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"Even If You Have Food in Your House, It Will Not Taste Sweet": Central African Refugees' Experiences of Cultural Food Insecurity and Other Overlapping Insecurities in Tampa, Florida

Shaye Soifoine
University of South Florida

“Even If You Have Food in Your House, It Will Not Taste Sweet”: Central African Refugees’ Experiences of Cultural Food Insecurity and Other Overlapping Insecurities in Tampa, Florida

by

Shaye Soifoine

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Department of Applied Anthropology
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Dr. Dillon Mahoney
Roberta Baer, Ph.D.
David Himmelgreen, Ph.D.
Sibel Kusimba, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, resettled African refugee populations experience food insecurity at rates up to seven times higher than those of the general population. In Tampa, Florida, anthropologists have documented high levels of food insecurity among Central African refugee households since members of this population began to be resettled in the area in 2016. Utilizing an intersectional lens and drawing upon theoretical concepts such as cultural food security, navigational capital, and social reproduction, this thesis examines how Central African refugees, particularly women, experience food (in)security and other overlapping forms of (in)security as they integrate into US systems of structural inequality amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and following major admission and funding changes to the US refugee resettlement and integration system. Data were collected in two phases (n=18 households; n=6 women) using ethnographic methods such as interviews, participant observation, and go-alongs. Findings indicate that Central African refugee households' cultural food security has been negatively impacted by disruptions in supply chains of traditional foods caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and by the informalization of local refugee resettlement and integration services. Much attention is paid to how the passing of risk and responsibility from refugee service providers (RSPs) to Central African refugee households and their informal social networks creates and exacerbates gendered and intersectional precarity and vulnerability. Specifically, this thesis examines gendered differences in mobility, paid labor, and social reproduction. It also discusses how individuals and households use navigational capital to negotiate structural inequalities as they attempt to build prosperous and successful lives in the United States. This project provides seven

recommendations for improving the capacity of the local refugee resettlement system to better meet the needs of the Central African refugee community.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Research

The objective of this project is to explore how Central African refugees, particularly women, experience food (in)security and other overlapping forms of (in)security as they integrate into US systems of structural inequality amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and following major admission and funding changes to the US refugee resettlement and integration system. Because the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare and exacerbated the negative effects of long-standing economic disparities, there has been renewed public attention for social issues within the United States and abroad (see the 2020 special issue of Human Organization on COVID-19 including Gray, Himmelgreen, and Romero-Daza 2020 and Mahoney et al. 2020b). In the United States, skyrocketing levels of food insecurity briefly caught the public's attention in 2020 as the devastating impact of the early pandemic was vividly captured in widely circulated images[1] of seas of people in vehicles waiting in line to receive free food from food banks and masked volunteers and staff loading boxes of food into backseats, truck beds, and trunks. While these images may contribute to the narrative that food insecurity in the United States is limited to crises, national statistics reveal that US food insecurity rates have hovered at 10-15% for the past two decades (USDA 2021). Obscured within these figures is the reality that Americans of Color experience food insecurity at a much higher rate than White Americans (Feeding America 2021). In addition, many studies have shown food insecurity to be a common,

[1] These images were shown across all major US media outlets regardless of political affiliation.

and often unexpectedly severe experience for immigrants and refugees (Sellen et al. 2002; Hadley, Zodhiates, and Sellen 2007; Gallegos, Ellies, and Wright 2008; Hadley, Patil, and Nahayo 2010; Dharod et al. 2011; Peterman et al. 2013; Gichunge et al. 2015; McElrone et al. 2019; Baer et al. 2021). This is especially true for US-based African refugee populations who are often reported as having food insecurity rates between 50% and 85% (Hadley and Sellen 2006; Hadley, Zodhiates, and Sellen 2007; Dharod et al. 2011; Baer et al. 2021). According to research conducted among the Central African refugee community in Tampa, Florida, food insecurity has been a major issue for many households since 2016 (Mahoney et al. 2020b; Baer et al. 2021).

This project builds upon several applied anthropological research projects that have recently been conducted among the Central African refugee community in Tampa, Florida (Holbrook 2019; Holbrook et al. 2019; Mahoney et al. 2020a; Mahoney et al. 2020b; Baer et al. 2021; Billingsley and Mahoney 2021; Inks 2021). By drawing upon the connections established by these researchers, I was able to quickly build rapport with multiple stakeholders including a community-based non-profit, American Relief for World Migrants and Refugees (AR4WRM), as well as members of the Central African refugee community and the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force, a consortium of volunteers and refugee service providers (RSPs) who work with refugees via several state and non-profit entities in the area. These previous projects also provided longitudinal insights on the Central African refugee community as well as the state of refugee resettlement in the area. By establishing working relationships and identifying community needs, these research projects made the breadth of this applied project possible.

Throughout this thesis, I discuss how members of the Central African refugee community perceive the food available in the United States, as well as how they experience food (in)security and other overlapping (in)securities. This project is part of a team-based engaged collaboration

with AR4WRM which seeks to advocate and create culturally and linguistically appropriate educational materials for the Central African refugee community. This project also aims to provide recommendations to multiple stakeholders on the best ways to address cultural food insecurity within the Central African refugee community. Recommendations for creating and implementing more gender equitable resettlement and integration services will also be given.

In this thesis, I add ethnographic texture to the small body of work that examines the relationship between culture and food (in)security. Despite a plethora of sociocultural studies that consider food and identity, the intersection of culture and food insecurity remains under-investigated. This is an especially important topic because a desire to eat culturally appropriate food is sometimes (wrongly) contrived as a barrier to food security for refugees (Gichunge et al. 2015; McElrone et al. 2019). To recognize that food security is more than the availability, access, and use of any type of food, I draw upon the concept of cultural food security which was coined by Power (2008) and recently expanded upon by Moffat, Mohammed, and Newbold (2017). I also contribute a gendered intersectional sociocultural and political economic analysis of overlapping insecurities to the body of work on refugees. Such an approach is vital because refugees' ethnic background and immigration status is often privileged as their core identity. This means their experiences are rarely viewed through gendered and/or other intersectional identity lenses.

This project's approach to the COVID-19 pandemic also makes it unique. When I first began framing this project in early 2021, the pandemic appeared to be waning. Then, in June 2021, just weeks into this study, the more transmittable delta variant became the dominant strain of COVID-19 in the United States (Anthes 2021). Despite the delta surge, no member of the Central African refugee community told me they were concerned about COVID-19. For many

participants, the immediate effects of the pandemic were short-lived as they temporally lost their jobs but were back to work months before the start of this project. Thus, this study's minimal discussion of COVID-19 is a purposeful refusal to engage in a state-based crisis narrative that erases the historical and political-economic structures which have contributed to the pandemic. Moreover, few studies have de-centered COVID-19 to show how the pandemic has become just another risk factor among many for precarious and vulnerable households and communities.

Overview of the Central African Refugee Community

Reflecting on the Labels Used in this Thesis

For this project, all participants are refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) who were forcibly displaced by the waves of ethnic and gender-based violence that followed the end of colonial rule, the Rwandan Genocide, and the First and Second Congo Wars (Stearns 2012; Mahoney et al 2020a; Inks 2021). While this population is commonly labeled as Congolese refugees by policy documents and members of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force, the contestedness of Congolese identity is a core aspect of the historic and ongoing violence in the eastern part of the DRC near the borders of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania. In acknowledgement of this reality, anthropologists from the University of South Florida (USF) have been referring to this group as Refugees from the Congo Wars (RFCW) in publications since 2020 (see Mahoney et al. 2020a; Mahoney et al. 2020b; Baer et al. 2021; Inks 2021). However, to be inclusive[2] and to recognize that members of this population wish to distance themselves from their past experiences of violence, I will be referring to this population as Central African refugees. This choice is especially fitting for younger Central African refugees

[2] When I was framing this project, it seemed likely that African refugees from other backgrounds would be arriving in Tampa, Florida.

as many of them do not remember or have never been to the DRC since they either fled the country when they were children or were born on refugee camps (Mahoney et al. 2020a).

Although I use the term community throughout this thesis to reference the Central African refugees living in Tampa, Florida, there are both overlaps and gaps in the social networks of these individuals and households. According to Mahoney et al. (2020a), these networks often "emerge along ethnolinguistic lines as much for practical reasons of communication as for reasons of power" (79).[3] Although networks may not always emerge according to previous camp-based experiences, the identities formed while living on camps in Burundi, Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda for 10-20 years are important for many Central African refugees (Mahoney et al. 2020a). Moreover, individuals' and households' previous access to opportunities and resources, or lack thereof, on camps significantly impacts their lives in the United States. For example, Central African refugees who previously lived in Uganda under the "self-reliance" model (Betts et al. 2019), which gave them the freedom to pursue education and employment, and sometimes even live off-camp, are better prepared for life in the United States (Mahoney et al. 2020a; Inks 2021).

Given that the eastern DRC has always been populated by a "mixture of multilingual and multireligious East and Central African peoples" (Mahoney et al. 2020a:79), it is unsurprising that Central African refugees are experts at maintaining and using multiple, flexible identities (Mahoney et al. 2020a; Inks 2021). Rather than casting off identities, many Central African refugees draw upon their deep ethnolinguistic backgrounds and their camp-based identities while working to build their US identities. Thus, while there are many differences within the "community," there are also many similarities. This means that most Central African refugees

[3] As I will later discuss, these networks are also highly gendered.

will, at least occasionally, build and draw upon connections with individuals and households who are both like them and quite different from them for the purpose of accessing resources and supporting each other in the transition to US life.

Previous Research among the Study Population

Two anthropological research projects recently conducted among the Central African refugee community in Tampa, Florida are especially important for this study. The first is an applied nutritional project conducted by Baer et al. (2021)[4] which began in 2016 and continued through the summer of 2017. This project utilized interviews with household heads, anthropometric measurements, dietary recalls, and focus groups with youth and adults to examine intergenerational and gendered experiences of food insecurity and dietary transition. According to the researchers, food security was a major challenge for Central African refugee households prior to the pandemic as approximately half of the 12 participating households were having problems with food. Moreover, many of the food insecure households were having issues with their food-assistance benefits, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Specifically, they found that these families' benefits were "either lapsed or they were not taking full advantage of the programs available to them" (2021:7). This is a critical finding as RSPs are supposed to educate refugees about and assist them with these benefits.

This project also builds upon a rapid ethnographic assessment that was conducted during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic from May-June 2020 (Mahoney et al. 2020b).[5] Drawing upon their existing rapport with community members, these researchers conducted interviews, participant observation, and community support via phone, WhatsApp, and Zoom.

[4] Everything in this paragraph is coming from Baer et al. (2021).
[5] Everything in this paragraph is coming from Mahoney et al. (2020b).

These methods allowed them to safely examine Central African refugee households' understandings of the pandemic and assess the community's ability to protect themselves from the novel virus given their exposure to underlying inequalities derived from being under resettled. According to these researchers, the early pandemic's economic impacts were acutely felt among the Central African refugee community as many household members either lost their jobs or had their working hours cut in its wake. They found that out of a sample of 21 households, only two Central African refugee families (10%) had received unemployment benefits, while sixteen (76%) were unable to successfully navigate the system. As a result, most Central African refugee families struggled to pay their bills and rent and to buy more food than usual as their children were no longer eating at school. According to these researchers, "six families (29%) reported they did not have enough food [… to eat] and eight of the fifteen families who had enough food said it was only because of food stamps" (2020b:277).

Research Aim and Questions

This project was designed to further explore and then address critical issues that have been highlighted in previous projects with Central African refugees in Tampa, Florida. As discussed, these community issues include poor nutritional status and structural barriers to food security prior to the pandemic (Baer et al. 2021) as well as negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic including high levels of food insecurity and problems accessing states benefits before July 2020 (Mahoney et al. 2020b). Through their sustained efforts, anthropologists from USF Anthropology and Public Health have been able to identify and, at times, fill gaps in the formal refugee resettlement system and meet the urgent, basic needs of many Central African refugee households. However, much of the collaborative effort exerted by the anthropologists, local refugee non-profits, and RSPs has been focused on addressing "crises" (see Cabot 2019 for a

critique of anthropologists studying refugee crises). Too often, the structural causes of these crises, including the local RSPs' roles in creating them, are ignored by powerholders within the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force. Moreover, despite the critical counter narratives provided by the anthropologists, and the founder of AR4WRM, the powerholders tend to shift the blame for these crises onto the Central African refugees themselves. Thus, from its inception, the central aim of this applied project has been to engage in immediate anthropology that goes beyond crisis and deficit narratives by prioritizing community members' experiences, knowledge, and perceptions (Billingsley and Mahoney 2021) and to use these findings to provide recommendations to those with power.

To accomplish this, I worked closely with the founder, and strong advocate behind, the community-based non-profit American Relief for World Refugees and Migrants (AR4WRM). The help I received from my major professor, Dr. Dillon Mahoney, to set up this internship and research partnership was essential and is greatly appreciated.

This project was guided by the following research questions:

1. How are Central African refugee households in Tampa, Florida attaining or striving for cultural food security amidst the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How do the intersectional identities (ethnic, gender, class, generational, and racial, etc.) of Central African refugees shape their experiences with resettlement and integration in the United States?
3. What role can American Relief for World Refugees and Migrants play in helping the resettled Central African refugee community build social and navigational capital?

Thesis Organization

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces food insecurity as a common experience for refugees, particularly US-based African refugees. It also explains how this project builds upon previous research conducted among Central African refugees in Tampa, Florida, and reflects on two labels used throughout this thesis – Central African and community. Finally, it discusses the research questions that have guided this project and outlines the structure of this thesis.

Chapter 2 considers how refugee populations are impacted by US policies. It begins with a brief history of US refugee resettlement policy, including historical trends in refugee admittance caps. It then deconstructs the term refugee to show how a broad usage of this label is negatively impacting Central African refugees. The chapter also discusses how the structure of the US refugee resettlement system disadvantages many members of the Central African refugee community in Tampa, Florida. Attention is then given to the recent defunding of the US refugee resettlement system and the devastating impacts these changes have had on the study population. Because this thesis is partially focused on Central African refugees' experiences of food, the chapter concludes with a brief history of US food-assistance policy and a critical look at how two Florida benefits systems failed to protect residents from risk amidst COVID-19.

Chapter 3 examines literature relevant to the intersections of this project which include culture, food, labor, gender, and mobility. The chapter begins with a brief description of nutritional anthropology, the main subfield in which this project is grounded. It then discusses the intersection of culture and food through the lens of identity before turning to the topic of food insecurity. The discussion of food insecurity centers the intersection of food and culture by championing the concept of cultural food security. Next, the chapter touches upon the negative

impact of immobility on food security, and then examines the intersection of mobility and gender. The discussion of gender is continued in the last section which focuses on labor and connects structural violence, precarity, and vulnerability to social reproduction.

Chapter 4 situates this project within applied anthropology and reflects on the politics of conducting community-based research. It then gives a description of how I entered the field, including recruitment, sampling, and my positionality, before moving to a discussion of why adapting research methods to the field is critical. This chapter also details the research methods used to collect data in two phases with the Central African refugee community as well as within networks adjacent to this community. The methods include ethnographic interviews, go-alongs, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews. The chapter ends with a reflection on how I used recursive analysis (LeCompte and Schensul 2012) to analyze data while in the field, during late data collection, and after a six-week project hiatus.

Chapter 5 presents the findings from the first project phase and includes the sample demographics from both phases. Phase one findings are divided into two sections. The first section is ethnographic findings. This section details participants' perceptions of African, American, and other types of food as well as the cultural importance of African food. The ethnographic section also includes participants' experiences of food in America, including their intergenerational food preferences. The second section is quantified findings, and it summarizes the findings relevant to three aspects of cultural food security.

Chapter 6 synthesizes project findings, themes and broader issues that emerged during recursive analysis, and relevant literature into three overarching themes – cultural food insecurity, the informalization of US refugee resettlement, and overlapping insecurities. The first theme contextualizes cultural food insecurity within the Central African refugee community. It is

divided in four sub-themes which are aligned with the four pillars of cultural food security. Within this theme, much attention is paid to the negative impacts of COVID-19 on supply chains for traditional foods. The ways in which gendered mobility and labor impact households' cultural food security are also explored. The second theme documents how the informalization of US refugee resettlement is negatively impacting Central African refugees. The third theme shows how members of the Central African refugee community experience and navigate overlapping insecurities. Sub-themes include overlapping insecurities, precarity, vulnerability, shifting social reproduction responsibilities, and social networks and navigational capital. Because this theme draws heavily upon data collected during the second phase of this project, gender (and intersectional) analysis is centered throughout. Only the relationship between vulnerability and gendered mobility is given special attention. This chapter concludes with Fatima's story which is a powerful demonstration of the relentlessness of overlapping insecurities and the tenacity of individuals, households, and their communities.

Chapter 7 summarizes the main findings of this project as well as the scholarly contributions. Then it discusses how the findings from this project have been applied as well as avenues for future research and application. The chapter also provides seven recommendations for improving the capacity of the local refugee resettlement system to better meet the needs of the Central African refugee community. To conclude, I offer a reflection on my third research question which asks, "what role can American Relief for World Refugees and Migrants play in helping the resettled Central African refugee community build social and navigational capital?"

CHAPTER TWO:

REFUGEES AND POLICY

Introduction

The contradictions created by competing altruistic, humanitarian logics which seek to alleviate suffering and capitalistic, economic logics which seek to promote self-sufficiency are present in US refugee resettlement policy as well as most other US social policies. At the core of these contradictions is a broader discussion about whether the government, individuals, or their social networks should be responsible for managing risk (see Giddens 1991; Beck, Lash, and Wynne 1992; Beck 2004; Mahoney 2016, 2017). For this thesis, it is important to understand how US refugee resettlement policy shapes and constricts Central African refugees' lives and the risks they face and take, as well as how other US social policies intersect to expose particular individuals, households, and communities to more compounded risk.

A Brief History of US Refugee Resettlement

The current US refugee resettlement system is an outgrowth of President Truman's dual desire to provide humanitarian assistance to displaced Europeans following World War II and to cement America's place as a global leader in the post-War era (see Haines 2022).[6] In the early days of refugee resettlement, religious organizations were tasked with *taking care* of resettled refugees and generating the necessary funds to do so. Slowly, the federal government began to take more fiscal responsibility for refugee care until the 1980s, when under President Reagan,

[6] Everything in the first two paragraphs is coming from Haines (2022).

refugee resettlement was defunded and bureaucratized. These changes to the refugee resettlement system mirror broader shifts in US politics, including the dismantling of most public benefits.

After the passage of the 1980 Refugee Act, the refugee admissions cap was set at 50,000. However, actual arrivals were much lower. For the next two decades, and especially following 9/11, refugees from more diverse and less privileged backgrounds were admitted to the United States. Notably, the number of African refugee arrivals increased sharply from almost zero prior to 1980 to nearly 50% of all new arrivals by the early 2000s.[7] Under the Bush and Obama administrations, approximately 40,000 to 85,000 refugees were granted permission to enter the United States per year. The exception to these figures were the two fiscal years (FYs) following 9/11 when refugee admissions plummeted to 27,000 and 28,000, respectively. Although broad humanitarian-based refugee admittance that granted entrance to greater numbers of refugees who would have more difficulties integrating into the United States continued under the Obama administration, the funding for and the length of resettlement did not increase accordingly.

More recently, the Trump administration governed during a period of record numbers of forcibly displaced persons internationally. Yet, the administration reduced the United States' refugee admissions cap annually (Kerwin and Nicholson 2021). In the last months of the Trump administration, FY 2021, the refugee admissions cap was set at an all-time low of 15,000 (US Department of State 2021). Upon taking office, the Biden administration did not raise the refugee admissions cap until they were faced with mounting political pressure from members of their own political party. In May 2021, the administration raised the refugee admissions cap to 62,500 (Shear and Kanno-Youngs 2021). However, approximately 400 fewer refugees entered the

[7] According to Haines, "one of the embarrassments at the time of the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980 was how few African refugees were admitted to the United States" (2022:6).

United States in FY 2021 than during the COVID-19 border closures in FY 2020 (The Associated Press 2021). In the next fiscal year, the refugee admissions cap soared to 125,000.[8]

Despite the refugee admissions cap being increased to a figure that was last seen in the 1990s, the damage done to the US refugee resettlement and integration service framework by the Trump administration's budget cuts is going to take years to remedy (Kerwin and Nicholson 2021). Thus, any population resettled during this period is likely to face major challenges as RSPs will be working with more clients with less resources while also trying to recruit staff and rebuild community connections. Because the trend of allocating more visas to African refugees than any other population continues, they will likely be the most impacted.

In this thesis, I do not advocate for a return to the early days of US refugee resettlement. Instead, I seek to explain who is most exposed to risk within uncaring, violent systems and to describe how these individuals and households navigate their lives. Moreover, I critically reflect on whose caring labor is co-opted when *providing care* is not at the core of formalized organizations and systems.

The Politics of Defining "Refugee"

According to Shore and Wright (1997), "a key feature of modern power is the masking of the political under the cloak of neutrality" (8,9). Because the term refugee is blurred in legal, political, and vernacular usage by powerful actors who continuously categorize and count people for the purpose of assigning, or denying, them rights and benefits, it is important to define and use the term refugee clearly. For the purposes of this thesis, I define the term refugee in accordance with the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.[9] The

[8] For more information about the 2022 FY refugee admissions cap see the following October 2021 US government memorandum at https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/10/08/memorandum-for-the-secretary-of-state-on-presidential-determination-on-refugee-admissions-for-fiscal-year-2022/.
[9] This was the first document to define the term.

convention states, "a refugee is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion."[10] In 1967, a protocol was added to the 1951 convention, but the original definition of the term refugee was unchanged. In fact, this definition of refugee is used by many governing bodies. For example, the US government's definition of refugee as outlined under Section 101(a)(42)(B) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA)[11] is nearly identical to the definition provided by UNHCR. However, what matters the most is not necessarily the political-legal definition of the term refugee, but rather who is encompassed under the definition.

In everyday conversations, the English word refugee is used to label people who are seeking safety (i.e., refuge) from unsafe or undesirable circumstances.[12] Because few Americans understand the nuances of US immigration law, which is used to govern entry into the country, and given the uncritical use of the term refugee in US media, refugees are often understood in political discourse to be anyone who enters the United States for humanitarian or even economic reasons. This vernacular conflation of asylees, entrants, undocumented immigrants, refugees, special visa holders, etc. is problematic because each of these terms have political-legal definitions which are used to assign rights, benefits, and sometimes, limit the number of individuals allowed to enter in according with admissions caps. Since the Trump administration

[10] The full convention and protocol are available online. https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/basic/3b66c2aa10/convention-protocol-relating-status-refugees.html.
[11] The Refugee Act of 1980 added this definition into the INA. Importantly, this is the definition of refugee that is used when the US government announces the yearly refugee admissions cap. The yearly refugee admissions cap uses geographical as well as referral type to create sub-quotas. Based on the US Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration's FY 2021 report to Congress, it seems that asylees and most Cuban/Haitian entrants are not counted towards the yearly refugee admissions cap. However, other ORR eligible populations, such as individuals who entered through the USRAP process (i.e., Central African refugees), special visa holders, and Afghan nationals, are counted. https://www.state.gov/reports/report-to-congress-on-proposed-refugee-admissions-for-fy-2021/.
[12] In Swahili, the word for refugee is *wakimbizi*, which means people who have been made to run/flee.

politically constricted all entry channels into the United States through executive orders upon taking office in 2017, the distinctions between these terms have become even more obscured in the public mind. After years of negative representations of immigrants and refugees by politicians and in the media (Baker 2020), many progressive Americans are reluctant to use the term refugee for fear that it is derogatory.[13] For the refugees discussed in this thesis, such refusals are problematic because refugee is a rights-based label which they sought out.

In August 2021, when I began to attend online meetings[14] with the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force, I realized many of the professionals in attendance were applying the label refugee to diverse groups of people including Central African refugees, Cuban and Haitian entrants, and more recently, Afghan humanitarian parolees. At first, I thought they were conflating these diverse groups via a vernacular usage of the term refugee. However, after following the funding flows and policy, it became clear that the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) under the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHH) is recategorizing diverse groups of people as refugees. ORR uses the term refugee to refer to individuals who entered the United States via the USRAP as well as all individuals eligible for its services including asylees, Cuban and Haitian entrants, certain Special Immigrant Visa holders, Amerasians, and some victims of trafficking (ACF 2017).

To be clear, when I label the study population as Central African refugees in this thesis, I am referencing the fact that all participating households were vetted in accordance with the rules set forth by the United Nations Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, a

[13] I witnessed instances of such hesitation throughout this project. For example, a church group with whom the founder of AR4WRM has been working with for several years will not use the label refugee. They insist on using the Swahili word for friend, *rafiki*. Additionally, when I was exploring a potential partnership with a local urban farm on behalf of AR4WRM, many of the people involved preferred to use the label community. Although the term community is no less political than refugee, it does not carry the same negatively politicized meaning.
[14] Before the pandemic, the meetings were in-person. As of June 2022, the meetings are still being held online.

document which tasks the UNHCR with "promoting international instruments for the protection of refugees and supervising their application." Moreover, I am referencing that after living in host country UNHCR camps in East Africa for 10-20 years, the participating households entered the United States through the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).[15] However, in Tampa, Florida, previously camp-based populations who went through UNHCR and USRAP processing are not the only people recognized as refugees nor are they even the most common "type" of refugee.

According to Wedel et al., "policy aids the state in shaping, controlling, and regulating heterogenous populations through classificatory schemes that homogenize diversity, render the subject transparent to the state, and implement legal and spatial boundaries between different categories of subjects" (2005:35). As discussed in the paragraphs above, refugee resettlement and integration policies do problematically homogenize diversity. However, as resettlement has simultaneously become more bureaucratized and deformalized, I argue there is little transparency and clear-cut separation. For example, while ORR provides federal and state level admission statistics for refugees admitted via the USRAP, the agency only provides federal level admission statistics for the other populations eligible for its services. Meanwhile, the Florida Department of Children and Families (FDCF) reports county and state level admission statistics for many ORR eligible populations. For FY 2017, ORR reported that 1,698 refugees arrived in Florida via the USRAP. However, FDCF reports that 1,699 refugees entered via "formal processes" and another 441 refugees entered via "informal processes" (ACF 2017; FDCF 2017). It is unclear which informal processes are being used to enter and who exactly is entering via these processes and being classified as a refugee. For the subsequent fiscal year, the data are again contradictory.

[15] The USRAP is managed by the humanitarian bureau of the State Department known as the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM).

According to ORR, 591 refugees entered Florida in FY 2018 via the USRAP while FDCF reports that 698 refugees entered the state (ACF 2018; FDCF 2018). I suggest that the differences in these data illustrate the ongoing political-legal conflation of USRAP refugees with other ORR eligible populations.

In addition, at least in the state of Florida, there is very little transparency around who is a refugee and what rights and services these people are guaranteed. Locally, the blurring of refugees and populations eligible for ORR benefits and services is negatively impacting Central African refugees who are the only population arriving through UNHCR and USRAP processing. Compared to other arrivals, such as Cuban and Haitian entrants, Central African refugees appear to be a very small and very high-need population. This makes their specific resettlement and integration challenges easy to ignore (Mahoney et al. 2020a), and often results in them being blamed for these challenges.

Structural Challenges within US Refugee Resettlement

Even in a stable national political climate without a global pandemic raging, adapting to US life is difficult for refugees (Wachter 2015; Saksena and McMorrow 2020). While refugees remain eligible to receive integration services, such as free English classes, for the first five years after their arrival, intensive resettlement services only last 30-90 days.[16] This means that after this brief period, [17] RSPs are "no longer required to check-in on refugees, work intensively with these persons, or assist them in job placement or social service navigation" (Holbrook 2019:13).

[16] The initial 30-90 days of refugee resettlement is funded by PRM. However, the Bureau "anticipates that sponsoring agencies [RSPs] will contribute significant cash or in-kind resources to supplement US government funding." https://www.state.gov/refugee-admissions/reception-and-placement/.

[17] Except if they enroll households in the Matching Grants program which provides cash-assistance, intensive case management, and other services to help ORR eligible populations "overcome barriers and quickly find jobs." To fund this program, ORR awards $2 in federal funding for every $1 raised by the [RSP] agency, up to a maximum of $2,850 in federal funds per enrolled client. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/refugees/matching-grants.

Because one of the central goals of US refugee resettlement is economic self-sufficiency,[18] RSPs' main focus during the initial resettlement period is finding employment for ORR eligible individuals. However, research has shown that emphasizing employment over language training causes refugees and other ORR eligible populations to be stuck in low wage jobs (Keles 2008). Moreover, RSPs hyper focus on the idealized American value of economic self-sufficiency is contradictory with the US admission process as refugees resettled through the USRAP are often selected based on their degree of vulnerability, rather than their ability to achieve economic stability through employment (Kerwin 2012; Holbrook 2019).

Three months is an excessively rapid pace to expect any ORR eligible person to adapt to US life. For Central African refugees, many of whom come from rural backgrounds and have lived on rural camps for 10-20 years (Mahoney et al. 2020a), the timeframe is unrealistic. Not only must Central African refugees learn how to navigate complex, urban (education, financial, food, housing, transportation, etc.) systems, but they must do so while negotiating unfamiliar cultural and social dynamics. Moreover, they are less likely to have English skills, formal education, or work experience than other ORR eligible populations given their past experiences of violence and life on camps (Mahoney et al. 2020a). Adding to these already formidable challenges is the looming financial stress of needing to repay the travel expenses incurred during their journey to the United States. To facilitate their travel, refugees resettled through the USRAP, are offered loans by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) with the legally binding expectation that they will begin to make payments just six months after resettlement with the balance paid in full within 46 months of resettlement (IOM 2018; Holbrook 2019).

[18] According to the ORR website, the Office "wants to front-load resettlement services so that refugees are empowered through early employment, reach self-sufficiency as soon as possible and become active, contributing participants in their communities." https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/about/what-we-do.

Recent Changes to US Refugee Resettlement Funding

Because the Trump administration dramatically reduced federal funding for ORR (Amos 2018), the last several years have been a turbulent period for all ORR eligible populations and the RSPs who submitted funding proposals to safely resettle and integrate them (Holbrook et al. 2019; Mahoney et al. 2020a; Inks 2021). According to ORR annual reports, federal funding for the Refugee Resettlement Program and the Survivors of Torture Program decreased[19] by approximately 170 million dollars from FY 2017 to FY 2018 (ACF 2017; ACF 2018).[20] Then, in FY 2018, ORR funding was significantly restructured. To provide grantees with "more flexibility in allocating funding," the agency condensed three separate budgetary line items (Refugee Social Services, formula and discretionary Targeted Assistance Grants, TAGs, and the Refugee Health Promotion Program, RHP) into one budgetary line item, Refugee Support Services, or RSS (ACF 2018). Thus, for FY 2018, the main budgetary line items were Transitional and Medical Services, Refugee Support Services, Survivors of Torture Program, and Unaccompanied Alien Children Program. The ORR Cuban/Haitian Social Services Set-Aside program which had previously been funded as part of the social services budgetary line item was also discontinued. Despite the dissolution of this program, Cuban and Haitian entrants have remained eligible for ORR benefits and services (ACF 2018).

The impact of the budget cuts and funding restructures outlined above have been devasting for RSPs operating in Florida and the ORR eligible populations, including Central African refugees, who are living here. In FY 2017, Florida received approximately 151 million

[19] During this same period, federal funding for the Unaccompanied Children Program increased by just over 37% to approximately 1.3 billion dollars. This program is also managed by ORR.
[20] Under the Refugee Act of 1980, ORR is required to produce an annual report for Congress. However, the last report made available to the public online is from FY 2018 which ran from October 1, 2017 – September 30, 2018. FY 2018 was the Trump administration's first year of budget implementation.

dollars[21] from ORR including just over 15 million dollars earmarked for Cuban and Haitian entrants (ACF 2017). In the next fiscal year, the state's funding dropped by almost 63% to 56 million dollars[22] with no funds earmarked for Cuban and Haitian entrants (ACF 2018). This forced half of the RSPs in the Tampa Bay area to suspend their operations, and the two remaining agencies to cut back on "extra" refugee services and reduce their number of employees (Holbrook et al. 2019; Mahoney et al. 2020a; Inks 2021). Because there are fewer RSPs with fewer employees and less funding operating in the area, and the number of Cuban and Haitian entrants has not decreased, there is little funding and support available to devote to individuals, households, and communities facing challenges. As discussed in the previous section, these circumstances have left Central African refugees facing high levels of risk.

Overlapping US Policies and State Dysfunction

A Brief History of US Food-Assistance Policies

According to Poppendieck, unlike virtually every other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)[23] nation, the United States aids impoverished families via food-assistance rather than income transfers (2014:177). In the United States, food-assistance programs are mainly operated by the Department of Agriculture (USDA). Although the USDA oversees many such programs, five food-assistance programs account for 96% of the department's food-assistance spending (Poppendieck 2014). They are the Child and Adult Care Feeding Program (CACFP), the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program (SBP), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Special

[21] The funding was split into three categories: 107 million for Cash and Medical Assistance (CMA), 29 million for Social Services, and 15 million for TAG.
[22] The funding was split into two categories: 21 million for CMA and 35 million for RSS.
[23] There are 38 member nations, including many North American, European, and Pacific countries. The OECD assists member countries in formulating effective economic and social policies.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). In this thesis, I discuss SNAP, which is the United States' third largest[24] welfare program, and by far the largest[25] USDA food-assistance program (Nestle 2019). I also discuss WIC.

The vital difference between the United States' and other OECD nations' approach to reducing poverty can be attributed to historic factors and ongoing political disagreements about the proper role of government in alleviating national suffering and preventing dependency. The framework for SNAP, which was called Food Stamps until 2008, was created in response to the Great Depression. During that period, the US public became outraged that many Americans were going hungry because they were unemployed and could not afford to buy food, whilst American farmers were destroying their crops and livestock because there was nobody to buy them. To appease the masses and dispel the dissonance of such "want amid plenty," the US government began to purchase surplus commodities from farmers to keep them from seeking assistance (Poppendieck 2012:563). The government then distributed these foodstuffs to unemployed people already receiving assistance. This first attempt at providing government assistance to Americans in need lasted from 1939-1943 and required an upfront purchase of stamps to exchange for food at participating stores after which people were given a set number of free stamps (Nestle 2019). It was then discontinued because of the shortages caused by WWII. In the aftermath of the war, many Americans were believed to be prospering (Fitchen 1987).

By the early 1960s, it was once again clear that inequality in America was a serious issue as nearly one-fifth to one-quarter of the population was estimated to be living in poverty (Fitchen 1987). John F. Kennedy's political campaign and presidency, as well as documentaries, such as Hunger in America, brought renewed attention to the topic. For many Americans, including

[24] The two most effective programs for reducing poverty are Social Security and Earned Income Tax Credits.
[25] According to Nestle (2019), SNAP accounts for 65% of the USDA's budget.

those in government, the descriptions and depictions of US poverty were shocking, and demanded immediate action. In response to citizens' rising concerns, President Nixon told the American public in 1969 that he would "put an end to hunger in America for all time" (1987:386). Thus, from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s many social programs were created or expanded, including Food Stamps and WIC.[26]

Although welfare programs are the closest thing to a guaranteed income the United States has ever created, even the federal policies that put food-assistance benefits in place as part of the social safety net never intended these benefits to cover all household food expenses. Instead, they were designed to fill the imagined gap between the amount of money needed to obtain adequate nutrition and the money a household could "rationally" budget (Fitchen 1987). Thus, while these programs were intended to help protect Americans from risk, they have always emphasized personal responsibility. Following the election of President Regan in 1980, risk management has been increasingly passed from the state to individuals and households as all US welfare programs have largely been bureaucratized and defunded (Poppendieck 2014). These assaults continued in the 1990s under democratic leadership as President Clinton infamously sought to "end welfare as we know it." To do so, he helped pass the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996 (Black and Sprague 2016). This act enacted time limits, work requirements, and sanctions for noncompliance. As a result, 10 million fewer people received Food Stamps from 1994 to 2000 (Poppendieck 2014; Black and Prague 2016).

According to Poppendieck (2014), when research on obtaining Food Stamps following PRWORA began to show that many households in need were being denied benefits, supporters of food-assistance made the political choice to advocate for the Food Stamp program as work

[26] The WIC program was created in 1974.

support and to champion state-level control over the program. Two decades later, the result of these mixed politics is a welfare system that is heavily surveilled and policed and largely deformalized. Food-assistance programs, such as SNAP, are difficult for Americans, let alone refugees, to navigate. Most recently, these difficulties have been exacerbated by the shift to online application systems which makes needed benefits even harder for low-income Americans to access given their lower levels of technology access and literacy.

State Benefits Dysfunction During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Florida

In Florida, the effects of basing policies on strict economic self-sufficiency logics, which push the responsibility for managing risk from the state to individuals and households, have been visible throughout the pandemic. It is now public knowledge that Florida's unemployment crisis during the first year of the pandemic was largely due to the state's strict approach to fighting fraud within the state benefit system rather than an overloaded online system as was previously claimed by some state officials (Mower 2021). The prioritization of fraud detection over residents' ability to access benefits has been an ongoing issue since 2013 when Florida implemented a new software system to identify suspicious patterns by cross-referencing data sets which caused "fraudulent claims" to spike by 600% (Mower 2021). Since the 2013 implementation, Florida has consistently had one of the worst unemployment recipient rates in the country, and during the pandemic many residents were unable to get the benefits they were owed and desperately needed (Sainato 2021). According to one former Florida unemployment benefits call center worker, "people with any kind of disability, or language barrier, or pregnancy, or health issue were discriminated against" (Mower 2021).

More recently, Floridians, particularly Tampa Bay area residents, have faced a seemingly endless wait to receive SNAP benefits from FDCF (Saeidi 2022a). According to FCDF, initial

SNAP applications were being processed in 17 days in December 2021, but local news argued that families experiencing the most delays were attempting to renew their benefits by a process known as recertification (Saeidi 2022a). Many of these families demonstrated they had been waiting up to two months to have their applications reviewed, despite FDCF hiring 125 staff members during December 2021 and January 2022 to assist with processing SNAP applications (Saeidi 2022b). As of February 2022, FCDF had reached out to USDA to request waivers for some approval requirements, such as in-person interviews, to speed up the review process (Crawford 2022). However, it is unclear when (or if) the processing delays will be fixed.

Conclusion

In everyday conversations and US media, it has become commonplace to naturalize the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic as a "perfect storm." However, this apolitical metaphor[27] erases how decades of stagnant wages and rising living costs under unfettered capitalism as well as the bureaucratization of and disinvestment in the nation's public safety net programs under neoliberal governance have left many Americans susceptible to the slightest economic downturn. Refugees living in America have been particularly impacted both before and during the pandemic by these realities because US refugee resettlement policy is not designed to minimize their exposure to risk. In fact, instead of helping refugees establish a foundation to build a prosperous life in the United States, which would minimally entail a guaranteed income during a period of language and job training, US refugee resettlement policy promotes self-sufficiency through quick (under) employment. In Florida, COVID-19 has exacerbated state dysfunction which has in turn compounded and complicated many local Central African refugees' experiences of risk.

[27] See Eichelberger (2007) and Brandt and Botelho (2020) for further discussion of metaphor use during disease outbreaks.

CHAPTER THREE:

INTERSECTIONS – CULTURE, FOOD, LABOR, GENDER, AND MOBILITY

Introduction

All culturally defined material substances used to create and maintain social relationships are powerful sources of identity, and given the centrality of eating in human lives, food is arguably the most powerful of these substances (Mintz and Du Bois 2002). Building on this recognition, I champion the concept of cultural food security as a needed critique of the term food security. Although cultural appropriateness has recently been added as a factor to consider in food security, it continues to be conceptualized as more of a luxury than a right, or even a need.[28] In discussing the barriers which the Central African refugee community face in attaining cultural food security, I utilize an intersectional approach to labor and mobility that moves beyond centering individuals' and households' ethnicity and migration status as their core identities. I also seek to re-politicize cultural food insecurity using an asset-based, political economic framing.

Nutritional Anthropology

Anthropologists have been studying food and nutrition since the late nineteenth century (Mallery 1888;[29] Boas 1921; Richards 1939; Bennet 1943; Lévi-Strauss 1965; Douglas 1966), and nutritional anthropology has been a distinct area of study within the discipline since the 1970s. Currently, the Society for Anthropology of Food and Nutrition (SAFN), a sub-section of

[28] See David Himmelgreen's work for a longitudinal consideration of the need for culturally appropriate and sustainable food to achieve food security.
[29] This work appeared in the first volume of American Anthropologist.

the American Anthropology Association (AAA), is dedicated to researching the intersection of human nutrition and social science. Although this middle ground between exclusively biological and exclusively social approaches to food is a topic of study in many disciplines, anthropologists are especially well-suited to undertake this type of research because of our holistic approach which combines topical information and theories from multiple fields with cultural and historic information (Pelto, Durfour, and Goodman 2012).[30]

In this thesis, I approach food (in)security from an asset-based, feminist sociocultural and political economic perspective. Although I do not delve into the biological perspective, readers should recognize that the consumption of processed high-calorie, fat, salt, and sugar foods (Patil et al. 2010; Dharod et al. 2011; Albritton 2012; Dufour and Bender 2012; Himmelgreen et al. 2014) and longitudinal food insecurity[31] (Rondinelli et al. 2010; Himmelgreen, Romero-Daza, and Noble 2012; Wang et al. 2016), are likely to have negative long-term health impacts. Moreover, readers should understand that minimizing long-term and intergenerational health risks (Burris et al. 2020; Himmelgreen et al. 2022) is nearly impossible for many Central African refugee households because food is the flexible budget category[32] which allows them to manage the immediate, overlapping insecurities present within their everyday lives in the United States.

Food and Identity

Food holds a central and intimate position in human lives. Not only must food be consumed regularly to procure nutrients and stave off physical hunger, but it must also be consumed regularly to satisfy our psychological needs for comfort and security. In addition, food

[30] See page 2 for a modified version of a 1980 ecological model of food and nutrition which illustrates how to approach food as a system. This model is popular within nutritional anthropology.
[31] Longitudinal food insecurity is linked to the dual burden of under- and over-nutrition.
[32] Unlike monthly expenses which are nonnegotiable and incur late fees, such as rent and utilities, households can adjust the amount of money they spend on food as well as the date they buy it.

is one of only a few categories of materials that transgress our corporal body while also passing through our affective realm of taste and smell. Because of this, Highmore argues that food practices are experienced with a high "register of intensity" that makes them more like having sex than walking (2008:394). Like sexual practices, food practices merge the biological and psychological, and are fundamental processes through which people are made. Thus, scholars can learn much about identity by studying food practices such as who eats which foods, when, how, and with whom. These same questions should also be asked about food procurement and preparation, areas in which women often hold significant power (Counihan 1999).

According to Farb and Armelagos (1980), identity construction begins in childhood as children are enculturated through customs connected with eating. This means that children slowly become conscious of kinship and social distinctions (age, class, gender, race, etc.) through the medium of food. Children also learn to differentiate which foods are edible by human beings and which foods are edible by human beings like them, since populations free from severe food pressures rarely, if ever, consume every food available to them in their environment (Lowenberg 1970). While children are being enculturated into their cultures and societies, the cultural and social meanings of foods are impacted by sociocultural and political economic forces. Food meanings can also be altered or reinforced through individual and household tastes. Taste, which refers both to the sensory experience of tasting as well as the way foods are viewed and desired, has a strong effect on food practices.[33] Thus, to cultivate taste is akin to cultivating aspirations and identity (Bennet 1943; Welsch 1971; Fitchen 1987; Wesitmantel 1989; Allison 1991; Gillette 2005; Yan 2005; Walker 2012; Wilk 2013).

[33] These two elements of taste and distaste can be closely tied together, or they can be at odds with one another.

One topic that has received much scholarly attention is the impact of manufactured Western foods, which are often positively associated with status and prestige, on people's tastes. Researchers have found that people's tastes for Western foods vary according to their social demographic identities at both the individual and household level (Welsch 1971; Weismantel 1989; Gillette 2005; and Yan 2005).[34] In addition, these researchers have shown that parents purposively shape their children's tastes in the hopes of creating specific aspirations in them (Gillette 2005; Yan 2005), and that children's tastes influence that of their parents (Weismantel 1989). Thus, both parents and children can shape household food consumption. Of course, many foods other than manufactured Western foods are entangled in complex webs of identity and taste (see Walker 2012). Finally, taste cultivation is not a linear process as foods that were rejected by one generation may come to be valued by subsequent generations (Welsh 1995).

Although food practices, and the identities they help create and recreate, are flexible, they are among the most deeply entrenched aspects of culture. Research has shown that migrant populations hold onto their food practices long after their other cultural practices have faded or been abandoned (Magliocco 1993; Weisberg-Shapiro and Devine 2015). According to Weisberg-Shapiro and Devine (2005), even food practices such as the timing of meals can contribute to identity construction and maintenance. Food is a means by which migrant populations showcase different aspects of their identity and they suggest food practices may differ based on the audience (Magliocco 1993). For example, some foods may be used to perform identity for wider publics while other foods may only be consumed within private spaces.

[34] These studies focus on age, class, gender, and generation identities.

Food Insecurity in the United States

In 2019, Feeding America announced that the US food insecurity rate had reached its lowest point since measurement began in the 1990s. However, the deleterious economic impacts of COVID-19 have since caused the national food insecurity rate to rise dramatically. In the first year of the pandemic, estimated American food insecurity rates were up almost 50% from pre-coronavirus levels (Himmelgreen and Heuer 2022). As a result, food banks within the United States "provided 4.2 billion meals between March and November 2020 and at least 80% of them supported more people than […] before the pandemic" (Himmelgreen and Heuer 2022:23). Furthermore, the number of households participating in SNAP increased by approximately two million from March 2020 to April 2020. Although the number of US households receiving SNAP benefits peaked in September 2020 at nearly 22.4 million, the number of US households utilizing SNAP benefits as of December 2021 was consistent with early pandemic levels.[35]

Locally, Feeding Tampa Bay responded to increased rates of food insecurity in 2020 by providing up to two million meals a week and serving a clientele comprised mainly (68%) of first-time receivers (Feeding Tampa Bay 2020).[36] As of September 2021, the CEO of Feeding Tampa Bay reported that the need for free food in the Tampa Bay area remained 35% higher than pre-pandemic levels (DaSilva 2021). Simultaneously, at the state level, the FDCF saw a significant uptick in the number of SNAP applications. According to local news, during the week of March 16, 2020, there was a 67% increase from the previous week in the number of SNAP applications submitted in Florida, and two weeks later there was another nearly identical increase in the number of SNAP applications submitted (McGivern 2020; Ross 2020). As discussed in

[35] For exact numbers see the USDA SNAP data tables. https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap.

[36] Feeding Tampa Bay is the local branch of Feeding America. According to Heuer et al. (2020), Feeding Tampa Bay served between five to six million meals per month before the pandemic.

Chapter two, high volumes of SNAP applications amidst the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with state dysfunction created significant and ongoing delays in Florida's distribution of SNAP benefits.

While the sharp national increase in food insecurity and utilization of public and private food-assistance can be partially attributed to tens of millions of Americans losing their jobs[37] during the early pandemic combined with historic increases in food prices (Feeding Tampa Bay 2020), the speed at which COVID-19 created a financial crisis for so many American households speaks directly to rising levels of US income inequality since the 1970s (ALICE 2020).[38] According to Devy et al. (2021), even before the pandemic, about 30% of American families did not have a $2,000 emergency fund, and 50% did not have enough savings to cover three months of expenses. In Florida, although the number of people living below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) remained at approximately 13% from 2007 to 2018, the number of Floridians living between the FPL and a basic survival threshold known as ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed)[39] rose from 22% to 33% during this period.[40] Because food insecurity is ultimately rooted in social and economic inequality, this context is essential.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO),[41] individuals are food insecure when they "lack regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life."[42] After giving this definition, the FAO

[37] Over two million Florida residents filed for unemployment benefits during the early pandemic (Mahoney et al. 2020b citing Florida DEO 2020).
[2] The ALICE report states that from 1979 to 2016 "the average income for the top 1% increased over five times more than that of the middle 60% and over three time more than that of the bottom fifth" (2020:5).
[39] ALICE is an important measure as it includes households which earn more money than the federal poverty level, but do not earn enough money to afford basic household necessities.
[40] In Hillsborough County, Florida, where all study participants reside, 540,142 households (42%) are below the ALICE threshold. https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-overview/florida.
[41]The FAO is the oldest permanent specialized agency of the United Nations. It was established in 1945 with the objective of eliminating hunger and improving nutrition and standard of living (Mingst 2006).
[42] This definition of food security is from the FAO website. https://www.fao.org/hunger/en/.

elaborates that food insecurity can be caused by the unavailability of food and/or the lack of resources to obtain food. While this second sentence alludes to political-economic factors, the FAO is not alone in their failure to concretely make that connection. Many organizations, including Feeding America, depoliticize food insecurity by focusing on it as if it were the problem rather than a symptom of inequality (Poppendieck 2012). If Feeding America were committed to solving food insecurity, the organization would conduct more critical, intersectional analyses of who experiences food insecurity to further racially- and socially-just policymaking. Currently, there are no national statistics on food insecurity rates among immigrant and refugee populations, let alone immigrant and refugee populations of color.

To fill this gap, many researchers have shown food insecurity to be a common refugee experience that cross cuts host countries and refugee nationalities (Sellen et al. 2002; Hadley, Zodhiates, and Sellen 2007; Gallegos, Ellies, and Wright 2008; Hadley, Patil, and Nahayo 2010; Dharod et al. 2011; Peterman et al. 2013; Gichunge et al. 2015; McElrone et al. 2019; Baer et al. 2021). According to these researchers, common explanations for why refugee populations experience high rates of food insecurity are that these households do not know how to budget, navigate SNAP benefits, operate cooking equipment, speak English, shop in the United States, or use public transportation (Hadley, Zodhiates and Sellen 2007; Gallegos, Ellies, and Wright 2008; Hadley, Patil, and Nahayo 2010; Dharod et al. 2011; Gichunge et al. 2015; McElrone et al. 2019). Certainly, these are areas likely to pose challenges for many newly resettled refugee households. However, by not discussing how these challenges are also shaped by political economic factors, the researchers make it seem like refugees have characteristics which innately predispose them to experiencing food insecurity. Such framings depoliticize food insecurity and contribute to shifting responsibility for creating the conditions for food security from the state

onto refugees themselves. Finally, these framings contribute to deficit-based master narratives about refugees which hyper focus on what they lack (Shapiro and MacDonald 2017).

To be sure, some of these same studies (Hadley, Zodhiates, and Sellen 2007; Gallegos, Ellies, and Wright 2008; Dharod et al. 2011; Hadley, Patil, and Nahayo 2010; Gichunge et al. 2015) draw upon political economic reasons, such as high household bills (and medical bills), welfare payment issues, and low incomes to explain why refugee populations have high levels of food insecurity. However, these discussions often lack historical context and depth. In addition, many of these studies do not critically engage with gender. It was not uncommon for studies to either not analyze by gender after recruiting both men and women participants (Sellen et al. 2002; Gallegos, Ellies, and Wright 2008; Hadley et al. 2010) or to recruit only women participants without providing an explanation (Dharod et al. 2011; Peterman et al. 2013). Three studies which recruited a majority of women participants did provide an explanation (Hadley et al. 2007; Gichunge et al. 2015; McElrone et al. 2019). However, only one of these studies engaged in critical gender analysis. The exception was Gichunge et al., as they briefly utilized gendered political economic analysis to describe how refugee mothers with young children are unable to improve their English by attending the free language classes provided by the Australian government due to inadequate childcare (2015:385). The only study that consistently linked refugees' experiences of food insecurity with political economic analysis and critically engaged with gendered differences in food security is Baer et al. (2021).

Another popular explanation as to why refugee populations experience high levels of food insecurity is that members of these populations want to consume expensive traditional foods (Gichunge et al, 2015; McElrone et al. 2019). This deficit-based framing is problematic because it assumes this practice is negatively impacting food security. In this thesis, I take an

asset-based approach to refugees and food (in)security which seeks to "emphasize the resources and strategies [that refugees] employ toward their goals" (Shapiro and MacDonald 2017:2). It is important to reframe the consumption of traditional foods through an asset lens to avoid contributing to master narratives which make refugees and their practices the problem. Moreover, I use this reframing to focus on the under-studied interaction between culture and food security (see Power 2008; Moffat et al. 2017; Baer et al. 2021).

Cultural Food Security

The term cultural food security was first used by Elaine Power to critique how the Canadian public health system is based on "conceptualizations of food security that were developed in non-Aboriginal contexts [and] do not take full account of the traditional food practices of Aboriginal people or Aboriginal conceptualizations of food security" (2008:95). According to Power (2008), these groups have unique food security considerations which directly affect the four pillars of food security outlined by the FAO. These pillars are access, availability, utilization, and stability of supply. Power argues that "food obtained from traditional food systems is key to cultural identity, health, and survival," thus, "cultural food security is another level of food security for some […] people," that goes beyond individual, household, and community food security (2008:95). Building on Power's commentary, Moffat, Mohammed, and Newbold (2017) use the concept of cultural food security to think about the cultural dimensions of food insecurity that affect low-income immigrants and refugees who enter Canada with culturally specific foodways. Like Power, these researchers tie their analysis to the FAO pillars of food insecurity, namely, availability, access, and use.

Availability. According to the FAO (2008), the term food availability speaks to the supply side of food security, i.e., the physical availability of food in stores. For Power, who

focused on Aboriginal peoples' consumption of traditional foods obtained from outside the world market, the main factors affecting food availability were environmental contamination and the impact of global climate change on ecosystems. For Moffat, Mohammed, and Newbold (2017), who worked with immigrants and refugees in a mid-sized Canadian town, the main factors affecting availability were different. Because of the size of the town, many of the participants involved in their study reported obtaining ethnic foods at a variety of stores, while elaborating that there was a decrease in the variety of foods that were abundant in their home countries. Moreover, the participants discussed being unable to find specific foods they desired, and they said the quality and freshness of the foods available to them was not as good as in their home country. The participants also lamented that the taste and smell of foods in Canada were not as good, and they worried about the chemicals used in the food sold at the supermarkets.

Access. Unlike the food availability pillar which is only concerned with the presence of culturally appropriate food within a geographic area, food access recognizes that adequate supply does not guarantee food security (FAO 2008). According to Moffat, Mohammed, and Newbold (2017), the two main factors impeding cultural food access for the participants in their study were low-income and difficulty shopping. Because finding and maintaining high-paying employment is a major challenge for immigrants and refugees, the researchers link the participants' employment issues with their inability to afford more expensive, culturally desirable foods. The second major challenge that they discussed was problems with grocery shopping. This theme was stressed by the service providers they interviewed. These workers engaged in deficit-based discourse as they explained that immigrants and refugees were not able to properly identify food in supermarkets due to their lack of English skills as well as their overall low education levels. However, Moffat, Mohammed, and Newbold report that while

participants who had recently arrived in the United States also talked about these struggles, participants who had been in the United States longer, but who were not necessarily more educated or stronger English speakers, said it just takes time to become acquainted with where to shop and what foods to buy.

Use. The third pillar of food security identified by the FAO is use. Use links the human body's ability to make use of nutrients to a variety of factors such as, "good care and feeding practices, food preparation, diversity of diet, and the intra-household distribution of food" (2008:1). For Moffat, Mohammed, and Newbold, food use refers to the "the knowledge and ability to prepare nutritious, safe, and culturally satisfying food" (2017:21). While the service providers in their study thought immigrant and refugee women have vast food use knowledge, they noted that these women needed to learn how to cook with Canadian ingredients, budget, and improve their children's nutrition. However, the immigrant and refugee women who participated in their study wanted to learn how to cook Canadian foods, interpret nutrition labels, and safely store food.

M**obility and Immobility**

Immigrants and refugees experience a multitude of difficulties in the United States as everyday processes such as accessing healthcare, gaining an education, obtaining employment, securing housing, and shopping for necessities are unfamiliar and tiresome. Two related factors, low English proficiency and low socioeconomic status, are widely recognized as the main barriers these groups face in successfully navigating these processes (Hadley, Zodhiates and Sellen 2007; Gallegos, Ellies, and Wright 2008; Hadley, Patil, and Nahayo 2010; Dharod et al. 2011; Gichunge et al. 2015; McElrone et al. 2019). While it is next to impossible to obtain a driver's license and vehicle without English skills and steady income (Bose 2014; Saksena and

McMorrow 2020), the multifaceted obstacle created by a lack of transportation should not be underestimated. A lack of private transportation has been shown to be a major food security barrier for refugees as it makes accessing stores and other food sites, such as community gardens and food banks, difficult (Patil et al. 2008; McElrone et al. 2019; Baer et al. 2021). This is especially true for refugees living in cities with inadequate public transportation systems, such as Tampa, Florida. According to Baer et al. (2021), many Central African refugees' access to food is limited by Tampa's notoriously unreliable bus system (Johnston and Zhang 2017). In this thesis I argue that in a country as car centric as the United States, access to reliable, private transportation is just as essential to integration as learning English and gaining employment.

The importance of vehicle-based transportation around the globe, and particularly in the United States, is highlighted by Sheller and Urry's (2000) concept of automobility. Automobility refers to the complex assemblage of vehicles, infrastructure, and social practices which allow people to move through cities in "spatially-stretched and time-compressed ways" (Stuesse and Coleman 2014 citing Sheller and Urry 2000:744). Although automobility may be convenient for some individuals, the car-dependent dispersion and fragmentation of US cities is infused with inequality. While car-owning segments of society can piece together fragments of their time through quick movements, those who rely on public transportation cannot do so easily (Sheller and Urry 2000; Stuesse and Coleman 2014). Therefore, automobility is both a form of mobility and immobility as it "frees and fixes populations" (Stuesse and Coleman 2014:56).

Recently, three studies (Bose 2014; Morken 2016; Zakel 2019) have examined how refugees, including Central African refugees, experience and navigate (im)mobility in US states.[43] According to these researchers, most of the refugees who participated in their studies

[43] The states are Vermont (Bose 2014), Colorado (Morken 2016), and Indiana (Zakel 2019).

face significant transportation barriers which are not only inconvenient, but also negatively impact their agency, community creation, and integration. One of the most used strategies to gain access to private transportation was ride sharing (Bose 2014; Morken 2016; Zakel 2019). Drawing upon the work of two cultural anthropologists,[44] Zakel refers to refugees' ability to "repurpose or workaround infrastructures to give themselves access to resources or infrastructure that they may not have had access to before" as hacking (2019:3). Another possible term for these workarounds, which was coined by anthropologists Stuesse and Coleman is altermobility, or the "strategies people use to survive, resist, and contest immobility" (2014:61). While this thesis speaks to some of the hacks or altermobilities used by Central African refugees, it is more concerned with how members of this population draw upon their social networks to become mobile. Morken (2016) also examined the effect of social networks on mobility, but they framed their argument through the concept of strong and weak social ties. I frame my discussion of mobility through the concept of navigational capital to highlight that it is not simply the presence of social ties, but the capital, i.e., the knowledge, skills, and resources, available within social networks that helps people to become mobile.

Navigational Capital

Drawing upon critical race theory, which is a framework for "theorizing, examining, and challenging the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices, and discourses" (Yosso 2005:70),[45] Yosso coined the term navigational capital to challenge the classic idea of social and cultural capital put forth by Bourdieu. According to Yosso (2005), the dominate interpretation of social and cultural capital is weaponized against People of Color. Instead of recognizing that racism detrimentally impacts the academic and social outcomes of

[44] Anand (2011) and Schnitzler (2013).
[45] Everything in this paragraph comes from Yosso (2005).

People of Color, these impacts are often explained by asserting that People of Color lack the social and cultural capital needed for social mobility. The term navigational capital is part of Yosso's broader concept of community cultural wealth which pushes back against deficit-based narratives by highlighting the "array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (2005:77). Specifically, navigational capital refers to the abilities and skills that facilitate maneuvering through social institutions that were not created with Communities of Color in mind. A core part of the concept is that it "acknowledges individual agency within institutional constraints, […and recognizes how] social networks facilitate community navigation through places and spaces" (2005:80). In this thesis, I extend the concept to include intersectional community identity (i.e., race and refugee status) and to incorporate systems (i.e., refugee resettlement, food-assistance benefits, and driver's licenses) that create barriers to cultural food security and mobility for Central African refugees.

Gendered (Im)mobility

Although feminist anthropology became an official sub-field of anthropology in the 1970s, there has always been an "awkward relationship" between feminism and anthropology (Strathern 1987). Moreover, at the end of the twentieth century, there was still the ongoing problem that feminist anthropologists consistently "place gender at the center of experience over differences based on race, class, or sexual orientation" (Mahmud 2021 citing Aggarwal 2000:14). According to Mahmud (2021), Black feminist anthropology arose out of these internal struggles. This thesis seeks to balance advocating for more critical gendered analysis of refugees' experiences with highlighting how intersectional identities shape refugees' experiences.

In this thesis, using a gendered lens is vital because several researchers have previously examined how US-based refugees are impacted by transportation barriers as well as the strategies they use to navigate them (Bose 2014; Morken 2016; Zakel 2019; McElrone et al. 2019; Baer et al. 2021), yet a gendered analysis is missing from all of them.[46] This is particularly alarming as research conducted via a gendered lens among resettled Syrian refugee women in Turkey found that women were both more likely to be immobile and more likely to be negatively impacted by their immobility than men in their community (Ozkazanc 2021). According to Ozkazanc (2021), out of the 56 women and 142 men who responded to their survey, none of the women had a bicycle or driver's license, whereas slightly more than 30% of men did. In addition, while acknowledging the potential influence of Islamic religious norms on the gendered discrepancy, Ozkazanc notes that the Syrian refugee women openly discussed the "negative physical and emotional health issues" they were experiencing due to their immobility and subsequent social isolation (2021:10).

While gender is an important lens for analysis it must be combined with other critical lenses to produce an intersectional analysis to avoid creating "narrations of mobility and fixity [that can be] used to reinforce not only the normative striation of women's movement but gender binarisms in which women are positioned as fixed and men as mobile" (Boyer et al. 2017:1). Moreover, intersectional analysis highlights the diversity of women's experiences. In this thesis I show how members of the Central African refugee community, particularly women, use their intersectional identities to become mobile while sometimes also being immobilized by them.

[46] Morken provides a table with ethnicity and car ownership data which clearly shows both an ethnic and gendered pattern in car ownership (2016:19). Specifically, 7 of the 11 men they interviewed (64%) owned a car compared to just three out of nine women (33%). In addition, none of the seven Central African refugees they interviewed reported owning a car.

Structural Violence, Precarity, and Vulnerability

According to Paul Farmer, "structural violence is violence exerted systematically, i.e., indirectly, by everyone who belongs to a certain social order" (2004:307). The concept is often used to study how oppression is socially structured by tracing how "large-scale social forces crystallize into the sharp, hard surfaces of individual suffering" (Farmer 2009:12). While structural violence has been critiqued as being too broad to be effective (Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes 2004), I think it is useful for this thesis which seeks to illustrate through ethnographic accounts that the implementation of seemingly mundane social policies should be considered non-deviant, even sanctioned, acts of violence against people whose lives are made precarious and vulnerable by interwoven current and historic sociocultural and political economic threads. To separate precarity and vulnerability, I am drawing upon Han (2018) who traces the use of the term precarity to show that it first became popular in Europe[47] in the 1980s due to labor reforms and the reduction of the welfare state. Therefore, precarity can be understood as intrinsically linked to work, and is best used to refer to the increasingly generalized lack of financial and lifestyle security afforded to workers. According to Han, other academics, such as Judith Butler, have theorized that precarity is also the "differential distribution of bodily destruction and grievability that emerges through specific social and political arrangements" (2018:337). However, I echo Han and Das (2015) to argue that research that uses precarity to describe how common human vulnerability is unequally distributed misses the point. Instead of assigning labels to individuals or communities, which are quickly co-opted by the state, we should be paying attention to how the everyday "textures of vulnerability" are interwoven with politics in people's lives (Han 2018:341).

[47] According to Han (2018), the widely used academic term precarity is derived from the French word precarité.

Shifting Social Reproduction Responsibilities

From the 1980s until the early 2000s, analyses of care and social reproduction were separate. However, over the past decade the idea of care has gradually merged with and replaced social reproduction in academia (Kofman 2014).[48] This change is reflected in Hochschild's (2000) popular theoretical lens, "global chains of care." This framework is used to discuss migration from less to more wealthy regions of the world (often from Global South to Global North) due to histories of chattel slavery, colonialism, and ongoing market demand for human physical and emotional labor. The demand for and subsequent migration of mostly female labor creates "care" gaps in households and communities in sending countries. According to Kofman (2014), scholarship on global chains of care has come to dominant feminist scholarship on global migrations and the transfer of labor. Yet, they argue that the classic feminist notion of social reproduction,[49] which emphasizes the relationship between production and reproduction, should be revitalized to highlight how the interactions between external agents, institutions of care, and households shape the transfer of labor as well as the role(s) familial arrangements within households play in these complex transfers (Kofman 2014). In this thesis, I focus on the manual dimensions of social reproduction, particularly how "food […] is made available for immediate consumption" and to a lesser extent "the ways in which the care […] of children is provided" (Kofman 2014 citing Laslett and Brenner 1989:3838). In doing so, I seek to show how neoliberal changes to social policies which structure US systems, including the refugee resettlement system, have created production precarity which in turn has exacerbated the exploitation of those

[48] According to Kofman (2014), the term care has become popular because it highlights emotional labor and is favored in social policy discussions.
[49] This term was coined by Laslett and Brenner (1989).

responsible for social reproduction. Ultimately, I argue violence flows from the state through Central African refugee households falling upon oldest daughters.

Conclusion

The availability of and access to adequate culturally appropriate food is critical for identity construction and maintenance and has been recognized as a human right (Sampson et al. 2021). Yet, resettled refugee populations, particularly those of African descent, have been shown to have food insecurity levels much higher than the general population. While researchers have pinpointed several overlapping factors which contribute to the severity of African refugees' experiences of food insecurity, many of these explanations lack historic and political economic context and depth. Thus, many of these explanations are based in deficit narratives which focus on all the things these populations lack. Such narratives erase the state's role in creating these circumstances and shift responsibility onto refugees and their communities. Additionally, much of the research on food insecurity among refugee populations privileges individuals' and households' ethnicity and migration status as their core identities. To improve cultural food security among the Central African refugee community in Tampa, Florida, more data, and sharper analysis is needed. By taking an asset-based approach which asks how members of this community strive for and attain food security, this thesis will highlight strategies that are already working within the community that can be strengthened. Moreover, by conducting an intersectional analysis which looks at more aspects of individuals' and households' identities, this thesis will highlight how gaps in US policies are inflicting violence on specific refugees. Such information is useful because it can be used by AR4WRM and local workers within the US refugee resettlement system to close these gaps with targeted programs.

CHAPTER FOUR:

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Within Anthropology there has been an increasing recognition of the need for greater public relevance and critical, real-world engagement since the mid 1990s. Despite these ongoing calls, Anthropology's "fifth subdiscipline" – Applied Anthropology (Baba 1994), which combines theory and practice to address human problems, continues to be marginalized.[50] The often-used critique of Applied Anthropology, as voiced by Schepher-Hughes and Bourgois, is that it is a "partisan of neoliberal globalization in the name of a kinder, gentler cultural sensitivity and sometimes more openly as cost-effective market-based research" (2004:7-8). Even in a major US Applied Anthropology department, such critiques leave few anthropologists keen to reclaim and label themselves as applied anthropologists. Therefore, many of us inhabit a liminal space of overlapping, subtlety different labels such as, activist, applied, engaged, and public anthropologist[51] that have little meaning beyond the boundaries of our discipline. As we work on increasingly interdisciplinary teams, and with professional stakeholders, many of us grasp for more broadly used labels to communicate what it is we do. For those of us applying anthropological knowledge, we commonly describe our research via another set of overlapping, subtly different labels – action research, participatory research, participatory action research, and community-based participatory research (see Hacker 2017 for a review of these approaches).

[50] Even classifying Applied Anthropology as a subdiscipline rather than recognizing how theory and applied practice are interwoven is part of the marginalization of this approach.
[51] There is also the popular choice to not label oneself.

While adopting theories and methods from other disciplines is necessary, we should ask ourselves, what is lost when anthropologists are quick to abandon our own academic knowledge? This is an especially critical question because applied anthropologists have been doing what is now called "engagement" for decades (Rylko-Bauer, Singer, and Willigen 2006:186).

The project on which this thesis is based was advocacy focused, community-based, and participatory. For me, these are all hallmarks of Applied Anthropology, and yet, I have also been hesitant to label this project and myself as such because of the academic politics discussed in the previous paragraph. Instead, I have been describing this project as community-based participatory research (CBPR) because it has followed the foundational principles of this approach including working with a community partner to define the research questions, consulting the partner throughout the data collection process, and discussing the interpretation and dissemination of findings together (Duke 2020). And yet, I am also hesitant to label this project as CBPR because the term has turned into a buzzword that is often uncritically assigned to research that is only loosely affiliated with a poorly defined community (Blumenthal 2011; Banks et al. 2013; Hacker 2017; Duke 2020). Moreover, while data collection and thesis writing are complete, the relationships established are ongoing and the advocacy efforts via the application of the findings are just beginning. While this type of long-term commitment and engagement are not necessarily unique to Anthropology, it is extremely common within our discipline and notably missing from many discussions of CBPR.

Collaborating with AR4WRM

Although there is more than one community-based non-profit that has historically assisted Central African refugees in Tampa, Florida, I decided to partner with AR4WRM because it is the only non-profit that is committed to addressing women's issues, helping the

most vulnerable households, and working across the ethnic divides that are present within the community. In Tampa, Florida, Central Africans are the only refugee population that do not have a well-established non-profit with clear, functional pathways for coordinating assistance with and receiving new referrals from RSPs. Thus, I wanted to collaborate with AR4WRM to help empower the founder of the startup non-profit by helping her establish more connections within the local refugee resettlement network and by providing her with data she could use to solidify the non-profit's proactive role in the local refugee resettlement system.

By collaborating with AR4WRM, I have been able to gain richer, more contextualized, and historicized data which has helped me develop a critical understanding of the complex interactions between Central African refugees, local refugee non-profits, and RSPs. Moreover, my internship and partnership with AR4WRM added[52] to my identity as a USF Anthropology graduate student, giving me more access to and legitimacy in mostly online spaces where I was "studying through"[53] (Shore and Wright 1997; Wedel 2005) by engaging with members of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force. The policy and social network insights I gained from these connections have been critical for framing this project. However, I remain politically aligned with the interests of AR4WRM and Central African refugee women. In recognition that these two groups have both overlapping and diverging identities and interests and that Central African refugee women are part of a "large local network connected mainly by the process of refugee resettlement" (Inks 2021:38), I am striving to provide tangible, direct benefit (Borofsky 2015) to

[52] Drawing upon and negotiating multiple identities is common within the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force. Many members hold overlapping informal and formal positions as scholars, paid professionals, and non-profit board members and volunteers. This is not to say that the practice is unproblematic when done unreflexively.
[53] According to Shore and Wright, the goal of studying through is to trace "the ways in which power creates webs and relations between actors, institutions and discourses across time and space" (1997:11).

both the non-profit and the women within the community through the application of this project's findings.

Entering the Field: Recruitment, Sampling, and Positionality

Because of the increasing informalization of refugee resettlement and integration in Tampa, Florida, where informal personal and community networks have become vital for accessing benefits and resources that legally should be available to everyone, I will be especially transparent about how I entered the field. The founder of AR4WRM introduced me to many of the households with whom I worked most closely. These households tended to be the newest and/or the most vulnerable within the community. They also tended to be from an ethnic group other than Bembe, although this detail is less important now that many of the Bembe households have left Tampa. If we connected and they gave me their phone number(s), I often visited families again by myself.[54] I am aware that I may have been able to establish relationships with many households because they perceived me, a White woman attending the local university, as an asset to their social network (see Kusimba 2019 for a discussion of wealth-in-people). Thus, I was conscious of and explicit about my own resource and time constraints, while simultaneously working with AR4WRM and the anthropology research team to meet some of their urgent, basic needs. I sought to balance the research sample by making connections with less vulnerable households, including three families who had purchased houses in the area. AR4WRM and the anthropology research team extended our collaborative efforts to help these more established families when they expressed needs too.

While the founder of AR4WRM is acquainted with most families, I was introduced to some households by my colleagues, or in the case of five households, I met them while

[54] Some households I visited only while conducting check-ins as part of AR4WRM.

conducting fieldwork at the homes of other participants. Undoubtedly, my positionality as someone who has spent at least a month in every East African country and is married to an East African also increased my initial rapport and helped me establish relationships with many members of the Central African refugee community. Often, families asked about my spouse and urged me to bring him to come visit them. Being new to Tampa ourselves, we were eager to meet people familiar with East Africa, and we gladly accepted some households' invitations.

Adapting the Methods to the Field

Originally, I proposed to do this project in two phases. In the first phase, I had planned to complete 20 semi-structured household interviews followed by extended participant-observation and ethnographic filming with 5-8 women participants in phase two. While I did complete this project in two phases, after the fourth interview, I decided to stop doing formal, audio recorded semi-structured interviews because the format was a mismatch for the context. When visiting Central African refugee households, it is common for multiple family members and sometimes other visitors to be present. The surrounding action of children playing, food cooking, people talking, and YouTube jamming does not stop for an interview. If you push for formality, the social dynamics quickly change and many participants who have just consented to being interviewed will become hesitant, suspicious, and visibly uncomfortable. Instead, the interview needs to be flexible to incorporate the viewpoints of multiple individuals who will inevitably jump in whether out of interest or for translation purposes.

Most interviews also need to progress slowly to build trust and adhere to cultural expectations around visiting. Doing research should not be extractive, and once I entered the participants' homes the social rules were different. Throughout the eight-months of research, I only left one household without being offered, and if I declined, coaxed, into eating or drinking

something. Often, the interviews took place over multiple hours and were interspersed with activities such as helping people fill out forms or go through their mail,[55] as well as watching African series, TikToks, and music videos on YouTube. I also left room for inaction and silence during interviews and participant observation since not every second in an unfamiliar, cross-cultural social space needs to be filled. This is a valuable insight and skill that took me a long time to learn as a Peace Corps volunteer in Comoros in 2017-2018.

As I became more familiar with the community's needs and the multiple constraints on their time, I decided not to use visual methods in phase two. I felt it was unethical to ask people to be in or help produce media when the anthropology research team and AR4WRM were unable to secure a source of funding to create needed programs for the community which would have incorporated the media. Ultimately, the above adaptations made this project stronger because I spent more time in the field conducting ethnographic interviews, participant-observation, and go-alongs. These methods allowed me to build deeper, more trusting relationships with many households which increased the amount of spontaneous and "backstage" (DeMunck 1998), i.e., less publicly constructed, data I was able to collect.

Phase One – Interviews and Participant Observation

Most of the data for this thesis were collected using interviews and participant observation. These methods form the foundation of anthropology, and I have used them in creative combinations to generate more than one hundred pages of field notes.

Pilot Interviews

As discussed above, the first four interviews were formal, semi-structured interviews with two married couples, a married mother, and an oldest daughter. These interviews took place

[55] Because of their limited English skills, many participants could not read their mail. One household told me they frequently help their neighbors read their mail.

in May 2021 and June 2021. Two were conducted in English with another adult participant or the child of a participant translating, one was conducted only in English, and one was conducted with the founder of AR4WRM acting as a translator. The three interviews conducted in English were standalone interviews, meaning I did not interview these participants again. However, I did interact with these participants and/or other adult members of their households on other occasions. When I conducted the three interviews in English, I was alone in the field. The fourth interview took place on an especially busy field day when multiple members of the anthropology research team as well as another outreach team were present. In Chapters 5 and 6, I will not differentiate between data gathered from pilot interviews, ethnographic interviews, and participant-observation because of the natural overlap.

Ethnographic Interviews and Participant Observation

According to Bernard (2011), ethnographic interviews, sometimes called unstructured interviews, are good for getting people to open-up and express themselves over multiple sessions. This method is especially well suited for learning about participants' lived experiences, such as how they negotiate food insecurity and the refugee resettlement process, which were the goals of this project. As is common in anthropology, I paired ethnographic interviews with participant-observation to gain a closer perspective on participants' lives (Bernard 2011). Thus, most of the data for this project come from ethnographic interviews and participant-observation conducted with 18 households over an eight-month period from May 2021 to January 2022.

As previously mentioned in the entering the field section, the contexts in which the data were obtained for this thesis varied. Often it was just the founder of AR4WRM and me, or just me in the field, but occasionally my major professor or other members of the anthropology research team were also present. The diversity of people present during the recruitment, consent,

and even research process illustrates the heterogeneousness of the Central African refugee community in Tampa, Florida. Because I sought a purposeful sample in which significant differences (i.e., ethnicity) were balanced, it was sometimes better to initiate the research process with either my major professor or the founder of AR4WRM. Sometimes it did not matter, and introductions were made upon convenience, and other times I met new participants while visiting a household with whom I was already working. During this phase, I met with each of the 18 households at least twice. While I met and explained my project to other Central African refugee households, I did not follow up with these individuals and they are not included in this sample. Most phase one data collection took place in the participants' homes, except a brief, but important, interaction which occurred in a driveway as men from multiple households packed vehicles with food and grills before speeding off to the place of mourning for a community member who had died.[56] I also communicated regularly with participants by WhatsApp. At times I went back through these messages to reflect on experiences in the field and emerging themes. Finally, according to IRB guidelines, all phase one participants gave verbal, informed consent.

Phase Two – Diving Deep with Women from Six Households

As phase one progressed and I continued to interact with families, I was able to build deeper relationships with women from six households. I used convenience sampling to select these six households, although there was an ethnolinguistic balance within the sample. By the

[56] Although I did not visit the place of mourning or attend the community member's funeral, these funerary practices impacted this project. During many early interviews, participants discussed and reflected on this significant event. According to some participants, the solidarity of the community is most visible in the wake of death because their culture demands specific funerary practices. For other participants, the pressure to contribute money at such periods as well as the opaqueness around how the money is spent creates disharmony and distrust. The death also highlighted divisions within the community as not every household knew about, contributed money to, or attended the funerary practices. Finally, the funerary practices were mentioned in relation to food practices. Many girls and women were responsible for cooking food for the community to consume at the place of mourning. Alternatively, one teenage girl said she had a break from cooking because her family had been eating at the place of mourning.

end of this project, four of these women were the head of their households. Although I was in contact with the men in charge of the other two households, I spent most of my time interacting with their wives. This was ideal because, from the onset of the project, I was most interested in working with women participants based on the recognition that they wield considerable food-related power in their households, rather than an assumption of vulnerability. Additionally, given my positionality as an adult, married woman, I felt working with women participants was more culturally appropriate and would avoid creating feelings of mistrust. During the second phase, I continued gathering data using ethnographic interviews and participant observation. I also began conducting go-alongs.

Mobile Methods

Kusenbach defines "go-alongs" as a method in which "fieldworkers accompany individual informants on their 'natural' outings, and – through asking questions, listening, and observing – actively explore their subject's stream of experiences and practices as they move through, and interact with, their physical and social environment" (2003:463). While Kusenbach (2003) uses the term go-along in a strict sense to emphasize the systematic nature of this method, I use the term in a more general sense to describe how I conducted a combination of ethnographic interviews and participant-observation while on the move with participants. The go-alongs I conducted with six women who were attending non-profit based community events and with five women who were buying groceries were more systematic. Although many of the one-off go-alongs I conducted with one or two women were not systematic, they were illuminating. By conducting one-off go-alongs and systematic go-alongs I was able to collect data on how women's experiences of food, gender, jobs, transportation, and the refugee resettlement and integration process intersect. This also allowed me a lens onto broader issues of

labor, mobility, and empowerment. The locations I visited during one-off go-alongs include an apartment leasing office, a bank, a church, an English class location, a food distribution site, a popular employment site for Central African refugees, a RSP office, and a Tax Collector office.[57]

Collecting Data in Networks Beyond the Central African Refugee Community

To better contextualize Central African refugees' experiences of food insecurity and refugee resettlement and integration, I interacted with two local non-profits which strive to empower refugees by connecting them with resources and services. As discussed above, I worked closely with one of these non-profits, (AR4WRM), as both an intern and a researcher. One of the benefits of this collaboration was that I was able to conduct participant observation with many Central African refugees in a community setting. I also completed key informant interviews with the owners of the two African food stores in Tampa. Furthermore, because I am a member of the anthropology research team which works closely with diverse refugee resettlement and integration stakeholders (including AR4WRM), I was eventually invited into the online spaces where community liaisons, non-profit leaders, scholars, and the professionals whose job it is to safely resettle refugees meet to plan, discuss, and celebrate their efforts. In these spaces I conducted informal participant observation and solicited an interview from the leader of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force.

Participant Observation at "Community Events"[58]

During my internship with AR4WRM, I attended four events that we organized and hosted in collaboration with a local church. For two of the four events I provided transportation for two Central African refugee women and their children. The first event, a food donation,

[57] Tax Collector offices are Florida's version of the DMV.
[58] I also attended one event that was planned and hosted by a Central African refugee household to mark the 40th day since their father's death in East Africa. See page 70 for further discussion of this event.

occurred at the beginning of this project in June 2021. The second event, a school supplies drive, occurred towards the end of phase one data collection in August 2021. The third event, a baby shower, occurred in September 2021. The fourth event, a Christmas celebration, occurred in December 2021. During the summer of 2021, I also attended three out of four food security and advocacy workshops hosted by another refugee focused non-profit. Women from one Central African refugee household were present at these workshops.

Interviews with African Food Store Owners

Throughout this project I frequented the two African food stores in Tampa to purchase cassava flour and frozen cassava leaves to give to participants to build trust with and modestly compensate them. For funding reporting purposes, it would have been far simpler to purchase the needed supplies in one shopping trip.[59] However, I opted to make the purchases over the duration of my project to avoid depleting the stores' inventories of highly desired foodstuffs and to build relationships with the store owners. Because there are only two food stores in Tampa that cater to Africans, I knew these locations would be at the center of this project. Therefore, I introduced myself and explained my project to each of the two owners during my first trip to their stores.

Although I aimed to balance the amount of time and money I spent at each store, I ultimately favored the African Place Market Inc.[60] because it is more popular amongst Central African refugees, and it is closer to my apartment. Through casual conversations with the two owners, I gained important information about African foods, customer populations, SNAP acceptance, and supply chain issues. After witnessing the effect of supply chain issues on a participant during a go-along at one of these stores, I asked both store owners if I could interview

[59] The USF's Center for the Advancement of Food Security and Healthy Communities (CAFSHC) generously gave me $300 of funding, $200 of which was earmarked for the purpose of buying these foodstuffs.
[60] The two owners gave permission for the name of their stores to be included in this thesis.

them. In October 2021, I completed semi-structured interviews with each of the male owners. Each interview lasted between 30-60 minutes.

"Studying Through" using Participant Observation in Online Spaces

The Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force, which is a consortium of academics, paid professionals who work with refugees via a number of state and non-profit entities, and volunteers, meets quarterly. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, these public meetings were held in person at FDCF. However, they are now held via Zoom, and although still open to the public, you must have the meeting link[61] to join. These meetings are often attended by approximately 50 people, and their main purpose is to provide general updates and share resource information across the Tampa Bay area. During this project, I attended two of these meetings, one in August 2021 and the other in December 2021. In addition to these meetings, there are also more frequent Hillsborough County Provider/Partner meetings which are not open to the public. Their main purpose is to provide more detailed information about the state of local refugee resettlement and integration. During this project, I attended two of these meetings, one in September 2021 and the other in November 2021.

Although I actively attended these online meetings, I was on the fringe of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force until October 2021 when I attended an online "emergency meeting" with a small group of core Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force members. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss one of the Central African refugee households who were actively participating in my project. Unsure of how to navigate my positionality as an AR4WRM intern, a graduate student, and a researcher with ethical obligations, I mainly listened in the meeting. The meeting marked a critical point in this project because I witnessed the effects of informalization firsthand. Although

[61] My major professor sent me the Zoom link to both the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force and the Hillsborough County Provider/Partner meetings until I was added to the email list in early October 2021.

the meeting was arranged to discuss a vulnerable household who RSPs and state workers framed as being in "in crisis," no one claimed the household as their "client." It was also an important meeting because I was formally introduced to the leader of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force. This introduction opened a channel of communication between the two of us. Not only did they encourage me to directly report households' food-assistance issues to them, but in October 2021, they also agreed to participate in a one-hour Zoom interview.

Analysis

The data from this project were analyzed using recursive analysis. According to LeCompte and Schensul, recursive analysis "involves constant questioning, getting answers, asking more refined questions, getting more complete answers, and looking for instances that clarify, modify, or negate the original formulation" (2012:32). This type of analysis is at the core of ethnographic research because it occurs throughout the research process– in the field, during late data collection or soon after data collection is complete, and after some time away from the field (LeCompte and Schensul 2012). Such longitudinal analysis creates space for findings to emerge and facilitates a layered interpretation of the data. Finally, recursive analysis allows researchers to cycle between inductive, i.e., bottom-up, reasoning, and deductive, i.e., top-down, reasoning (LeCompte and Schensul 2010).

In the Field

During phase one of this project, I focused on conducting inductive analysis by following the lead of the founder of AR4WRM and members of the Central African refugee community. When I entered the field, I thought public transportation would be a central focus of this project as well as quantifiable food (in)security. However, I quickly learned that quantifying food

insecurity with the USDA six-item food insecurity measure[62] did not capture the nuances of participants' experiences of food security which were in constant flux due to overlapping insecurities as well as unstable African food supply chains. My attention was also redirected to gendered experiences of mobility by participants and gendered experiences of labor by the founder of AR4WRM. Thus, most of the themes discussed in this thesis arose from conversations, interviews, and observations made in the first four months in the field.

During Late Data Collection

From October 2021-January 2022, I shifted my focus from participants' experiences of food (in)security and (im)mobility to their immediate needs and their interactions with RSPs. This shift in research priorities reflected my deepening involvement with several newly arrived households as well as some particularly vulnerable households. During this period, participants told me, and I witnessed, how overlapping insecurities and the refugee resettlement system were affecting them. I also had many conversations with the founder of AR4WRM and the anthropology research team which helped me think about the data from different angles. Thus, new themes as well as interpretations arose during this period. In December 2021 and January 2022, I wrote a report containing critical case profiles for seven households,[63] which also helped me recognize and summarize patterns in the data.

After Some Time Away

After approximately six weeks of not working on this project, I began looking at my pictures from the field, reading through my fieldnotes,[64] and scrolling back through my

[62] More information about the USDA six-item food security measure can be found at https://www.ers.usda.gov/media/8282/short2012.pdf.
[63] See page 133 for further discussion of this outcome.
[64] I also relistened to the four interviews I recorded.

WhatsApp conversations with participants. I then started to write through the data as I prepared to deliver presentations on this project[65] and wrote this thesis. Specifically, I began to code the data using codes produced from themes identified by participants as well as broader issues identified by key informants. I did most of this coding on printed copies of my fieldnotes using highlighters and felt pens. I then typed or copy and pasted these codes into Word, quantified them when appropriate, and summarized them into paragraphs. During this phase I also did deductive analysis. To illustrate the three overarching deductive themes I created, I drew upon all three data types (fieldnotes, photos, and WhatsApp messages) to write vignettes.[66]

Conclusion

This project is an example of how applied anthropologists can utilize their flexible identity as scholars to collaborate with people across divides and with differential access to power (Schuller 2010). By aligning with AR4WRM and the Central African refugee community, and utilizing qualitative methodologies, I was able to collect data on Central African refugees' experiences of food (in)security and (im)mobility and their strategies for navigating these realities. Although I established relationships with members of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force, I did so to better understand the webs of power and social relationships through which AR4WRM and the Central African refugee community must move to access resources and services. By studying through I was able to collect data on how the informalized local refugee resettlement and food-assistance benefit systems work.

[65] I presented the findings at the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA) conference in Salt Lake City, Utah in March 2021 and at the University of South Florida Anthropology Department Master's Colloquium in April 2021.
[66] See Chapter 6.

CHAPTER FIVE:

FINDINGS

Phase One Sample Demographics

The population studied is 18 households, or approximately 100 people in total. Because most of the data collection took place in participants' homes over many months, a variety of family members, neighbors, and friends were present at the multiple research sessions. Additionally, participants' children, who are all linguistically adept, were often present and many organically joined the research sessions either to add their own viewpoints or to translate for adults, myself included. Out of the 18 households, ten (56%) are two-parent households. The other eight (44%) are headed by women. Additionally, ten (56%) of these households have been living in the United States for more than three years (56%), five (28%) have been living in the United States between one and three years, and three (17%) have been in the United States for less than one year. All three households that have been in the United States for less than one year arrived in late summer 2021. I met two of these households for the first time while they were living in hotel rooms waiting for their RSP to find them permanent housing. Three (17%) households have purchased a house. All three of these households have been living in the United States for more than three years.

As I report and discuss the findings, I will be separating the study population by demographics such as marital status and parenthood. These factors are significant life events that are also gendered marks of status within the Central African refugee community. Out of the 100

people who participated in this study, 34 are women over the age of 16[67] and 20 are men over the age of 16. Specifically, 11 (32%) are married women, 13 (38%) are young, unmarried women in their late teens through mid-twenties without children, eight (24%) are single mothers, and two (6%) are recognized by their family as disabled women. As for the men, ten (50%) are married and ten (50%) are unmarried in their late teens through mid-twenties without children. Out of the 18 households who participated in this study, all but two have at least one child under the age of 16. On average, households have 2.9 children, and three households have five or more children under the age of 16. This means that nearly half of the sample population is children. Because this study was focused on adults, I will only be sharing a small amount of data about children.

At least one person is working in 16 (94%) out of the 17 households,[68] and at least two people are working in seven (41%) out of the 17 households. It is difficult to ascertain specifically where many people work because they often do not know the address of their employer or even the name of the company. This is a result of being continuously moved from job site to job site within a network of factory employers, a situation that may have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, people frequently talk about working in an industry, such as fish packing, or in a town, such as Largo. Without knowing the exact location where people are working, it is still clear that women are more likely to work in the cold, and highly undesirable fish packing industry than men. Currently, women from seven (42%) households are working as fish packers, and women from two more households were recently working in this industry until they were injured at work, whereas men from only two (12%) households work as

[67] I am using the age of 16 to demarcate the end of childhood to make the driving statistics I will later present clearer. Sixteen is not a significant age within the Central African refugee community. Culturally, Central African refugees do not recognize people without children, even if those people are married, as full adults. The phrase "changanyisha damu" (to have mixed your blood) is used to talk about someone who that has "completed" their marriage by having children.

[68] Current employment information is unknown for one of the 18 households because the married couple and their young children left Florida in late summer 2021.

fish packers. Women from five (29%) households are also employed at amazon warehouses, a hospital, and in "Largo," while men from eight (47%) households are employed at an AC repair company, a casino, and a gas company as well as in construction and in "Largo." The one household that is not working is comprised of an elderly mother and her disabled adult daughter.

Ethnographic Interview and Participant Observation Findings

As we sat around the end of a long wooden table, the founder of AR4WRM asked two unmarried Central African refugee women if they wanted to plan a baby shower for their friends in the community who would be giving birth in the coming months. The young women hesitated before agreeing and excitedly beginning to make plans. One of them grabbed a notebook to write down the names and numbers of women they should add to a WhatsApp group about the party. As the list swelled, they turned their attention to food. The four of us agreed that food would be an essential part of the event, and the list of desired dishes was easy to compile – meat sauce, rice, *sombe*, and *ugali*. However, the details, such as who would buy the food, left everyone puzzled. One of the young women said the expectant mothers could pay for the food with their SNAP benefits, while the founder suggested the pregnant women's relatives, especially one of their brothers, could be responsible for purchasing the food. Still unclear, the women started to think about where to cook the food. The stove in the room next to us cooked too slow, and the other woman's house did not have big pots. To add to the worries, the women weren't sure there would be enough space in the few available cars to transport both food and people. Overwhelmed, the discussion shifted to brighter topics. What would everyone wear? Should the pregnant women be told about the event, or should it be a surprise? What about decorations?

For the next month, this conversation continued in WhatsApp with little clarity until the founder suggested that the meat sauce could be prepared at someone's home and the *sombe* and

ugali could be prepared at a local Anglican church[69] where the baby shower was going to be held. Everyone agreed, "*gahunda niyo*[70] – that's the plan."

As people began to trickle into the baby shower, the only food in sight was a cake covered in white frosting, yellow sunflowers, and lettering that said, "prayers to your babies." While we waited for everyone to arrive, a retired schoolteacher from the congregation chatted with me excitedly about the process of buying the cake at Publix. She hadn't known what to get but had settled on a cake similar to the one she had bought her daughter for her baby shower.

Each expectant mother received a table full of gifts, and having recently arrived in the United States, were moved to tears by the outpouring of support. However, when it was time to cut and eat the cake, nervous looks washed across the refugee women's faces. At the founder's behest, some women took pieces of the two-layer vanilla and chocolate cake and picked at them. Others, such as the young women and a small child, declined the cake. One of these women who had previously told me she doesn't want to become fat in America looked at me and made a no motion while pointing to her stomach. The oldest woman present took one bite of the cake and passed it right back to the woman from the church who had handed it to her.

As we see in this vignette, women in the Central African refugee community view the preparation and consumption of African food to be an essential component of hosting a successful community event. However, cultural food security barriers, such as the high cost of African food and the large amount of time, space, and energy needed to prepare these foods, as well as limited mobility make obtaining this ideal exceedingly difficult. Moreover, this vignette highlights that when African food does not materialize, American food is there to fill its place.

[69] AR4WRM has been partnering with this church to hold events for the Central African refugee community for several years. The priest and his wife have spent time in East Africa.
[70] This is a Kinyarwanda phrase.

Yet, these high sugar foods are rejected by most Central African refugee women because they are neither a means by which to perform identity nor do they taste good. Instead, it seems likely that Central African refugee women (and probably men too) are relying heavily on the stylization of their physical bodies to perform their identities. Throughout the rest of this section, I will present findings on Central African refugees' experiences of American and African food as well as the cultural importance of food and the impacts of consuming food in America.

Operationalizing and Discussing Food Categories

Often African foodways are erased because the public imagines the African continent to be conflict and famine ridden rather than home to dense, cosmopolitan food systems. Yet, different African ethno-linguistic groups have continuously been in contact with each other and many of these groups were linked to global trade networks long before Western colonization. Therefore, Western colonization, decolonization, and the current neo-colonial development period did not jump start the internationalization of African foodways. Like foodways around the world, those on the African continent have always been dynamic. However, unequal geopolitical power dynamics have made it easy[71] for capitalistic commodities such as corn, wheat flour, and sugar (Annear 2004), and more recently, industrialized "junk food," to spread quickly throughout Africa. Still, people, and the cultures they create, are adaptable and many processed foods are now dietary staples that have been reimagined and remade into "traditional foods" (McCabe, Leslie, and Deluca 2010; Guira et al. 2016; Trapp 2016).[72]

Given the histories and widespread exchange and availability of foodstuffs, it is difficult to bound and define categories such as "African" and "American" food. However, anyone who

[71] Although not undisputed.
[72] For example, both cassava-based *ugali* and corn-based *ugali* are seen as "African" or "Congolese" foods. However, neither of these crops are indigenous to the African continent.

has eaten American food sold in Africa or African food sold in America knows, based on the juxtaposition they experience through their senses, that there is something real about these categories. According to Baer et al. (2021), one way to operationalize these categories is by looking at meals instead of food. They argue that foods such as white bread, tea, juice, corn meal, chicken, fish, vegetables, and fruit are not necessarily American or Congolese,[73] rather what is important is how these foods are turned into meals and then consumed (4). Thus, these researchers based their coding of American meals and Congolese meals on preparation and consumption patterns (Baer et al. 2021). For this project I purposively left the categories of American and African food open to Central African refugees' emic interpretations because I wanted to learn about how members of the community perceive and experience food in the United States.

African, American, and Other Types of Food

I started each interview with basic questions about food preferences, such as, 'do you like American food?' and 'do you like African food?' I followed with more specific questions about household food consumption, asking which American and African foods they often eat. This not only allowed me to collect nuanced information about food and identity, but it also helped me build rapport with participants. Because the refugee resettlement and integration processes are largely bureaucratized and depersonalized, sharing my own African and American food preferences and consumption patterns with families was an essential part of this project. During the initial research sessions, a lot of time was devoted to discussing "African" and "American" foods (linguistically distinguished as such), as well as life in East Africa more generally.[74]

[73] I have used African food as a category to distance myself from the ethnic politics surrounding Congolese identity.
[74] This was especially true for the several families who had previously lived on an urban refugee camp in the capital of Uganda. Because I had lived in the same city for two months, we spent a significant amount of time discussing our experiences of daily life there.

African Food. When asked about African food, participants named many types of food that are common throughout East and Central Africa, as well as some that are more specific to the countries where they lived on refugee camps. The most mentioned foods were *chapati* (similar to tortillas, but thicker), *chai* (tea), *daga or omena* (small, often sun dried fish), *mandazi* (sweet fried balls of dough often eaten for breakfast), *matoke* (plantain based dish), *maharagwe* (beans), *mchuzi wa nyama* (meat sauce), *samaki* (larger fish), *sambuusa* (samosa), *sombe* (cooked cassava greens), *uji* (porridge), *wali* (rice), and *ugali* (thick maize or cassava flour mixed and boiled with water, also called *fufu*). Out of these foods, all participants stressed the importance of *sombe* and *ugali*. One elderly man referred to *sombe* and *ugali* as the community's "*repas principal*," but reminded me "we do not eat that every day."

Two other households also shared this sentiment. After listing a few African foods, one woman exclaimed "there are many recipes, so we change a lot." Another household said they eat many foods throughout the week but always try to have *sombe* and *ugali* in their house in case their children invite their friends over or they get another visitor.

Sombe. Sombe is a culturally important dish in the Rwanda-East Congo region that is consumed by Central African refugees from all ethno-linguistic groups. According to one woman who had lived on a refugee camp in Uganda, "people in Uganda don't really eat *sombe*, but the Congolese eat it there. People [also] eat it a lot in Rwanda."

Every household prepares *sombe* slightly differently, but the base of the dish is always cassava leaves to which ingredients such as beef and/or beef bones,[75] celery leaves, eggplant, garlic, green pepper, onion, palm oil, peanut powder, and spices such as salt, pepper, and everyday seasoning are added. Cooking *sombe* is a slow process as you must boil the cassava

[75] *Sombe* can also be made with goat and/or goat bones or without meat.

leaves for at least an hour and a half, although many households boil them for much longer. While the leaves are boiling, the remaining ingredients (except the meat and/or bones) are blended. After the cassava leaves have been boiled and the water has been drained, additional water is added as well as the blended ingredients and the meat and/or bones. The dish is then re-boiled until it becomes thick.

In the Tampa Bay area, three stores sell frozen cassava leaves, and one market sells fresh cassava leaves. Although participants buy packages of frozen cassava leaves[76] at the two African food stores in Tampa, they do not necessarily like the taste of them. When asked about *sombe* in America, one elderly woman, who had been in the United States for about a year, said she does not like to eat *sombe* here because it is "too runny." Another woman who had been in the United States for less than a year and who was pregnant during the interview, said that although she was craving *sombe*, she had stopped eating it because it did not taste the same as she remembered.

Other participants who disliked the *sombe* were suspicious about the contents of the package. One man said the mixture contains hard parts of the cassava plant that shouldn't be consumed but are added because "it is a business." Another referred to the frozen *sombe* as "machine *sombe*," and another man said he just doesn't trust food in America, including frozen items like cassava leaves and fish. He explained, you don't know how long they have been sitting in the freezer and you don't know "whose hand prepared them." Concern about trusting frozen food also showed up in another interview. Participants believed that "fresh is better than frozen," and boxed and canned food is inedible.

[76] The casava leaves come in 50 oz. tubes and are sold for approximately $8. For most households, one package makes enough *sombe* for one meal.

Despite the critiques of the cassava leaves available at the African food stores, most households continued to purchase and consume them[77] because *sombe* is both culturally and nutritionally important. In many households, *sombe* is the preferred vegetable dish, and participants touted its health benefits. One man remarked that an elderly woman was looking well because she regularly eats *sombe*, while another man explained that the dish is good for your bones because it "has a lot of calcium." This man went on to explain that *sombe* is also an important dish for breastfeeding mothers because it "helps them produce more milk."

Ugali. Ugali, also known as *fufu*, is a staple dish in many African cuisines. It is especially widespread in East, Central, and West Africa and many individuals from these regions do not feel like they have eaten a meal unless they have eaten this dish (Annear 2004; Ohna, Kaarhus, and Kinabo 2012). *Ugali* can be prepared from the flour of several crops[78] and traditionally, at least in Southern Tanzania, the type of flour, including its milled texture, carried significant sociocultural and political economic meaning (Ohna, Kaarhus, and Kinabo 2012). Even if these meanings have faded or were considerably different around Lake Kivu and Lake Tanganyika, where many Central African refugees originally lived, *ugali* itself remains an important and desired marker of national and regional identity. Previous research with Central African refugees resettled in Tampa found that although expensive, *kwanga*,[79] fermented cassava flour, is the idealized base for making *ugali* (Mahoney et al. 2020a; Baer et al. 2021). However, the only flour preference shared by Central African refugee households who participated in this project was that they do not like *ugali* made from yellow maize flour. Otherwise, participants said that

[77] Participants often use social networks and technology to spread information about better quality foodstuffs.
[78] The most popular being cassava, white maize, and yellow maize.
[79] Sometimes also referred to as *kikwanga* or as *lafun* in West African markets.

ugali made from either cassava flour or white maize flour is fine, although they taste slightly different.

One man gave an especially insightful and vacillating response. According to the community leader, he likes and eats both types of *ugali*. He elaborated that that he likes *ugali* made from cassava flour because "that's what we ate when I was a boy in the Congo, so it reminds me of the Congo," but he also likes *ugali* made from white maize flour because they "taste very similar" and that is what "we ate on the camps." His answer reminded me of Boswell's (2017) reflection on Chagos islander's consumption of coconut chicken curry. They write, "I came to understand that dispossession has hidden depths. Some experience it as a bittersweet dish, a reminder of what was and what can never be regained whilst others perceive in that dish, the goodness of the past, a part of them that can never be taken away" (200).

Unlike the recipe for *sombe*, the process of making *ugali* is ubiquitous, but the skill required to make it is not easily mastered. First, water is boiled, and the desired flour is added while stirring. The cook must then continue stirring and breaking lumps. The dish quickly becomes thick and requires both patience and strength to stir. Rather than stir the entire mixture at once, sections are stirred and scraped into bowls. The *ugali* then takes the shape of the bowl and the molded *ugali* are often stacked on a platter before later being placed onto plates. *Ugali* is always eaten with your hands by rolling the hot, stiff dish into small balls and dipping it into a sauce and/or *sombe*.

American Food. While households shared many thoughts about African food, they had little to say about American food beyond expressing their distaste for it. Central African refugees who arrived in the United States as older teens or adults firmly responded that they do not like American food. In fact, many immediately gave an emphatic no through nonverbal channels

such as making faces of disgust and shaking their hands or head. While a few participants who have been in the United States for more than three years said they occasionally eat American foods such as pizza, hamburgers, or fries, no participants reported liking these foods more than African food. One woman sidestepped picking between African and American food stating, "I eat all kinds of foods," but she only listed a few American foods she likes. When asked to talk more about American food, one participant said she likes Papa Johns and four participants brought up McDonalds. One of these participants code switched into English to say, "I like hamburgers," and then returned to a mix of French and Swahili to elaborate that she orders the "number 10 – chicken."

Other Types of Food. After discussing African and American food, I asked participants about their experiences with other types of food available in Tampa. Only one household who had been in the United States for more than three years and has someone employed in the food industry discussed eating outside their home in detail. The husband and wife in this household both agreed that they enjoy eating at different restaurants, especially international buffets. While the husband said he likes all types of food, the wife said she "likes to choose." During the pandemic, the location where the husband normally works as a chef closed, so he took a job at a Spanish[80] restaurant. However, neither this household nor any other said they like to eat Chinese or Latin American food. This does not mean that participants are not aware of these foods. According to one participant, "Spanish" food is like African food because it consists of "rice and chicken." Additionally, at a community event I attended the host household showed great care in preparing and sorting foods for the attendees. Because it was a memorial party, the household first shared food with the predominately Hispanic congregation where they attend church, before

[80] This is how participants refer to people and food from Latin America.

inviting the Central African refugee community to come for performances, speeches, and food. Although the same foods were served to both groups, the household consciously sorted the food so that there was more rice for the Hispanic congregation and more *sombe* and *ugali* for the Central African refugee community.

Cultural Importance of African Food

The possible lack of familiar foods is a common concern expressed by Central African refugees[81] in their pre-resettlement cultural orientation classes (Cultural Orientation Resource Center 2013:7). Because food is an essential part of everyday life as well as identity construction and maintenance, this concern likely reflects fears about food insecurity and identity loss. The two quintessential foods identified by participants of all ages as African food, specifically Central African food, were *sombe* and *ugali*. However, while these foods are sometimes prepared at home and consumed by the household, it seems these dishes are currently being used more often as identity markers.[82] Notably, the cultural importance of these foods stretches across the ethnic differences present within the Central African refugee community.

When there is a community event, such as the baby shower or memorial party previously discussed, both Central African refugee hosts and guests assume *sombe* and *ugali* will be eaten. While these two events took place much later in the project, I learned the importance of these foods to the community in two instances during the summer of 2021. The first time, I was standing in a household's driveway with my major professor waiting for another researcher to arrive when men began pulling up in vehicles. The men were obviously in a hurry, and I watched as they loaded supplies into a van, including a grill and Walmart sacks filled with bags of corn

[81] This source specifically refers to Congolese refugees.

[82] As we will see in the later discussion, there are likely many reasons for this including cultural food insecurity, differences in intergenerational food preferences, and shifts in social reproduction responsibilities.

flour to make *ugali*. As they worked, they explained that a woman in the community had died, so many community members were going to her home to grieve. An important part of the grieving process would be the preparation and consumption of *sombe* and *ugali*. However, the men explained that after checking the usual stores,[83] they had not been able to find enough cassava leaves to make an adequate quantity of *sombe*.

The second time, I was at a multi-cultural cooking event hosted by a local refugee focused non-profit,[84] to which I had been invited and had subsequently invited a mother and daughter from one of the households participating in my project. They had arrived excited to cook *sombe* and *ugali* for refugee women from other ethnic backgrounds and the public, but the event did not go as expected. Not only did it take the Central African women much longer to cook their dishes than everyone else, but the non-profit had purchased the wrong kind of flour[85] to make *ugali*. The women were upset and explained that that type of flour produced a stickier *ugali* which is only given to sick people. Later, another African woman commented, "we do not make *ugali* like that in my country," but the Central African refugee women were not there to hear her, and the difference was lost on the other people present. To make the situation worse, the non-profit did little to encourage other participants to try the foods the Central African refugee women had prepared. Instead, the ingredients[86] were exotified, and other participants made disparaging comments such as, "I decide what to eat with my eyes first and I will not eat that." This was the third event in a serious of four and after having attended the first three events, the mother and daughter did not attend the fourth event the following week.

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[83] See page 79.
[84] There are three refugee focused non-profits in Tampa, AR4WRM, Radiant Hands, and Refugee and Migrant Women's Initiative (RAMWI).
[85] The non-profit purchased plantain flour after having received directions to one of the African food stores and explicit instructions to buy cassava flour or white maize flour.
[86] For the event, the women chose to make *sombe* with beef hooves.

Hospitality. Fulfilling culturally prescribed ideas of gendered hospitality, in which food sharing practices are embedded, is deeply important to members of the Central African refugee community. Although households will share any cooked food that is available in the house, it is most desirable to share culturally important, and high-status foods, such as *sombe* and *ugali*, as well as beef, goat, and fish. However, given economic as well as time constraints,[87] these foods are not always present in households. Because people knew I was interested in food, they would often invite me back later to prepare and consume these types of foods. I did accept three households' offers, and I am deeply grateful to the women from those households for being so linguistically patient and kind, and for the memories of laughing and sweating in their kitchens.

Given the cultural importance of hospitality, it is difficult to leave a household without at least accepting a drink,[88] and it is rude to repeatedly decline a host's offers. Although I was aware of hospitality customs before starting this project, it was sometimes challenging, especially early on, to balance accepting too little or too much when I knew that many of the households were experiencing food insecurity. Eventually, I found a balance, which included giving cassava flour, cassava leaves, or other foods, such as fruit, to households, and acknowledging that for Central African refugees, having enough food to offer guests is a vital part of how they understand cultural food security.

As will later be discussed, there are generational differences in household food preferences and many parents are bending to their children's tastes. However, parents are rigid about cultural expectations surrounding hospitality, and are explicitly instructing their children

[87] Most cooking is done by women, but many women are also working long hours as fish packagers.
[88] It is common to offer guests drinks such as soda, juice, tea, or water. In the afternoon or evening, male guests are often offered beer. Throughout this project, I noticed many families were giving their guests the same type of non-alcoholic ginger beer. One household said they had started purchasing it from the "African Market" after drinking it at another community member's house.

how to be good hosts.[89] In addition to instructing their children, it was not uncommon for participants to explicitly explain to me the importance of hospitality and what it means to them. For example, one man apologized when he did not have any cooked food to give me because in his "African culture" he should give me something or he would not feel good about himself. He added that it would not be "polite"[90] for me to leave without accepting. Another time, an elderly man reflected that "eating together is like being back home [in Africa] because people share everything."

Food in America

Because many foods which are commonly consumed in the United States are also available in the African countries where households used to live, adult participants' discussion of American and African food, as well as their food preferences, became blurred at the interviews deepened. Overall, participants felt that food in America was not fresh, healthy, or natural. Moreover, most participants felt that the bread, milk, and produce available in America was not as good as the African version. One woman described bread in America as being "sweet and wet like cake," and another woman talked about teaching herself to like the milk sold here because it is too sugary. As for produce, one woman said she did not like the fruits and vegetables available here because they are "too watery." When pressed to describe the taste of specific foods in America, many participants simply stated they just taste "different," but "not in a good way." When asked about the taste of food in America in general, most participants instantaneously said sugary, while one participant said salty. Because American food contains high levels of sugar

[89] The only time I saw a parent reprimand their child was when a young woman broke the implicit gendered rules around hospitality by serving herself before serving a male neighbor.
[90] There are also gendered norms surrounding being a good guest.

and salt (Albritton 2012; Himmelgreen et al. 2014) I was surprised that only one participant described it as too salty.

Chicken. It quickly became evident that chicken is the most detested food sold in stores in America as participants in almost every household lamented its quality and taste. According to one man, the chicken sold in the United States is not "real" chicken. This sentiment was repeated by other participants who drew a sharp distinction between American chicken and African chicken. Another participant, a woman, went into detail explaining that African chicken cooks better in sauces because it does not get soft and has an overall better flavor than chicken from American supermarkets. One teenage boy added scientific information to his description of American chicken stating that "the [American] chicken isn't actually good for you [because] they give the chickens shots to make them grow faster."

One ethnographic moment in which a mother and son were discussing chicken succinctly captures the flexibility of food and identity. We had just shifted the interview from the living room to the kitchen so the woman could prepare lunch for her sleeping family members who would soon leave for the night shift, when a young boy, who was translating for his mother and I, volunteered that he liked American food like chicken wings. His mother who was cutting vegetables at the sink quickly corrected him that chicken is an African food. The young boy was surprised and began to explain himself until he relented that he hadn't known there were chickens in Africa. Beyond illustrating the differences in intergenerational understandings of food and identity, this conversation sticks out because the woman was the only participant to claim the chicken sold in America as an African food.

Intergenerational Food Preferences

Based on Central African refugee children's comments during household interviews and participant observation, as well as their parents' reflections, there are stark intergenerational differences in food preferences within households. Generally, children of all ages reported liking American food such as hamburgers, pizza, and spaghetti. However, when I asked young children from some households about their food preferences over the course of this project, it was not uncommon for their answers to fluctuate.

Memorably, an elementary aged girl from the family I visited most often, originally said she liked American food, and then months later added, "I like spaghetti." Because her mother had shown me a cabinet filled with boxes of spaghetti noodles the family had received from food donations, her answer was not surprising. However, when I was leaving the family's home that day, I noticed the girl was playing a cooking game on a phone. At that moment she was virtually pouring tomato sauce from a bottle onto a plate of cooked spaghetti noodles. I said, "oh, is this why you like spaghetti now?" To which she replied by smiling broadly and nodding her head in affirmation as she served the spaghetti to her avatar before beginning to expertly chop, boil, and feed the avatar carrots.

When Central African refugee teenagers discussed their food preferences, they gave details about American and African food. One teenage girl said she doesn't really like American food, but "you just got to go ahead and eat it." She then gave a very specific account of her American food preferences. For example, she said, "I like milk, but not every day. I like chocolate milk, but regular milk, I don't like it no more." Another teenage girl said it is difficult for her to "mix"[91]American and African food. Because she was out of school for the summer, she

[91] When she said mix, she did not mean to eat both African and American food at one sitting. Rather, she was stating that she does not like to switch between these types of food.

said she was eating African food and enjoying it, but that she did not like to eat American food at school and then African food at home. During the school year, she either doesn't eat at home or she asks her brother to buy her food from Burger King. One teenage boy said he likes both American food such as burgers, chicken wings, and pizza, and African food such as *ugali*. However, his high school aged sister reflected that even when she wants to eat *ugali* because her family is eating it or it smells good, she cannot because it feels like it gets stuck in her throat. Overwhelmingly, adults, teenagers, and even children, reported that Central African refugee youth prefer rice over *ugali* and beans over meat or chicken sauces. It is common for parents to remark that their children will no longer eat meat and chicken sauces, and multiple teenagers told me that they were "tired" of these foods because they "ate them too much."

Impacts of Intergenerational Food Preferences. The intergenerational differences in food preferences discussed above are challenging for parents. The pressure to buy or cook food that everyone will eat creates friction in households and negatively impacts household food security. Despite financial strain, one set of parents described cooking separate meals for themselves and their children to make everyone happy. Because the family had lost access to SNAP benefits the parents were eating smaller portions to ensure they could afford foods that everyone in their household likes. Yet, they worried that their African neighbors would gossip about and tease their children who would surely need to bring suitcases filled with American food when the family returned to visit their home country in the future. Although parents in other households described how their children's' food preferences differed from their own, no other household explicitly discussed how they are handling the differences. However, based on our conversations about daily meals as well as the observations I made in their homes; it seems that many parents are acquiescing to their children's preferences. For example, one single mother

described cooking a big pot of rice for herself and her children each afternoon before leaving for work despite having a five-gallon bucket of corn flour in the pantry. In another household headed by women, the mother and oldest daughter said they do not like rice, but often cook it anyways for the rest of the household.

Appetite and Body Image. Although participants were not asked about their appetite or body image, participants from many households spoke about these topics. Like food preferences, their answers show intergenerational differences. The responses also showed gendered differences in understandings of body image. Participants from three households who had been in the United States over two years said everyone in their home is eating less because of a drop in appetite. While one family attributed their decreased appetite to a doctor's recommendation that they reduce their food consumption to keep their cholesterol in check, the other families attributed their decreased appetite to the food available in the US. One woman in her late teens reported that everyone in her family was eating less, and specifically eating less meat, because they were "tired" of it. She said they had switched to consuming mostly beans.[92] In another household, the father, mother, and their elementary aged daughter said they don't feel hungry in the United States. When asked to elaborate, the mother shrugged and said she did not like American food.

In their earlier research with members of this community, Baer et al. found that younger and older girls had a strong desire to not "become fat like Americans" (2021:13). In this study, one younger, unmarried woman, whose family was reported to be malnourished by American doctors, also explicitly stated that she did not want to eat American food because she does not want to become fat. While younger teenager girls were less explicit about their motivations, two

[92] Although this participant framed this change as a personal choice based on taste, economic realities may also have played a role in the decision.

described coming home from school and not eating anything because they felt full. Both stated "my mom worries about me." Beyond concerns about weight-gain, their appetite may reflect the intergenerational differences in food preference discussed above. Finally, when parents spoke about concerns surrounding their children and food, they spoke about their young sons. Parents from two households said they were worried about an elementary aged sons' weight gain. Another household was not necessarily worried about their pre-elementary aged son's weight, but they shared that the boy often talked about his own weight. According to his father, the boy had started doing work out activities, such as push-ups, because he didn't like when he had "started to get a belly."

Quantified Interview and Participant Observation Findings

Preferred Stores

When I asked participants from the 18 households where they buy groceries, three stores were commonly mentioned. Participants from every household discussed shopping at Walmart, and for the newest families, this was often the only store they could frequently access. The next most popular answer, given by fifteen households (83%), was one of the two African food stores in Tampa. These two stores are owned by West African men who have been selling imported African foodstuffs since the early 2000s. These stores are important sources of highly desired foodstuffs such as cassava leaves, dried fish, flour, palm oil, and ground peanuts. These stores are referred to differently within the Central African community, and the inexactness of the community's naming practices surrounding these stores can be a source of confusion. It was not uncommon for participants to refer to the African food store located on W. Waters as the "Ghana" or "Nigeria" store despite it being owned by a Togolese man. Three households (17%) also discussed being aware of African food stores in other cities, such as Orlando, Florida, and

other states, such as Georgia and Ohio. Participants from thirteen households (72%) said they shop at a large warehouse that sells items in bulk. Despite the store carrying many Asian foodstuffs, the Central African refugee community has dubbed this location the "African Market."

A few participants also discussed buying specific foodstuffs at an Asian farmer's market in neighboring St. Petersburg, Florida as well as at several ethnic stores in Tampa. Although the farmer's market sells highly desired foodstuffs, such as fresh cassava leaves and tilapia, only three households (17%) mentioned shopping there. Participants gave a few reasons why other community members do not shop there, including distance, operating hours, and a cash only payment system.

As for the ethnic stores, participants mentioned a halal butchery, a small Asian grocery store chain, and an international bazar. The halal butchery, which sells live animals, such as chickens, cows, and goats, that are then killed on site for the buyer, was mentioned by five households (28%). These five participants felt that although expensive, the butchery was the best place to buy chicken in Tampa. The Asian grocery store chain, which participants call the "Chinese Market," was mentioned by four households (28%). Participants discussed buying foodstuffs such as fresh fish, frozen cassava leaves, and potato leaves there. The last store, which markets itself as an international bazaar, but predominately sells Indian foodstuffs, was mentioned by two households (11%). This store sells a variety of beans and flours.

Grocery Shopping

In addition to asking participants where they like to shop, I also asked them who does the grocery shopping in their family and how this person gets to the store. In the ten two-parent households, 60% of married couples reported going grocery shopping together, but two of these

women also said they sometimes go grocery shopping alone. The other four married women discussed asking their husbands to buy groceries, driving to the store, sending their children to the store either by vehicle or on foot, and walking to the store. Out of the eight households headed by single mothers, the mothers, or oldest daughters, in seven of these households (88%) said they rely on men in the community to give them rides to the store. Three of these women asked their close male relatives, such as their son or brother, one woman asked her boyfriend, as did her sister, and one household asked a young man whose family was from their native town. Women from all eight households also either sent their children or siblings to the store on foot or walked there themselves. Additionally, a young unmarried daughter from one of these households recently obtained her driver's license which she uses to run errands, such as grocery shopping, for her family. The one household who did not ask men from the community to drive them to the store was the most isolated family, and the older unmarried daughter in this family said she took the bus to the store.

Vehicle Ownership

Thirteen of the 18 households (72%) that participated in this project have been able to purchase at least once vehicle. The five households who have been unable to purchase a vehicle are all headed by single mothers. As of late January 2022, no household that was resettled in 2021 had been able to purchase a vehicle. However, it should not be assumed that their inability to purchase a vehicle is only a reflection of the time since their arrival. Two of the families who have been in the United States for over three years and with whom I discussed transportation deeply, said they bought a vehicle within a few months of their initial arrival. Moreover, two of three households who have been in the United States between 1-3 years were able to purchase a

vehicle approximately two years after arrival. However, these four families were all two-parent households, whereas the three newly arrived families are headed by single mothers.

Driver's Licenses

A households' ability to purchase a vehicle is not the only gendered barrier to private transportation. Out of the 18 households who participated in this study, 20 men and 32 women were potential drivers (Table 1).[93] Out of these potential driver's, 21 (40%) had obtained a driver's license. However, this percentage hides a significant gendered difference. Out of the 20 men who were eligible to obtain a driver's license, 15 (75%) either self-reported or someone in their household said they have a driver's license. Meanwhile, the percentage of eligible women who have obtained a driver's license is much lower as only six out of 32 (19%) women said they have one or were reported as having one. These numbers are even more striking when marital status and parenthood is taken into consideration. While eight out of ten (80%) married men have obtained their driver's license, only two[94] out of 11 (18%) married women and one out of eight single mothers (13%) have a driver's license. Furthermore, seven out of ten (70%) unmarried men in their late teens through mid-twenties have obtained their driver's licenses compare to three out of 13 (23%) unmarried childless women in their late teens through mid-twenties.

[93] For this project, I have defined a potential driver as a person over the age of 16 whose family does not recognize them as having a disability.
[94] One woman obtained her driver's license before she was married.

Table 1 Central African Refugee Household Transportation Characteristics Ordered by Time since Arrival in the United States

Household	Time in the US	Vehicles	Eligible Men Drivers	Licensed Men Drivers	Eligible Women Drivers	Licensed Women Drivers
#1	<1 year	0	0	0	1	0
#2	<1 year	0	1	0	1	0
#3	<1 year	0	0	0	1	0
#4	1-3 years	0	0	0	1	0
#5	1-3 years	1	0	0	3	1
#6	1-3 years	0	0	0	2	0
#7	1-3 years	1	0	0	1	0
#8	1-3 years	2	1	1	3	0
#9	3+ years	1	2	1	3	1
#10	3+ years	2	2	1	1	0
#11	3+ years	1	2	1	2	0
#12	3+ years	2	1	1	2	1
#13	3+ years	2	2	2	2	0
#14	3+ years	2	2	2	3	1
#15	3+ years	2	1	1	1	1
#16	3+ years	1	2	2	2	1
#17	3+ years	1	1	1	1	0
#18	3+ years	2	3	2	2	0

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

The Central African refugee community's preferred type of food-assistance benefits is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),[95] formerly known as Food Stamps, because they can choose which foods to purchase. Fifty percent of interviewed households reported having SNAP benefits at least once during this project. Out of these households, five (56%) had arrived in the United States within the last two years. The other four households receiving food-assistance were extremely vulnerable due to medical issues which often limited their ability to work, or family turmoil. Notably, all nine households were having ongoing, often cyclical, problems with receiving SNAP benefits. For the five newer families, there were two initial problems. First, their RSP caseworker had never given them their login name or password

[95] In Florida, the Department of Children and Families oversees SNAP benefits.

to access the online SNAP system. Second, for at least three of these households, their notices regarding their food benefits were still being mailed to the RSP office. For two of the other four households, their initial problem was that they needed someone who spoke English to call to check their balance or order them a replacement card. However, at least six of the households eventually also had problems navigating the complex recertification process which is required every six months to keep obtaining food-assistance benefits. For the five newer families, who are still connected, even if only informally, to RSP caseworkers, there is a highly bureaucratized and hyper personal process through which to seek help reapplying. However, the other four vulnerable families do not have access to this process.

During this project, eight families were not receiving SNAP benefits. At least six of these families wanted to receive it, and would have likely qualified, but they did not have someone to help them navigate the complex system either in person or online. Moreover, like the four vulnerable households who had been receiving SNAP benefits, the informal process by which to re-apply was closed to them. When I asked one woman if she was receiving SNAP benefits, tears welled in her eyes as she told me, "I do the paperwork many times and then wait and a month later get a letter that says no food stamps."

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

The other type of food-assistance benefits which some Central African refugee households accessed during this project was the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, commonly referred to by the shorted acronym WIC.[96] Out of the nine households who were eligible for WIC benefits, only two (22%) received it during this project. These women are both single mothers who have been in the United States for less than a

[96] In Florida, the Department of Health oversees WIC benefits.

year. As for the other seven households, three (33%) were in the process of obtaining WIC benefits, three (33%) did not want to receive it, and one was not asked about their WIC status. Unfortunately, I lost contact with two of the households who were signing up for WIC benefits, but the third household was using the program as a safety net after incurring unexpected funeral expenses following a death in their family in Africa and a death in the Central African refugee community. For two of the households that did not want to sign up for these benefits, the main reason was that they felt the program was undesirable because it offers American food, not African food.

Donated Food

During the initial resettlement period as well as later moments of "crisis," it is common for households to receive "Boxes of Hope" from Metropolitan Ministries. These boxes mainly consist of canned foods, and it is rare for them to contain fresh produce. Because all participants agree that they do not eat boxed or canned food and these types of food are not African foods, households do not later seek out donated foods when they experience hunger. Three households (17%) were aware of places to receive free food, and one household even showed me a flyer for such an event, but zero households were interested in obtaining these foods. In fact, households who had received donated foods in the past were likely to still have these foods in their cabinets and pantries. Multiple newer households said they did not know what to do with foods they received that they did not want, while households who had been in the United States for a few years discussed giving these foods to their Spanish co-workers. When I began to ask questions about their experiences with donated foods, five households dug out canned and boxed items to ask me to identify them. One household produced three cans of food – chicken noodle soup,

Italian green beans, and whole potatoes, and made faces of disgust as I explained to them what was in the cans by using the fresh produce they had recently bought at Walmart.

Changing Patterns of Social Reproduction

Social reproduction responsibilities, or activities such as cooking and watching children, are patterned in three ways among Central African refugee households. In the most recently resettled households, there are two family networks split into four households, all headed by women. Two of these households are headed by elderly mothers and the other two households are headed by their daughters who have young children. Both daughters who are the heads of their own households with children are working as fish packagers. While it is unclear how these elderly mother and single mother households, who live in apartments next to each other, are dividing cooking responsibilities, both elderly women are taking care of their working daughter's young children. In households where mothers are at home, either because they were recently injured at the fish packaging company or because they are unwell, the degree to which their oldest daughter is responsible for the households' social reproduction fluctuates. Both mothers who were injured at the factory have teenage daughters still in high school. However, the two mothers that are unwell have daughters in their late teens through late twenties. All three daughters whose mothers are unwell are working outside the home and doing social reproduction work at home.

Most concerningly, unmarried daughters who are in their mid-teens through mid-twenties are now primarily responsible for the social reproduction labor in seven households (39%). All seven of these young women's mothers have entered the labor market and at least five of the mothers (71%) are working as fish packagers. Two of these daughters had recently left the fish company so their mother could begin working there, while the two oldest of these daughters are

themselves working at the fish packaging company. Two out of the three other daughters who are primarily responsible for their households' social reproduction are still in high school while the third just graduated.

Phase Two Sample Demographics

During phase one I became familiar with 18 Central African refugee households, and I built deeper relationships with women from six of these households. These six women then agreed to participate in the second phase of this study which used go-alongs, i.e., mobile ethnographic interviews and participant observation, to collect data. Because my relationship with each of these women is different, I accompanied or drove them to a variety of places including community events and grocery stores as well as an apartment leasing office, a bank, a church, an English class location, a food distribution site, a popular employment site for Central African refugees, a RSP office, and a Tax Collector office.[97]

In this chapter I have presented gender and generational findings, but I have not yet discussed ethnicity. Because I worked across ethnic boundaries in the community, I mostly avoided bringing up the sensitive subject. However, I mention ethnicity now because the six women who participated in phase two are from the two sub-communities within the Central African refugee community. I cannot speak to the intricacies of their ethnic backgrounds, but it is important to note that three of the six women are native Kinyarwanda speakers, who can code-switch with varying degrees of skill into Swahili, while the other half are native Swahili speakers, who cannot code-switch into Kinyarwanda. While I observed close male friends or relatives of these six women build social relationships across the Kinyarwanda-Swahili ethno-

[97] The Tax Collector office is Florida's version of the DMV.

linguistic boundary, I witnessed very little social interaction between women from these two ethnolinguistic groups, even when they attended community events hosted by AR4WRM.

In addition to ethno-linguistic concerns, language also had a major impact on the relationships I formed with each of these six women. Due to language differences, I was close to two women in each of the two sub-communities because we could communicate well, while I had a more distant and less verbal relationship with the third women in these social groups. Specifically, two of the three Kinyarwanda speakers speak high intermediate English, so we communicated in depth in English. However, the third Kinyarwanda speaker and I struggled to verbally communicate because we had to rely on Swahili. This was difficult for us because I speak basic Tanzanian Swahili and rely on linguistic knowledge from Comorian[98] which I speak well, while she speaks Congolese Swahili which includes many significant phonetic changes. Among the three Swahili speakers, one woman speaks low intermediate English, so we mainly communicated in English. A second woman speaks fluent French and understands basic English, so we communicated in a mix of English, French and Swahili. Because this woman is especially linguistically open and playful, she also often included basic Spanish too. The third Swahili speaker speaks very fast Swahili. Fortunately, she is patient and good friends with the second woman, so we often communicated as a group. Additionally, the third woman's teenage daughter is highly skilled at code-switching between English and Swahili, so she often jumped in to translated if we could not understand something that was important or nuanced.

Out of these six women, five are mothers, and one is the oldest daughter in her family. Although she is still in her early twenties, she has become the head of her household because she has a driver's license and speaks English. Only two of these women live in a two-parent

[98] Comorian and Swahili are from the same sub-group of Bantu languages under the broader Niger-Congo family.

household.[99] Additionally, the Kinyarwanda speaking women have been in the United States for fewer years than the Swahili speaking women. Two out of three Kinyarwanda speakers have been in the United States less than a year while the third Kinyarwanda speaker has been in the United States for one to three years. All three Swahili speakers have been in the United States for more than three years. Finally, at least one person from all six of the households where these women reside are working, including three of these women. All three women work as fish packers.

In this chapter I have presented the findings from my project, including the phase one sample of 18 households and the phase two sample of six women. In the next chapter, I will present additional findings in the form of ethnographic vignettes to illustrate key analytic themes.

[99] A third woman's husband is still living on a refugee camp in East Africa. It is unclear if he will be reunited with his family and young children in the US.

CHAPTER SIX:

FURTHER ETHNOGRAPHY AND ANALYTIC THEMES

Introduction

This chapter incorporates vignettes written from my fieldnotes and WhatsApp conversations with participants to introduce and provide ethnographic texture for three overarching themes – cultural food insecurity, the informalization of US refugee resettlement, and overlapping insecurities. Each of these themes are divided into sub-themes and discussed by blending additional findings with theory. Finally, the gendered (and intersectional) dimensions of many of the sub-themes are highlighted and explored in detail.

Contextualizing Cultural Food Insecurity

In late June 2022, a woman leaned forward as she intently discussed her households' food situation with me and the founder of AR4WRM and me. As the two of us sat on a leather couch next to a TV playing Swahili music videos, the woman explained that her household had little access to African foods, such as *samaki* (fish), *sombe* (cassava greens), and *ugali* (thick starch made by mixing maize or cassava flour with boiling water), because they are always waiting for their friends from another county (Pinellas) to take them grocery shopping.[100] Normally, their friends from Pinellas do not make the trip across the Bay to visit them until late Sunday afternoons. She rubbed her hands nervously as she elaborated, "I don't ask them to go to another store [besides Walmart] in a different direction to get small details."

[100] They did not have a support network in Tampa.

As the woman was walking us to our vehicles after the interview, I offered to take her to the African food store that accepts SNAP benefits whenever she would be free. Because it was summer, my schedule was open. However, the woman began to list the days and times her family members work at the fish factory. After searching for a time when the store would be open and someone would be home to watch the family's young children, we agreed on Friday afternoon.

The following Friday, the bell at the top of the door rang as the woman, two of her older children, and I entered the Togolese-owned African food store. The owner greeted us from behind the counter and I stopped to talk to him as the woman walked straight to the freezers in the back of store where the cassava leaves and fish are kept. Within seconds, she returned to the front of the store and asked, "*sombe*?" The owner shook his head and said, "the truck did not come last week but I hope it will come on Sunday." As I explained the problem to the woman, disappointment washed over her face. There was a long pause as we stared at each other in disbelief. Then, she shook her head and quietly resumed shopping while I stood thinking, "after finding a ride and time to go to the store, the family still will not have *sombe* for dinner."

The above vignette demonstrates how food availability (lack of *sombe*) and access issues (busy work schedules and a lack of childcare and transportation) intersect, negatively impacting cultural food security. In this section, I will contextualize the four pillars of cultural food security (availability, access, use, and stability) through a gendered and intersectional lens.

Cultural Food Security – Availability

The degree of overlap between the findings of this project and those reported by Moffat, Mohammed, and Newbold (2017) is striking. According to these researchers, participants experienced a decrease in the variety of foods available to them in Canada along with a

decrease in the quality and freshness of available food. Moreover, participants felt that the taste and smell of foods was not as good, and they worried about the chemicals used to grow them.

As discussed in Chapter 5, many Central African refugees also reported feeling like the quality and freshness of the food available in the United States is not as good as that of the foods available in the African countries where they used to live. While no participants mentioned a difference in smell, many explained that foods sold in America taste different. In addition, some participants said they do not trust foods that are not fresh. This distrust extended past boxed and canned foods to include frozen foods. Some participants also said they are unhappy that fresh foods sold in the United State may not be organic. They saw this as a major difference between food sold by African farmers and food sold in American grocery stores. Moreover, while members of the community were (sometimes) able to find common food items they desired, such as cassava leaves and corn flour, they could not find many of the foods they missed. For example, one woman told me she could never find the fish she wanted to eat, and when I asked her what fish she wanted, she replied, "you wouldn't know them if I told you." To overcome this challenge one household said that when they hear someone is traveling to East Africa, they ask them to bring them back specific foods and spices. Meanwhile, a different household had arranged for their sister living in Burundi to send them boxes of dried fish.[101]

Supply Chain Issues

During this project, the availability of foods which members of the Central African refugee community wanted to consume was severely impacted by supply chain issues. Beyond COVID-19 itself, one of the biggest concerns throughout the pandemic has been product

[101] This household, headed by a single mother, was partnering with another woman in the community to sell these dried fish to Central African refugees throughout the United States. The women did not want to sell the fish to other Central African refugees living in Tampa because they "will complain about the price." The women said they were selling the fish for $50 per two-gallon freezer bag.

shortages due to changes in supply chains. According to Aday and Aday, the pandemic has impacted food supply chains at every point "from the field to the consumer," including production, processing, distribution, and demand (2020:167). However, when I began framing this project in early 2021, it seemed like the world was in the late stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Then the more transmittable delta variant emerged and became the dominant US variant by June 2021 (Anthes 2021), just weeks into this project. Despite the delta surge, no member of the Central African refugee community told me they were concerned about COVID-19. For many of them, the immediate effects of the pandemic were short-lived as they temporally lost their jobs but were back to work months before the start of this project. However, the delta variant intensified global supply chain issues (Mull 2021; Gamio and Goodman 2021) and as shown in the opening vignette, caused delays and shortages of many of the foodstuffs commonly consumed within the community.

In early October 2021, when I interviewed the owners of the two African food stores in Tampa, supply chain issues were at the forefront of their minds. This was especially true for the Togolese man who owns the store where the majority of Central African refugees shop.[102] According to him, shipping in "2020 was okay, but 2021 was very bad. [Since] January things are not moving that much. This time coming late, you can't get your stuff on time, especially the last three months, no sale." For example, he continued,

> If I had to order *sombe* right now I'm going to order it from Maryland to have a frozen truck to bring it. If I have to order it from Georgia, because when I am out of *sombe* I order it from different places, Georgia if you get to November Georgia won't be come anytime. Right now to November is really hard. Today one customer was here be looking for smoked chicken. I call the warehouse in Georgia and request for smoked chicken and the guy say no, it's a little bit hard right now. We can't place an order for smoked chicken

[102] The community shops at this store because it accepts SNAP benefits. However, many people in the community would prefer to shop at the other African food store because it has a wider selection. According to the owner of the other store, his business would do better if he could take SNAP benefits again, but he and his store has been banned from accepting them for life because of transaction mistakes in the past.

> because for a truck to keep it inside it's going to be spoiled. They also can't find a frozen truck on time. For me, a frozen truck is taking a long time to get it.

In addition to issues stemming from a lack of freezer trucks, the owner was experiencing issues at the port in Miami, Florida. He felt these COVID-19 related shipping problems were negatively impacting his business. He elaborated,

> because what customers are looking for you don't have that much. So, if two people come to you, you don't have it. When they go out, somebody is coming they say no, he don't have it. So that is gonna affect you. So things are going bad up to now. If one person call you three times for one item, you don't have it, you got a problem." When I asked him how he would respond to these business challenges he said, "I have to raise them [the prices] a little bit. Because all of the truck companies are high right now. Everybody's busy and stuff. For me, it took me forever to raise everything by hand.[103] Because the way Africans speak, drive me crazy. This was $3.99, I was supposed to raise it to $4.99 a long, long, long time. But if I want to change it, the way they're going to be talking,[104] I keep it that way. Finally, when the COVID pop up and everything was going high, I said I got to change it.

While the Nigerian man who owns the second African food store was having supply chain issues, his specific issues were different than those experienced by the Togolese man. During the interview I commented that I was surprised his store looked so full of products. He responded,

> it's a lot of stuff but before we have about 350 items, but now we only have about 200 or less than 250 items. But the only thing is, we had one item maybe normally before we have three at a time as inventory. But now we get in six just to make the store full. So, you know, so we increase our inventory on certain produces that we can access. But overall, the number of items we are selling has reduced by like, 100, because of the shortages, because we can't find them. We don't have access to them.

Specifically, he said he was having shortages of manufactured and processed products, "like most of the powders and grains. We short on a lot of them on like a canned fish like sardines and stuff like that. We have a shortage like noodles, like African noodles. [Also]

[103] He handwrites the labels for his products.
[104] In an earlier part of the interview, the owner described how dealing with customer complaints and requests to lower the prices of products are the biggest challenges in owning an African food store.

different kinds of fish, we only have access to a few of them" However, when I asked him about cassava leaves to make *sombe*, he said "cassava leaves will always come because that's a plant. It's not using much processing because it's natural. But when it comes to stuff that are going through manufacturing and processing, like flours and stuff like that."

Like the first owner, the Nigerian owner felt that COVID-19 had mainly disrupted his business in 2021. He said, "we stay open all through the pandemic and business was good. Yeah, because people need food to stay at home. Business wasn't bad. Like I said, in 2020. Bringing in stuff selling stuff wasn't bad. But everything started in 2021 when there's a shortage of everything." When I then asked him how long he expected the shortages to last he replied,

> as long as the Africans can't have a kind of help. Every company that shut down if they have help to resuscitate their company, to bring their company back to life, then everything will be well. If not, America is so lucky, there's a lot of money out there giving to companies, manufacturers, and stuff like that to stay in business, but there was no such program in Africa. So, that's the worst thing about it.

As the responses of the African food store owners show, throughout 2021 there were major delays and shortages of foods commonly consumed by Central African refugees, and although none of the participants explicitly linked their troubles finding specific foods to the pandemic, it was the likely cause. While previous research within the Central African refugee community showed that finding and then affording cassava flour was a major problem for members of the community (Mahoney et al. 2020a; Baer et al. 2021), none of the participants in this study mentioned or showed me this type of flour. However, many households discussed their inability to find white corn flour because the "African Market" had recently stopped selling the one they liked, and they could not find a new brand that produced good *ugali*. Thus, many households were spending money on different brands to try to find a suitable replacement. However, two households said they always found a brand they like at Walmart or from another

African food store in Orlando, Florida. Whether or not it was true, one household gossiped that the "African Market" had not stopped selling five-gallon buckets of white corn flour, rather, people from Iowa were driving down with trailers to buy all of it.

Cultural Food Security – Access

The concept of food access recognizes that adequate supply does not guarantee food security (FAO 2008). According to Moffat, Mohammed, and Newbold (2017), the two main factors impeding cultural food access for the participants in their study were low-income and difficulty shopping. In this project, low-income was a significant barrier for Central African refugees. While difficulty shopping was mentioned by only one participant, a lack of access to food-assistance benefits, and a lack of access to culturally appropriate foods via food donations and the WIC food-assistance program were noted as significant barriers. This project also found that gendered immobility negatively impacts cultural food security.

It is widely recognized that refugees are often underemployed and work long hours in low wage jobs that do not necessarily reflect their educational and employment backgrounds (Keles 2008; Holbrook 2019; Baer et al. 2021). This is true for members of the Central African refugee community in Tampa, especially women. In 42% of households, women only earn $500 per week after working more than 40 hours at local fish factories. Moreover, in six out of the eight households (75%) headed by single mothers with children, at least one person in the household is employed at these factories. According to a woman who works as a fish packer, her household, which often has four to seven people living in it, spends half of its $400 monthly grocery budget on meat. When I last spoke with this woman, her household was not receiving SNAP benefits and they were eating one to two meals a day. Like most Central African refugee households, this family does not like American foods, so they spend their small budget

exclusively on African foods, including meat from the halal butchery. While households may make small price-based substitutions like replacing palm oil with vegetable oil (Baer et al. 2021) or cultured buttermilk and/ or Nido[105] with gallons of whole milk, many prefer to reduce their overall food consumption rather than eat American foods.

While a lack of knowledge about how to grocery shop is often cited as a barrier to food security for refugees (Moffat, Mohammed, and Newbold 2017; McElrone et al. 2019), only one household in this study discussed this challenge. Notably, the single mother did not feel like grocery shopping in general was a problem, rather she was having difficulties shopping for WIC-approved items. According to Holbrook (2019), this is a common problem for refugees from all ethnic backgrounds because RSPs do not teach their clients how to match the foods available at stores to WIC food lists which are written in English and use abbreviations such as "oz." and "lb." Holbrook elaborate that most of the participants in their study learned how to use WIC benefits from their friends or family through "peer learning" (2019:58).

Peer learning, i.e., drawing upon social networks, is also common in the Central African refugee community. Throughout this project, participants discussed learning how to shop, where to shop, and what to buy from fellow community members. Three households who had been in the United States for more than two years anticipated helping newly arriving families learn to do these activities. However, Mahoney et al. (2020a) warns that given the intersectional differences within the community, there are gaps in social networks that may isolate the most disadvantaged families, such as those from stigmatized ethnic and social backgrounds, including single mothers with children. Moreover, it can take time for new families to become connected with other members of the community. In my study, knowledge about preferred stores and food was spread

[105] This is a brand of powdered milk that is common in East and Central Africa.

evenly throughout the community, including to new arrivals,[106] except in two instances. The first household is from a stigmatized ethnic background, and they arrived just before the onset of the pandemic. This household reported having very little contact with the Central African refugee community. They also reported being severely food insecure during their first year in the United States. The second household is not from a stigmatized ethnic background, and they have been living in the United States for at least three years. It is unclear why there were not aware of the African food stores[107] as I met them while visiting another household who shops at these stores. The household in question said they frequently shop at the "African Market," and they were eager to get google map directions to the African food stores.

Because most Central African refugee households are low income, they should be eligible for SNAP benefits. For members of the community, SNAP benefits are the most desired and sought-after form of food-assistance because they can use them to purchase a wide variety of foods. Since many households had little control over the food they were given while living on refugee camps (Baer et al. 2021), enacting food-agency is especially important to them. However, most households said it was exceedingly difficult to access and then renew these benefits largely because of the informalization of the SNAP application process. While half of the households were able to access SNAP benefits at least once during this project, all nine households later experienced issues with their benefits. Moreover, at least six of the eight families who weren't receiving these benefits wanted to receive them and would have likely

[106] Members of the community quickly showed the three households who arrived in late summer 2021 where to shop and what to buy. Notably, these households had blood relatives who had lived in the area for more than two years.
[107] The father said another community member sometimes gives them fresh cassava leaves. In addition, the household could have been buying their preferred foods at either the small Chinese supermarket chain or the international bazaar as both are near a mall which the household used as a reference point to say they buy groceries at a store near there. It is common for members of the community to give locations in reference to certain landmarks as they often do not remember the names of stores, or the community refers to them by a different name.

qualified if they had someone to help them with their application. Formalizing the process for applying for SNAP benefits could increase the community's cultural food security.

Central African refugee households with children under the age of five should also be eligible for WIC benefits. However, only two of the nine households eligible for WIC received it during this project. For three Central African refugee households, the decision to not access the WIC program was an empowered refusal to not eat just any type of food,[108] rather than a lack of information. For example, when one expectant mother was asked why she did not want to use WIC, she explained, "I had wanted food for Africa, but they give me food for here, for America, and we do not eat this." Thus, while some households obtained WIC for their first baby born in the United States, it was less common to sign up for the program for subsequent babies. More Department of Health outreach about the WIC program to dispel myths and explore the possibility of advocating for more culturally appropriate WIC foods for this community could help the newest and most vulnerable households increase their cultural food security.

As for donated foods, when many households first arrived in the United States they were given "Boxes of Hope" by Metropolitan Ministries. Because these boxes consist mainly of boxed and canned foods, which families consider inedible, there is little interest in negotiating work schedules and finding transportation to pick up these foods. In fact, one household said they prefer to obtain high-interest, short-term loans[109] to keep their family from experiencing hunger when they run out of money before their next paycheck rather than access donated foods. Because newly arriving families are likely to continue receiving donated foods during early

[108] The expectation that African refugees will quickly adapt to eating just any food mirrors framings of food insecurity among Africans themselves. See Annear for a critique of the deficit-based stereotype that the "hungry continent requires food, any food" (2004:16).
[109] The household had taken out several $500 loans from Community Choice Financial to pay for food. The interest on these two-week loans is $55.

resettlement, it would be beneficial for RSPs and refugee focused non-profits to explore partnering with a different food bank that offers more fresh food, such as Feeding Tampa Bay. Recently, RSPs have begun to give households donated Walmart cards to purchase their own food. Households appreciate these cards because it gives them the power to decide which foods to purchase. This practice should be continued, and potentially expanded to include gift cards from the African food stores.

Gendered Mobility. Rather than stressing grocery shopping as a major barrier to food security for this community, I echo Baer et al.'s (2021) finding that behind low-income, lack of transportation is the biggest barrier to food security for this population. However, while the anthropologists, AR4WRM, and members of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force often acknowledge that transportation is a challenge for the community, this is not the full story. In fact, 13 out of 18 households (72%) own at least one vehicle and 15 out of 20 men (75%) in the community who are legally eligible for a driver's license have one. Meanwhile, the percentage of eligible women who have obtained a driver's license is much lower as only six out of 32 women (19%) in the community who are legally eligible have a driver's license.

Most often, Central African refugee women are responsible for the social reproduction of their households, including grocery shopping, so women's decreased mobility, and the resulting gendered power imbalance is concerning. According to this project, households are unlikely to purchase a vehicle and have a licensed driver in the home within their first two years in the United State. Moreover, households who are headed by a single mother with young children are unlikely to be able to purchase and drive a vehicle at all or may have to wait until their sons become old enough to drive. Other than utilizing private transportation, obtaining rides from other community members, especially to go grocery shopping, is the ideal means of

transportation within the community. However, because most community members who can drive are men, in the act of becoming mobile, newly arrived women and single mothers become vulnerable to gender-based violence. During this project, there were no accounts of gender-based violence, rather, men from the community were helping women who had arrived in the United States in the past two years become mobile. Beyond giving them rides, one man helped a young woman obtain her driver's license and helped his friend buy his sister a bicycle. Yet, there were high rates of gender-based violence, especially while receiving rides from men, reported within this community in the past. The drop in violence may be a reflection of many factors, but it should be noted that the women who have arrived in the United States in the past two years had strong social ties to men in the community either through blood or long-standing family relationships. Therefore, empowering women to become mobile should be a central goal for the non-profits, RSPs, and volunteers that work with this community.

Cultural Food Security – Use

The third pillar of food security identified by the FAO is use. This pillar links the human body's ability to make use of nutrients to a variety of factors such as, "good care and feeding practices, food preparation, diversity of diet, and the intra-household distribution of food" (2008:1). For Moffat, Mohammed, and Newbold, food use refers to the "knowledge and ability to prepare nutritious, safe, and culturally satisfying food" (2017:21).

Gendered Labor. During this project, I collected very little data on food use other than households' gendered division of social reproduction activities, specifically cooking. Because most participants were working the night shift six days a week at factories, many of the interviews and participant observation sessions were conducted during the late morning through early evening on the weekend day that participants were off work. Given the timing and multiple

hour duration of the research sessions, it was common for someone in the household to be cooking when I showed up or for someone to start cooking while I was there. In contrast with American food that is stereotyped as quick and easy, the food consumed in Central African refugee households is slow and labor intensive. Therefore, the cook (*mpishi*) in the household spends several hours each day preparing, cooking, and cleaning up after meals. While households consume a wide variety of dishes that differ in the amount of energy and time needed to prepare them, large family sizes make any type of cooking a significant social reproduction activity. In addition, culturally important foods, such as *ugali* and *sombe,* require especially high energy and time inputs.

When I asked men if they cook in America, two were adamant that they do not know how to cook. Two other men said everyone in their household knows how to cook and helps cook. One of the latter men explained that it's important for men to be able to cook to feed their kids, but twomen from his culture do not respect men who cook. Another man said that he cooks international food, and his wife cooks African food. He added that "eating her food is like being back in Africa." When I asked the same question to a teenage boy, who was warming up Rice-A-Roni in the microwave, he responded that his mother had taught him how to cook *ugali*, *sombe,* and spaghetti. One teenage sister of an unmarried man answered for her brother saying that he used to cook in Africa when their mother was at work, but he does not help her cook in America.

During this project, I never observed a man or teenage boy cooking for their household. Moreover, no teenage girl or woman, even those related to the men who said they sometimes cook for their households, said their male relatives cook. Cooking was clearly a highly gendered social reproduction activity.

Cultural Food Security – Stability

Although Powers (2008) and Moffat, Mohammed, and Newbold (2017) did not explicitly address the fourth pillar of food security in their studies, given the duration and timing of this project, this pillar is important. According to FAO (2008) the fourth pillar, stability, examines shifts in the other three pillars over time. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the precarity and vulnerability that characterizes Central African refugees' lives, this pillar is an important aspect of assessing their cultural food security. As was discussed in this section, the availability of culturally appropriate food has been and will likely continue to be impacted by fluctuations in the global market, including shipping delays. Many access factors make the Central African refugee community susceptible to cultural food insecurity. However, cyclical changes in access to SNAP benefits, including the changing informal requirements for being deemed deserving of obtaining help navigating the SNAP application process, have a strong negative impact on these households. Finally, changes in the distribution of cooking and grocery shopping responsibilities can create cultural food insecurity within households. Not only do traditional foods take more time and energy to prepare, but the stores that sell these foods are often more difficult to reach. These realities are exacerbated by overlapping insecurities such as job and transportation insecurity.

Documenting the Informalization of US Refugee Resettlement

In early 2022, I accompanied a Central African refugee woman to register for English classes.[110]Although she had been in the United States for almost six months, her RSP had not enrolled her in English classes, and she had grown tired of waiting. When we arrived at CARIBE, we were surprised to find out that she would need a signed recommendation form from

[110] In Hillsborough County, Florida, RSPs subcontract English to another local group.

her RSP caseworker to register for classes. Although the English class provider had an employee working from the RSP office, they were adamant that the refugee woman would have to obtain the signed form herself. This was a major inconvenience for the woman who had left her newborn in the care of her elderly mother. However, seeing a closing window of opportunity to access English classes, we agreed to drive across town to the RSP office.

When we arrived at the office, there were dozens of Spanish speakers clustered around the entrance waiting for an opportunity to speak with a worker when the locked door inevitably opened. After calling the help number listed on the door to no avail. We attempted and failed to catch the attention of the worker responsible for opening the door. After half an hour, we caught their attention and were escorted to the desk of the English program's employee.

The worker was a kind woman counting down the days to her retirement. After we explained the situation, she agreed to search the online system to direct us to the refugee woman's caseworker. After typing, she looked up from her computer. "Are you sure you have a caseworker? You aren't in the system." The three of us exchanged confused looks as the refugee woman insisted that a caseworker sometimes calls her, although the caseworker never seems to answer the phone when she called her for help. Looking at the paperwork the woman had provided, the woman searched the online system again. The search result was the same. However, this time the English program worker elaborated that the refugee woman had previously been in the system, but her case had been closed for a few months.

The local RSP office has an open floorplan. In the middle of the room there is a sea of cubicles for low-level workers, and along the perimeter there are floor to ceiling glass offices with wooden doors for caseworkers and other high-level staff. Serendipitously, the caseworker nearest the English program worker's cubicle had her office door open. Upon hearing our

conversation, she walked over to us. After looking at the computer screen, she reflected with some irritation that she had just helped another Central African refugee with the same problem. Having talked to another project participant who was leaving the RSP office as we were waiting to enter, it was clear the caseworker was referring to another newly arrived, single mother .

Although the caseworker normally works as a childcare specialist, she spent the next few hours helping the refugee woman. In fact, we were the last people to leave the RSP office, which had technically already closed. To begin, she found the woman's previous caseworker and took her official file. From the file, she learned that the RSP had been paying the woman's rent and utilities, but they had stopped the previous month. This was news to the refugee woman, who had never been provided a copy of her lease. There was also a letter from FDCF in the file stating that the woman's SNAP benefits would be terminated if she did not immediately complete the recertification process. Although the RSP had placed the woman in an apartment some months prior, the letter had been mailed to the RSP. The RSP had not acted, and the deadline to recertify had already passed. In addition, the refugee woman never received her SNAP login information. The helpful caseworker discovered that the information had not been written in the file, thus her account would have to be reset.

To solve these additional issues and provide the needed form to enroll in English classes, the caseworker asked her bosses for authorization to formally re-enroll the woman in a resettlement program. The caseworker then collected all the necessary signatures and began asking her coworkers to take the woman on as their client. The caseworker returned defeated, stating that no one would add the woman to their caseload. She quickly put on a positive expression and reassured the refugee woman, saying, "I can help you. You speak English, so we

can communicate." She then told us that she had recently taken on several Central African refugee households as clients,[111] because none of her coworkers would work with them.

When she left her apartment that morning, the refugee woman wanted to take English classes to improve her intermediate language skills so she could find a job near her apartment. Getting a job near her apartment would allow her to earn money and devote time to caring for her young children and elderly mother. However, as evening approached, she learned that she would need to start working in just a few days. To make matters worse, the only job in which the RSP could place her was in the distant fish packing factory.

The woman's new caseworker found an employment specialist. This woman brought a stack of documents, mostly in Spanish, for the refugee woman to sign. In silence, the worker pointed, the woman signed, and pages were flipped. On one page, the word training caught my attention. I asked the employment specialist to flip back to the document. By signing the paper, the refugee woman had agreed that she had attended RSP sponsored job training. When I asked if the woman would receive job training, the employment specialist said, "there is no time. She will work now."

With no choice but to start working to pay the rent and utilities due in less than two weeks, the refugee woman signed the documents. Afterwards, the five of us discussed the importance of finding the woman a better job given her English skills. Numbers and emails were exchanged, and both the caseworker and the employment specialist promised the refugee woman that her job at the fish factory would be a short-term measure. Four months, one additional phone call and a string of unanswered emails later, the refugee woman is still working at the fish factory and has not been able to attend a single English class.

[111] Three of the four households were participating in this project.

Informalization as Context

While the data obtained from my one in-person interaction with the local RSP only speaks directly to the experiences of three households who participated in this project, it is important context for understanding the gaps in service provision which continuously expose Central African refugees to overlapping risks. The informalization of the local refugee resettlement system is a theme that has come up in previous research conducted with the Central African refugee community (see Mahoney et al. 2020a; Billingsley and Mahoney 2021). According to Mahoney et al. (2020a), informalization is a side effect of the federal changes to US refugee resettlement funding that began under the Trump administration and have not (yet) been significantly altered by the Biden administration. Because the arrival of Central African refugees in Tampa, Florida largely coincided with these cuts, further research on informalization within the US refugee resettlement system is needed.

Navigating Overlapping Insecurities

Four days after swapping numbers with one Central African refugee household, I woke up to three messages in English sent at 1:14 AM by a participant who works the night shift. The first message, which was long and urgent, asked me to come the following day to help them help their neighbor with a landlord issue. This message was followed by one greeting my husband and another with only a prayer hand emoji.

When I showed up at their apartment the next day, it was clear that the matter was urgent as the complex manager was threatening to evict a three-generation Central African refugee household headed by a single mother. The manager did not want to renew the household's lease because they claimed the family had not been properly taking care of the apartment. However, the family and their helpful "brother" were frustrated that the household was expected to upkeep

the apartment when it had major issues the manager refused to address. After a tense discussion in the doorway of the leasing office, it was revealed that the complex had missed the deadline to legally notify the household that their lease would not be renewed. Frustrated, the manager said they would still evict the family in a month if their apartment was not in better condition. The manager then asked for money to renew the household's lease as well as a written list of things that needed to be fixed in the apartment.

On our walk back from the leasing office, the man who had texted me began to tell me about his own household's experience with being evicted from their first apartment in the United States following a seven-day-notice. He reflected, when faced with housing insecurity, "even if you have food in your house, it will not taste sweet."[112] Later that day, after we had taken the long list of apartment issues back to the complex manager and driven to another family's apartment complex to ask about vacancies, just in case, the man woke up from a brief nap in the passenger seat. He explained that he had not went to sleep since getting off work that morning, and since it was late afternoon, he would not be able to sleep before going back to work. Exhausted, he asked, "how can I sleep when I know my sister needs help?"

Not only does the above vignette demonstrate how insecurities overlap, but it also shows how households, particularly those headed by single mothers, draw upon their own informal social networks to navigate risk. In this discussion section, I will discuss why risk becomes concentrated in certain households. I will then consider how overlapping insecurities and the informalization of US refugee resettlement hinder women's mobility. Finally, I will describe two strategies households use to mitigate and navigate risk.

[112] Members of the Central African refugee community often critique American food as being too sweet, so the usage of the word sweet here is linguistically interesting. The man was speaking English, but it seems likely that he was drawing upon the Swahili word "tamu" which can, but does not always, refer to sugary sweetness. He was probably using the English word sweet to mean content and satisfied.

Overlapping Insecurities

As I spent more time in the field and built stronger relationships with women from six households, I began to hear about and witness the complex ways overlapping insecurities manifest in participants' lives. I came to realize that for many Central African refugee households, while food may be an issue, had recently been an issue, or would soon become an issue again, it was just one of several. Thus, while households were open to talking about food, and hopeful I could help them get their SNAP benefits reinstated, they were more focused on their immediate and overlapping documentation, education, financial, housing, job, medical, and transportation problems. Only by understanding how US social policies create overlapping insecurities and how Central African refugees utilize strategies to navigate these insecurities, can RSPs develop programs that are refugee-centered.

In the opening vignette, we see how housing, job, and transportation insecurity overlap, but in later moments, it was clear that these insecurities were also influenced by educational and financial insecurities. Although the household headed by a single mother lives within walking distance to a location that offers free English classes for refugees, the mother as well as her two unmarried, adult daughters rarely attend classes. When I asked them why they do not attend, they said it was due to their work schedules at the fish factory. Because they work the night shift at least five days a week, they do not have the time or energy to attend morning English classes. Moreover, for the mother, her job-related pain makes it unfeasible to walk to the location. In turn, their stagnant English skills make it impossible for them to change jobs, and even when the mother tried to save money in a savings account, she fell victim to identity theft.

The mother heading the three-generation household is gregarious and laid-back. One day, she explained to me that English is close enough to French[113] that she can comprehend a lot of written English. However, her other English skills are very basic. Thus, while she was aware there was a problem with her bank account, she was not able to attend to the issue until her oldest English-speaking son could take a day off work. During summer 2021, the mother and son went to the bank multiple times to file complaints about more than a thousand dollars of unauthorized airline charges. For the mother, each trip to the bank meant losing sleep between work shifts. For her son, the trips meant reduced work hours which in turn meant reduced income.

When I visited the bank with the mother in fall 2021, we were told there were no complaints on file, and too much time had passed to submit a complaint. When it was clear there was absolutely no pathway for recouping the money, the mother asked the bank to close her account. She was then asked to stand in line to receive what was left of her households' savings– five dollars and change. The mother's face reflected both the loss of the money and the absurdity of being made to wait in a long line for cash that couldn't feed even one person. Although the household was no longer under threat of eviction, and the apartment manager had even fixed some of the requested items, it was once again the end of the month. After leaving the bank, the mother asked me to drop her off at Amscot so she could get a cash advance to pay rent.

Precarity

Like many immigrants, and Americans from working class backgrounds, Central African refugees face extreme labor precarity within the United States. Because economic self-sufficiency is the core tenet of US refugee resettlement, refugees are expected to quickly take jobs that do not necessarily reflect their educational backgrounds or previous work experiences

[113] She was attending a school in which lessons were delivered in French before her parents were killed in the DRC. Following their deaths, she was forced to abandon school because she could not afford the fees.

(Keles 2008; Kerwin 2012; Baran et al. 2018). Refugees' health and their medical conditions, which may have qualified them for resettlement, are often not considered. In Tampa, many Central African refugees are placed into positions in freezing fish factories where they are expected to stand and engage in repetitive tasks without proper clothing, such as gloves, for shifts that often exceed ten hours. The hand and hip pain caused by these work conditions was described by multiple women in this study. Although refugees are eligible for food-assistance benefits for the first five years after they enter the United States, they must be employed within six months to be eligible to renew these benefits. The pressure to take and maintain employment to keep these food-assistance benefits combined with a lack of language and job training support from RSPs makes it nearly impossible for many Central African refugees to switch jobs. This is especially true for women.

To better understand how people with power think about precarity and social policies, I interviewed a high-level member of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force. In Florida, economic self-sufficiency is the goal for both refugee and American welfare recipients, so it was unsurprising that the interviewee focused heavily on the importance of employment for Central African refugees. However, it was notable that the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force member often engaged in deficit-based discourse about the community. For example, the interviewee said that for camp-based populations, integration takes a while since "a whole culture develops" on the camps around being in limbo and not being able to go to school or work. Moreover, despite their intimate knowledge of refugee resettlement and welfare policies, the interviewee never critically reflected on the structural factors which shape Central African refugees' lives. Instead, they excitedly described a deepening relationship with the fishery, stating that they had had a meeting with the company the day before because "they [the fishery] really want to partner with

us more, because they're finding that these [refugees, particularly Central African refugees] are really good staff to have, they work hard, they stay committed."

While the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force member is aware that community members detest the fishery because it is extremely cold and they are often forced to work beyond their scheduled hours, they unironically called the fishery a "job where people can make enough money to survive." They felt that without better language skills, Central African refugees have few choices.

> That's the situation we're in right now that's so challenging is that jobs, like the fishery, work because they can work a lot of hours and make money. Also, there's staff there that speaks Swahili and English. And till they learn English? Those are the kinds of jobs they're sort of trapped in; you know? And yet, how do you have time to learn English when you're working so many hours? It's this catch 22.

Although the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force member is a high-level state employee with power within the local refugee resettlement system, they have little day-to-day contact with refugee families. It is the RSP employees such as caseworkers, community liaisons, and employment specialists who are responsible for implementing US refugee resettlement policy. However, these workers, many of whom are former ORR eligible persons, are in a precarious work position themselves. This is especially true at this moment as the Biden administration has not restored funding to the US refugee resettlement system following the infamous Trump era budget cuts, which has left these workers with fewer coworkers and more clients. Yet, we must hold space to simultaneously assert that while these workers are also at risk because they are overworked and underpaid, their choices and politics shape how Central African refugees experience resettlement. As discussed in the section on informalization, these workers are instrumental in gaining access to the formal resettlement system through which resources and services are distributed. Thus, these workers hold significant power within the resettlement

system as they decide which refugees receive "guaranteed" service and which face compounded and overlapping risks from having to rely on informal networks.

Vulnerability

According to Quesada, Hart, and Bourgois, vulnerability is a positionality, which is determined by an individual's "location in a hierarchical social order and its diverse networks of power relationships and effects" (2011:341). As will be discussed later in this section, within the Central African refugee community some individuals and households are more vulnerable than others because their intersectional identities are devalued due to sociocultural, historical, and political economic factors. However, migrants, including refugees, do not simply bring a static culture, or more broadly, a static way of being and thinking, with them to the United States. While this may seem like an obvious assertion, in the words of De Genova, anthropologists have tended to "transnationalize the originary locus of 'culture' (such as a village) by mobilizing 'the native' and […] insistently treating people as the mere embodiments of their 'native' culture" (2016:229). Therefore, it is important to ground this study, which focuses on women's experiences of food and overlapping insecurities, in the recognitions that participants' lives are embedded in numerous evolving relationships and spaces which have different, but often intersecting, conceptions of value. Without this recognition, it is easy to misinterpret gendered differences in the data as simply a result of culturally-based ideas of gender.

Throughout this project, girls and women highlighted, some more directly than others, that gender inequality is a salient theme in their lives. While many of these girls' and women's experiences and reflections are shared throughout this thesis, I want to briefly focus on the most recently resettled households. All these households are headed by women and their experiences speak to the gendered nature of the local refugee resettlement system. According to four women

from households resettled in the previous two years, they felt there were delays and hesitancy on the part of the local RSP to give or help women acquire bank accounts, employment, Florida identification cards, language training, and even cash- and food-assistance benefits such as SNAP, TANF,[114] and WIC. While AR4WRM has helped some of these women obtain bank accounts and Florida identification cards and sign up for language training, as of May 2022, some women participants are still waiting for these basic necessities.

Because of my positionality and language skills, I was closest to two of the younger of these household heads, who are both strong English speakers. These women, as well as the woman who runs AR4WRM, raised my awareness of the violence occurring within the local refugee resettlement system. Not only did they express their frustration surrounding watching men from the community receive benefits such as employment, Florida identification cards, and language training, while they waited, but they also discussed how their requests for these benefits were ignored or met with hostility by RSPs. According to the women, when they asked to receive these benefits, or in the case of the founder of AR4WRM, asked for other women to receive these benefits, they were often yelled at by both men and women RSP workers.

Gendered Mobility. While it is unclear whether women who were resettled in previous years were met with similar levels of gender discrimination during their early resettlement period, having enumerated the ways that the local RSP has recently discriminated against women, it is important to look deeper into an aspect of Central African refugee women's lives that shows stark gendered differences – mobility. As reported in Chapter 5, out of the 18 households who participated in this study, 20 men and 32 women were potential drivers, and 21

[114] According to ACF (2018), refugees are guaranteed cash benefits for the first year after arrival. If a refugee household is eligible for TANF they should receive it, but if they do not meet the eligibility requirements, they are entitled to receive RAC from their RSP. However, this rarely happens. When one participant asked her RSP about these cash benefits she was told, "why would you get cash? You are not an old woman, you should work."

individuals (40%) had obtained a driver's license. However, there was stark difference in the percentage of legal men and women drivers as 75% of men compared to just 19% of women had obtained a license. The difference is even more striking when marital status is taken into consideration as only 11% of married women had obtained their license compared to 80% of married men.

Instead of assuming that Central African refugee women's immobility is predominately rooted in their culture, it is important to think critically about how their lack of driver's licenses could be tied to the overlapping insecurities created and exacerbated by the informalization of the US refugee resettlement system. Moreover, I question whether their immobility is in fact a form of state sponsored disciplining. This line of thinking aligns with Stuesse and Coleman (2014) as they have shown how US automobility was used to police undocumented immigrants in Atlanta. According to these researchers, cars and roads were infused with risk as police instrumentalized these into weapons to create a widespread condition of immobility. It also aligns with Conlon who has described migrant populations' immobility as a condition of "forced waiting" that should be viewed as a "lived facet of [inequitable] social structures" (2011:355).

Because (im)mobility emerged as a salient theme late in this project, I did not explicitly ask women about their past experiences with (im)mobility, nor did I systematically ask participants why they hadn't obtained their driver's licenses. However, these topics came up naturally in multiple interviews. Four women who had lived on the refugee camp in the capital of Uganda[115] spoke at length about their previous mobility. These women had moved around freely via bus, motorcycle, or on foot, and two of the women discussed being highly mobile in relation

[115] This "self-reliance" model camp is unique because it allows refugees to leave (Betts et al. 2019).

to their businesses as they had been successful entrepreneurs.[116] In contrast, a woman who had lived on a camp in Rwanda said she often went more than a year without leaving the camp.

The women who had lived in Uganda were also vocal about the challenges they faced in becoming mobile within the United States. According to one of these women, after several attempts, she was able to pass her learner's permit exam in French and obtain her driver's license.[117] While the other three women do not speak French, they are conversational in English. Two of the women had never attempted to obtain their learner's permit,[118] whereas the third claimed that her results were not accepted by the Tax Collector despite having passed the exam at a library.[119] She explained that she had been unable to retake the exam because of her work schedule at the fishery. However, she had recently been injured at work, and was planning to take the exam while recovering. Notably, no woman said that a man objected to them becoming mobile, and when men were present, none of them objected the idea of their wife, daughter, or sister learning to drive. With that said, more research on the matter is needed, as it was common for households to have one or more men driving while the women there were not.

To become a licensed driver in the state of Florida, you must first make an appointment online to take the learner's permit exam and then pass it. Currently, this exam is not offered in Kinyarwanda or Swahili, the two languages most widely spoken within the Central African refugee community. And while it is possible to take the exam using a translator, none of the participants with whom I spoke were aware of this exception. Like the women discussed above,

[116] One woman owned a small store where she designed and made clothes, and the other moved goods, such as clothing, jewelry, and shoes as well as raw food products and soda, between multiple countries including the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, and South Sudan.
[117] Again, it is often unclear whether participants had obtained their full license or their learner's permit.
[118] One woman is unwell and was told by a doctor she cannot drive. However, the other woman owns a vehicle, but did not perceive her English skills as strong enough to pass the exam.
[119] She said the Tax Collector office had authorized her to take the exam at a library because of the pandemic, but there was still a problem with her results.

they thought the test could only be taken in languages such as English or French. Despite the little known, and possibly informal, clause that the exam can be taken with a translator, there are currently no visual or written study materials available in languages accessible to the community. Thus, due to language barriers, passing this exam seems implausible to many participants.

Many women in the community have few English skills and lack access to language classes because of their demanding paid work and unpaid social reproduction work schedules. Their lack of transportation further complicates their schedules as relying on buses which move slowly via winding routes makes it impossible for them to reach the many places they need to be in the short amount of time they have available between rigid time boundaries, such as the start/end of English classes and work. In addition, childcare policies are actively making it harder for women to stack their responsibilities. For example, the organization that offers language classes for refugees also provides childcare at some class sites for students' children or can give them a voucher for childcare at a pre-approved location. However, students can only get childcare for their own children. Thus, older teens or young women who are responsible for watching their siblings do not qualify for this benefit. Additionally, the organization only provides childcare for the duration of the class and an hour pick-up and drop-off window. These policies combined with long work schedules make it impossible for women to effectively move between their residences, their children's daycare, the free English sites, and their distant jobs.

For recently resettled families, there is an option to receive subsidized childcare from the RSP. However, workers are only eligible for this benefit if the RSP places them in a job. At first this seemed like a great option for one 'unmarried' woman who wants to improve her

intermediate English while working to support her young children, until the RSP revealed that the only job placement option they have for Central African refugees is the fish factory.[120]

If women can obtain their learner's permits, there are still significant challenges to becoming a licensed driver. For example, permit holders must take their driver's test in a car that is licensed and insured and can pass inspection. Moreover, during the pandemic, they have also needed a licensed driver present. Towards the end of this project, one woman texted me to ask if I could go with her the next day to take her driver's test. Fortunately, the man who had taught her to drive was able to accompany her because I had class during her allotted appointment. I was genuinely surprised at the request because she had been telling me for months that she had obtained her "driver's license." While it is unclear how long the requirement to have a licensed driver present will persist, this obstacle is likely to be particularly burdensome for women since few members of the Central African refugee community have full licenses.

Shifting Social Reproduction Responsibilities

Because RSPs resettle Central African refugees minimally and informally, the community is exposed to high levels of risk inherent within overlapping insecurities. Instead of being given a solid foundation on which to build prosperous lives in the United States, Central African refugees quickly face mounting economic pressures as they are often stuck in low-wage jobs and lose access to cash- and food-assistance benefits within months of their arrival due to overlapping structural problems with the distribution of these benefits.

[120] AR4WRM has attempted to liaison between the RSP and Central African refugees to help with finding these women employment. However, the RSP workers did not follow up on the job leads. The lack of follow-up is at least partially due to the employment specialists' own difficulties navigating the US job market.

Currently, the work pattern in most two-parent Central African refugee households is for the father to begin working followed by the mother.[121] When mothers begin to work, I have found that social reproduction responsibilities within households, such as caring for younger siblings and cooking, are passed along gendered vulnerability lines to the oldest daughter. Thus, daughters whose mothers are facing more precarity and vulnerability because they are underemployed, unmarried, lack social connections, or some combination of these often-interrelated factors, are likely to be burdened with excessive unpaid social reproduction work. This finding highlights a notable contradiction. According to Inks (2021), daughters within the Central African refugee community are likely to be the most well-educated individuals within their families. Within the community parents protect their daughters from risk,[122] such as early pregnancy and marriage, by limiting their mobility and encouraging them to stay in school while their brothers quit school, move out, and get jobs (87). Therefore, some of the daughters who are primarily responsible for performing social reproduction labor are the only individuals within their families who have high school diplomas, which would qualify them for better paying jobs.

Out of the 17 households that participated in this study, daughters who are in their mid-teens to mid-twenties are now primary responsible for social reproduction labor in six households (41%). All six of these girls' mothers have entered the labor market and at least four of the mothers are working for the same fish packaging company. The oldest of these six daughters is herself working at the fish packaging company, and two of the other daughters have recently left the fish company so that their mothers could begin working there. One of these daughters has a high school diploma. Two of the other three daughters are still in high school.

[121] As discussed above, this pattern may be rooted in gender discrimination within the local refugee resettlement system rather than in Central African refugee's culture. During the interviews, women who lived on camps where they were allowed to work, such as those in Uganda, said they worked outside their homes for pay.
[122] Risk perceptions are culturally constructed (Mahoney 2017).

When I asked these teenage girls and young women about their responsibilities, they gave a variety of answers. One teenager, who is the only girl in a large family of boys, claimed that it was unfair that only she was expected to cook and clean because "I am a girl." The other daughters were less direct about inequities in their responsibilities. During the early summer, two teenage sisters explained that "all we do is cook and sit at home," and then added "we don't really mind because that's all we did in Africa too." When we discussed what their siblings do for fun, they said their brothers play basketball and ride bikes and their younger sister likes to ride bikes too. The oldest daughter said she used to play netball and soccer when they still lived in Africa, but now she was not interested in those activities. Instead, the sisters said they like to watch TikToks on YouTube. The girls said they don't often see other young Central African refugees, but that they follow and greet each other on social media.

Another teenage girl in the community, who was at home with her infant sibling, said "African girls work hard." She shared that in addition to watching the baby, she is the main cook her household. When discussing food, she said that although her family likes *chapati*,[123] she cannot make them more than once a month because it is just too much work for her to roll enough of them out and fry them to feed her entire family.[124] The sentiment that African girls work too hard was also shared by one of the older young women in the community who has become the head of household because of her English skills. Reflecting on her many responsibilities, she stated, "it is not easy, and I am tired."

The tensions that can arise from these gendered and generational strategies for sharing social reproduction responsibilities and spreading risk throughout a family group are illustrated

[123] A thin circular bread that is popular throughout East Africa and can be eaten at any time of the day.
[124] Her reflection is a reminder that gendered social reproduction responsibilities contribute to cultural food insecurity.

by the family dynamics present between three households within this study. One elderly woman has a second daughter who is also the head of her own household with children. This daughter was resettled in the United States before her elderly mother's household, so when that household arrived, the RSP expected the two households to merge. To do so, the daughter's household had to move to a less desirable and more expensive apartment. To pay for the new apartment the adult daughter was forced to work multiple jobs. However, working and caring for everyone in the merged household was impossible, and she reported being so tired from trying to do everything that she became sick and had to go to the hospital. To cope, she eventually taught her mother to grocery shop, but this strategy was not ideal because the elderly woman does not speak English and she had to bring the groceries home in a shopping cart. By the end of this project, the daughter who had arrived first and speaks English well was pregnant and had extracted herself from this family dynamic by moving in with her boyfriend. This leaves her recently arrived, non-English speaking sister's household and her elderly mother's household heavily reliant on one another.

Social Networks and Navigational Capital

Throughout this study, participants were keenly aware that refugee resettlement is a "business," in which the goal is not to take care of them, but "to make money." Having long been exposed to extractive, deformalized systems, Central African refugees quickly understand this dynamic while simultaneously drawing upon their right to resettlement to protest it. However, their phone calls and messages to their RSPs often go unanswered, and as one participant told me, "if she [the case manager] won't help me with a small problem, why would I ask her for help with a big one?" Given the lack of formal institutional support, how are households, especially the women within them, managing experiences of food insecurity and

other overlapping insecurities? The answer is that they are attempting to manage risk the same way they did in East and Central Africa. They are building wealth in people (Kusimba 2019) by creating and utilizing social networks.

Within these social networks, Central African refugees share navigational capital, or information and skills that increase members' abilities to maneuver through social institutions as well as everyday spaces that were not created with communities of color, never mind communities of refugees of color, in mind (Yosso 2005). For the first wave of Central African refugees who arrived in Tampa in 2016, early resettlement was exceedingly difficult because local RSPs had never resettled Kinyarwanda and Swahili speaking refugees, and there were no established social networks or Central African refugee focused non-profits[125] in the Tampa Bay area. Thus, newly arrived households had to manage risk and learn to navigate US life, a major part of which is achieving physical mobility, with inadequate formal services and little informal assistance. Within such conditions, social networks constructed around ethnicity arose. These channels for creating and circulating navigational capital were beneficial to households within the social network, especially when RSPs and other Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force members began to rely on them to access the "community," However, the Central African refugee households outside the network faced more precarity and more vulnerability as their needs went unrecognized and unmet by both the formal services and the informal networks.

Now that some households are well-established and thriving and AR4WRM is working to formalize to provide assistance across ethnic boundaries, there are more networks along which navigational capital can be spread more inclusively. However, there is still a lack of adequate, formalized assistance for the Central African refugee community from local RSPs and the

[125] This is notable because many commonly resettled refugee populations have well-funded groups to assist them.

Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force. Moreover, there is no formalized relationship between AR4WRM, RSPs, and the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force. Both of these conditions are problematic because in the absence of formalized, professionalized systems, informalized networks use personal trust as capital. In the face of overlapping insecurities and risk, developing and preserving trust is critical, although it is also difficult and time consuming.

Notably, on multiple occasions throughout this project, I witnessed participants, especially women, tap into online networks[126] to get advice and help from resettled Central African refugees living in other US states and even other countries. Further research on these dispersed networks that are built on trust from kinship and other ethno-regional connections is needed.

In addition to issues with trust, the household from the opening vignette explained that there is risk involved in helping other community members build navigational capital. According to this couple, they don't mind helping people, but sometimes they grow tired of being constantly bothered as community members may knock on their door for help more than ten times a day. Then, the people want help at that exact moment, and they do not understand that things are very strict in the United States and must be done correctly with certain steps. Moreover, the couple told me the husband had gotten in a car accident while driving community members to get groceries. This created major problems for their household because the husband had an issue with the police, and they were solely responsible for paying for the repairs since the people they were helping did not have the money to help them.

[126] It was common for participants to use social media platforms, especially WhatsApp, to stay connected with resettled Central African refugees in the Tampa Bay area as well as other US states and even other countries. Additionally, participants remained in contact with their social networks in East and Central Africa.

To summarize, the informalization of refugee resettlement shifts responsibility and risk onto community members and organizations who do not necessarily have the capacity, support, or resources to meet the needs of vulnerable community members as they themselves are in precarious and vulnerable positions. In addition, informalization can create dependency as vulnerable members of the community may become over reliant on certain individuals within the community. These community members may or may not have their best interest in mind. In two early interviews with households who had been in the United States for more than three years, participants felt that life in the Unites States would be easier for Central African refugees who would arrive in the future. However, they emphasized that this would only be true if new households could find community members to trust. While it is common for Central African refugees to build and spread navigational capital, it is more of a resistance strategy than a solution. Navigational capital cannot and should not be a substitute for guaranteed RSP services.

Anthropologists who have been working with these households and members of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force, specifically the state- and market-based workers who are paid to do refugee resettlement and integration, have advised the latter that while these social networks may seem like an undivided community, there are divisions that leave some members with little support (Mahoney et al. 2020a). Thus, while risk-management strategies, such as building social networks and utilizing navigational capital, can be effective for some households, it also creates and recreates power imbalances and vulnerability among members. As the interview I conducted with a Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force member shows, the nuances of the anthropologists' presentations to the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force about risk and informal networks among Central African refugees have been largely forgotten. According to the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force member,

> I think there's really been a strength in community. And unfortunately, I think it's been several different communities, I think it would be even stronger if it could be one. And there have been some attempts at trying to get that to happen, but it just never has. And so there are factions, there are some different divisions, but […] you know, [community leaders] really are there for individuals and their community, which has been, I mean, they meet new people at the airport, they help them get connected, once they're here, during the pandemic, they were going around door to door taking masks and hand sanitizer, and, you know, cleaning products. I mean, that's, that's a pretty strong sense of community, you know, especially in a brand-new place where, you know, everyone is new, and there are different divisions of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

Although outsiders may perceive the community as resilient and supportive, when Central African refugees were asked about their community, many of them said there is too much jealously and not enough solidarity among members. Moreover, women expressed nostalgia for the friendships they had with other women when they lived in Africa. Because most Central African refugee households do not live near one another, and women work long hours, it is difficult for them to visit each other. To overcome this, women (and girls) talk to each other on the phone or interact via social media, but many lamented that this is a shallow form of social interaction. According to two teenage sisters, although they often greet other young community members and like their posts on social media, they are not actually friends with them.

On multiple occasions, it was apparent that women had limited knowledge of other members of the community, such as everyone in a household or households' addresses. Although I was not able to explore this in more detail, it is likely that social networks and the spreading of navigational capital is highly gendered. Because Central African refugee women are less mobile than men, they may have smaller social networks. For example, I once asked two women if they knew that another woman in the community had given birth, and I showed them a picture of the new mother and baby. The women were surprised and said they had never seen this person. I knew the woman in the picture was from a different ethno-linguistic group than them, so I

decided to quickly move to a different subject. However, later in the day when I was preparing to leave, I was shocked to see the brother of the woman in the photo be met with a flood of enthusiastic greetings and hugs after entering one of these women's apartments without knocking. When I told him the story about the women not recognizing his sister's picture, he explained that he had not told them his family had arrived. He translated our conversation to the two women and then promised to introduce them to his family. Another time, in the household who had been in the United States for more than three years but was unaware of the two African food stores in the area, I had met the husband, but not the wife, at another household. When I later talked to the couple at their own home, the wife said she had been sick for a while. This raises the question, did the household not know about the stores because the husband was the one interacting with other households?

Conclusion: Fatima's Story

To end this chapter, I leave you with the story of one young woman and her family who have faced and continue to face numerous overlapping insecurities.[127] In sharing their story, I hope to give you, the reader, a more complete picture of how the informalization of the US refugee resettlement system creates the conditions for structural violence as risk is passed along to individuals and households in ways that produce and reproduce many intersectional inequalities. I also hope to illustrate some of the common strategies used by individuals and households to navigate state sanctioned violence as well as the risk of relying on personal trust within informalized, formal systems.

Fatima, who is now in her early twenties, arrived in the United States with her parents and six siblings a few months prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Fatima's mother remembers

[127] The state- and market-based RSP workers often fail to see these overlapping insecurities. Instead, they label the household as being in "crisis." See Castaneda and Homes (2016) for a critique of crises narratives.

their early time in the United States as a time of "suffering" because they did not have SNAP benefits for many months, and their caseworker was not helpful. When I first met this family in early 2021, Fatima wanted to know how she could attend English classes. Instead of being enrolled in an educational program, her father and her were working the night shift six days a week in a freezing fish factory. Nobody in their household could drive, so they were paying someone to drive them to and from work and were dependent on their friends from another county to take them grocery shopping once a week.

Eventually, a young man in the community, to whom Fatima's family had preexisting social ties, helped Fatima obtain her learner's permit. Unfortunately, in the fall of 2021, the family had to move due to overlapping crises. Due to the affordable housing shortage the only place Fatima's family can afford on her mother's paycheck is a one-bedroom apartment across the city. To make the situation worse, the family lost access to SNAP benefits. Like many Central African refugee fish factory employees, the household has never received steady paystubs, and their money is deposited onto a prepaid card. This creates confusion about how many hours they have worked and how much money they should be making. This lack of transparency makes obtaining the documentation needed to renew food-assistance benefits excessively difficult.

Because Fatima is driving and can transport her mother to work and her siblings to multiple schools and complete the household's errands while watching her youngest sibling, the family has been able to stay afloat. However, Fatima's schedule is "not easy," and she worries about being late to her multiple appointments. As of early 2022, she has been able to sign up for online English classes, but the last few times I have seen her she has repeated "I am tired." After months of drawing heavily on internal channels between anthropologists, the non-profit

mentioned earlier, the family's caseworker, and a high-level member of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force, the household was able to re-obtain SNAP benefits during the ongoing state delay. However, this maneuvering was costly as the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force member now feels they have "done enough for the family."

CHAPTER SEVEN:

CONCLUSION

Introduction

Early in this project I learned that the resources I had carefully thought out as potential interventions (i.e., a food map and videos on taking public transportation) were not what the Central African refugee community felt was important. Almost all the households I interviewed were already aware of the best places to buy the foods they wanted, including stores in other cities and states, and even newly arriving households were quickly advised where to shop by community members. As for public transportation, there was consensus within the community that buses are an undesirable form of transportation because they take too long and are scary to navigate. Two adult women reported being highly skilled at using public transportation, but most participants, including men, said they would prefer to wait for rides from other community members, especially if they need to buy groceries. However, waiting for rides was also acknowledged as difficult because the method is not necessarily reliable, and it is hard to ask people to make multiple stops.

Because of their social and economic marginalization, acquiring adequate, desirable food is difficult for Central African refugee households. Overall, most participants felt food in America tastes indescribably different. Many stated it is too sugary, but some described it as too salty. Moreover, participants felt that food in America is generally unhealthy and not natural. This even applies to the African food sold in Tampa. Only two households were able to acquire fresh cassava leaves and tilapia from a cash-only market in St. Petersburg, Florida. Reflecting on

his relative privilege, a man from one of these households stated, “if you have a thousand dollars in food stamps, you still don’t have a single dollar in cash.” Although 10 out of 16 households obtained SNAP benefits at least once during this project, at least 70% of these households were having cyclical problems with them. Additionally, at least four of the six families who did not receive SNAP benefits during this period wanted to receive them, and would have likely qualified, but they did not have someone to help them navigate the complex system either in person or online. Thus, most families were, at least periodically, having difficulty affording any type of food. However, they were not utilizing food banks. While there are differential food preferences in the community, especially intergenerationally, all participants agreed that they do not eat boxed or canned food and that these types of food are not African foods. Because households are most familiar with the boxes of food given away by Metropolitan Ministries, which consist mainly of canned foods, they do not seek donated foods. They also do not eat from these “Boxes of Hope” when they are delivered to them.

While food was an issue, had recently been an issue, or would soon become an issue again, for most Central African refugee households it was just one of several. What many women said they actually need is someone to help them learn to drive. While the anthropologists, AR4WRM, and members of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force often acknowledge that transportation is a challenge for the community, this is not the full story. In fact, 13 out of 18 households (72%) own at least one vehicle and 15 out of 20 (75%) men in the community who are legally eligible for a driver’s license have one. However, only six out of 32 (19%) women in the community who are legally eligible have a driver’s license. Thus, one of the most important findings from this research on food is that mobility is highly gendered within this community. Given women’s central role in social reproduction activities, including cooking, a women’s

driver education program could be one of the best interventions for addressing overlapping insecurities. For unmarried daughters in their late teens and early twenties, many of whom have taken over the social reproduction responsibilities for their households so their mothers could join the workforce, learning to drive could be a vital first step towards a future that includes employment and higher education.

Another significant entry point for addressing overlapping insecurities is job training.[128] Although the local RSP is supposed to provide Central African refugees with job training, this may or may not happen given the current defunded and informalized service provision environment.[129] A lack of adequate job training is a serious issue which is likely directed connected to the gendered difference in employment within the community. Currently, women from seven households (42%) and men from two households (12%) work as fish packers. Additionally, women from two other households recently worked in this industry until they were injured at work. When/if they heal, they are likely to resume working as fish packers. Thus, women are more likely to work in the cold, dangerous, and highly undesirable fish packing industry than men. The lack of training and job opportunities for Central African refugee women is also negatively impacting their daughters who are in their teens and twenties. In the six households in which daughters are now primarily responsible for social reproduction activities, all six mothers have entered the labor market. In at least four of these households, the mothers are working in the fish packaging industry.

[128] See the recommendation below about increasing opportunities by building connections with local businesses.
[129] See page 106 for a vignette in which a RSP worker asked a Central African refugee woman to sign documents stating she had received job training when in fact she had not received any training.

Scholarly Contributions

This thesis expands the literature on US-based refugees, particularly Central African refugees, by utilizing an intersectional lens to decenter immigration status and simplistic constructions of ethnicity as refugees' primary identities. In doing so, this thesis contributes to the small body of literature that recognizes how nuanced ethnolinguistic, gender, generational, and marital status identities impact refugees' experiences of and with resettlement and integration in the United States. This thesis also expands the literature on US-based refugee populations by drawing upon the theoretical concepts of cultural food security, navigational capital, and social reproduction to show how Central African refugees' intersectional experiences of food (in)security and other forms of (in)security are entwined. Specifically, findings from this project indicate that Central African refugee households' cultural food security has been negatively impacted by disruptions in supply chains of traditional foods caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and by the informalization of local refugee resettlement and integration services. Because the risk and responsibility of daily life is passed from RSPs to Central African refugee households and their informal social networks, stark gendered, generational, and marital status differences in mobility, paid labor opportunities, and uncompensated social reproduction have emerged. All women, including teenage and unmarried adult daughters, are negatively impacted by intersectional inequalities. Although they build and utilize navigational capital to facilitate their everyday lives, girls and women living in households headed by single mothers continue to be severely impacted by structural inequalities.

This thesis is based on an applied anthropology project, and it contributes to the field by highlighting how anthropologists can reflexively use their flexible positionality as researchers to study through networks with power imbalances to create grassroots change. Studying through is

important because it allows researchers to critically consider how power is used within networks. Too often, power remains under assessed in community-based research which results in any stakeholder being positioned as the community and asked to voice community needs and wants. Thus, understanding power dynamics among stakeholders and within communities is critical for contributing to social justice efforts. Moreover, applied anthropologists can use studying through to create opportunities for bottom-up collaborations by building relationships between stakeholder with different connections and access to resources.

This thesis also has implications for nutritional anthropology as it details how cultural and political-economic factors impede food security, two areas which remain insufficiently explored in studies on food insecurity. By drawing upon the concept of cultural food security, I repositioned individuals, households, and communities as tasting and desiring agents. In this study, the foods that participants desired were both culturally important and nutritious. Thus, cultural food security places humanity and health at the center of food security rather than economics. While recognizing participants as agentive agents, I also considered how political-economic forces impact their food security. This allowed for a critical discussion of the ways in which structural inequalities negatively impact food security and participants use navigational capital to negotiate these structures. When combined with an intersectional lens, such an analysis is useful as it can be used to make recommendations for improving cultural food security through structural change and targeted programs.

Applied Outcomes

The findings from this project have already been used to help AR4WRM advocate for formal case management for some of the most vulnerable families in the Central African refugee community. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 4, I wrote an anonymized report on the behalf of

AR4WWRM which included the case profiles and immediate needs of seven households. My major advisor and I edited this report and sent it to several lawyers as well as the local RSP. At least four of the households included in the report were enrolled in formal case management around the time it was distributed. While the effects of formal case management on these households is not yet known, they should in theory now be in contact with people who are paid to help them apply for food-assistance benefits and find better employment.

Like many non-profits, AR4WRM lacks adequate funding. Thus, one of the most important outcomes of this project is data for the non-profit to use in grant applications. In January 2021 these gendered immobility findings were used to apply for a $10,000 local grant. Unfortunately, AR4WRM was not selected to receive the grant during that funding cycle, but the non-profit plans to re-submit and keep searching for additional funding opportunities.

Currently, I am discussing how to disseminate the findings of this project with the anthropology research team and AR4WRM. There will be two more Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force Meetings this year, and I would like to present some of the findings about food (in)security, employment, gendered resettlement, and transportation (in)security in that online space. Ideally, the presentation would spark conversation and create more opportunities for collaboration between anthropologists, AR4WRM, and RSPs.

As I continue into the Applied Anthropology Ph.D. program at the University of South Florida, I will continue to advocate for AR4WRM and the Central African refugee community. I am currently planning how to return to my initial study aim of creating culturally and linguistically appropriate resources that the Central African refugee community will find helpful. One of the future project strands I am most excited about is a budding collaboration with the

Hillsborough County Tax Collector Office. I hope this collaboration will open avenues for responding to Central African refugee women's stated desire to learn to drive.

Recommendations

I have seven recommendations for improving the capacity of the local refugee resettlement system to better meet the needs of the Central African refugee community.

First, the US refugee resettlement system should be adequately funded to ensure all refugees receive the services they are guaranteed. Currently, the ORR budget is allocated to states based on the number of ORR eligible arrivals in the past two years. This is problematic because RSPs are expected to continue to serve ORR eligible individuals for the first five years after their arrival. Moreover, arrivals have been historically low due to Trump era immigration restrictions and the COVID-19 pandemic. The US government should institute a five-year "look back period" on the number of ORR eligible arrivals to determine ORR state funding.[130]

Second, relationship and trust-building should be at the core of refugee service provision. When the responsibility to resettle households with all the risk inherent within this major transition are passed to informal social networks and volunteers, trust issues, even within the community itself, arise. Therefore, stronger, and more transparent connections need to be forged between non-profits, RSPs, and Central African refugee households. Currently, there is not an agreed upon process by which RSPs connect AR4WRM with newly arriving Central African refugee households. This is a major issue because it takes time for the non-profit to become connected with new households through the community (and some families remain isolated) to begin advocating for them to receive the services they should be guaranteed. Additionally, to increase opportunities and resources, relationships need to be built between the people who run

[130] For more information about FY 2021 ORR funding see https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/orr/DCL_21_10_FY_21_RSS_Formula_Allocations.pdf.

refugee focused organizations and local businesses. Currently, there is no interaction between non-profits, RSPs and the two African food stores in Tampa, Florida. However, these stores should be regarded as hubs for connecting with the broader African community. Moreover, there is an urban farm in downtown Tampa that accepts SNAP benefits and is experimenting with growing cassava. The farm is a socially progressive business, and open to exploring collaborations with non-profits and the Central African refugee community.

Third, RSPs should immediately and continuously enroll Central African refugee households in formal case management. Because Central African refugees are arriving via the UNHCR and USRAP processes, RSPs must recognize them as a particularly vulnerable population.

Fourth, RSPs should formalize the refugee resettlement process so that both men and women, whether married or single, receive the same types of resources and services. Because AR4WRM has strong connections within the Central African refugee community, the non-profit should be consulted to create a check list of culturally appropriate steps to ensure households are being set up to succeed in the United States. The check list and formal process should correspond with research on how to prevent gender-based violence. Some areas that need immediate improvement are help acquiring bank accounts and Florida identification cards and receiving copies of important documents such as apartment leases, food-assistance benefit account login information, and utilities.

Fifth, RSPs should take allegations of gender discrimination seriously and act swiftly in accordance with US laws. They should also hold regular trainings for their workers on best practices for providing gender equitable resettlement and integration services as well as reducing gender-based violence.

Sixth, the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force should create a committee focused on increasing Central African refugee households' cultural food security, especially during early resettlement. This working group should facilitate the creation of a formal pathway for assisting the Central African refugee community with applying for SNAP benefits. This pathway should include RSPs, FDCF, and a refugee focused non-profit, such as AR4WRM. This committee should also help the Department of Health[131] organize outreach within the Central African refugee community to dispel myths about the WIC program and educate interested households on how to locate WIC food in stores. This committee should explore how RSPs and refugee focused non-profits can partner with Feeding Tampa Bay to receive culturally appropriate donated food. Recently, the local RSP has begun to give households donated Walmart cards to purchase their own food. This practice should be continued. Finally, the committee should explore how to expand gift card donations to include the two local African food stores.

Seventh, the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force should create a second committee focused on reducing refugee women's experiences of overlapping insecurities. As discussed in this chapter's introduction, creating a driver's education program, and strengthening job training[132] are two critical intervention points. Other intervention points that should be further examined are childcare and English classes.

Conclusion

I want to end this thesis with a reflection on my third research question, "what role can American Relief for World Refugees and Migrants play in helping the resettled Central African refugee community build social and navigational capital?" As an applied anthropologist this question has swirled around my mind throughout this project. Because AR4WRM works with

[131] Although undesirable to some households, WIC remains an underutilized, potential source for nutritious food.

many of the most vulnerable families in the Central African refugee community, most of its limited funds go to meeting the expressed immediate needs of individuals and households. While the non-profit acknowledges the importance of empowering families by assisting them in creating a foundation on which they can build prosperous lives, the range and scale of community events and programs it can deliver is curtailed by the time and money it spends on addressing crises. As I have shown throughout this thesis, these crises are in fact the predictable outcome of a defunded local refugee resettlement and integration system that overlaps with inaccessible (and diminished) US social safety nets. While I agree with Billingsley and Mahoney's call for scholars to "rethink how they can immediately apply their methods and expertise collaboratively alongside the communities with which they work" (2021:125), I would add that we also need to organize for long-term change. Thus, my recommendation for how AR4WRM can help the Central African refugee community build social capital is that the non-profit should continue to utilize its strength, which is critical community engagement, and begin to organize both internally and externally. Currently, AR4WRM holds a weak position within the local refugee resettlement network. Therefore, only by getting clearer on its long-term vision and positioning itself as a central stakeholder in the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force can AR4WRM build enough social capital to move beyond offering band-aid solutions to the Central African refugee community.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Exempt Determination

UNIVERSITY of SOUTH FLORIDA

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

May 27, 2021

Shaye Soifoine
8901 Club Avenue Dr
Tampa, FL 33637

Dear Shaye Soifoine:

On 5/27/2021, the IRB reviewed and approved the following protocol:

Application Type:	Initial Study
IRB ID:	STUDY002694
Review Type:	Exempt (2)
Title:	Rethinking Care: Utilizing Food Network Mapping to Build Wealth among the Central African Refugee Community in Tampa Bay, FL
Funding:	None
Protocol:	• Soifoine IRB 5.27 Clean.docx;

The IRB determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review.

Approved study documents can be found under the 'Documents' tab in the main study workspace.

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Please note, as per USF policy, once the exempt determination is made, the application is closed in BullsIRB. This does not limit your ability to conduct the research. Any proposed or anticipated change to the study design that was previously declared exempt from IRB oversight must be submitted to the IRB as a new study prior to initiation of the change. However, administrative changes, including changes in research personnel, do not warrant a modification or new application.

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not

UNIVERSITY of SOUTH FLORIDA

apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

Sincerely,

Tatyana Harris
IRB Research Compliance Administrator