The Role of Refugee Social Networks to Navigate Transportation in Colorado Springs

by

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The Refugee Resettlement Process in the U.S.

Only three percent of the world’s population has ever migrated outside of its countries’ borders (IOM, 2008). As of 2014 there were a total of 19.5 million refugees worldwide, and with present day conflicts this number is expected to rise (The UN Refugee Agency 2015a). Developing countries host the vast majority of refugees, with over 86% of the world’s refugee population (The UN Refugee Agency, 2015a). The U.S. has resettled the most refugees out of all the developed counties and has resettled over three million refugees within its borders since 1975 (Committee on Foreign Relations, 2010). Indeed the United States is one of the main developed countries to resettle refugees, and has an entire agency set up to help refugees in the resettlement process. It is recognized that the main obstacles that refugees initially face during the resettlement process are related to health, housing, and language issues, however, transportation is seen as the lynch pin that exacerbates the above problems (Bose, 2014; Bose, 2013; Cresswell, 2010; Garasky et al., 2006; Liu and Painter, 2012).

Refugees are not the only individuals that face transportation barriers, but what makes their situation unique is their differences in their social networks. While there are studies that explore how refugees utilize social networks in order to establish their lives in their new host counties, few examine how refugees in the Unites States utilize their social networks. This study will provide insight into if and how refugees utilize their social networks with a focus on strong and weak ties to navigate both the public and private transit sectors in Colorado Springs. Thus, the research questions that this study
explores includes: 1) What is the settlement process of refugees in Colorado Springs? 2) What barriers do refugees face while accessing transportation? And 3) How do social networks play a role in settlement and transportation?

The purpose of this project is to examine the refugee resettlement process in a case study of Colorado Springs and analyze one of the key problems that refugees face in their host country, transportation barriers. “Mobility and control over mobility both reflect and reinforce power. Mobility is a resource to which not everyone has an equal relationship” (Skeggs, 2004, p. 49). With this in mind there is a need for research within Colorado Springs on refugee’s access to transportation and mobility, for it is seen as a key aspect in successful resettlement and integration.

The Refugee Resettlement Process

The first legislation that was put in place in the United States that pertained to refugees was the Displaced Person Act of 1948, which facilitated the flow of 250,000 Europeans who were displaced after World War II (Singer and Wilson, 2006). Most of the refugees at the time fled communism. The 1951 U.N. Refugee Convention set the universal standard of the definition and qualifications of a refugee, the rights of the refugees and the legal obligation of states (Brown et al., 2007). A refugee is defined in the 1951 Refugee Convention as someone who:

owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail of the protection of that country (The UN Refugee Agency, 2015b).
For the next 30 years, the United States used this definition to determine who qualified as a refugee; though admission of refugees fleeing communist countries were most common, with over 540,000 refugees resettled in the U.S. from 1952 to 1980 (Singer and Wilson, 2006).

With the U.S. resettling so many refugees, a new need emerged in 1980 to organize and control the flow of refugees. The Refugee Act of 1980 systemized entry into the United States and standardized the domestic services provided to all admitted refugees. The Act also set annual ceilings for regular and emergency admittance along with federal funding to support refugee resettlement (Singer and Wilson, 2006).

Since the Refugee Act of 1980, every fiscal year the United States president comes out with a declaration outlining the number and region of origin of refugee admissions for that particular year (Government Accountability Office GAO, 2012; Office of Press Secretary OPS, 2015; Singer and Wilson, 2006). For example, for the fiscal year of 2016, the United States set the quota for refugee admissions at a total of 75,000 refugees, with the majority, 34,000 refugees, coming from the near East and South Asia, followed by 25,000 refugees allotted to Africa (OPS, 2015). Many refugees wait out the process, which often times takes years, to resettle in another country.

While refugees are waiting to resettle into their host country, they undergo a screening process to assess their health and to see if they fit the United States definition of a refugee (Barnes, 2001; Committee on Foreign Relations, 2010; Lutfy et al., 2014; Singer and Wilson, 2006). The Department of Homeland Security then approves and screens refugees that are seeking admission to the United States (GAO, 2012).
Upon arrival in the United States, the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BPRM), processes the refugees and coordinates with voluntary resettlement agencies to help place and support the refugees for their first few months in the United States (Brown et al., 2007; GAO, 2012). Refugees work with these voluntary resettlement agencies during the first few months of their arrival to help them get settled into communities throughout the United States (Barnes, 2001; Committee on Foreign Relations, 2010; GAO, 2012, Lutfy et al., 2014). These voluntary resettlement agencies are national voluntary organizations, and are oftentimes faith-based groups that help with refugee resettlement (Barnes, 2001; Committee on Foreign Relations, 2010). The BPRM allocates funds to help refugees integrate into their various communities. These funds help cover the costs of housing, food, clothing, and other necessities (GAO, 2012). Each voluntary agency receives $1,850 (as of 2012) per refugee to provide them with services for the first 30 to 90 days in the resettlement process (GAO, 2012).

The literature tends to state that the amount of funding and assistance period is often inadequate to ensure economic self-sufficiency among the refugee populations (Barnes, 2001; Committee on Foreign Relations, 2010; GAO, 2012; Singer and Wilson, 2006). In some cases, refugees that are admitted into the United States are illiterate in their native language as well as in English, have a lack of formal education, suffer from both serious health and mental conditions, and lack basic skills to compete in the job market (Barnes, 2001; Committee on Foreign Relations, 2010; GAO, 2012; Lutfy et al., 2014; Singer and Wilson, 2006). These factors create obstacles in integrating refugees into American society that cannot be overcome within a 90-day timeframe. Nonetheless,
the long-term goal of the resettlement process is to encourage refugee competency in the English language and to have refugees reach economic self-sufficiency (GAO, 2012; Haines, 2010). In effect, after the 90 day period, refugees are treated much like regularly admitted migrants and expected to become self-sufficient. Yet there are particular issues that are problems for refugees, especially related to their health, housing, language, and transportation that create significant barriers that oftentimes do not confront regularly admitted migrants.

Though health, housing, and language issues are key concerns and barriers to the resettlement process, transportation is seen as the lynch pin that exacerbates the above problems (Bose, 2014; Bose, 2013; Cresswell, 2010; Garasky et al., 2006; Liu and Painter, 2012). Transportation is considered as one of the key factors in the integration process as it brings stability to one’s life, thus a key reason for this study is to see if there are transportation barriers in Colorado Springs that are prohibiting refugees from successfully integrating into society.

**Social Networks**

The process by which refugees arrive in their host countries is different from that of regular migrants, because refugees cannot necessarily rely on social networks to navigate the settlement process. Instead, they rely more on government and resettlement agencies for assistance. According to Singer and Wilson (2006) only about twenty percent of the refugees admitted into the U.S. experience family reunification (Singer and Wilson, 2006). The majority of refugees coming into the U.S. do not have family or friends to draw upon for support while adjusting to their new life. Yet having social
networks can be very helpful in mitigating resettlement integration. This is because Goss and Lindquist (1995, p. 329) argue, “Social networks are generally defined as webs of interpersonal interactions, commonly comprised of relatives, friends, or other associations forged through social and economic activities that act as conduits through which information, influence, and resources flow”.

By focusing on the social aspect of migration one is able to connect the social and individual reasons for migrating. It is important to define what constitutes as social networks of migration.

They are not simply the strong ties of family, kin, and hometown associations, but also other networks that involve a whole range of actors operating both legally and illegally from large employers and their sub-contracted employment agencies, to government and private recruiting agencies, to smugglers and traffickers (Samers, 2010, p. 87).

For refugees the main social network that influences their decision to migrate is the government of the host country that is taking them in. When refugees first arrive in their new home, they utilize the resettlement agencies to obtain information and resources to help establish themselves in their new home. Since refugee migration networks are so different from those of economic migrants, it is hard to incorporate refugees into various conventional theories about migration.

It is widely accepted that migrants utilize their social networks when migrating to new countries. These social networks can help them find housing, employment, and other resources in the new towns where they relocate. This highlights how migration chains play a role in how migrants choose and move to the cities they do, as well as how they utilize these social networks, “Social networks are the primary source of information, and facilitate assimilation” (Brown et al., 2007, p. 57). Hodagneu-Sotelo (2007) explores
these relationships in her book, *Domestica*, about how Latina women utilize social networks to find a job, housing, and navigate life in the Los Angeles. Without knowing someone in Los Angeles and not having the right references for jobs, she discovers it is nearly impossible to start a life as a migrant in the city. Her book stresses the importance of networks and how they shape migrant’s lives.

With a particular focus on the idea of how migrants utilize “network capital,” Bose (2014, p. 152) too describes network capital as “the ability to unfold one’s life through highly interconnected networked societies”. Network capital, then, indicates that those who have more connections are more likely to integrate successfully into their host countries.

An example of how more connections help facilitate successful integration is in the articles by Simich (2003) and Stewart et al. (2008). They show how refugees and migrants in Canada have more economic opportunities and resources to draw upon if they had family or friends already living in Canada. It is through these social networks that they were able obtain information on affordable housing, various job opportunities, and other useful information to better establish themselves in their destination.

The type of social networks that migrants utilize while establishing themselves in their new destination can be broken down in to strong ties and weak ties (Granovetter, 1973). Strong ties can be described as the social relations between ego and close friends and/or kin (Wilson, 1998, p. 397). Weak ties are described as the relationship between ego and his/her “acquaintance network” (Wilson, 1998, p. 397). Strong ties are recognized as important for they are the easiest way to receive information, but Wilson (1998) stresses that weak ties tend to be more useful in the exchange of information like
finding jobs, and housing. It is widely recognized that migrant’s weak ties are extremely
beneficial for finding employment opportunities (Brown et al., 2007, Hodagneu-Sotelo,
2007; Ryan, 20110; Williams, 2006; Wilson, 1998). It is also noted that weak ties can
change into strong ties over time. Williams (2006) provides examples of how newly
arrived refugees in the U.K. utilize weak ties with already established refugees for the
exchange of information on where to find services, housing, and employment. These
weak ties were comprised of friends from their own ethnic groups and often fellow-
nationals who share a common language.

Ryan (2011) explores how these social networks are made once migrants become
established in their new destination. She explains that social capital is built through
bonding and bridging. Bonding are ties to people who are similar in some important way
and are utilized for ‘getting by’, while bridging are people who have less in common but
in some important way help with ‘getting ahead’ (Ryan, 2011, p. 710). Ryan
acknowledges that the binary of “bonding” and “bridging” is too simplistically drawn and
that there is a continuum of relationships that are blurred together between the two
variables. In her study she explores how Polish migrants create their social networks in
Britain. She found that initially the Polish migrants would utilize weak ties of friends and
acquaintances that they knew from Poland to establish themselves, but then would
focuses on bridging relationships in Britain to find better employment opportunities, and
find individuals with similar interests rather than those with similar ethnic backgrounds.
Ryan (2011) also found that often migrants face obstacles in accessing certain networks
that would lead to upward mobility. These obstacles include their social position,
language fluency, occupational status, expectations and ambition.
While the use of social networks is widely understood when it comes to migrants in general, few studies have investigated how refugees adjust to life with or without the use of various social networks in the U.S. Trudeau (2012) conducted a study on how nonprofits and resettlement agencies play a role in how refugees get incorporated into U.S. society. In part, this is because the resettlement agencies provide vital services that they would otherwise not have access to. He discovers that resettlement agencies and non-profits can be utilized as another type of social tie to draw support from.

Other researchers discuss how refugees utilize social networks during their resettlement throughout Canada (Simich, 2003; Stewart et al., 2008) and in the U.K (Williams, 2006). In Canada, Stewart et al. (2008) describes how newcomers tended to seek support about how to establish themselves from their peers first, then seek help from professional or ethnic specific organizations. In Canada, they find, social networks are vital for the passing of information and knowledge through refugees and migrants.

In the U.K. Williams (2006) discovered that the utilization of weak ties is necessary in order to establish a new life for refugees. It is important to keep in mind that the U.S. resettlement process is different than in Canada and the U.K., so this paper will give some insight in how refugees in the United States use the various weak and strong ties to establish themselves in the United States. Unlike other migrants, refugees have little say into where they are going to be resettled, “it is not chain migration, family reunification, or economic opportunities that drive the flow, but rather the directives of the state and its agents that determine where one will be placed” (Bose, 2014, p. 153). This suggests that the integration process for refugees will rely on the support from the resettlement agencies.
Transportation

The literature has found that adequate access to transportation plays a significant role in anyone’s ability to integrate into society. “A lack of access to desired and required destinations may lead to less optimal outcomes – fewer job opportunities, poorer health, and missed chances to improve skills and education” (Bose, 2014, p. 157). With this in mind, transportation is a key factor for refugee integration, for it affects all aspects of a refugee’s life. For instance, transportation affects one’s access to health care, to various employment opportunities, to community events, to social services, and to educational classes. If these various opportunities are not located on public transit routes or refugees do not have access to other forms of transportation, it often leads to missed opportunities, which in time could hamper long-term integration.

In studies done about immigrant and refugee mobility patterns, the majority of the respondents in the studies stressed the importance of having a car (Bose, 2014; Bose, 2013; Garasky et al., 2006; Sheller and Urry, 2006). The reality is that not everyone can afford a car, let alone accommodate for the maintenance costs, insurance, and obtaining a driver’s license (Bose, 2013). Due to the cost of having a car and the various challenges in obtaining a car, most of the U.S. refugee population relies on public transit. In case studies done about immigrant and refugee mobility patterns, the trend of unequal access to public transit results in difficulty in obtaining resources and services that would benefit this population (Bose, 2014; Bose, 2013; Cresswell, 2010; Dluhy et al., 2002; Garasky et al., 2006). Bose (2014) gives an example where an English language-learning program was located in a neighborhood far from where the refugees are settling, and the public transit system did not serve the community where the language program was located. As
a result, the majority of the refugee population was not able to take advantage of the opportunity to better their English due to the barriers in their mobility.

Bose (2014) highlights some of the key consequences of limited access to transportation on refugees.

Limited transportation options can, in substantial ways, restrict the autonomy and independence of refugees, leaving them dependent on the services and schedules of others. This, in turn, can adversely affect their ability to seek and secure gainful employment, receive necessary medical care, and access other goods and services vital to bother basic survival and social advancement. (Bose, 2014, p. 152)

For example, refugees who work second and third shifts have to either car pool with co-workers or pay for a taxi to get to work, due to the bus not running at their shift times. This forces refugees to depend upon other people to access their jobs, and inhibits their ability to become self-sufficient. This lack of transportation options can also lead to missed employment opportunities due to suitable jobs not occurring in close proximity of the refugees housing. Bose (2014) gives an example of this phenomena happening with a refugee community in Vermont. A new industrial park has many employment opportunities for refugees, however it is located thirty miles away from the town of Burlington and the public transit system does not serve this area. The result was that refugees could not access these employment opportunities. If there is a good transit system in place where the refugees are being resettled then there is less of a problem of transportation, mobility, and access.

Refugees that are settling in “gateway cities,” like New York, Chicago, and Minneapolis, have extensive public transit services in place, and other services needed for resettlement into the U.S. Thus, there are fewer barriers to transportation in these communities. However, the present day trend is that refugees are being settled in non-
traditional destinations, such as rural settings and smaller cities throughout the U.S. (Bose, 2014; Brown et al., 2007; Kraly, 2008; Secor and Ehrkamp, 2015; Singer and Wilson, 2006; Winders, 2012).

This trend is due to resettlement agencies influencing where refugees are placed, and playing a major role in creating new settlement patterns (Brown et al., 2007; Kraly, 2008). This trend emerged around 1975, when the U.S. government altered the places where they were resettling refugees and created a policy to settle them into smaller cities and towns, especially in states west of the Mississippi, which began to see higher inflows of refugees (Brown et al., 2007). The process becomes self-perpetuating as communities that settle refugees begin to become magnets for more refugees. Thus, when a specific community begins to resettle a certain origin population, the result is that more refugees from that ethnic group continue to be settled there due to the ability of the community to sponsor more such migrants (Brown et al., 2007; Singer and Wilson, 2006). This has resulted in a higher refugee population in these small, non-traditional resettlement cities.
Map 1: Shows the dispersion of the refugee resettlement agencies across the United States. As you can tell there are a lot of resettlement locations that are not considered gateway cities. (Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, US Department of State, 2014).

These non-traditional resettlement locations do not have the same number of resources and access to resources as the traditional gateway cities (Bose, 2013). It is in these nontraditional resettlement communities that the issue of transportation becomes a major problem for refugees.

One issue that can arise from a lack of access to transportation is social-spatial exclusion. Social-spatial exclusion, defined as all those circumstances – social, economic and political – that prevent individuals, households and even entire communities from
fully participating in and better integrating with mainstream society (Engels and Liu, 2011; Schwanen, et al., 2015).

We therefore propose to understand transport disadvantage as a relational and dynamic outcome of a lack of access to basic resources, activities and opportunities for interaction of a lack of cognitive knowledge, know-how, aspirations and/or autonomy regarding travel and its externalities, and a lack of influence on decision-making in the context of transport policy and governance. (Schwanen et al., 2015, p. 126)

As identified above the issue of transportation among refugees is key in determining integration into society. “Transit needs to be recognized as a key ingredient for the success of the immigrant settlement process” (Lo et. al., 2011, p. 470), justifying the reason to study the mobility patterns of refugees, especially in areas that are not considered “gateway cities” (McGarth, 2009).

By exploring the transportation patterns of refugees, one begins to understand the various barriers that refugees face while accessing transportation. Where transportation or lack of transportation can have a substantial impact on individuals’ lives and their integration into society. While exploring how refugees navigate the various forms of transportation, it becomes possible to discern whom they utilize for support, and how they obtain information about how to conquer the barriers they face. While the trend is that refugees are being resettled in these non-traditional locations, one implication is that refugees will not have as many strong and weak ties to draw support from. Without a significant refugee community, there is potential for more challenges to emerge in the integration process.
Colorado Springs: A Case Study

The state of Colorado in 2014 resettled 1,893 refugees from 28 different countries (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2015). Of those resettled in Colorado, just over 150 were resettled to Colorado Springs. Given the breadth of diversity of refugees that are coming into Colorado and the fact that Colorado Springs is not a “gateway city,” Colorado Springs makes a good case study to examine how the state and cities are doing in incorporating refugees into U.S. society in a non-traditional destination. Colorado Springs is also an automobile dependent city and thus, transportation can become a problem for those who depend on public transit. The public transit in Colorado Springs has also suffered budget cuts, which have affected the bus schedules and routes, causing less access to the public. Since 2004 the transit system is promised $5.7 million dollars annually. However, since 2004 the public transit budget has failed to reach its goal, with $1.9 million missing in 2014 alone (Mendoza, 2014).

Another aspect that makes Colorado Springs a unique resettlement location is the high concentration of faith based organizations. This is likely to have an impact on the resettlement process due to the amount of volunteerism that takes place in the city. It would seem that individuals in these faith based organization are going to be more willing to help out and volunteer with the resettlement agencies to provide support to refugees, due to the caring values of the various faiths found in Colorado Springs.

This research project will provide insight on the issue of transportation for refugee populations located in Colorado Springs. Using social network theory this research investigates the following research questions: 1) What is the settlement process of refugees in Colorado Springs? 2) Are there barriers that refugees face while accessing
transportation? and 3) How do social networks play a role in settlement and transportation? The overall goal is to determine the role of transportation and social networks in the long-term integration of the refugees.

Significance

Examining transportation patterns of refugees provides a glimpse into the sources of refugees support to help facilitate their integration. I decided to focus on refugees rather than migrants in general because refugees do not generally have a say in where they are going to be resettled. The role of social networks in the refugee’s navigation of life in their host countries is not widely studied in the literature. Most of the literature focuses on migrants in general, however refugees do not utilize the same types of social networks to facilitate migration, and when resettled do not have the same type of social networks to draw upon as typical economic migrants (Mazen, 2015). The articles that do address the type of social networks that refugees utilize typically take place in Canada (Simich, 2003; Stewart et al., 2008), or in the U.K. (Williams, 2006). Since the Canadian and European resettlement process is vastly different than the American resettlement process it is hard to tell if the findings about refugees’ use of social networks in these places are applicable to the American resettlement process. A lot of the literature that explores migrant social networks focuses on how they are used for economic opportunities. This study will provide a different angle and insight into if and how
refugees utilize social networks to navigate the various transportation systems in Colorado Springs.

It is widely understood and discussed that poor transportation can lead to social exclusion (Cass et al., 2005; Delbosc and Currie, 2011a; Delbosc and Currie, 2011b; Dodson et al., 2004; Engels and Liu, 2011; Lucas, 2012; Preston, 2009; Schwanen et al., 2015). The degree of social exclusion is defined as all those circumstances – social economic and political – that prevent individuals, households and even entire communities from fully participating in and better integrating with mainstream society (Engels and Liu, 2011; Schwanen et al., 2015). This is key to the long-term integration of refugees. Transportation becomes a key to this because if refugees are unable to access the resources they need, it will hinder the amount of time it takes for them to integrate into their new host country society.

The problem of poor public transportation occurring in Colorado Springs makes it a good case study to explore the mobility patterns of refugees. In order for the U.S. refugee population to become self-sufficient, cities need to address the issues that are associated with transportation and mobility barriers. With this in mind there is a need for research within Colorado Springs on refugee’s access to transportation and mobility, for it is seen as a key aspect in successful resettlement.
Methods

I conducted twenty in-depth semi-structured interviews with refugees that have been resettled in Colorado Springs (see Appendix 1 for semi-structured interview questions). In 2015 Colorado Springs resettled around 150 refugees, meaning that my results reflect about 10% of the experiences of the refugee population coming in to Colorado Springs in 2015. I used a semi-structured interview guide to allow me to ask key questions so that I could then compare responses amongst participants’. This format has provided opportunities to let the interview flow and diverge into various themes that I did not foresee in my interview guide. An example of a theme that came up that I was not anticipating was reasons why individuals bought the certain cars that they did, and if they knew how to perform maintenance on cars. The interviews took place from December 2015 to February 2016. There were no parameters on the origin, age, or gender of the refugees that interviewed because I wanted to get an understanding of the many transportation patterns of the refugee population in Colorado Springs. These results only reflect the experiences of the twenty refugees that I interviewed and may not be true for the entire refugee population in Colorado Springs. Nonetheless, the results provide insight into the role of transportation into the long-term integration process.

All of the participants that I interviewed have been resettled in the US over the past year, which means that my results reflect the varied experiences of very newly arrived refugees. My interview sample are of those who have been recently resettled might reflect a different story than those who have been in the United States for a longer
period of time. The individuals in my sample are still trying to figure out and navigate life in their new home, and this then is certainly reflected in some of their responses. I wanted to focus on the newly arrived refugees because it is during the initial months of resettlement that refugees receive the most support from the government. I want to fully understand the government’s role in assisting with refugee resettlement, and form a complete understanding of the support drawn from the resettlement agency.

Table 1: This table shows some of the demographics of the participants that I interviewed in this study and whether they own a car or not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Transit Country</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Own a Car</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fumu</td>
<td>Congo left in 2000</td>
<td>South Africa 2000-2015</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunia</td>
<td>Congo left at 13yrs</td>
<td>Zambia 9 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halim</td>
<td>Baghdad, Iraq</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Najah</td>
<td>Congo left 2006</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadim</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muna</td>
<td>Congo till she was 9</td>
<td>South Africa 11 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
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<td>Uhuru</td>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>Burundi 12 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Than</td>
<td>Myanmar till 14</td>
<td>Thailand 6 years</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Congo</td>
<td>Burundi 12 years</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>Makin</td>
<td>Baghdad, Iraq</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>Jordan 6 years</td>
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<td>Haroon</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Turkey 4 years</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interview participant’s origins ranged from the Middle East (12 participants), to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (7 participants), and Myanmar (1 participant).

The refugees either came to the U.S. through the refugee application process with UNHCR or were granted Special Immigration Visas through the U.S. government.
because of their employment with the U.S. military. Those coming to the U.S. on the Special Immigration Visas are supported by the same programs and have access to the same resources as the refugees who went through UNHCR. All of the participants were able to speak English fairly well, so no interpreter was used. Because most of the refugees could speak English relatively well, I realize that this group represents a more self-sufficient population because they do have to conquer the language barrier that other individuals might face. I offered each refugee participant a $10 gift card to Kings Soopers as compensation for their time and information. Not all of the participants accepted the gift card.

I tape-recorded the interviews if the participants gave me permission; otherwise, I took notes during the interview. I transcribed the interviews after interview completion. Depending on how long the interview was I transcribed word for word the key passages and themes in the interview. After transcribing the interviews I performed latent content analysis (Hay, 2010, p. 125), to find and look for the key themes from the interviews. The key themes that came up were the various barriers that refugees experienced with accessing public and private transportation: transit time, waiting for the bus, bus availability, navigating the drivers license process, the process of buying a car, car maintenance, costs of transportation, and the weather. Other themes that were prevalent were the use of volunteers and/or friends and family to navigate these various barriers.

I also added notes on observations about the surroundings of their homes, like how far away is the bus stop is from their apartment, how other members in the community are using transportation, and the accessibility of the neighborhood (like shoveled sidewalks, stairs or ramps, damaged walk ways, etc.). The interviews mostly
took place at the homes of the refugees, or after job class (where I served as a volunteer).

All of the refugees lived in various apartment complexes throughout Colorado Springs.

**Map 2: Concentration of Refugees Living in Colorado Springs** This map shows the areas of concentration of refugees living in Colorado Springs. The various colored lines on the map are the METRO public bus routes throughout Colorado Springs. [Base map: (City of Colorado Springs GIS Analyst, 2015).

I also conducted an interview with one of the staff members at Lutheran Family Services (LFS) to get the resettlement agency’s perspective on the process of refugee resettlement and issues that the agency faces with refugee resettlement. Another goal was to obtain a better understanding of the processes and services the agency offers (See Appendix 2 for set of questions).

To locate individuals that I could interview for my master’s thesis, I volunteered with the local refugee resettlement agency in Colorado Springs, Lutheran Family
Services. Beginning in June 2015 and, over the next several months, I mostly helped out with a program called Job Class. The main purpose of that class is to train and help refugees prepare for jobs here in the United States. The program educates refugees about the job application process. Refugees are also able to practice and prepare for job interviews. The program also identifies potential job expectations, and provides guidance to work through tax forms. In that position, I encountered more than a dozen refugees living in Colorado Springs.

During this time, I also volunteered as a cultural mentor for a refugee family. In this position, I taught the family how to use the oven and dishwasher, took them shopping, brought them to various medical appointments, helped with their English, and become one of their first friends in the U.S.

Thus, I met most of the participants for my interviews through this volunteering experience at LFS. I believe working with LFS gave me an insider standpoint because I was able to experience firsthand the effort that goes into the refugee resettlement process. Many of the participants had seen me around or had talked with me previously, possibly making them more willing to let me interview them. This created a level of trust with participants and I was visible when I was calling up individuals to interview them. Those that I called and had never talked with before were a little more hesitant to invite me over, while those I had talked with previously and knew me were more than willing to accommodate me right away. Only one individual did not return my phone call for a potential interview.

I used convenience sampling for my sampling method (Bradshaw and Stratford, 2010, p. 75). Participants were selected based on those who I could gain access to either
by having met them before or through a contact that was facilitated with the help from LFS. To keep confidentiality of the participants in my research project I use a pseudonym for each individual. I choose their pseudonym from a list of the most popular names from their country of origin.

Results

The Resettlement Process in Colorado Springs

Lutheran Family Services has been successfully resettling refugees in Colorado Springs since 1980. During the first initial months in the United States, refugees receive assistance from the federal government, their local resettlement agency and volunteers to assist them while adjusting to their new life in the United States. The process of resettlement begins when refugees first arrive in Colorado Springs, when a volunteer and/or a representative from the resettlement agency picks them up from the airport, and brings them to their new home. At their new home, they have a home cooked meal from their country of origin waiting for them. The first few weeks of the resettlement process is set aside for all the paper work to get sorted out and let the family settle into their new home. Refugees take a cultural orientation class where they begin to learn some of the things they need to know about American society, laws, expectations, and American culture.

Initial medical appointments are set up and the family is introduced to a volunteer who acts as a cultural mentor, who is assigned to them to guide the refugees as they adjust to their new life in Colorado Springs. These cultural mentors provide the service of
aiding the resettlement agency with everyday tasks that the agency does not have time to assist with. Examples are teaching the family how to use appliances around the house, taking them to the store, teaching them how to navigate the neighborhood they are living, how to ride the bus, and bringing them to various medical appointments for at least their first four months in the United States. The volunteer also provides guidance on how to navigate the public transit system their first and second time, but advocates for self-sufficiency so that the refugees are eventually able to navigate the city by themselves. All recently resettled refugees use the public transit system for at least their first couple months in the United States if not longer. The resettlement agency will help cover transportation costs, including a $63 monthly bus pass until the refugee starts a job, then the refugee has to pay for their own bus fare.

Volunteers are a key player in helping refugees adjust to their new life. On average LFS has 100 active volunteers who are either working with specific families outside of the office as cultural mentors, in-office interns and volunteers (including Job Class, and English as a Second Language Classes). Various other community members help with cleaning apartments for newly arriving refugees and families, donations, etc. Though it depends monthly, in the month of January 2016 the agency reported 330 volunteer hours, but this does not include all of the church partners and community partners that provide critical support for their program. Each volunteer attends an orientation meeting to provide an overview of what is expected of volunteers and how to handle certain situations. The resettlement process would not be as successful as it is without the generous aid of volunteers, according to the LFS representative.
Volunteers also help bring refugees to various medical appointments during their first initial months during the resettlement process. Volunteers may drive them to and from the appointments or they may drop them off at the appointment and have them take public transit back home, so that they can navigate to their appointments on their own in the future.

English as a second language classes are offered free for refugees for their first five years in the United States. During their initial months their English classes are catered to help the refugees communicate, like if they are having health issues, and to be able to communicate at a job. The English classes offered for refugees in Colorado Springs take place at Roy J. Wasson Academic Campus and High School in District 11 during the school year and at the First Presbyterian Church in downtown Colorado Springs during the summer. Each location is within walking distances of public transit routes. The map below shows where the refugees that I interviewed lived within Colorado Springs. The map shows that all of the participants lived along public transit system routes.

Refugees typically get a job after being the United States for three or four months. This gives them time to adjust and learn some basic communication skills in English. Their first jobs are typically entry-level jobs to allow the refugees to adjust to the job system and ethics. Interestingly, some businesses have a history of hiring refugees in Colorado Springs, including the Broadmoor and the Asian Market. Other employers include food services on Fort Carson, and kitchen jobs at various local restaurants. While these may not be long-term jobs, they provide an entry point into the local job system and begin to allow refugees to stand on their own feet.
Public vs. Private Transit

In every single interview that I conducted all the participants recognized and emphasized the importance of having a car in the United States. “What I have noticed in the United States is if you do not have a car, you don’t have shoes. Without shoes you cannot walk anywhere” (Aamir). After spending a short amount of time in the United States, all of the refugees I interviewed recognized that the U.S. is car dependent, and that owning a car makes life much easier. All of the participants have used Colorado Springs public transit system to get around Colorado Springs\(^1\). They all described the struggle it can be taking public transit to get around Colorado Springs. All of the individuals that I interviewed expressed interest in owning a car. “The dream is to have your own car because with your own car you can go on time to do anything, and everywhere on time. The bus is good but it is taking time” (Fumu). Throughout my interviews, the dichotomy of public vs. private transit became prevalent.

Public Transit

When refugees first arrive in their new home, they rely on public transit as their main mode of transportation. During the interviews three themes came up while talking about the public transit system in Colorado Springs, they included the long transit time, the amount of time waiting for the bus, and the availability of the buses.

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\(^1\) All of the participants, except for the refugee from Myanmar (Than), have used Colorado Springs public transit during their initial months of their resettlement process. Than had family already established in Colorado Springs when he arrived here, and they were able to provide rides for him to places that he needed access. Than and his family also have an American family that provides an immense amount of support for their family here in Colorado Springs. I will discuss in the results, recognizing his case is vastly different than those of other refugees.
Transit Time on the Bus

The most common complaint about taking the Colorado Springs public transit system was how long it takes to wait to take the bus. The average transit time for taking the bus was one and half hours, with most of the refugees having to take two buses to access English learning, GED, and job classes located at Roy J. Wasson Academic Campus. While the transit system did get refugees to their destinations, a common annoyance was the irregularity of the bus system. Aamir describes his typical transit journey to Wasson for his GED classes:

My class was stating at school at 9. So I had to leave the house at 7:30 because the 7:30 bus was coming to the Citadel Mall and the next bus was 8 o’clock, like bus number 6 to Constitution comes every hour. So I was early to class like every day like forty minutes. And after I got a car it’s like a five-minute drive (Aamir).

Refugees either would arrive extremely early to their destinations or would arrive late.

“Sometimes I have missed a class. This is now two times I have missed a class. Sometimes I do not wish to miss the class but because of transport I can miss it” (Dunia).

The general trend is that getting to and from key appointments, classes, and events on the public transit system takes too much time. Refugees either have to plan to make sure that they make it to their destination on time or risk being late. “The bus is good but it is taking time” (Fumu).

The amount of time that it takes to take public transit can become a problem for refuges. An example is with Uhuru and her mother Zari, Zari is unwilling to leave the house due to language barriers that she faces which results in Uhuru to carry out the responsibility of shopping, and being the primary breadwinner for her family. Uhuru’s
brother, Muamba, used to live with their family but moved out recently to live with a friend. While he was living with the family he was able to contribute resources and time to help take care of the family. However, since he has moved out most of the family’s responsibly has been shifted to Uhuru, resulting in a constraint of time for working, and getting all the chores done. With the time that I spent with Uhuru, I helped her with laundry, walked to the store to go shopping with her, and talked with her while she cooked dinner for her family. Uhuru relies on public transit and walking as her main modes of navigating the city. It takes about two hours round trip for her to walk or take the bus to and from work, which results in her unable to finish all of her chores on her work days. The amount of time it can take just taking the bus to various destination can be time consuming, but when transit time is combined with the amount of time it can take to wait for the bus it results in even less time to complete the various daily tasks that need to be completed.

*Waiting for the Bus*

Refugees also complained that they spent too much time waiting for the bus. “All the time, waiting for bus” (Nadim). During the time that I helped out with job class, individuals were always making sure that class got out before a certain time so that they would be able to catch the bus. Otherwise they would have to wait another hour for the bus to arrive again. Job class runs from noon to one, but we usually end around 12:45 to make sure that individuals make it to the bus in time. “Sometimes I have to wait maybe 30 minutes or maybe one hour I can wait” (Najah). The combination of waiting and
taking the bus can take up a substantial amount of time, resulting in less time for refugees to complete their other daily tasks.

During the winter waiting for the bus tends to become worse due to the cold winter wind and snow. When asked what is the hardest part of the resettlement process, Muna, from the Congo, responded, “The hardest part while I’m here, the bus cause when it’s cold you get to wait in the cold.” Not all the refugees resettled in Colorado Springs are used to the winter weather and the cold. The bus stops rarely have shelters, but comprise of a sign and a bench exposing those waiting to the elements. Waiting for the bus can become uncomfortable during the winter months when one is just trying to keep warm.

These long waits for the bus have to do with the frequency of the buses. The bus routes tend to have a bus come about every hour from six in the morning to around seven at night. Since the buses stop running at seven at night it makes it difficult for refugees to work later shifts like the evening and graveyard shifts because public transit is not offered as an option. All of the participants that use public transit as their main mode of transportation worked day shifts. The individuals that worked evening shifts had their own car, so finding a way home at the end of the night was not a problem for them. This leads into the next hurdle of using the public transit system in Colorado Springs, which deals with the availability of the buses.

*Availability of the Bus*

An additional criticism of the public transit system is that some buses do not run on the weekends or late at night. Out of the twenty-two bus routes only three buses run
till 10 at night, and seven run till 9 at night. Uhuru relies on public transit to get to work at the Broadmoor. She takes buses 11 and 4 to get to work, and it takes a little under an hour. The bus is reliable for getting to work throughout the week and on Saturday if she works from 8am to 3pm. However, sometimes her boss wants her to work from 3pm to 11pm, which causes problems because the bus system stops offering its services around 9pm. This results in her having to walk home late at night. The hour-long walk is a little over two miles. While Uhuru does not mind walking to work, during the winter when it’s cold and the sidewalks aren’t shoveled it can become a problem. Uhuru also has to walk to work on Sundays because bus number 4 does not run on Sundays. Fortunately, on Sundays she usually doesn’t have to walk home because she gets a ride to church with some coworkers who are friends in her congregation. This is the only time that she says that she gets a ride from someone, otherwise she relays on public transit and walking.

Aamir described his work and transit situation before he owned a car. Due to the bus services not being offered at night he was not able to work night shifts at his work. Aamir complained that he was trying to work more hours at his job, however he was unable to do so due to the only available shifts being the night shifts. Due to the poor availability of the bus services he was unable to increase his hours and eventually had to find another job.

Many of the refugees criticized the amount of buses that run during the given day. Many of the refugees had stories about how they would have to get up extra early in order to catch the bus in time for them to get to class. English classes typically start at nine in the morning; Dunia describes how she has to wake up early in order to catch the
bus to get to English class. “Because if I want to come to school I ride the 7:30. I have to get up at 6. I catch the 7:30 and I can maybe be here around 8:30 or 8:20” (Dunia).

The resettlement agency acknowledges the shortcomings of the public transit system, but there is nothing that they can do to resolve the city’s public transit deficiency. When asked, “Do you think the public transit system in Colorado Springs provides enough access to the various amenities that refugees need access to?” the LFS representative responded;

The transport system is good during the weekdays, they can access their various classes and medical appointments no problem. However public transit becomes a problem on the weekends because not all the buses run during the weekends. Which can make it difficult to go to the grocery store or to get to work (LFS Representative).

While the public transit in Colorado Springs might not be spectacular in allowing access around the city, refugees have no other option until they are able to buy a car. ²

**Private Transit**

As stated earlier, all the participants recognized the importance of a car and the ease it brings. All of the refugees recognized this during their first month in Colorado Springs when they experienced firsthand how time consuming and frustrating it can be using public transit to access the various places that they need to go. This section will explore how refugees gain access to private transit options by obtaining a driver license, buying a car, and maintaining a car.

² A couple of the refugees that I interviewed had bikes donated to them during their first few months in the United States. However, all of them either had their bike stolen or a part of the bike stolen making them unusable. Muamba did not have a lock for his bike and thought that no one would take it, meanwhile Omed and Haroon had their bikes locked up, but someone stole the front tire. Unfortunately they were unable to find a replacement tire that works for that bike.
Navigating the Drivers License Process

In my interviews, I learned there are two main ways in which refugees learned about how to obtain a drivers license. The first was through friends and family; the second was through volunteers that work with LFS. Interestingly most of the refugees from the Middle East learned how to get their drivers license through friends in the community or from family members that are already established in the United States. Indeed, ten of the twelve Middle Eastern participants received advice on how to get a drivers license from either friends or family. For example, Penaw responded “Yea, they (his friends) say first they have to test you for a permit, then practice, or schools. But my friends say after you get the permit you can practice with our car. My friends are teaching me all the rules and ways of driving.” His friends are also Kurdish and are only a two-minute walk from his home. They have been extremely helpful to Penaw by assisting him with navigating his new life in Colorado Springs, giving him rides, and providing him with home cooked meals.

Meanwhile all the refugees that I interviewed from the Congo had learned about the drivers license process from volunteers. The Colorado Driver Handbook is available online for free, however most of the refugees do not own a computer or have access to one to print it off. Uhuru, originally from the Congo, was able to obtain the Colorado Driver Handbook from her family volunteer who picked up the Handbook from the DMV. Those who did not know how to get a drivers license yet like Najah, said that they were going to ask their volunteers on how to get one. These examples show the important role that volunteers fill, and how they exchange information with the refugees.
While learning about how to navigate the drivers license process a frequent hurdle individuals have to encounter is actually passing the written and practical test. While some refugees were able to pass the written test the first time, like Aamir who knocked out both the written and the practical driving test in one day, many fail the two drivers license tests multiple times. Some of these failures have to do with language barriers. Many of the refugees are unaware that they are allowed to have a translator, either an official one or a family member, to translate the test for them. The practical driving test can also be a bit tricky to pass for those who did not drive in their home counties or abroad. For example, Askar failed his practical driving test four times.

While the tests themselves are an obstacle, the next bureaucratic process of actually obtaining the license can be tedious as well. Makin told a story about how he had to navigate the drivers license process and how he ran into multiple obstacles in obtaining one. For starters he had to translate most of the drivers booklet into Arabic with Google translate for him to fully understand the driving laws in Colorado. When it came time to take the written test he ended up failing it twice, though he passed it on his third time. However, the DMV employee informed him that he would not be allowed to get his drivers license until he fixed his names so his social security card matched his passport. His passport has four names, his first name, his father’s name, his grandfather’s name, and the name of the state where he was born. But his social security card only has two of his names listed. Makin took care of the name situation, however when he went back to get his drivers license he encountered another problem with his date of birth. He decided to leave his date of birth alone and came back another day to try again. The DMV employee he encountered this time was confused as to why he went to all the trouble with
changing his name. The employee explained that DMV employees are supposed to know that refugees might have some differences with their names on their passports and social security cards and that they should overlook this small logistical issue. He was finally able to get his drivers license after many hurdles. While it did take a couple of weeks to get his license, Makin noted that getting a drivers license in the US took substantially less time than obtaining one in Iraq, where it could take up to two months to get a license.

Lutheran Family Services does not offer any classes on how to navigate the drivers license process, buying a car, or car maintenance. The representative at LFS said that if refugees have family that already live in Colorado Springs they are helpful in providing information on the steps to obtaining a car. If refugees do not have family in Colorado Springs the representative said that the refugees tend to talk with one another and share information amongst each other or they rely on volunteers. The representative stressed the importance of volunteers and how they are able to fill a void in services that the agency cannot always help with, due to lack of time and volume of refugees that are in need of services.

**Buying a Car**

Ten of the refugees that I interviewed owned a car at the time that I interviewed them. The refugees that I talked to that own a car are from the Middle East and the participant from Myanmar. They typically bought a car within their first three to five months in the United States after they got a job. The use of the Internet and social networks that they had in Colorado Springs was the most common way that refugees found a car to buy. Most but not all, of the refugees that owned cars had driven/owned a
car in their home country, and knew how to work on cars before moving to America. This proved to be important because those who had driven in their home countries tended to get a car sooner than those who had not driven before. This is seen in the Middle Eastern population where almost all the individuals that I talked with had owned a car previously in their country or origin. Where the Congolese population had never owned cars before and none of them had bought cars within their first year in the United States. In addition, knowing how to work on a car influenced some decision-making on the type of car they were looking to buy.

An instance where social networks were utilized was with the sisters Salma and Zahra who have a friend of a friend that owns a used car dealership. That friend was able to assist their family with buying their three cars. Meanwhile the brothers Omed and Haroon draw upon a sister and an uncle in Colorado Springs for support during their adjustment period in the U.S. Their brother-in-law guided them in finding and buying a car on the Internet. The two brothers now share the car and carpool with one another. One has to pick up and drop off the other, all depending on their work schedules.

Most of the refugees that bought cars usually bought those that were available to them, and did not have any particular reason for buying any particular type of car. They would buy either a car that they could afford or a car that could fit their whole family. Makin bought his first car from a coworker/neighbo who was selling his car. He said that he soon sold it because it had accumulated substantial miles and because he needed the money at the time. He said that he had no particular reason for buying the car that he did. This compares to the brother of Zahra and Makarim. He bought a specific type of sports car because he had always wanted one but the model was not available to him in Iraq.
Then there is Aamir from Afghanistan, who specifically bought a Ford car because he already knew how to work on Fords. This prior knowledge played a big role in his car search for he didn’t want to pay for mechanical work if problems occurred with his car.

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**Car Maintenance**

Of the participants that had cars, not all the refugees knew how to work on them. For some this created problems because they did not know to address simple problems that occurred with their car or how to properly take care of the car. Askar, from Afghanistan, described the struggle he had with trying to figure out what was wrong with his car. His car kept overheating while he was driving it, and he would just pull over to the side of the road until it cooled off enough for him to keep driving. His roommate was with him one time when this happened. Luckily, his roommate knows a thing or two about cars and was able to help him. His roommate taught him what kind of coolant to buy and how to check and fill the coolant, as well as some of the other maintenance that goes into taking care of a car.

Some of the refugees that did not know how to work on cars have family in Colorado Springs that are able to teach them about car maintenance. Than from Myanmar knows how to work on motorcycles but not cars. He relies on his family to help with car maintenance. “Yea, my dad, yesterday I change my car, some oil and we fix on my car a little bit. My dad and I fixed my car” (Than). Omed and Haroon are also able to draw upon their uncle, sister, and brother-in-law to help them take care of their car. They had never driven before coming to the United States, so they did not know how to change
their oil, add coolant or window washing fluid. With the help of their family they are slowly learning how to properly take care of a car.

Lutheran Family Services does not offer any classes on car maintenance. Thus, individuals must go to the mechanic for car issues or rely on any family members that they know or friends that they make in the United States.

**Costs Affects on Transportation**

An unforeseen theme that I saw throughout the interviews was the cost of transportation. A monthly bus pass costs $63 a month. The resettlement agency covers this cost during the initial months of resettlement until the individual acquires a job. Then it is the refugee’s responsibility to cover their own transportation costs. Not all refugees end up buying a bus pass after they get a job. Since Uhuru walks to her job so often she opts out of buying a bus pass. Instead, she pays for the basic fare of $1.75 a ride, which includes transfers. She will ride the bus to work on snowy days or to her English classes twice a week. Uhuru does not mind walking and even walks two hours to the nearest Goodwill to go shopping for clothes.

Najah from the Congo, usually walks five minutes to the store because she does not want to buy a bus pass. Her volunteer gave her some big bags so that she can easily carry everything from the store. When talking about carrying everything from the store and in the weather she replied, “Yea, nothing I can’t do, I can do it” (Najah).

The refugees that had cars at the time of the interview, all bought their cars after they had obtained employment. While they all desired a car earlier on, they could not
invest in one without the financial stability of a job. All of the cars that the refugees had bought were used cars.

While talking about car maintenance with individuals, it became apparent that most of them wanted to work on their own cars not because they enjoyed it but because it cut down on costs.

Cost was an important factor in their decision when buying a car not just because of the cost of living in the United States but because many of the individuals were sending money home to their relatives. Aamir sends money back to his mother in Afghanistan regularly to help support her. I discussed Aamir’s reasoning for buying a Ford earlier in the car maintenance section because he knows how to work on Ford cars which results in lower costs of maintenance for the car. Makin also shared that he sends money back to his brother in Iraq. He even sold the first car that he bought to be able to send his brother money. From my interviews, it was clear that cost is a factor in decision-making.

**Effect of Weather on Mobility**

A little less than half of the participants were accustomed to seeing snow in their home countries. For example, Makin said that he enjoys the cold weather and that it is perfect here. Yet, many are not prepared for the cold and snowy weather of Colorado Springs. Indeed, half of my sample was not familiar with snow and had comments about how the weather affected their mobility. Zari from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, describes how the weather affected her life. During the beginning of December, she broke her foot from slipping and falling on some ice on her way to the bus stop.
Breaking her foot made her more reluctant to leave her house during the winter. Also, Zari arrived in the U.S. illiterate in her native language of Swahili and never learned to count. Navigating a city becomes that much more difficult due to not knowing how to read signs or not knowing how to communicate in English. Zari only leaves the house when her daughter Uhuru can accompany her, and help her navigate the city.

Other participants complained about the cold weather and described how it made it harder for them to get to the places that they need/want to go to.

Now this type of snow is better to be in the house when it’s cold. It is better to be in the car when you are going. You can’t walk cause in this snow you are freezing too much. Now if you have a car you are suffering less. Cause when you want to go somewhere and you need something, maybe it’s at the store or go to work. You must come out and wait for the bus to take the bus. And at that time waiting, going out for the bus, in the time the bus will come, you’ll be freezing! (Dunia.)

Although having a car might make it easier and more comfortable to travel around the city, many of the cars that refugees have do not deal with the snow that well. Most of the cars that the refugees buy are not equipped with 4-Wheel Drive, which can become a problem in the wintertime. Aamir keeps chains in his car just in case the roads get too bad and he gets stuck.

In early February 2016, a big snowstorm hit Colorado Springs with over a foot of snow. Salma told a story of how she was stuck in the snow on Fort Carson while leaving work. She was stuck with her son in the snow for two hours before someone was able to come and pull them out. Meanwhile, Zahra’s brother was driving their family van and spun out on the road near their house. They ended up hitting a fire hydrant and ripped the front bumper off their car. This snowstorm also shut down the public transit system of Colorado Springs for a day and a half, resulting in the users of the public transit system unable to get to work or other destinations.
While the weather poses an obstacle for refugees to access the places that they need to go, all of them said that one does not have a choice but to brave the cold. Uhuru said that she just bundles up with multiple jackets and scarves on her walk to work and shrugged when talking about the cold, “you just have to deal with it.” Fumu responded when asked, “Has the weather ever affected your ability to get somewhere?” with “Sometimes, but there is nothing you can do.”

Analysis

While initially conducting my research I thought that I was going to find strong evidence that social exclusion was taking place within the refugee community due to poor transit. However, my results reflect a different story. I found that the majority of the refugee population in my study is extremely resilient primarily because of both their strong and weak ties. Social networks clearly help refugees to navigate the various barriers that these individuals face while accessing transportation.

Though the barriers that are faced while accessing public transit are obstacles that any user of public transit faces, what makes refugees cases unique is their differences in the use of social networks to face these barriers. Throughout my research process it became apparent that the use of social networks in the refugee community was important. The use of social networks was especially prevalent within the Middle Eastern community where most of the participants found out how to navigate the drivers license process, and buy a car with the use of friends and family. This compares to the African
community, which relied more on volunteers and the resettlement agency to obtain information about transportation and the resettlement process more generally. This difference of the use of social networks affected whether individuals suffered from social exclusion from the community.

**Social Networks**

During my research it was interesting to see how fellow refugees interacted with their surrounding communities. Many of the refugee families live amongst each other in the same apartment complexes. While some were aware of each other and frequently exchanged information with one another, others had no idea that other refugee families were living in the same apartment building as each other. An example is when I was talking with Uhuru and Zari from the Congo, and asked if they knew any other refugees or families within the area. They said that they did not talk too much with their fellow community members. Within days I was in the same apartment complex talking with Nadim, Farha, and Halim and they did not know of the fellow refugee family living five doors down. However, Nadim, Farha, and Halim knew other refugee families from the Middle East that they exchanged information with. This example shows how individuals from the same countries tended to talk with one another, most likely due to similar languages and cultural backgrounds. While this might expand upon their weak ties to increase their social capital, it appears that other bridging weak ties don’t emerge during their initial months in the United States.

This use of social networks is prevalent throughout the Middle Eastern community in Colorado Springs. Refugees learned how to navigate the driver’s license
process and buy cars through family or friends that they have in the United States. From my observations it was prevalent that the Middle Eastern community utilized weak ties in the exchange on information. Indeed, the interview results point toward a tight knit community within the Middle Eastern population. Aamir has helped multiple fellow refugees navigate the drivers license process, and find cars including Halim, Nadim and Farha. Aamir has also helped other fellow refugees with life in America including families from Afghanistan and Pakistan that I was unable to interview. The support he provides is an example of “bonding,” networks with people who are like each other, and have similar ethnic background or languages (Ryan, 2011). Another example of refugees utilizing social networks is with Zahra and Makarim whose family bought their three cars from a friend of a friend who owns a used car dealership. It would seem that the Middle Eastern population has access to high amounts of network capital and utilize this interconnectedness to exchange information.

During the time before Job Class starts, I have witnessed firsthand the exchange of information among refugees. There have been multiple discussions on the various ways to buy and find a car in Colorado Springs. Certain individuals have offered to accompany other refugees, who cannot communicate in English very well, to go look at cars with them. Interestingly these discussions included only male refugees from the Middle East.

Not only does the Middle Eastern refugee population talk amongst themselves they also tended to know other people in the United States or Colorado Springs before moving here. I saw this as an example of the use of strong ties within the refugee population. For example, Than, Makin, Salma, Omed, and Haroon all had family
members living Colorado Springs, or in the U.S. prior to being resettled in Colorado Springs and regularly utilized these social ties to gain information to help establish themselves in their new home. Meanwhile, Aamir, Halim, Nadim, Penaw, Askar, Farha, Zahra, and Makarim all from the Middle East and all had friends or knew people living in the United States prior to being resettled in the U.S. In part, this has to do with the United States military involvement in the Middle East over recent years. A number of the individuals listed above have worked as translators for the military or have friends from Iraq and Afghanistan already living in the United States. Aamir said that he gets together with fellow translators who worked for the same company as him in Iraq and play chest regularly in Colorado Springs. Whereas Makin, who did not work as a translator but had his brother’s good friend living in Colorado Springs, was able to draw support from him in his transition in the United States.

The social networks of the Middle Eastern population align with the literature about migrant social networks (Granovetter 1973; Ryan, 2011; Samers, 2010). Where often times had social ties already living in Colorado Springs and the United States that they could draw support and obtain information from. While the resettlement agencies are the initial tie that facilitates information and settlement patterns, it does not stop refugees from moving around the United States to utilize their various weak and strong ties. An example of this is with the brothers Omed and Haroon. They have a sister living in Colorado Springs already. However, their family is moving to Virginia where they have more extended family living there, and their family is able to get them better jobs in Virginia. This example aligns with migration literature where individuals are more likely to move to areas where they have connections that can facilitate information about
potential job opportunities, housing, and other aspects of life (Brown et al., 2007; Hodagneu-Sotelo, 2007).

The Middle Eastern refugee population has access to both strong ties of family and close friends, and weak ties of the resettlement agency and volunteers to draw support from. My results also showed that the Middle Eastern refugee community is more likely to “bond” with people who are similar to them, like sharing the same country of origin or speak the same language, to exchange information. The utilization of social networks within the Middle Eastern population varied to that of the Congolese population.

The Congolese refugee participants do not have the same access to social networks as the Middle Eastern population. None of the Congolese individuals that I talked with had friends or family in the United States from whom they could obtain information from. The Congolese population tended to not share information among those who are from the same region and speak the same language as them.

Yea we have people that are from where we are from, I cannot say that they are friends, cause we come from the same country, but they give us rides sometimes… They are not friends we just talking, explain something, if there is something we don’t understand (Dunia).

While they do talk with one another at times it does not seem that the Congolese population relies or utilizes these social networks the same way as the Middle Eastern population. Uhuru does get rides from fellow people in the choir where she sings with at church on Sundays, but that is the only time that she said she gets rides from someone else. The church that she attends has their services in Swahili which shows that there is potential for the building of social networks among the African refugee population. However, none of the individuals that I talked with stressed the importance of this
community. This aligns with the findings of Ryan (2011, p. 715) in her study, “while people tend to seek friends who are like themselves in some way, it is apparent that shared ethnicity may not be a sufficient basis for close friendships.” All of the individuals that I interviewed from the Congo said that they obtained information about how to get a drivers license from volunteers.

The Congolese refugee population does not have the same type ties in social networks to rely on for information about their host country as the Middle Eastern population. None of the Congolese participants had family members or close friends living the United States already to draw upon for support, meaning that they are missing strong ties to help facilitate integration. The prevalence of weak ties throughout the Congolese population was also missing with most of the refugees receiving information about how to navigate into private transit from the resettlement agency and/or volunteers. Where in the Middle Eastern population bonding was occurring with individuals that were similar to them, this was not the case in the Congolese population.

It is important to note that the resettlement agency is seen as a social tie for the refugees to utilize during their initial months in the United States. Both Ryan (2011) and Wilson (1998) note that social ties tend to change throughout the migrants life. The resettlement agency and volunteers are seen as important weak ties that refugees rely on during their first few months of the resettlement process. However, as time goes on support from the resettlement agency ends at about four months of being in the United States. Volunteers that are cultural mentors are not expected to keep helping out with families after about four or five months of working with them. This is due to the model of the United States resettlement program that advocates for self-sufficiently. Volunteers
of course are allowed to keep working their families if they want to, because friendships are made and are encouraged to continue. However, this is an example of how some weak ties are phased out of the refugee’s lives. Other weak ties may grow to become strong ties like friends made during the various classes that are offered, coworkers, and volunteers. The LFS represented did express that refugees tend to talk amongst each other to exchange information, showing that social ties do play an important role in the resettlement process.

The literature on the refugee resettlement and social networks in Canada and the U.K. points toward the importance of social networks with family, friends, and various “weak ties” in order to successfully integrate into their host society. While the participants in my study utilized social networks, especially among the Middle Eastern population, these “strong ties” in social networks do not seem as critical in order to achieve successful integration in the U.S. The use of social networks proved to be useful in obtaining information, and exchanging resources. However, from the responses of the participants, the role of the resettlement agency and the services it provides are just as important as the use of social networks (Brown et al., 2007; Trudeau, 2012). This supports the findings of Brown et al. (2007), Kraly (2008), and Singer and Wilson (2006), who acknowledge the importance of the role that resettlement agencies play in successful integration. If anything, the resettlement agencies provide another type of social network to help refugees establish their lives during their initial months of resettlement.
Conclusion

Through this study I was able to develop an understanding on how the twenty refugee participants navigate their life in Colorado Springs by focusing on their uses of transportation. Social networks clearly played a role in the exchanging of information about obtaining a drivers license and buying a car. But challenges emerged as well, especially for those with fewer ties. In addition, this case study was able to reveal that those who utilize public transit as their main mode of transportation in Colorado Springs tend to suffer from higher levels of social exclusion than those who are able to purchase a car.

While gateway cities may seem like the ideal locations to resettle refugees due to their extensive public transit systems, established refugee communities, and diversity; resettling refugees in non-traditional resettlement locations also has its benefits. These non-traditional locations have been successful in dispersing the refugee population throughout the United States, so much so, that many Americans’ do not realize how many refugees the United States have actually resettled. This dispersion has been one of the keys to the success of our resettlement system, for it allows various economic opportunities for refugees in the various cities instead of a concentration in a particular sector in gateway cities. The Lutheran Family Services representative highlighted some of the advantages to resettling refugees in Colorado Springs, “Colorado Springs has good services here and it is relatively inexpensive compared to other cities that refugees are being resettled in.”
Many of the refugees expressed how much they enjoyed living in Colorado Springs. “I don’t see a reason to move. It’s a quiet place; I need to stay where it is quite. It is good” (Muna). Zahra expressed how she actually liked living here because it was a smaller city and there wasn’t as much traffic as in Baghdad, where she is from, or Denver, where she has visited.

Adriana- Do you ever think that you would want to move?
Zahra - Noooo, I like it here, its calm it’s quite, its peaceful. I like being in a big city. Denver is fun but I like going there on the weekends, but aside from the weekends I like it here just fine. The traffic is a lot less, it’s peaceful. I like it here.

Since there is such a difference in the use of social networks between the refugee populations, I think it would be beneficial for the resettlement agency to provide an informational pamphlet about how to negotiate the barriers of private transit. The pamphlet could provide details about how to obtain a drivers license, helpful tips, the DMV address, and the drivers license handbook so that they can study for the test. The pamphlet could also have information about the various used car dealerships located in Colorado Springs so that it will be easier for refugees to find a car. This would be extremely beneficial for those refugee populations that do not access to various ties in their new settlement location. For example the Congolese population relies on the resettlement agency and volunteers to facilitate information, but can only utilize these weak ties during their initial months of resettlement. This would maximize the amount of information that they are getting from these weak ties.

While talking with the Lutheran Family Services representative it became apparent that there are a plethora of volunteers that want to help out with refugee resettlement. However, the potential volunteers are not all being utilized due to the
limited volunteer positions available. I think a program could be created where volunteers could help refugees who have permits learn how to drive and help fulfill their permit driving requirement hours. Also, a class about car maintenance could be created to help mitigate the knowledge gap of car maintenance within the refugee population. These suggestions can help maximize the benefits of the weak ties of the resettlement agency and volunteers to their fullest potential to assist and create equal opportunities for refugees to receive information about their transportation options.

It would also be beneficial for the businesses that have a history of hiring refugees to offer transportation services for those who work during shifts when the bus services are not offered. From my interview results it seems that refugees tend to concentrate in certain communities, which would make it easier for businesses to offer transit to their employees. Businesses could also offer resources to help their employees network and connect to find individuals to car pool with.

While all the refugees that I interviewed face the same barriers to transportation, like struggling with public transit, navigating the drivers license process, and buying a car; having access to social networks and utilizing strong and weak ties proves to be beneficial for assistance with acquiring private transit. My results showed that the Middle Eastern population has more access to social networks through both strong and weak ties, while the Congolese refugee population only had accesses to weak ties. These differences in access and use of social networks affected ones ability to navigate the various transportation options.
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Zahra, personal communication, February 6, 2016.

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Appendix 1: Open-Interview Questions for Refugee Participants

**Background**
Where were you born and where have you lived most of your life?

Did you live in a different country before other than your home country before coming to the United States? How long were you there for?

How many people did you come to the US with? (How big is your family?)

How was the resettlement process? What has been the hardest part of the resettlement process for you?

How long have you lived in the U.S.?

Did you have a particular country that you wanted to be resettled in? Where were you hoping to move to? The U.S. or another country? Why?

What have been some obstacles that you have faced in the United States? How did you overcome them?

Did you have a job in your home country (or any other countries that you lived in?) What was your job?

Do you have a job now?

Where did you learn English?

**Transportation Questions**
What is your main mode of transportation?
- walking
- biking
- taking the bus
- driving
- carpooling
- taxi
- other

How long does it take you to get to the store? To get to school? To get to work?
How far away is your house from the nearest bus stop? How long does it take you to walk to it?

At what time do you work? Does the bus run at that time?

What are some of the challenges for you in Colorado Springs? In terms of travel?

When you first arrived in the US how did you get to your medical appointments? Bus, walk, volunteer took you, agency took you, other

When you first arrived how did you get to classes like English learning class and the job class?

What is the most common reason you need to travel?

Do you live close to the places you need to get to? Can you walk to them or do you need to take the bus or drive?

How often do you have difficulty getting to where you need to go? Why do you have difficulty getting to where you need to go?

Has weather ever affected your ability to get some place? How so? Tell me about an experience.

Have you ever missed a medical appointment, or class? Why did you miss it? Ex: opportunity is not located on bus route, bus wasn't running at the time. Tell me about the experience

Describe an experience when you haven't been able to do what you want to do due to lack of transportation.

If you could ask the mayor to help you with one thing what would it be?

**Car Questions**

Do you think having a car in the U.S. is important?

Do you have a driver’s license? How long were you in the U.S. before you got a drivers license? How did you get a drivers license?

How did you learn about how to get a drivers license?

Did you drive in your home country? If no, how did you learn how to drive in the U.S.?

Do you or your family own a car? If yes, how long were you in the US before you got a car? How did you buy the car? Describe the process.
Where did you look when you were trying to find a car? Newspaper, internet, friends, other

What kind of car do you have? Why did you choose that particular car?

**Social Networks**
Do you rely on anyone else (friends, community members) to get to places that you need to go?

Is there a time when you have felt uncomfortable asking someone for a ride?

How do you exchange the favor for carpooling? Do you feel like you need to repay them in any way?

Do you know many people in the community where you live?

Are you part of a church or any organizations where you get to meet new people and talk with them? Do you draw support from them?

Do you know anyone else in the United States? Where do they live? Do you want to move to where they are?

Do you keep in contact with friends and family back in your home country? How do you keep in contact with them?

**Future**
Are you going to try and further your education at all? Do you want to get your GED, college education or any other type of schooling?

What would you live to study?

What type of job do you want to have in the future or would like to get?

What are your hopes for the future? For your family/children? What would you like for yourself? Your children?

Do you want to move to different city in the future? For what reasons.

**Demographic Questions**
In what year were you born? How old are you?

In a year does your family make less than $25,000, $25,000-$50,000, $50,000-$80,000, or $80,000 or more.

What is your address?
Appendix 2: Interview Questions for Resettlement Agency

Questions for Resettlement Agency
1. How long has the agency been resettling refugees for in Colorado Springs?
2. How do you go about finding housing for newly settled refugees?
3. In your opinion what is the most common problem that affects newly resettled refugees?
4. Do you think the public transportation system in Colorado Springs provides enough access to the various amenities that refugees need access to?
5. On a sale of 1 to 5 with 1 being very bad to 5 being great, on average how is the refugee population access to transportation?
6. How do you find the locations for the various classes that are offered for refugees?
7. How do refugees navigate the driver’s license process?
8. Do you have educational workshops on getting a drivers license, buying/leasing a car, car maintenance?
9. Does refugee resettlement aid cover transportation expenses?
10. On average how many volunteers do you have helping out?
11. Do any of the refugees, that Lutheran Family Services in Colorado Springs has helped, moved elsewhere in the U.S.? Why?
Appendix 3: Institutional Review Board Approval

University of Colorado
Colorado Springs
Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects

Date: 11/18/2015

IRB PROTOCOL NO.: 16-072
Protocol Title: The Mobility Patterns of Refugees in Colorado Springs
Principal Investigator: Adriana Morken
Faculty Advisor if Applicable: Emily Skop
Application: New Application
Type of Review: Expedited 7
Risk Level: No more than Minimal Risk
Renewal Review Level (If changed from original approval) if Applicable: N/A No Change
This Protocol involves a Vulnerable Population: N/A (No Vulnerable Population)
Expires: 17 November 2016

* Note, if exempt: If there are no major changes in the research, protocol does not require review on a continuing basis by the IRB. In addition, the protocol may match more than one review category not listed.

Externally funded: ☐ No ☐ Yes
OSP #: Sponsor:

Thank you for submitting your Request for IRB Review. The protocol identified above has been reviewed according to the policies of this institution and the provisions of applicable federal regulations. The review category is noted above, along with the expiration date, if applicable.

Once human participant research has been approved, it is the Principal Investigator’s (PI) responsibility to report any changes in research activity related to the project:

- The PI must provide the IRB with all protocol and consent form amendments and revisions.
  - The IRB must approve these changes prior to implementation.
- All advertisements recruiting study subjects must also receive prior approval by the IRB.
- The PI must promptly inform the IRB of all unanticipated serious adverse (within 24 hours). All unanticipated adverse events must be reported to the IRB within 1 week (see 45CFR46.103(b)(5)). Failure to comply with these federally mandated responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of the project.
- Renew study with the IRB prior to expiration.
- Notify the IRB when the study is complete.

If you have any questions, please contact Research Compliance Specialist in the Office of Sponsored Programs at 719-255-3903 or irb@uccs.edu

Thank you for your concern about human subject protection issues, and good luck with your research.

Sincerely yours,

Michele Okun, PhD
IRB Reviewer