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Cultural Resources and Resilience: A Qualitative Study With Liberian, Congolese and Eritrean Refugees

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CULTURAL RESOURCES AND RESILIENCE:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY WITH LIBERIAN, CONGOLESE
AND ERITREAN REFUGEES

BY
SENAIT K. KASSAHUN

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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PSYCHOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

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Abstract

Research has been conducted which examines the psychological impact of separation from one's cultural resources for refugees living in refugee camps. This study examines the role of access to cultural resources, such as social support, traditional ceremonies, elders and religion, in fostering resilience amongst African refugees. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the factors that contribute to resilience and healing in refugee camps, as well as those factors which contribute to psychological distress. This study utilizes qualitative methodology and has a sample size of ten participants. The interviews in this study revealed a great deal of resilience amongst participants and their peers. Cultural resources, particularly social support and religion played an important role in fostering this resilience. The greatest causes of psychological distress in the refugee camps, as reported by participants, were in fact, a dearth of basic necessities and material resources. The results of this research suggest that the provision of adequate basic necessities to refugees would greatly improve their psychological well-being and allow refugees' own cultural systems of social and psychological support to flourish, even as they live in a refugee camp setting.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all of the courageous individuals who participated in this research. Their ability to overcome great hardship with the utmost humanity, is a great inspiration. Dedicated also to the memory of Magic.

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Introduction

During refugees' stay in refugee camps, and during their resettlement in a new country, a great deal of emphasis is understandably placed on the basic needs of refugees, including adequate food, clothing, and shelter. However, refugee mental health is also beginning to have an important status among humanitarian aid groups. Unfortunately, mental health workers who seek to treat refugee populations generally have little or no training in the specific cultural issues affecting mental health in the areas in which they intend to work (Englund, 1998).

Many researchers believe that trauma can affect refugees most dramatically when their cultural resources are also depleted (Bracken, Giller & Summerfield, 1995; Englund, 1998; Hernandez, 2002; Schreiber, 1995). Writes Englund (1998), "refugees' mental health may depend on their ability to carry out certain culturally salient practices" (p. 1172). This phenomenon of trauma related to diminishing access to important cultural infrastructures has been termed *cultural bereavement* (Bracken et al., 1995; Schreiber 1995). This study will investigate the level of resilience among refugees from Liberia, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Eritrea to examine links between access to cultural resources and resilience. Namely, I will be seeking to understand which cultural resources were particularly beneficial to refugees while they were in refugee camps or internally displaced, as well as which cultural resources may have been regrettably absent during their experience in their respective refugee camps.

Third World cultures in general and African cultures in particular are characterized by close family relations, as well as closely intertwined communities. Individuals are interdependent with the larger community; the community and the

individual rely on each other for the preservation of society. War, as an unnatural phenomenon, disrupts the ordinary functioning of any society. In Africa, war has devastated countless individuals and communities. The loss of family members, homes, livelihood and exile from one's country have a tremendous effect, but another potential loss is also important to examine – the loss of a way of life. It is important to attempt to understand how cultural bereavement can affect members of a culture psychologically. Traditions and cultural infrastructure, such as traditional healers, spiritual leaders and artistic expression, provide stability, a sense of belonging, and a sense of unity. When individuals from such a community face losing their cultural world as they know it as they flee their homeland for safety, a profound sense of loss and disorientation can occur (Bracken et al., 1995; Englund, 1998).

Englund (1998) provides the example of the importance of funeral rites in the Dezda-Agonia region bordering Mozambique and Malawi. During the cruel war between the Mozambican government and the Renamo rebels, many civilians were brutalized, sometimes being killed in massacres. Malawi became the new home for one million Mozambican refugees, the third largest concentration of refugees in the world (Nunes, 1994). Englund's research amongst Mozambican refugees living across the border in Malawi described the crucial role of resources for proper burials of friends and family for these refugees' mental health. In fact, one of the major mental health problems affecting Mozambicans living in refugee camps in Malawi was the guilt associated with the improper burial of their relatives and fellow villagers who died as a result of the war.

One of the greatest responsibilities of community members from this region is to ensure a ceremonial burial of kin in their home village (Englund, 1998). Funerals in the Dezda-Agonia region are replete with the details of proper protocol. The deceased is

called *mfumu* or chief and the entire village must attend the funeral. Funeral ceremonies last for six months. At the end of this period a ceremony called *m'meto* occurs, the effect of which is to release the community from their mourning. The negative effects of not being able to perform such a ceremony are devastating for the survivors. Local healers found a greater than usual incidence of spirit possession during the first few years after the refugees had resettled in Malawi. Spirit exorcisms are believed to alleviate the problem of spirit possession caused by an improper burial; thus for refugees who have experienced trauma in this region, exorcism is a therapeutic process. The possessed person's entire family and friends also participate, which allows the trauma to be treated as a collective concern rather than an individual psychological problem.

To the extent that aid workers and mental health practitioners understand the importance of the cultural resources that refugees have traditionally had access to, such as proper burial rites, they can better plan the structure of refugee camps and the presence of important cultural elements within the camps (Englund, 1998). This could have a profound effect on reducing the prevalence of refugee trauma and can contribute to enhancing the resilience that many members of refugee communities already embody. For example, Englund suggests that humanitarian assistance could include allotments for important ceremonies, such as extra provisions of food aid for funeral guests or to assuage spirits, as well as wood and cloth needed for the coffin.

Sadly, political violence and war continue to abound in the 21st century. Even when war is no longer occurring, many individuals and communities experience its residual psychological effects. Of particular concern are the ways in which political violence has affected entire cultures, where poverty and the impact of globalization compound the process of returning to a comfortable peace after war. Hernandez (2002)

asserts that “models that overemphasize trauma’s intrapsychic dynamics and conceptualize its social dimensions as merely another external factor that fails to address the intertwined nature of social, political, and personal conditions of war” (p. 16).

Hernandez further articulates that a danger of traditional trauma models is that they “help to maintain a view of social problems as individual” (p. 16).

It may be that if psychology is to contribute to the process of healing individuals and communities affected by war, it must transform itself into unique forms in the Third World. Martín-Baró (1989) identified the term “social trauma” in reference to the ways in which history and society affect individuals in the dynamic interchange between individuals and the larger society. The rupture of trust between community members, community support systems, and one’s view of the self in relation to the larger community are all issues to consider in understanding social trauma (Hernandez, 2002). Psychologists who hope to help individuals cope with social trauma and the many horrors of violence in the international arena must be armed with flexibility and a willingness to incorporate healing elements from the individuals’ surroundings. In doing so, psychologists can become aware of the enormity of strength existing amongst those who have experienced some of the worst types of atrocities. Perhaps in coming to understand how those who have suffered the most can remain spirited and determined, the field of psychology can continue to learn about human upliftment and courage.

Write Bracken et al. (1995),

We would suggest that...recovery over time is intrinsically linked to reconstruction of social and economic networks, cultural institutions and respect for human rights. Recognizing these dynamics will not only assist us in understanding why some victims become psychological casualties but also, perhaps the most resonant question of all, why the large majority do not (p. 1081).

Even historically strong “social and economic networks” and “cultural institutions” can be dismantled when communities are forced to migrate in order to escape violence or political persecution. In a study of Malawian returnees’ coping mechanisms, participants noted that while reading the Bible, praying, or having religious gatherings may not solve their repatriation difficulties, these activities provided hope and the strength to carry on (Gillespie, Peltzer, & Maclachlan, 2000). It is apparent that the type of trauma experienced by individuals from many war-torn regions is an experience that must be viewed through a different lens from that of traditional Western psychology (Bracken et al., 1995; Englund, 1998).

The very symptomatology of trauma can be drastically different in the Third World from how it is understood in the West. Refugees from the Casamance region of Senegal, now living in The Gambia, reported many instances of recurrent beatings and torture. Tang and Fox’s (2001) knowledge of symptomatology in the region prompted them to add two categories to their trauma questionnaires – body heat and general body pain. These items were amongst the symptoms most commonly identified by the study’s participants.

As we have seen, when Western psychology meets Third World populations, a clash of perspectives can occur (Bulhan, 1985). Often, the problems facing individuals in the Third World reach magnitudes beyond the individual level. Refugees are often victimized by poverty, forced migration, internal displacement, political oppression, the exploitation of labor and resources by the West, decades of war, and disenfranchisement. This is not to imply that such problems never affect the disenfranchised of Western countries, nor does it suggest that all communities in all less-industrial countries are impacted by these difficulties. The idea is to highlight some of the distinctions that can

be found when psychologists trained in a Western orientation work with individuals or communities exposed to particular and unfamiliar types of hardships. However, it is critical to remember that there are many communities in the Third World in which, if not for poverty, political violence, and war, people would be able to lead psychologically healthy lives; lives in which interdependence and connection with a larger community provide benefits lamentably absent in large part throughout the Western world.

Because trauma in the Third World is often a reflection of complex and unresolved political conflict, Bracken et al. (1995) suggests that the diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may be ill-designed for application in a Third World setting. The authors pose the question: Is PTSD, as it is generally understood, internationally applicable, or is it a more culturally-bound phenomenon? Hernandez (2002) also makes an important point about the limits of this diagnosis in recognizing that “to label the victims of political repression, genocide, or torture as *disordered* because of the symptoms they experience presents fundamental ethical problems” (p. 20). Instead of being labeled “disordered,” some authors (e.g., Becker, 1995; Eissler, 1993) suggest referring to victims of war and political violence “as persons suffering the consequences of a disturbed society” (Becker, 1995, p. 104). Also, some question the use of the prefix “post” in post-traumatic stress disorder since the traumatic event or events have not necessarily ended for the individual, or for the community (Becker, 1995).

As we have seen with Malawian and Senegalese refugees, trauma is manifested in some cultures with symptoms that are not included in the DSM-IV. An additional example of such a circumstance involves a woman who was part of a mass exodus of Ethiopian Jews, also known as Falashas, or by their preferred name Beta Israel. In 1984-1986 more than 7,700 of the Beta Israel fled the Ethiopian province of Gondar to escape

war and hunger, with the goal of “ ‘returning to the old-new land – Israel’ ” (Schreiber, 1995, p. 135). The Israeli government organized aerial convoys, which transported the refugees from Sudan to Israel. During their journey through the desert to refugee camps in Sudan, an estimated 2,000-3,000 Beta Israel died. Those who traveled through the desert faced the dangers of robbery, murder, rape and hunger. Many families were fragmented along the way, and some were left unaware of which of their family members were able to complete their voyage to Israel and who may have died along the way.

One can imagine the disorientation and trauma that might result from such a voyage. Not only did these migrants leave behind their homes, but also members of their community who did not survive the journey. Upon their arrival in Israel, the Beta Israel found that something else was beginning to elude them – access to conditions in which they could perform traditional ceremonial rites, which had previously ensured their social order and secured a stable cosmos. In Ethiopia, purification rites had been one of the most important types of rituals the Beta Israel performed. Contact with a corpse is one of the most serious pollutions that could occur among the Beta Israel. One must remain in isolation for a week following exposure to a dead body. Following isolation, all individuals who had contact with the corpse shave their heads and bodies and bathe in a river. Their clothes are sprinkled with the ashes of a red heifer, in accordance with Biblical descriptions (Schreiber, 1995).

This important aspect of Beta Israel culture was disrupted upon their migration to Israel. A major hindrance was the lack of a nearby river in Israel. Also, red heifers are not sacrificed in their new country. A Beta Israel woman, “M,” tragically lost her baby, who was accidentally killed during a panicked flight in a refugee camp. M. kept her dead child with her until she landed in Israel and the child was taken from her and buried. M. was

hospitalized for psychiatric treatment and diagnosed with a dissociative state and an acute psychotic episode. She complained of voices telling her “bad things” and of “having a snake in her leg.” Upon further inquiry, M.’s therapist established through anthropological consultation that the “snake in her leg” was a cultural idiom for not getting along with one’s mother-in-law. Nightmares and other sleep disturbances plagued her and memories of her baby’s death flooded her thoughts day and night (Schreiber, 1995).

Once it was realized that her problems stemmed from PTSD and complicated bereavement, M. participated in intensive psychotherapy and was encouraged to talk about the tragedies she had experienced during her migration. Her emotions stemming from the death of her child had been “eating her from the inside,” and her mother-in-law would not allow her to process her pain. An Ethiopian community religious leader was consulted, and a trip to the Jordan River was arranged so that M. could finally receive her purification rites. M.’s extended family was recruited to participate in the purification rituals. This treatment brought a great deal of relief to M., who afterwards renewed her previous activities, gave birth to another child, and though still mourning her lost baby, was able restore to normalcy to her life (Schreiber, 1995).

This case illustrates several important points regarding psychological healing with refugees and immigrants. It gives examples of hurdles such as language barriers and culturally specific semantic meanings, which may elude even a native translator; the challenge of understanding culturally specific religious and spiritual beliefs; and the importance of incorporating traditional healers and ceremonies when it will help in the healing process. Another aspect of M.’s trauma was her separation from the social structures that would have made her purification and healing more accessible in Ethiopia.

The Beta Israel were forced to abandon elements of their heritage upon departure from Ethiopia, and with it some of the ways in which their community has traditionally helped its members recover from psychological pain. Bracken, et al.(1995) note that in some societies, “the experience of illness does not occur in isolation but rather within the context of a whole set of cultural, family and individual values and orientations” (1995).

When traditions and cultural institutions are damaged by war and political violence, what results may be an intensified traumatic experience, felt not only on the individual level, but on the community level as well. When cultural frameworks are negatively affected by war, cultural bereavement may be a consequence. Cultural bereavement can be manifested in various ways across different cultures; for example in Mozambique, Uganda, and Ethiopia those forced to flee violence left behind dead relatives without proper burial or ceremonial rites, or amongst Cambodian immigrants to the United States who may experience guilt for leaving their homeland and being unable to fulfill their obligations to their dead relatives. Many scholars argue that in understanding the effect of violence on its victims, there is no single manner in which the experience may be manifested. Debilitating PTSD does exist on one end of the spectrum, however, “factors such as community cohesiveness and political solidarity determine to a large extent how the traumas of war are experienced and coped with” (Bracken, et al., 1995, p. 1078).

The healing effect of solidarity can serve as a mode of psychological healing in itself. In Nicaragua, PTSD symptoms were found among peasants displaced by war; however, the difficulties that members of this population experienced did not inhibit them from being “active and effective in coping with new and difficult circumstances in the face of the continuing threat of further attacks. What they were interested in was

peace so that they could return to their old communities and lands and repair their social worlds” (Bracken et al., 1995, p. 1078).

In Uganda, a 45 year-old man was among many tortured by counter-insurgency operations in an area called the Luwero Triangle, also known as the “killing fields.” Soldiers cut off both of his hands and he was separated from his wife whom he has never heard about since. It is interesting to note that despite this man’s horrific experience, four years after the incident he showed no signs of PTSD symptoms. His neighbors had supported him a great deal, and demonstrated solidarity with him to such an extent that the problems that he faced were solely related to the practical difficulties of his disability rather than psychological trauma (Bracken et al., 1995). A 40 year-old prominent Ugandan politician was tortured while being interrogated during government counter-insurgency operations. During seven days of detainment, his Christian faith grew and he felt that he was able to relate to the suffering of Jesus Christ. This experience strengthened his spiritual beliefs so much that overall he saw his difficult experience as a positive one (Bracken et al., 1995). Responses to traumatic events experienced collectively, or as part of a larger vision or purpose, seem to be processed in a way that is more psychologically healthy than when one suffers from trauma in isolation. It is important that psychologists working with Third World populations consider the contextual social, political, and cultural framework within which violence has occurred (Bracken et al., 1995). This approach calls for a closer look at: “a) the subjective meaning of the violence or trauma; b) the way in which the distress associated with the violence is experienced and reported; c) the type and extent of general support available to the individual; d) what type of therapies are available and are appropriate” (Bracken et al., 1995, p. 1077).

So what saves some survivors of war and political violence from imminent psychological distress while others are unable to continue with their lives with a settled peace of mind? Psychologists working with non-Western communities need to have an understanding of if, and how, the effects of trauma tend to be manifested in a particular community or culture. Developing this understanding can help in the structuring of refugee camps, and the administration of treatment, so that the culturally specific needs of people affected by war can be met (Bracken, et al., 1995).

The vision of oneself as a link in a chain of a society, allows one to feel that if she or he should fall, there will be someone, perhaps an entire community, who will help her or him to restore a sense of groundedness to her or his life. In comparison, traditional theories of psychology operate from a distinct paradigm. Within Western culture, psychology has focused on paths toward individual personal development and inner strength (Bulhan, 1985). For example, as White and Marsella (1982) illustrate:

the use of 'talk therapy' aimed at altering individual behavior through the individual's 'insight' into his or her own personality is firmly rooted in a conception of the person as a distinct and independent individual, capable of self-transformation in relative isolation from the particular social contexts (p. 28).

This concept of an individual as a distinct and separate entity, whose personal development occupies a space separate from society, can be particularly inapplicable to populations in which solidarity experienced with others involved in a similar struggle is, in fact, a major source of individual strength and motivation. Bracken et al. suggest that, "when it comes to responding to the effects of violence, Western style psychotherapy can have the effect of 'individualizing' the suffering of the person involved. Psychotherapy of this mode might be inappropriate and indeed harmful in more 'sociocentric' societies where the individual's recovery is intimately bound up with the recovery of the wider

community” (Bracken et al., 1995, p. 1080). It has been suggested instead, that in addressing trauma in a Third World context, social, cultural, and political realities should be considered central to the overall concern of the psychological welfare of an individual or a community (Hernandez, 2002).

According to Jenkins (1991), “trauma, conceived within a framework of individual psychopathology, cannot account for the global affective consequences of terror and distress” (p. 1082). If this is the case, in what ways can trauma be addressed in the context of engagement with the larger community and culture of which one is a member? Engagement with traditional healers has not only helped individuals to recover from the effects of violence, but these healers also have a beneficial impact on the maintenance of cultural institutions amidst political disruption. In the Luwero Triangle in Uganda, traditional healers reported an increase of sicknesses after wartime. Some of the illnesses they treated include madness (*eddali*), foolishness (*obusiri*), and disturbed behavior (*akalogojjo*). Post-war in the Luwero triangle, the impact of traditional healers was two-fold. They administered therapies that restored normality for affected individuals, while simultaneously connecting people with their community’s past and contributing to a cultural continuity that war had disrupted in many ways. The traditional healers in Luwero served as shamans, consulting with the ancient spirits of the ethnic group, who would indicate the cause of the sickness as well as its remedy (Bracken et al., 1995).

Another example provided by Bracken et al. (1995) is the experience of a 19-year-old former soldier, who had joined the army at 16, after his father had been killed by a rebel group. The young man had been discharged, after being thrown from a lorry as a grenade exploded. Although his injury had since healed, he complained of headaches, and feeling generally unwell. He experienced nightmares, during which he would see friends

who had been killed in the war, as well as people whom he himself had killed. When his nightmares became overwhelming, he visited a traditional healer in his village who decided that a chicken should be sacrificed, and rituals should be performed by the client and his family. These rituals provided the individual with a sense of relief, and also contributed to a closer relationship with his family and civilian society.

The cohesiveness of a community can help to save its members from despair, after the experience of war and political violence. In Punamaki's (1996) research on children's psychological functioning in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, she found that their ideological and political commitment to their people's struggle served as a buffer, protecting them from psychological damage, relating to the danger that surrounded them (Berman, 2001). The perception of a common goal, and a strong sense of ideological and political beliefs can serve as a coping mechanism, facilitating an ability to persevere amid great horrors.

Psychologists may find that in war-torn Third World environments, two factors in particular are indicators of the ability of individuals and communities to cope with, and overcome trauma: a sense of identification with a common political cause or objective, and/or a cohesive and supportive community network. Both circumstances imbue a sense of solidarity that protects individuals from feeling alone in their sorrow and devastation.

It is important, however, not to assume that this is the case in every community in the Third World. Sometimes being ostracized from a tightly knit community can compound a traumatic experience. Though there are many instances when community support is an immense healer for violence-related trauma, there are moments when this support system breaks down for individuals in need. Bracken et al. (1995) provide the

pertinent example of a 34-year-old Ugandan woman, with five children, who had been raped by two soldiers. Because of the shame associated with her assault, she was scorned by her husband and forced to leave their household. She was left to fend for herself, until she found her way to the home of some distant relatives. Ashamed of what had happened to her, she did not disclose the reason for her arrival to their home. Her right to her land and her children was forfeited, and she remained in the role of a servant in her relatives' home. She mourned the loss of her children intensely. When individuals are exiled from a close-knit community, the psychological impact of the rejection can be all the more debilitating.

While the rape of women, even when occurring during a period of political oppression and war, may be one of the areas not well addressed by many communities, among themselves women who have had similar experiences of assault have found refuge and a source of empowerment. The power of solidarity of victims of violence can be seen in a group of Ugandan women living in Luwero, who were victims of sexual assault. These women organized themselves into meeting groups, which focused on development projects. These meetings had the effect of healing social relations for the women (Bracken et al., 1995).

While integration with one's community can be an integral component of psychological healing from trauma, Harrell-Bond warns that an " 'over-socialized concept of man' in reference to Third World societies can lead to an underestimating of the individual psychological suffering in times of war and violence" (Bracken et al., 1995, p. 1080). This is elucidated particularly well with refugees who have traveled to the West to escape, war, poverty, and religious and political persecution. These individuals are suddenly left to fend for themselves in a world socially alien from the communities of

their upbringing. The threat of war and political violence may be far away, but so too is the close-knit society in which they may have been raised. Posits Geertz (1975),

The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures (p. 35).

If it is true that individuals in Third World countries tend to perceive themselves as belonging inextricably to part of a social whole, which permeates their being, then the trauma of migration from their former home can be doubly challenging. On the one hand, they must cope with the trauma of the violence to which they may have born witness, and additionally they are forced to cope in a new environment, unequipped with the social network or traditional healing system that may have been their traditional path to wellness. If indeed the cultural resources utilized for healing were accessible even after a refugees have left their homes, resilience fostered by these healing practices may help refugees overcome the effects of trauma.

PTSD researchers have tended to espouse a universalist approach, which asserts that there is a verisimilitude of characteristics associated with PTSD irrespective of the context or locale. Treatment modalities which focus on a general response to trauma need to be reassessed when applied to different cultures, since “ the meaning and importance of such phenomena as nightmares and vivid memories vary from culture to culture and any treatment which ignores the cultural aspects of these and other phenomena tend to be unsuccessful” (Bracken et al., 1995, p. 1076). Because of the amount of war, man-made disasters, political violence, and poverty that continue to affect many countries throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America, there is an urgent need for a

deeper understanding of how trauma is experienced and expressed amongst different Third World populations (Bracken et al., 1995; Hernandez, 2002). Furthermore, the role that cultural resources can continue to play, when refugees are physically separated from their land of origin, is important to explore. This is one of the purposes of this study.

Writes J. L. Herman (1992),

The systematic study of psychological trauma therefore depends on the support of a political movement. Indeed, whether such study can be pursued or discussed in public is itself a political question. The study of war trauma becomes legitimate only in a context that challenges the sacrifice of young men [and women] in war. The study of trauma in sexual and domestic life becomes legitimate only in a context that challenges the subordination of women and children (p. 9).

Bracken et al. (1995) paraphrase Salvadoran psychologist Martín-Baró's articulation that "what was traumatized [because of war in El Salvador] were not just Salvadoran individuals, but Salvadoran society" (p. 1078). In addressing the enormity of the trauma of an entire society or culture, we must first understand the strengths of the particular society. What we learn from these strengths may be beneficial to expanding Western psychology's understanding of human connectivity and the importance of cultural survival for mental health.

Goals of This Study

Studies of the effect of war on individuals and communities often focus on symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that ensued because of the war. However, as discussed earlier, there have been many debates about the appropriateness of this nosological term, with reference to individuals affected by war in a Third World context (Bracken et al., 1995). Some scholars feel that *cultural bereavement* more accurately describes what many individuals from closely-knit communities experience after war has

ravaged their communities and social support networks (Schreiber, 1995; Bracken et al., 1995; Englund, 1998). Both the concepts of cultural bereavement and PTSD address the ways in which war can devastate individuals and communities. It may also be beneficial to understand how individuals can overcome such trauma. A study of resilience can help us to comprehend the factors that contribute to healing and recovery, after the horrific experience of war. The implications of such an understanding can extend to the planning of refugee camps, and the structure of refugee aid agencies (Englund, 1998). As we develop a greater awareness of the factors that contribute to resilience, we can help to enhance the conditions that can help to foster the resilience of members of displaced communities. This is a critical endeavor, as entire generations have come of age in the confines of refugee camps (Gillespie, Peltzer, & Malcolm, 2000).

Gillespie et al. (2000) explain that studying the coping tools and resilience of refugees can, “provide empirical guidance to facilitate psychological adjustment.” This study seeks to do just that, through examining the cultural factors that contribute to resilience. It is helpful to understand these factors, as this awareness will aid mental health workers in their efforts to provide services which enhance the strengths already present in individuals and communities. Humanitarian interventions typically focus on basic necessities, such as ensuring that refugees have adequate food, clothing, and shelter. Understandably neglected, but crucial for mental health recovery from refugee trauma, are efforts toward the maintenance of important cultural institutions in communities devastated by war (Englund, 1998). Many communities have built-in structures to effectively treat or prevent trauma and other mental health concerns. Not only are food supplies and housing depleted and destroyed during wartime, but cultural institutions can suffer in a manner which can leave refugees without tools that previously would have

been accessible to aid in healing. One goal of this study is to gain an understanding of which cultural tools are most meaningful to the refugees interviewed, and how these tools contribute to psychological healing.

Seeking information from refugees who do not experience PTSD symptoms, or who were able to overcome these symptoms, may help us to understand the factors that contributed to their resilience. By directly asking refugees what contributed to their recovery from traumatic experiences, this study will begin to gather clues about which cultural institutions and social support systems can be supported by humanitarian interventions during, and after times of war. This is especially important for interventions from the field of psychology. The nature of psychologists' work in Third World countries requires much research into the cultural context of the community in which they intend to make a contribution. The cultural context in which Western psychology was developed is quite particular to the West (Bulhan, 1985; Cross & Markus, 1999). Acknowledgement of this necessitates learning about the adaptations that would be necessary for Western tools to have a positive impact in a non-Western setting. For example, group therapy has been found to be beneficial for communities affected by HIV and AIDS in Uganda (*New York Times*, 2004). Individual therapy may not, however, have had such an effective impact in this particular community in Uganda. Psychological interventions outside of the West can have a positive impact, but we must first approach the culture with the openness and humility required to learn about what already works well for healing in the culture's context. This study will inquire about the specific cultural and other resources that can contribute to psychological healing within refugee camps.

Since in qualitative research, the background and context of the participants' lives is often an important part of the research (Fischer, 1999), it is important to briefly

provide some historical background of the cultural and political dynamics of the countries in which the participants were born. Many Liberian refugees have suffered horrendous experiences due to the civil war in their country. By 1990 Liberia's civil war had displaced 40% of its population. Over 150,000 lives had been lost (Burrowes, 2004). Liberians who have come to North America as refugees have likely spent time in refugee camps in Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone or Guinea, before leaving the African continent. The Democratic Republic of Congo also experienced decades of war and civil strife, that has devastated large parts of the population.

Ethiopia and Eritrea fought a 30-year war in which Eritrea was seeking independence from Ethiopia. In 1991 the war ended, and in 1993 Eritrea became a sovereign nation. In 1998 however, a border war began between the two countries that resulted in over 100,000 deaths and pre-empted the deportation of thousands of Ethiopian nationals of Eritrean origin from Ethiopia to Eritrea. Many of these deportees were unfamiliar with Eritrea and may not have spoken any Eritrean languages. For various reasons thousands of these deportees, and other Eritreans, have left Eritrea to live in Ethiopia. However, because of the failing state of diplomatic relations between the two nations, Eritrean immigrants are not allowed to reintegrate into Ethiopian society, and live instead in refugee camps.

This study seeks to address the experiences of African refugees in refugee camps, and to gain an understanding of the level of social and cultural support participants experienced as refugees, as well as participants' current quality of life and attitude towards life in the present. Through learning of these refugees' experiences we can gain a greater and much needed understanding of the hindrances to psychological well-being in refugee camps, and the role that mental health practitioners can play in designing interventions

that help to decrease psychological hardship. What we can learn from the resilience of some refugees in the face of great hardship can also make a contribution to the field of psychology by teaching us a great deal about perseverance, belief, faith and the importance of a support system for well-being. Through exploring the experiences of the participants, this study seeks to graze the surface of this important well of hopefulness.

Method

Participants

Ten refugees from countries in Africa which have been plagued by war and violence, who are now residing in North America, were interviewed for this study. All participants were required to be over the age of 18 and English-speaking. They were from the west, central and east African nations of Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Four participants were born in Liberia. One participant hailed from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Five participants were born in Ethiopia. Though the five East African participants were all Ethiopian-born, they were living in Eritrea before becoming refugees.

Two of the participants were female and 8 were male. The ages of participants ranged from 24 years of age to above 50 years of age. They belonged to six different ethnic groups. Together the participants spoke more than 22 different languages in addition to English. Educational backgrounds ranged from high school completion to Master's degree completion.

Collectively, participants had lived in refugee camps in seven host countries in Africa. The length of time participants had lived in one or several refugee camps ranged from 3 months to 6 years. The participant who had only lived in a refugee camp for 3 months, however, had lived for 11 and one-half years as a refugee just outside of a refugee camp.

Materials

I facilitated each interview using a standardized open-ended interview format of 11 questions, for the 45 to 90 minute interviews. These questions are listed in the following section. I also asked participants to complete a demographics information form

which contained questions pertaining to nationality, age, educational and professional background, and the native language of the participants. Because each interview was tape-recorded, along with the informed consent, a Consent to Audiotape Interview form was also presented, explained, and read and signed by participants.

Procedures

Selection and nationality of the participants was guided by the populations of refugees living in the communities where the research was conducted, and by those refugees who self-selected to respond to the invitation for participants. Two non-profit organizations that aid refugees in resettlement assisted me in finding participants. Through these organizations I distributed fliers inviting African refugees who had lived in refugee camps to participate in the study. Caseworkers from the refugee aid organizations also contacted, on my behalf, individuals they thought would be interested in participating. Participants were given \$20 as a token of appreciation for their time and valuable input at the completion of the interview.

Qualitative research allows for a unique understanding of the issues being examined here as, “qualitative psychology concerns itself with human experience and action” (Marecek, 2003). A qualitative approach to the issues of refugee trauma, culture and resilience allows for an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of Liberian, Congolese and Eritrean experiences in the refugee camps. What refugees are able to inform the researchers and the field of psychology about their first-hand experiences is a meaningful gift towards more complete knowledge about refugees’ psychological needs, and the needs of human beings to derive meaning from our experiences, including our experiences of suffering (Frankl, 1984). In attempting to comprehend what refugees need to contribute to their psychological healing, this study asks them directly.

The investigation involved face-to-face interviews with 10 adult refugees now living in the United States and Canada. Each interview was between 45 and 90 minutes in duration. Two of the interviews were conducted with two interviewees participating at once. This was in response to the preferences of these participants who preferred to be interviewed together. The interviews began by introducing myself and the research project. I then presented the Consent Form for Research. I addressed each part of the form in detail, so that participants could understand its information and could ask any questions about the research that they may have had. The questions I asked participants were related to their reflections on the refugee camp experience as a whole. I was not primarily seeking information about participants' personal experiences, though this was often conveyed by the interviewees; rather I solicited their opinions about what aspects of refugee camp life should be improved in order to facilitate a better transition from refugees' home country and improved psychological well-being.

The interview questions were structured using the standardized open-ended interview approach. The questions were written in a manner designed to allow the participants to answer freely, while the general uniformity of the interview questions across interviews allowed for comparability of participant responses (Patton, 2002). I also incorporated some aspects of the interview guide approach to the interviews, in that follow-up questions were unstructured and conversational, and followed interesting points made by participants or responses for which I sought to gain a clearer understanding (Patton, 2002).

The standardized open-ended interview questions I asked each participant were:

1. In which refugee camp did you live? In which country? How long did you live there?

2. Can you tell me what it's like to live in a refugee camp? What is an average day like in the camp you lived in?

3. What are some of the hard things about living in a refugee camp?

4. I wonder if there were any positive things about living in the refugee camp?

5. a. Many times when people leave their country they may leave parts of their culture behind as well. People might also bring some parts of their culture with them. Can you tell me some of the aspects of your culture, or community that you brought with you to the camp?

b. Tell me about some of the aspects of your culture that you left behind when you went to the refugee camp. How did you feel about leaving this part behind?

Note: Probe about celebrations, religious ceremonies, consultation with community leaders, and visits with family members.

6. I'd like to ask you about your religious practices.

a. How did you practice religion back home? Were you able to continue to practice in this way at the camp?

b. What was it like to try to practice your religion in the refugee camp?

7. Were there some things you used to do, or would have liked to be able to that you found that you couldn't do as easily in the refugee camp? Tell me about some of these things.

8. How did your culture help you to cope with living in the camp? Are there some things about your culture that were not as helpful?

9. How did the way you were raised help you to cope with living in the camp? Are there some things about the way that you were raised that were not as helpful?

10. If you were in charge of the refugee camp(s) where you lived, what kinds of things would you do to improve life there? Why?

11. Finally, I'd like you to reflect on your adjustment to life in the United States. How would you say that you're doing here in terms of getting used to American culture and way of life? Do you feel connected to a larger community, or do you sometimes feel isolated? Do you feel hopeful about your future here?

Analysis

After conducting each interview, I transcribed the interview in full, editing the transcript for identifying information. I then read each interview thoroughly to become familiar with the text. During the in-depth reading of the interview transcripts, I developed a list of codes that emerged from the data. The next step was to build upon the coding process using the qualitative analysis software, Nvivo. After uploading the transcripts into Nvivo, I again examined each interview and noted the themes that emerged from participants responses. This second reading of the transcripts allowed me to compare with and to build upon my initial reading. In this way I was able to allow the interview data to “ ‘coauthor’ meanings” instead of inserting pre-established meanings onto the data (Fischer, 1999). I carefully noted common themes found in the data, while at the same time examining the unique ways in which each participant experienced and viewed life in the refugee camp. The rich descriptions that are so important in qualitative research come from the study's participants' vivid and emotion-laden recanting of daily refugee camp life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Qualitative research theorists note that one aspect of the “trustworthiness” of qualitative analysis involves including specific examples from the interview data in the establishment of more general theories, or “ ‘grounding’ the interpretations” (Merrick,

1999). Following this approach, I worked as much as possible to examine the information provided in the interviews based on the data itself, rather than solely on how it fits into the larger theories explored at the beginning of the research development process. It is my hope that this study's interviews and analysis will provide important information about the experience of cultural bereavement amongst refugees, as well as factors that contribute to their resilience to trauma. While this research focuses specifically on the experience of three distinct groups of refugees, it may allow us an understanding of the relationship between community support, culture and psychological well-being, that can be considered for many groups of African refugees, and perhaps refugees world-wide.

Results

Many factors contributed to both the distress and resilience in the refugee camps as described by this study's participants. Participants described some of the hardships that they faced while living in refugee camps, as well as some of the experiences that contributed to their own resilience in the camps. They shared many of these experiences in response to the question, "What were some of the hard things about living in the refugee camp(s)?" While participants shared their own experiences openly, they also provided examples of fellow refugees living in the camps who may have suffered more, or in a different way. Participants provided thoughtful explanations of experiences of hardship, distress and resilience in the camps. The following themes highlight some of the major categories of hardship, cultural influence, resilience, and participants' suggested solutions for psychological distress that emerged from the interview data. Pseudonyms are used for each participant to protect all participants' confidentiality.

Perceived Causes of Hardship

Access to Food and Water. Food and water were major issues of concern for all participants ($n = 10$) during the duration of their residence in refugee camps. Half of the participants ($n = 5$) described the difficulties, if not the impossibility of obtaining safe drinking water in the camps. Henry, a refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), who lived in a refugee camp in Zimbabwe, describes the dangers residents of his refugee camp faced because of the inadequate water supply this way, "Refugee they have water problem... You see, we used to have case of diarrhea, cholera, in the camp. Why? Because there's not clean water." Hope, a 24 year-old refugee from Liberia, remembered that refugees living in her refugee camp in Ghana did not have access to free, clean water. Refugees, with little or no income at their disposal, were forced to buy

water brought to the camp from outside. Hope recalls, "...if you don't have money, it's difficult because, how will you get water? And then you got to go to the well, to-to get some water for you and the kid. And the water from the well, it's not – it's not good. But it's not hygienic, it make you sick and all that thing." She continued, "Sometimes it can come to the point that you-you can't even afford a bag of water to drink on the refugee camp...there's nowhere to turn."

Obtaining food was an equally, if not more challenging process. Much of the participants' daily life in the camps was oriented around finding food to eat. Participants reported waking up before sunrise, sometimes at 3 o'clock in the morning, to queue for water, or begin looking for food. Generally participants were provided a ration of food from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or other refugee aid organizations, but in all cases participants reported that this food was not enough, and many refugee adults and children went hungry and became malnourished in the camps. Hope, who was herself a girl when living in a Ghanaian refugee camp, opined that dealing with food shortage was, "The hard thing...Sometimes, you don't even have food to eat." James, 37 and a refugee from Liberia, who lived in camps in Sierra Leone and Guinea, felt that refugees' experiences in the camp would have been less difficult, "...if they were giving *enough* food to the people...they were not giving enough food." Henry also recalled living with hunger in the refugee camp and noted, "Sometimes you have one meal a day. Sometimes you won't have it. Maybe, you know, you might spend a day just by, you know, porridge. That's it."

Several participants also reported intermittent reductions in the amount of food provided, or a cessation of food provision by the United Nations. Hope remembered that, "From the beginning the UN was giving the food, but certain time they stop giving

them food.” Mr. Lewis, an older gentleman and father of 9 children reflected on the added challenge of finding food for his children, who had accompanied him to the camp. Mr. Lewis lived in a refugee camp in Ghana for 3 months, with several of his children, and lived as a refugee in several towns in Ivory Coast for 11.5 years. Here he echoes Hope, Henry and James with his sentiments about enduring food shortage: “To live in a refugee camp is really very difficult. Especially when food run out, and you have children to feed. When we went first, we didn’t have food at all before the UNHCR people came along with food.” Solomon, Tesfai, Haile and Alem all refugees who lived in Ethiopian camps recalled, with a certain incredulity, a period when their bi-weekly distribution of 15 kilograms of wheat was reduced. Solomon and Tesfai, both in their 20’s, were interviewed together and the following dialogue between them illustrates the hardship of this food reduction:

Tesfai: And one time it was like –[pauses to inhale]– 10 kilo wheat.

Solomon: Yeah, sometimes it comes, decrease, it comes down. You know? And they said that...

Tesfai: Because they didn’t get enough...from UNHCR. So, if they don’t get, they don’t give you, you know?

Solomon: Yeah, that’s the only they can do, is they cannot give us 15...I remember one day it was 10 kilogram for two weeks.

Tesfai: You can’t survive, you know? With 10 kilograms.

Similarly James referenced the difficulty of trying to stretch a provision of 2 tins of sardines to last for two weeks. “...It was not even enough to take you for two weeks. It only took your for like [laughs] – if you want to eat sardines, just imagine two – you could eat that for two days, and [laughs] you have two weeks to go.”

Corruption, a reality which negatively affected several participants, was also an issue with food distribution. Food that was intended for refugees was sometimes diverted for other purposes as Mr. Lewis describes: “The United Nations was giving us food. But, the problem was that uh, people were *stealing* the food. People who were in charge of the food used to sell it and – to outsiders. Refugees that they put in charge of the food to give to their fellow refugees used to *steal* food and sell it to the town people.” Mr. Lewis went on to explain that the most vulnerable victims of the food theft were those who did not have the strength or leverage to demand their fair share.

“...I was able to get enough food for my children because I was strong. In those days I was a little bit younger...I had my own little power. I would talk to the leaders and convince them that, ‘look this food is for us’... You know, uh, out of respect and fear that I might report them to-to-to [laughs] the authorities, so they would give me enough food. But the other refugees who didn’t have the power to do that – they suffer. They didn’t have food for their people. Some of the children got sick and died.”

In addition to the regular food shortages, the quality of food was also an issue of great concern. Henry’s experience illustrates a most dramatic account of the caliber of food provided, which refugees had no choice but to eat. He explains,

“Even the commodities we were receiving [pause], hmm, sorry to tell you but, you used to get expired food... They gave us mew-mew. You know mew-mew...Maize uh, flour [corn flour]. To-to cook... But you may find that they give you something which it’s marked that you have to... use it by such and such date, but you see that the date they’re giving you it’s – it’s already expired. So even when you look at the quality of – it smells. It smells bad. But we had no choice... So as we’re believers [in their religion] you just cook, you pray, and eat it.”

These are conditions that no one should be subjected to, but as we will see, participants and many fellow refugees endured the terribly sub-standard food and water conditions and continued to persevere.

Medical Care. Another theme that emerged from the interview data is that medical care was largely absent or of very poor quality in participants' experiences. The lack of adequate medical care resulted in a great deal of problems, including preventable mortality and sickness, and psychological distress. Several participants cited deaths in the refugee camp from preventable diseases and other treatable ailments. James, for example, recalled that, "there's not enough medical care." The clinics available to refugees in the two camps in which James lived in Sierra Leone only staffed nurses, and no doctors were available to provide treatment. The medicine available there was only, "aspirin, you know, those cold/flu stuff." In one of the camps in which James lived, the nearest nurse was a three hour's walk from the refugee camp. Because of the great distance to medical services, three refugees died in 5 months from preventable deaths. James remembered, "One was bitten by a snake, and he died. And the other girl was 20 years old, and she just had – I think a fever or something. You know because no doctor – died. Three persons in a short period."

James also noted that there were no psychological services available in the camps in which he lived. In his words there were, "...No social workers, [laughs] that would talk to people." Later in the interview he mentions some of the psychological effects that the lack of access to medical care had on residents. "...A lot of people go with guilt...each pregnancies they feel responsible for that because they can't take care – they can't provide for the children. So the children dying of minor sickness and things. They can't afford medical stuff, that leave them depressed and uh, that leave them sad, you know..." Hope echoed James sentiments about the psychological impact of the lack of medical care in the camps – especially with new pregnancies, as James also mentioned. Hope explains, "It affect the family because you don't already have money. You don't have money to go to

hospital. You don't have money to take care of yourself. Your daughter is pregnant. Now you thinking about her, she and...that baby."

Like James and Hope, Mr. Lewis also addressed the psychological distress caused by refugees' lack of access to medical care. In Mr. Lewis's experience poor medical care produced a great deal of fear: "...Another thing we used to be afraid of is to get sick and die. Because we didn't have good medical facilities. Yes. Good medical facilities was lacking." As with access to food, access to medical care was sometimes dictated by those who were responsible for distributing aid from the United Nations. Mr. Lewis continues, "Although the United Nations built some clinics...but as I say before, most of those things used to get-be controlled by the leaders. When they – when you are not connected with the leader who is in charge of the drugs, you can't get good service." Henry also mentioned that the aid intended for medical care of refugees somehow did not filter down to those who needed it in the camps. He noted that, "the UNHCR used to give money to the Zimbabwean government for which we never got that one..." According to Henry, these funds were supposed to reach refugees "through the social welfare." However, he explained that in reality, "you got sick, you go to the clinic, you won't get attention from the doctors...you might spend the whole month going, the same procedure, then the only tablet they give you is like the painkillers. Instead of giving [specific] treatment they just give you...a general one because they know that they won't get money if they treat you well."

For Solomon and Tesfai another issue arose regarding accessing medical treatment. The diplomatic relations between the country they fled, Eritrea and their host country, Ethiopia, had long ago deteriorated, largely due to the 1998 to 2000 border war. The lack of trust between the two countries permeated many aspects of aid provision to

over 14,000 Eritrean refugees living in Northern Ethiopia. As Solomon describes, the conflict between the two countries even had a negative impact on the medical treatment experience of refugees. Solomon explained this further: “Those doctors, even they are from uh, you know, from Ethiopia. Which means against of Eritrea. They have some of them, they have ...bad feeling...you know, about the countries...Most of them they say that, ‘you killed us yesterday, and you came us today here. Even, even our blood, it doesn’t get d-d-dry. They said that.” Tesfai continued by recounting the danger posed by overnight hospital treatment where, “they don’t provide you food. And you have to get food from your friends. And if you don’t have any assistance, you’re gonna die!” The participants interviewed expressed an acute feeling of vulnerability regarding their health, as a result of the poor medical care available in the camps.

Disease was also a constant threat for many participants while they were living in refugee camps. Many of the diseases present in the camps were preventable and treatable, yet many refugees died because of their presence. According to James, “Children were...suffering from those communicable diseases like measles, and diarrhea...” Haile and Alem remembered that more than 10 people died from malaria while they lived in the Northern Ethiopian camps. In the last 5 months that they lived in one refugee camp, malaria caused the deaths of 6 people. Solomon also felt that “the malaria was very bad” in the same camps. Tesfai also recognized that in addition to deaths caused by malaria, “people died from malnutrition.” Haile and Alem mentioned that in spite of the severity of malaria risk in the camps, mosquito nets, an effective form of prevention of bites from malaria-carrying mosquitoes, were only distributed to refugees who were already “very sick” with malaria. Unfortunately, poor and absent medical care, were just one of many sources of hardship that participants and fellow refugees endured in the camps.

Danger, Safety and Comfort Issues. Other sources of hardship included issues of physical safety and comfort. When asked about some of the difficult aspects of camp life, several participants referred to their discomfort and insecurity with relation to their housing conditions. There were many physical discomforts such as the absence of electricity in some camps, and the infrequency of electricity in others. Hope remembered that when there was no electricity in the Ghana refugee camp, refugees who had little access to any income, “got to get money to buy kerosene to light, the-the candle. Or, you got to get money to use light in the house, because no light is difficult.”

The UNHCR usually provided participants with plastic sheeting as a form of shelter. Refugees were then responsible for raising the plastic sheeting into a tent-like structure, and filling in the open sides with sticks and dry grass. These most minimal shelters did not protect refugees from the extreme heat and cold that participants experienced. As we will learn, these housing arrangement also sadly contributed to the deaths of many residents as a result of fires.

When asked about sources of hardship in the camp, James described the shelter provisions in the Sierra Leonean refugee camps where he lived. “Basically,” he explains, “life in the camp is hard because, you are living in uh...If you know tarpooling? It’s a rubber sheet that they like, just put around the place...” Sleeping was particularly uncomfortable in the camp. As James recalls, “...sometimes no beds, you know. You just get sticks that you put together, you know and sometimes, yeah, sleep on the floor.” Mr. Lewis also experienced difficulty with the sleeping conditions in the camps. He describes the conditions that he and his children endured when they first arrived at the refugee camp. “The first night my children and I were in the refugee camp...we slept on the bare floor. With just a-a sheet of, of uh-uh cloth and put it on the floor. We slept on it and

then uh, the place was full of mosquitoes...It's really a blessing that...my children didn't get sick...some of them could have gotten sick and died!" Later, Mr. Lewis was able to improve the sleeping conditions for himself and his children by utilizing his own ingenuity. He was eventually able to move into a house, and there, "I was able to build...a bed out of...sticks from the bush. And I used some of the, the refugee plastic sheetings that, that were given to us, for mattress." Here we see that in order to improve their situation many refugees' own creativity was their best tool.

James noted, however, that in spite of the innovations of many refugees, these physical discomforts took a great psychological toll. "You know," he explains, "...many things contribute to the psychological effect that there were on the people and...a lot of it is brought down to material things. Material things, how they are taken care of in the camp. You know, like, the sleeping locations...they were so bad..."

Other housing inadequacies produced both a psychological and health hazard for refugees. In the Northern Ethiopian camps fire was a constant danger that resulted in many deaths. Ephraim, Solomon, Tesfai, Haile and Alem all discussed their experiences with fires in the refugee camps. As participants explained, because the houses were made of dry grass and plastic sheeting only, cigarette sparks, lanterns, cooking flames and other heat sources could result in an often deadly fire that would quickly engulf one or several tents. Ephraim reported that he continues to dream about the fires of the refugee camp: "When I was there, there was one most difficult...we made a house with grass. So daily, weekly, always happened to burn. When we cook our food it always burn, so this was a suffering. Even me, always in my dream it comes." Solomon described the immense losses that resulted from these fires. "We got everyday burning the houses...I know that we had almost 10 people who died with the burning stuff. Because people – say they

smoke and for some reason the house get burned...and people die, we lost a lot of documents, we lost a lot of clothes, everything's ours." Solomon continued by stating that having a tent burn was, "the worst thing...so we had a lot of problems."

Haile echoed Solomon and Ephraim's sentiments about the tent fires, and noted that the nighttime was the deadliest part of the day to experience a fire. When residents were asleep there was no one present to help the fire's victims. "At night. They can't do anything at that time...That's how most people died. They can't get help." These tragedies affected more than just the victims. According to Haile, feeling responsible for the fires because, "somebody they throw out a cigarette...[the] camp starting burn," may have caused some residents to commit suicide. As is evident from these examples, a lack of basic safety and security in the camps can have devastating physical and psychologically repercussions for refugees.

Another safety concern that had a psychologically impact on some participants was the physical location of the refugee camp. Several participants lived in refugee camps that were situated near areas of conflict, war and violence. This resulted in feelings of insecurity and a sense of living in constant danger for participants and their fellow refugees living in the camps. As Ephraim explained, "this camp found in conflict area also. In the border of Eritrea and Ethiopia." This made residents of the camp feel "uncomfortable." Solomon also explained that the camp was "located close to the...conflict border. Which is called Badme." Badme is the town on the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia, where the 1998 to 2000 border war between the two countries began. Solomon referred to the location of this refugee camp as one of the hardest aspects of life there. This first of two camps where Solomon lived was only 15 kilometers from the actual conflict zone. He recalls that eventually the refugees living in this camp

were moved to a different camp “because...I think the UNHCR complained that these guys, they don’t have to live here because it’s very hard for security. So they moved us [to] [name of camp], which is far [from] Badme like for 60...kilometers. Still it – still we are close. It’s nothing. Sixty kilometers, is nothing. So that is the worst thing.” Solomon then explains that living so close to the conflict zone was so difficult because, “There is no secure at all. You never know, if the war starts one day, you’ll be the first victim there...That’s the bad thing.” One can imagine the psychological impact such fears had on refugees’ daily lives.

This sense of insecurity and danger was especially salient because many refugees had fled violence before arriving to the camps, seeking respite and peace there. Mr. Lewis also cited the proximity to a conflict zone as one of the most difficult aspects of life for Liberians refugees in the border region of Ivory Coast. According to Mr. Lewis, one of the greatest difficulties was, “being afraid for incursion. Now we are living so close to the border that we were afraid that rebels could infiltrate-infiltrate into our areas. And it happened – it happened.” Mr. Lewis remembered the exact date that rebels entered a refugee area and “drove us out.” He reiterated that this was, “the main thing we used to be afraid of. Because we were living *too* close to the Liberian border.” This fear was in fact well-founded because, as Mr. Lewis stated, “They killed people, yes. They killed some of the Liberian refugees. Yes.” There were also auditory reminders that the war the refugees had hoped to leave behind, was still close by. Since the refugees lived only 10-15 kilometers from the Liberian border, “we could still hear people fighting...gun sounds, this kind and so-forth.”

It is interesting to note that because these very real fears were a part of many refugees’ everyday realities, the role of culture and tradition in refugees’ lives was

sometimes of lesser importance than more life-threatening issues. According to Mr. Lewis, “people were mostly concerned about their safety, you know and...health problems, and how their children go to school and many other problems that did not have anything to do with...culture...Security and safety, was really the main thing that everybody was...looking at.” Mrs. Williams, a middle-aged woman from Liberia, who seemed to feel more physically secure in her Ghanaian refugee camp, echoed Mr. Lewis’s sentiments about the importance of feeling safe. When asked if there was anything positive about her refugee camp experience she answered, “Well the only thing...positive was, we were there, and we thank God that we were there. We were able to escape for our lives to be safe. That was one of the most [important] thing I saw there. I would like to be safe. Yes.” Though safety would have brought relief to many more refugees, it was illusive for most participants. Ephraim for example stated definitively that in the camps in which he lived, “...I was not feeling safe.”

James pointed out that during the 1991 outbreak of war in Sierra Leone, many refugees who fled the war in Liberia became victims of war once again, in their host country. James recalled that, “when the war came in Sierra Leone, people were killed in the camp.” Because of all of the violence that refugees witnessed and experienced James felt that there was a serious need for psychological intervention. He explains that in the camps, “there are some people who are really, really traumatized. They are really traumatized. Some of them were raped. Some of them, their parents were killed right in their presence. They are just scared to go anywhere. They are scared to do anything. They are scared of everybody, so they need some counseling, you know.”

In the camps, even an activity such as seemingly simple as finding a bathroom, was often fraught with impediments and dangers. Hope explains that in her camp, “you

don't have bathroom. You got to go to bush. Like in the forest...Hmm, it's terrible...No bathroom, no toilet...See so you got to walk for far distance to go way in the bush to go to toilet." But even this strategy was not always a solution. Hope continued, "sometimes if you go on the next man land, they try to stone you, they say 'don't go-go to bathroom on my land, use my land to go to toilet.'" One can understand from Hope's description how perilous such an everyday activity can become in a refugee camp. It was even more dangerous for children. In Hope's camp, sometimes children who went to find a bathroom would go missing. "...Your kid want to go to toilet, right...and then you tell her 'okay...but follow your friend,' so then you don't see your kid anymore! Your kid get missing." In response to cases of missing children, many refugees in Hope's camp began building latrines directly behind their houses. Mr. Lewis noted that in Ghana there was the option of paying to use a public toilet. This however, was not a reality for most refugees, because of the cost: "open toilet for 500 cedis [Ghanaian currency]...Then you want to use [flush toilet]...you pay 1,000 cedis."

Refugees were forced to cope creatively with such difficulties in order to survive. But, some problems seemed to have no apparent solution, such as preventing thefts from houses made of grass. Solomon explains with the following example. "Somebody who has no money, he can go to my house if I have some money, he can come to my house and steal my watch or my money. Because there is no any security, my house is made...from grass. You just pull over the grasses and get in and take all the money, all of it, all the clothes, and he gonna sell it." We can see that security, danger and comfort issues pervaded many aspects of refugees' lives in the camps.

Freedom and Mobility. Another source of hardship that was salient across participant's experiences was a lack of mobility and freedom in the camp. For the five

Eritrean refugees interviewed in this study, there was no freedom of movement allowed outside of the camps in which they lived. This was a source of great frustration for Ephraim, Solomon, Tesfai, Haile and Alem. Ephraim mentioned that, “there is signature every week.” Presumably, these signatures were meant to confirm the presence of registered residents. Ephraim stated that the signatures were taken “because...Ethiopian and Eritrean government [are] enemy.” According to Ephraim and the other Eritrean participants, travel outside of the refugee camps was “not allowed.” Solomon and Tesfai explained the consequences of defying this rule:

Solomon: We don't have any right.

Tesfai: We are not allowed to go to the city and uh, buy...something...So we don't have any permission.

Solomon: If somebody go...leaves the camp without any permission [pause] yeah, he gonna be in prison, in jail.

Tesfai: They just put him in jail. For a couple months.

Solomon: And he comes through, through there again, back to the camp.

The prohibition of mobility outside of the camps was particularly painful for many Eritrean refugees who were deported from Ethiopia beginning in 1998, at the onslaught of the border war. Many of these deportees were forced to leave part of their family behind in Ethiopia, as not all Eritreans were forced to leave the country. These refugees hoped that upon reaching Ethiopia again, they would be able to reunite with their families living in Ethiopia. As Solomon and Tesfai explain,

Solomon: They couldn't get...any opportunity to go to...

Tesfai: To join their dad and mom.

Solomon: To go to Addis Ababa or wherever they are and to meet their families. There is no option.

Because of the lack of freedoms refugees experienced, their economic and subsistence opportunities were also thwarted. Mr. Lewis informed me that, “in Africa it is out of the bush where we get most of our supplies.” He recalled that at home in Liberia, people could freely access the ‘bush’ or forest, to acquire important materials. However, in Ivory Coast, Mr. Lewis found that refugees’ access to the bush was often controlled and sometimes denied. He explains that, “if you are not able to...use the bush to get your food out of it, then you will suffer. So...at times when they want some money, or for to bribe them, they will tell us not to go into the bush. Uh, ‘don’t go to the bush.’ If I can’t go into-into the bush and it is out of the bush where I get my food from, then how do you expect me to be able to get...something to eat?” Mr. Lewis also explained that some refugees’ livelihoods were interrupted when they were denied entry to the bush, since making charcoal from wood was, “the main economic activity that we used to carry on.” When refugees could not go into the bush, they could not access the wood they needed to chop and burn in order to produce charcoal and sell it to sustain themselves. And that, as Mr. Lewis said slowly, “is a matter of problems – is a lot of problems.” Some refugees also planted cassava patches in the bush. Cassava, a root vegetable, was a staple food, and denied entry to the bush for a planter meant that he or she could not access the food that he or she needed to harvest in order to have enough nourishment to survive.

Ephraim, Solomon and Tesfai all remarked upon refugees’ desire to engage, as Ephraim says, in “business...[or] shopping.” But this becomes a nearly impossible task because, “if there is no freedom to move, how can” refugees access the necessary goods? Solomon noted that the shops in the refugee camp were mostly owned by locals “because the...refugees, we don’t have any right to move from place to place.” Therefore, participating in trade or commerce would, for the most part, be impractical.

Many of the participants also mentioned the difficulty of speaking out against injustices, or challenging policies in the camps. These participants felt that freedom of speech was not a right afforded them in the camps. Access to speak openly with UNHCR protection officers was denied many refugees for various reasons. In the Ethiopian camps, the Ethiopian government, through the Ethiopian refugee administration, maintained the day-to-day operations of the camps. UNHCR officers served to protect the well-being and safety of refugees in the camps. Ephraim noted that one of the practical barriers to communicating with UNHCR officers was the location of the UN office, which was “far away from the refugee camp. Almost one day in drive.” According to Solomon and Tesfai, the UNHCR protection officers’ office was “about 150 kilometers away from the camp.” The protection officers did have a regular general meeting with refugees, but Solomon, Tesfai, Haile, and Alem all stated that speaking with the UNHCR officers would result in dire consequences for them from the camp administration and soldiers. Regarding the dangers of speaking out about camp concerns to the protection officers, Tesfai and Solomon explain:

Tesfai: There was a meeting...But you can't say that word. [The camp administration] can observe. They gonna [arrest you], you know?

Solomon: You cannot say that. Because you'll get the worst. You will get the worst! If you say that, the worst will come...most of the time you live with [the camp administration]. You don't live with UNHCR. UNHCR comes once a while. So if you told them once a while? Imagine...what's the worse will come to you.

Tesfai: We better off quiet...They can pick anyone they want, you know? And they can take him with them.

Haile and Alem echoed Solomon and Tesfai's experience of denial of free speech. They too, felt that it was safer to keep their problems to themselves, than to speak with the UNHCR, as they explain here:

Haile: We have a soldier around our place. The government with soldiers...Maybe...I have an opportunity to talk for that representative for UNHCR. After that uh, I'm talking, they come and kidnap for me...That's why I'm not talking about anything...they take for me to prison, or uh, for death.

Alem: Not freedom. We have not...

In this climate of silencing refugees' voices, we can see that a great deal of inner strength was required to endure the violation of human rights participants experienced. Henry also found that in his Zimbabwean refugee camp, speaking out brought harsh consequences. Henry did try to vocalize his grievances and speak out against injustice in the camp. Here he tells what he endured as a result: "I went through – we-we refugees in Zimbabwe went through a lot. I got arrested by the Zimbabwean government twice. I was jailed for [pause] 30 days. I spent 30 days in prison. No reason – nothing. Just being a refugee and you know, speaking out. I tried to speak out about our rights, and I was jailed...No trial nothing. I didn't even have a chance of maybe having a lawyer or someone to defend, no, no. That was their decision." Henry also talked about how difficult it was for him to witness and experience mistreatment in the camps. He explained, "I don't like seeing people being oppressed, and I don't like myself being oppressed...That's, that was like agony for me everyday when...I used to be in pain, cause I-I know that even if I express myself, you know what will happen." In this type of environment, not only were refugees' basic necessities not being met, but their basic human liberties were also violated on a daily basis. This contributed to the overall hardship that refugees faced in the camps.

Prejudicial Treatment and Host-Refugee Relations. Treatment of refugees by administrators and local residents varied in participants' reports; however, experiences of discrimination and prejudice were a common theme. The majority of participants ($n = 9$)

discussed some element of prejudiced treatment during their time living in the refugee camps. Sometimes this mistreatment was as a result of administrators and locals feeling threatened by the refugees' presence. Other times prejudice was perpetuated because of misconceptions about refugees, or because of language and cultural barriers that negatively affected host-refugee relations.

Some members of the local population even directed their grievances with the refugees' country of origin toward refugees themselves. Ephraim explains how he experienced the perception and treatment of Eritrean refugees in the Northern Ethiopian camps as a function of the failed diplomatic relations between the two countries. "The most hard is because of the Eritrean and Ethiopian government are enemy...to live in the camps we have not treat as a refugee person. We didn't see as a refugee person." I asked Ephraim how he was treated if not as a refugee, and he responded with certainty in his voice, "It is like enemy." One can imagine how disheartening such treatment must have been for participants and fellow refugees, who fled to their host country seeking refuge and peace.

Unfortunately, some refugees who fled war and violence also experienced similar traumatic events in their host countries. James explained that in Sierra Leone, Liberian refugees were victimized when the war "spilled over into Sierra Leone." Because some Liberians were involved in these attacks, Liberian refugees became suspects and targets. James recalled that life as a refugee was, "worse at that time. They start calling every refugee rebels. And a lot of Liberians were killed. A lot of them, you know, were killed." The abuse of Liberian refugees corresponded incrementally with the movement of the rebels into Sierra Leone. "The deeper they went into Sierra Leone...anytime they advanced, then the-the security, the army would terrorize Liberians. They have check

points, Liberians would be put aside...some of them were beating, you know?” This is a cruel second layer of violence in addition to that which many refugees fled in their home country.

For the Eritrean participants, there was a pervasive sense that the very people that were, as Tesfai asserted, “supposed to be nice for refugee people,” actually harbored a deep-seated resentment and anger toward the refugees. At the time the participants lived in the refugee camps, the devastating border war was still a fresh memory for all affected, and future conflict seemed imminent. As a result, distrust by camp personnel was a major element of the Eritrean participants’ experience as Solomon and Tesfai describe in the following dialogue:

Solomon: They accept us as a refugee...but they have bad feelings with the situations...There is no trust. There’s no trust at all...There are also Ethiopian people who lives in the neighborhood, the Tigray people, uh, you know they feel, they have bad feeling. Because they lost uh, 2, 3 of their son. Which is happened between two countries...

Tesfai: They reflect in different ways, what, what was happened for their families. What they lost.

Solomon and Tesfai empathize with the heartbreaking losses of the local population as a result of a horrendous war. Solomon also points out that the war “happened between two countries.” Sadly, the anger about the local experience of the border war and was mistakenly linked with the refugees from the other side of the border.

There is a tragic irony to the plight of the Eritrean refugees who hoped to reintegrate into Ethiopian society, only to find that they were now considered threats and were detained in camps. It is important to remember that the study’s Eritrean participants, Ephraim, Solomon, Tesfai, Haile and Alem, were all born and raised in Ethiopia. Thus, in a literal sense, it was actually their native country. They left Ethiopia as

young men, only because the war resulted in mass deportations of Ethiopians of Eritrean origin. When these participants fled Eritrea to Ethiopia, they hoped to again lead a normal life in the country in which they were raised. Instead, as Haile points out, “we went back to Ethiopia. Everything is changed! That’s why everything... without uh hope, you do everything. You can’t get from refuge hope.” The consequences of trying to become a part of Ethiopian society again, were too grave, as Haile explains in this hypothetical scenario, “Okay, I went... to somewhere in Ethiopia, whoa, maybe they... catch up – I’m in prison... if the police get to me... in that time, I’m a terrorist. You know? Every Eritrean peoples... they looks Ethiopian government like a terrorist.”

Tesfai explains his reasons for wanting to return to his native country. “We came to Ethiopia to find peace and to live in Ethiopia. So we didn’t come to Ethiopia to go to Europe, you know?” But when these young men arrived in Ethiopia all doors that were previously open were now tightly closed to them. For example, “the Ethiopian government... didn’t allow to go to school,” or have many other freedoms. Solomon felt that part of the problem was that the Ethiopian government could not understand why these refugees would return to a country from which they were deported, even if it was the only country that had every known. He explained that the authorities’ perspective was, “‘no, I don’t believe those guys.’ [pause] ‘Because I deported you guys and then you come back. Me – to me, I don’t believe those guys. You guys are very dangerous for my security. So yeah, you have to live in the camp – the refugee camp.’” And according to Solomon, “that’s why the refugee camp started. It was new.”

Because of the feelings of distrust, anger and resentment, Haile felt that he and his fellow refugees were treated as refugees only nominally. In Haile’s words, “our names... refugees. But that uh, meaning, does not look like [other] refugees, you know?”

Solomon noted that the refugees even received prejudiced treatment from those who are most expected to be neutral and fair such as the medical doctors mentioned earlier, as well as UN employees. Haile explains, “the UNHCR workers...they employed there...they are Ethiopians, their nationality, so they have no good feeling. They, most of them they said that ‘you killed us yesterday, you were killing us yesterday. Even the blood, the blood that happened here in Badme, it, it doesn’t get dried. It isn’t dried...And you live here. That’s amazing thing.’ ”

James also found that the local populations where he lived in Sierra Leone directed feelings of resentment toward Liberian refugees. However, this was a resentment that developed rather gradually. Initially, James explained, local residents were sympathetic toward the refugees’ lot. “At first it was like they were so sorry for the people that were coming in, you know. But as times went by, you know, they thought like, these guys are going to take over our little places” As several participants mentioned access to the bush was tantamount to survival. This access began to be denied when host-refugee relations began to deteriorate. James continues, “The town I was in really, the locals started getting jealous sometimes. They start stopping people from going to the bush – in the bushes to get wood. Uh, sometimes went on their farms to get wood and they start stopping people. And you know it was getting really difficult.” This resentment was felt on an interpersonal level as well, such as when, “the ladies were getting jealous [laughing] maybe the [refugee] women were going to take their men away.” James concludes, “At first it was like, ‘oh the people are suffering,’ but later on...it became worse for-for us in Sierra Leone.” According to James and Haile, both Liberian and Eritrean refugees were also excluded from obtaining work locally. As James explains, “the normal [local] citizens don’t have work to do so what’s about refugees...every application said ‘suitable Sierra

Leonean.” And Haile recalled that in Ethiopia, “we are not accepted for the job,” even though, “we live in that area.”

Language and accents for some refugees also proved to be a source of discrimination. James noted that even in Sierra Leone, where English is spoken, because of the Liberian refugees’ accents, “some people tease, you know when you speak...they make fun of you, like there was the city area – sometimes...people just say, ‘Get out from here man, you refugee.’” James also lived for a time in Guinea where French and other indigenous languages are widely spoken. “Guinea was a bit worse, because the language barrier...They speak French, Sou Sou, Fula, which are so foreign to Liberia and Sierra Leone...And the French people are not that friendly to English speaking people. So it was really, really, really tough.” In Guinea, again, being denied access to the bush for resources was a form of discrimination refugees experienced. In these circumstances, the inadequacy of the food provided by aid agencies became even more detrimental. As James explains, “Like Sierra Leone, you could go into farm bushes and get stuff. They started stopping people from going into farms in Guinea. So except what they got from the agencies was what they had. So nothing else. It was very, very hard.”

Mr. Lewis also faced a language barrier in Ivory Coast where, “people speak mostly French.” He continues, “And when you are coming from, English-speaking country, you come to Ivory Coast [there are] a lot of problems because you will not be able to understand each other.” Mr. Lewis remembered one particularly hurtful instance of language-based discrimination when he was denied service at an Ivorian post office because he spoke little French. He explained such treatment this way, “They thought that English-speaking people are bad people. ‘And that is how they spoiled their country, uh Liberia, and they have come here to spoil ours too.’” In addition to lack of access to their

basic necessities, experiencing such mistreatment was an additional burden that participants and many other refugees have faced.

Corruption. Refugees contend with many issues that are beyond their control. One such problem is corruption. Many refugees witness and are victims of corruption that negatively impacts on their lives, and yet they are often powerless to fight it. For the majority of participants interviewed, corruption was a contributing factor to the overall hardship they endured in the refugee camps.

Hope talked excitedly about the ramifications and injustice of the corruption she experienced. Regarding food that was designated for refugees from aid agencies she remarked, “They didn’t get it! Because the people they put in power to share the food, they decided to hide it! And they turn around and sell it to you!” Mr. Lewis mentioned that refugees were required to pay for medical treatment in clinics that were established to help refugees, and which he felt were created to provide refugees with free services. Instead they were charged for care and Mr. Lewis asked a logical question: “Where does a refugee get a money from?” Since Mr. Lewis was eventually able to find employment because of his educational background, he was able to buy medicine for himself and his children, but he sympathized with the majority of refugees without any financial means. “Somebody who didn’t go to school at all and...that person has 1 or 2 children, or 3 and their husband died in the war in Liberia and they are there among the refugee – where do they get money to buy drugs? See, it was very difficult.”

Haile noted that in the Ethiopian camps, even though administrators seemed to hold refugees in disdain, some officials also viewed their presence as a financial opportunity. According to Haile, some officials bribed refugees when they would try to retrieve money sent from family members abroad. He felt that the attitude of these

officials was, “ ‘Oh, a refugees, they are a rich. They get a money – from the family,’ ” and they would often demand a portion of the remittances received from family members. A common theme among participants who cited corruption as a concern was the theft and selling of aid intended for refugees, in order to make a profit. Tesfai felt that this was, “the worst thing.” He continued, “The [administration], they steal some stuffs...from our property, you know. The property came from the UNHCR, they steal yeah. That’s corruption, yeah.” For example, Solomon and Tesfai noted that they never received the replenishment of tents that the UNHCR sent every month, as they explain here:

Solomon: The UNHCR always send us tents, but we don’t get tents...there uh big corruption...They-they just take that for their purpose.

Tesfai: Blankets. You know, all this stuff.

Solomon: Which costs them – if they sell it, which costs 100 [birr – Ethiopian currency] for one...

Tesfai: It’s gonna be 10 [dollars]. Just for one tent.

Solomon: Imagine, for 14,000 people... We’re supposed to get 14,000 tents. If you sell 14,000...with 100 [birr] – it’s 140,000 [dollars]. How much money they can make. There’s a corruption there.

For Haile, because of this corruption and failure to distribute aid, the value of the NGOs that were intended to help refugees was greatly compromised. He explains, “In the name, in the symbol, they have uh, NGO. They uh, they give us everything – in the symbol...but we can’t get that everything.” Hope felt similarly about the quality of the education provided in the camps. She felt strongly that camp teachers did not care about the effectiveness of their teaching because they worked at a school for refugees and because “nobody’s there to check on them...nobody know whether they even go to class

and teach [the refugee children].” In Hope’s opinion the refugee camp teacher’s were only teaching because, “it’s a refugee camp – everybody want money. So if you get someone the money, he will teach the way he or she like.” The result of the lack of teacher evaluation, as Hope explained it was that, “we, the innocent kid, we suffer.”

Hope offered an astute suggestion for those responsible for the camps in reducing the amount of employees corruption. Simply put, “make sure they’re full [camp employees]. [Give] their food and make sure that those people get full, because if you don’t do that, those same people who run the organization – they gonna get most of the food home, and then later on they just share it among people.” Consequently, “some of the families not even gonna get food...” This lack of oversight also meant that, “Teacher go to school whatever time he want to go to school.” Hope indicated that she recognized the challenges of maintaining a refugee camp with her statement that, “It’s a difficult place to live. It’s not easy. It’s a difficult place to take care of too.” But she felt strongly that improvements in the care of refugees need to be made. In an environment where, as James describes, there are sometimes, “no clothes...no shoes” and “some children walking...barefoot there, then naked all around,” one can recognize the importance of addressing corrupt practices that divert precious resources from those who need them most.

Absence of Work and Money. A lack of money and opportunities to earn money was also a great hardship for participants and their compatriots in the camps. All of the participants, except Hope who was too young, worked in their home countries before they became refugees. They were accustomed to being productive members of society and supporting themselves and their families. In the refugee camps, however, opportunities for work were few and far between. As is evident in participants’

experiences, in spite of the lack of opportunity, the will and desire to work was quite strong amongst the refugee populations. Ironically, despite the lack of work, money remained a crucial element of survival for refugees in the camps. Those who were fortunate enough to have relatives living abroad depended on donations from their family members. Those who did not have outside assistance had to invent ways to survive, or remain destitute if they could not. As Haile described it, “It’s difficult to live...survive. But you...must have a fund...somebody... without any fund, you cannot survive.”

There was also a network of assistance amongst refugees in the camps. Tesfai explained that refugees did not receive money from the UNHCR, but instead, “We just get money from my friends, you know? We used to help each other. Yeah, because you don’t have choice.” Solomon continued, “Some of the people they have uh, relatives in foreign. They just send...like 100 dollars for 2, 3 months. And people, they share...with people.” This spirit of sharing scarce financial resources allowed many refugees with no other source of income to survive. Mrs. Williams recalled, however, the contrast between “haves” and “have nots,” in her Ghanaian camp, with reference to sources of outside assistance. She explains, “No money. It finished completely. And then you’re waiting. For either your relative abroad, or for example, let me put it in the case of those who don’t have anybody at all abroad. Can you imagine?” Mrs. Williams was still incredulous when she recalled to what some people in this situation resorted. “They even have some Liberians on the camp begging day and night! Begging! Before they will survive. For they will eat, drink and bathe. For many years that had been going on, maybe it is still going on.”

As Tesfai describes, access to money was clearly paramount to survival in the camp, yet it eluded so many: “Many people, they don’t have money, eh?...You don’t

have money to buy even matches, you know?” According to participants, some refugees were able to create their own opportunities to raise funds. Making charcoal was an enterprise mentioned in interviews with Mr. Lewis, Solomon, Tesfai, Haile and Alem. Refugees would go into the woods, cut down trees, chop the tree into pieces and then burn the wood into charcoal. They would then sell the product to anyone who could afford to buy it. James also noted that he and others also sold firewood so that, “at least you would have small money, at least to buy [seasonings] for the food.” James explained that the people who bought the wood included, “some of the citizens...and some of the refugees, few of them who...maybe have relatives abroad, who will send a little money for them.” Some refugees who fled Liberia before the war became more dire, “were able to take one or two stuff with them...so they had a little cash. And those kind of people...would buy the wood.”

As we learned earlier from Mr. Lewis and James however, access to the woods or the “bush” was sometimes denied refugees, resulting in a greater lack of financial options. With regard to charcoal production Haile recalled, “This time they cut off that uh, things. Because of the damage of...wood...The trees. That’s why that stopped that things.” With access to a previous self-support mechanism prohibited Haile and his fellow refugees were left to wonder, “What-what-what can I do” to survive?

According to the participants, refugees employed a number of other methods to raise funds. One last resort for residents, as Henry recalled, was to sell their own material provisions, and persevere with what remained. He explained that, “we normally end up selling the same thing that they’re giving us to survive so that at least when you sell one pot you remain with one. Or you sell one blanket, you remain with one.”

James described another approach to income generation. Those who were able would raise a small amount of money by engaging in “small trading.” James and other refugees traded in farina, a staple food made out of cassava. As James details the steps involved in this type of trade, one can understand that it was a quite elaborate process. First one had to, “go deep into the village. We walked many, many mile – like to whole day – walking to get to...where you fix those cassava, then you buy from the local people and you have to put it on your head. You walk almost the whole day to get back to your town.” These workers would then store the cassava, and until the market day when they would, “walk again to the border, where traders would buy the cassava to sell across the border in Liberia, where there was not enough food because of the war.” As one can imagine, not every refugee could engage in such labor intensive work. James explained that, “it was really hard for mothers, a lot of single mothers...they couldn’t do some of those stuff, you know?”

Participants illustrated the psychological, social and economic ramifications of the lack of work options in refugee camps. The lack of work was a psychological burden and a shock, particularly for refugees like Mrs. Williams, who remarked, “We were not working [in the camp]. Can you imagine?” She remembered that at home in Liberia, “you were working. You were catering to your family...And finding yourself in a refugee camp where today you’re not working – you’re doing nothing...” Mrs. Williams describes a sense of helplessness as she continued by explaining, “When day break you just sit down and just look up to God. So the condition for me, it was not satisfactory.” Her dissatisfaction with the lack of work is apparent as she continues, “Hm. All these years. Yes, I must admit.” Not earning money for Mrs. Williams was clearly one of the “difficult

things,” especially because at times “you can’t even afford a bag of water to drink on the refugee camp. ’Cause there’s nowhere to turn.”

These conditions were “not satisfactory” for most participants. Tesfai noted that refugee life was difficult for people who “came from uh, good life, good work, something, but we couldn’t have that one anymore in the camp.” Haile felt that whatever one’s work experience or training may have been, in the camp “you have not...opportunity...what you want to do...you can’t.”

James also describes how the loss of one’s livelihood took a psychological toll upon becoming a refugee. He noted that, “Some men who had good jobs, left their jobs. That was hard. They couldn’t find a job to do.” Yet the responsibility to take care of one’s family was ever present. As a result, “some people started getting older than their age. They look older because you are worried about what you are going to eat. You are the breadwinner, you can’t provide, you know.” For families attempting to foster the next generation in the camps, this was a major source of problems. Given the financial realities of the camp, James wondered, “What kind of discipline are you going to give your children? [The] upbringing you want to give your children, you can’t do it because you know, it’s not there.”

In Hope’s view, the impact of the lack of financial resources on families had many negative consequences. Her sentiments echoed James’ when she noted that disciplining one’s children was nearly impossible for many refugees. The reality for many refugee children in the camp was that “their parents don’t have the money to take care of them.” Hope felt that as a result of parents’ lack of financial control, “now most of the kid want to be grown. Doing their own thing.” Hope details this disintegration of parental control further, and contrasts it with childrearing at home in Liberia: “Now their

parents can't control them anymore because they don't have money to take care of them. So most of the kid, by the age of 13, 15, they have boyfriend...and they don't even listen to their parents!" Not so in Liberia where, as Hope recalls, "if your mom say 'shhhh,' you can't even say 'blob.' "

Hope pointed out that in Liberia, parental control was extended as long as the child still lived at home. Parents would provide financially for their children living at home, at least up to 20 years of age, but in exchange they were required to obey their parents' rules. In the camp, Hope said, "I saw that changing." For girls and young women in the camp having boyfriends became a means to an end. Perhaps they could have access to some of the things one's parents couldn't provide. Sometimes finding a boyfriend even provided the only option for survival. Hope explains that in the camp setting, "When I reach 20 years old and start having boyfriend, you gonna accept it. Because at least the boyfriend is going to be helping me, giving me some money, and now providing for the home, you see. So now your dad can't say anything, your mom can't say anything. That is the difference...That's why war is not good." For some young women, having a boyfriend in the camp can result in additional difficult challenges for one's family. Repeating a phrase cited earlier in these results, Hope explains that when girls and young women get pregnant, "It affect the family because you don't already have money. You don't have money to go to the hospital. You don't have money to take care of yourself. Your daughter is pregnant. Now you thinking about her, she and...that baby."

As participants explain in great detail, the problems associated with a lack of income and work opportunity in the camps are numerous, and can result in great hardship and psychological anguish. The most tragic of such hardships are those that result in a state of hopelessness from which some refugees do not return. Tesfai

explained that sometimes the camp's dire circumstances became too much for some to bear: "A lot of people getting hungry, you know. If you don't get money from – if you don't get assistance, and you don't have any bright future, so you decide to kill yourself." Clearly steps need to be taken to empower refugees financially, so that no refugee would feel that suicide is the only option to escape his or her desperation.

Challenges for Women. Refugee camp life presented particular hardships for many women, mothers and girls. Some women were single because their husbands did not survive the war in Liberia. Single mothers in the camp were responsible for both sustaining their families financially, and caring for their children. Carrying both of these responsibilities was difficult, especially in light of the difficult manual labor that most forms of earning money in the camps entailed. James explains this situation here: "Some single women, who were not working, their husbands were taking care of them. Their husbands were killed. That was hard!"

As a result of these challenges, many single women looked to relationships as their key to survival. James remembered that, "[single] women have to get in relationships just to sustain their families like, some of them start going out with some local people, or some of them start going out with some refugee guys who would be strong enough to go in the bush and get wood...who would be able to get some of those business done." As James described it many women "had to attach themselves...so that they could be covered."

Some young girls entered into relationships as a means of survival as well. James even recalled that some girls' parents would encourage their daughters to be in relationships. "If their parents were a bit older, they cannot get into a relationship, so they have to push the young girls to do so that the guys can cover the family...so it was hard

for them really. So small girls were having children.” The desperation of some women is clear in James’ description. “No way to support the family. You can’t look at it, your children hungry in the morning, nothing to eat, you know.” Unfortunately help from others was not always given without strings attached. “You...ask somebody for something and the next thing, they want something back too, you know?”

James pointed out that it was difficult for parents to witness their daughters turning to relationships in order to survive. “Parents with teenage girls...they can’t provide for them. They start getting into relationships that...is harmful for them, but – you just can’t take care of the girls...It was painful for the parents.” Hope observed that sometimes the lure of material things, that were otherwise unattainable, drew some girls into relationships. “Everybody eyes were opening...You see your friend just putting on a new dress and they – your mom don’t have the money to give it to you to buy that dress. The next thing you’re going to your mom, say...see she have a boyfriend. I’m looking for a boyfriend too.” A girl may use the money a boyfriend may give her to, “eat, or to buy something to wear.”

Hope asserted that pregnancy for these girls was always a risk. And once pregnant, “sometimes the guy who give you the-the baby, you don’t even see him anymore. He gone, you don’t even know where [he] live.” Teenage pregnancy contributed to hardship and conflict in families whose resources were already stretched thin. Hope explained, “You’re left with the baby and then another responsibility come over with your mom and dad. Now you start struggling. She struggling with you, and start struggling with the baby.” James felt that something could and should be done to help young women in the camps. He asserted that camp administrators should develop, “some handy training programs that would help women to do stuff for themselves.”

Socioeconomic Background. According to the participants, the socioeconomic background of refugees served as a benefit for some refugees, and a source of hardship for others. For some refugees who came from middle and upper class background, camp life was a harsh and drastic change. As James noted, “there were people who came from good homes and they were sleeping on the floor. You know it was just hard for them to accept that, that I’m that low on the floor.”

James recognized that camp residents who never lived in a village or in the countryside had a particularly difficult time adjusting to the rigors that the camp demanded of them. “Those who came out of the city, it was very hard for them...some of them had never held a cutlass, to go hunting from the farm. [laughing] They had to do it. And they had not walked in the bush. They had to do it. It was just hard.” James felt that this adjustment had more than merely practical ramifications. The change also “had so much psychological effect on them, because, they didn’t know where to begin from...Some of them were not doing business before. ‘How am I going to...?’ Some of them never carried things on their head! I don’t understand. Yeah! It was just too much.”

Mrs. Williams felt that the war was responsible for destroying the wealth and comfort of many Liberians. “Our country went through war for many years and things fell apart. Some of us were wealthy and everything went away from us. Houses were destroyed by enemies. No job. Nothing.” Tesfai recognized that it was challenging for some refugees to “accept to live in a tent...if you’re from a rich family...”

Solomon and Tesfai also felt that coming to the refugee camp from the Eritrean villages was also a difficult adjustment for some refugees. “They just give up on life...they don’t have any person to help them...from abroad something. So they just give

up...Most of them are...coming from uh, the villages of Eritrea. So they don't know nothing. So things becomes, you know, dark for them." It seems that albeit for different reasons, both the previously wealthy and some poor villagers experienced adjustment to refugee camp life as a great hardship.

Lack of Access to Quality and Higher Education. Lack of access to education was another difficulty experienced by participants and their peers in the refugee camps. All participants espoused the importance of education, and the majority of participants lamented the absence of educational opportunities in the camps. Participants' current educational backgrounds ranged from high school to Master's level education.

Several participants expressed disappointment with their inability to access higher education within the camp's confines. James, for example, was planning to attend college just as the war broke out in his native Liberia. His higher education plans were thwarted and he could not afford to pay for college in his host country, Sierra Leone. Solomon and Tesfai also felt that access to higher education was an unfulfilled longing for many refugees. Solomon explained that, "most of the people, they have a university background...and most of them, they didn't finish the university stuff, and...they just interrupted classes." The talents and training of these former students languished in the refugee camps where they "don't go to school. You don't have access to computers. You don't have a library...they just stay at home and sleep."

James noted that for some education was not an option because of having to meet their own basic needs. For example, "some young people couldn't go to school. They were just like, go in the bush coming back. Some of the ladies who wanted to go to school, start having children." For these young people, "the whole future was just bleak,

you know?” In the refugee camps in Ethiopia, there was not even a junior high school or high school available in the camps – only primary school.

For the participants who raised children in the camp, Mr. Lewis and Mrs. Williams, the presence of the UN sponsored schools was a great benefit. Their children attended the free schools and were also provided with free school materials. Mr. Lewis commented that his children’s education was of utmost importance. “It was important for me for my children to go to school. For one thing, I went to school, and I didn’t want my children to be [in a] refugee camp and grow up without going to school. So that aspect of it was...taken care of by the United Nations...”

For Hope however, who was a student in the UN sponsored schools, the education provided was sub-standard and wholly inadequate. She found that “Most of the kid on the camp, they don’t even know how to read and write... They have a refugee school on the camp, but how many do the kid learn over there? Tell me? How many?” Hope felt strongly that the problem with the refugee camp schools was that they didn’t have “somebody to check on them.” As a result of the teachers not being monitored or evaluated the children “go to school, but they don’t have good education because the teachers-the teachers, they ain’t care.” According to the consensus of participants, education is of crucial importance for refugees on a practical, psychological, and emotional level.

Cultural Practices Left Behind

Some aspects of refugees’ culture were not able to be continued while they resided in the refugee camps. Sometimes the cessation of important cultural practices was a result of issues of practicality within the camp, in other instances the efforts exerted in seeking basic needs such food, water and shelter made continuing certain cultural

practices unrealistic. Participants' perspectives on the aspects of their culture that were left behind varied. While in some cases, participants were ambivalent toward the cultural practice left behind, and in other cases, some participants expressed a degree of cultural bereavement toward the missing part of their culture.

Community and Family Togetherness. Mr. Lewis described some of the cultural practices enacted by his tribe in Liberia. Communal celebrations were a way for members of the tribe to support each other in both happy and difficult times. “[One] thing that they celebrate together is the death, for example. When somebody dies everybody go and then immediately...you either start drumming, and playing, and singing, and dancing.” This type of celebration had a psychologically therapeutic intention. Mr. Lewis explained that the purpose of this practice was “so that the bereaved will not think too much about...the dead person and...maybe become too sad about...the death of their father, or mother, or baby or so forth. That’s one time they have people rejoice together.” Similarly when a child is born, “you see the people play together, and they rejoice.”

The death of a loved one also presented a unique opportunity for family healing. If there was an ongoing disagreement between members of a family or tribe, after the death of a relative, the disagreeing parties could approach one another to reconcile their differences. Mr. Lewis explains, “for example, you and I have...a long-standing problem...so, when one of my relative die, or when one of your relative die, I will come to you and say well uh, the dead person has carried the problem, so-so now we can speak to each other.” This was also true when a mutual friend passed away. “Because one of our close friend had died, I will come to you and say well, let the problem between us be finished. And you will accept it, as a member of the same tribe.”

It is easy to imagine the possible psychological benefits of such cultural practices. Interacting with one's family and community in this way, however, was not possible in the camps. Mr. Lewis lamented the absence of these traditions. "Those are...some of the things that we really miss. Because when you are living in the refugee camp, sometimes you run away, you leave some of your family behind – you can't practice that again."

Mrs. Williams also mourned the loss of a particular way of life while living in the camp. When asked if there were parts of her culture that Mrs. Williams had to leave behind in Liberia, Mrs. Williams cited the closeness of her family, and the sense of togetherness they shared on a daily basis. Mrs. Williams explained that in Liberia, "we were 15 living in a house." Even though Mrs. Williams was able to go the refugee camp with her nuclear family, she missed her extended family interaction dearly: "One of the most thing I miss is that I don't be with my family like before. I'm here with my children, but like my sisters, my brothers, my aunties, all of them, relatives, I-I, I've not been with them like we used to be, back home. And I've missed them for all these years." Because of the immediate danger posed by the war, close extended families like Mrs. Williams' were separated. "You're fighting to run away, so you can't get killed...everybody run away. Nobody know where your ma gone, your sister gone, your cousin or who-so-ever." As a result the close extended family unit dissipated. "Ya'll were in the house – gone. Your family fall apart."

Traditional Ceremonies and Societies. Mr. Lewis and James from Liberia, and Henry from DRC, each mentioned traditional training societies as a part of their upbringing and respective cultures. These long-standing youth cultural education programs symbolize coming of age and tribal membership.

James and Mr. Lewis explained that these societies were separated by gender and practiced by at least 5 tribes in Liberia. In these societies boys and girls, usually 12 to 14 years of age, were taught the responsibilities of men and women in their tribes. Mr. Lewis explained that in the Poro society, boys would learn from men, “how to be a good father, how to take care of a wife, how to...be part of the society that men belong to.” James noted that in the Sande or Bondo society, girls were trained, “how to take care of your husband, how to be a woman. And they sing, and they dance.”

These periods of youth education usually last for about 3 months and are designed so that the young people participating can focus solely on that experience. James emphasized that the children are doted on during the training: “Just like – you have a queen sitting somewhere. You really want to treat them. So they are not doing *anything*.” Because of this, the societies require a great deal of resources to support the children, which parents and community members help to provide. James explains, “It was a *big* celebration. It took a lot of money. It took a lot of goods...just imagine...you got hundreds of children there to feed.” As James laughingly describes it, “They just be treated and eat enough, so when they come out really – you know the people go skinny and when they come out they are...completely different.” The entire community celebrated the children’s completion of the training. Mr. Lewis recalled that, “when they are coming out, that is a time of celebration. When the girls are coming out they celebrate them – a-a lot of drumming, a lot of uh, dancing, a lot of uh, merry-making. People drinking, and uh, rejoicing. And it seems it is true also with uh, the boys.”

In some sense these societies have been able to adapt with changing times. To accommodate children’s school vacation schedules the societies were shortened from a year or more in duration to 3 months. Members of the tribe who live in the city, as James

noted, “will send their children right in the village – to go through it and come back. And they come back in time for the next school year.” Nevertheless, in the camp young people’s participation in these societies was no longer feasible. For the participants and fellow refugees in the camp, there were a range of responses to this reality. Older and more traditional refugees mourned the inability of children living in the camp to participate in the societies. Younger and more “modern” refugees were more ambivalent towards the practice.

James noted that for some refugees, not participating in these societies meant that one’s development was incomplete. “Some people felt bad about it...some traditional people, ‘oh my children should have gone in that place...to the societies.’ They feel that if you don’t go there...you are still half, half a human being! So...when you go through that you become a full person and if you don’t go there...you’re missing something.”

Mr. Lewis felt that the value of the societies was that, “it promotes the culture of the people and make the people to continue to live the way how...their ancestors have lived long ago.” But Mr. Lewis felt that this was “both positive and negative, because...we are now in a modern world.” Regarding the societies, James remarked that he “was not a big fan,” and he noted that in the societies “there are some malpractices that are widely condemned. They do female circumcision there. And also, in the Poro the men are circumcised...they do some markings...on the back...like a design...tribal markings.” James noted that even though some Sierra Leonean cultures had similar practices, in the camps, “people...were not tolerating that.”

While some refugees mourned their loss and others had mixed feelings, it was clear that the traditional societies were a practice that refugees living in the camps now had to live without. Even so, Mr. Lewis felt strongly that mourning one’s culture was a

luxury that camp residents could not afford, particularly considering the horrors of war that refugees escaped from. Mr. Lewis explains, “Back home in Liberia...they would line up people and kill them. Right...in your presence. If God helps you and you escape from there, you don’t have any feeling to say ‘oh, I’m not back there...and I’m missing this.’ You can’t miss anything there! Because you know the same thing is still going on.” And with the daily hardships of the camps, Mr. Lewis felt that, “you don’t have time to say, ‘...I’m not practicing my culture...Culture becomes...almost nothing.’”

Echoing Mr. Lewis’ experience, Mrs. Williams noted, “I didn’t see Liberians doing traditional ceremonies in Ghana.” James remembered that in Liberia, “there were some traditional worships that went on. People went to, like, trees to worship. People went to the river to worship. Those stuff were not happening in the camps.” According the Mr. Lewis refugees in the camps “forgot” about culture and concentrated on safety, health issues, and their children’s schooling. Their perspective on their culture was, ““We cannot practice it here. We will...wait until after the war. We’ll go back, then we’ll go back to practicing our traditions.” Clearly, for participants emphasis was placed on survival and adaptation, over continuing certain traditions. As Henry explained it, “When you’re in Roman, you have to act like the Romans. If they’re dancing on one feet than you have also to dance, they go one way you have to go one way. That’s how I used to do it in Zimbabwe.”

Politically Sensitive Celebrations. Ephraim, Solomon and Tesfai recalled that there was one particular celebration that was not practiced in the refugee camps in Ethiopia. That celebration was for Eritrean Independence Day. The participants explained that because the holiday celebrated Eritrea’s independence from their host country, it would not be wise to attempt to continue celebrating it as refugees in Ethiopia. Also, because the two

countries had been at war with each other very recently the political environment was prohibitive for Eritreans to celebrate their nationhood. In Eritrea, Independence Day was a grand event as Ephraim reminisced: “I remember that one because of in the city, downtown almost 20,000....They singing on Liberation Day.”

Tesfai recalled, “once we join that camp, we don’t celebrate that day.” This was a celebration whose absence was noticed by the participants. In Tesfai’s experience, “you miss that thing once you join a refugee camp.” Solomon recognized that, “nobody forbided us,” from celebrating Independence Day, yet the fear associated with the consequences of such a celebration was palpable. Tesfai explained that refugees had to put aside their warm feelings towards their country. “Even if you want to celebrate [Independence Day], that would be no good for you. You know the [administration] people will catch you and take you somewhere, you know?... We have feelings for Eritrea, right?...But we don’t do that in the camp.” Tesfai noted that non-political holiday celebrations did not arouse an animosity, such as, “any religious day. That would be okay.”

Family Structure. According to several participants, traditional family structures were up-ended in the refugee camps. James and Hope both pointed out that in Liberia men were expected to work hard, and to take care of their wives and children, and women often worked at home. As Hope explained, “In Liberia, they don’t let their wife to work! The men do the job, and the ladies stay home to take care of...the kids, and to take care of the home and all these things. And they work and they have money to sustain the family.” Back then, “everything was normal...but the war spoiled everything.” James and Hope felt that as a result of parents’ inability to provide for and shelter their children, the immense parental respect practiced in Liberia began to disintegrate in the camps.

James felt the status changes families went through in the camps were difficult for parents because they were no longer able to raise and discipline their children as they would have at home. Hope explained the family dynamics in Liberia before the war: “Back home when your parents are working they do everything for you... You don’t even have to ask them.” While parents gave a lot to their children, the children were expected to respect and listen to their parents in return. In Liberia, “you got to respect your parents. You got to serve them until you leave their house. So as long as you still live under your parent roof, no boyfriend, no girlfriend.” Hope continued, “And no talking back to your parents...our grandparents do the same thing to them so they train you like that... When your mom is cooking, you’re right in the kitchen with her learning how to cook.”

In the camps this respect and reverence for one’s parents was no longer ubiquitous. Hope noted, “Because of the war...their parents don’t have the money to take care of them. Now most of the kids want to be grown. Doing their own thing. And now their parents can not control them anymore.” It is striking how quickly such a deeply-rooted cultural practice as parental respect began to change in the camp, and this highlights the effect that loss of livelihood had on culture and many other aspects of refugee life.

Cultural Practices Maintained in the Refugee Camps

Many cultural practices, characteristics and traditions were indeed continued in the camps. For many participants, the majority of these cultural elements proved helpful in the camp environment. Some cultural practices contributed to participants’ survival, while other practices helped raise participants’ spirits and fostered a sense of togetherness among members of the same culture in the camps. In most cases being able to continue

valuable cultural practices was of great benefit. For the purposes of this study, the term culture is used to refer to characteristics such as types of social interaction and behavior, as well as specific practices such as traditional religious ceremonies, consultation with elders, and community celebrations amongst others.

Helping One Another. Most of this study's participants belong to cultures in which mutual help and support are key cultural elements. In many African cultures interdependence and reliance on extended social networks is normative. Whereas in the West emphasis is often placed on interaction within the nuclear family, amongst most ethnic groups in Africa, one's sphere of social inclusion is extensive. Mr. Lewis explains with conviction that unlike in the United States, "in Africa we don't ask people to give us permission to go visit them. Like for example, if I want to come to your house, I'll just get up and put on my clothes, get in my car, and come knock on your door – I have come to visit you. If I come, and your family is sitting down around the table eating, you will draw the chair and you will give me...a plate and I join the family." Based on participants' reports, it seems that to the extent possible, this spirit of sharing and closeness that Mr. Lewis described was continued in the refugee camps in which the participants lived.

When I asked if the common cultural characteristic of helping one another in the Tigrinya ethnic group diminished at all in the camp, Solomon informed me that, in actuality, "Even, we were...helping each other better than where we were in Eritrea. Yeah, because life there? That makes us to help each other more." It seems that in the refugee camp setting mutual assistance is a cultural practice that becomes increasingly valuable.

Amongst the Eritrean refugees interviewed, a practice of sharing financial resources was a common experience in the camp. Friends who lived together shared not

only household responsibilities, but also precious remittances from relatives living abroad. The following dialogue between Solomon and Tesfai illustrates how this system of interdependence functioned in the camps:

Solomon: Most of the people, they live together uh, because you have to...contribute to what you have – the money. If you don't have money, one of your friends might have it so, if you need something, that guy he can buy to you and we can live in one room, like 10, 9, 8 people...

Tesfai: And one of them get stuff from one of his brother refugees, he get some from here, then he can share his money with his friends... Then we get that money from my friend so he shares all the money with us, yeah. That's good thing. That's family, yeah. We become closer.

Solomon: Yeah, that's how we survived.

Clearly, social support plays a quintessential role in survival and well-being in the refugee camp setting. Similar to this system of financial interdependence established by Eritrean refugees, Liberian refugees continued tribe-based assistance organizations in the camps. Hope explains this important cultural phenomenon, beginning with the example of the Bassh ethnic group. "Like the Bassh people...they have meeting. How to visit their friend when, if the other person is sick, they go there and console them, pray with them, encourage the family." Hope goes on to explain that these organizations operate within a system of member dues payments. "That is their culture, they pay due so that when the other family don't have it they get a save – soon as the family say okay, we're going to give assistance to the man so that your wife will make business to take care of your family."

These organizations were continued amongst many ethnic groups in the camps, as Hope explains: "See so, every tribe, every tribe on the camp have their own culture, have their own way to...pull their friends together so that...that tribe will...still be

together that they can help one another, visit one another.” This assistance was of particular importance in times of great need. “When somebody dies they can put like hand together and bury you... They put [the money] together, they have meeting, and then like they decide how to bury the person, or if the person is sick, how to take the person to the hospital.” Hope explained that the system of dues-paying and tribe-based support was continued in the camp because people felt that, “what happened to Paul today going to happen to you tomorrow. So you don’t know... that’s why they do that so that they be able to help one another.”

Hope, Solomon and Tesfai also noted that elders continued to play an important role in the camp through mediating conflicts and family problems. According to Hope, elders and community leaders help to de-escalate problems using wisdom and reason as their most important tools. She explained that when “we have a problem in the home and you go to the organization and they call you both instead of you going to the police station. You settle it in a family way.” In the case of marital conflict the elders would,

“...talk you both because even if you are married and they see that there’s confusion in the home and everything is falling apart... they call the elder... and go home and talk to you people, say ‘we’re in next man land. This is not our home. We here for a reason. We-we don’t know what we came from. We-we came here for a reason so we got to focus and be able to pray so that the war will be over and we go back to our home. So they try to talk to you... both parents so that you will release tension. Because when you start fighting, the kid too start fighting, everything fall apart.”

Hope reiterated that this practice was carried over from a strong tradition from home: “Liberia [they] used to be very serious on that.” Tesfai and Solomon recognized the important role that community leaders played in the Ethiopian camps as well. As Tesfai explains, “There are couples in the refugee camp... If they get divorced, they must

go the...leaders and...they decide, you know? They decide through meeting and they decide to divorce, to separate. So we have leaders. We have community leaders.”

Social interaction continued to be an important part of life within the camps. According to Ephraim, the common social practice of drinking coffee together (either through formal coffee ceremonies, or in a more casual setting) was a part of camp life. “Always we do in camp also...to drink coffee with my friends...when we conversation on topics, we make coffee in my home, in our home, in refugee camp...Just to drink coffee to chatting, together.” James noted that attending church in the Sierra Leonean camps also served an important social function. “That’s the only social, little social activities that you have, you know, meet other people and you know, sing a little bit and...[laughs].”

It was clear from the responses of the majority of participants, that the cultural elements of how people interact in a mutually supportive way, was one of the most important aspects of culture that was brought with refugees to the camps. For many refugees the strong cultural characteristic of helping one another and contributing to a collective well-being, was a practice that was invaluable in helping refugees to survive. As Haile astutely describes the social conditions, “Every peoples in that camp, they are loved closely, you know?...they didn’t get any dangerous time...Every people...they lives close...sharing. Yeah, sharing.”

Celebrations and Other Cultural Traditions. Various other traditions and cultural practices were sustained amongst refugees in the camps. Participants who lived in camps in both Ethiopia and Sierra Leone noted that there were cultural similarities between their own and local cultures. This contributed to the ease of maintenance of some cultural practices. Explains Solomon, “The neighborhood...the place that we were living is

Tigrinya [ethnic group]. Which is Ethiopian people. We have also the same culture. So we kept the culture, we kept the culture... We didn't lose the culture because you know, sometimes your culture depend on your neighborhood. So the neighborhood in themselves, they are our culture followed." James asserted that, "People in Sierra Leone, they are just almost the same people," and that "just boundaries" separated them from Liberians.

Even some of the other Eritrean ethnic groups present in the Ethiopian refugee camps such as, the Kunama, were able to maintain important traditions in spite of their residence in the camps. According to Solomon, the presence of a large number of Kunama people helped them to sustain aspects of their culture. "Even the other ethnic groups, the Kunama, they are too much people though, so they are keeping their culture... We have seen that they have... wedding... you know like, the traditional stuff... You can see it from what they are doing. They kept that as it is."

Many participants felt that in general, refugees were free to continue various cultural practices in the camps. Ephraim noted that, "everybody they bring their cultures and they live according their culture in the refugee camp. All kinds of ethnic group Eritreans there was... All culture we bring it." Haile asserted that, "I want to [practice] my tradition. I make in my home. I can do that uh, tradition in the camp. They have ceremony... the person [who] want[s] to make a tradition." Henry felt that while practicing one's culture was possible in his Zimbabwe refugee camp, some other forms of expression were prohibited. "In the camp... you know, it's a free world. You free to do whatever you think you can do with your culture. That you're not free to do – politics."

One aspect of James culture that was maintained proved particularly important in the camp. He explained that, " back home, our culture is like, men you got to work and

take care of the home. You know, that is part of our culture. So most of the time we're not complacent in waiting for people to do stuff for us. So that is what helped us, that part of our culture is what helped us to really strike hard...not just depend on people doing stuff for you." Since assistance for refugees was minimal, this spirit of self-determination was surely invaluable.

Many aspects of religious culture were also maintained in the camps. For example, Hope learned from her father that in their home community in Liberia, "Christianity was real strong...Every morning, every kid got up and go to church. Every morning...our parents put on our clothes, because we believe in that. They take us to church...My daddy, my mom, everybody would go to church together." Hope found that this practice continued: "It's the same thing they do in the camp." Mrs. Williams also found that she was able to continue practicing her religion in the camp because of the similarities with her host community. "I'm a Catholic," she explained, "and the Catholics in Ghana worship the same way – like in Liberia...Because the Catholics got one way of worshipping...There's no different thing I saw there."

Haile also felt connected to the culture of his hosts, because he grew up in Ethiopia and was most familiar with Ethiopian culture in general. Unfortunately though, when he came back to Ethiopia as a refugee after the border war, he was no longer accepted within that familiar culture. "I need to live in Ethiopia, because...our...tradition, or our, my culture, for everything the same to that side...Everything! I look like the same to that...culture. But uh, I come back to Ethiopia, everything's changed."

Solomon and Tesfai felt that there was one particular cultural characteristic that proved somewhat of a liability in the camps. Perhaps the stress of every day life in the

camps, and the treatment received by their hosts compounded this particular characteristic. As the two explain:

Solomon: What does not helpful, in the camp is...we are – I don't know what the word exactly... You know we Eritreans – we are very emotional. Very emotional, from our culture. I don't know – the blood. Very emotional, so that emotional thing. Sometimes...you know some of them, they just drink and uh, you know say, "this Ethiopian people!" You know uh, which is unnecessary and very bad thing...It's the culture. Emotional culture – culture of Eritrea.

Tesfai: But you don't have to be emotional once you join the refugee camp [firmly]. You have to be neutral, you know. Even though you are from Eritrea.

Given the conditions and limitations of the camp, however, it may be understandable to many that refugees would become frustrated with and emotional about the lack of opportunity. Especially considering the ambitious and hardworking nature that was characteristic of this study's participants and their peers. Solomon explained that the refugees in his camps exuded these cultural traits. "People are very eager to know what's going on in the world, and people are very eager to work, to prove himself."

Other participants also felt that an appreciation of the value of hard work was a cultural characteristic that made refugee camp life somewhat easier to manage, especially when combined with farming skills. Hope explained that, "Liberian, they are strong people so, they got to make farm...for they will plant some food [in the camp], so that they and the kid to be able to eat." Earlier training in farming work was helpful to James in the camp: "Where I came from...our people were farmers, so um, I went on the farm, worked on the farm. So I was not very strange to do in the bush, getting stuff done."

Similarly, when asked if there were any aspects of his culture that helped him in the camp, Mr. Lewis paused briefly and responded. "Yes. That was hard work. Work, learning to work with your hands. That really helped me and-and God used it to bless me."

Because I was able to uh, make my own garden. Things that I am not able to, that I don't have enough money to buy from the market, I get it out of my garden... Um hmm, I grow it myself. Eh, that was...good for me."

Along with food preparation, many important cultural and national celebrations were continued in the refugee camps. These ceremonies served many purposes. First, they allowed continuity with one's past and one's home. Second, they provided an opportunity for community members to socialize, spend time together, and brought relief from some of the camps' daily stressors. A common theme discussed by participants was the continued celebration of holidays, albeit with fewer resources. While it was not possible for celebrations in the camp to be as elaborate as they were at home, they held no less importance.

Ephraim remembered that in the camps there were some "parties and religious cultural celebrations." He also explained how these celebrations were sustained despite the impoverishment of camp life. "Maybe to produce material, maybe it is very hard, but we celebrate without material. Maybe [with] few things. Maybe for example in my country – where everyone...celebrate with food, special food, something else. But in the refugee camp it is very hard to make different food so only with coffee only." In this way refugees allowed some important traditions to continue in spite of the camp's hardships.

Haile noted that in the camp, "sometimes they celebrate. Every holiday." Solomon recalled that continuing celebrations was emphasized in the camps, even as traditional elements of the holidays were not accessible or affordable. He explained, "we do that [celebrate holidays] as much as possible. Even though the things are not available there. And uh, even though our capacity is not allowed...Let's say Easter. When I was [in] Ethiopia or Eritrea...we had sheep or goats, something. But we were trying to do in

the camp, as much as we can. We just buy 5 dollars meat, or something. Somebody have...meat for sale – we just buy from there...We are trying to celebrate it as much as possible.”

For Solomon and Tesfai, there was a clear benefit to continuing to celebrate as a community. For Tesfai the holidays allowed him to interact with his friends, to talk and to reminisce. For Solomon, another positive effect of the celebrations was that they broke the monotony of everyday camp life. The following dialogue illustrates both of their perspectives on celebrating holidays in the camp:

Tesfai: You gather with friends, yeah. And you feel more happy. You go to your friends house, but if today is Easter or Good Friday, then you go to my friend's house and then, you know. So you feel more happy. You laugh and yeah, you talk about the life in the past and the future. And to what's going on, yeah.

Solomon: Yeah, and uh. As we told you...we have no weekend. You know like most people, they work weekdays and they enjoy the weekend, yeah? We have no weekend at the camp, because every day is, you know, black days for us. So, we just celebrate...like holidays as, as weekends off, you know what I mean? We just need a reason to celebrate because we have no works, we have no weekends, we have no anything. All the days are the same for us. We don't have special day for us. As long as we are like in...you can call it jail or prison. Yeah. So, the holiday, it helps us to get each other.

Similarly, Liberians in refugee camps continued to celebrate important holidays. For example James pointed out that a “special ceremony” after a child's birth was carried out amongst the different tribes living in the camps. The type of birth ceremony, “varies from tribe to tribe...” James explained. “For the Mandingos, they dance, they cook big food. You know they have feast.” He added that, in the camps refugees also “didn't forget about their special holiday celebrations.” According to James and Mrs. Williams, at home in Liberia school children celebrate Flag Day by parading with a band of musicians and wearing special ceremonial clothes. This tradition continued in the camp, although

without some of its usually elements. James explained, "Since they couldn't wear, you know, ceremonial, special clothes. They just uh, march. You know they don't even have bands there to play." James laughingly continued, "But you know, they just bring the memory of those days. They just march, you know... around the camp. And it was a very huge camp really – very huge camp." In this way, cultural heritage and community togetherness continued to be transmitted in the camp, against many odds.

Mr. Lewis recalled that animist African religion also continued to be practiced in the camps. Here Mr. Lewis explains his view of the essence of the indigenous African religion brought to the camps:

They have something called African religion. That one they practice also in the refugee camp because uh, the African man know that...there is a God. Alright, and the big tree... They will go and worship that tree. Say okay, 'I know this tree was put here by somebody very, very powerful so, in order to get to that per-the thing that put it there, I will go through the things that he made. That is the same thing, the bodies of water, uh, rivers, and uh rocks, hills and so – that's the main idea behind African religion.

Mr. Lewis added, "they practice it in the camps. But in secret." When asked why these religions were not practiced openly Mr. Lewis answered, "Because they think that okay, this camp is being uh, supported by foreigners, who are not used to something like this. So if we practice it in the open and they see us, they might not like it." Some cultural practices it seems, apparently disappear in the camp setting, but continue nevertheless, in a less overt fashion.

Upbringing. Another manifestation of one's culture – one's upbringing – continued to be important in the refugee camp setting. Participants noted that many aspects of their culture made an impact on their experience of camp life. Hope credited her strict upbringing with her ability to stay on a healthy path while she was a young person in the

refugee camp. Unlike some other families in the camp, Hope's family were able to continue to discipline her and monitor her actions. For Hope, one important element of her upbringing was her family's commitment to talk often, and reflect on camp life. Hope sees the value in having "strong parents, who go to church, who believe, who put you down and talk to you everyday. Advise you say, 'you see the life we're living, we ain't supposed to be in this life, but because of situations.' " Hope felt that it was also the child's responsibility to listen to the advice one's parents heeded. "That's why," she continued, "the African people have some proverbs. They tell you, 'the child who don't listen, the child always feel [pain].' "

In this vain, Hope's family kept a watchful eye on her in the camp. She remembered, "My dad talked to me. My uncle do. So now like, you want to leave the house and go somewhere, they want to make sure where you are going. They want to know-make sure what time you coming back." Hope also acknowledged that fear of repercussions of disobedience kept her from rebelling. "Sometimes if you do something and your dad is not satisfied, he gonna put you in the room and lock the door, and you stay there for the whole day. They punish you... That helped, because you don't want to be locked up in the room for the whole day – you don't even see daylight. You see, you want to listen to your parents because you're scared." In the refugee camp, strict parenting and transmission of important cultural values, may have been especially important in lieu of the challenges children and their families faced in the camps.

For Solomon and Tesfai, there were also lessons learned from their parents that remained with them in the camps. In an irony of history, the two young men found themselves reliving some of the same challenges that their parents experienced some 40 years earlier. Both generations were forced to migrate because of the political turmoil of

the day. Tesfai explained, “Our parents emigrated from Eritrea to Ethiopia, you know? Forty years back, you know? Same thing happened to us now. So they left Eritrea due to political situation that happened to the – during the Dergue regime [military dictatorship] on Ethiopia, you know? Before independence [Eritrean independence in 1991]. And now we left back home due to political situation, so same thing happened.” Tesfai added astutely, “History repeated now.” According to Solomon and Tesfai, there were two important lessons that they learned from their parents’ immigration experience. The first, according to Solomon, was that, “leaving the country is the only solution,” to escape hardship and oppression, and to create a “better future.” The second lesson, as Tesfai explains it, was that once leaving the country, Eritreans can then find success. They knew this, “because our parents are successful, you know? So you know, they built homes while working in Addis Ababa [Ethiopian capital], so they built homes in Asmara [Eritrean capital].” Because of their parents’ experience, Solomon and Tesfai believed that given the chance to relocate, with hard work and determination, they too could become successful.

As a father himself, who was raising three children in foreign lands, Mr. Lewis felt it was all the more important to impart certain cultural values to his children. Mr. Lewis viewed his style of childrearing as one cultural practice that he was able to continue in the camp. Several childrearing factors were paramount for Mr. Lewis. He felt strongly that he, “had to continue to teach my children how to respect elderly people... So that they would be able to-to have that value in them, so that uh, they will not, you know, forget about it.” Another aspect of his children’s upbringing that reflected their home culture was the food that Mr. Lewis prepared for them. He remembered, “Sometimes we eat our – some of our own foods, the kind of food we eat at home, and I-I had to cook it the way I-I

wanted to cook it.” This was in contrast to some of the local ways of preparing food.

“Like for example in Ivory Coast, they eat mostly, you know uh, corn, um hmm. They eat mostly cassava... But we eat rice mostly... So uh, that was one-some of the culture, how to train our children, and the kinds of foods that we brought with us.”

For Mr. Lewis, religion was also an important part of his parenting. As he explains, evenings were mostly reserved for religious education for the children. “In the evening hours we uh, tried to uh, continue to make the children to know that... Jesus, is their lord and savior. So... refugee people, uh grown up people would try to encourage them... to go to church. And then... we teach them some religious songs. We teach them uh, a little bit about-about Jesus.” It seems such dedication to children’s well-being from parents would impact doubly in conditions such as those of the refugee camp, where children were exposed to great suffering too early in life.

New Cultural Developments. The refugee camps were also a birthplace of new cultural elements and experiences. Ephraim made the interesting assertion that in addition to maintaining one’s cultural heritage in the refugee camp, a new culture was also evolving. He explains, “There is a new culture in refugee camp. What is that? New culture, we created new culture. Because of what? Different ethnic group living together.” In the refugee camp, no longer were cultures as separate as they had been at home. “Mostly in back home, I lived with one ethnic group. Maybe we will take Asmara – only Tigrinya. But in refugee camp, different ethnic group and we participate. We sharing cultural... we sharing the cultural.”

Ephraim was not alone in noticing the cultural exposure that life in the refugee camp brought. Hope who lived as a refugee in Ghana, found the dual emphasis on religions such as Christianity and Islam, along with indigenous religion fascinating: “They

do both! The Ghanaians do both. That's why I say, you see, we got it all mixed up, say every African country is different. That's why we travel to learn more thing...I know in Liberia they go to church, and only Muslim um, church [mosque]. That's what my parents told me. But in Ghana, they have their traditional, they have their church, and they have Muslim." And Hope added, "They don't play with that traditional," explaining that traditional religion in Ghana is closely adhered to.

Henry also felt that the opportunity to interact with people from many different cultures was one of the positive aspects of his life in the Zimbabwe camp. There were refugees from six different African nations living together in Henry's camp. Even though Henry felt that it was sometimes difficult to make friends across nationalities, there was also great value in that, "I learned different culture...I learned about Rwandese. I learned about Sudanese, Burundese, Angolans. And I learned things about those people." Fortunately, in spite of the many individual languages spoken, most residents in this multinational refugee camp were able to use Kiswahili as a *lingua franca*. This cultural exposure had a significant impact on Henry and he remarked that, "If I had the talent of...being a writer, I could write something about this."

Interestingly, Mr. Lewis also cited exposure to new cultures as a positive aspect of his refugee experience: "We were getting exposed to-to things foreign. Alright? Exposure to things foreign. Uh, especially the practices in the various countries where we were refugees." Because of their residence in countries outside of their own, Mr. Lewis felt that it was important for his children to be well-trained in respecting other cultures. It was important that know how to "accept other people. Uh huh, because we were not living in our home now and we were in the home of other people." Mr. Lewis was happy and proud that as a result of their time in Ivory Coast, "our children learned the language."

Especially one of his children who “speaks French so fluently.” Whether maintaining one’s cultural traditions, or adapting to and learning about another culture, it is clear that participants and fellow refugees, tried to derive the most meaning possible from their difficult lives in the refugee camps (Frankl, 1984, p. 76)

The Role of Religion in the Refugee Camps

According to the majority of participants, religion played a key role in the daily lives of refugees in the camps. Religion was one aspect of life to which refugees had open access. Participants felt that religious freedom was abundant in the camps and there were many different religions practiced. Interestingly, several refugees felt that their religion was one of the most valuable aspects of their culture that they were able to continue to practice in the camps. As participants explained, religion was a source of strength, stability, and hope during their tenure in refugee camps.

Religious Freedom and Abundance of Religious Forums. It is interesting to note that religion was one area of refugee life where there was no scarcity. Participants were asked about how they practiced religion at home, and whether they were able to continue to practice in this way in the camp. While some participants responded that they were able to practice exactly as they did at home, others explained that their religious involvement in the camp evolved in some way or became more intensive.

Tesfai explained that in the camps, “we have churches and we can go to any religion that we believe.” Regarding religion Henry concurred, “you were able to continue that.” Haile also noted that in the camps, “we have...so many religions,” and he, like other participants, proceeded to name some of the major religions practiced in the camps. Some of the religions and religious denominations found in the camps included the

Orthodox Christian, Catholic, Pentecostal, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Jehovah's Witness, Islam and Baha'i faiths.

For James, religion was one of the most helpful components of culture that he saw expressed in the camp. He asserted that, "I think one of the greatest thing [refugees] took was again, religion. They took their religion with them and there were a lot of mosques and churches....And people went to church on Sundays, and people went to mosques on Friday." He noted that in one of the camps in which he lived, Muslim refugees had an easier time practicing at first, since the surrounding town was predominately Muslim. Soon however, more churches and mosques were built to serve the refugee population. "In the refugee camp...their people built mosques, and people built...churches. You know so, there wasn't any problem. So people practiced their religion in the camps."

Some participants also noted that they experienced more religious freedom in the camps than at home. This was the one joyful liberty afforded these participants in the camps. Ephraim, Solomon and Tesfai felt that this religious freedom was important because as Ephraim articulated, "There is no freedom in back home. Religious freedom, there is no freedom." Solomon and Tesfai explained that the lack of religious freedom in Eritrea was one of the reasons that they felt compelled to leave the country. Solomon recalled examples of restriction on religious freedom in Eritrea, such as one episode when, "the churches were closed." Solomon added that religious practice is also restricted while participating in the national service required of all Eritrean citizens: "In the national service if, if two or three people are get together and read the bible, you, you gonna put in jail." He continued, "so the religion also one of the big issue in the country... To leave the country." Tesfai described the situation of Jehovah's Witness, whose religion is

particularly prohibited in Eritrea. “Even Jehovah people, you know, they are not allowed to go to their assembly, right?...So in [the camp], so they can pray.”

Solomon explained further that, “For me, I am Protestant. But the Protestant, we cannot follow the church in Eritrea. We cannot.” However, in the camp Eritrean refugees were relieved of all religious restrictions. Solomon felt positively about this religious freedom, even as he acknowledged the absence of freedom in other arenas of refugee life. “In the camp, that’s, that’s good. That’s good. Nobody have a bad feeling [about religious practice]...that’s the positive uh, thing of living in the camp.” He added, “We have freedom for religion. Uh, we cannot move from place to place and uh, we cannot, we don’t have right for the things, but...In the refugee camp you can follow whatever [your] religion is.”

Tesfai agreed, and also noted that there was so much freedom of religion that there was even an element of “competition” between the various religions. Even so, there was no backlash from their hosts in the camps. Tesfai explained, “Oh yeah, there is competition between religions, you know?...People go to Pentecostal Church, people go to Catholic church, see which one is the best one, so ‘this is my belief, yeah.’ People do something else...And the government doesn’t do some activities against the religions, you know? So you give us freedom to believe. That was a good stuff from Ethiopian government.” Tesfai also felt there was an important reason why refugees were so active with their religions and even trying new religions in the camps: “So once you’re in the refugee camp, so you rely on religion, you know? In order to have bright future. You go to your church and pray.” And according to the participants all refugees were free to choose where to pray.

Increased Religious Participation. Several participants noted that their personal involvement with religion increased while they were in the camps. According to participants, religion was well integrated into everyday camp life. Henry noted that, “A usual day in the refugee camp starts like at, around 4-5 A.M., in the morning. Most refugees, Muslims they go to mosques, Christians, they go to different churches.” James felt that there were many reasons why people began to participate more in religious life in the camps, including some who were not previously religious. “And in fact,” he explained laughingly, “people who never thought of going to church – ever – found themselves in churches.” In James view, this was “because...there you got hope, there you got courage. When you go...pastors encourage you...that you should not lose hope and uh, trust God, things could change, you know.” And, James added, “at least you got someone to complain to like, you can tell God all your [laughs] – all your complaints. All your troubles.”

In fact, James himself underwent a transformation in his religious practice in the camp. Before the war forced them to flee Liberia, he and his friends were, as he describes, “just kids in the choir [laughs]. And we were just looking at the girls in the choir – we were not serious [laughs].” Even though he and his friends may have been, “just little church boys,” they were also moved and, “inspired by, just seeing how God protected us” during the war. Because of this inspiration, when James and his friends were asked to help form a church service for refugees in the predominately Muslim area, they agreed, because they felt that, “God gave us here to do something.” As James and his former choir member friends organized the Christian service they reminded each other to be thankful for their safety by saying, “remember God brought us in. We were promising God we were going to do something, and now we got to do something.”

Other participants also felt that appreciation for their safety was an important aspect of their practice in the camps. For Mrs. Williams, “the only thing positive was, we were there and we thank God that we were there. We were able to escape for our lives to be safe. That was one of the most thing I saw there.” Mr. Lewis also was thankful for many things, including the fact that neither he nor any of his children became seriously ill in the camps, in spite of the unhygienic conditions. “I was really blessed because my children would have gotten sick from drinking that kind of – myself could have gotten sick from, from drinking eh, from that water hole.” Hope also observed a great deal of religious appreciation in the camps and noted that people continued their religious celebrations, “because they say, ‘God first before anything.’ They say because, ‘By the grace of God, if you able to wake up in the morning and see your kid, and you are healthy, you got to praise God.’ So they believe that especially Liberian.”

Ephraim was a great deal more involved with his Baha’i faith in the camps than at home. He explained that this was in part because he now had more free time, and partly because of the difficult experience he was now living through. “When I was in uh, Asmara, mostly I spent time in working...everybody, not only me. But, this refugee camp, because of frustration and hardship, we involve in the camp, Baha’i activity.” As opposed to having religious meetings once a week at home, in the camp there were meetings, “*everyday*.”

Henry noted that in the camps people found the time to worship in the churches or mosques, at home with friends, or alone: “If you want to...put chairs in your house, so you fellowship with others. If you just by yourself, you can’t fellowship with others...you do it by yourself in your house.” However they practiced, refugees like Hope, Mr. Lewis, Mrs. Williams and James expressed their appreciation for their survival

through their faith. As James, who escaped several dangerous situations during the war, articulates, “Coming to the war, you know, what we saw, what we went through, we just thought, it just had to be God.”

Benefits of Religious Practice. According to the participants, for many refugees religion was a stabilizing force that helped them through a period of great suffering. Participants explained what they experienced as the many benefits of religious practice in the camps, such as hope, inner strength and courage. Ephraim attributed a great deal of meaning to his spiritual journey in the camps, and in some ways recalls this period of spiritual growth with fondness. For Ephraim, religion played an important role in the camps because, “I am so love in religious, spirituality. Mostly I participate on spirituality and religious. Because it helps me morally.” He continued, “It help me to stabilize it. To mind rest.” Because of this Ephraim became heavily involved in religious activity and in-depth study. “When I came to refugee camp...the only one, it gives energy, stabilize it everything is – religious activity. So because of this, we study books, different books, not only Baha’i book. All books. All holy books. All...Koran, uh, the Bible, Torah and Christian books. We study this...This help me – not only me – for many persons, it helps me to stabilize it.”

Religion helped Ephraim and many others to cope with everyday reality in the camps: “So many persons, eh? Would participate to chatting...to chatting, to discuss each, the concept of book.” There was another reason why this religious study was so important to Ephraim and other refugees. Through study, they found that they could identify with and learn from the struggles and suffering that important religious figures, such as Jesus and Mohammed, had endured. Ephraim explained, “All founder of those religions, they pass through suffering. Eh? So we are exist in suffering. So it teaches what?

To give one [hope]...Hope, hope, yes.” In fact, the benefits that Ephraim gained from this period of religious study remain with him today. He shared this about the role that his religious practice in the camp plays in his life: “Actually...in my time, in my history, that gives more hope, more courageous, stabilize it. Stabilize it, it gives, in my history.”

Solomon echoed Ephraim’s sentiments about religious practice in the camp. He felt that, “The good culture that we have, uh, one which helps for the people who live in the camp is religion. Which it gives them rest...With that life, if you think about the religion, you will be – you know, you will live in the hope, because you know about the Bible...so you live hopefully. So the religion that we got from our culture, that’s very helpful from that...in the camp.” In a most challenging time in their lives, participants explained that they were able to cope with their suffering and maintain a sense of hope, in large part, through their religion.

“Commercialization” of Religion. Mr. Lewis also felt that he experienced a great benefit from his religious practice in the camp. There was one aspect of organized religion in the camp, however, that Mr. Lewis did not care for. He felt that in the camps, religious leaders tended to “commercialize” the churches. In his view, some pastors sought to “establish these churches, and then they get the offering...share it among themselves.” Mr. Lewis felt that the churches allowed people a way to “control the money.” This was a difference between religious practice back home and in the camps where according to Mr. Lewis, “they put too much money” in the practice of religion. Because of this Mr. Lewis felt that, “they were not really churches in the refugee camp. They were just doing it in order to-to have money from the people that use it.” He continued, “As a result of that, the multiplicity of churches became so numerous that uh, in-in the camp in Ghana alone, we had 175 churches there.” Mr. Lewis laughingly

remarked, “ ‘Fireside churches.’ I call them ‘fireside churches.’ ” He felt strongly that, “they taking money from people...and use it for their private use.” And he added, “I didn’t approve [of] that.”

In response to what Mr. Lewis felt were unethical practices, he did not become a member of any church in the camp. Instead, Mr. Lewis turned his religiosity inward, and like the other participants, Mr. Lewis also experienced a great benefit from his evolved religious practice in the camp. Mr. Lewis explained how he practiced in lieu of church membership:

“So I decided, I say well, I will pray by myself, and I will not be member of any church. As a result of that, I developed this idea of getting up midnight, when everybody is sleeping – I still do it - when everybody is sleeping, I get up, I take my lantern and I take my Bible, I read, and pray. And that’s how I was, I-I was doing in the camp. And that is what I still do, even though I...am a member of a church here [in the U.S.]...But every night, every night, that became – that is one of the things, yeah, that is one of the things that I got from refugee life. Pray by myself...It helped a whole lot and uh, I-I’m still doing it.”

Mr. Lewis, Ephraim and Solomon’s experiences highlight some of the way in which participants were able to somehow maintain hope and a vestige of optimism during their time in the camps. As we have seen, in light of the camp’s daily hardships, this was no easy feat. For the participants, their religion was a pillar of strength on which they could lean, in this time of great need.

Causes and Experiences of Psychological Distress

Participants cited a number examples of ways in which aspects of daily camp life contribute to psychological distress. According to participants some refugees in the camps experienced depression, stress, anxiety, and in some cases, committed suicide. Life in the camp was not only physically challenging. Psychologically also, refugees had to muster enormous strength, so as to avoid succumbing to the stress of everyday life.

Emotional Impact of Camp Life. Many of the participants shared their own feelings toward refugee camp life. These descriptions provide a window into the emotional impact of the camps. Ephraim describes his camp experience as, “the most hard in the world. The most hard living standard in the world is refugee camp. Especially this camp. This my camp, Shemelba camp.” James described living in the camps as “strange,” while Hope noted simply, “it’s hard to live in a refugee camp because...it’s not your home. It’s another person home.” Commenting on the negative impact of war, she noted, “a lot of changes people go through when you have war in your country...It’s hard.” Mrs. Williams echoed Hope’s comments and felt strongly that, “Life on the refugee camp is not suitable because – for example, to live in the refugee camp, you left your home.” Mrs. Williams continued, “You left your home. The life you used to live in your home, you don’t live in a refugee camp.”

One of the biggest causes of distress for Mrs. Williams was the fact that she was unable to work and to provide for her family in the refugee camp. “You’re doing nothing,” she lamented. Mrs. Williams also raised another issue, which was that in all the five and a half years that she lived in the refugee camp, she never felt comfortable there and was concerned about when she would ever get to return home. Her love for her country is evident in the following statement. “The only thing...we worried about in the camp is that we hoped that Liberia would be safe so we can return home. There is nowhere like home. I must admit the fact, I never liked any other country, let’s say West Africa, or even other African countries more than my home. You understand? Not a day I ever felt good, to live in a refugee camp.”

Henry felt similarly toward refugee camp life: “To live in a refugee camp, it’s not an easy life first of all. It’s very hard, to live in the camp.” In fact, Henry’s feelings about life in the camp are very much a part of his current life in the United States. He remembers what he went through and continues to feel a great deal of concern for those who are still forced to endure the same conditions. Henry explains those feelings here:

“That’s [pause] – that’s like my daily thoughts. [pause] Every time here in the morning [pause], when I wake up, I go in my bathroom, I finish, I sit down, having my breakfast, everyday, I do have tears. I look at the cup of milk in front of me, I will be thinking about others back in different refugee camps around Africa, and I ask myself, ‘at least I’m eating, at least I’m having this. Em, people back home, people back in the refugee camps, are they doing the same as I’m doing?’ So it really touches me every morning. I can go to a store, buy maybe a shirt, I’ll think about people – you know in the camp we are-we’re having people who are almost walking naked – without clothes, without shoes. When it’s cold they don’t have enough.”

From this moving recollection of the hardships of camp life, we can see that the emotional impact can continue once one has been able to leave the physical camp behind. But Henry also maintained another perspective, one that helped him to endure the emotional difficulty. Through his long and challenging ordeal as a refugee, Henry was able to learn a great deal about his own inner strength. He explains, “There’s a saying back home, say that, ‘a man measure his capacity when he’s in front of obstacles.’ Through obstacles I learned a lot. I spent 10 years without my family. I survived. That is the most positive things I learned out of it.” He added, “I at least appreciate – it was a bad experience, but I learned a lot about it.”

Solomon described camp life as “very aggressive.” He stated that in the camp, “everyday is a black day for us. No different.” This problem of the boredom and repetition of everyday life in the camp was a common theme expressed by participants. Tesfai noted that many people in the camp, “just stay at home and they sleep. They just

waiting for – from the UNHCR, that’s it.” James stated that, “really nothing, no activities were going on in the camp. In the morning you just get up [soft laugh] and, you know, sit around and the next thing is you-you try to find something to eat.” Echoing Tesfai’s observation he noted, “people just sleep early.”

When asked what an average day was life in the camp, Hope responded, “The same old thing!” Clearly boredom was one experience that took a toll on refugee well-being. Mrs. Williams, describing camp life recalled, “From morning to the evening we just sit down one place whole day, doing nothing. You try and find something to eat. You eat. In the ev – you take bath. In the evening you find something to eat again. You take bath and just go to bed.” Haile noted that, “some people just stay in their room and doing nothing.” In Solomon’s view, “there is no anything to do...most people they don’t have anything to do.” Haile described a life that revolved only around the bare essentials. “The life is...just to survive only. You have not any doing, any jobs, or anythings. Just to live and to survive only.”

Mr. Lewis was in agreement with the other participants about the camp’s challenges. He noted, “to live in a refugee camp is really very difficult. Especially when food run out, and you have children to feed.” James also recognized the particular stressors for parents and caregivers in the camps. “Some people started getting older than their age. They looked older because you are worried about what you are going to eat. You are the breadwinner, you can’t provide, you know.” Many participants cited anxiety as a problem. Hope remembered, “sometimes our parents worry about us.” James observed that “some people, just worrying killed some of them.”

Three major causes of anxiety, stress and depression, emerged from the interviews with participants – uncertainty about the future, separation from one’s home,

and separation from one's family. James describes the air of uncertainty that pervaded his camp. "People, you know, never knew when things were going to change, you know, they didn't know when they were going to get out of that situation... Like the whole future was just bleak, you know?"

For Mr. Lewis a distressing experience for refugees was the reality of being separated from one's home. "Really... the fact that you are – you are taken away from your home, the place where you are used to as being your home. And you uh, [pause] just forcibly taken away from there. That can have a stressing, a stress on people, or anxiety, or you know, they become depressed. If you are not somebody who got strong resistance to those things, it become problems." Ephraim also noted that life in the camp was "very hard for those who have, uh, homesick, or country sick." And described such an emotional state as very dangerous. Hope, for example, expressed some regret about never having had an opportunity to experience Liberia as older relatives described it: "Your parents, as you grow, they tell you... what happened... those older than you, they tell you, like when my uncle... tell me, 'Liberia was nice, it was sweet and they had a lot of enjoyment.' We didn't enjoy it because we didn't see anything."

When asked about some of the psychologically difficult aspects of camp life, James responded, "number one, people-people were like, missing their relatives. You know, like the being away from their relatives." Tesfai also felt that being without family members in the camp could result in psychological distress. In his view, "if you join the refugee camp with family you feel more comfortable. Because you have your brother, you have sister, you know? But if you come alone... you feel anxiety inside. And you develop disorder... So it's support to live with family." And Tesfai noted that in the camps there

was indeed, “a big level of psychological stress. Especially, you know anxiety.” James also remembered that in the camp, “there are people...with nothing, with nobody.”

According to Solomon, “a lot of people” in the camp were “depressed, stress.” Haile and Alem also noted that there was a great deal of stress in the camp. Solomon and Tesfai witnessed the transformations of some of their friends who seemed to succumb to the stressors of the camp. Solomon explains, “We knew people, they are very good guys, but you know, uh, they are already now abnormal. They are mentally, you know...they gave up on their life. They don’t have any option to do. The life is very aggressive.” Ephraim associated these types of changes with the hard life of the camp: “If there is hardship, it pushes this hardship to make conflict among them. This hardship makes an unstabilized mind.”

For Hope, witnessing the hardships of the came was a fearful experience, but one that also motivated her to strive to improve her life condition. Here she explains, “You see how people live in the camp, you see how people dying on the camp from [curable] diarrhea and all these things. It make you scared. You say, I want to do something for myself tomorrow so that I have a life...I didn’t want it to be, continue to be suffering.” James, who later was able to help other refugees through outreach and workshops, was able to transform his hardship experience into a tool to help others. This made him feel happy and fulfilled as he describes here, “Really it was uh, I felt joy that I could help other people. That I was there...I could share my story. I was right here, and when I went in those camps, I stayed with them, I ate with them.” One would hope that all refugees would have the opportunity to transform their suffering as James and Hope did, but unfortunately for some refugees the hardships felt like too much to bear.

Suicidality in the Camps. Suicide was a tragic response to hardship, which several participants noted was a reality in the camps in which they lived. Participants described suicide as a choice that some refugees made when the stress and anxiety of refugee camp life became too overwhelming. Other precipitating factors were a lack of outside financial help from relatives, a lack of familiarity with the language and culture of their hosts, and a lack of previous exposure to similar hardships before coming to the camp. Together Solomon and Tesfai describe the prevalence of suicide in their camp:

Tesfai: Sometimes, some people, kill themselves, you know?...A lot of people getting hungry, you know, if you don't get money from – if you don't get assistance, and you don't have any bright future, so you decide to kill yourself...

Solomon: Since we been there, I knew that, 5, 6 people suicide themselves... Yes, 6 people suicide themselves, almost every two, three months, one person suicide. Haile and Alem, who also lived in the Ethiopian refugee camps remembered 3 or 4 suicides during the time that they were there.

Solomon explained his perspective on why some refugees chose to commit suicide. He felt that unlike himself, who was born and raised in his host country, other Eritrean refugees who never left Eritrea, and didn't speak the language, had difficulty coping with refugee camp life: "They cannot speak the language. They have a lot frustrated. But we know the people, we know the culture... So they lose hope. That's why they suicide themselves." Tesfai and Solomon also felt that without relatives abroad to send them money and help them to survive, many refugees "just give up on life."

In Haile's view, refugees who had never left the comforts of their own homes before had a more difficult time adjusting to the hardships of the camp. He, on the other hand, had experienced the austere and challenging life of national service camps before coming to the refugee camp. Refugees who had never had an experience such as this to

expose them to such hardship felt a sense of hopelessness. These refugees may feel, “you have not any choice in that time. That your choice is death.”

Solomon felt that if conditions in the camps were to improve so that refugees have enough resources and better opportunities within the camp, that people would not succumb to despair and commit suicide as frequently. “But now,” he explains, “people staying longer and longer, they suicide themselves a lot. A lot of people suicide themselves, because there is no option.” It is not difficult to grasp Solomon’s point that better conditions for refugees would reduce stress and anxiety levels, as well as the prevalence of suicide in the camps.

Traumatic Experiences. Many refugees who fled war and violence, and sought refuge in the camps experienced traumatic events that they were often left to cope with on their own. It is important to recognize the types of trauma that some refugees were exposed to, in order to better meet their psychological needs in the camps. Participants noted that many Liberian refugees witnessed violence, murder and brutality before fleeing, while escaping, and even in the refugee camps. James noted that this was a cause of great psychological distress for residents of the camps: “Some just...thinking about loved ones that were killed, you know, affected them. You know, some people really saw some of their relatives killed right in their presence.”

The sudden separation of family members, due to the danger of war, was also a traumatic experience for many refugees. Mrs. Williams described the fearful experience of being forced to flee during the war, without contact with one’s family: “Everybody get confused, all you fighting for your life to run away. You don’t know where you’re going cause you’re fighting to run away...so you can’t get killed. And, everybody run away. Nobody know where your ma gone, your sister gone, your cousin or who-so-ever. Ya’ll

were in the house – gone. Your family fall apart.” It is difficult for many to imagine living through such a tragic situation, but far too many refugees are survivors of such horrific circumstances.

Many Eritreans were also separated from their families when they were deported from Ethiopia during the border war. With communication and travel blocked between the two nations, many hoped that upon arriving in Ethiopia as refugees, they would soon be able to reunite with those family members who remained in the country. Solomon explains further, “I’m the only one deported from my family. . . They had no good uh, way of doing how-when they deported people. They had no clue. They just pick you and uh drop you wherever you go. So for that reason, when I–when I went back to uh, camp – Ethiopia, I was expecting that I gonna meet my families. . . but I had no any chance to meet them.” Since refugees are not allowed to travel from the camp, and they are also not allowed to receive visitors, it was not possible for them to reunite with the families in their host country that they longed to see. Solomon added that he was one of many Eritrean refugees who were in a similar situation. “There are a lot of people like me. There are people, who, they send their children, and their mothers are back in Ethiopia, but when they came back they couldn’t uh, meet their mother.”

Ephraim had an experience that was similar to Solomon’s. He explained that he couldn’t communicate with his family at all while in the refugee camp, and in fact was not able to talk with them on the telephone until he resettled in the West. “When I was in a refugee camp, I didn’t – I was not meet for my family, my brother for a long time, because there was no communication. There is no allowed to communicate with uh, your family. So when I came here, I met with my family and they enjoying because they think,

he die or something.” Ephraim noted that living without his family was “very hard – challenging.”

Unfortunately, the separation of families is a tragedy that many refugees endure. Mrs. Williams continues to miss the family she was separated from during the war in Liberia. She describes her own difficult experience and that of others.

“As I’m sitting-sitting here I’ve not seen some of my brothers and sisters here. Just imagine, for many years. And up ’til now, since 1991, some mothers have not seen their children. Since I think from 1990 up to this time-time, it’s about 16 years. Can you imagine? Terrible things went on. Since some parents have not seen their children, they’re still looking for them. They don’t know the whereabouts what is children. So we went through all these things. See. These are some of the things that cause us to find ourselves on the refugee camp. Because the only time – the only thing that could save us, was to get out of Liberia completely.”

For Mrs. Williams the separation from her family was particularly painful because they were, “very close. I miss them for too long.”

Some refugees lived through such traumatic events, only to be faced with more war-related violence at a later point. One example of this, according to James, was when the war spread into Sierra Leone, where thousands of Liberian refugees had fled in search of safety. James describes the frantic time that ensued in the refugee camps in Sierra Leone and Guinea: “They have both Sierra Leoneans and Liberians because, the Sierra Leoneans ran into Guinea. And Liberians ran out of Liberia into Guinea. And some Liberians that were in Sierra Leone ran into Guinea, so the camps were a mess.”

One can imagine the level of distress experienced when even a tenuous feeling of security suddenly disappears. James explained that some refugees returned home to Liberia during periods of peace, only to find upon returning home, that the war was to begin again. First though, James provided reasons why some people decided not to try to

return home: "Some of them want to go back home. They don't have place to go back to that they would call home. Some of their people were killed. They were fighting. You know so, people stayed in the camp all along." Even some of those who remained in the Sierra Leonean camps did not escape the war. "When the war came in Sierra Leone, people were killed in the camp. And people stopped there because they don't have nothing to go back to. Where are they going?"

The reality of the Liberian refugees' insecurity is evident in James' descriptions. Those who stayed in the camps were at risk, and those who returned home were also at risk. He explains why: "The Liberian war, was on and off, on and off, on and off. There were reports of people who went back home and got killed, you know, so. So it was just the same thing. And going back home where um, you don't have place to stay, would be like being a refugee in your own country."

Mrs. Williams echoed James' sentiments about the dangers of returning home from the refugee camp. Her description offers a clear picture of the "on and off" nature of the Liberian war and the devastation that this caused:

"Can you imagine? If you went out of your country in 1990 and stay on the refugee camp for...two years, and hoping to return. And when you return in 1992, then another war break out. Put it in your shoes. If you leave 1992, how would you feel – you would want to go back there again? Okay, please. These are some of the things. Okay, then when you go back 1992, and run back out of the country when war is fight, then 1996 another war fought. So which was from '92, '93, '94, '95. After 3 years again another war fought in Liberia. Can you imagine? And people left again. People left again. After '96, '98 again another war fought. So we had a bitter time all these 16 years. All the years... Their fear there. Their fear is still there."

Mr. Lewis infact, was one of the refugees that did make the journey back home to Liberia from the refugee camp. And like in the examples Mrs. Williams and James cited, he too was forced to flee once again, and once again, to become a refugee. He explains,

“As I told you, there was a break in between there. Where, after the election in 1997, I went back to Liberia. Well in fact before that I went back to Liberia and I was there, for something like two years. Then April the 2nd, 1996, I had to run away from there again, because I was attacked in my house, alone with my grandchildren – we had to run. And we walk-we walked to the bushes for one full month before we got to uh, Ghanané in Ivory Coast – again. Uh, there again I became a refugee all over again.”

The trauma that many refugees experienced remained with them in the refugee camps and resulted in additional problems. Sometimes personal tragedy and loss was transformed into a desire for vengeance, inevitably leading to more tragedy. James explains, “People watched their relatives killed. And that [cross] were in their heart. You know, that kept the war going – you killed my father, and when I have the opportunity now, any time you have the opportunity you come and it just – the cycle start going.” Fortunately some people, like James, became involved in working towards peace in the camps. “We...wanted to break this cycle of violence. Start going the refugee camp – start talking peace, you know – we are the same people.”

What is important to Mrs. Williams is that the Liberian government, and others in the diplomatic arena, recognize that fear, as a result of the horrors refugees lived through, is still very much a part of their lives. Because of all of the violence that occurred during the war, Mrs. Williams still does not feel it is safe to return to Liberia, in spite of the present peace – especially because she feels that the government cannot possibly protect every individual. She explained with great feeling,

“You feel to stay out of the country so your life can be secure. It’s better you stay out of the country and your life be secure than for you to look at yourself and carry yourself back home to be killed. You see, fear-fear is still there. The government supposed to know that fear is still there. You see. Fear is still there. As for me, I’m afraid. I won’t lie to anybody. I am afraid. For what I saw over the past years in Liberia, I am afraid. And I can never forget it. I’m afraid.”

All participants discussed the psychological distress that many refugees experienced. James suggested one way in which refugees could be helped to overcome the trauma they survived. He asserted, "It would just be good to have some counselors, you know to talk with them, you know, because there are some people who are really, really traumatized. They are really traumatized. Some of them were raped. Some of them, their parents were killed right in their presence. They are just scared to go anywhere. They are scared to do anything. They are scared of everybody, so they need some counseling, you know." No participants mentioned the presence of mental health practitioners in their camps, yet clearly there is a great potential for counselors to make more of a positive impact in helping to reduce psychological distress in refugee camps.

Resilience to Trauma and Distress

This study's participants demonstrated an impressive degree of resilience to the hardships they faced while living in one or several refugee camps in Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia or Zimbabwe. Participants were asked what they felt helped them to cope with life in the camps and whether they felt that their upbringing, or their culture may have played a role. It is clear from the participants' experiences and those of their former peers, that many refugees employed all of their available resources, both physical and mental, to improve their lives as much as possible in the camps. As the participants illustrated, refugees employ a great deal of innovation, ingenuity and hard work to overcome some of the obstacles they face. As we will see, other factors also play an important role in refugees' resilience, such as family support, social interaction, religious practice and hope.

Innovation: Creating Opportunity in the Camps. We learned from the participants that they were no established employment opportunities to be had in the camps in which they

lived. However, this does not mean that refugees did not work to gain an income. On the contrary, refugees created various work opportunities for themselves and worked hard to use their modest monetary gains to improve their lives. In this way refugees were not passive or complacent in the face of their problems.

Much of the work refugees were able to create entailed difficult manual labor. In James' experience, in Sierra Leone some refugees were eventually able to begin selling produce in the local markets. Refugees also helped local residents with manual labor, such as cleaning their farms for them. The locals would pay the refugees for their services, and refugees might use this as seed money to begin trading foodstuff, such as farina – a widely used type of food made from cassava.

James noted that some fortunate refugees did not have to seek out work opportunities because they had relatives abroad who could afford to send them money to help sustain them. Even so, some refugees used these remittances as a way to begin their own small businesses and support themselves. As James noted, these refugees used the money and “just keep turning it around. So it wouldn't finish.” Hope also discussed these strategies. She also noted that some parents would send their kids to the market to sell things there so that the family would be able to buy food and water. Hope remembered that at some point during her stay in the refugee camp, the UNHCR stopped their food distribution. Because of this, more refugees tried to engage in their own small business. Hope explains, “So now they, some people make business and then you got to do it on – get money on your own, buy food. So some people started doing like business. Selling in the market, get some money. Some people have parents over here, send them money and then they try to make business to um, sustain their family, so that they will eat.”

Mrs. Williams also recalled that “some Liberians were selling and...doing business on the camp.” She added that this contributed to “helping them to get out of the hardship.” In Henry’s camp, residents also were “running small businesses, serving groceries.” Many refugees in his camp also employed another creative survival strategy – selling the non-food items provided by refugee aid agencies. He explains, “Then we normally end up selling the same thing that they’re giving us to survive so that at least when you sell like one pot, you remain with one. Or you sell one blanket, you remain with one. The money you have, it will help you so that you can move around, you know.” Selling charcoal and firewood, was a standard practice in both the East African and West African participants’ experiences. Solomon also noted that some refugees set up small shops in the camp selling tea, coffee and “essential things.”

Several refugees described their cultures as full of “hardworking” people. While refugees waited for relief from their plight, they innovated and worked to create a better environment in the camps. Describing his fellow refugees’ innovation, Tesfai recalled with excitement just how impressively creative some refugees were: “Even if you go to now, in the refugee camps. We have cables you know, so we have T.V. shows [smiling] – trust me! So we don’t get that stuffs from the UNHCR. People do by themselves, yeah. So you get generator, so we get T.V...we use some stuffs, yeah! So you-you can see – we can follow Eritrean T.V., what’s going on in Eritrea, what’s going on in Ethiopia, what’s going on in United States, so we, we watch movies, we watch soccer games. Trust me!” Tesfai contrasted this with his current life in the West. “Even now, we are not watching soccer now! We used to watch soccer all day, you know [smiling]?” One imagines that most refugees were only able to improve their lives in much simpler ways, but they did whatever they could, however small to make a difference. For Henry this was to create,

“small gardens of vegetables, sweet potatoes,” to supplement inadequate food distribution.

Activities within the Camp. Participants engaged in different types of activities in the camps that helped them to pass the time, acquire new skills, and share camaraderie with fellow refugees. Several participants reported that participating in certain communal activities helped them to experience a greater sense of well-being in the camps. Tesfai and Haile both remembered participating in soccer games as Tesfai explains, “We have teams, soccer teams, that we play together... That make life easier, you know?” Presumably, playing sports was a rare opportunity for enjoyment, which also allowed refugees to deepen bonds of friendship.

Henry recalled that refugees would share access to news and entertainment sources. They would “try to find out whose got a radio to listen to some news, or whose got a T.V. to watch T.V.” Henry and Mrs. Williams also participated in some trainings sponsored by aid organizations. In Henry’s camp, aid organizations such as Jesuit Refugee Services organized trainings in computers, English, tailoring, soap-making, and baking. Henry participated in the computer training while in the camp, and Mrs. Williams participated in similar classes in her refugee camp in Ghana. The classes for adults in Mrs. Williams’ camp included nursing, construction, sewing, home economics, baking and crocheting. Mrs. Williams participated in several of these courses and felt strongly about their value. Her feeling about this adult education was that she “love it there.”

Ephraim and Tesfai both recalled that getting together and talking was one way in which refugees interacted with each other and shared camaraderie. Especially at mid-day, when the temperature in the camp was at its highest, Ephraim and his friends, “spent

time in home...chatting.” Tesfai recalled that he and his fellow camp residents would, “spend the whole day talking.”

Religious activities were also very important to Ephraim. These activities were not organized by the camp administration, but rather as Ephraim explained, “created by ourselves.” Refugees like Ephraim facilitated these classes on a daily basis in their homes. Solomon recalled that in addition to church every Sunday in the camp, there were also Bible study classes organized by refugees of Catholic, Orthodox and other denominations. Hope remembered that some refugees also spent much of their time in church. She noted that, “People still go to church. People sleep in the church. People have revival every night, at the camp.”

According to Haile, refugees also shared knowledge and taught each other skills. He remembered that if, “they have the knowledge, or...they have some uh, technical school, they have a great grade...they teach...each other.” From the participants’ experiences it seems that in many ways refugees tried to use their time in the camp as productively as possible, whether that meant acquiring new skills, deepening their religious practices, or building close friendships.

A Network of Helpers Inside and Outside of the Camp. One of the factors that played a quintessential role in increasing resiliency was help from friends and family. Survival in the camp was often a collective effort, either through friends coming together to support each other, or financial support from relatives living abroad. Refugees often pooled precious resources, helped each other with chores and offered each other valuable moral support.

Ephraim explained the group dynamics amongst friends who shared a home together in the camp. “We helped each other. We bring wood for food. Just to walk one

hour, or two hours to bring wood for baking food, something. We each helped like this each other.” Ephraim went on to describe how single refugees shared both a home and household chores: “When person to come alone, one person, to share with like you people and in one home six person live together in one home – which means 4 by 4 [4 meters by 4 meters]. And they help each other to bring water, maybe tomorrow to make a food one person, the other day to make food another person. To help each other.”

Hope remembered that sometimes when families did not have enough to feed their families, other residents would step in to help the family through a challenging period: “Sometimes if...you don’t have any family back here to send you something, and you don’t have anything over there...they have people on the camp who help. Can maybe your neighbor can give you something, give you some food, to help you for you and your family for the next day.”

Along with sharing many other things, Haile remembered that refugees shared emotional support. “Every people, they share advice, or some things like that...They share, they share.” When more refugees arrived from his country, fleeing the war, Henry tried to help them adjust to camp life based on what he had learned. He explains, “When people came from the Congo, you’ve been there before them, you know, you try to help them with what you can, to advise them, to tell them, ‘Look guys, this is a camp. This is what happens in the camp. Life is like this.’ At least try to give them a certain life orientation in the camp.”

Truly fortunate indeed, were those refugees who had relatives abroad who sent them money in the camp. Many of the participants cited this assistance as a literal lifeline for some refugees. For many of the Eritrean refugees, this outside help benefited not only those individuals with relatives in wealthier countries, but also all of the members of that

individual's household. Refugees who were friends and lived together supported each other with any money received and stretched the financial benefit amongst themselves as widely as possible. Haile explained, "If you share a room with several people, and if you're lucky that one of the people in the room have a relative outside of the country...he or she may be able to sustain you from the money they get from outside." For Tesfai the benefit of this money-sharing extended beyond basic survival. As a result of this spirit of sharing, a group of friends would transform into a family. "We become closer," he explained.

For many refugees this spirit of caring about the well-being of their fellow refugees did not get left behind when they came to the West. Several refugees expressed a desire to continue to help others. For these participants the connection with those they left behind in the camps remains strong. Henry shared his future ambitions: "I'm looking forward to help people in the camp...if it's like – it was an organizations which-which is fighting about life – refugee's life in the camp, I'm ready to join it because, I'm first a refugee." He also expressed a desire to talk to government officials and the UNHCR about conditions in refugee camps. Solomon now works hard to financially support his family back in East Africa. And now that Ephraim is living in the West, he is able to "give a support for so many friends that was in refugee camp."

Clearly the bonds that grow out of the helping and sharing amidst such adversity, leave a lasting impact. For Solomon, the feeling produced is one of a profound love for his fellow refugees. He explains,

"We love-we love all the people who live there. Special when we think that what-what we pass through. The life there, how it's aggressive. When you think there, oh you very miss the-the friends. Once you are living in one home, in one room, they are not friends, they are brother/sister. So we are missing all the people, we are missing all the people. Especially for those who

have no...who have no income from out. And we know that, how they are living. So we are missing everyday, all the people. The life, aggressive life – we miss them.”

These moving sentiments illustrate that even in the times of greatest need, many refugees contribute to resiliency by giving more, and caring for each other more than ever.

Upbringing & Socioeconomic Background. Several participants felt that their cultural background and upbringing played a role in allowing them to remain resilient in the refugee camps. Some participants had previously experienced great challenges and hardships, and they attributed their resilience in the camp’s austere environment to having survived those earlier struggles. James, for example, cited his early training as an 8 year-old leaving his parents to further his education in the city, as contributing to his ability to deal with the challenging circumstances in the refugee camp. Because his village school concluded with Class 4 and there was just one adult teacher in his district, some students of just 8 or 9 years of age, upon completion of Class 4, were sent to teach kindergarten and Class 1. In James’ case, he was fortunate to be able to continue his studies with class 5; however, this was a challenging endeavor, as James describes here: “After you finish Class 4, then you have to travel...it’s a whole day journey to the next town. So you have to go and live in the next town, where your parents are not...it was a hardship so, I went through some of that, so it all helped to prepare me.”

James continued to describe his life as a young boy living in the big city in order to continue his education:

“I had to leave my parents and go there, and be with my elder brothers, and when we were going we had to carry rice and oil, that’s all we could take...we would go in the market places, to help people. You know, when they park their market, and to take it to their home, we helped them, you know, after school. Like around 3, 4, 5 [o’clock] they are packing up to go home. We go and help them carry their loads to their different places and give us small money – you know, buy fish, buy little thing. Then

go and cook, you know...I grew up, but the training I got, you know around 8, 9, 10 [years old], I didn't forget about it..."

James also cited periods of time growing up, when his parents had a hard time making ends meet. Through this experience James had an early exposure to the lack of food and diminished quality of food that so many experienced in the camps. He refers to this early experience here: "We too, when we were coming up, we had some tough times. We ate some funny stuff. You know, so...when I had to eat some funny stuff in the camp...I could easily adjust than my friends...because of my background."

As a sharp contrast to this unintended preparation for the harsh life of the camp, James discussed some of the challenges faced by refugee camp residents who fled to the camp directly from a comfortable life in the city,

Those who came out of the city, it was very hard for them...some of them had never held a cutlass, to go hunting from the farm [laughing]. They had to do it. And they had not walked in the bush. They had to do it. It was just hard...it had so much psychological effect on them because they didn't know where to begin from...some of them were not doing business before. How am I going to...? Some of them never carried things on their head! I don't understand...It was just too much.

Haile and Alem also referenced a previous hardship which made their transition to refugee camp life more bearable than for those who come to the refugee camp directly from "[their] house." Explains Haile, "Most...peoples, they come out from...her...house. It's difficult to manage yourself...they didn't know everything. They come out from them house...That's why so many peoples, they get stress. Some things hanging [suicide]...they can't survive...that means that...things happen."

Haile explains that he and Alem had previous exposure to a very challenging life during their military service in Eritrea. "For us," he says, "...the life the [background] to help for us, because we passed a very hard time to live...That's why [it] teach for us

that...experience. That's the past from our country...that's why to survive, or to strong yourself." Haile continues, "...for me, or for Alem, or for some peoples, mostly they comes from...the military...Most of the peoples comes out from soldier and the soldier they get so many hard things...that's why they get strong."

Solomon and Tesfai offered their assessment of how their earlier exposure to the culture of their host country helped them to endure the difficult life of the camp. Since they were both born and raised in their host country, they spoke one of the major Ethiopian languages, Amharic, fluently. They were also well acquainted with local culture and geography. This dialogue illustrates their perspective on the struggles and fear of some of their fellow refugees:

Solomon: Most of them...they are coming from...the villages of Eritrea. So they don't know nothing. So things become...dark for them, because they don't know anything...Like for us, especially is you come for us, we know Ethiopia.

Tesfai: We can speak Amharic.

Solomon: ...if something happens, like if the war created there, we can escape to Ethiopia, because we know Ethiopia. But those people, they don't know Ethiopia. So, they don't know anywhere else...Those people, they thought that if they go to Ethiopia, somebody kill them. They thought that somebody kill them....So they don't have...any clue about the country.

James felt that his experiences working on his uncle's farm at a young age taught him important lessons about the value of hard work. He remembered that during his school vacations, he would go to his uncle's farm to work. There James would "cut sugar cane, grind it, produce wine, sell it." In this way James was able to earn his own pocket money. Even so, sometimes James didn't understand why his uncle insisted that he work. His uncle would respond to James' query by pointing out some elderly workers on his farm and say, "Look at those guys...some these guys, when they were young like you,

they didn't work. They were running around. And now they are forced to work because they need to eat. If they don't work, they don't have food to eat! So, you need to work now, so that you will rest later on." James added that his uncle's advice, "used to challenge us a lot." But in the camps, where one was forced to be proactive and work hard, James' uncle's advice went a long way.

Among the lessons James learned growing up, respecting one's elders was one that he found useful in the camp. In fact, this aspect of James' upbringing was also useful to others. Although James was raised to believe that "elders are always right," some of his friends who grew up in the city did not, and as a result James,

"...became like a liaison person...between the young refugees and the town people." This gave James an important role in the community. He explains, "I knew how to relate, you know, I knew what [the elders] wanted to hear... They wanted to talk to me. So I was in-between. When they want to talk with other people they would let me know. 'This guy is behaving like this. Why don't you talk to this person.' And I was like, 'eh, these people, this is how you should behave when you in the interior [countryside], because I was born in interior, I spent so-a little time in interior. So I know how these people are expecting you to treat them, to behave, talk to them.'"

As a result of James' bridge-building efforts, he developed a good relationship with the elders in the community. He recounted laughingly, "They would come to me and say, 'You are different from all these refugees.' So that's because of the way I was brought up."

There was also an important piece of advice that Mrs. Williams received from her family as a young person. The advice was that she should avoid problems or trouble with others. Mrs. Williams found this to be especially important in the refugee camp. She explains, "being in a strange land like that, people will have their policy. They have their rules and regulations that you have to abide by. And you don't abide by that – not

because you're a refugees – you'll be penalized for it. So I tried to a-avoid it. Because when I were coming up, my parents taught me how to avoid trouble...because you don't know where trouble will lead you." According to Mrs. Williams, it lead some refugees to the police station, and then to jail. She was grateful to have avoided any such plight.

Henry also learned helpful lessons from his parents, lessons that he carried with him into the camp. He explains, "Back home I used to have a talk with my parents almost each evening...they used to tell us about life...they used to give us some home-based education." One of the lessons his parents taught was, " 'Never show people that you are hungry. Never show people your weakness. You can be weak, it just has to be in you.' " This advice helped Henry to stay strong in the camp, and to make the most out of whatever scarce resources he had. Henry explained how he implemented this advice in the camp. "Sometimes it can be hard...I might not have meat in my house, I might just have eggs... You know I go outside and buy some tomatoes, onion. I spice up. I cook. The smell which will be coming out of my house...people used to think that I used to eat meat every day. But when it's like in my house, it's eggs. So that was the, one of the secrets that I got from my mom." Through sharing their wisdom and advice, Henry felt that his parents were, "trying to prepare me to be a man enough before the age."

One of Mr. Lewis' early influences on his ability to cope with camp life was his training at a missionary school. In order for Mr. Lewis to continue his education, he needed to work to cover his tuition. He remembered that if you were not able to keep up with the hard work then, "you will not be able to stay in school." He continued working his way through school and learned the value of hard work in the process. His education, many years later, was beneficial as a refugee because he was eventually able to find work and to support his children.

As a result of Mr. Lewis' ability to find work, he was able to help other refugees in the camp. One lesson he learned from his father was to always be generous and to open his home to others in need. In Mr. Lewis' village, his parents hosted many travelers who needed a place to sleep. Mr. Lewis carried his father's hospitable nature with him to the camp and as a result, "a lot of people came to be a part of my family, even though they were not part of it." Haile and Alem also felt well supported by their families and felt that this helped them to persevere in the camps. Haile remembered that his father, "gave us moral advice...to live, to learn."

In addition to the lessons he learned from his parents, Henry was exposed to a particular type of education as a child. Even though he lived in the city, his parents brought him back to the village to receive cultural training. He explains, "I was in a town but, um at a certain age my parents asked my school so that I have to go to my rural area to get what we call the – to be initiated to the culture...I had to spend a month to get prepared, you know. They tell you, how to build a house, how to go hunting, how to go fishing, all those type..." When asked if this training helped him in the camp he responded, "Yes it did, it did!"

The explanations that James, Haile, Alem, Solomon and Tesfai shared above, provide distinct examples of individual resilience, its precipitating factors, and the implications of the absence of such preparation for enduring the great hardships of the camp. As we have seen, some common themes include exposure to challenging times and previous scarcity, family advice and an awareness of other cultures and ways of life outside of one's own.

Hope and Optimism. It is interesting to note the optimism and hope that many participants were able to maintain while they lived in the refugee camps. Such positive

outlooks, seemed to play a role in participants resilience and resistance to despair. Henry maintained in spite of his hardships, “I always have been optimistic in my life. I have been optimistic. I don’t think negative. I don’t think negative. Negative is my first enemy. Yeah negativity is not – I’m not.”

Solomon and Tesfai were also able to remain positive about the possibility of finding resettlement in a third country. In fact it was their hope for this opportunity that at times helped to sustain them. As they explained,

Solomon: We were looking for peace, so we had hope...

Tesfai: You have more opportunity [in a third country]. Bright future, yeah.

Solomon: Yeah, for the bright future. That is the positive thing that we experienced, when we were there [in the camps]... We can be settled and uh, help ourselves and, you know. We got like peace. Yeah. That was uh, hope. The positive thing.

As Hope had witnessed the destitution of many refugees, she decided that she would work hard to, “do something for myself tomorrow so that I have life.” For Ephraim, in spite of all he endured in the camp, he remained optimistic. When asked if he felt hopeful about his future he responded, “Yes, hundred percent.” Mr. Lewis had to use all of his inner strength in the refugee camp, in standing up for his rights. He recognized that, “You had to be very strong to live in the refugee camp. If you are not strong you will – something will happen to you.” In Haile’s view, survival in the camps was a choice that he had to make. He explained, “His choice is one... It is only survive or death. That’s your choice.”

For Mrs. Williams, her hopes in the camp revolved around a lasting peace in her home country. She explains that, “All our hope here is that Liberia should be able to get out of war completely, so that one day we will return back to our home and stay there.”

On the other hand, for Ephraim, a lack of patriotism helped him to resist homesickness. He explains, “there is in our culture most, in my understanding, to love uh, your country... This is very difficult... To move [from] one place is very bad... I don’t have more love [for my] country. Yeah, so I don’t think – it was not hardship for me.” Ephraim also noted that through achieving resettlement in a third country he was able to inspire his friend in the camp and now, “all my friends have hope.”

It seems that one of the reasons many refugees remain hopeful in the camps is that they believe in their own capacity to succeed, if only given an opportunity. Solomon poignantly explains this source of hopefulness: “People are very eager to know what’s going on in the world, and people are very eager to work, to prove himself – so in every, each and every Eritreans mind, they have something which is – if they leave the country, they can make what they want to go, yeah, so they can make a life. They can make it.”

Solutions: Participants’ Perspectives

After participants addressed the difficult aspects of refugee life and the their experience coping with it, they were also asked what they would change about the refugee camps in which they lived in order to improve the well-being of residents. Asked what decisions they would make in the position of camp administrator, the participants gave thought-provoking answers which shed light on the relationship between material and educational needs and psychological well-being.

Education in the Refugee Camps. Education was one of the aspects of life that many participants wanted to improve in the camps, if they could. Participants felt that there was a strong link between access to quality education and the overall well-being of refugees. Mrs. Williams explained what she would do as a camp administrator. “First I would

prioritize education. Yes, because education brings a better future. Especially for the children of today.”

James noted that he would not only want to improve the quality of education, but also the classroom materials, which he felt were wholly unsatisfactory for students. He explained, “You wouldn’t believe some of the schools. You know what the children use? They use rocks to sit down. Yeah, stones, yeah. They take the rock. [laughs] And sometimes their parents fix small bench for them – you carry out bench in the morning and bring your bench back home! If they could improve some of those, that would be good.” James also felt that training programs would make a positive impact. “They need to really get some training programs that people, the people can be trained to do stuff for themselves. You know. Some handy training programs that would help the women do stuff for themselves.”

In James’ view quality education and refugee well-being are closely interwoven. He explains why: “If they have schools, good schools that they send their children to, they have hope that, something will come out of their children. And if they have, if they are able to sustain their families, they feel good that, ‘oh, even though I am not home, but I can still provide for my child.’ ” We can see from James’ assertion that effective services for refugees have a ripple affect that can help to relieve distress.

One of the things that Solomon wanted to improve about his refugee camp was access to educational resources. He explains that he would, “try to...make a big library. And to make uh, computer...stuff there.” He also felt that it would be important to establish a high school in the camp. Currently, his refugee camp only made primary school education available. He asserted that a high school could have two positive effects – one was continued education for young people in the camp, and the second is the

possibility of utilizing some of the refugees' talents. "If there's high school, there are a lot of people who has potential to teach in high school...I could hire for – teachers from the immigrants, from the refugees. Which creates an employment stuff for the refugees." Undoubtedly, as the participants describe, there are countless potential benefits to improving education in refugee camps.

Counseling. Many participants raised the issue of the traumatic events that so many refugees endured. Participants also discussed the symptoms of psychological distress refugees experienced, including stress, anxiety, depression and suicidality. As James articulated, traumatic events continue in camps where parents who can't afford medical treatment and may lose a child from a "minor sickness" and are left feeling "depressed" and "sad." Because of the violence, killing and rape some refugees have been subjected to during the war, James felt that counseling would be particularly beneficial. He explains, "It would just be good to have some counselors, you know, to talk with them...They are scared of everybody, so they need some counseling."

Medical Care. Medical care in the camps was another issue that participants felt was in urgent need of improvement. For Haile, medical care is the "first...problem" that he would want to improve in the camps. Mr. Lewis concurred and recognized that illnesses such as diarrhea and cholera in the camps were a result of a lack of clean drinking water.

James suggested that the health conditions would be better for refugees if administrators, "tried to set up like mobile clinics," and, "if they have enough staff, medical staff to take care of the people." He added that not being able to access medical treatment for one's children had tremendous psychological effect on parents. If she could, Mrs. Williams would improve, "medicine mostly," and "open hospitals, clinics for refugees." If in charge, Mr. Lewis would fight corruption, because while he was in the

camp, workers “sold drugs to other people.” Improving the medical care of refugees would clearly ease both the physical and psychological suffering they endure.

Food and Water. The quality and frequency of food and water distributions were also of great concern for participants. Refugees in the camps expend much of their daily energy and time, just seeking enough food to eat and clean water to drink. James felt that life in the camps would improve, “if they were giving *enough* food to the people. Giving them enough food. And they were not giving enough food.”

Haile also expressed frustration that the food provided never seemed to be enough. “They are an NGO, World Food Programme...But they can’t change *anything*, you know? Everything is finish.” Ample food and clean water provisions would make life easier for many refugees, especially for the great number without any means to support themselves financially.

Materials Provisions. Adequate housing, bedding, and clothing are all basic human needs that are denied many refugees. James felt strongly that the psychological distress many refugees experienced was due in large part to their material concerns. He noted that “many things contribute to the psychological effect that there were on the people...a lot of it is brought down to material things. Material things, how they are taken care of in the camp.” He adds, “you know like the sleeping locations...there were so bad.” As James illustrated, there is much room to make a positive psychological impact on refugees’ lives, just by improving their material provisions.

Work Opportunities and Microcredit. Better food and material item distribution would certainly provide much-needed relief for refugees but, in addition, affording refugees the opportunity to provide for themselves, would make a tremendous impact. Solomon felt that even a small amount of income would produce a great benefit for many refugees. He

explains, “You can earn a few money in the refugee, and you can make a lot of different there. You can make a lot of different, yeah. You can make certain money in the refugee and you can give relief for a lot of people, and knowledge.” Solomon also felt that if employment were available for refugees, people could live there for many years without falling into despair. He continued, “If those things are created for refugees – people can then...can they stay for 12 [years], whatever. But now, people are staying longer and longer – they suicide themselves a lot, a lot of people suicide themselves, because there is no option.”

James also felt that access to financial opportunity would be greatly beneficial to refugees. He suggested that, “they could get some microcredit programs, because they don’t have initial capital to start anything!” Whether through microcredit programs that helped refugees to start their own businesses, or employment opportunities created in the camps, access such financial means would not only help refugees improve their quality of life, but their self-esteem and psychological health as well.

Other ideas for improving refugee well-being in the camps focused on more intangible, but no less important aspects of life. If Haile could make a change in the camp he would re-design the camp so that “it’s not to survive.” He did not like that in the camp refugees must concentrate so much on mere survival. They should be free, not just to survive, but also to thrive in life. But in many camps, refugees are not yet given that opportunity. In a similar vein, Solomon “would like to develop the public service stuff.” He felt that improved public service could “give them relief at least, for the refugees.” If Mr. Lewis were in charge he would “apply to the authorities, the UN authorities to bring in more and more of uh, things that people would use.” Mr. Lewis would be particularly

interested in “people who are not able to take care of themselves...the grassroots people. I would be more interested in them, so that they would be able to uh, survive.”

For both Tesfai and Ephraim, one solution to refugees’ problems lies in resettlement. Tesfai noted that if he could, he “would see to get out people from the camp.” He saw this as particularly important since Eritrean refugees are not allowed to leave the camp to live freely in Ethiopia, or to return to Eritrea. Tesfai explains that, “you must get third country, you know? To come out from the refugee camp.”

I would like to conclude with one of the simplest and yet most profound participant recommendations for those who would like to improve the plight of Africa and the world’s refugees. When asked what he would do if he were in charge, Henry thought for a moment and responded, “I would listen... You know what makes some of us bad leader is we don’t listen to our fellows. I would first listen. I would make sure, schedule my time to go, door-to-door, listen to each and every refugee problems... So I would listen and try to find... ways of how to help them out.” Many refugees would benefit if those who can make a positive impact began to listen and learn from the strengths and hardships of refugees, and work with refugees to implement solutions.

Discussion

This research study examined the role of culture in helping to foster resilience in the refugee camp setting. The ten former refugee camp residents shared their experience of the refugee camps, including causes of hardship, factors contributing to their resilience and the role of access to cultural resources in the camps. Participants' in-depth responses highlighted some of the major challenges for refugees, and the major detriments to their psychological well-being. Participants noted that a number of major and more subtle elements of their culture and family background were beneficial in the camp setting. While some of these benefits included cultural skills training such as farming and house-building, and other benefits were of a more intangible nature, such as hope and inner strength gained from one's spiritual practice. It seems that in the participants' experiences, a lack of access to basic necessities was the main source of physical and psychological hardship. Perhaps because of this focus on survival, and the cultural similarity of the local communities surrounding the camps, cultural bereavement did not seem to affect refugees severely until they achieved third country settlement in the West. Upon reaching North America, the majority of participants ($n = 8$) expressed adjustment difficulty with many aspects of the American lifestyle. While in the camps however, life was at times so desperate for refugees that, as Mr. Lewis articulated, "You can't miss anything there!" Those cultural practices that were continued in the camp however, made a positive impact for participants' and their fellow refugees' overall well-being.

Implications of Findings

From the experiences that participants shared, one can learn a great deal about factors that contribute to refugee mental health in the camps. Not only did participants contribute their analysis of what would help refugees' psychological well-being, they also

gave many concrete examples of specific aspects of refugee camp life which cause the greatest amount of stress.

The study's findings indicate that of foremost importance to refugee mental health are the basic human needs of food, clean water, and medical care. The negative implications of a lack of access to these necessities are numerous and extremely detrimental to the well-being of individuals, families and entire communities. Through the examples that refugees provided of remarkable kindness shared amongst refugees in the camps, we can see that many refugees are doing the best that they can to make the most out of their difficult circumstances. In this way, cultural traits such as generosity, sharing, and community support are invaluable. But refugees need more. Millions of refugees in Africa and around the world are fighting for their own daily survival in the camps. As participants explained, some refugees feel that they can no longer fight on their own and tragically decide to commit suicide in the camps. According to the results of this study, preventing such human tragedies may be much simpler than it may seem.

Fortunately, many refugees carry with them beneficial cultural characteristics such as a willingness to work hard, and an emphasis on self-sufficiency. We have seen that many refugees enact these traits by creating their own ways to gain income in the camps. However, in general this income only allows refugees to eat enough rather than too little, and to drink clean water, rather than disease-causing water. For the most part refugees are not able to improve their living conditions beyond a most basic living standard. Furthermore, many refugees are unable to work because of the intense physical labor that is required, or because they cannot leave their children for the amount of time necessary to do such work. In an effort to improve the mental health, of refugees living in the camps, aid agencies should provide enough food and clean water for refugees, and

provide some opportunities for refugees to earn income in the camps. As we have seen with this study's participants, refugees bring with them to the camps a wide variety of skills, knowledge and experience. This talent should be acknowledged and brought to the fore, whereby, as Solomon suggested, refugees could teach their skills to others, helping their community and improving their own well-being in the process.

Psychological counseling should be made available in refugee camps in Africa. Because many refugee camps are formed to accommodate individuals fleeing war and violence, some refugees suffer from symptoms related to the trauma they have experienced. While many refugees exhibit impressive coping skills and perseverance, those who are severely traumatized should not be left without mental health treatment. Some options for mental health treatment in the camps may be designed to be both efficient and cost-effective. For example, group work could prove meaningful and therapeutic for victims of violence and rape in the camps. Women's groups geared specifically towards young women, girls and mothers could empower women, who are struggling to cope with the loss of their partners, being single mothers, or being victims of assault. Echoing the peace work in which James participated in various camps, refugees could work to stem recurrences of violence by facilitating workshops that discuss the affects of violence and how refugees can work together to make a contribution to lasting peace. Participants noted that their days in the camps were often filled with boredom. Therapeutic activities such as these would give refugees the option to use this time to work to heal the psychological wounds of war, and to deepen camaraderie.

As participants have illustrated some refugees show natural leadership skill in the camps. Together refugees organized their own religious study groups and reached out to

help others in need. Some refugees could be trained by therapists to be para-professionals, in order to be able to recognize symptoms of trauma and psychological distress, and to assist those in need of mental health services. Such training would give refugee para-professionals a sense of fulfillment, and could help to stem the negative affects of stress, anxiety, depression and suicidality. It would also make it possible for the greatest amount of refugees in need to receive therapeutic care.

As the study's results have indicated, many refugees in the camps maintain the hope for a "bright future" in spite of the hardships that they endure. As many participants asserted, education is viewed by many in the camps to be one of the most important steps toward a better tomorrow for themselves and their children. While participants with children were appreciative of the presence of free schools in the camps, the education provided was sometimes inadequate in that the quality was poor, or that it did not extend to high school age children. Therefore, the refugee camp schools denied children the opportunities they may have had at home, and increases their educational disadvantage. As Hope so adamantly expressed, the quality of teaching in refugee camp schools should be evaluated. As much as possible, efforts should be made to ensure that high school is an affordable option for all children and interested adults. Improving access to quality education would give refugees the tools needed to become successful upon leaving the camps, and would, as James articulated, help to improve the psychological well-being of refugees by increasing their hopefulness about their futures.

There is another problem whose remedying would greatly improve the welfare of refugees living in camps. That is that some of the provisions intended for refugee relief do not reach those who most need it. Corruption was an issue of great concern for many participants in this study. Many refugees suffered unnecessarily because the food donated

for them was sold for a profit by those in charge of distributing it. Sometimes it was even sold back to the very refugees for whom it was originally provided. In the case that Solomon and Tesfai cited, refugees never received the tent replenishments that they were supposed to receive – the tents had been sold instead. Clearly, refugee assistance organizations would do well to more carefully oversee the distribution of the aid that they provide to ensure that it reaches its intended recipients. Hope offered another solution for the problem of corruption in the camps. She recommended that administrators make sure that aid workers are well taken care of themselves so that they do not need to take refugees' food for themselves, or sell it to earn more money. If aid workers are also in need, they may be more likely to resort to corruption.

In seeking to understand how refugee well-being could be improved, this study unearthed some unexpected findings that shed light on the connections between basic needs and mental health. The findings have also illustrated the cultural and individual traits that help many refugees to persevere in spite of their hardships. Participants expressed, with telling uniformity, their views on how improved basic assistance for refugees could make a positive impact on refugees' mental health and overall well-being. The findings suggest that in order to make a contribution to the psychological wellness of refugees, their basic needs should be met. Mental health services should also be available to assist refugees in need. When these most essential needs are met, refugees are even more able to continue to engage in and benefit from the cultural traditions and cultural resources that many rely on to help sustain them through their time living in, as Ephraim described it, "the hardest living standard in the world."

Limitations

This study sought to evaluate the role of culture in psychological healing. This relationship was explored through participant's responses, and key benefits of access to cultural resources was explored. The extent that it was able to fully explore the role of cultural resources in resilience was limited by two major factors.

One factor that played a role in the ability the results to reflect the role of cultural resources and resilience was that the participants are all currently living in the United States. If the study were conducted in a refugee camp, for example, it may have been easier to learn more directly how cultural resources were utilized in the camps and which cultural resources were not available to participants.

This factor relates to another limitation of the study, which is the familiarity with and importance of cultural resources among the study's participants. The study's recruitment criteria did not specify that participants ought to have had a close orientation with traditional cultural practices. As a result, the participants reflected a wide variety of association with and appreciation of various traditions and other aspects of their cultures of origin. The fact that several participants were highly educated – some with university degrees and one with a Master's degree – and the fact that the majority ($n = 9$) of the participants were Christian, may be related to the lack of emphasis on the relationship between the ability to continue certain traditional practices and mental health. Participants were on a continuum with regard to their connection to the traditional practices from their particular ethnic group. Nevertheless, the diverse background of participants illuminates the effects of camp life on refugees with various socioeconomic backgrounds and highlights the various qualities that can contribute to resilience in difficult circumstances.

Future Directions

Refugees in Africa are affected by their displacement in a number of different ways. This study has included participants from Eritrea, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but indeed the study's findings cannot be said to be conclusive regarding the contributing factors to the mental health of refugees from those countries or of the continent in general. Efforts to improve the mental health of refugees should be geared toward the specific needs of specific populations. Indeed, as the participants described, refugees in one camp can have a great variety of backgrounds and life experiences.

For these reasons it would be helpful to conduct further research on refugee mental health issues in camps from within the refugee camps themselves. Because refugees living in camps are often in desperate need of immediate assistance, future studies could be designed to assess the psychological needs of refugees in a particular camp with the end goal of implementing the findings of the study in the same camp. The research would make the most direct impact if it were used to develop psychological services in the camps where it was conducted.

In order to involve refugees in developing solutions for their own well-being such research could be conducted using a participatory action methodology, which would allow refugees to participate in focus groups and work with researchers to come up with culturally-relevant mental health solutions that would decrease levels of stress, anxiety, depression and suicide in their own camps. This would both increase the agency of camp residents in improving their own lives and have the potential to contribute to the implementation of the most effective interventions for refugee mental health possible.

Table 1								
Background of Participants								
Pseudonym	Age	Education	Birth Country	Refugee Camp(s)	Time in Camps	1st Language	Other Languages	
Ephraim	25-35	technical	Ethiopia	Ethiopia	2 years	Tigrinya	Amharic, English	
Solomon	25-35	college	Ethiopia	Ethiopia	1 year, 8 mos.	Amharic	Tigrinya, English	
Tesfai	25-35	college	Ethiopia	Ethiopia	1 1/2 years	Amharic	Tigrinya, English	
James	37	technical	Liberia	Sierra Leone, Guinea	2 1/2 years	Lorma	English	
Hope	24	college	Liberia	Ghana	1 year, 7 years	Bassh	English	
Mrs. Williams	35-50	high school	Liberia	Ghana	5 1/2 years	Krou	English	
Henry	25-35	college	DRC	Zimbabwe	4 years	French	English, Lingala, Chokwe, 16 total	
Mr. Lewis	over 50	graduate	Liberia	Ghana, Ivory Coast	3 mos., 11 years	Kpelle	English	
Haile	25-35	high school	Ethiopia	Ethiopia	1 year, 2 years	Amharic	Tigrinya, English	
Alem	25-35	college	Ethiopia	Ethiopia	1 year, 2 years	Amharic	Tigrinya, English	

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