgrounds where they have obtained higher level skills which can be applied effectively in the United States, so that they do not have to make as many adjustments (Gans, 2007, 2009). It is also easier to engage in selective acculturation by being active participants in their religious communities. Since the United States has freedom of religion, religion is an area where refugees can find a support group and choose how they will

acculturate (Warner, 2007). However, it is harder to find a vibrant community of co-believers for those refugees who practice minority religions.

A second type of acculturation is *dissonant acculturation*, which is when the children of migrants completely break away from their own cultures and traditions in favor of American customs that are not in agreement with the customs of their parents. This results in downward social mobility (Gans 2007; Warner 2007) because they cannot fully assimilate into American culture, and since they have removed themselves from their own culture, they have no culture with which they can identify (Warner 2007). It also harms relationships between parents and children, because the children lose connection with their parents who have not absorbed American culture (Warner, 2007). The third type of acculturation is *consonant acculturation*, which results in a mixture of the first two types. It takes place when families remain intact and share the struggles of adjusting to a new environment, but they do not have a significant community of co-ethnics to assist them in the process (Warner, 2007). The next segment summarizes existing literature on the specific factors that shape refugee resettlement and integration.

Factors Affecting Resettlement:

Language Barriers: One of the main problems refugees and immigrants encounter throughout the process of resettlement is the language barrier (Björn et al, 2013; Ives, 2007; McDonald, 2013; Smith, 2008; Sowa, 2009; Steimel, 2010). While refugees are provided with English classes, it is still very challenging for them to learn the language. Some ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers believe that in order for refugees to do well in their lessons, they also need to be doing well in other aspects of their lives (Smith, 2008). If refugees are facing significant other challenges, their ability to learn English effectively suffers. This is a difficult

problem since refugees are struggling to transition to the new culture in many ways.

Furthermore, the language barrier is a huge challenge for refugees as they try to find employment. Refugees who had no English speaking skills before arrival are the most likely to experience downward social mobility (Gans, 2007).

Religion: As mentioned earlier, active participation in religious institutions facilitates integration among new arrivals (Ives, 2007). Given the principle of religious freedom in the United States, religion is an area where refugees can find support groups and choose how they will assimilate (Warner, 2007). However, it is harder for those refugees who practice minority religions to take advantage of this benefit.

Education and socioeconomic status: Adaptation to a new society can also be made either easier or more difficult depending on the previous lifestyles the refugees had in their home countries. Refugees who come from poverty, “are almost always upwardly mobile because even the lowest-paying American jobs pay more than those in their country of origin” (Gans, 2009: 1660). This is most often the situation because typically refugees are pushed out because their lives are bad enough to have to flee to another country. However, for refugees who had been professionals of some kind or had formal education before arriving to the United States, it is disheartening to have to struggle to find entry-level jobs that are below their skill levels (Gans, 2009; Ives, 2007). This downward mobility can create many hardships for refugees as they have to endure “a reduction in standard of living, social position and prestige. It can also result in a decline in personal autonomy, control and self-respect, and it can lead to self-blaming for the occupational decline. Then follow demoralization, depression, stress and stress-related diseases, addictive behaviour, family violence and breakup and other individual social ills” (Gans, 2009: 1659).

Location: In most areas of resettlement (including Roanoke, Virginia), the newly arrived refugees and immigrants are often located in racially segregated areas, thus causing them to acculturate into lives that are “downwardly mobile into persisting poverty, each stream coming into alignment with one or another segment of a culturally diverse, economically graded population” (Warner, 2007: 103). It is more difficult to acculturate because they are resettled in areas with other disadvantaged minorities. These groups of people are of a lower class and already struggle with unequal access to opportunities (Zhou, 1997). As a result of the refugees being resettled in minority neighborhoods, as opposed to among white Americans, for many refugees, their ethnic identity is sidelined while their status as racial minorities becomes more salient (Gans, 1997).

Resettlement Policies: Several studies have recommended modifications to the existing resettlement policies (Hanna, 2011; Ivan, 2007; Macekura, 2011; Smith, 2008; Sowa, 2009) and have especially advocated the need for greater flexibility to these policies (Björn et al, 2013; Hanna, 2011; Smith, 2008). Refugees to the United States come from varied backgrounds and have different circumstances. It is therefore problematic to treat them as all the same and deserving of the same assistance. Instead policies and assistance should be tailored to specific cultures and needs.

The goal for refugee resettlement is to provide assistance for a short period of time in order to promote self-sufficiency economically (Ives, 2007). While resettlement policies are intended to help the refugees assimilate and get on their feet, after a while (around six months) they are dropped off from any assistance “for fear of catching ‘dependency syndrome’” (Sowa, 2009:113). Self-sufficiency is a big factor that is included in the resettlement process as agencies want their clients to be transformed into permanent residents who are working hard and

achieving a successful life, according to American standards (Sowa, 2009). When refugees arrive in the United States, the focus is to make sure they become integrated into American society (Ives, 2007). The prevailing fear of welfare dependency among the poor that has shaped welfare policy in the United States also influences resettlement policies. In order to encourage self-sufficiency among the refugees during the resettlement process, the welfare assistance provided is purposefully kept low and for a short duration. Many researchers have criticized the limited economic assistance provided to refugees when it very difficult for them to find employment while they are also trying to adjust to their new lives and learn a new language (Hanna, 2011; Steimel, 2010). Refugees are expected to achieve self-sufficiency within the first three months of being in the United States. However, it is nearly impossible for these individuals to be able to adapt to the new culture and succeed in this amount of time due to hindrances such as language barriers and limited access to employment (Ives, 2007). In fact, research finds that this does not encourage refugees to remain self-sufficient for an extended amount of time after their assistance has been taken away, so policies need to be changed if they are really to help refugees integrate and be economically independent in the long term (Ives, 2007).

Co-ethnic communities: Identity is another aspect that is affected in the process of moving and adapting to a new culture. While refugees are expected to acculturate to the culture of the host country, the process is shaped by the presence of a large group of co-ethnics, and by power relations in the United States. Fong and Chan (2010) examined how immigrants tend to cluster in neighborhoods with inhabitants of their same ethnicity. Co-ethnic preference is very common among refugees because they are able to have co-ethnic resources and they like to settle amongst family/group members. Refugees like to have people and things from their culture close by, such as friends, grocery and clothing stores, and places to worship. This co-ethnic clustering affects

their acculturation because they are able to maintain a stronger sense of ethnic identity (Fong and Chan, 2010; Warner, 2007).

Psychological Hardships: Refugees face a number of consequences while transitioning to a new life in a new country. One of the most obvious consequences is the fact that they will face discrimination and racism for being of a different ethnicity (Hanna, 2011; Lamberti, 2006). Stereotypes, hostility, and resentment also contribute to the difficulties of refugees' assimilation. In many instances, refugees are seen as burdens and they are not necessarily welcomed, especially if they are unable to speak English and are racial minorities (Lamberti, 2006; McDonald, 2013). Refugees can be classified as victims in search of their "American Dream," or failing to achieve their "American Dream" (McDonald, 2013; Steimel, 2010). However, there is also the middle range of segmented assimilation, which was described earlier, where refugees succeed by adjusting to some segments of society, but not others (Zhou, 1997). Psychological well-being is another consequence that refugees encounter. This includes missing parts of their old life, dealing with the effects that the hardships of their old life had on them, experiencing difficulties making new friends, attempting to look positively to the future, and deciding whether they are strong enough to look back at their past or whether it is best to forget about all that they have been through (Björn et al, 2013).

Similarities with Dominant Culture: The culture the refugees come from also influences their ability to assimilate. The greater the similarity between the sending country and the United States, the lower the difficulty refugees will have in adapting to American culture (Smith, 2008). For example, Isik-Ercan interviewed twenty five Burmese families settled in a midsize Midwestern city and found that they struggle with adapting to American culture due to the different educational values. Since the parents lack education and language skills, they do not

know of the importance of encouraging their children, and therefore cannot, or do not know how to, help them with their schooling. Another factor that plays a role in preventing the refugees from assimilating is that they struggle with the desire to assimilate into the new culture and the desire to maintain their cultural identity. This struggle with balancing the two cultures can cause further alienation for the refugees (Isik-Ercan, 2012). Also, resettling in an area with a more welcoming community that is better adapted to taking in refugees, by having enthusiasm and flexibility in assisting refugees, has a very positive effect on their acculturation process, as it takes an effort from both the refugees and the host community to have effective resettlement (Smith, 2008).

Due to the many cultural variations of different refugees, they “may belong to social groups to varying degrees” (Zhou, 1997: 997). The refugees who either have, or are willing to adopt, the social norms and values of their host country are going to be better integrated and more accepted by the dominant group. Those with less similarities or who are more unwilling to change their lifestyles to fit in with the dominant group are going to be less accepted and integrated (Zhou, 1997). For instance, some refugees are accepted by the lower class, and others by the middle class. Some who practice Christianity may fit in with the beliefs of a church, but not fully due to the manner in which they worship. As a result of refugees only adapting to certain segments of society, whether by choice or not, segmented assimilation occurs (Zhou, 1997).

Length of Residence and Pre-migration Expectations: It is also important to understand that although it may seem individuals become more satisfied as they become more assimilated and better integrated into American society the longer the amount of time they have spent in the United States, this is not usually the case for the post-1965 refugees and immigrants. The better

integrated the individuals become into American culture, “the greater the control of the group over the individual” (Zhou, 1997: 998). By becoming more “Americanized,” they become more aware of the opportunities for upward mobility (Zhou, 1997). However, due to the previously discussed physical and other limitations that prevent them from ever being able to fully assimilate, such as skin color and language ability, they also become more aware that they are not able to achieve what the rest of society is able to. In other words, as the individuals adjust more to the United States, which is a society with organic solidarity, they have higher expectations and more dissatisfaction because they are prevented from obtaining those expectations, which increases levels of anomie (a concept explored in greater detail in the next section) (Durkheim, 2012).

Anomie and Social Solidarity

In order to apply the findings to Durkheim’s theory of anomie, a deeper analysis of this concept must first be provided. Durkheim was interested in the study of social solidarity, which is a reference to the means by which societies are held together. He looked at how the division of labor in society leads to solidarity, and whether this solidarity “contributes generally to the integration of society” (Durkheim, 2012: 17; originally published in 1893). A society that has a collective or common consciousness is a society with mechanical solidarity, or solidarity built on similarities. In these types of societies, there is a lot of homogeneity as the communities are small and everyone is alike. There is also repressive justice, meaning those who are deviant are dealt with severely. Organic solidarity is when there is more individualism, diversity, and heterogeneity. The societies are larger and are characterized by interdependence. The deviant undergo restitutive justice, whereby they have to make restitution or pay a price for their actions (Durkheim, 2012).

The two types of solidarity are not opposite sides of a coin but rather on a continuum, and Durkheim believed that mechanical societies eventually transform into organic societies. According to Durkheim, this move from mechanical to organic solidarity is a positive one because it leads to more individualism which promotes more freedom, stronger societies, and less tyranny due to less governmental oppression. However, there is a negative consequence of organic solidarity, which is anomie. When there is more individualism in society, there is also more dissatisfaction. Individuals in organic societies are able to see all that can be achieved because others in their societies have achieved more. Material wealth is often important in these societies, so those individuals who have less feel a sense of frustration, and ultimately can subscribe to the view that the norms of society do not apply to them (Durkheim, 2012; Merton 1938). Social mobility is an aspiration, but it is difficult to achieve. This, coupled with the ideology of meritocracy (that is, the belief that social mobility is attainable through one's efforts and abilities), can lead to alienation among those on the lower levels of the social hierarchy (Durkheim, 2012; Merton, 1938).

... actual advance toward desired success-symbols through conventional channels is, despite our persisting open-class ideology, relatively rare and difficult for those handicapped by little formal education and few economic resources... The cultural demands made on persons in this situation are incompatible. On the one hand, they are asked to orient their conduct toward the prospect of accumulating wealth and on the other, they are largely denied effective opportunities to do so institutionally (Merton, 1938: 679).

Therefore, they feel anomic, or normless (Durkheim, 2012). Although wealth does not determine satisfaction, individuals who have the confidence and certainty that they have equal ability and access to opportunities as the other members of their society are going to have lower levels of anomie than the individuals who perceive and encounter barriers to upward mobility and therefore are unable to achieve as much success as the rest of society (Durkheim, 2012; Merton,

1938). Thus, societies with organic solidarity and high rates of upward social mobility are also the societies with the highest rates of anomie. Their populations have more expectations because they know the possibilities, but there is a gap between their accomplishments and their ambitions (Durkheim, 2012). As a result of their difficulty acculturating and their inability to completely assimilate due to racial/ethnic/religious differences and dependence on their acceptance by the host culture, over time, refugees become much more dissatisfied with their lives (Zhou, 1997). What can contribute to this sense of dissatisfaction are the structural barriers to upward mobility and eventual assimilation, barriers such as their reception by the dominant group, which is influenced by the existing socioeconomic conditions and by the racial/ethnic/religious hierarchy. Therefore, this paper seeks to combine two broad strands of literature: Durkheim's ideas about anomie with the literature on immigrant and refugee resettlement and integration into a new environment. It also argues that levels of anomie are dependent upon the length of residence in the United States and the ability to acculturate into the new society and meet expectations.

Moreover, the expectations the refugees have before reaching America can also have a large effect on their integration. A very common pre-migration expectation deals with employment. Refugees expect to find employment in their area of expertise rather quickly and without problems. However, it is more often than not that refugees are disappointed with the reality of their professional lives. Most refugees either cannot find jobs or are given jobs for which they are overqualified (Sienkiewicz, Mauceri, Howell, and Bibeau, 2013).

On the other hand, individuals who do not feel as though they are fully a part of their society are less likely to have expectations. Refugees who have not lived in the United States for a very long time and still feel like outsiders are not likely to experience anomie because they already feel detached from the rest of society. Refugees are often born in societies where they do

not have opportunities for social mobility. Most of them also spend a lot of time in refugee camps, which limits them even further. As a result, they have less anxiety about trying to achieve a lot of success because they do not feel as though it is possible for them to have a life any different from what they have (Merton, 1938). While the refugees who come from societies that are held together by mechanical solidarity, which are very homogenous, are going to have a harder time adjusting to the United States because it is such a diverse society, they are going to have much fewer expectations than those who come from societies with organic solidarity, which are more heterogeneous (Durkheim, 2012). Since there are more opportunities and more individualism in organic societies, refugees will have higher expectations and experience more anomie.

Research Question

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of refugees in the Roanoke Valley as they transition to American society. Past studies have tended to focus on one group of refugees and used methods such as case studies, structured interviews, ethnographic techniques, field reports, and videotaping family therapy sessions. Other methods, such as in-depth, semi-structured interviews should be used as well because they will provide first-hand information, allowing the refugees to share their perspectives. Also, past studies have looked at areas that are known for having a large population of refugees, such as San Francisco and Boston (Ellis, 2011; Schumacher, 1987). There needs to be coverage of other areas that are less urban and diverse. The studies are also specific to one group of refugees, and not generalizable to refugees from diverse regions. Lastly, the studies do not provide suggestions for how to help with the transitions and assimilations of current refugees who have already entered the country. They only provide recommendations for changing the policies in order to help future refugees. This study

seeks to fill these gaps by providing information on different groups of refugees from several countries in the Roanoke Valley, which has a smaller, though growing, population of refugees (roughly 200 refugees are resettled by the Commonwealth Catholic Charities each year) (UWRV 2012). It involves in-depth, semi-structured interviews to study the perspectives of the refugees.

This study explores refugees' expectations about life in the United States and the ways in which their experiences reinforce and contradict their expectations. It uses existing literature on assimilation and acculturation and on anomie to examine the settlement experiences of the recently-arrived refugees who lack a significant community of co-ethnics. In analyzing the differences among the expectations of the sample population, Durkheim's theory of anomie is applied through a critical perspective. While the researcher can infer whether individuals with higher levels of anomie are from societies with organic solidarity and those with lower levels are from societies with mechanical solidarity, the paper mainly focuses on how their acculturation into an organic society affects their perception of upward and downward social mobility and of how the constraints of assimilation are outside of their control (Durkheim, 2012; Gans, 2007). This paper contributes to scholarly literature on refugees because it studies the challenges the refugees face when moving to a new country and how this affects their lives. This research thus gives voice to a relatively marginalized group in society while also providing local agencies with additional information that should help them with providing service to refugee populations.

Methodology

This study is based on interviews conducted with refugees in the Roanoke Valley who have been resettled by Commonwealth Catholic Charities which operates the Refugee and Immigration Services (RIS), as well as three staff members of the RIS. While an effort was made

to have a sample representing multiple countries, language barriers were an issue. In two instances where the individuals did not speak English or Spanish, the services of an interpreter were used. The sample includes eleven refugees who are from the countries of Bhutan, Burma, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Rwanda, Sudan, and Tanzania. The refugee interviewees' lengths of residence in the United States ranged from six months to six years. Among the refugee participants, there were six women and five men, and their ages varied from twenty-two to sixty-five. Among the three staff participants, there were two women and one man. Educational attainment of the refugees ranged from no education to completion of high school, and one respondent also had a college degree. The religious affiliations included various denominations of Christianity, as well as Hinduism and Islam. The refugees lived in a variety of households, ranging from single parent families and nuclear households (with none to eight children), to extended family households (consisting of parents, children, parents' siblings, nieces and nephews).

In-depth interviews were conducted with the participants in order to gain insight into their lives and what they find difficult in their transitioning process (see interview questions in Appendix A). The interviews were recorded with the informed consent of the subjects and transcribed. The subjects were asked to talk about the struggles they are currently facing and whether they have any suggestions for how to improve the process of refugee settlement. Most of the study participants were contacted with the assistance of the Refugee and Immigration Services. The Refugee and Immigration Services provided phone numbers and twelve people were successfully contacted. Eight agreed to participate. In addition, three other participants were approached through the researcher's academic mentor's contacts. The interviews ranged from thirteen minutes to one hour and twenty minutes and were recorded and later transcribed.

Five interviews were conducted in the office of the Refugee and Immigration Services and the remaining six were conducted in private homes. All locations were chosen by the participants in the study. Additional interviews were conducted with five of the refugees who are clients of the resettlement agency, to ask questions specifically about the services the office provides in order to determine what improvements can be made. Three interviews were also conducted with staff members of Commonwealth Catholic Charities to learn more about the resettlement process, and to gain a perspective on what the employees think can be done for improvement. (See interview questions for clients and staff in Appendix B). By acting as an intermediary, the researcher provided a needs assessment with anonymous suggestions and feedback to the agency. These studies have received approval from the Institutional Review Board at Roanoke College. As this study was conducted through ethnographic methods, the results are not generalizable. However, the data provides in-depth, first-person accounts of challenges faced by the local refugees and thus yields valuable information.

It is possible that the identity of the researcher, as a young, white, English-speaking female might have influenced the interviews for this project. While the refugees may have been completely open and honest in these interviews, there is no way of knowing if the differences in social positions and cultural backgrounds may have altered their responses. The refugees, especially the older male refugees, may have been less willing to share their stories and honest opinions with a white American female student. The researcher's lack of in-depth knowledge about each of the societies the refugees came from may have also affected the understanding of the responses. The researcher also didn't speak any of the native languages of the refugees; the respondents had either learned English before arrival to the United States or had been living in the United States for a long enough time to have learned English. Since most of the interviews

were with people who spoke English, it is possible that the results include experiences that are different from those of refugees who don't speak English and therefore have a much more difficult time adjusting to American society. While interviews were conducted with refugees who did not know English upon arrival, they were responding based on recall in describing their experiences before learning English (Gans, 1997). In addition, given the fact that they were approached by the researcher through the resettlement agency, they may have felt less comfortable sharing their opinions, and especially their criticism of the agency. While many experiences were shared, it is important to take these factors into consideration when determining the validity of the findings.

Findings

The interviews with refugees resettled in the Roanoke Valley elicited information about the challenges they face; several of these challenges are similar to those listed in existing literature on refugee resettlement.

Language Barriers: Just as other studies have indicated (Björn et al 2013; McDonald 2013; Smith 2008; Sowa 2009; Steimel 2010; Zhou 1997), participants in this study experienced challenges with regard to language. Several of the refugees talked about the difficulties in understanding Americans and making themselves understood. Seven of the eleven participants in the study did not know any English before coming to the United States, and they said that this factor has been the hardest part adjusting to their new lives. From the moment of arrival, the lack of English language skills create barriers: one participant talked about the difficulty in reading the signs and the gate numbers at the airport. Even when refugees can read and write English, communication can still be difficult since they do not have fluency in spoken English. One

refugee had a very difficult experience when some of her fellow employees said hurtful things to her. Even though she could understand what they said, she couldn't report them to her boss because of the language barrier. Several participants also talked about feeling lonely as they did not have anybody to talk to in their own language. Having more people to communicate with would make it easier to adjust and to find a good job, as previous research has also found (Björn et al, 2013; McDonald, 2013; Smith, 2008; Sowa, 2009; Steimel, 2010).

One individual talked about how disheartening it is to be able to see the look on potential employers' faces when she is having trouble filling out applications. "When they was looking at me, it's like they show me they will not give me a job because of the English." This represents both the micro factors that affect integration, due to the language barriers, and the macro level factors, due to the discrimination and powerlessness she faces to move up in society (Ives 2007). When refugees do not know any English before coming to the United States, all of their time is spent trying to learn and improve their language skills for as long as it takes. Mastering the language is their only focus, and if they have other issues or priorities, such as health or transportation problems, then they are unable to have any communication or interactions with other people, which exacerbates their isolation. Sometimes the location of the English classes are too far and at inconvenient times for refugees, who often have no means of transportation. The five refugees who did have some English skills before reaching the United States consider themselves very fortunate to have had this advantage. Several of them were taught British English, so the way of speaking (i.e. the accent, the choice of words) is different. Nevertheless, they are able to communicate and receive better opportunities. They find that having the language skills gives them the ability to exercise more control over their lives and achieve more success. The four refugees with the higher expectations knew English before they arrived while

none of the remaining seven did. According to the female from Rwanda, “that was a really big advantage for us, because I see friends of mine here that don’t know and are learning English. Before anything they have to go to school. They have to learn English and it is a delay.”

Resettlement Policies: As seen in past studies, the meso level factors of integration are another huge challenge that refugees face (Ives 2007). Most of the refugees that were a part of this study felt that they were misinformed and unprepared for the length of time that they are provided with financial and medical assistance. One individual said he feels the refugees should be helped at least six months, but they don’t receive financial assistance beyond three months. Also, as soon as they start working, the benefits are taken away. One woman said that she feels as though the office does not wait until they are self-sufficient before taking away food stamps or Medicaid. When an additional person in her family came to the United States at a later time, he was put on his mother’s food stamps, but there was no change in income. The food stamps and Medicaid assistances were then taken away even though the mother was not employed, because other people in the household are employed. This is a large issue because not all jobs provide insurance. She is on medication, but she can’t afford them without insurance, so she has to do without some.

What they were told before arrival also did not match the realities. For instance, they expected to receive Medicaid for much longer than the six months they are provided. They also expected to receive more financial assistance with paying bills, at least until they were self-sufficient. This is the most stressful things refugees face, in one woman’s opinion. It is very challenging because “they tell us something but when you come here, it’s different.” A refugee from Bhutan says that he understands that people are helping, but he explained how he doesn’t think the refugee office is doing enough to help the refugees get employed. He feels there should

be a platform where they are open to listening to suggestions and ideas that people have. They should also be networking more to have more job opportunities to provide the refugees.

While the staff agrees that in many circumstances they don't provide the refugees with assistance for a long enough period of time, they explain that the problems are systemic, and therefore out of their control. They are able to provide financial assistance for 90 days and they have no control over the length of that time. They also expressed that many refugees come in with unrealistic expectations and there is nothing the office can do meet those expectations. It is very difficult for them because there are so many ways they wish they could help, but they simply can't. There are many issues with the health care system in the United States, for citizens and non-citizens alike. They wish the Refugee Medicaid lasted longer than eight months because they truly want to make their clients' lives easier, but their hands are tied. Refugees are expected to learn the workings of American culture within 30 days and be financially self-sufficient after 90 days, which is very unrealistic. In many cases, the staff will assist the refugees after 90 days because it is so hard for them, but they simply cannot change the system.

Education/Employment Mismatch: After the initial challenge of the language barrier, the refugees face a lot of frustration with regard to formal education. If the refugees are over eighteen, they are not allowed to go to high school. Some are placed in community college, but they quickly find themselves unable to continue as they cannot understand that level of English. Even when refugees arrive with formal education, whether at a high school or higher level, they must start almost from the beginning, as their educational credentials are not recognized in the United States. This is especially frustrating for refugees who know they are intelligent individuals who have had significant education, but are no longer viewed that way. The refugees can see how people look at them or treat them as if they are ignorant just because of language

barriers. They struggle because it is very hard for them to find the time to study and work for their education once again.

When the refugees were asked about challenges they are still facing and ways they wish the resettlement office could help, education was a difficulty that commonly was mentioned. Two individuals who have children discussed how difficult it is for their children to be able to do well in school, because of the language barrier. One individual had to have her son drop out and work because he couldn't keep up in class, and another individual similarly expressed how challenging a time his children are having adjusting to school. A college-age refugee had many issues with how education is handled for refugees. She doesn't understand why refugees who are still under 21 cannot go back to high school to get a diploma, but instead are told to get their GED. This is especially frustrating for her because she and her siblings are well-educated, but weren't educated in the United States, so their only option is to get a GED. She also wishes the office would provide more help those who want a college education, because it is very hard to start on their own and get loans when they have no financial history/records. GED classes are also difficult for the refugees to attend because they usually take place at night after the buses stop running.

A staff member explained that there is an over-18 program in Roanoke, but the office does not have a very good track record with them because refugees often have to quit for various reasons, such as having to work because their families haven't been able to get a job. The lack of financial stability causes many refugees to quit before completion, and as a result the refugees are rarely accepted into the program.

Another common frustration is finding employment. All but one of the eleven refugees provided feedback about employment, as it is one of the hardest parts about making a life in the United States. Due to age and physical disability, one man has not been given employment. Another woman has an issue because she needs to work in the afternoon because her children are with her in the morning. However, she cannot find work during the time that she needs. She also has problems because she has not been able to get experience in the United States, which employers tell her she needs. She has gone through interviews and done paper work, but she doesn't have recommendations, so she can't get hired. She also says she is unsure if the resettlement office is still helping her or not, because the employee in the specialist position changed.

Two individuals suggested that there should be employment training and skills development by the office so that the refugees can be more productive and efficient in the workplace. One individual also suggested that the office should build strong relationships with employers. "They have limited network with employer...they need to build strong relationships with local employer...And my point is they have very limited connections with employer." He added that the office should have job fairs in order to create a "platform so the employer knows who can work...Maybe more jobs and connectivity will be there." He also said the office should help with job searches for refugees of the "second migration," which is when refugees move to Roanoke from other areas. These individuals who move to the area either for family or friends currently have no assistance here. The office should also be finding employment for everyone, not just one member of a family.

The staff also pointed out how frustrating and discouraging it must be for the refugees who had higher jobs in their home countries to come here and struggle to find employment. The

new employment specialist is also working to branch out and find places that will hire more refugees. However, there is also the challenge in that the office must maintain good relationships with employers. They need to find companies that trust them and will hire multiple refugees. Therefore, the office must be selective in who they send to certain jobs. It is a hard decision, but they have to know that the refugees they send to the jobs are going to do well in order to maintain the trust and good relationships.

Finding employment is all the more difficult for refugees with little or no formal education. While their choice is already limited to jobs that do not require a certain level of education, they are further hindered by the geographical location as the job market in Roanoke city provides limited opportunities. Six out of the eleven individuals noted that a lot of their problems come from the fact that there simply aren't many job opportunities in Roanoke. The challenges are even greater due to the linguistic and educational difficulties discussed earlier. Refugees therefore receive irregular work. The study participants talked about how when they are not working, they are not happy because they have nothing to do throughout the day. One individual in this study pointed out that if the government were to provide more jobs, the refugees would be able to help in return by paying taxes. A majority of them expect to find jobs shortly after arriving, yet quickly discover that that is not the case. This supports Sienkiewicz et al's (2013) finding that refugees commonly expect to find jobs quickly and in their area of expertise. A lot of times they cannot find a job until they learn English, or they are given jobs they cannot perform: The main jobs they are given involve physical labor. However, many refugees have health problems that hinder their ability to work for long hours and some are merely too old to perform the tasks they are given. For instance, one participant talked about a physically challenging job which he was too small to perform. He tried his best, nevertheless, but

one day was found unconscious after throwing up blood and had to be rushed to the hospital. Another individual developed a back problem from the work she was doing. Even though she returned with a doctor's note, she was let go because the employer wanted someone who was perceived to be completely healthy.

All of the refugees face the issue of being given jobs that they do not want. Many study participants discussed this mismatch between jobs and their abilities and interests. Some of them accept these jobs, but keep looking and applying for jobs that interest them. Many of the refugees talked about the different things they are passionate about and how unsatisfied they are about not being able to get a job doing something in which they actually have interest. "You don't get the type of job that you want even if you're somebody who can do something better." One individual said the only thing she misses about her home country is her job because she was doing something she was passionate about. She was helping the youth in the refugee camp with the issues they were facing, while now she is a nail technician. The issue of mismatch has other implications, since without a better job, refugees cannot spend much time with family, have a good life, or even have money to move out of an unsafe neighborhood. This mismatch is also detrimental for employers. One refugee from Bhutan discussed how his biggest frustration is the job mismatch. Since refugees are given whatever job openings there are available, they have no option to receive employment in what they actually have passion or interest or skill. Before coming to the United States, this individual had "big expectations that [his] life will be 80% greater than whatever it was.... [He has] a house, [he has] a car, [he has] everything. [He has] already the 80%. The remaining 20% is [his] studies." Now that he has gotten his family into safety and received employment, he has much greater expectations.

Another male from Bhutan was just as determined and ambitious as the previous individual. He also had a lot of expectations about employment. This refugee was educated in India and had worked for a U.S. company, which probably explains why he expected to have the same career opportunities once he arrived here. However, for the first year and a half that he was living in Roanoke, he was given a job as an interpreter that did not fit his interests or skills. “It was fun, but it wasn’t a career.” He applied for countless jobs and never heard anything back and it was a long time before he was finally able to get a job that matched his skills, education, and experience. Eventually, he even started his own small business. This individual was one of the lucky ones who had the opportunity to go to school in India where he was able to learn English and gain very beneficial experience, which greatly contributed to his success here. However, he knows that most refugees aren’t so fortunate and the biggest problem that they face is finding employment. “Not having a job in America is a huge problem. That was the big challenge. Why didn’t I get a job for so long? Why didn’t they even respond to my resume and application? The refugee office is helping, but not everybody is employed...I could do a lot of things, but I didn’t get a chance to use my skills. We came to the U.S. in a bad time...the economy is slowly growing, no employees are hiring, lots of businesses closing down, lots unemployed.”

When asked about his expectations before coming to the United States, he laughed and responded, “Oh I think I expected too much, honestly. I was a senior analyst, I had a lot of benefits in the company, I was enjoying life and doing a good job in a high profile business environment, but with that in mind, I expected more than what I got here. But I realize, that’s the way of life. I cannot get everything at once. So I need a new start/beginning, not get frustrated with the situation. I need to find new job and talk to people, build relationship.”

A refugee from Rwanda said that “what you expect is not what you get. So it’s real hard because you’re starting a new life here. You need to work and you don’t get the type of job that you want even if you’re somebody who can do something better given the opportunity, because you simply didn’t go to school in this country.” His job is very difficult physically, but does not match his intellectual capabilities, which is very frustrating for him. He is also frustrated because he expected that the refugees would be given a lot more guidance. “There’s not much happening about helping adults with school, prepare to read, classes that they can take, you know they should be able to go to the college...because we have been out of school for such a long period of time. Like my case, seven years, that’s a long period of time. I need to you know, do some recap.” Due to the education and similar American values he previously had in the refugee camp, it is much more discouraging for him to no longer be recognized as the educated, intelligent adult that he is. The challenges that the refugees are facing support Gans’s research that many refugees and immigrants struggle with downward social mobility, but it “is particularly true of new arrivals who were professionals in their country of origin and now work as technicians” (Gans 2009: 1658).

Location: The refugees in this study are not able to spend time with people from their own culture because of the absence of a large community of co-ethnics, and because they are all too busy with work to be able to socialize. Refugees find American people to be so busy with work that there is no time for visiting and no time for fun. As a result of this being a characteristic of American society, refugees also have become too busy with work to socialize. In two different interviews, the refugees joked that they had to make appointments if they wanted to spend social time with both Americans and their own people. Majority of the refugees feel that this aspect of American culture causes them to experience a lot of loneliness. Some of the participants only

have about three to ten other co-ethnic families in the Roanoke Valley and this limits their opportunities to socialize. This problem is exacerbated for those who do not speak English. Those who can speak English still do not have a lot of interactions with Americans either, because it is very hard, from their perspective, to get to know people. Most individuals only spend time with their family. One individual said that she sometimes questions why she even came to America because she misses the culture in her part of Africa where it was acceptable to walk over to her neighbor's house whenever she wanted company. Yet in America, she doesn't even know her neighbors. She is sometimes happy here, but loneliness is a big challenge. Her daily routine includes English lessons, cooking, and sleeping. Refugees would find it much easier if they had more people from their cultures with whom they could have communication. Not having people from their own cultures causes the refugees to miss their native land more. While it is hard enough for refugees to move to a new country, it makes it even harder when they do not have any friends. These factors support the findings that missing their home countries, not being able to make friends, and loneliness affect the psychological well-being of the refugees (Björn et al, 2013). Even though accommodation/pluralism occur in American society, many refugees in the Roanoke Valley are unable to practice their customs and because they do not have a community to "maintain their distinctiveness" with (Yetman, 1999:232). This causes the refugees to have to abandon some of their cultural identity and individuality. One refugee said she would love to have more people in the area from her own culture because she doesn't have the same bond with the people she meets here. She cannot have the same relationship as she did with people in her country, because she is an outsider here with very different experiences, to which most people here are unable to relate.

The refugees also find loneliness to be an issue because Roanoke has a lower population density than the areas/regions many refugees are from. Some individuals would rather move to a place where they have a larger community of co-ethnics. Not only does the absence of co-ethnics cause loneliness, it also makes it extremely hard to maintain their traditions and customs when they don't have many people from their own culture. They cannot have the same celebrations and holidays because they would be the only people who would attend. Refugees feel they cannot be open about who they are. There aren't many opportunities to just laugh and have a good time. Instead, they are mostly quiet, which isn't healthy.

American versus Refugee Culture: Adapting to the many cultural differences between the United States and the refugees' cultures of origin is another challenge that the refugees must undergo. This supports Björn et al's findings (2013) that missing different aspects of their old lives, such as family, friends, and a sense of belonging, can greatly affect the psychological well-being of the refugees. One man from Burma talked about how he misses his home country and does not like modern American culture, though he does like the freedoms and is grateful to be able to live here. A woman from Iraq spoke about how much she and her family still struggle and miss their family and friends. A woman from Rwanda struggles a lot with transportation, loneliness, and different social norms about clothing, diet, and what is considered polite and impolite. For instance, she said she has gained a lot of weight since being in the United States because she is not used to the type or amount of food that she has here. She doesn't have any friends here and is very bored and lonely, and she suggested that the RIS office help the refugees with socializing. If she had opportunities to meet people, such as going outside or to different events, she "could forget [her] problems completely."

However, many of the cultural differences the refugees experience are positive. For instance, the Iraqi woman's life was very unsafe in Iraq. Every time she, her husband, or her children left the house, they never knew if they would return. There was constant fear of whether bombs would go off at any minute or her children would be kidnapped. She describes her life in Iraq as "every time you hear, 'boom, boom!' Like this, you go to the phone and there is no one answer. You know, you feel your heart go down, like this. You feel, oh maybe my husband! Maybe my son! This is not good. This is the way we live in Iraq." Therefore, even though she misses her friends and family and struggles with adjusting to her new life, she is simply thankful to not be living in fear all the time: "I don't have any problem where I will live, just my family is safe and they enjoy, that's all."

The male from Rwanda said it was less difficult for him to adapt to American culture because he was used to living amongst all different types of people, since his refugee camp consisted of all sorts of people from different nationalities. One of the refugees from Bhutan talked about how his time spent in India made the United States more familiar since it is also a more modernized country. In addition to having similar food options, such as Olive Garden and McDonalds, the diverse types of people is also similar. "Some people are so good, so nice, some people are not nice at all. So it's not just in America. If you go to India, you find the same situation. Some people really care about you, some people don't care. So personally, [he doesn't] feel that big difference."

Religion: The participants in this study who practice a religion that does not have a large presence in the Roanoke Valley had a much harder time finding a supportive community of people with whom they could socialize. Those who practice Christianity did not discuss these issues as much. However, those who are Hindu and Muslim felt they could not carry out the

same celebrations and holidays in the same manner. While one individual said he was allowed to take off work for the holidays of his religion, he still missed the way everyone would be out in the streets celebrating during the holidays in his country. When his people did get together one time, they had the police called on them for being too loud when they were blowing the conch shell, something that is a part of their culture. This supports the claim that refugees are expected to discard their old lifestyles and embrace the American customs (Shepard, 2008; Sowa, 2009), and that it is easier for refugees of a majority religion to find a community of support (Warner 2007). Another individual said that he only went to temple a few times a year, as there are only a few Hindu temples in the area and they are far away. Those who practice a minority religion do not have the same community and support that others do. This is borne out by the data as well: according to data from 2010, nearly 38% of Roanoke's population practices Evangelical Protestantism (with 21% being Southern Baptist), 18% Mainline Protestant, 5.5% Catholic, 3.5% are Black Protestant, .5% Orthodox, 9% Other (with 7% being Muslim), and 26% unclaimed (ARDA, 2010). This information backs up the view that when refugees come from a culture that is more similar to the United States, they find it easier to assimilate (Smith, 2008).

It is important to consider how religious affiliation and practice provide people with a support group and facilitate community formation. Due to the freedom of religion in the United States, refugees are able to seek community and acceptance from a vast variety of religious groups, although it is much more difficult for religious minorities to adapt (Warner, 2007). The data from the interviews support this claim. Those individuals that did not feel anomic either practiced a majority religion, such as Protestantism and Catholicism, or if they practiced a minority religion, for instance Islam, they frequently attended worship services and events with individuals from their same religion. The most dissatisfied individuals, including the woman

from Burundi who became more anomic over time, practiced minority religions and did not participate in communal religious practices on a regular basis, although they still worshipped on their own. This may have been a contributing factor to why they felt more alienated from the society in comparison to the rest of the sample group. For instance, a refugee from Bhutan talked about how practicing Hinduism makes it hard for his family and friends to carry out their own customs, such as their Hindu celebrations. Therefore, it is clear to see that religion does contribute to segmented acculturation and can facilitate or hinder the acculturation process that refugees undergo (Warner, 2007).

Existing Racial/Ethnic Hierarchy: The findings from this study support the existing research that the attributes (real and perceived) of refugees and immigrants, such as race and ethnicity affect their extent of acceptance by Americans (Zhou 1997). However, more research is needed on refugees' perceptions of how Americans view them. One man from Bhutan said that even though Americans are referred "in the Old World as the 'helper people,'" he still feels as though there are many Americans who dislike and mistreat his people. He is aware that his people, and all foreigners, are often judged by Americans and are targeted by the police. The woman from Burundi has also struggled with racism and discrimination in the work place, as was mentioned earlier, as she has had difficulty getting hired and been called names from coworkers who assumed she didn't understand English. She is also an example of acculturation into minority groups/downward mobility as she lives in a very unsafe neighborhood and her hopes of having a safer life was not achieved (Zhou 1997). She still hears gunshots and worries about her family's safety.

Anomie, Mobility, and Acculturation: The United States is a society characterized by organic solidarity. There is an emphasis on individualism, and on upward mobility which it is believed

can be achieved through hard work, application of one's abilities, and perhaps a little bit of luck (i.e. the American Dream). The refugees resettled in the Roanoke Valley have come from a variety of countries and situations and with diverse types of skill sets, language abilities, education etc.: these factors shape their extent of expectations and their level of satisfaction with their experiences in the United States.

Out of the eleven refugees interviewed, only four had some expectations before arriving to the United States. Two of these four were from Bhutan and the other two were a sibling pair from Rwanda. The remaining seven refugees had only some completion of high school, or no formal education. One refugee from Bhutan had some college education, while the other had completed his college degree. All four had higher language, educational, and occupational skills than the other refugees. The two refugees from Rwanda both had some college education. All four also knew English before arrival to the United States, while none of the others did. One man from Bhutan had developed skills and interests in information technology, and the other had been working for an American company in India and was skilled in accounting. The man from Rwanda gained skills and interests in public health/medicine, while his sister worked in social services and is very interested in studying sociology. The other seven refugees did not discuss their vocational pursuits and worked at different tasks around the refugee camps, such as growing and selling food.

The experiences of the other refugees in their home countries and in the United States can perhaps be related to why these individuals did not have expectations or complaints about life in the United States, but were merely grateful to have had the opportunity to come to this country. Thus, the four individuals with high expectations had a background of formal education, skills and interests in professions, and the ability to speak English, while the remaining had been living

in such harsh conditions that they have already achieved upward social mobility just by coming to the United States, even though they may be on a trajectory to assimilate into the lower class (Gans, 2007; Gans, 2009; Zhou, 1997). A refugee from Burma talked about how his only expectation of coming to the United States was that “we never starve, we never hungry, we never thirsty.” A woman from Sudan talked about the sickness and suffering in her home country, but here “the health is very good...thank goodness for America.” The woman from Iraq said that she “didn’t think about what [her] life would be here. [She] was just asking about the necessary things.” The only expectations these refugees had was that they would receive help from the Americans and have a safer life in the United States. However, the refugees from Rwanda and Bhutan had very different responses. The man from Rwanda talked about how excited he was for the opportunity to come to the United States, but found that “when you get here, it’s pretty much overwhelming...what you expect is not what you get.” The woman from Rwanda talked about her expectations, as well: “I was thinking like when I come here, I go straight and enroll in school. I felt like coming here I could get full support like when it comes to Medicaid...I also thought like maybe they could pay our bills until we are self-sufficient enough to pay it. But no. The moment you get a job, they stop paying for you. And that’s really so stressing.” The men from Bhutan also had very high expectations about the different assistances they would receive and how quickly they would be able to find a job that suited their skill-sets.

Several of these refugees, from Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Tanzania, and Burundi were grateful for the physical safety they experienced in the United States, the easier access to food and water, and the friendly assistance provided by the folks at the RIS and other Americans. One refugee described his life in Congo: “The big problem is that they killed my parents there...the second problem, the life is not good there. Every time the

people die...it's not good. Everything is not good there...Here, we can go wherever we want, but in Africa, if you go in another state, we can kill you.” One woman spoke about the fear and defeat that everyone feels in Iraq: “When you live from when you're small until you grow bigger, this is the life, ‘Oh I don't matter for anything...I will die, let me die.’ Like this. That's when you live in the bad area a long time, like kill and bomb, ‘Oh whatever they will do, they will do.’ Like you feel yourself not comfortable...‘If I don't come back home, that's what I can do.’ Everyone speaks like this.” Due to the situations in the home countries and the social class of these seven refugees, it is understandable as to why they did not have high expectations of what their lives would be like in the United States due to lack of information. They also, for the most part did not have any major complaints about their current lives. A male refugee from Burma referred to the United States as a “second heaven,” and the migration to America as an “exodus from hardship in Burma.”

The exception was a female refugee from Burundi; she did not have any expectations before coming to the United States. However, after living in the United States for over six years, she did have some complaints and dissatisfaction with her life. She is unable to do paid work due to a physical injury, and as a result of that as well as language barriers, lack of sufficient education, and the absence of a large community of fellow Muslims from Burundi, experiences loneliness and isolation. “I just stay in my house. I can't spend a lot of time with American people. Even the people from my country I don't spend a lot of time with them because they work and they come back, they stay busy...I stay home, but I'm not happy to stay home.” Thus after six years, her concerns have increased to include interaction with others and productive activity, both of which factors are conducive to happiness: according to Heeks (2012: 25) having a “meaningful source of employment and income is central to happiness.” What may account for

her discontentment is how long she has been living in the United States, which has allowed her to become more adapted to the organic society.

While she was not anomic upon arrival, she became anomic as she acculturated and became more integrated with American society (Ives, 2007). Yet for the remaining six individuals, after the many hardships they endured in their countries of origin and unfamiliarity with social mobility, they were simply grateful for the progress in their lives. The individuals are also likely unaware of the opportunities the rest of society has and the expectations of upward mobility and success that characterize American society.

Although the four individuals who came from more middle-class backgrounds were still very grateful for the improvements in their lives and that they are able to live in safety in the United States, their expectations and levels of satisfaction with their lives were very different from the other seven refugees. The length of time that they have been living in the United States might contribute to this, as they have had more time to adapt to the American culture and have been able to see the concept of the American Dream. While this can account for the Bhutanese refugees, who have been here for four to six years, it is not applicable to the sibling pair from Rwanda, as they have only been living here for six months. A very insightful description that one of the refugees from Bhutan gave reveals how the time that he has spent in the United States has changed his expectations: “For example, if me and you dive in a lake to find a diamond, I have an intention. I have a target to get the diamond only. But I see that you have an intention. To get the diamond is your choice, but you see many things inside the lake. You find many and you grab them. You bring that and let other people know those things. But I will bring only the diamond. See the difference? ... My intention now is not only to grab the diamond...because I am still looking for some things. I am looking for every opportunity.”

Preliminary research on Bhutan and Rwanda seems to indicate that these countries might be characterized by organic solidarity, which would also help explain the greater unhappiness of refugees from these two countries. This research is provided in Appendix C. However, much more research than what is provided is needed on this topic.

Conclusion

Through the analyses of the different expectations the refugees had before coming to the United States and whether those expectations had been met or not, it becomes possible to learn a lot about the levels of anomie and what contributes to those levels. In addition, this study examines the factors shaping the experiences of refugees in the Roanoke Valley. As existing literature has indicated, location, language barriers, religion, education and socioeconomic status, resettlement policies, co-ethnic communities, and psychological hardships shape refugee resettlement. Through this sample population of eleven individuals from the various countries of Bhutan, Burma, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Rwanda, Sudan, and Tanzania, Durkheim's conclusions about anomie can be combined with a critical perspective to analyze the experiences of refugees' acculturation. The refugees who had fewer expectations before arrival to the United States due to lack of awareness and information about United States society had fewer complaints about their current lives. Since they have not formed a familiarity with social mobility, but come from societies in which they simply accept what they have been dealt in life, they have few anticipations or desires to have more opportunities. In contrast, the individuals who had far greater expectations and goals for their new lives had much more dissatisfaction with their current social statuses because structural factors, such as settlement policies, lack of economic opportunities, and language skills, have kept them from being able to achieve upward mobility to the extent they hoped for. It is likely, given the current racial

hierarchy, economic conditions, attitudes towards immigrants and refugees, etc., that the pathway towards upward mobility and eventual assimilation will continue to be difficult for them.

While it is interesting to look at the differences in prior expectations and current satisfaction levels with life in the United States, it is important to note that all of the refugees that were interviewed in this study showed great appreciation and thankfulness for the opportunity they had to come to the United States and start new lives. Although some individuals were less satisfied with different aspects of their lives, it is not to say that they are ungrateful or bitter toward their new communities. In addition, just because some individuals are satisfied with their lives and don't share the same American value of constantly striving for more, it doesn't make them any less hard-working or less concerned about their livelihoods. The purpose of this paper is to reveal how societies can shape the values and ideals of its people, not make a particular set of ideals come across as superior. Every refugee has his or her own opinions, all of which being valid and important.

Future Research

Further research should be conducted in order to compare refugees to immigrants in their levels of anomie. It would be of importance to see whether immigrants have more, less, or the same issues with unmet expectations, or if it is the desperate situations in the home countries of the refugees that create their levels of anomie. While refugees and immigrants both face the issues of lack of acceptance from the dominant group on the basis of skin color, language ability, social class, and religious difference, it would be worthwhile to investigate just how much the previous lives and backgrounds of the individuals affects their experiences in the United States.

More research should also be conducted on the nature of the solidarity of sending countries in order for it to be determined whether refugees and immigrants are coming from mechanical or organic societies. There also needs to be more research on the impact of the length of residence in the United States and of religion on the levels of anomie among refugee and immigrant populations. It would also be of interest to apply Durkheim's totemic principle to refugee and immigrant populations in regard to anomie, to see if it can be supported. Even though some refugees come from different religious backgrounds, others come from similar ones but still have different levels of expectations. This might be attributed to the fact that not all societies practice or treat religion in the same manner, because religion adjusts to conform to its society (Durkheim, 2012). Finally, suggestions for policy changes are provided in Appendix D based on the findings of this project. Further research should work to implement these policy changes in order to effectively improve the experiences of refugees in the Roanoke Valley.

Appendix A

List of Interview Questions:

(This is a semi-structured interview so different/new questions were asked during the process of the interview)

1. Where are you from originally? Are your parents from the same place?
2. How old are you?
3. What was your life like before you came to the United States? Where did you live? Were other members of your extended family there with you? Why did you decide to leave? What struggles did you face? Did you spend time in a refugee camp?
4. Describe your journey from your last place of residence to the United States. How old were you when you left? What preparations did you make? Did you encounter any problems?
5. What processes did you have to go through once you reached the United States?
6. What have been the toughest parts of adapting to your new life (language barrier, loss of cultural ties, finding employment)? What could have made/could make it easier (having a larger co-ethnic group, receiving more assistance from local agencies)?
7. Are you able to maintain your traditions/customs here (Music, food, clothing, celebrations...)?
8. What makes it easy or hard to maintain your traditions here? Would you like to teach your children (if you have any, or in the future) about your culture? What

- aspects/elements of your culture (food, clothing, language, religious beliefs, values [eg. importance of family ties] etc.), would you like to teach them?
9. Do you have any ties to your home country?
 10. Do you feel you have a lot of interaction with people from your own culture here in the Roanoke Valley? Are there many people from your country/culture here? Do you interact with them often? Where else in the United States is there a large group from your country/culture? Would you prefer to move there? Why/not?
 11. Do you have significant interaction with Americans? What kinds of interactions do you have with them? What are some similarities, if any, that you see between your culture and American culture? What are some major differences you see between your culture and American culture?
 12. Had you wanted to come to the United States? What had you expected the United States to be like? Have your experiences here matched your expectations?
 13. What are some advantages of living in the Roanoke valley?
 14. What are some challenges of living in the Roanoke Valley?
 15. Has your new life brought about the changes you were hoping for?
 16. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B

List of Questions – Staff

Thank you very much for taking the time to sit down with me today. My goal with this research is to learn more about the services CCC provides for its clients, and to glean your ideas for better serving refugees and immigrants via CCC and throughout the Valley. The information you provide will help put the client interviews I'm conducting in better context, as well.

1. Let's start here: tell me about your own involvement here at CCC. What is your role here? How long have you been here? Walk me through the life's path that led you to this position. PROBE: [If has experience at a similar organization, where did you work? How is CCC different from that organization? If no, how is working at CCC different than/similar to other positions you've held?]
2. I'd like you to tell me about CCC. In your words, what does CCC do? PROBE: What are all the ways you provide assistance for clients? How many refugees in the Roanoke Valley do you serve?
3. I want to ask a couple of questions about client interaction with CCC. What are some things that you think CCC does really well to make it easier for clients to adjust to the area?
4. What would you say are some of the most common barriers to service for would-be clients? In other words, what can make it difficult for folks to use CCC's services? PROBE: What are the things CCC does to overcome these barriers? What more could be done?
5. Do you help your clients with transportation? PROBE: If so, how? If not, how do they receive transportation?
6. Talk to me about the process of reaching clients. How do clients typically hear about and come to approach CCC? PROBE: What forms of outreach have been most effective? Are

there things that you tried and didn't work well? What would make it easier to reach out to would-be clients?

7. On average, how long do clients stay connected to CCC? PROBE: Do you think this length of time is too long, too short, or just right?
8. I know there's a newcomer's class that you provide. What does CCC do in terms of post-class follow-up? What is working well? What else could be done?
9. What are some other organizations CCC works with? PROBE: Why do you work with those organizations? Do you refer your clients to other organizations for assistances other than what you provide? Are there other organizations you think are worth exploring collaboration with? Why or why not? What makes it easy/difficult to work with other organizations?
10. Let's talk about funding for CCC's good work. What are things that have been successful for CCC in terms of securing funding? What are some frustrations you've experienced in competing for funds? PROBE: What ideas do you have to help with this challenge?
11. We're getting close to the end – all I have left are a few summary questions. As you look at CCC's work, what are you most proud of? PROBE: What else?
12. Similar question: As you look at CCC's work, what could be improved upon? PROBE: If you could change one thing about this agency, what would it be? Are there things you wish you could do/services you want to provide, but because of money or some other reason, you can't? Is there anything else?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add that will help me assess CCC's needs in the community and better understand your good work?

List of Questions – Clients

Thank you so much for meeting with me during our last interview. Our conversation was very helpful in my report. Thank you, also, for agreeing to meet with me again. Your good responses, plus those of others, led me to more questions. These questions are more about what CCC does for you, and the goal of this research is to be able to give them some suggestions and ideas so they can help you and others even more. Does this sound okay?

1. I know we've already talked about this last time, but for this interview, where are you from/where did you grow up?
2. Tell me about how you became a client. PROBE: How long have you been a client of CCC? How did you first hear about CCC? What was your first experience with them like? Did they approach you first? Were you immediately put in contact with them when you came here? What made you decide to ask for assistance from CCC?
3. Think back to when you first began working with CCC – what had you been told about how they'd help you? What did you expect? Did you have any concerns or fears about working with CCC? (If so, what?) We're asking because we want to know how to help overcome any barriers to working with CCC.
4. Walk me through your experience with CCC. What has it been like? What have they helped you do during your transition to the United States?? PROBE: Do you receive their help with English lessons, finding a home, finding a job?
5. If you met someone who was new to the United States, would you recommend CCC to them? For what reasons? PROBE: What is the best thing about CCC?
6. Are there areas where CCC has been less helpful than you hoped they might? What more do you think CCC could do?
7. What struggles, if any, are you still facing with resettlement (probe for: transportation, employment, loneliness, language barrier, education)?
8. How do you think these struggles can be made easier? (Probe: We're looking for specific ideas that CCC and other agencies can use to make it easier for the Roanoke Valley to welcome immigrants and refugees. Any ideas you have would be quite helpful!)
9. Since you've been here, are there other organizations that have helped you or your family? How so? Are you continuing to receive assistance from them? Has CCC ever

helped connect you with another agency locally? (Probe for organization names and type of service, plus how the respondent learned about each organization.)

10. Is there anything else you would like to add to our efforts to improve service for immigrants and refugees in the community?

Appendix C

Bhutan: A brief look into Bhutanese society will help to provide context for the experiences of the two refugees' experiences who had a lot of expectations. While Bhutan is very different from the United States as it places less priority on maintaining freedom and democracy, it is still a diverse culture that is undergoing modernization. Something very unique about Bhutan, since it is the only country that does so, is that it measures happiness. Instead of directing its attention to gross national product, the government focuses on gross national happiness, or GNH. This country had no signs of modernization until the 1960s, as it had "no schools, no hospitals, no paved roads..." and "television was only introduced in 1999" (Heeks, 2012:24). Although technology has only been recently introduced, its use and presence has grown rapidly. Bhutan has put effort into trying to link technology to happiness in order to maintain high levels of happiness with the modernization of their society. Two main causes of happiness that can be related to "information and communication technologies (ICTs)," are jobs and relationships (Heeks, 2012:24). As can be seen in the interviews with the two refugees from Bhutan, having a "meaningful source of employment and income is central to happiness" (Heeks, 2012:25). This country obviously places high value on the happiness of its citizens, including their individual relationships and employment. Therefore, there must be organic solidarity because the individuals have opportunities for upward social mobility. If happiness wasn't as important an aspect of society, people wouldn't have as many expectations, hopes, or desires to improve their livelihoods. It is clear to see why refugees from this country would have many expectations, because they place so much worth on their contentment and success.

In addition, the reason for the large number of Bhutanese refugees is due to the ethnic conflict that began in the late 1980s. There are three major ethnic groups in Bhutan: the Ngalung, the

Sharchop, and the Lhotsampa. (Rizal, 2004). The Ngalung is the group that controls the political sphere of Bhutan, and they, along with the Sharchop, follow Buddhism. The Lhotsampa are of Nepalese origin and follow Hinduism. The government felt the diversity would lead to conflict among the groups. Therefore, the Ngalung decided to address this issue by creating a policy titled, “One Nation, One People” to induce and compel conformity” (Rizal, 2004: 154). As a result of this policy, the Lhotsampa have been forced to adopt the religion, dress, and traditions of the Ngalung group. Those unwilling to conform were exiled, or killed if they did not follow the order to leave their land (Rizal, 2004). Although the government has been attempting to get rid of the diversity in recent years, the refugees that have migrated to the United States are familiar with, and for the most part in favor of, the diversity that has previously been an important aspect of their culture.

Rwanda: Rwanda is another country that can be further researched to provide insight into the contexts of the individuals with high expectations who came from Rwanda. Although the first thing that typically comes to mind when Rwanda is mentioned is the genocide of 1994 against the Tutsis, Rwanda has made a lot of progress in its attempt to reconcile, to prevent further ethnic conflict, and to change the negative perceptions about the country. The country has made many improvements “in social, economic and political transformation, the nurturing and institutionalization of a culture of tolerance and coexistence, accountability, inclusive governance, and a culture of democracy and integration in regional and global affairs” (Mutimura, 2014: 154). After the country went through such a tragic and devastating event, it formed a more democratic government in order to hear from all of the citizens. There are more freedoms of expression and speech to create more tolerance and acceptance of differences. They even formed “homegrown solutions” such as Gacaca, which consists of the heads of the villages

who meet with everybody who wants to participate to create discussion and hear suggestions (Mutimura, 2014: 157).

There have also been more programs put in place to create more gender equality and to empower the women. Something very significant about this country is “that women must hold at least 30 per cent of positions in all decision-making organs of the State” (Mutimura, 2014: 157). These factors are significant indicators of why the two refugees from Rwanda had the level of expectations and ambitions that they did. It was hard not to notice how the sister was much more vocal and opinionated than the brother about her expectations and complaints; whether this was simply her personality or a result of the recent empowerment of women in her home country is difficult to determine. The way Rwanda has worked hard for its success after many drawback from the terrible events of 1994 might explain the determination evident in the two refugees that were interviewed.

As can be seen, because these four refugees from Bhutan and Rwanda come from backgrounds in which they have been educated, formed skills in their occupations, and can see the opportunities they have, they are much more dissatisfied with their current societal positions. They were also all well-educated and had formed goals and interests in future vocations before arrival. It is evident that the experiences they had in their home countries led them to have greater expectations and goals, which causes them to feel more anomic and less a part of American society. They also are aware of the separation they have with the rest of American society and the barriers that their race, culture, and even accents create for them. They realize their powerlessness and that their assimilation relies on the dominant group accepting them (Gans, 1997; Gans, 2007; Gans, 2009; Zhou, 1997).

Appendix D

List of Suggestions:

- Education:
 - Help refugees interested in college get started and receive loans when they don't have financial history/records
 - Work to offer more times of GED classes
 - Fix the damaged relationship with the over 18 program in Roanoke or work to start another one for refugees
- Employment:
 - Provide employment training/skills development
 - Build more relationships with local employers by networking, forming connections, and having job fairs
- Transportation:
 - Organize a class to help refugees learn the traffic rules and how to drive
 - Locate refugees closer to bus stops/Employ refugees closer to their homes...or
 - Bring awareness and create ways to improve the public transportation system
- Duration of Assistance:
 - Lobby to increase the length of financial assistance/insurance/health care (at least to six months)
 - Lobby to get health care/insurance for all refugees, even after employed, when employers aren't providing coverage
 - Work with the UNHCR so refugees don't come with unrealistic expectations
- Size of Staff:
 - Have more full-time employees to be able to take the time to take each case more specifically
 - Continue to use community resources
 - Have more interpreters available for less common languages
 - Have more committed volunteers
- Community Involvement/Socialization:
 - Organize events for socialization to provide relationships for refugees (can have volunteers to organize these events)
 - Continue with the refugee dialogue group
- Organization:
 - Have more planning/budgeting ahead of time (by increasing staff)
- English Lessons:
 - Have bilingual teachers
- Location of Immigration and Citizenship Offices:
 - Lobby to have offices brought closer to Roanoke
- Health Care/Mental Health Care:

- Lobby for better mental health care in Roanoke - make Roanoke and outside communities aware of the great need in these professions
- Use more traditional healing methods
- Continue working with the office of civil rights to enforce the law of having interpreters in every facility that accepts Medicaid
- Legal Counsel:
 - Provide more assistance for abuse victims
 - Create more contacts with other legal counsels, such as pro-bono and low-bono

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