

2013

The Will to Adapt: The Post 2008 US Economic Crisis and its Impact on Refugee Resettlement in the United States

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Government Honors Papers

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The Will to Adapt: The Post 2008 US Economic Crisis and its Impact on Refugee Resettlement in the United States

An Honors Thesis
Presented By
Meredith I. Byrne

To
The Department of Government
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for
Honors in the Major Field

CONNECTICUT COLLEGE
NEW LONDON, CONNECTICUT
MAY 3, 2013

The Will to Adapt:
The Post 2008 US Economic Crisis and its Impact on Refugee Resettlement
in the United States

By
Meredith I. Byrne

"While every refugee's story is different and their anguish personal, they all share a common thread of uncommon courage: the courage not only to survive, but to persevere and rebuild their shattered lives." – Antonio Guterres

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TRISTAN BORER: You once told me that the best part of your job was producing student who make meaningful changes in the world. I hope I can be another. Thank you for instilling in me the same passion that you have for truth and justice.

MOM and DAD: Thank you for creating a safe, warm and loving environment whenever I have needed it. It is a blessing to have a home that is more than just a physical space.

ROBYN: Thank you for setting a high standard to live up to.

AND: Thank you to all of the people who have touched my life in both small and large ways. From Cameroon to Connecticut and beyond, you have selflessly given small pieces of yourself to make me who I am today.

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Chapter One Introduction: Where to Go From Here

And now I reach America, but I am very sad and worried because I am worse than a normal refugee and look like somebody begging. I am waiting week to week to get \$150 for five persons to survive.-Murad, Iraqi Refugee (Martin 2005)

Murad, a former chauffeur for the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, fled Iraq in late 2005. He was jailed earlier that year for refusing to work for Iraqi intelligence under Saddam Hussein's regime. With the help of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, Murad and his family were resettled in the United States. Murad left behind two houses, two cars, family gold and \$25,000 in savings. In early 2006 Murad arrived with his family in Houston, Texas where he began receiving food and limited cash assistance and moved into subsidized housing (Martin 2005).

Basically I think (America) will be better than a refugee camp. In a refugee camp, you have no rights. You are put in a cage. It's illegal to travel outside the camp, so it's very different from being a human – Hsar Say, Karen Refugee (Wright 2011)

Hsar Say, an ethnic Karen from Myanmar, has spent the last 20 years of his life in a Thai refugee camp. He fled Myanmar in the 1980s after being targeted by the military government because of his ethnicity. Hsar Say has been sharing a bamboo house with other Karen who also fled Myanmar in the 1980s. After a 2008 earthquake further deteriorated living conditions in Myanmar, he was accepted for resettlement in the United States. Hsar Say hopes that upon resettlement in the U.S. he can pursue higher education and improve his English (Wright 2011).

Based on Hsar Say and Murad's narratives it is hard to imagine how they will be able to achieve economic self-sufficiency given the odds they face. Even under the best circumstances the road to self-sufficiency after fleeing conflict and enduring trauma is a difficult one. Given the additional obstacles the current economic and job market pose, refugees like Hsar Say and Murad face a new set of challenges. Their ability to overcome

these challenges will largely depend on their will and ability to adapt to their new environments despite difficult circumstances.

Domestic Framework: A Brief Explanation of U.S. Resettlement

Each year the United States admits an average of 70,000 people who have left their countries of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinions or belonging to a particular social group (ORR 2012, 1951 UN Convention). The United States provides refuge for people who have fled their countries of origin and are unable to find adequate protection elsewhere. After being approved for resettlement, the United States resettlement program provides refugees with a patchwork of social services for their first 30-120 days in the US.¹ After this period of support is over refugees are expected to have achieved self-sufficiency. Despite this expectation, the majority of refugees remain dependent on social services after their first 90 days in the United States.

The pressure to become economically independent has increased as the United States' economic crisis has strained resources that were once available to ease the process of becoming self-sufficient (Eckholm 2008). State welfare programs are becoming less generous, low-income housing is becoming scarcer and jobs typically filled by refugees are being filled by recently laid-off Americans (Eckhom 2008). This thesis examines how

¹ Social Services vary depending on the state that the refugee resettles in. Federal assistance includes cash assistance from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or Matching Grant programs. Medicaid is administered for up to five years, though the type of coverage changes after 8 months. Food stamp assistance is also issued and remains indefinitely (See ORR report "Refugee Self Sufficiency: An Exploratory Study of Approaches use in the Office of Refugee Resettlement")

refugees use their own social and human capital to achieve or not achieve economic self-sufficiency in the after math of the 2008-2011 US economic crisis.²

A Well Founded Fear: Background on Iraqi and Karen Refugees

In 2008 the United States Congress passed the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act (Human Rights First 2009). The act offered territorial protection to the estimated 146,000 Iraqis that had become the targets of insurgency attacks due to their affiliation with the US government or its contractors in Iraq (Human Rights First 2009). Consequently, Iraqi translators, drivers, technicians, engineers and doctors who had worked for the US government in Iraq became eligible for resettlement in the United States.

Since 2007, the US has resettled 64,174 Iraqi refugees (USCIS 2012). Because of the groups' close association with US government in Iraq, they generally had higher English language skills and more professional and advanced degrees. A study conducted by Refugeeworks found that 63% of Iraqi refugees who settled in Detroit had a college education, while 36% had a high school equivalent and 25% elementary or vocational training (Sturm 2008). The average Iraqi in Iraq, however, has finished only ten years of schooling, just short of a high school diploma (CIA 2012). Clearly, the Iraqis given priority under the 2008 act largely represented upper middle-class individuals, not the majority of Iraq's population.

In contrast 70% of Myanmar refugees had not been unable to finish elementary school (UNIEF 2008). In Myanmar only 1 in 4 students continue past grade school (Garber 2006). Though Myanmar has a proud tradition of higher education, economic

² According to the Connecticut Department of Social Services (2013) economic self-sufficiency is defined as "earning a total family income at a level that enables a family unit to support itself without receipt of a cash assistance grant."

crisis in the military run state has limited the availability of education to the majority of its citizens. Outside of Myanmar, in refugee camps along the Thai border, education is limited only to primary school.

Even if refugees are able to gain education and training, foreign professional certifications and advanced degrees are not recognized in the US. Iraqi refugees who were once doctors, lawyers and engineers are largely employed in entry-level positions. Nevertheless, Iraqi refugees' levels of education and language skills are significantly higher than the typical refugee arriving in the United States. These skills benefit them as they apply for driver's licenses, interview for jobs and fill out Social Security paperwork. Conversely, the Karen require more integration assistance to accomplish the same tasks due to their different, less-relevant, pre-arrival experiences.

As of 2012, the United States had admitted 150,000 refugees living along the Thai-Myanmar border (USCRI 2012). Karen refugees who have been resettled in the United States largely come from nine refugee camps located along the Thai-Myanmar border (Kenny 2011). Due to the remote location of the refugee camps and lack of resources inside the camps, the refugees generally do not have access to education, employment opportunities or Western culture. Many of those living in these camps have been there for ten years or more. (UNHCR 2013) Consequently, the camp's residents have been without education or occupation for a large part of their adult lives. The general lack of resources available to the Karen puts them at a disadvantage when they are resettled in the United States.

Though the Karen are disadvantaged in terms of language skills and levels of education, they do benefit from kinship networks in the United States. Kinship networks

are based on bonds between people of the same heritage (Keown-Bomar 2004). In recent years, reports note a trend in secondary migration among the Karen in the US partly attributable to kinship networks, employment opportunities and a desire to live in close proximity to those with the same language, culture and heritage (Keown-Bomar 2004). This secondary migration has resulted in highly concentrated Karen ethnic communities in Midwestern cities like St. Paul, Des Moines and Indianapolis (Ott 2011). These Karen communities have developed advocacy groups, community centers and lobbying groups to support one-another. These groups serve a variety of purposes including supplying free job referrals, translation assistance, tutoring and childcare.

Iraqi and Karen refugees represent two different socio-economic profiles. Iraqi refugees represent a highly educated and professionally trained population while Karen refugees represent a population with lower levels of education and job training. The 2008 Iraqi Refugees in Crisis Act identified a group of Iraqis who were vulnerable based on professional relations with the United States government (Kennedy 2008). The Karen were selected for resettlement based on their protracted living situations in Thai refugee camps.³ Consequently, Iraqi refugees have more resources at their disposal to find employment and gain self-sufficiency than Karen refugees, who have been isolated in camps.

While socio-economic backgrounds are important aspects of resettlement outcomes, the time and place of resettlement are also significance. During times of economic downturn, those with fewer resources are generally more vulnerable (Eckholm 2008). Resources are not limited to financial capital, but include human capital and social capital as well. The latter forms of capital include kinship networks, individual

³ Protracted living situation denotes a period of time spent in a refugee camp for ten years or longer.

resourcefulness, education and religious affiliations. These types of capital cannot be lost in times of economic recession and therefore warrant close examination. Economist Gary S. Becker (2008) explains:

Tangible forms of capital are not the only type of capital. Schooling, a computer training course, expenditures on medical care, and lectures on the virtues of punctuality and honesty are also capital. That is because they raise earnings, improve health, or add to a person's good habits over much of his lifetime. They are called human capital because people cannot be separated from their knowledge, skills, health, or values in the way they can be separated from their financial and physical assets (Becker 2008)

The various forms of social and human capital that refugees carry upon arrival to the United States dictate how they will interact with their new environment. Human capital is based on the previous education and occupational experiences in host countries, while social capital is made up of co-ethnic and familial ties in the United States. The impact of human capital on employment success in the US is determined by the recognition of foreign educational and occupational credentials and systematic discrimination in the United States. The impact social capital has on relative success is determined by the structure of social networks and societal discrimination. After 9/11 for example, Muslim migrants and refugees found it harder to find employment despite their qualifications (Sturm 2008). Race and ethnicity are important deciding factors for whether or not new immigrants and refugees will be able to succeed in gaining economic self-sufficiency. Other factors that warrant mention include the age, gender, conditions under which someone fled their country of origin, household composition and the site of resettlement. I will cover these categories in fuller detail in the following sections.

Hypothesis: The Importance of Nationality and Human Capital in the Resettlement Process After 2008

This thesis's preliminary hypothesis states that Iraqi refugees, given their above-average levels of education, their familiarity with English language and their previous employment with the US government abroad, will be more successful in achieving economic self-sufficiency than their Karen counterparts. I also predict that Iraqis will achieve self-sufficiency at a faster rate. I hypothesize that during times of economic downturn human capital plays a more integral role than social capital for refugees. The thesis will be tested using evidence collected from interviews with case management and employment specialist at refugee resettlement agencies in addition to a year-long case management internship with a resettlement agency in New Haven, Connecticut. Additional factors that may impact resettlement success will be evaluated using pre-existing literature in the field of gender and women's studies and studies of race and ethnicity. Ultimately, I argue that the most significant determinant of resettlement success will be based on the refugee's country of origin and the subsequent resources that were available in the country of origin prior to resettlement.

Much like nationwide trends in resettlement, Connecticut has experienced an increase in the number of resettled Iraqi refugees and an increase in pressure to make refugees economically independent in a short period of time (Bauer et al 2011). A large percentage of the refugees I personally worked with in New Haven were Iraqi women. In order to collect equal amounts of research on both case studies, I used other resettlement agencies in the Midwest to supplement my participant observations on the Karen. To

support my research, I consulted other academics in the field of refugee studies. In December of 2012, I attended the 30th Anniversary Conference of the Refugee Studies Center at Oxford, which provided numerous contacts and generated conversations on economic factors that drive refugee resettlement.

Secondary sources are used to provide a framework for analysis. Karen Jacobsen and Malicia Bookman (2002) and Novjat Lamba (2008) provide a framework used to examine how social and human capital informs the economic success of refugees. Anthony Giddens' (1997) structural theory contributed to my understanding of the relationship between the directing of resources and the regulations that guide them. Policies direct resources in ways that benefit or do not benefit specific groups of refugees based on the types of capital refugees possess upon arriving in the United States. Various journal articles relating to the field of refugee resettlement are also used to provide context for the existing resettlement system, while newspaper articles form the basis for the specific case studies.

Ways and Means: A Clarification of Methodology

Definition of skills and success

The definition of success in terms of refugee resettlement varies depending on the source. The United States Refugee Program (USRP) and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) define successful resettlement as the refugee's ability to achieve economic self-sufficiency within the first 120 days of resettlement (ORR 2013). Alternatively, local and faith based community groups tend to view success as the ability of the refugee to integrate into their new communities (Dwyer 2012). In 2010, Church

World Services launched an investigation into what constitutes success in refugee resettlement. The list they produced includes feelings of satisfaction, achieving a balance between preserving culture and contributing to the host culture, the expansions of employment and economic opportunities, the ability to communicate, the expression of positive attitudes and the degree of community participation (Dwyer 2012).

The goal of successful resettlement is twofold. This first component is to find employment. Once refugees arrive in the United States they are given temporary assistance until they can find employment.⁴ The period of assistance is terminated after three months whether or not the refugee has found employment. The temporary nature of assistance makes employment the first priority for newly arriving refugees, which delays the pursuit of education, English language training and professional recertification. The second component of successful resettlement is the independent ability to provide for basic needs. This means earning sufficient income to pay for utilities, rent and transportation. Additional basic needs include food, clothing, medical attention and transportation. If the refugee is unable to financially support his or her own basic needs, he or she may compensate by relying on social networks. These social networks include church groups, friends, co-ethnics and family members that may be able to give informal loans or services.

Refugees develop strategies to adapt to their new environments based on their human and social capital. According to Navojot Lamba (2008), refugees sometimes find that certain forms of human capital like professional certifications are not recognized in the United States. Lamba (2008) proposes that social capital, which includes kin

⁴ Some refugees remain on cash assistance if they are selected to participate in the Matching Grant program.

networks and social circles, can sometimes compensate for a lack of applicable human capital. I will argue that human and social capital have different levels of importance during times of economic crisis.

I am interested in the resettlement outcome for refugees who have resettled in the United States after 2008. The time period examined in this thesis spans 2008 to 2013. This time span was selected based on the high rate of unemployment, increased cost of living and decrease in social services. In 2008, unemployment rose to 9.1%, living costs increased without wage adjustments and social security benefits shrunk (BLS 2008). The public, both refugee and non-refugee, was forced to adopt and employ skills to find new jobs and cut costs to maintain a basic livelihood. These skills were learned, inherited, developed and shaped by cultural, social and economic influences (USDOL 2012). Based on the above definition of success and the scope of this thesis, I will compare different resettlement outcomes for the two groups of refugees and assess future outcomes based on job forecasts for the post-recession period.

Refugee specialists Karen Jacobsen (2005), Milica Bookman (2002) and Najovot Lamba (2008) study how human capital, social capital and financial capital impact a refugee's success once they have fled their countries of origin). I use human capital, social capital and financial capital to examine the resettlement outcomes for Karen and Iraqi refugees. I use a mixed methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative data to examine how refugees adopt and employ certain skills in times of economic downturn. I compare how Myanmar and Iraqi refugees' forms of capital enable or constrain successful resettlement based on current economic trends. Variations within the

two groups including the gender, age and class of the individual also warrant attention in the final chapter.

The Refugee Regime: How the UNHCR Functions in Relation to Domestic Resettlement

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the United Nations' body mandated to find a permanent solution to end the plight of the world's refugees. The UNHCR was founded after WWII to provide protection to those fleeing communist countries (UNHCR 2006). Since its creation in 1950, the UNHCR has been forced to expand its mandate to meet the needs of a more diverse group of refugees (UNCHR 2006). Today the UNHCR oversees refugee camps, coordinates aid efforts, and makes group and individual referrals to overseas embassies for resettlement.

The Preamble to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention established three durable solutions to try to permanently end the plight of these refugees. The solutions, as stated by the UNHCR, "promise an end to refugee's suffering and their need for international protection and dependence on humanitarian assistance" (UNHCR 2006, p. 129). The three solutions are asylum, resettlement and repatriation. Asylum provides legal protection to a person who demonstrates a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group (UN Chronicle 2007). Resettlement is intended to relocate refugees from their initial countries of protection to a third state of resettlement, better equipped to provide protection (UNHCR 1997). Repatriation aims to return refugees to their country of origin

once conflict has ended and peace has returned.⁵ The three solutions are most effective when used alongside one another, requiring high levels of commitment across developing and developed countries.

Today, developing nations house 80% of the world's refugees (UNHCR 2005). These countries have the fewest resources to support large refugee populations yet house the majority of the world's refugees. Out of the 80% of the world's refugees in the global south, the majority are housed in camps (Smith 2004). Refugee camps are intended to act as temporary shelters for large flows of refugees. Typically, camps are set-up and run by the UNHCR or a partnering organization to offer protection and basic needs to the population. States prefer to house refugees in camps because they serve as a means to control refugee flows (Smith 2004). If refugees are placed in these camps, they cannot interfere with the host economy, government and population (Smith 2004).

Some host nations are not signatories to the 1951 Convention or 1967 Protocol. This means that they are not in violation of international law if they fail to provide environments conducive to just resettlement. Under the convention, countries of resettlement are supposed to provide paths to citizenship for refugees, employment opportunities and freedom of movement within their borders. Refugees that are not lucky enough to resettle in countries where the convention has been signed are not guaranteed these basic rights (UNHCR 2006).

Developing countries overwhelmingly shoulder the bulk of responsibility for these refugee flows. The Indian permanent representative to the UN expressed the following at the UN 48th Session of the UNCHR Executive Committee:

It has to be recognized that refugee and mass movement are first and foremost a 'developing country' problem and that the biggest 'donors' are in reality developing countries who put at risk their fragile environment, economy and society to provide for refuge of million (Gorlick 2003).

Developed nations, by contrast, play the role of financial donors in the international refugee regime. The United States, European Union, and Japan fund 94% of the UNHCR's total budget (Whitaker 2008, p. 243). In recent years economic strain, domestic politics and national security concerns have reduced the total UNHCR funding received from donor countries, which compromises the ability of the UNHCR to provide protection. The UNHCR is dependent on donor countries to effectively carry out its mandate, but sovereign states have no obligation to contribute to the UNHCR. In fact some states benefit when the UNHCR is unable to properly carry out refugee protection. Author Guy Goodwin-Gill explains, "some states do not want solutions, and some interests profit from disorder. Few states prepare to commit to long-term development and democratization" (Goodwin-Gill 2006). Some states in conflict benefit when an ethnic group is displaced based on competing interest and therefore remain unlikely to promote solutions that would result in their return.

Resettlement is used by developing nations to offer specific groups of refugees territorial protection within their borders. Groups that risk refoulement, or the forced return to their country of origin before peaceful conditions have been established, are eligible to be considered for resettlement in a third country (UNHCR 2006). Also meriting consideration for resettlement are refugees who face the threat of expulsion to a country where their lives would be in danger (UNHCR 2006). These groups of refugees are pre-determined and admitted through in-state screening processes. Selection for resettlement is limited and only available to approximately one half of 1% of the world's

15.1 million refugees (UNHCR 2006). Developed nations are geographically distant from refugee-generating nations and therefore exercise more control over the refugees they choose to admit.

Resettlement can be used as leverage by developed nations to compel developing countries to accepting more refugees. For example, if the United States accepts 1,000 Iraqi refugees from Jordan, it is the hope that Jordan, once relieved of some of the physical stress of being a host country, will promote more liberal refugee policies. Though resettlement benefits only a small portion of the world refugee population, it is an important tool that requires the use of the two other durable solutions to work effectively. Because refugee flows have not only increased over the past decade but have also become protracted,⁶ developed states share a growing responsibility to offer resettlement. The number of refugees the US resettles, however, has not been adjusted to meet the increase in the number of refugees globally. Bill Frelick explains, “Unfortunately, resettling small numbers—a generous act of enormous benefit to a few fortunate souls—also doesn’t solve many problems” (Frelick 2002, p.27). In order for resettlement to work effectively, more comprehensive solutions need to be generated, to address the livelihoods of refugees in developing and developed countries.

Resettlement is the least used and least preferable of the three durable solutions because of its cost, the degree of international coordination required and the perceived domestic threat. Global refugee policies favors solutions that result in the return of refugees to their countries of origin (UNHCR 2006). The international refugee system has tendency to view refugee crises as temporary. In some cases, however, refugees are

⁶ A protracted refugee situation is one that has lasted for more than 5 years and resulted in the displacement of more than 25,000 people from the same location (USCRI 2013)

unable to return to their countries of origin. In such cases Northern states play an important role in offering protection. Describing the situation of Iraqi refugees who have fled Iraq and find themselves unable to return due to general regional instability, Alexander Betts states, “Notwithstanding the reluctance of some states to accept Iraqis, resettlement programs are essential if refugees are not to be isolated and marginalized in the Middle East, leading more to enter irregular migration networks, with all their associated dangers” (Betts 2009, p.19). Northern states can alleviate pressure on host states in the southern hemisphere and consequently increase their willingness to provide sustainable services and policies for their refugee population.

In 2002, in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks, refugee resettlement and asylum were temporarily halted in the United States (Frelick 2003). Though they resumed in 2003, the pause in admissions created a general fear that terrorists would use refugee resettlement to wage attacks on the United States. After 9/11 there has been an upsurge in xenophobic, anti-refugee sentiment. Bill Frelick explains, “the U.S. bureaucracy has become a culture of no, where an official risks his or her job security by saying ‘yes’ to a non-citizen” (Frelick 2003, p 27). When determining if a groups is eligible for resettlement, state and government official are likely to offer more scrutiny in the decision making process in order to appease national security interests. Politicians, employers and US citizens can contribute to the culture of no by adding to the social and economic barriers refugees face once they enter the United States.

On an international level, the willingness of the United States to financially and physically support the world’ refugees significantly impacts the global system. As discussed above, developed and developing countries must equally distribute the burden

of refugee movements. Ultimately the UNHCR aims to repatriate refugees or return them to their country of origin once peaceful conditions have been established so that no burden is permanently felt by any host nation.

The Realities of Resettlement: How Contemporary US Refugee Resettlement Functions

The Refugee Act of 1980 created a set of procedures to resettle refugees in the United States. The resettlement process begins when the UNHCR or an affiliated nonprofit makes a resettlement referral to the in-country US Embassy. The US Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) then processes the refugee's case in the United States. The Department of Homeland Security and the US Citizenship and Immigration Services are responsible for conducting security checks, background searches and interviews with the refugee. If the refugee clears all security checks and is deemed eligible for resettlement, PRM sends out final approval. From referral to approval, this process can take anywhere from eight months to two years.

Before a refugee arrives in the US, he or she undergoes medical screenings and a pre-departure briefing. While the refugee goes through pre-departure briefings, the Department of State (DOS) identifies a suitable resettlement location in the US. One of eleven voluntary aid organizations (VOLAGS) are assigned to manage the refugee's case for their first 120 days. VOLAGS partner with one of these 350 regional aid organizations to dispense cash assistance and basic needs services (USPR 2013).

All placement and reception decisions are made by the State Department's Reception and Placement Program (USRP, Bruno 2011). When determining the location

where the refugee will be resettled, PRM considers where other refugees of the same nationality live, whether the refugee has family already resettled in the US and whether the region has the capacity to support the refugee. All travel arrangements are made by the International Organization for Migration, which offers travel loans that need to be repaid after 120 days in the United States. Once in the US, the refugee is met at the airport and transported to his or her new home by one of the VOLAGS or affiliated agencies.⁷

Federal cash assistance programs are run by the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families and administered by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Each refugee is eligible for temporary resettlement assistance for up to 90 days. ORR offers cash assistance in the form of monthly stipends, which are distributed in cooperation with local VOLAGS to pay for rent, utilities, and other basic needs. Food stamps and refugee health care coverage are also provided. In addition, some refugees are selected by the partnering VOLAGS to participate in the Matching Grant Program. The Matching Grants Program is an alternative to public cash assistance, where refugees are provided with assistance for their first six months of resettlement based on the ability of their affiliated aid organization to match federal cash stipends with donations and volunteer hours.

Each refugee is entitled to pre-departure briefings and placement, reception from the airport upon arrival, transport to their new residence,⁸ basic need support,⁹ and referrals for health, employment and schooling (Bruno 2011). The identified partnering

⁷ VOLAGS arrange for rent and lease agreement prior to the refugees arrival. The refugee has the right to request change in residence. The VOLAG pays all rent and utilities for the first 120 days or until the refugee is able to find employment.

⁸ This may be a temporary living arrangement until permanent, affordable housing can be secured.

⁹ Furnishings, food and clothing for at least 30 days.

aid agency assigns each refugee a caseworker, who helps the refugee apply for social security benefits to support them after their first three months of refugee cash assistance has expired. Cash assistance is determined by the Department of Social Services and varies given the number of children, medical conditions and employment situation of each refugee. An assistance case worker I spoke with estimated the average sum of cash distributed to an unemployed refugee family of four was estimated at \$466 per month as of 2012.

In 1994 the United States established a framework for refugee admissions. The system divides refugees into three priorities.¹⁰ Priority one (P1) constitutes urgent cases, or cases in which conflict erupts in the host country, putting the refugee in direct danger. Priority two (P2) is reserved for particular nationalities and priority three (P3) is for refugees who have become separated from family members who reside in the United States (Frelick 2008). To be considered a P1 case the individual must be recommended for resettlement from the UNHCR office in his or her first country of resettlement. A P2 case must come from a referral given by the in-country US Embassy or identified NGO. In 2008 special P2 status was assigned to those who had worked with the United States government in Iraq under the above mentioned Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act (Frelick 2008).

Since the passage of the 1980s Refugee Act, the nature of refugee resettlement has changed. Refugees coming into the United States are more diverse, fleeing increasingly protracted conflicts and given less public assistance. When the act was passed in 1980, refugee cash assistance was issued for a period of three years, now it is

¹⁰ Priorities were originally separate into five categories, with the last two distinguishing degrees of familial relation when applying under family reunification. In 2011, the five categories were condensed into three, combining family reunification into the P3 category, regardless of degrees of separation. See Bill Frelick, *Rethinking U.S. Refugee Admissions: Quantity and Quality*.

issued for three months (Ott 2012; Kennedy 1981). Shorter aid periods, in combination with additional external economic hardship has made resettlement a more challenging experience than it was thirty years ago.

Economic Factors Influencing Refugee Resettlement

In the wake of the US economic crisis, federal aid, which is used to run regional refugee resettlement programs, has not been adjusted to meet the increased cost of living. In 2006 the United States experienced the burst of the housing bubble. Over speculation on real estate, coupled with decades of irresponsible lending, resulted in an economic crash that created massive unemployment.

In December of 2008 the Bureau of Labor Statistics published a 7.3% unemployment rate, the highest in almost a decade (BLS 2008). By January of 2011 unemployment reached 9.1% (BLS 2011). In 2011, 14 million American were unemployed, while 6.2 million of the 14 million had been out of work for over 27 weeks (BLS 2011). The unemployment rate and mass layoffs experienced from 2008 to 2011 made lower-level jobs more competitive. While 14 million Americans lacked employment, the Social Security Administration made no annual adjustment to meet the increase in cost of living. This meant those living in the US were paying more for food, fuel and housing while many had no income to cover the increasing costs. Refugees consequently found it harder to secure employment during their first 120 days, as the entry-level jobs they typically filled were filled by recently laid-off Americans. Compounding the problem was the rise in refugee arrivals in 2009, which put the annual arrival rate higher than any other year post 9/11 (US Government Accountability Office

2009). Cash assistance was stretched thin as purchasing power declined and the number of recipients receiving benefits rose.

A Roadmap to Resettlement: A Overview of this Thesis's Structure

Chapter two of this thesis will review the literature relating to refugee resettlement, public policy reviews, congressional reports, economic journals, social service literature and anthropological research. In chapter three I lay out the case study for Iraqi refugees. It includes a brief description of the conflict the Iraqis have fled, an overview of forms of human capital and an analysis of the skills used when resources are stretched in times of economic downturn. I consult historic and economic literature to analyze current trends in Iraqi resettlement. Chapter four covers the case study of Myanmar refugees in a similar fashion to the case study covered in chapter three. Finally chapter five answers the primary research question to prove or disprove the prediction that Iraqi refugees have a better chance at succeeding in the United States during economic downturn due to their ability to effectively draw upon their skills.

Economic Constraints of Resettlement: The Relevance of These Research Questions Today

The goal of this thesis is to determine how refugees' social and human capital relates to their resettlement experience. It is set within the time period of the 2008-2012 US economic crisis in order to explore how refugees use skills to achieve success when resources are limited. It is my hope that this study will demonstrate that refugees are an extremely resourceful, productive population. Regardless of their forms of capital, all

refugees have been forced into living conditions that are sub-optimal through no fault of their own. A better understanding of the ways individuals adapt and cope with financial instability can point toward better aid processes and create more efficient systems.

Over the past decade refugee assistance has decreased during the first 120 days of resettlement. In the 1980s refugees were eligible for 36 months of cash assistance (1980 Refugee Act). Today refugees are eligible for 3 months of services (USCR 2010). The methods of finding employment focus on immediate, entry-level positions that leave little room for economic mobility or job security. While resources are becoming scarcer in the wake of the economic crisis, there has not been any significant reform of the methods used to gain economic and social stability. Through my research I have discovered that refugees respond to the same economic situations that US citizens do. The ways that they cope with diminishing resources emphasizes survival skills. In the case of the Karen, I found that refugees are engaging in secondary migration, sometimes separating themselves from family members in the United States, in order to fill positions at meatpacking plants in the Midwest. In the case of Iraqi refugees, ethnic enclaves offer social support for newly arriving refugees.

While I set out to examine how resettlement success varied between two groups, it became more clear that a variety of other factors influenced success in the US after 2008. Given the current economic climate, gender, class and age all play an important role in the resettlement experiences of each refugee across nationalities and their consequent ability to achieve self-sufficiency. An intersectional approach to studying refugee and forced migration would offer new insight in future field studies.

Chapter Two: The Cross Sections of Resettlement: A Literature Review

In this chapter I analyze how the 2008-2012 economic crisis has impacted refugee resettlement in the United States based on prior research conducted by refugee resettlement organizations, academics in the field of forced migration, economists and think tanks. I review existing literature on refugee resettlement and the economic crisis in addition to case studies on Karen and Iraqi refugees. I use this information in later chapters to draw conclusions about how each topic contributes to the resettlement outcomes for the Karen and Iraqis. While some authors like Milica Bookman (2002) and Karen Jacobsen (2005) examine the significance of human and social capital in resettlement, other authors like Douglas Dowd (2011) examine how race, class and ethnicity impact the attainment of forms of capital. Little research has however been conducted on how economic constraints in a country of resettlement affect the use of these forms of capital.

I begin by giving an overview on how the US resettlement program functions and focus on how national security concerns and economic constraints have impacted the domestic resettlement program. I then provide an overview of the conditions Iraqi and Karen refugees have fleeing before coming to the United States. The work of Karen Jacobsen (2005), Milica Bookman (2002) offers a useful analysis on refugee's economic capabilities based on the conditions they have fled. Each author addresses the types of human, social and financial capital respective to different refugee groups. Based on what Anthony Giddens (1997) describes as transformative capital, I connect the profiles of each group with its resettlement experiences once in the United States (1997). I do this by

comparing the current demands of the job market with the transferable skills each group has. Richard Florida frames my analysis on how the economic crisis has impacted different sectors of the economy (2008). I connect the overall economic crisis with refugee resettlement by concentrating on the impact the economic crisis has had on blue collar employment and the service sector, two industries where the majority of refugees are employed. I conclude with two strategies refugees used to compensate for economic hardship: secondary migration and supplementary income earning.

Refugee Resettlement as a Potential Durable Solution

Existing literature on refugee resettlement is helpful in contextualizing how today's resettlement system manifests itself in times of decreasing resources. The United States resettlement program was originally established to offer a safe haven to refugees living in unsafe environments where they had sought protection. This mission was conceptualized within framework of the 1951 Convention Relating on the Status of Refugees and has evolved to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse group of refugees and an increasingly complex socio-political climate (1951 Convention).

In its 2006 report, *The State of the World's Refugees*, the UNHCR explained, "the three durable solutions-voluntary repatriation, local integration in the country of first asylum or resettlement in a third country- are durable because they end the refugee's suffering and their need for international protection and dependence on humanitarian assistance" (UNCHR 2002, p.129). Until the 1980s resettlement was the preferred solution, seen as "a symbol of shared responsibility," and an "expression of international solidarity" (UNHCR 2006). After 1980 however there was a shift away from resettlement

as states that historically had resettled refugees began to develop what the UNHCR calls a “fear of the pull factor,” or “irregular movements of refugees”(UNHCR 2006).

In 2009, the UNHCR Resettlement Section published a study on how contemporary refugee resettlement serves as an instrument of protection (UNCHR, 2009). Though resettlement used to be considered a viable solution at the end of the Cold War, it has since become the least preferred solution. Immediately following the Cold War, refugee resettlement was used to meet the strategic national interest of the United States (Power et al. 2012). By admitting large numbers of refugees fleeing communist countries, the United States strategically used refugees to display democracy as superior to communism. Today, however, resettlement is used as a last resort due to the financial and physical burden of hosting a permanent refugee population (Powel et al., 2012). The UNHCR discovered in its 1997 report that the very use of resettlement as a “last resort” has created a negative connotation for the durable solution, where individual governments undermine its value. Instead, the report suggests that resettlement should be used internationally to “strengthen the good will of the country of first asylum” (UNHCR 2006). To accomplish this objective the UNHCR recommends resettlement countries develop programs that address the immediate and long term needs of refugees.

Contemporary resettlement programs often reflect national interests; for example, the United States accepts Iraqi refugees based on its involvement in the Gulf region. It has been suggested that needs-driven resettlement programs replace programs that pursue national interests (Frelick 2008). The UNHCR Resettlement Section focuses on the quality of resettlement, concluding that state-run resettlement programs ideally “ensure that resources are made available in order to meet (the refugee’s) identified needs,” and

“ensure that resettlement is implemented in the most effective and durable manner” (UNHCR 2006). Instead of using national interest to drive the acceptance of refugees into the United States, the US should use an approach that admits refugees at the greatest risk.

In the same report the UNHCR highlights the criteria that it uses to guide the implementation of global resettlement programs (UNHCR 2006). It favors domestic programs that are predictable according to levels of funding, budget allocations and resettlement criteria, diverse in the refugees they admit based on the conflicts they are fleeing and the special needs they have, responsive to emergency needs and budget sharing with other resettlement programs, proactive according to domestic considerations and holistic in creating lasting solutions within broader refugee policy (UNHCR 2006). The UNHCR, however, concludes that national governments do not generally maintain the flexibility necessary to respond to emergency refugee needs (UNHCR 2006, Whitaker 2008).

The UNHCR has designated thirty resettlement countries. The countries that offer resettlement are largely developed countries that have the finance and infrastructure available to carry out viable resettlement programs (UNHCR 1997). However, despite having sufficient financial institutions and infrastructure, resettlement countries privilege their citizens above any foreign-born population. Therefore, in times of economic or social instability, being anti-immigrant or anti-refugee can be seen as good politics by virtue of favoring natural-born citizens (Bohmer and Shuman 2008).

Domestic Resettlement: Local Actors in Integrated Support

As discussed above national governments are unable to maintain flexible resettlement programs due to competing interest at the state level. This inability to adjust to rapid changes is further constrained when economic resources are scarce. Given the timeframe this thesis takes into account, it is relevant to review how local and national actors contribute to refugee resettlement. Further chapters will examine how these actors carryout activities under constrained economic conditions, and how this impacts a refugee's resettlement outcomes.

Private actors provide crucial resources that support and supplement domestic resettlement programs. In relation to the resettlement of refugees in the United States, several studies point to the importance of private, faith-based organizations. Six out of the eleven established VOLAGS that partner with ORR are faith-based or have religious affiliations. Jessica Eby, Erika Iverson, Jenifer Smyers and Erol Kekic found in a 2011 report titled, "The Faith Community's Role in Refugee Resettlement in the United States", that faith-based organizations actually helped refugees reconstruct identity after their initial displacement (2011). After losing a sense of security and identity while fleeing violence in Myanmar, faith-based organizations help Karen refugees identify with a wider religious community. Eby et al. state, "religion provides a privileged window to shed light on the identification process of refugees" (Eby et al, 2011).

Once resettled in the US, refugees discover that many local resettlement agencies are run by churches or other faith-based community organizations. Eby et al. conclude that, faith-based actors' support of refugee resettlement through community co-

sponsorship increases refugees' local integration prospects, especially by enhancing social connections in the community that have a positive impact on other aspects of integration, including employment (Eby et al. 2011, p. 587).

Sarah McKinnon, however, questions the ways faith-based organizations use religion to recruit volunteers by portraying their refugee clients as in need of the generous support of the public. She states, “[the faith based organizations] narrative positions volunteers as vital to the resettlement process for refugees, without asking refugees their feelings about the quality of assistance they receive” (McKinnon 2008, p. 32). McKinnon also recognizes that faith-based organizations have a stronger financial base than resettlement agencies that are funded by the state or federal government. She states, “faith based organizations rely on the generous support of private individuals and groups to maintain their services to refugees” (MacKinnon 2008. p. 314). By tying the role of refugee resettlement to religious missions, faith-based organizations are able to attract more reliable donors than secular non-profits because they are able to maintain a more consistent base of support from congregations even in times of recession.

Janet Bauer and Andrea Chivakos (2010) explore the role of post-resettlement services and the importance of faith in integrating into the United States. They specifically examine faith-based services in Muslim communities. Faith-based service groups fall under what Mary Pipher (2002) identifies as ‘cultural brokers,’ or individuals who help facilitate integration into American culture. Pipher (2002) describes how faith-based services can provide safe social spaces where groups can reconstruct their identities and gain a sense of belonging. Within the Muslim community, Bauer and Chivakos (2010) identify religious organizations and cultural brokers as significant because they

combat what some call Islamophobia, or the discrimination against Muslims. Sarah McKinnon (2008) however finds that faith-based services can potentially force religious identification where refugees feel pressure to identify as a particular religion so that they can justify receiving services, particularly in times when resources are made scarce by economic crisis (2009).

Social networks, whether religious or secular, provide extra support to refugees coming to the United States. Hope Jensen Leichter and William E. Mitchell (1978) explore how kinship networks mediate social, financial and health concerns. They assert that understanding specific types of kinship networks is a critical part of providing effective social services. They argue that social services should augment kinship networks instead of reducing the involvement of kin. In both the Iraqi and the Karen cases, kin play an important and distinct role in integration. Nazli Kibria(1993), in a study on Vietnamese occupational mobility in the United States, finds that occupational mobility occurs through resources provided by the family or kin. In the case of Vietnamese refugees, having a spouse or child at home, in addition to other extended kinship networks, facilitates a more positive resettlement experience for the refugee. In cases like that of Vietnamese refugees, kin can be used to find jobs, housing, child care and translation services within the refugee community (Kibria 1993). However, based on circumstances from which refugees have fled, refugee families often arrive in their country of resettlement separated (Besier 1991). Familial separation is linked to heightened depression and decreased mental health (Beiser 1991). Poor mental health can also be linked to lower economic success (Takeda 2000). Such kinship ties are an important factor in post resettlement outcomes for any group of refugees or migrants.

Network ties including the proximity of family members and intra-and extra-familial ties also impact the ways that social capital can be used to find employment and generate income. Harvey Krahn and Navjot Lamba (2003) concludes that refugees living with a spouse are more likely to find higher quality employment based on the degree of flexibility two household incomes can afford the job search. Krahn and Lamba (2003) also argue that additional children and household dependents can adversely affect resettlement outcomes. In general employment opportunities increase when social capital can be used, however as Lamba states, “ethnic-group and familial ties do not have the capital to overcome societal restrictions” (Lamba 2003, p. 60). Ultimately a lack of sustainable income cannot be compensated by informal assistance given by friends of family members.

Transformative Assets: Human, Social and Financial Capital

The types of capital that refugees hold prior to arriving in the United States are one means of analyzing resettlement outcomes. This thesis explores how human and social capital is used by groups of refugees to achieve desirable resettlement outcomes. It is therefore critical to define each type of capital that is relevant to a refugee’s resettlement experience in order to conduct further analysis.

Different forms of capital are reviewed by Karen Jacobsen in her book *The Economic Life of Refugees* (2005). Jacobsen (2005) categorizes the different types of capital that refugees have under a “portfolio of assets” framework. These types of capital include natural capital, physical capital, human capital, social capital and financial capital (Jacobsen 2005). Natural capital includes the land and water that refugees have at their

disposal, either in their country of origin or in their country of first asylum (Jacobsen 2005). Physical capital includes livestock, infrastructure, real estate and cars, which refugees mainly have access to before fleeing their country of origin (Jacobsen 2005). Human capital includes levels of education, language skills, life experiences, health and professional degrees. Social capital encompasses community networks, familial networks and religious affiliations (Jacobsen 2005). Finally, financial capital includes earned income, remittances and cash assistance (Jacobsen 2005). Financial and physical capital is likely lost after fleeing the country of origin.

After leaving their country of origin, refugees most likely lose all financial, natural and physical capital, though as Jacobsen describes, some of these types of capital can be regained in their country of asylum or country of resettlement. The United States and other resettlement countries are non-agrarian societies, disadvantaging those with human capital that encompasses agricultural skills (Jacobsen 2005). Furthermore, professional certifications from countries of origin are not necessarily transferable in the United States (Dwyer 2010). Jacobsen argues, in reference to resettlement in the United States that, “few with professional skills are able to use them” (Jacobsen 2005, p. 12). Consequently, refugees must establish access to new sources of financial and human capital. Jacobsen (2005) considers local authorities, host communities, social networks and social services to be important factors as refugees establish new sources of financial and human capital. Despite losing most physical, financial and natural capital refugees can benefit from some forms of human capital and social capital (Bookman 2002). Jacobsen adds that, “common to almost all refugees, however, is the destitution that results from their flight experiences, paired with a strong desire to support themselves by

pursuing livelihoods” (Jacobsen 2005, p.1). The desire to pursue livelihoods is evident in the strong work-ethic reported by employers of refugees in the for mentioned IRC case study, *Welcoming Refugees in an Economic Crisis* (2009).

Milica Bookman examines how scarcity in refugee camps creates “encampment economies” (2002). Bookman states, “when displaced persons first reach shelter, there is no question of their dependency on the goods and services provided by others” (Bookman 2002,p. 87). At the micro-level in refugee camps, refugees engage in the trade and barter of rationed goods and labor, incorporating outside aid and resources from neighboring communities into the insular camp economies. As she explains, “[refugees] leave behind most of their assets, including livestock, furniture and bank accounts,” when they flee (Bookman 2002, p. 100). The most valuable asset then becomes human capital, which is not shed upon fleeing their country of origin. Bookman illustrates how human capital has a positive correlation with economic growth, but warns that not all human capital is conducive to all economies (Bookman 2002).

Local conditions and economies dictate what skills contribute to productivity and the ability of a refugee to gain upward mobility based on his or her human capital. Roberta Cohen and Francis M. Deng (1999) argue that refugees, when housed in a society where their human capital is not conducive to the local economy, actually go through what they call de-skillment, or the loss of skills due to lack of use over a long period of time. When refugees are unable to practice skills that they once used to support their livelihood, new skills must be adopted through skill enhancement training so that the refugee can achieve self-sufficiency (Cohen and Deng 1999).

Anthony Giddens (1997) uses a structural theory, which described how social structures and organizations are derived and developed to meet human needs. Giddens views the ability to use human and social capital as dependent on social structures and institutions that enable or constrain the use of capital (Giddens 1997, p.46). When applied to Jacobsen's portfolio of assets, Giddens's theory draws attention to the ways the US-resettlement program, and wider US society, enable or constrain the use of human and social capital. For example, a refugee from an agrarian society, in general, would not be able to transform his or her human capital into a lucrative income generating activity because the US labor market is not structured around small scale agriculture. Giddens (1997) calls resources that can be used to generate positive resettlement experience 'transformative capital.' Transformative capital is determined by the agencies and structures that govern society. Agencies and government entities set rules and structure institutions that benefit specific types of human and social capital. Those born into the existing systems generally have a better understanding of these rules and structures and therefore develop human and social capital that benefits them within the existing system. Refugees however come from outside the society and therefore have forms of capital that may or may not benefit them (Giddens 1997).

Because refugees come from societies outside the United States, many have not had the opportunity to gain capital that would translate into upward economic mobility. Consequently refugees generally fill the entry-level positions. Sharing similar socio-economic profiles are single mothers, minorities and immigrants. In a study on single mothers and welfare reliance Jane Devine et al. examine low-income adaptive strategies (Devine et. al 1997). They find that supplementary income, which is largely unreported,

compensates for income shortages during periods of unemployment or economic hardship. Supplementary income includes informal work such as childcare, working at a friend's business or cleaning houses, and cash assistance from friends and family.

Supplementary income-earning activities are categorized as adaptive strategies used to meet necessary expenses such as rent, food, utilities, transportation, laundry, phone bills and bank charges. Because low-income single mothers make up the same unskilled labor force that refugees encompass, some of the adaptive strategies used by single-mothers in the case study, "Low-Income Adaptive Strategies," can be applied to refugees.

A Viable Solution?: Constraints on the US Refugee Resettlement Program

Once in the United States refugees rely on a patchwork of social services, both formal and informal to support their general livelihoods. In times of economic crisis services are harder to qualify for and more scant when administered. The allocation of services to groups of refugees is an important aspect of how contemporary resettlement may or may not hold both intentional and unintentional biases towards certain groups of refugees.

Their social and economic outcomes depend not only on the types of capital they have accumulated prior to coming to the United States, but also on the economic and political climate within the US. According to Bill Frelick, the current political and economic climate in the US further compromises the use of resettlement as a durable solution (Frelick, 2003). The reasons for this compromise are found in a study on national refugee policy conducted by Sonia Cardenas (2008) who explores how nationalism and racism in the United States have produced weak refugee policies at the domestic level.

Cardenas claims, “national governments cannot support liberal policies” (Cardenas 2008, p.1). Though the US government commits to liberal refugee admissions targets, electoral-pressures, especially during times of economic downturn or perceived terrorist threats prevent governments from meeting admissions targets. As the UNCHR explains, “refugee resettlement is far more susceptible to policy shifts because it is much more directly controlled by government and humanitarian agencies, both in countries of 1st asylum and final destination” (UNHCR 2006, p. 17). Because resettlement takes place within the borders of sovereign states, the implementation of policies governing domestic resettlement programs reflect individual state interest. This can result in policies that are xenophobic or exclusionary. Changes in domestic policy also impact the international resettlement system, making it more difficult to find stable and durable solutions for the world’s 15.1 million refugees (UNHCR 2013).

In 2003 Frelick examined the ways the United States designates priorities for refugee resettlement. Priorities are used to determine the status of an individual or group of refugees referred to the US government for resettlement. As it stands, priority one (P1) is reserved for individual cases that have been referred by the UNHCR for resettlement. Priority two (P2) is reserved for group resettlement, where the US State Department pre-identifies groups of refugees that are threatened based on their ethnicities, nationalities, religions and locations. Priority three (P3) is reserved for family reunification, but only for specific nationalities determined in advance by the US State Department. Frelick argues that the current system needs to be re-prioritized to meet the needs of a more diverse group of refugees (Frelick 2003).¹¹

¹¹ Under Frelick’s new priority model, separate priorities would be made for refugees put at risk due to their affiliation with the US government, women and children displaced without parents. Frelick recommends reserving priority one for

In theory the US refugee resettlement program is the most generous refugee program, admitting more refugees than any other designated resettlement country (UNHCR 2006).¹² The generous ideology that drives the mission of the US refugee resettlement program promotes the adoption of policies that let in approximately 7,000 refugees annually (Salehyan 2000). In 2005 Carol Bohmer and Amy Shuman investigated the relationship between the liberal ideology that promotes refugee resettlement and the conflicting domestic concerns for national security and stable economies that constrains it. Once states are actually faced with groups of refugees, governments often adopt policies that restrict resettlement citing national security concerns and economic stability as justification. They conclude that the US refugee policies are far more liberal in theory than in actual practice (Bohmer and Shuman 2005). Daniel Kranstroom supports Bohmer and Shuman's conclusion, finding tension between universalist humanitarian law, embraced by the world's democracies, and what he calls "the more particularistic political practices" (Kranstroom 2012, p.115) of nation states.

The Double Bind: US Resettlement and National Security Concerns

National security concerns in the aftermath of 9/11 further compromises the use of resettlement as a durable solution (Frelick 2008). Post 9/11, groups of refugees are more likely to be scrutinized as potential terrorist threats. Given the importance nationality plays in determining the potential national security risk a refugee possess, it is relevant to review the ways nationality impacts contemporary resettlement.

only refugees with emergency security needs, those in danger of nonrefoulement, those in danger of an attack in their current location and those in need of immediate medical attention (Frelick 2003).

¹² In 2011, of the 61,649 refugees that were resettled in the world, the United States resettled 43,215 individuals (UNHCR 2013).

The admission of a foreign-born population is often associated with increased terrorist threats (Frelick 2008). Idean Salehyan (2008) investigates how counter-terrorism measures have impacted refugee resettlement, particularly for refugees from the Middle East, who have been referred for resettlement, but are unable to enter the US due to pending background checks. Salehyan concludes that “After 9/11, with security fears stemming from individuals associated with militant groups such as Al-Qaeda, it is possible that immigration policies have discriminated against persons from Muslim countries” (Salehyan 2008, p.2).

A protectionist policy adopted by the newly created Department of Homeland Security, not only delayed refugee admission after 9/11, but created the notion that refugees are a terrorist threat (Frelick 2003). Bill Frelick describes the perception of refugees and migrants as “undifferentiated mass(es) of ‘illegals,’ prone to criminality and terrorism” (Frelick 2003, p. 228). Frelick (2003) concludes that there is no possibility for progressive refugee policies while the US remains preoccupied by homeland security concerns. In a post 9/11 world Frelick recommends that refugee resettlement policy be re-examined so that it can act as what he calls a, “vehicle for individual rescue and a mechanism for comprehensive solutions” (Frelick 2003, p.1).

The United States is in what Donald M. Kerwin of the Migration Policy Institute describes as a double bind:

The US system of refugee protection has diverse goals. It must prevent terrorist and criminal infiltration, while enabling those fleeing persecution to reach protection. It must admit vulnerable refugees and promote their successful integration. It must weigh numerous requests for temporary protection from vulnerable groups and individuals, despite the limited legal categories available to allow such persons to enter and remain. The system must both meet its enforcement responsibilities and its legal imperatives to protect refugees (Kerwin 2010, p. 2).

Groups of refugees that trigger national security threats based on the procedures set forth by the Department of Homeland Security, go under more intense screening and scrutiny (Kerwin 2010). More extensive background checks, multiple interviews and requests for additional documentation are all applied to refugees fleeing countries that the United States has deemed a terrorist threat. Iraqi refugees are unique in the way that they are a national security concern based on their country of origin, but also offer the United States a chance to showcase the humanitarian nature of its foreign policy.

Limited Resources for a Growing Population: The Effects of the Economic Crisis

While national security concerns immediately following 9/11 severely restricted the number of admitted refugees, the admissions numbers are rebounding and currently close to the pre-2001 levels. At the same time, however, services available to the growing numbers of refugees are coming under threat as fewer resources are available. This has an impact on the ways refugees are viewed by federal and state governments, resettlement agencies, employers, politicians and US citizens. What has emerged is an inefficient resettlement systems that does not take into consideration the types of human and social capital individual groups of refugees have as discussed on page 35 to 38 of my literature review.

In times of economic crisis, Bohmer and Shuman (2008) discovered that the distinction made between refugees and economic migrants becomes blurred. This affects the types of resources states are willing to designate to resettlement over programs for U.S. born citizens. Because refugees are perceived as using up limited resources there is a tendency, under increasing economic strain, to group all foreigners searching for

employment together without distinguishing between refugee and economic migrant. Since refugees are required to find employment within their first three months in the United States, they are perceived as a threat to the shrinking number of job opportunities. In 2008 the Lewin Group investigated the economic crisis and refugee resettlement in Atlanta and Phoenix, concluding that strained resources and xenophobic hiring practices made finding immediate employment more difficult for refugees.

The study describes the employment climate refugees face in the US. In the report, the Lewin Group (2008) found that employers reported that refugees make good employees because they have, “a very strong work ethic.” Because of this strong work ethic refugees typically fill minimum wage positions that normally have a very high turnover rate. Erik Eckholm (2009) found that refugees not only fill positions US born citizens are unwilling to take, but fill the minimum wage positions for longer periods of time than US citizens.

The types of employment positions refugees fill today are dictated not only by their reputation as handworkers, but are largely dependent on their language skills (IRC 2003). Not surprisingly those with English language skills have a better chance of finding employment quickly because they are able to start the job search without any time spent in English language training (IRC 2003). While English language skills can help refugees secure employment with more ease, the quality of employment that they do find is not necessarily better than non-English speaking refugees. Refugees coming to the US with professional degrees actually face a downward shift in employment outcomes. The IRC argues that many refugees feel, as they state, “their potential is being wasted and that they could make greater contributions to the US society if they were given sufficient time and

resources to recertify their profession” (IRC 2003, p. 445). Today, refugees face a tougher job search where Erik Eckholm (2009) finds that entry-level work is being taken by overqualified US citizens who have been laid off from higher level positions.

While entry-level work is increasingly competitive an average of 153,000 jobs have been added each month since 2010 (BLS 2012). These positions, which Eckholm highlights, are overwhelmingly in the service sector and trade professions. Other sectors that did gain jobs include healthcare, which added 55,000 jobs, hospitality which gained 38,000 and manufacturing which gained 25,000 (PBS 2013). Temporary jobs in construction after Hurricane Sandy added an additional 30,000 jobs (PBS 2013).

The current employment opportunities for those with educational profiles similar to refugees (a high school degree or less) are heavily concentrated in construction and building (BLS 2012). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the top five jobs with the fastest growth rate, not requiring a high school diploma included brick mason, cargo and freight assistant, cement mason, glazier and construction assistant (BLS 2013).

The surge in construction and trades-based job openings is a sign of general optimistic post-recession. Cathy Lewis (2013), states that while many Americans are unable to buy new homes and continue to rent, real estate has rebounded somewhat after the economic crisis. She states, “The real estate community is saying the prices are starting to come up, and they’re feeling more optimistic” (PBS 2013). Positive gains in real estate are one reason trade professions are seeing a positive forecast in job growth. Though these jobs are some of the fastest growing, all require additional on-the-job-training or apprenticeships to gain upward mobility. The physicality of the jobs excludes those that have experienced physical trauma or health complications. According to

monster.com, a job search engine, construction constitutes, “one of the more demanding physical jobs. Workers must work in all types of conditions and be active for many hours; performing physical labor and lifting various objects” (Monster.com 2011).

Additional qualifications for permanent construction positions include math proficiency and additional apprentices. These additional qualifications that would allow for mobility within the position cannot be realistically earned if the refugee has a minimum of eight months to become economically self-sufficient. The average annual earnings for the top five jobs hovered around \$21,000 without benefits a sum that would hardly cover rent and grocery bills (BLS 2013).

While the employment climate favors those with the physical ability to engage in trade professions, resettlement agencies help to administer short term services for those that are unable to find employment. These programs vary state-by-state. The Lewin Group further details the impacts of economic downturn on the state resettlement programs in Miami, Florida, Houston, Texas and Sacramento, California (2008). In all three cases it concludes that federal-funding is not only insufficient to run programs for increasing numbers of refugee resettled in the US, but relies on unreliable private contributions and fundraising at the state and local levels.

In times of economic crisis private contributions tend to be less generous, exposing the resettlement program’s dependence on private resources (Lewin Group 2008). In addition to this dependence on private resources the IRC concludes that, “the economic crisis has exposed the extreme dependency of the program on early employment in order for refugees to thrive” (p. 447). Refugees, who are required to find employment within three months of their arrival, cannot afford to spend time recertifying

previous professional degrees, which would allow them to fill higher paying; more stable job positions (Lewin Group 2008).

The Lewin Group also examines the impact of the economic crisis on specific populations of resettled refugees. In Miami, Cuban refugees account for the majority of the refugee population, while Houston resettles a large number of Liberian and Somali Bantu refugees (Lewin Group 2008). Sacramento on the other hand sees refugees from the former Soviet Union and Hmong refugees resettled from Thai refugee camps (Lewin Group 2008). After reviewing all case studies, the IRC has determined that a refugee's English language abilities have the largest impact on their employment outcomes in the United States. Refugees who are able to speak English can automatically start a job search upon arrival in the United States. The interesting exceptions were Cuban refugees living in Miami, who could find employment with only Spanish language skills due to the area's high concentration of Spanish speakers (Lewin Group 2008). Somali, Liberian and Hmong refugees who lacked English language abilities had to enroll in ESL classes before they started a job search, slowing the job search processes (Lewin Group, 2008). Some resettlement programs, like the one in Sacramento combine employment with ESL classes, using employment to help refugees gain language skills (Lewin Group 2008).

As seen in the IRC study, different states have different ways of structuring resettlement services (2008). While some states are used to large numbers of resettled refugees being resettled within their borders, others are witnessing a trend in unprecedented secondary migration. Secondary migration occurs when a refugee moves out of the state he or she was originally resettled to. Secondary migration is significant

because services are administered based on a refugees primary resettlement location. Movement away from this community may result in a loss or decrease of services.

In a Congressional Report, Senator Richard Lugar (R-Indiana) presented the problem of secondary migration in refugee resettlement (Ott 2012; US Congress 1993). He claimed, “In a difficult economic climate, the federal government must do more to support and resource the local communities who bear the responsibilities of receiving this increased flow” (title 8, chapter 12, subchapter I, section 1101, 1993). A blog post covering a Bloomberg.com news article retold the story of Alabama’s Republican state Senator Scott Beason, who sponsored a law cracking down on Hispanic migration and declared that it helped, “put thousands of native Alabamians back into the work force” (Coen 2012; Douban et al. 2012). Instead of doing what Beason predicted it would, it caused a huge labor shortage that resulted in the secondary migration of refugees, willing to fill the blue-collar positions that locals refused (Douban et al. 2012). Because federal assistance does not follow the refugee once he or she has moved from his or her original place of resettlement in the US, the Office of Refugee Resettlement adopted Supplemental Services in 2010 to assist states and cities that experienced large influxes of refugees from secondary migration (ORR 2010). This program is still developing and has yet to deliver matching services to refugees who have moved from their original place of resettlement.

A foreign press briefing on refugee resettlement and the US State Department’s role in the refugee admissions program highlighted concerns expressed by local governments that felt they could no longer support a growing population of refugees without increased federal support (U.S. Congress 1993). In 2010 the Mayor of

Manchester, New Hampshire even asked the resettlement program to suspend resettlement to Manchester (Corcoran, 2010). As of April 2012 \$340 million dollars had been allocated for refugee admissions in the United States, while \$1.7 billion had been allocated for the development of overseas refugee resettlement programs. (Foreign Press Briefing 2012). The current resettlement system has yet to adapt to the increasing prevalence of secondary migration in the United States, putting secondary host communities and refugees that chose to migrate, at a disadvantage (Ott, 2012; US Congress, 1993).

Economist and writer for *The Atlantic*, Richard Florida states that as of October 2012, 66% of Americans are part of a growing underclass (Florida, 2012). The fastest growing industry in the United States is the service industry, which has yet adjusted wages and benefits to meet the growing number of employees (Florida 2012). The service industry represents employment opportunities such as sales persons, cashiers, food preparation staff, nurses and waitresses. It is estimated by that the service industry provides about 30% of refugees with employment (DHHS 2008). The majority of service workers earn approximately \$30,000 annually and do not receive benefits to supplement the gaps left by the meager salary (Florida 2012). Florida states, “what is desperately needed is a new social compact, which treats service workers as a source of innovation and productivity, and turns the millions upon millions of low-wage jobs into higher-paid productivity-enhancing, family-supporting middle class work”(Florida 2012). It should be noted however, that access to the service industry is contingent upon English language skills (personal communication 2012), a form of human capital that many groups of refugees are lacking.

In a 2011 article Florida reported on the top twenty cities where paychecks go the furthest. Because of a low cost-of-living and relatively fair wage rate, Des Moines, Iowa; Washington DC; Arlington, Virginia; Worcester, Massachusetts; Houston, Texas; Ogden, Utah; Colorado Springs, Colorado; Dallas, Texas; Atlanta, Georgia and Raleigh, North Carolina represent the cities that have the highest real income (Florida 2011). In June of 2012, the *Houston Chronicle* declared Texas to be the number one state of resettlement in the nation based on the low cost of living and fair wages. The article states, “Houston has one of the lowest unemployment rates for a big city. Housing here is relatively cheaper than in other places, too, and while it’s not an easy place to get around, one can do it with a little perseverance” (Freemantle 2012). Out of the ten cities listed by Florida to have the highest real incomes, Atlanta, Washington DC, and Dallas were included in the Migration Policy Institute’s 2007 listing of the top 20 resettlement cities (Migration Policy Institute 2007).

In August of 2010, Florida released another report for *The Atlantic* that tracked the fate of blue collar jobs and their employees. In 2001 the IRC estimated that the majority of all refugees only qualify for these blue-collar positions (IRC 2001). Florida argues that blue collar positions, according to the US Labor Department statistics, had the highest level of unemployment and therefore the greatest degree vulnerability generated from the economic crisis. On the opposite side of the fence, Florida predicted that the service industry accounted for 45% of the workforce, and was projected to make up over half of the workforce by 2018 (Florida 2012). Due to the growing numbers and service-based positions, Florida concluded that in the long term those employed in the service industry will see an increase in salaries and benefits (Florida 2012). Alejandro Portes

(2001) however predicts that the segmented, downward assimilation of immigrants into blue-collar urban society will persist, with Ithutu Ali, claiming that this downward assimilation applies specifically to the low-skilled refugees coming to the United States (2002). Because refugees possess human capital that is complementary to blue collar work, I predict that Ali's claim will hold true.

A much lower percentage of refugees (25.6 per cent) work in skilled jobs compared to other immigrants (41.7 per cent) (Batalova and Fix 2008). Occupations in this skilled category include teachers, engineers, health professionals, scientists, and administrators. This occupational difference for refugees should not come as a total surprise as refugees and other migrants that have lower English abilities and educational levels, often end up in the first available job they can find via the assistance of their sponsor, a governmental agency, or family members (Ali 2002)

In his book *Inequality and the Global Economic Crisis*, Douglas Dowd examines how poverty and the generation of inequality has been impacted by the US economy, "downsizing and outsourcing" (2009, p. 5). The inequality that Dowd speaks to is applicable to foreign born populations, especially those in their first generation. Refugees in their first generation are more likely to work in positions that are either eliminated or made temporary as budgets are cut.

Dowd distinguishes between relative poverty, where, "the bottom 1/3 of society's income distribution are made to feel poor, even if they are better off than previous generation," and absolute poverty, "when people's health and life-spans are reduced by their inaccessibility to adequate nutrition, shelter and healthcare, education and job training that might lift them and their children out of poverty" (Dowd 2009, p. 9). The

economic crisis has had a major impact on the perceived quality of life, and the actual income people are receiving. 14% of all US household reported living in poverty, while 25% of all jobs provided incomes below the poverty line (Dowd 2009, p 32). This statistic represents a different perception of poverty among people that are earning the lowest pay grade. This may also not account for low-income adaptive strategies used by earning wages below the poverty line (Devine et al. 2008).

Because refugees fill jobs that pay minimum wages, the impact that a reduction of wages in already low-paying positions has on refugees is significant. Timothy Smeeding and Jeffery P. Thompson identify the impact the economic crisis has had on all parts of the income distribution. While in 2012 the Bureau of Census reported a rise in poverty, home owners and real estate investors lost value on financial assets, home prices and property value (Bureau of Census 2012). Smeeding and Thompson conclude that the economic crisis has reduced inequality in terms of personal wealth but increased inequality based on household wealth (Smeeding and Thompson 2010).

Dowd (2009) connects the pursuit of capitalist profit to an increase in inequality as a result of the global economic crisis. He identifies four unavoidable reasons for inequality including where and when the individual was born, the individual's gender and race, the income and wealth of the individual's parents, and the laws governing the nation. He defines power in the US as, "the ability to act effectively to cause things to go one's way and remain so; and equally often and more important, to keep others from having their way" (Dowd 2009, p. 30-31). Because white males hold the majority of power in the US system, immigrants and refugees are accepted based on their ability to

mirror those who hold power. As Dowd states, “You will be accepted-as long as you become like ‘us’” (Down 2009, p. 50).

Over the past several decades welfare reform and a general move toward fiscally conservative policies have restricted the access refugees have to social services once resettled. Ithutu Ali states, “over the past decade, the US has increasingly restricted the social and civil rights of non-citizens by limiting their access to public assistance, cutting funding for social services, questioning their loyalty to the nation and deporting them” (Ali 1996, p.83). In Ali’s study on the impact of welfare legislation on refugee resettlement, Ali claims that 1996 policy reforms marked the first pieces of legislation that made federally funded benefits available to US citizens and shifted the cost of benefits for foreigners to the state level. Because social services are provided on a short term basis by the state, refugees do not have adequate time to develop human and social capital necessary for upward mobility (Ali 1996).

Exceptional Circumstances: Iraqi Refugees and the U.S. Resettlement System

Unlike the bulk of resettled refugees, Iraqi refugees have higher than average socio-economic profiles before arriving in the United States. Despite these above average socio-economic profiles, various sources, including a New York Times article, *Iraqi Refugees in the US: Seeking a better Future in Difficult Times* (Eckholm 2009) detail the effects of trauma on the resettlement experience. The US resettlement of Iraqi refugees reflects the humanitarian principle of US foreign policy, which since the 1990s has used humanitarian assistance to achieve political interests (Humanitarian Policy Group 2002). The resettlement of Iraqi refugees meets US political needs, mainly by shaming the

regimes refugees are fleeing by offering refugees comparatively favorable protection. The pursuit of self-interested policy fails to federally support and coordinate viable resettlement programs targeting the needs of Iraqi refugees.

Because Iraqi refugees were only admitted to the United States in any significant numbers in 2008, limited literature exists on their resettlement experiences, especially in their long-term resettlement. On June 19, 2007, Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA), speaking to the 110th Congress, made the case for accepting more Iraqi refugees under the US resettlement program. Though formed out of consideration for the needs of Iraqi refugees put in harm's way because of their affiliations with the US government, the document presented to Congress was framed in a way that appealed to national security concerns.

Kennedy states:

The humanitarian needs of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons are significant. If their needs are not quickly and adequately met, these populations could become a fertile recruiting ground for terrorists. (Kennedy 2008, S 1651)

The resettlement of Iraqi refugees has been likened to the political justification used to resettle Vietnamese refugees (Haines 1981). The United States in Vietnam, like in Iraq, was engaged in a war against a regime it ideologically opposed. Though Vietnamese refugees filled a lower socio-economic profile than Iraqi refugees, who are largely well-educated and professionally trained, Vietnamese refugees were consistent with the political interests of the United States during war. Both Vietnamese and Iraqi refugees were given priority for resettlement in the US, though Vietnamese refugees benefitted from a longer period of aid than refugees receive today. David W. Haines (1981), in a study on kinship networks of Vietnamese refugees in the United States, concludes that the development of a Vietnamese refugee community has resulted in family-based

businesses and enterprises. Haines (1981) further concludes that the large degree of government involvement within the resettlement process has made the reunification of families in the United States easier, which has benefitted the resettlement experience of Vietnamese refugees in general.

New York Times journalists Sabrina Tavernise and David Rohde examine the dynamics of the resettlement of Iraqi refugees in their article, *Few Iraqis Reach Safe US Havens Despite Program* (2007). The article details how the US admission of Iraqi refugees has given preferential treatment to employees of the US Embassy in Iraq but failed to protect average Iraqi citizens. Tavernise and Rohde (2007) find that cleaners, security guards and construction workers who worked with the US Embassy have not been given the same preference as people who held desk jobs inside the Embassy. Furthermore, Tavernise and Rohde question how a four to five month processing period for refugees being considered for resettlement can ensure the worker's safety while they wait for final determination. In a follow up article, Tavernise (2007) presents an additional problem with the US processing of Iraqi refugees. To be considered a refugee, people must be interviewed by US immigration officials outside of Iraq. Not only does this limit the people who can afford to travel outside of Iraq, but also presents additional dangers while crossing the Iraqi border (Tavernise 2007). I will examine the Iraqi case in much further detail in the following section.

Out of their Context: Karen Refugees and the U.S. Resettlement System

The literature on Myanmar refugees is limited to case studies and UNHCR documents relating to conditions of Thai refugee camps. In 2000, over 122,000 persons

were registered in border camps along the Thai-Myanmar border (Lang 2006). Because Myanmar is the most ethnically diverse state in South East Asia, Hazel J. Lang claims, “contemporary wars and socio-political violence clearly present challenges for refugee protection that, in terms of both causes and responses, extend well beyond the original scope of the refugee convention” (Lang 2006, p. 14). A study of the mental health of Myanmar’s refugees housed in refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border concluded that Karen refugees experienced high degrees of trauma, resulting in complicated mental health outcomes and social functioning once in the United States (Centers for Disease Control 2007). Out of 317 households interviewed in a University of Texas School of Social Work report, 94% of Karen refugees had no reported employment while living in camp conditions while 79% reported high levels of trauma based on hiding for prolonged periods of time in the jungle. An additional 67% had forcibly been relocated by government intervention and 66% had lost all property in flight (D. Mitschke, A. Mitschke, Slater, Teboh 2011) The conditions endured before being resettled to the United States have generally impacted the ability of Myanmar’s refugees to integrate and adapt once in the US.

Hlaing Min Swe and Michael Ross conclude the following:

Because most of the refugees came from camps in tropical areas where they lived in bamboo houses without electricity and had spent more than two decades in camps, these refugees faced a lot of challenges in the US, including inappropriate clothing for colder weather, unfamiliarity with modern housing, amenities and communication systems, misunderstanding on cultural politeness, little understanding of the job application and interview process and unfamiliarity with US laws. (Min Swe and Ross 2012)

In the same report Min Swe and Ross include interviews with resettlement agency staff who repeatedly noted Myanmar refugees’ ability to learn quickly and apply a strong

work ethic. Because most men lacked English language skills, they were largely employed in manufacturing jobs or other blue collar occupations that involved little client interaction. Women on the other hand, out of a desire to maintain flexible work schedules to take care of younger children, were mostly employed in the private sphere as housekeepers. Min Swe and Ross state, “due to their minimal English proficiency, limited job skills and opportunity, they could hardly strive for economic or social self-sufficiency” (Min Swe and Ross 2012). Denis Gray, a journalist for the Pittsburg Post-Gazette adds that 63 years of guerilla war in their home country has generated a general lack of trust in the government that makes resettlement, run through the US government, difficult for Myanmar’s refugees. In chapter 3 I will offer further detail for the Karen case study in connection with their resettlement experiences after the economic crisis.

Conclusion: Diverging Outcomes

Although Karen refugees and Iraqi refugees are admitted under the same resettlement program, their experiences upon resettlement vary given their diverging forms of social and human capital. Karen refugees, tend to have substantial difficulties integrating into the United States given their isolation in refugee camps (Centers for Disease Control 2010). The Karen, who have little English language abilities, largely fill blue-collar positions. Iraqi refugees on the other hand, have more familiarity with Western culture and English language given their exposure to American personnel through work in Iraq. While Iraqi refugees experience downward mobility in terms of employment compared to previous work experiences in Iraq, they more commonly fill service sector jobs as line cooks, cashiers and delivery workers. Given the general

employment patterns of each group of refugees in the service and blue collar sector we can predict the effects of the economic crisis on their resettlement outcomes. Richard Florida (2012) predicts that a growing service sector will result in more positive benefits for workers, while those who depend on blue collar work will continue to face hardship, as blue collar jobs are increasingly outsourced or replaced by mechanized labor. In an attempt to cut costs in a time of economic downturn blue-collar positions are the first to be eliminated. We can then assume that refugees like the Karen will be harder hit by the economic crisis and have to adopt new ways to maintain their basic livelihood.

In the sections that follow I provide more comprehensive analysis for the two case studies. Brief historical sketches of the conflicts that have generated each refugee flow are used to give context to the group's current situation in the United States. The historical context is linked to the political premise for resettlement in addition to the types of human and social capital each group has. I then explore the types of sectors each group is involved in with attention to the regions, industry and skill sets each job requires. In the final analysis section I will use job forecast to better assess what types of capital will be most beneficial in resettlement. I also analyze additional factors within groups such as race, gender and age. My hypothesis that Iraqi refugees will fair better, which is supported by the work of Richard Florida, is used to evaluate the future resettlement experiences for each group. In conclusion I offer several policy recommendations on how resettlement can be reformulated to converge with current economic trends in the US.

Chapter 3. Case Study: Iraqi Refugees

The Iraqi refugee case study was selected in order to illustrate how a group of refugees with higher than average levels of education and professional certification fair in the post 2008 economic climate. As described below, Iraqi refugees are able to use their human capital in ways that benefit them, but are not able to practice previous professions that were more lucrative in their country of origin. For this reason, Iraqis have to use alternative forms of capital to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

Debate and the Definition of Conflict: Background on Iraqi Refugee Resettlement

Following the United States invasion of Iraq in March 2003, it was estimated that approximately 1 million refugees would be generated from the conflict (UNHCR 2003). Surprisingly, a mass exodus did not occur until early 2007¹³ when 2.2 million Iraqis were displaced by violence in their home state (Betts 2009, Damon 2007). The Bush administration then deployed 20,000 US troops surrounding Baghdad and the Al Anbar Province (Duffy 2008). Shortly after the military surge, the US government, UNHCR and international aid groups reported that the security situation had improved considerably allowing 2.2 million refugees and an estimated 2 million internally displaced persons to return home (Betts 2009, Harper 2008.)

After the UN declared that security had changed for the better, Iraqi refugees found it difficult to seek international protection under the 1951 protocol.¹⁴ Ban Ki Moon released a statement in 2008 saying, “a combination of political and military efforts has led to continued improvements in security across Iraq in the past three months” (Betts 2009; UN New Services 2008). Though Ban Ki Moon cautioned against economic and political instability, the international community took the assessment to mean that the refugee situation for Iraqis was no longer dire.

¹³ According to US media sources, a bombing in the Samara providence spurred several thousand Iraqis to flee Iraq in 2007, however prior to 2007 thousands had already been displaced by conflict.

¹⁴ See page 16

In a report to Congress in December of 2008, the United States Defense Department stated:

The overall security situation in Iraq continued to improve during this period. Many factors have contributed to an environment of enhanced security and political progress, including increasingly capable Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) aided by the Sons of Iraq (SoI), Coalition forces' continuing support to the ISF, the demonstrated will of the Government of Iraq (GoI) to counter extremists, and the rejection of terrorists by the Iraqi people. This period witnessed a nationwide reduction in civilian deaths by almost 63% compared to the same period in 2007. This rate remains lower than at any time since early 2004. Further, while high-profile attacks involving personnel and vehicle-borne explosive devices continue, the number of these attacks and resulting casualties remain at 2004 levels. For the second year in a row, there was no significant increase in violence during or immediately following Ramadan (The Department of Defense Report to Congress, 2008).

As Hannibal Travis explains, "The [US]Department of Justice utilize[d] the doctrine of 'changed circumstances' to render much evidence of past persecution of little use, even when refugees ha[d] been tortured by persecutors in their country of origin" (Travis 2007, web). Marked improvements in security for the most part underscored the fragile nature of the civil and political environment in Iraq. Violence and mass displacement still remained a significant problem even after the escalation of troops in 2007 (Travis 2007).

In 2008 the International Crisis Group and Amnesty International released statements contradicting the UN and US Defense Department's assessments that security had been returned to the region (ICG and Amnesty International 2008). Amnesty International summarized its assessment as follows:

Five years after the US-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussain, Iraq is one of the most dangerous countries in the world. Hundreds of people are being killed every month in the pervasive violence, while countless lives are threatened every day by poverty, cuts to power and water supplies, food and medical shortages, and rising violence against women and girls. Sectarian hatred has torn apart families and neighborhoods that once lived together in harmony (Amnesty International 2008).

The International Crisis Group warned that the underlying causes of displacement had not been resolved, leaving returning persons vulnerable to renewed conflict and violence (Betts 2009). The few refugees that did attempt to return home found their homes ruined and neighborhoods unsafe to live in (IRC 2008.) In 2010 the UNHCR conducted interviews with returned Iraqis. Of those interviewed, 61% regretted returning to Iraq from their country of asylum and 80% of those that returned did not return to their former place of residence (UNHCR 2010, p.173). Most cited personal security, a lack of infrastructure and basic needs as reasons for their regret (UNHCR 2010, p.173).

The majority of those that fled Iraq after the start of the war were not concentrated in refugee camps. Instead the vast majority self-settled in the urban areas of Damascus, Amman, Cairo and Beirut (ICRC 2008.) Many Iraqis initially fled with financial assets from their country of origin and were reluctant to register with the UNHCR (ICRC 2008). Most hoped to support their families independently and return home before their assets ran out. An International Committee of the Red Cross report estimated that only 10% of Iraqis who had fled their country of origin registered with the UNHCR in 2007 (ICRC 2007). As the conflict in Iraq became increasingly prolonged, resources dwindled. By 2008 Refugee International accounted for over 500,000 Iraqi refugees squatting in slums inside Syria (Refugee International 2008).

The US government was slow to respond to the Iraqi refugee crisis. The government was largely unwilling to claim accountability for the millions of displaced people (Dewey 2007). Following the bombing of a mosque in Samarra in February of 2006, thousands more refugees fled to Syria, Jordan and Egypt, drawing increasing attention from, aid groups and elected officials UNHCR (IRC 2007, Worth 2006).

Prior to the Samarra bombing Senator Ted Kennedy called the war “George Bush’s Vietnam” (CNN 2004). After the bombing Kennedy later stated, “The refugees are witnesses to the cruelty that stains our age, and they cannot be overlooked. America bears heavy responsibility for their plight. We have a clear obligation to stop ignoring it and help chart a sensible course to ease the refugee crisis. Time is not on our side. We must act quickly and effectively” (Kennedy 2006). Though a formal resettlement program was not established for Iraqis until 2008, the State Department announced a plan to resettle 7,000 Iraqis for the 2007 Fiscal Year (IRC 2007).

The United States’ initiative gave priority to Iraqis who had been put at risk due to their association with the US government and contractors in Iraq. In theory, this meant that translators, security personnel and embassy employees had additional security screenings waved in favor of expediting the resettlement process. Despite earning priority, national security concerns after 9/11 still delayed the process of reviewing resettlement cases for vulnerable Iraqis (ICRC 2007). While Iraqis waited months and years to secure background checks, their living conditions declined significantly. Syrian and Jordanian refugee camps started to form along the Iraqi border, with thousands of impoverished Iraqis fleeing areas of conflict (Refugee International 2008).

In response to increasing public pressure following the 2006 bombing in Samarra, Senator Kennedy (D-MA) and Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR) introduced the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act as an amendment to the Defense Reauthorization Bill (Gutafson 2007). Initially, the act was heavily opposed by the Bush administration. Any effort to pass the bill was counteracted by conservative interest in national security. After various op-eds and news pieces covering the plight of Iraqi refugees surfaced and more than 2,000

constituent letters flooded the Senate in support of the bill, opposition waned (Gutafson 2007). Government officials were forced to recognize the US's responsibility in bringing harm to Iraqi civilians associated with the US government in order to expedite their entry into the United States. On September 28, 2008 the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act passed in the Senate (Human Rights First 2009). The act included the following provisions:

- Provisions to provide a comprehensive plan for assisting countries in the region,
- The creation of Minister Counselors in Iraq and throughout the region to better coordinate refugee processing and emergency aid
- The establishment of mechanisms for processing refugees from within Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Egypt
- The creation of up to 5,000 special immigrant visas (SIVs) yearly for Iraqis who worked with the United States
- An increase in protection or immediate removal from Iraq for SIV applicants who are in imminent danger (Gutafson 2007, p. 1)

Since the act's implementation in 2008, 64,174 Iraqi refugees have been resettled in the United States (ORR 2012). In 2009 the program resettled 18, 838 individuals alone. Since hitting its peak in 2009, however, the program has significantly decreased the number of resettlement cases for the first time in over a decade (ORR 2012). In 2011, nearly half of the 2009 total were admitted and in 2012, a mere 2, 501 individuals were resettled (ORR 2012). ORR released a statement early in 2012, citing new screening processes as reason for the slow in resettlement, and predicted that numbers would return to their previous threshold by 2013 (ORR 2012). Whether it is a sign of increased

security in the region, national security concerns in the United States or UNHCR budgetary cuts, the once generous Iraqi resettlement program has declined.

Once in the US: Iraqi Refugees' Adaptation Under the United States Resettlement System

Iraqi refugees chosen for resettlement in the United States were given priority under the 2008 Act based on their well found fear of persecution in Iraq (UNHCR 1961). As discussed above their affiliation with the US government made them targets for insurgency attacks. By virtue of their professional affiliations with the US government, many of the refugees chosen for resettlement came from upper middle-class, well-educated families. Many had advanced degrees, high English proficiencies and professional certifications before fleeing their country of origin (Betts 2009). Before departing for the US, many Iraqis held high hopes for economic success based on their previous qualifications (Sturm 2007; Betts 2009).

Once resettled in the United States, Iraqi refugees, like all refugees, had to achieve economic self-sufficiency after 180 days¹⁵. After 180 days their cash assistance would be terminated, requiring them to quickly secure jobs that would allow them to provide for themselves in an independent manner (ORR 2007). Resettled Iraqis soon discovered that their professional certifications and degrees did not transfer into income generating opportunities. Most faced downward economic assimilation because the US government did not and still does not have any system of recognizing foreign credentials (IRC 2007).

¹⁵ Once a refugee has arrived in the United States they are eligible for 180 days of cash assistance dispensed by ORR.

Due to their inability to practice their previous professions, many Iraqis expressed frustration that their potential was being wasted in part-time, minimum wage positions. One refugee seeking service at Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS) had attained his PhD in physics from the University of Baghdad, the premiere University of the Middle East. He had previously conducted research in Iraq and mastered English three months after his arrival in the United States. Despite his knowledge and professional certifications he was only able to find part-time, entry-level work. When not at work in his part-time position, he filled his time meeting with the agencies' employment specialist, attempting to find full time work opportunities. Without full time work, he would not be able to independently afford his rent, grocery bills or additional living costs after his first 180 days of cash assistance ended.

Another Iraqi man in his fifties was a doctor in Iraq. Like many Iraqi males, he had been under the impression that the United States offered numerous opportunities for professionals like himself. After several months he sent for his three daughters and wife who were still living in Iraq. He hoped to find work by the time they arrived. When his family joined him months later, he was still searching for work, unwilling to accept a position on an assembly line at a local manufacturing plant. The man would soon be faced with settling for entry-level work, or remain unemployed; and face debt, eviction and food insecurity.

Another large segment of the resettled Iraqi population is comprised of Iraqi women who have lost their husbands to the war (IRC 2008). 1 million of these women lost their household's primary income providers. Most have been supported by a husband or male relative for the majority of their adult lives. Consequently, upon resettling, they

must find employment for the first time (Halpern 2007). These women have a higher risk for psychological trauma and mental illness due to the stress of losing their husbands or male relatives, causing increased economic and social stress (Beiser 1991).

One refugee client at Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS) was previously a nurse in Iraq. When offered resettlement in the United States in 2012, she brought her two children with her, leaving the rest of her extended family in Iraq. After six months, she was unable to meet her rent based on her part-time wages at a local Subway. In addition, in Iraq she had always lived with family and with the inherent support of those around her. Consequently she found it near impossible to operate in the US without her traditional support networks.

Human Capital

Iraqi refugees have a higher than average degree of transferable human capital that can generate positive resettlement outcomes. Human capital is comprised of language skills, education, health and vocational skills (Giddens 1997, Jacobsen 2005). English language skills, advanced degrees and professional certifications from Iraq should allow for easier economic integration. Normally, once refugees arrive in the US and they are register with a local resettlement agency, they are placed in ESL classes until their English language skills are adequate for finding employment (W. Kneerim, personal communication, October 29, 2012). Iraqis spend less time in ESL classes upon arriving in the United States, and many require no additional English language training.

While professional certification and advanced degrees are not recognized by US institutions, the knowledge refugees have can be used to quickly adapt to new

employment positions. Will Kneerim, employment specialist at a Connecticut-based resettlement agency (IRIS) comments, “Overqualified refugees often have to start at the bottom. However, their path to better employment, tends to be far more rapid” (W. Kneerim, personal communication, October 29, 2012). By virtue of being involved in the formal economy in Iraq, Iraqi refugees find it easier to adapt than groups that have engaged in informal employment or camp economies before arriving in the United States¹⁶.

According to Anthony Giddens (1997), human capital can only be fully used to generate income-earning activities if existing institutions recognize the advanced degrees and certifications earned in Iraq. As previously discussed, in the United States, there is no official way to transfer foreign credentials and professional certifications. English language skills then become the most defining asset for Iraqis in the employment process. Older Iraqis, who have less familiarity with the English language, are most often placed in blue collar positions that require little to no language skills (personal communication, October 29, 2012). Others are placed in temporary positions as translators or fill informal domestic positions based on their fluency (personal communication, October 29, 2012).

Though advanced degrees can help integration, they are often not recognized by employers (Halpern 2007). As discussed above, those with advanced degrees hold high expectations in terms of their employment in the United States. Those unwilling to fill entry-level positions are more likely to remain unemployed in the long term (personal communication, November 26, 2012). Employment specialist at the Omaha based

¹⁶ Camp economies are the informal economies developed in refugee camps, where individuals engage in trade and barter of goods and small sums of money. (Jacobson 2005)

resettlement agency, Southern Soudan Community Association of Nebraska (SSCA),

Denise Osterburg comments:

College degrees are not transferable so they cannot be utilized in the current job market. It is almost more difficult to find employment for an educated refugee as their employment standards are higher and the entry level job market is overtaken by bachelor's degrees. (D. Osterburg, personal communication, November 6, 2012)

The employment staff at resettlement agencies struggle to explain realistic economic outcomes to Iraqi refugees, who often hold high hopes for economic success in the United States (personal communication, November 2012). In the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis the wait to find employment has increased, while the number of jobs available has decreased (Floirda 2012). Jewan Poulis, an employment specialist at Lutheran Social Service of Nevada explains how the current job market makes the work of employment specialists within resettlement agencies increasingly difficult due to competition and fewer resources (personal communication, November 7, 2012). He comments,

The market was flooded with well-qualified or over-qualified job seekers; it was becoming more and more difficult to find jobs for our refugees. The agency strategy pursued at that time [was] to educate refugees about the economic situation and the need to accept jobs that are under their expectations. (J. Poulis, personal communication, November 7, 2012)

Re-evaluating and adjusting expectations is inevitable in an economy where 5.1% of US citizens with bachelor's degrees are unemployed (Davidson 2010). According to Ms. Osterburg of SSCA, if documentation can be provided as evidence of completion of a degree equivalent to high school, employers will sometimes place Iraqis in the same category as high school graduates (D. Osterburg, personal communication, November 6,

2012). However 10.1% of US citizens with only high school degree are unemployed, making entry-level work more competitive (Davidson 2010).

Social Capital

Family composition is defined by the relationships between adults, children and couples within a family unit (US Census Bureau 2009). Family composition is generally more conservative in Iraq where women hold domestic positions and men work outside the home. The US resettlement system challenges the Iraqi sense of family composition, by pushing for immediate employment and economic self-sufficiency within 180 days of resettlement. Iraqi males, in particular, are put under increased pressure to find work and support the family based on the more conservative family structure (Halpern 2007). With the prospect of minimum wage positions and the additional obstacles to finding employment in the wake of the economic crisis, most families find themselves in need of additional employment from previously unemployed family members, regardless of age or gender. In the first few months of resettlement, Iraqi families frequently experience a degree of turmoil as the economic power once held by the male bread-winner is dispersed to other family members (Halpern 2007).

Iraqi men traditionally find pride in providing for their families. Their inability to do so once in the United States often leads to feelings of inadequacy and depression (Sturm 2007). In order to avoid these feelings Iraqi men often form new identities once in the United States based on their experiences in flight. What could otherwise be contrived as a failed living experience in the US is instead seen by some as ‘the will of Allah’ (Halpern 2007). Some men associate their journey with an increased ability to serve and

worship Allah. In this way, their resettlement is given a higher purpose. Jodi Halpern explains, “The identity of *Muhajir*¹⁷ serves as a centripetal anchor for Iraqi men, who otherwise may perceive themselves as failures living on government support in the United States” (Halpern 2007, p.449).

Social networks outside the refugee community are at times compromised by xenophobia. Immediately following the September 11th attacks, xenophobic, anti-Muslim rhetoric flooded the US media (Bauer et. al 2010). Consequently many Arabs in the US reported xenophobic hiring practices that made it increasingly difficult to find employment when not affiliated with a resettlement agency (Bauer et al. 2010). Fifteen percent of resettled Iraqis in the Detroit metropolitan area reported verbal insults, workplace discrimination, special targeting by law enforcement, vandalism and physical assault (Bakter et al. 2004, Halpern 2007).

Despite anti-Muslim sentiments held by some employers, resettlement agencies can act as advocates for Iraqi refugees during the hiring process (Bauer et al. 2010). Resettlement agencies maintain lists of employers who generously hire refugee clients. Employment specialist Kneerim explains,

We tend to rely on whatever companies are "hot." Sometimes a new restaurant is opening, or a manufacturer gets a large new client, which means many people will be hired in a short period of time. We look for those opportunities. We also work with larger companies that hire on an on-going basis. The latter group is dependable in terms of delivering jobs, but often brings other issues such as low wages and unforeseen layoffs (personal communication, October 29, 2012).

By forming connections with a resettlement agency, the employer can ensure that the employee has been previously debriefed on cultural and employment practices in the US. Instead of having to expend resources on finding employees, employers are provided

¹⁷ Those who leave their homes in the cause for Allah (Halpern 2007, p. 449).

with a steady stream of reliable employees willing to accept low wage jobs. As a caveat the employment agreements do not guarantee full-time, or long-term positions, sometimes providing only temporary employment solutions (W. Kneerim, personal communication, October 29, 2012).

As discussed above, many Iraqi women that are resettled in the United States find themselves in search of employment for the first time. Because Iraqi women traditionally fill domestic roles, their transition to the public sphere can generate more stress and anxiety (Bryant et al. 2009). One Iraqi woman interviewed by Jodi Halpern (2007) explained, “I don’t feel settled. Nobody prepared me for this life. When I got married, I expected my husband to look after me and support me. That is what I have been told since I was a little girl” (Halpern 2007, p.450).

Some women are able to find part-time positions and others hold temporary positions as translators or domestic workers. In order to provide for themselves and their families beyond what government cash assistance and part time work can provide, some Iraqi women receive informal loans from other women in the refugee community. In addition to financial help, women may also help one another out by watching each other’s children, translating job applications and driving each other to appointments. Single Iraqi women resettled in the United States take on low-income adaptive strategies¹⁸ similar to those explored by Devine et al (2005).

Due to the economic difficulties encountered by Iraqis upon resettlement, a trend of outward remittances from Iraq to the United States has been formed in the past several

¹⁸ Low income adaptive strategies are explored by Devine et al. as the solutions used by single, low-income mothers to provide for their basic livelihoods which include informal income earning activities such as child care, informal waitressing, prostitution and taking on loans issued by family members and friends (2005).

years. In 2007, the World Bank accounted for \$17 million worth of outward remittances from Iraq while only \$3 million were flowing into Iraq (Ratha et al. 2011, p.1).

Alexander Betts cites that 70% of all Iraqi refugees interviewed in Syrian refugee camps had sold all assets before fleeing their country of origin, leaving them without financial assets to resettle with (Betts 2009). Consequently, many refugees depend on remittances from family members in Iraq to maintain their basic livelihoods (Ratha et al. 2011). This represents a new trend in remittances where more resources are being sent into the United States than back to Iraq.

Iraqi refugees also use various forms of social capital stemming from ethnic or kinship ties in Iraq. Whether it is new social ties formed with co-nationals in the United States or the ties maintained with family members in Iraq, Iraqi refugees depend on networks to acquire stability once resettled in the United States. Case managers at resettlement agencies often alert other resettled Iraqi refugees when a new Arabic-speaking family arrives in the area. They often ask established Arabic-speaking families to help translate, show new arrivals how to use the bus system and take new families grocery shopping, and often aid other families of similar faiths to find local places of worship. Consequently, refugees maintained social networks based around fostering the preliminary integration of new arrivals along language and religious lines. The importance of faith and religion also plays a significant part in the social circles Iraqi refugees maintain.

As described in a 2007 study, in Detroit, Michigan, Iraqi refugees living in the United States maintain identities associated with both religion and ethnicity (Ghosh 2009). Areas with a high density of Iraqis allows for further division based on categories

beyond nationality. Arabs, Kurds and Chaldeans, three ethnic groups within Iraq, form sub-communities in areas with heavy Middle Eastern populations (Halpern 2007).

Further social divisions also forms along gender lines. Men and women often socialize separately in circles both outside and within their immediate families.

Social networks in the Iraqi refugee community appear to be based most immediately on gender, language and religion and at time ethnicity. Those lucky enough to have immediate family rarely socialize without other family members present. As is true with any community, Iraqi refugees gravitate toward those with similar values and ideas.

The Significance of Ethnic Enclaves: A Case Study of Iraqis in Dearborn, Michigan

Dearborn is a suburb outside Detroit with approximately 100,000 residents of Middle Eastern descent (Rupersburg 2011). Since the 1990's the Detroit metropolitan area, which includes Dearborn, has experienced an influx of Arab immigrants (UNHCR 2012). From 1983-2005 one in every five Iraqi refugees resettled in the United States arrived in Detroit or surrounding areas (Ott 2011). Even when the Office of Refugee Resettlement put a two-year restriction on resettlement to Detroit in 2008 following the effects of the 2008 recession, hundreds of refugees still migrated there to join family and friends in the area.

Hasson Jaber, an employee at the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS), a refugee agency in Detroit, was quoted in 2011 saying, "every year for the past 6 or seven years, there are 3,000-4,000 refugees coming to Michigan, to the Detroit area" (Rupersburg 2011). Dearborn, in particular, offers newly arrived refugees comfort in numbers. A neighborhood within Dearborn called Sterling

Heights has been nicknamed “Little Baghdad,” as numerous Iraqi restaurants, bakeries and businesses have popped up in the past few years (Ghosh 2009).

While the city of Detroit lost 25% of its general population from 2000-2010 (Ott 2011; Banco 2010), Sterling Heights (“Little Baghdad”) earned over \$10 billion in new business investment. The mayor, Richard J. Nott, places emphasis on the contributions of ethnically-owned businesses, many of them Arab bakeries, video stores and markets (Rupersburg 2011). Ethnically-owned businesses in turn offer Iraqis means to build social networks and find employment without having to be subject to xenophobic hiring practices. USCRI noted in 2011 that “about 60-70 percent of refugees who come through USCRI Detroit find a job within three to six months (USCRI 2011).”

The cities’ growth in GDP pays heed to the potential contributions of Iraqi refugees (Rupersburg 2011). By participating in alternative earning strategies outside of the formal economy, refugees are able to better negotiate hours, salaries and working conditions that do not compromise their cultural norms and preferences (Devine et al. 2005). This means that women are able to work alongside women, men can schedule hours around worship and single-mothers can still take on the role of primary caregiver. While trained Iraqi professionals are still unable to directly transfer their credentials into income-earning activities, small businesses built by Arab community members offer an opportunity to integrate into a local economy that is more compatible with the individual’s needs (Rupersburg 2011).

In 2008, Detroit was in the middle of the worst economic recession in the city’s history, with unemployment reaching almost 50% by 2009 (CNN 2009, Ghosh 2009). In 2008, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) restricted resettlement in the area to

only immediate family reunification cases. Though formal resettlement was restricted, refugees still relocated from their original cities of resettlement to rejoin family and friends in Detroit, engaging in what is known as secondary migration (Ott 2011).

In Dearborn, Iraqi refugees have effectively used kinship and ethnic networks to circumvent some of the effects of the economic crisis in the wider Detroit metropolitan area. While kinship networks provide employment and support networks that generate favorable resettlement outcomes, Giddens's (1997) structural theory points to another important aspect that cannot be circumvented through social networks: federal and state resettlement policy.

On the Move: Resettlement Policy Affecting Iraqi Refugees

US resettlement policy is premised on the assumption of a sedentary pattern of migration where preliminary refugee placement is assumed to be permanent (Ott 2011). All resources are distributed on a state-by-state basis. ORR distributes national funding to states based on the number of resettled refugees they receive, not the numbers they generate through secondary migration (Ott 2011, Barnett 2011). Funds are distributed differently according to the services offered in each state.

Refugees, like other citizens and non-citizens, respond to economic and social stimulus by moving within the US. Refugees may move from their original resettlement location to find new employment opportunities, live closer to family members, or join other refugees of the same nationality (personal communication, October 7, 2007). Iraqi refugees, especially in the Detroit area, have moved primarily to be closer to family or those of the same ethnicity (Ott 2011).

Because the resettlement program assumes a refugee will stay in one area, it is difficult to determine if a refugee's social services will be transferred once they leave their original resettlement location. Once refugees move from their initial point of resettlement it is not fully guaranteed that they will receive these services. While 180 days of cash assistance is guaranteed by ORR, the employment services, health consultation and other basic services vary from state to state.

One group of Iraqi women received by IRIS became frustrated with their resettlement experience in the New Haven area. Consequently they made the independent decision to move to Boise, Idaho. Because the three women had only been resettled a month before moving, they were still eligible for cash assistance for seven additional months. However, the agency could not guarantee that the women would have the same services granted to them in Idaho. The transfer of services depends heavily on the refugee client and the states to and from which they move.

Cities that experience secondary migration often frame the population increase in negative terms, calling the influx an economic burden rather than a benefit (Ager 2008). More homogeneous, insular cities are more likely to respond negatively to a sudden foreign-born population increase. For example, the mayor of Manchester, New Hampshire, publically requested that the ORR cease resettlement into the area after the recession of 2008 (Goodnough 2011).

Dearborn presents a unique case because of its long-standing history as an enclave for Arab immigrants and high number of residents engaged in military service overseas. One resettled Iraqi refugee commented, "People from the local community often tell us how their kids deployed in Iraq are forming friendships with local Iraqis, and this makes

them eager to give back to Iraqi refugees here” (USCRI 2012). The experiences Iraqis have in terms of social integration are highly dependent on the resettlement location’s socioeconomic demographics. Locations with lower GDPs and more homogeneous populations tend to be more restrictive than areas with higher GDPs and more diverse populations.

Finding Employment: Economic Consequences for Iraqi Refugees

In 2012 the Bureau of Labor Statistics published its fiscal year goals for 2013. In it, the bureau listed an objective to “improve opportunities for America’s workers to succeed in a knowledge-based economy through industry recognized credentials” (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012). Based on the credentials of Iraqi refugees, the group could benefit greatly from a system of industry-recognized recertification.

Within the Iraqi refugee community, construction and highly physical jobs are filled by men. As discussed in the previous chapter, these jobs are the ones that are most widely available to entry level workers, given the governments investment in infrastructure projects. Women are unlikely to accept a physically demanding job where they may be placed next to a male co-worker. Further compromising the ability of Iraqis to fill physically demanding jobs are the higher than average rates of physical trauma and health complications as compared to the general public (IRC 2009).

Another sector with an extremely high growth rate that may benefit Iraqi refugees is healthcare. Home health aides earn approximately \$20,170 annually (BLS 2012) and the sector has a projected growth rate of 70% from 2010-2020 (BLS 2013). Qualifications for home health aides include basic English language, and 24 hour

availability, both of which are potential obstacles for Iraqi refugees. Many female Iraqis express concern over balancing their own childcare with wage-earning activities. A 24 hour on-call schedule is not a feasible career trajectory for a single mother. More applicable employment opportunities in the field include health aides at nursing homes, rehab units and hospitals, which operate on fixed hourly schedules.

A service sector growing twice as fast as the knowledge-based economy, also presents additional opportunities for resettled refugees that have knowledge of the English language. While the sector has little opportunity for upward mobility, economists predict an increase in wage rate and benefits as a larger proportion of the population finds employment in the sector (Florida 2012). Jobs within this sector that currently provide employment for refugees include positions as porters, baristas, line cooks and chauffeurs (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012). The degree to which refugees can gain mobility within these positions depends heavily on several factors including language, family composition, gender and physical ability.

Another objective for FY 2013 stated by the Bureau of Labor Statistics included an interest in improving access to unemployment benefits for those engaged in professional certification or recertification programs (BLS 2013). If this objective can reach the refugee population, professionals like Iraqi doctors, nurses, engineers and other specialists can have their productive potential fully recognized. Recertification also offers refugees the chance to engage in a more focused, efficient employment experience.

In the aftermath of the economic crisis, many long-term employees in professional positions have been laid off due to budget cuts. Because they have been in professions for a long period of time, many find themselves in need of recertification if

they hope to find new jobs or even re-enter the same sector. If Iraqis can meet the same criteria for re-certification training as recently laid-off, long-term employees, fewer resettlement resources would need to be continuously channeled to finding part-time, minimum wage employment.

Conclusion: The Relevance of Human Capital as Determined by the Economic Crisis

As noted by Malicia Bookman (2002), refugees lose almost all tangible assets when fleeing their countries of origin. The most valuable asset after flight then becomes human capital, which is not lost in transit. When asked about the impact of the current economic climate on the job market for refugees, Kneerim commented,

If anything, it's simply impacted refugees in the same manner - but more profoundly. Americans, who are native English speakers, immersed in our culture, and in possession of a job history, credit history, and verifiable background, will always have a leg up on refugees. But once a refugee gets a job, of any kind, drive and work ethic can make for an impressive trajectory (personal communication, October 29, 2012)

We can therefore predict that the long-term employment outcomes for Iraqi refugees will be more favorable than the short term. Once Iraqis have the opportunity to employ their skill sets, they will ideally be able to transfer them to more favorable employment outcomes if the correct institutions and policies are put into place.

Various recommendations following the Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012 *Employment Outlook Handbook*, suggest potential for professional certification training (BLS 2012). If these opportunities can be accompanied by additional unemployment assurance during the time of training, refugees can put what some refer to as “wasted potential” to work. The current economic climate suggests high growth in construction,

health work and the service sector. In order to compensate for the low wages and benefits that accompany these types of positions refugees can most realistically find employment in, the types of services they are offered need to be re-examined with a concentration on health care, food assistance and housing subsidies.

Iraqi refugees will benefit from the number of entry-level positions that are growing based on their work ethic and English language abilities. Iraqi women, based on the number of jobs requiring physical and full time employment, will not experience the same success that their male counterparts do. This assumption is however is based on family composition. Social networks and other groups that may help provide childcare and offset the caretaker role women fill in the home. Refugees with physical disabilities that prevent lifting and standing for long periods of time will also be limited based on the physicality involved in the types of jobs that are experiencing growth. Other variables that I have not explored that may also affect employment include location, professional networks, resettlement agencies and state assistance programs.

Chapter 4: Case Study: The Karen

The Karen case study was selected in order to illustrate how a group of refugees with lower than average levels of transferable forms of capital fare in the post 2008 economic climate. As further detailed below, Karen refugees have been resettled from refugee camps in Thailand, where they have been living for decades, deprived of opportunities to earn income or gain advanced education. Upon resettlement the Karen use forms of social capital to compensate for their lack of transferable human capital.

The World's Longest Civil War: Background on Myanmar's Refugee Population

Myanmar, also known as Burma, is a country of approximately 55 million people located in the northwestern most part of mainland East Asia (CIA World Fact book 2012). It is an extremely ethnically diverse country, with 135 different recognized ethnic groups (CFOB 2012). The Karen people constitute the third largest ethnic group in Burma after the Burman and Shan, totaling 7% of the population¹⁹ (CIA World Fact Book 2012).

Myanmar is divided into 14 provinces that represent 7 ethnic states and 7 divisions (Asterism 2013). The majority of the Karen now live in the Kayin State, a mountainous region in the South East. Under British rule, the Karen fought for a separate Karen State in an attempt to differentiate themselves from other ethnic groups. In further attempts to differentiate themselves the Karen boycotted pre-independence elections in 1947 and formed the Karen Liberation Union (KLU). The KLU fought for greater Karen representation in the decades following post-colonial rule (Karen National Union 2012).

Myanmar achieved full independence on January 4, 1948 under the leadership of General Aung San (CFOB 2012). Since its formal independence Myanmar has seen numerous insurgencies led by the Community Party of Burma and various ethnic

¹⁹ Myanmar was divided into several ethnic states upon independence. See : <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar/52611/The-socialist-state-1962-88>

minority groups struggling for autonomy²⁰ (Karen National Union 2012). In 1962, Myanmar went under a nearly two-decade period of de facto military rule when General Ni Win instigated a coup d'état. During the coup Ni Win arrested the chief justice and several cabinet members and replaced them with his sympathizers (CFBO 2012). After Ni Win took power, civil war erupted in Myanmar (CFBO 2012).

From 1962 until 1988 Ni Win consolidated state power and founded the “Burmese way to Socialism”(South 2011). Myanmar became one of the most isolated countries in the world, as Ni Win nationalized all privately owned land and placed strict government restrictions on economic activity (South 2011).²¹ Next Ni Win drafted a new constitution which prohibited citizens from taking political action or speaking out against the government. In 1967, Ni Win established rice quotas, which required that all rice farmers sell their product directly to the government (CFOB 2011). When civilians protested the requirement, 300 people were shot dead (Amnesty International 1998).

During two decades under Ni Win, living conditions deteriorated significantly. Myanmar became the “least developed nation,” in the 1987 Human Development Report (CBOF 2011, Human Development Report 1987). Ethnic groups, students, labor leaders and farmers took to the streets in the late 1980s to protest the declining living conditions (UNODC 2005). In a government-led attempt to counter the dissenting groups, people were forcibly relocated from their homes while foreign aid groups were expelled from the

²⁰ For a more in depth look at Myanmar's history see:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar/52611/The-socialist-state-1962-88>

²¹ Ne Win stayed in power largely due to his “divide and rule” tactics where he frequently rotated officials loyal to him in different ethnically dominated regions. In 1967, Myanmar experienced a huge famine due to extortion in various ethnic states and the establishment of large quotas, which required that farmers sell all or most of their production to the government.

county. In the wake of destruction thousands of people fled Myanmar into Thailand, where an estimated 160,000 of Myanmar's citizens resided by the late 1980s (Lall 2009). In 1988, student protests against the declining military regime broke out in the capital, Rangoon. After one student was shot dead by police, Myanmar's citizens and religious leaders rallied to demand full democracy (South 2011). At least 3,000 people were killed during the nationwide protests in 1988, which marked the beginning of a period of intensified military control (South 2011). Those that were suspected of dissent, were jailed, beaten or killed (South 2011, CFOB 2012). Human rights abuses targeted specific minority ethnic groups that were characterized as more rebellious by Ni Win's regime (CFOB 2012).

Though not all ethnic Karen are members of the KNU, they are targets of government attacks. According to various Human Rights Watch reports, military troops annually slash and burn Karen villages during the dry season, leaving people without food or shelter (Human Rights Watch 2012). More recently, the Karen have had their villages raided by military police and their people forcibly conscripted into military service. A 2012 Human Rights Watch Report recounts:

In January Burmese army units in the Karen State forced convicts to work as porters in ongoing operations in combat zones. This longstanding practice saw hundreds of prisoners drawn from prisons and labor camps transported to frontline units, and forced to carry military supplies and material to the frontline, often being used as "human shields" to deter attacks or clear anti-personnel landmines. Porters are often tortured, beaten, and subjected to ill-treatment during their forced service. (Human Rights Watch 2012).

The Karen Diaspora to Thailand

Since 1988 hundreds and thousands of Karen have crossed the Thai border to seek refuge in one of nine refugee camps. The camps have been in existence for over three decades, housing approximately 89,000 people (UNHCR 2013). The exact numbers are difficult to gauge and highly dependent on the season, the political stability in Myanmar and the resources available outside the camps.

Thailand is not a signatory party to the 1951 Convention or 1967 Protocol, and is therefore not bound by legal obligation to uphold certain standard guarantees to refugees under the Convention (1951 Convention). These include the freedom of movement, the right to work and the right to apply for citizenship. Thai policy in fact forbids refugees from leaving refugee camps (Human Rights Watch 2012). Those that do leave risk deportation in addition to physical beating and harassment from the Thai police, never the less when resources inside the camps run thin people often take the chance to search for resources outside the camp's border (Human Rights Watch 2012).

The most populous camp is the Mae La refugee camp. Like the other eight camps, Mae La is in a destitute location in the mountainous region of Thailand (Challenger 2008). When it was originally constructed in 1984 it housed 16,000 refugees (TBC 2012). Since 1988 the population has consistently hovered around 43,000 (Challenger 2008). The Thai government has placed more restrictions on camp residents over the decades, not allowing residents to move beyond the camp's boundaries. In the 1990s, the Thai

government started to close some of the other neighboring camps,²² forcing more people to move into the Mae La camp. Now overcrowded conditions strain resources, leading to higher rates of crime and violence (TBC 2012).

Thai policy hinges on the eventual return of all refugees and offers no opportunity to seek permanent citizenship in Thailand. Bill Frelick comments, “Thailand presents Burmese refugees with the unfair choice of stagnating for years in remote refugee camps or living and working outside the camps without protection from arrest and deportation” (Frelick 2012, Human Rights Watch 2012). When found outside the camp, refugees are subject to human rights violations. One refugee recounts his experience running into Thai authorities outside his camp:

They asked for money.... I said, ‘I don’t have money.’ Then one started to beat me here and then back here [on the back and shoulders], two times and then kicked me once.... They started searching our bag for money. They asked for 2,000 baht [US\$64] and we didn’t have that money. Then he looked in my bag and he saw my UNHCR ID card and he took it away” (Human Rights Watch 2012).

Since refugees are unable to leave the camp for a prolonged period, most live off UNHCR rations. Education in the camps is limited to grade-school, and higher education is nonexistent (UNHCR 2012). Formal employment is also impossible for refugees to find, so the development of vocational skills that would benefit refugees outside of the camp is also not possible. A generation of the camp’s population, now in their 20s, have been born and raised totally unfamiliar with life outside.

²² Because Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention, the UNHCR did not run any of the camps in the 1990s. Instead the United Nations Border Relief Operation, under UNDP, administered aid to camp residents (UNHCR 2012).

Karen Refugees in the 21st Century: How Contemporary Conditions Impact Karen Refugees in Thailand and the U.S.

In 2011, Myanmar had its first election since coming under military rule in 1948. President elect Thein Sein has since introduced reforms that have released political prisoners, improved human rights protections and eased government regulation (Myanmar Times 2011). Though democratic reform has begun, corruption, violence and ethnic conflict continue to plague the state. States currently providing refuge to Myanmar's citizens have taken the general improvements as evidence that repatriation is possible²³ (UNHCR 2010).

Thailand has increasingly pressed for the repatriation of Myanmar's refugees after reports of human right abuses have declined in the post-election period. In 2012, the US declared that it would stop resettling refugees from Myanmar as of June 2013 (Lay 2012). When Barak Obama visited Myanmar in 2012 he told reporters that, "This is an acknowledgment that there is a process underway inside that country that even a year and a half, two years ago, nobody foresaw" (Hunt 2012, web). Though democratic reform has begun, post-conflict tension still exists.

Much like in the previous case study, we see that indicators of progress are often times manipulated to force the end of temporary protection for refugees. When states view refugees as temporary, they do not typically extend full rights to refugees (Myers 2009). Once conflict is deemed to be diminishing, repatriation is pushed. In the case of the Karen, fear of reprisal from Myanmar's military still exists. Skirmishes between the

²³ "UNHCR's priorities when it comes to return are to promote enabling conditions for voluntary repatriation; to ensure the exercise of a free and informed choice; and to mobilize support for returnees" (UNHCR 2013, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646cfe.html>)

Karen Liberation Army and the military are still frequent as of 2013, which has led to military assaults on regions with high concentrations of Karen. Women in particular bear the brunt of these assaults. In March 2012 *Women Under Siege* reported:

A young woman from the Karen ethnic minority in Burma reported being ‘beaten, drugged, and sexually assaulted by two men wearing army fatigues.’ In November 2011, reports emerged that four women were being kept as sex slaves by the Burmese military near the Kachin-China border; forced to cook and clean during the day and gang-raped at night by the soldiers in the Light Infantry Battalion 321 (Sann et al. 2012).

Because the Karen are targeted based on their ethnicity, they meet the definition of a refugee according to the 1951 convention and 1967 protocol. It is unlikely that the Karen will be able to peacefully return to Myanmar anytime soon and instead face precarious lives either resettling internally in the jungles of Myanmar, or remaining crowded in refugee camps in Thailand. Given the conditions, repatriation does not appear to be a valid solution anytime soon.

Prolonged Conflict: How Warehousing and Protracted Living Situations Affect U.S. Refugee Resettlement

Thai officials do not use the term “refugee” but instead employ the term “temporarily displaced person fleeing conflict”(Brees 2008). This distinction denotes the refusal of the Thai government to provide long-term resettlement solutions, though the refugee camps that house Karen refugees have existed for over three decades. Because Thailand is surrounded by comparably less stable nations, the government maintains restrictive policies out of fear of attracting more refugees or migrants if policies were made too liberal (Human Rights Watch 2012).

The conflict in Myanmar has been referred to as the “world’s longest civil war” (CFOB 2012). The conflict is showing preliminary signs of easing in the current post

election period, yet more than 150,000 people still remain outside their country of origin (UNHCR 2013). Inside refugee camps, residents reside in what is referred to as a “protracted refugee situation.”

According to the US Department of State, a protracted refugee situation occurs when more than 25,000 people have fled the same country of origin and remain in need of protection outside their borders for more than five years (UNHCR 2011, US Department of State 2013). According to Convention Article 17 (2) a country is required to grant refugees the right to be gainfully employed if they have remained in the host country for longer than three years (Smith 2004). Thailand therefore is not legally bound to provide the conditions necessary to gain citizenship because it is not a signatory to the convention. However, the way they do address refugee flows constitutes “warehousing.”

Warehousing is a term used to describe the prolonged containment of refugees in camp environments without granting them rights (Smith 2004). Because most refugee camps are in destitute areas, they lack the ability to leave the camps to generate their own livelihood. Additional state policies, like the ones upheld in Thailand regarding freedom of movement, further prevent refugees from becoming self-sufficient in their host countries. One warehoused refugee states, “There is no other place I could go to. I am just like a child now. I don’t know where I am, I don’t know where to go” (Smith 2004). Camp conditions create dependency, when no resources that would provide enrichment are available.

The US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) is officially opposed to warehousing and advocates against its use as a solution to refugee flows. USCRI president Ms. Limon states:

When [refugees] are placed in camps, there is systematic destruction of refugees' ability to [be self-sufficient] because food is distributed to them, they aren't employed, and conditions are usually primitive; refugees often live under these conditions for generations (Limon 2011, Tarique 2011)

Refugees who are placed in camps for an extended period of time are put at a distinct disadvantage for third country resettlement. In the case of the Karen resettled in the United States, various case studies have noted the Karen's lack of familiarity with what Westerners would consider mundane tasks (Swe and Ross 2010). These tasks include things such as using indoor plumbing, doing laundry or going grocery shopping. The transition from a camp environment to independent living is made more difficult as a result of warehousing. One representative from Karen Konnection, a website that helps connect Karen to Baptist communities across the US, comments:

Coming from Asia, they (the Karen) also have a wider cultural gap to bridge compared to some refugees that might come from Europe. They are really coming from a different world and have a huge adjustment to make. Most have never lived with electricity, have never had a bank account, never used a computer, never used an ATM machine, etc. They come to the US with virtually no orientation and are thrown into urban America (personal communication, February 20, 2013).

The State Department has assisted Karen refugees in several distinct ways. First, the US government has pledged over \$31.4 million to Myanmar in the form of disaster relief after a deadly tsunami struck in 2008 (USAID 2008). Because the US did not have a bilateral relation with Myanmar at the time, most of its direct aid went to refugees in Thai refugee camps (USAID 2008). The United States has also engaged in diplomatic talks to try to encourage Thailand to adopt more permanent solutions for the protracted refugee situation, including freedom of movement and guest worker programs.

The most symbolic form of assistance the United States has taken has been the resettlement of 45,000 Karen refugees inside the US since the early 1980s (ORR 2012).

Though 45,000 only comprises a mere fraction of the total persons displaced by the conflict it symbolizes global responsibility sharing with the hope of encouraging other states to do the same.

Once in the US: The Integration of the Karen in the United States

The US resettlement of ethnic Karen began in the late 1990s after the UNHCR prioritized protracted refugee situations on its agenda. Because the Karen had been in the Thai refugee camps over several decades they were assigned priority status.²⁴ Several hundred Karen were admitted each year until 2008, after a tsunami devastated the region (ORR 2012). Some 20,000 Karen were chosen for resettlement, which marked a huge escalation in the resettlement of the Karen (ORR 2012). The Karen who were chosen for resettlement were given pre-departure briefings and cultural orientations on what to expect once they arrived in the United States.

Contrary to the general idealized picture of how American life many refugees hold, the Karen were skeptical of resettlement before leaving Thailand (Kenny 2007). The majority of the Karen described their unhappiness in the refugee camps as motivation for resettling, rather than a strong desire to come to the United States. One report states:

Many Karen choose to resettle not because of a strong desire to live in a third country, but to avoid spending the remainder of their lives in a refugee camp. Understandably perhaps, given the hardships they had experienced up to resettlement, the challenges and uncertainties that would follow seemed tolerable (Kenny 2007).

While living in Thai camps, some refugees were given rare opportunities to participate in job training pilot programs launched by the UNHCR. Though these

²⁴ See page 87

programs developed vocational skills, most Karen predicted that they would not help their chances of finding jobs in the US. One refugee participant explained, “I have had job training in Mae La as a family planning counselor. I know I will not be able to do this in America though; the standard is not the same” (Kenny 2007).

At the time when Karen were given priority for resettlement, the US found itself in its worst economic recession since the Great Depression. Jobs were scarce and the Karen had few transferable skills to apply to the extremely competitive work environment, despite limited camp training programs.

Before arriving in the United States the Karen, went through what Francis Deng and Roberta Cohen call “deskilling.” Deskilling occurs when skills fall into disuse for a long period of time and are subsequently lost. Many Karen traditionally practice agriculture, but did not have the tools or resources necessary to cultivate or pass on, skills to younger generations (Deng et al. 1998). Furthermore, most the Karen were never given the chance to participate in the formal economy outside refugee camps. The nearly four decades of time spent in the refugee camps put them at an extreme disadvantage once resettled in the United States.

Factors Affecting Karen Resettlement

In the wake of 9/11, the United States passed various national security measures that affected migration in and out of the United States. A 2005 amendment to the US Immigration and Nationality Act (1952) held that persons in affiliation with terrorist organizations were not eligible for refugee status in the US and thus not eligible for

resettlement (NCSL 2005). The United States PATRIOT Act²⁵ (2001) broadened this affiliation to bar persons who have provided material support to terrorist groups (Brown 2006). The Real ID Act further broadened the definition of a terrorist group to include any “group of two or more individuals, whether organized or not, which engages in, or has a subgroup which engages in any form of terrorist activity” (NCSL 2005).

This series of national security reforms affected the eligibility of any Karen, who had provided shelter, food and housing to soldiers of the Karen Liberation Army, an organization that fought against the ruling party in Myanmar. Refugees who had provided support to the Karen Liberation army had their cases put on hold (Sridharan 2008). The act made no distinction as to whether the material support was given by choice or by force and lacked specificity regarding the character of terrorist groups (Graham 2005).

Human rights activists and several Senate leaders, including Democrat Patrick Leahy, urged the Justice Department to waive the act so as not to impact resettlement opportunities for refugees (Graham 2005). This meant that resettlement should be granted to vulnerable groups of people, regardless of their assumed political ideology. Months of internal negotiations began in 2004, as state officials weighed the importance of national security with the US’s obligation to offer resettlement (Graham 2005).

By 2005, a total of 500 asylum applications were put on hold and resettlement of the Karen was suspended (USRC 2007). Senate leaders appealed directly to the Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff and the Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice to apply what is called “inapplicability authority” to the case of the Karen (Graham 2005).

Inapplicability authority would grant the Karen exception from the INA clause that linked

²⁵ Full title: Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001

suspected material support to acts of terrorism. Rice argued that the Karen National Liberation Army shared similar goals to the United States, and therefore did not constitute a terrorist threat. In 2006, Rice created a waiver for all Karen refugees residing in the Tham Hin camp and in 2008 extended the waiver to any Karen who had given material aid to the KNLA (Graham 2005).

Social Networks

The communities that the Karen were resettled in by the Office of Refugee Resettlement were dispersed across the country. A 2012 ORR report recorded Fort Wayne, Indiana as the biggest resettlement city, followed by Utica, New York; Elizabeth, New Jersey; Phoenix, Arizona and Fort Worth, Texas (ORR 2012). In 2008 alone, Fort Wayne resettled 1,400 refugees from Myanmar (Keen 2011). Since resettlement cities vary in demographics and economic opportunities, the Karen have engaged extensively in secondary migration (Ott 2011). A Congressional Report released in 2011 reported that for every one refugee from Myanmar that was resettled in Des Moines, two arrived (US Senate 2011).

Given the short-term pressure a rapidly growing foreign-born population can generate in any small city, ORR has explored several ways to finance projects in areas that attract large numbers of refugees through secondary migration. In 2012 the Office of Refugee Resettlement gave a \$150,000 grant to Black Hawk County, Iowa to go toward the development of a new resettlement agency and other support mechanisms for the 1,000 plus Karen coming to the area (ORR 2012). Though ORR recognizes secondary

migration as an area that needs to be better attended to as local communities have at times found issue with the sudden increase in any group of foreign born individuals.

In 2008 a local laundromat in Fort Wayne posted a sign that read, “For sanitary purposes, there are no Burmese people allowed” (Keen 2011). Though the sign was condemned by the wider community, it points to the tension that can build in any resettlement community especially during times of economic recession. As the Global Migration Group explains, “reduced demand for labor increases (perceived or real) competition between workers which, in turn, can fuel xenophobic and discriminatory reactions of nationals against migrant workers”(GMG 2009, p.1) . A similar reaction occurred in Lewiston, Maine in the early 2000s when numerous Somali refugees relocated from Chicago. In general, when economic conditions decline, foreign born populations become scapegoats (GMC 2009). This is not unique to the case of the Karen.

Human Capital

Because the Karen were resettled from camps, most of which lacked electricity and indoor plumbing, the acculturation process is more difficult than the one presented in the Iraqi case study. Some communities reported health code violations in building where the Karen are resettled, citing improper garbage disposal, public urination and improper food preservation (Keen 2011). All of these complaints point to a failure in resettlement on behalf of state and local agencies.

Ideally, VOLAGS match newly arriving refugees with community members who conduct orientations. During these orientations new comers learn how to use basic

amenities, grocery shop and communicate with neighbors. However, when secondary migration brings large numbers of refugees into an area, the resettlement agency cannot provide resources to conduct satisfactory orientations (Ott 2011). Since the economic crisis has decreased volunteer it is harder for resettlement agencies to attract adequate assistance for the increasing number of newly arriving refugees (Strom 2009).

Another large problem facing the Karen refugees presents itself in the classroom. Karen students are found to be extremely hard working and persistent; however language barriers leave them behind in the classroom (Matthews 2012). Some areas with larger Karen populations have been able to hire translators and English as a Second Language (ESL) specialist, but others have had to cut ESL classes due to cuts in state budgets. A school district's financial situation and student to teacher ratio often constrains the individualized language attention that the Karen students need. Furthermore, the structure of US school systems creates gaps in education that are extremely difficult to make up because each grade levels builds on information taught in the previous grade level (Dowd 2012). Moreover Karen students cannot rely on their parents for help with school work at home because the parents were not provided with educational opportunities in the refugee camps (Matthews 2012).

In 2011 ORR published a report acknowledging English language ability as the most crucial determinant of resettlement success or failure (ORR 2011). Not only does a lack of English language constrain educational attainment, but employment, health care and personal security (Lugar 2011). As one Burmese refugee explains, "we are facing a lot of problems in our community, number one is language barriers" (Hunter 2012). He goes on to explain that the language barriers constrain the ability to understand health

care professionals, call the police or report incidents to resettlement case managers (Hunter 2012). For fear of being misunderstood, some Karen fail to seek out outside assistance altogether (Watkins 2011).

Opportunities to learn and improve English are also constrained for the Karen by economic and social factors. The Karen are self-described as introverted and less prone to making showcases of self-promotion (Marshall 1997). The Karen also put weight on educational attainment for both men and women. Assistance with English language is generally difficult for the Karen to seek out, given an innate preference toward introversion. For fear of disappointing their teachers, some Karen described opting out of ESL classes all together (Watkins 2010).

Gender

Karen women, in particular find the attainment of English language difficult when compounded with the domestic and social stress of resettlement. Paula Watkins explains, “Respect for teachers and anxiety regarding failure and authority led some women to avoid attending classes” (Watkins 2010). Other cultural factors influence women’s pursuit of education. One Karen informant interviewed in a 2011 study explains, “In our culture the women look after the kids and stay at home and because of that you don’t have the chance to learn English” (Watkins 2012, p. 132). Most expressed frustration with attempts at learning the language in a class room setting (Watkins 2012).

Karen women are faced with both reproductive and productive roles once resettled in the United States. As was found in the Iraqi case study, Karen women are often times faced with their first employment experience once in the United States

(Kusakabe and Pearson 2010). When resettled, the Karen women are also tasked with totally reorienting themselves in a new domestic sphere. While coping with the anxiety of adjusting to a new domestic order, Karen women's pre-arrival trauma creates a greater risk for psychological trauma (Porter and Haslam 2001; Watkins 2011). Outside of the home Karen women become increasingly dependent on their children's language skills to help them navigate a new community (Watkins 2011). This increased reliance distorts traditional family structure where parents typically control their children, and results in an increase in the daily stresses Karen women face upon resettlement (Watkins 2011).

Men face similar but different daily stressors than Karen women. The push for immediate employment falls most heavily on Karen men once resettled in the United States. As a result of diminishing job opportunities for non-native English speakers, Karen men have found opportunities in meatpacking plants, sometimes 30 miles away from their resettlement location (Molseed 2010). Consequently male relatives are separated from their families for weeks or months at a time, as they travel to cities for temporary or seasonal employment in the meat-packing plants (Ott 2011).

Social Capital

As previously mentioned, the Karen are accustomed to cultural behaviors that downplay self-promotion and extraversion (Marshall 2007). Cultural values typically stress the significance of harmony, cooperation and consensus over assertion and individualistic pursuit (Marshall 1922). Western culture, which typically places the individual first, is at odds with Karen values, making transition to the public sphere difficult for the Karen. Karen encounter difficulty in finding employment, a sphere where

passivity is typically not valued. In the job hiring process applicants need to be able to advocate for themselves a skill that is even more necessary when there are countless applicants in competition for entry-level work.

Further challenges the Karen have reported during resettlement include stress over paperwork, mistrust of police and authority figures, unfamiliarity with laws, domestic abuse, alcohol abuse, trouble with budget management, trouble setting long-term goals and lack of transportation (Dwe and Cook). Resettlement agencies help to alleviate some of the troubles the Karen encounter, but aid is largely dependent on the concentration of other Karen refugees in the area and the availability of staff members.

Favorable factors that benefit the Karen includes their overall motivations for resettlement which downplays their general expectations of resettlement²⁶ (Dwe and Cook). A 2007 study of Karen in the Mae La camp found that most refugees chosen for resettlement expected a tough economic climate and competitive work environment (Kenny 2007). The Karen frame their resettlement as an investment in their children and grandchildren's future, rather than in terms of immediate benefits for themselves.

Other factors favoring the Karen's resettlement outcomes include their strong relationships with churches. The Karen that are resettled in the United States are largely Christian. Prior to resettling, some Karen had formed partnerships with Christian charities in the refugee camps (Hortsmann 2011). These faith based organizations provide food and education (Eby et al. 2011). Once in the United States Christian Karen use their religious identification to integrate into Christian networks. Religion plays a mutually beneficial role between the Karen community and Christian churches. The Karen benefit

²⁶ The Karen cite safety in the refugee camps as a leading cause for applying to be resettled. A second cause includes wanting to have more educational opportunities for their children. (Dwe and Cook) Economic reasons are generally absent for the Karen's motivations to be resettled.

from additional assistance integrating into their new communities while churches gain membership, which has dropped significantly in the past decade (Hortsmann 2011).

Ethnic Enclaves in the Karen Community: Case Study of Waterloo, Iowa

Waterloo is a city of 68,653 in Black Hawk County, Iowa (US Census 2011). During the 1980s Waterloo experienced a severe recession when John Deere cut 1,000 jobs and Rath meatpacking closed its facilities. Since the recession, Waterloo has rebuilt itself as an industrial city, attracting thousands of Karen refugees for employment positions in surrounding meatpacking plants (Molseed 2012).

In 2011 the Waterloo Courier released an article detailing a partnership between Tyson Foods Inc. and the US Department of State. Tyson worked with the US State Department to bring refugees to Waterloo from their original resettlement communities in Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Texas (Molseed 2011). Though the Karen benefited from the employment, the city was ill-prepared to aid the newly arriving population. The head of the Iowa Bureau for Refugees, John Wilken, estimated that there were as many as 1,000 refugees from Myanmar in the area due to secondary migration (Molseed 2011). In January of 2010, Lutheran Services of Iowa stopped resettling refugees and shut down its offices. Consequently, refugees arriving in Waterloo had no resettlement agency to assist them. Karen refugees encountered problems in the school systems, with attaining driving and work permits and getting appropriate social services.

In October of 2012, ORR pledged a \$150,000 grant to Black Hawk County towards the construction of a resettlement agency (USCRI 2012). Valerie Stubbs, the director of USCRI in Des Moines commented:

With this help, USCRI can ensure that new refugees in Waterloo may become economically self-sufficient, contributing members of their new community. Many of the newcomers, primarily from Burma, have migrated to our region thanks to the promising employment opportunities found here, often in Iowa's meatpacking industry. Many of them have limited English. Black Hawk County is far from any resettlement agency in the upper Midwest, leaving these new refugee families without access to needed temporary support and services for community integration (USCRI 2012).

Black Hawk County experienced a similar influx of Bosnian refugees in 1990. Consequently Bosnian restaurants and shops appeared in Black Hawk neighborhoods shortly after their resettlement. Bosnian refugees were also able to capitalize on the concentration of Bosnians by transitioning to service providers roles as the Bosnian population increased (Singer and Wilson 2007). Much like the Bosnian community, the Karen have started to establish small businesses in the area, catering to people from Myanmar, Vietnam, the Philippines and Thailand (Molseed 2012).

Zaw Min Than a refugee from Myanmar, moved to Waterloo in 2010 (Molseed 2012). He settled in the area because he had heard from other co-nationals about jobs at a meatpacking plant in Marshalltown. There, he befriended other refugees who were willing to lend him money to open an Asian food store in Waterloo (Molseed 2012). Than opened Lucky Brothers Asian Food Market in 2012. Though the business has been successful in its first few months, Than admits to facing obstacles including his ability to communicate in English with customers, and his inability to advertise publically due to his limited finances (Molseed 2012).

As in the Iraqi case study, ethnically owned businesses provide opportunities for immigrants and refugees to seek employment in an environment that is more conducive to their cultural orientation. Than also employs other immigrants and refugees from Myanmar to help run his business. Unlike the Iraqis however, the Karen community in

the United States is relatively new and less established. Most Karen are in their first generation in the US and in the process of gaining capital, mostly from jobs in manufacturing and meatpacking. Iraqis, on the other hand resettle in areas where Iraqi migrants have been living for decades, and benefit from more well established ethnic communities.

Despite the relatively new enclaves, the Karen can and do benefit from networks that already exists in the United States. A high percentage of Karen that are resettled in the United States, move from their original resettlement location months after arrival to join friend and family and find work. Kenny details:

For the Karen, initial resettlement does not appear to be the final phase in the migratory process. We see the experience of resettled communities come to resemble that of other migrants to developed countries, in which settlement patterns coalesce on pre-existing ethnic and kinship networks (Kenny 2007)

One official from JBS Swift and Company in Iowa commented: “most of the Burmese people we hire are from the same family” (Peck 2013). Job referrals from friends and family, particularly for jobs that attract few competitors, are a tool used by Karen to fulfill short term employment in a tough economy.

The Waterloo case study is a testament to the short term economic incentive that drives secondary migration. As discussed in the previous sections, refugees are given 8 months to find employment once they arrive in the United States. Refugees that lack the ability to speak English typically take 1-2 years to find employment, while those that speak English skill take 4-6 months (Nyein Chan, personal communication, November 8, 2012). The drive to find immediate employments puts the Karen in a more dire situation, where they will accept positions at meatpacking plants that have routinely failed safety inspections (Human Rights Watch 2005).

In 2006 Swift & Co. a meatpacking plant had six of its locations raided by Federal Immigration officers. In the round up, ICE rounded up thousands of migrants that were working in the factories without workers permits (Preston 2006). Consequently the factories, including one close to Waterloo, Iowa, suffered in production. In an attempt to draw more employees Swift & Co began to offer transportation to the plant for refugees from Myanmar living in surrounding areas. One plant manager comments, “Our refugee employees are a vital part of our workforce, helping us recover from ICE raids when we were struggling to keep operations running” (Blaney 2008). While employment opportunities like the ones with Swift & Co. offer immediate income, these positions do not offer health benefits, room for mobility or protection from exploitative working conditions.

Immigration reform which in the past decade has followed an enforcement model, has resulted in a crackdown on foreign workers without documentation. Refugees are authorized to work in the United States, and accept similar positions to the ones previously filled by these foreign works. Immigration reform offers more opportunity for refugees who are willing to accept jobs that other Americans would not. These types of employment however leave no room for promotion or upward economic mobility. Outward remittances to family members still in Myanmar further strains pay checks in addition to rents and monthly bills. Consequently, refugees have little to invest in their futures. As long as there continues to be the need for domestic meat processing, Midwestern towns like Waterloo will continue to experience the secondary migration of low-skilled workers. If dialogue about fair and sustainable employment does not enter

into the conversation at meatpacking plants, upward mobility for the Karen will be hard won.

Blue Collar Work: Economic Factors Affecting Karen Resettlement

The blue collar sector was by far the greatest hit during the 2008 economic recession. Factory operations in apparel, textiles and household goods were shut down or moved abroad where companies could save on cheaper labor and lower taxes. While this was a trend before the economic crisis hit in 2008, capital losses exasperated the need to cut costs (BLS 2010).

Blue collar work has long provided income for entry-level workers. It has traditionally played a role in the income earning activities of immigrant population. In US metropolitan areas about 30% of immigrants work in blue-collar occupations, compared to 17% of U.S.-born workers in these jobs (Immigration Policy Center 2009). Refugees fill similar position to immigrants based on similar levels of education, work history and English-speaking abilities.

As was true in the Iraqi case study, fewer economic opportunities are open to refugee women in the post-recession economy. In December of 2012, a law suit against Hormel Foods Corps, a meat packing plant, forced the company to compensate female job applicants approximately \$500,000 after being charged with discriminatory job hiring (List 2012). On top of the gender biased hiring practices in entry-level work, more conservative gender roles among the Karen further limits women's ability to participate in the post-recession economy. The physicality of the work required to participate in manufacturing is generally seen as unsuited for women.

One sector that has provided continuous labor to low-skilled male workers despite the recession has been the meatpacking industry. Unlike other sectors that have responded to the outsourcing of labor, post-recession meatpacking factories cannot outsource. One factory manager explains, “Our jobs can’t be exported. The animals are here so the jobs are here,” he continues, “there are millions more jobs in the US economy than there are legal workers to fill them” (Jordan 2008). The jobs that the Karen fill in meatpacking plants typically involve work that most US citizens would not accept.

These positions involve assembly line work that has been deemed some of, “America’s most dangerous jobs,” by a popular media outlet *Mother Jones* (Schlosser 2001). According to PBS, key workplace hazards for meat and poultry laborers include excessive processing line speed, work spaces soiled with animal remains, cutting in close quarters, and cumulative stress disorders due to repetitive motions (PBS NOW 2006). In 2005 Human Rights watch published a report on the working conditions in US meat and poultry plants that classified them as violating basic human and worker’s rights (Human Rights Watch 2005; PBS 2006).

As job opportunities for low-skilled workers have retracted post-recession, the positions that are still available are increasingly nonunionized, under the table and temporary or seasonal. The Karen have adapted by engaging in secondary migration to meat packing towns throughout the Midwest. This adaptive strategy is one means the Karen have coped with the recession. A representative of Karen Konnection comments:

I had the feeling the job scene turned around for the Karen sooner than it has for others mostly because the low level jobs they take are the ones most Americans won’t do so they are almost always available (Personal Communication, January 21 2013).

Though the positions achieve the goal of immediate employment, they also expose the workers to dangerous working conditions and low wages. In the long-term, the meat packing industry is expected to maintain a constant rate of growth (BLS 2012). It will therefore continue to rely on low-skilled employees to maintain production levels.

Conclusion: Ethnic Enclaves and the Promise of the Second Generation

The most distinct feature of the Karen's resettlement patterns over the past decade include their propensity to engage in secondary migration. Work and social reasons drive their migration patterns. Large Karen populations have subsequently formed in Midwestern towns around the US due to the availability of jobs. These types of jobs, however expose the Karen to dangerous working environments, long hours and low wages.

Given the Karen's low level of transferable skills and little knowledge of the English language, the push for immediate employment, advocated by the US resettlement system, puts them at a disadvantage. Ideally the Karen should be resettled in sites that specialize in ESL training that includes on the job learning, as is the model in Sacramento, CA. Instead, due in part to the economic crisis, fewer funds are available to invest in sustainable resettlement programs that invest in the long term success of newly resettled refugees. Denise Ostenburg explains,

Refugees are willing to work longer hours, more days, and in positions that many Americans will not. Unfortunately, the jobs held by many refugees do little to contribute to their quality of life, time with their family, and time to attend ESL classes (Ostenburg, personal communication, October 12, 2012)

Because the Karen engage in secondary migration to areas where there are other Karen, they are less apt to learn English and gain transferable skills, if not accompanied by ESL and vocational training. Ostenburg continues,

The Karen almost always want to work where there are other Karen. English is a difficult language for many middle aged refugees. If they work where their friends work they are more likely to stay for longer periods (Denise Ostenburg, personal communication, October 12, 2012)

As the Karen become accustomed to life in the US amidst other Karen, they become less likely to seek positions that would lead to their upward mobility. The Karen, who self-described themselves as reserved and introverted, are unlikely to push social boundaries in an unfamiliar context outside their communities. This in combination with economic factors that have constrained resettlement services, does not bode well for resettlement as a durable solution.

The second generation of Karen refugees, who have been able to enroll in the US school system early on in life, however, will experience upward mobility. A representative from Karen Konnection notes,

Already, many of the young people are graduating from high school and moving on to college and the numbers grow with each new year. Each year, the young people are increasingly more comfortable in English and in a couple more years be equivalent to US born speakers (Personal Communication, January 27, 2013).

The weight put on education, in combination with the inevitable integration that occurs in school settings, will make the Karen's long term resettlement outcomes more favorable.

Chapter Five: Conclusion: The Intersections of Gender, Age and Class in Refugee Resettlement

The US refugee resettlement system has been impacted by the economic crisis in a multitude of ways that are both general to all groups and specific to individual groups. This thesis asked whether Iraqi or Karen refugees have been better able to adapt to the post-recession resettlement climate based on their human and social capital prior to resettlement. Human capital includes language skills, levels of education and vocational training. Social capital includes family ties, ethnic communities and religious affiliations. While the Iraqis possess forms of human capital that are easier to translate in the United States, I found that there are more variables that impact resettlement outcomes in a post-recession economy. Within each group the gender, age and class of each refugee impacted their resettlement outcome more so than their nationality alone. I also discovered that the second generation for each group will be impacted by the economic success of the first generation. This means that the offspring of refugees will benefit from the forms of capital their parents possess or are able to generate in the US. In conclusion I recommend further areas of study to advance the understanding for the ways gender, age and class impact resettlement both within and across nationalities.

As previously discussed, the United States resettlement system provides protection to refugees that are unable to get secure protection in their preliminary host states. Iraqi refugees, for example, were unable to find adequate aid or security in the

region after fleeing Iraq. The Karen, who were housed in refugee camps in Thailand, were unable to secure adequate food, sanitation and medical assistance inside the camps after fleeing Myanmar decades earlier. Once chosen for resettlement in the United States refugees are given 180 days of cash assistance, medical assistance and food assistance. After the 180 days have expired, refugees are expected to provide for themselves in an independent manner. Given the post-recession job market, which has resulted in more competition for entry-level work, and a diminishing blue-collar sector, refugees are under more intense pressure to secure the economic and social resources necessary to provide for themselves after 180 days.

The Karen and Iraqi case studies in chapters three and four explore what kinds of impacts economic downturn have on refugee populations. The impacts vary based on what kinds of resources each group has that either advantages or disadvantages them once resettled. These resources include both social and human capital. Iraqi refugees have a higher than average education level as compared to other groups of refugees. They also, the most part, occupied a professional class in Iraq prior to being chosen for resettlement. Most Karen, however, have been warehoused in Thailand for several decades where they have been deprived of any opportunity to gain professional work experience that would benefit them in the United States. In terms of social capital, both groups have a high level of involvement in religious communities already established in the United States. Both groups also migrated toward areas in the United States with larger populations of people of the same nationality or kin.

Despite the different backgrounds of the two groups, primary and secondary research found that both groups struggled in the short term regardless of the amount of

human or social capital they each had. While Iraqis had higher levels of education and higher English fluency, their previous professional experience and advanced degrees were not recognized by US employers. In the long term, however, Iraqis have managed to use their education and language skills to benefit second generations. The Karen also experienced a degree of upward mobility, albeit slower.

My original hypothesis was that Iraqi refugees would transition to the post-recession resettlement climate easier than the Karen based on their human capital. Based on the findings in the two previous case studies my original hypothesis holds true. Iraqis did in fact fare better based on their language skills; however, this outcome was not apparent in the first 180 days of resettlement. In terms of human capital, language skills are the most critical factor for a refugee's success or failure once resettled (Halpern 2008). Language proficiency determines how quickly refugees will be able to find employment and the quality of employment they can find. Will Kneering of IRIS explains:

Lack of English is undoubtedly the greatest barrier to employment. So companies, like Dunkin Donuts, will work with Spanish speakers who are learning English. Some factory jobs allow little or no English if safety instructions can be understood. But, except for a lucky few, English as a Second Language and employment English is crucial to the job search (personal communication, October 29, 2012).

As previously discussed, Iraqi refugees are more likely to have a basic knowledge of the English language prior to resettlement based on their affiliation with the US government in Iraq. This does not alone, however, guarantee that all Iraqi refugees have adequate English proficiency, nor does it guarantee that all Iraqis will be able to successfully find employment once in the US. Likewise the Karen, who have been isolated in refugee camps, are less likely to be familiar with English, but there are also

Karen who speak English fluently. Nationality and ethnicity alone are not sufficient in determining resettlement outcomes for each refugee and instead can result in false generalizations.

Resettlement outcomes for Karen and Iraqi refugees vary not only between the two groups but also within each group. Each refugee has attributes beyond nationality or ethnicity that can benefit them or disadvantage them. For example, an elderly Iraqi woman is far less likely to speak English or have previous work experience than a young Iraqi male. Variations within each group are important in determining resettlement outcomes on an individual level. A refugee's ability to learn English and become educated in the country of origin varies by gender, age and class. Within each group of refugees age, gender and class are closely correlated, both positively or negatively with resettlement outcomes. The timing of resettlement, location of resettlement and wealth of the previous generation also factor into ultimate outcomes.

Aside from English language skills, other forms of capital vary both between and within the two groups. Douglas Dowd's (2008) research, reviewed in chapter two of the thesis, helps to explain how variations within resettled groups can predict resettlement outcomes. When looking closely at both the Karen and Iraqi refugee case studies, it becomes apparent that the factors that determine a refugee's ability to achieve economic self-sufficiency vary not only based on the language skill, but on gender, age and class. It is not simply a comparative analysis between groups that provides the necessary insight into post-recession resettlement outcomes; a more complex, multi-variable analysis is clearly called for. Gender is the first of three independent variables that I found to correlate with post resettlement outcomes in the wake of the economic crisis.

Gender

Gender is a critical variable and impacts resettlement success. Both Karen and Iraqi refugees hold more conservative views on gender roles as compared to Westerners. In the case of the Karen, Marwaan Macan-Markar explains, “In the military-ruled Karen state, tradition and a male dominated social order have long guaranteed men roles (of leadership)” (Macan-Markar 2010). Women traditionally occupy the domestic sphere, taking care of young children and the elderly. Similarly the Iraqi Women’s League explains gender roles in Iraq as follows: “Their [the women’s] role is to protect themselves and family members in a society that does not grant them all the right privileges men have” (Iraqi Women’s League 2012). Once in the US both Iraqi and Karen women are often faced with their first employment experience. The positions they do accept are influenced by gender roles in their home states.

As a result of religious and cultural values in both case studies, we see that women are less likely to take on physically demanding jobs in a workplace where they are surrounded by male co-workers. Because the current job market offers physically demanding entry-level work, women are automatically disadvantaged in terms of fulfilling their economic potential. Persons that are physically unable to carryout tasks due to disability or age are also disadvantaged in terms of immediate employment.

Women are further constrained as a result of their domestic roles within the home. If women are the primary caretakers, they cannot accept positions that conflict with unpaid childcare or eldercare at home. In both cases women are found to be in charge of picking children up from school, administering medication for elderly relatives

and taking care of young children. Many women are unable to accept positions at a traditional 9am to 5pm service-sector job, even if they do have the language skills necessary to acquire work.

While the scope of my research cannot ultimately prove this assertion, it seems highly suspect that there is a higher wage gap between men and women that are newly resettled in the United States based on men's ability to accept physically demanding entry-level jobs. Refugee women are more likely to benefit from jobs in the growing service sector, but these jobs, as discussed in chapter two, require language skills. As discussed in chapter three, home health care is a rapidly growing sector that is made up of primarily female workers (USDHHS 2012). Access to these positions often requires 24 hour on-call availability, which is not possible for women that have to support families of their own. Though the service sector offers more opportunities for Iraqi and Karen women based on gender roles, competition for laid-off Americans is also more intense in the service sector and health-service sector as compared to blue collar work, making initial entry more difficult (Florida 2012). Because refugee women are not exempt from needing to find employment upon 180 days of resettlement they are faced with the double burden of carrying out domestic roles and earning income outside the home.

The ways in which gender specifically affects each refugee at the individual level is determined by additional factors. Age is another independent variable that contributes to the types of jobs and services each refugee has access to.

Age

Age is an additional factor that influences resettlement outcomes. Refugees over the age of 50, especially those unable to speak English are automatically disadvantaged

as compared to younger generations that can more easily learn language skills.

Furthermore, the ability to take on physically demanding jobs diminishes with age.

Younger generations that can benefit from enrolling in public schools experience the greatest degree of success in terms of integrations and preparation for the workforce. The representative of Karen Konnection representative explains,

Many of the young people are graduating from high school and moving on to college and the numbers grow with each new year. Each year, the young people are increasingly more comfortable in English and in a couple more years (will) be equivalent to US born speakers. As they can get better educated, better job opportunities will present themselves. It is difficult for their parents though, as they will likely be confined to entry level jobs for the rest of their working lives since their English and education will always be limited. (Personal Communication, January 21, 2013)

Age also advantages younger refugees learning English for the first time. A

representative from Karen Konnection explains:

Certainly learning English would help and almost everyone who comes to the US makes an effort to learn. But learning a new language is not easy at any age and it gets increasingly difficult as a person ages. For those that are say, 45 - 50 years old or more and have never learned English in the past, chances are they will never be conversant no matter how hard they try. Job opportunities for the second generation will ultimate be more numerous (Personal communication, January 21, 2013).

Based on the higher retention rate of younger generations who learn English, second generations are more likely to experience upward economic mobility. Age alone, however does not determine the degree of ease the second generation will have in gaining upward economic mobility. Class and the economic resources of the previous generation contribute to the educational and work opportunities open to the second generation.

Class:

Douglas Dowd argues that the income earned by the first generation of resettled refugees contributes to the second generation's ultimate success or failure. If newly resettled parents are able to afford private schooling, higher education and out-of-class support for their children, the second generation is more likely to succeed (Dowd 2008).

Upward mobility can be achieved at a faster rate if the previous generation has economic resources at their disposal to pay for secondary education and extracurricular activities. The ability of the second generation to take advantage of these opportunities will depend on their parent's ability to support the second generation's needs. Secondary education, transportation to and from work, and the ability to find employment outside the home are all affected by a family's economic situation. Families that have not earned enough income to support higher education for their children will depend heavily on scholarship and state-funded educational opportunities. In an economy where a bachelor's degree is the new high school degree, a college education is crucial for upward mobility in the second generation (Lawrence 2012). A college education however can only be afforded by families that are of a higher socio-economic class.

Families and individuals that are unable to integrate into the economy where they are located due to a combination of their gender, age or class factors may choose to move to other areas of the United States. Secondary migration, or migration away from the original resettlement location, can compensate for unfavorable resettlement outcomes, especially in the short term. Women may migrate to be closer to family, the elderly may move to a state that has more generous services and able-bodied young men may move to areas where blue color work is still available.

The Myth of Sedentary Migration: Secondary Migration of Karen and Iraqi Refugees

The Karen have engaged in secondary migration to be closer to other Karen communities. In the Midwest the Karen have benefitted from job referrals within their communities. As seen in chapter four, some meatpacking plants have hired over fifty employees from the same family, based on referrals from relatives. Iraqi refugees, like the Karen, move to areas with higher concentrations of Iraqis. Many Iraqis claim religious reasons for engaging in secondary migrations and use the Muslim community as “cultural brokers” to transition into the mainstream economy (Pipher 2002).

Secondary migration can also be beneficial in terms of conserving resources. Refugees that are resettled on the East or West coasts have to pay higher costs of living. Though state programs are adjusted to compensate for higher costs of living, refugees can move to cities with lower costs of living, and more numerous job opportunities. In the Detroit and Waterloo case study²⁷, both Iraqi and Karen refugees were able to relocate from areas with higher costs of living and fewer job opportunities.

As Eleanor Ott discusses, secondary migration is a tool used by refugees to achieve more desirable resettlement outcomes; however, it is not supported by federally-run resettlement programs. Federal programs assume that refugees remain sedentary after their initial placement in the US. Social services do not always move with refugees if they do chose to resettle once in the US. This can create resource deficits in areas that

²⁷ See Chapters Three and Four

receive high numbers of refugees due to secondary migration, especially during financially difficult times (Ott 2011).

Further Research Potential:

Other related areas of research that would benefit from closer examination include the impact health has on refugee resettlement. Health impacts the ability of an individual to find and secure any form of employment once resettled. Because the United States assigns priority to refugees with cases of physical and mental disabilities²⁸, many refugees are resettled after undergoing physical or mental trauma. This can lead to increased difficulty finding employment (Tavernise 2009). Overall physical ability also determines the types of jobs refugees are able to acquire. Because entry level work for non-native English speakers is concentrated in fields that require physical exertion, overall physical strength is an asset in the current job market (USDOL 2012).

Often times physically demanding jobs are the first that are made available to refugees arriving in the United States. This can include assembly line work, construction, food preparation and janitorial work. If a refugee is unable to stand for long periods of time or carry heavy loads, they automatically have fewer job options in the current job market. Additional research on the types of employment available to disabled refugees in the United States would help build a more sustainable resettlement system.

A sustainable resettlement system needs to account for both the types of refugees a country admits and the state's ability to provide for their needs. Given the US's push for economic self-sufficiency upon 180 days of resettlement, careful attention needs to be paid to the types of jobs available to refugees and their ability to fill these positions.

²⁸ See Bill Frelick, Chapter Two

As the United States continues to open its borders to an increasingly diverse group of refugees, it needs to provide for a more diverse set of needs. Refugees coming to the United States have a variety of skills, backgrounds and values based on their pre-resettlement experiences. Although only 1/2 of 1% of the world's refugees will ever be resettled in the United States, the US resettlement system has a responsibility to create a climate that promotes long-term, sustainable self-sufficiency (UNHCR 2006).

Second Generation Success:

As I discovered Douglas Dowd's conclusions on second generation resettlement outcomes is applicable for second generation Karen and Iraqi children, who have been able to learn English in school and form social networks with their US-born peers. Both cultures emphasize the importance of education. Second generation children benefit from being exposed to cultures that place emphasis on education. Unlike the first generation they have greater access to resources in schools, after school programs and additional support within their social groups. These resources include in-class support, mentorships, early start programs, youth groups, athletics and ESL assistance.

Long-term resettlement outcomes for both groups will depend on the ability of the second generation to achieve higher education and gain upward mobility in the workforce. Both Vietnamese and Bulgarian refugees are previous cases that have proven successful in the second generation of resettlement. Both groups benefitted from kinship networks, which insulated the group for a period of time until second and third generations integrated into the mainstream economy. Both Iraqi and Karen refugees can

be seen utilizing kinship networks to buffer their adjustment period and achieve more desirable resettlement outcomes.

Conclusion: An Intersectional Approach to Refugee Resettlement

My preliminary hypothesis was that Iraqi refugees would achieve more desirable resettlement outcomes in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis. Ultimately this holds true based on Iraqis' general English proficiency as compared to the Karen. However, variations exist within each group based on gender, age and class. Women in both groups on average had less familiarity with the English language. Younger generations in both cases were able to gain proficiency more rapidly than their parents. While Iraqis, in general, originated from higher socio-economic classes than the Karen, there were exceptions in both groups. Those that came from an upper middle class background in either group had more familiarity with the English language, which improved their resettlement outcomes.

Originally, I proposed that both groups would use social networks to compensate for the tough job market, once resettled. Both groups relied on social networks, including family, friends, church groups or ethnic groups to employ survival strategies. They borrowed money from family members, moved in with people from the same nationality or ethnicity and accepted additional aid from religious communities. Both groups also engaged in secondary migration from their original point of resettlement in order to find work, live closer to family and afford cheaper costs of living.

In order for US resettlement programs to better meet the needs of resettled refugees in a post-recession economy, a more precise measure of secondary migration needs to be implemented. Possible solutions include better inter-state communication between VOLAGS, and a federal government more receptive to the needs of states experiencing influxes of refugees from secondary migration. Primary resettlement that places greater emphasis on regional job availability may also be helpful for providing for the needs of resettled refugees. This model would take into account data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics to identify areas that have opportunities for specific groups of refugees based on their skills.

English-language training is another critical component based on the current job market. Sacramento uses on-the-job ESL training, which has been fruitful in terms of meeting the goals of immediate employment and gaining economic self-sufficiency. With on-the-job training refugees can enter into positions that provide them with skills for advancement.

Ultimately, the economic crisis has reduced job opportunities for all refugees. Blue collar jobs are increasingly moved overseas or replaced by machines. Trade labor, which has been created by large infrastructure projects, is temporary in nature, and targets the male workforce. Service-sector jobs, which are growing at a fast rate, create opportunities for those with English-language skills but are also increasingly competitive. Iraqis' language skills will allow for the group to gain upward mobility quicker than the Karen. The Karen however will find work more immediately because they are willing to accept jobs that offer low wages and sub optimal working conditions. Within each group women and the elderly will experience the greatest difficulty in achieving economic self-

sufficiency in the first 180 days. This is not a new trend, but one that has been exasperated by the economic crisis. In the long run the second and third generation in both groups will show the most promise.

Globally, refugees represent the most vulnerable of populations. An analysis of any refugee resettlement program should not forget the events these individuals have had to endure to finally arrive in a safe country of resettlement. While achieving economic self-sufficiency is an admirable long-term goal, the fact that these people have the will to carry on with their daily lives, given the trauma they have experienced while fleeing prosecution is truly amazing. Ultimately, no economic indicator can pay tribute to the fortitude these people possess.

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