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Origins and Outcomes:
Migrant Integration in Uganda

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In the United States, the postal code of one's birthplace predicts more about one's future than nearly any other factor. Children born in wealthy zip codes tend to achieve better outcomes in income, education, and longevity than those who are born in poorer areas. This pattern is clear in the drastic variations in life expectancy between two neighborhoods in Washington, DC, for example. Residents of the Friendship Heights neighborhood live to an average of 96 years, while the predominantly poor, African-American residents of Barry Farms neighborhood in Southeast DC live an average of 63 years.[1] While interviewing refugees[2] in Kampala and Bidi Bidi Camp,[3] I found a parallel observation in which specific details of a refugee's origin could predict their outcomes, particularly economic and locational outcomes. Refugees from similar places of origin tend to settle in similar locales. While this finding may be obvious to refugees and development organizations, the deterministic elements of a refugee's place of origin do not seem to influence programming in the Uganda refugee context.

The importance of a migrant's origin can be explained by a combination of factors. First, geographical origin is important: for the most part, migrants leaving urban settings tend to possess more resources, better information, and skills suited to urban environments. The country of origin can also be important, as we will consider in the comparative analysis of Congolese, South Sudanese, Somali, and Burundian migrants. Second, associational links can "make or break" a migrant's experience in a new country. Religious organizations represent the most active institution in many migrants' lives, and strong linkages with a given denomination in one's place of origin can create access to religious organizations in their destination. Finally, economic origins play the most determinative role in a migrant's outcomes. Level

1 Owens-Young, Jessica. "Being Born in the Wrong ZIP Code Can Shorten Your Life." The Conversation, August 12, 2019. http://theconversation.com/being-born-in-the-wrong-zip-code-can-shorten-your-life-104037.

2 In this essay we use the term migrant and refugee interchangeably, though some research subjects were clearly refugees (for example those from South Sudan), while others were more clearly migrants, (for example those from Somalia).

3 The Tufts University study, Financial Integration in Displacement was funded by the International Rescue Committee and took place during July and August, 2019.

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of income, education, and language skills in one's place of origin seem to be the details most closely linked with successful migrant outcomes in their new home.

Qualitative data collected from field interviews suggest that geographical origin significantly impacts migrant outcomes once they arrive in Uganda. First, migrants arriving from urban contexts — specifically Juba, Goma, and Bukavu — tend to achieve better outcomes in Uganda than their rural counterparts. This trend was especially pertinent for migrants living in Kampala. Migrants who once lived in rural settings in their home countries typically lack the specific capacities necessary to succeed in urban settings. Congolese respondents Sarah, Adrian, Fabrice, and Marland provide illustrative examples of this urban/rural dichotomy. All four respondents originated in Bukavu or Goma, and all four were employed in a unique and profitable manner. Sarah operates her own tailoring shop, resells goods online, works occasionally as a cosmetologist, and also volunteers to train fellow migrants in tailoring at YARID (Young African Refugees in Development). Adrian teaches social studies at a recently opened school for Congolese migrants in Nsambya neighborhood. Fabrice works for a successful barbershop near his home in Ntinda. Finally, Marland works as a consultant, providing conflict resolution trainings for private companies. These four migrants are all highly successful relative to their peers, such as Davina.

Davina is a Muslim woman from Walikale, DRC, and she and her family experience some of the most profound financial struggles I encountered in Kampala. Her family is frequently late paying rent, can rarely afford to pay rental fees for Davina's tailoring shop, and some or all of her three school-aged children miss significant amounts of school due to late fees. Similarly, Lucia comes from the rural region outside Goma and struggles to find work and therefore also to pay her rent. Lucia noted that her landlord has locked her out of her apartment for late rent on several occasions.

This pattern of difficulty maintaining a regular income was also common among South Sudanese migrants interviewed in Kampala. Most of the South Sudanese interviewed were from the Western Equatoria region, which is primarily comprised of smallholder farmers working on ancestral land. All of the South Sudanese migrants interviewed were associated with the late Bishop Munde's Anglican Church in the Luwafu neighborhood, and almost none of the respondents had a consistent income-generating activity. Almost all relied on the charity of Bishop Munde's church, fellow South Sudanese, or non-governmental organizations. Their primary support system (Bishop Munde's charity) seemed likely to dissipate after his passing in late 2018.

South Sudanese migrants interviewed for this study in Bidi Bidi Camp didn't experience the same rural versus urban determinism in their outcomes, though a few migrants did exhibit a different, interesting pattern: very few migrants in Bidi Bidi Camp can access consistent income-generating activities, except for some South Sudanese migrants who had spent multiple decades living in Uganda due to a prior displacement in the 1980's. For example, Ahmed, Mohammed, and our local interpreter, Chapo, had all lived in Adjumani Camp in the 1980's and 90's due to instability in Sudan. All three had returned to South Sudan in the 2010's to work and care for family, and all three had fled again in the face of violence in 2016. Furthermore, these two respondents and our interpreter all held leadership positions and maintained income-generating activities in Bidi Bidi. All three South Sudanese men worked and/or currently work for NGOs in various capacities in paid "volunteer" positions. Mohammed was also the chairperson for his cluster in the camp. These South Sudanese men stood apart from their peers in that they spoke English well, spoke at least some Luganda (and even other common Ugandan languages), had relationships with native Ugandans, and had achieved an elevated degree of social status and economic power within the camp. Interestingly, the divide between rural and urban South Sudanese did not appear significant in Bidi Bidi Camp, likely because economic opportunities are generally scarce in the camp context.

One of the most surprising findings from the migrant interviews was the centrality of associational links in determining a migrant's outcomes. Religious organizations and ethnic or national associations both provided crucial support for migrants in the early days of their displacement. Religious organizations were especially important. Qualitative evidence suggests that Congolese migrants benefit from links with Pentecostal churches, while South Sudanese sim-

ilarly benefit from links with the Anglican Church. Many of the South Sudanese migrants interviewed in Kampala were mostly, or entirely, dependent on charity from Anglican Bishop Munde. Most of our interviews with South Sudanese migrants were in fact conducted in the spacious backyard of the late Bishop Munde's St. James Anglican Church.

Respondents Ruba, Anila, and Nadia (all female migrants) depended entirely on Bishop Munde's charity for rent money, medication, and food. They each expressed serious concern about how his death would impact their livelihoods. Bishop Munde had even taken in most of Anila's family of migrants, almost 30 members in total. Anila had essentially adopted children in her extended family as she fled to Uganda in 2014, crossing the border with 30 children and adolescents. The ten youngest children lived with Anila in Bishop Munde's family home on the St. James Church grounds, while most of the remaining adolescents slept on the porch or outside the Bishop's home. Bishop Munde's widow has allowed them to remain, but they will likely have to find new lodgings once the replacement bishop arrives with his family.

Pentecostal churches also heavily factor into the outcomes of Congolese migrants. Migrants relied on the churches to varying degrees for shelter, employment (often small, poorly paid jobs like janitorial duties, common for new migrants), and network opportunities within the Congolese community. Multiple respondents praised Congolese Pentecostal churches for taking them in during their initial displacement. Adrian and his daughter were given shelter in a church in Katwe for months, and Adrian was even provided a "fucking job," which he described as a kind of rite of passage for newcomers: "I was looking for some 'fucking job' — in Congolese this is small work that we do to make money. I was ushering at the church, sweeping the floors, cleaning. You know, a fucking job."

Fabrice similarly connected with a Pentecostal church upon arriving in Kampala and spent an evening there before a parishioner shared his home in Komwokya neighborhood with Fabrice for a year. Some Congolese enter churches for a more explicit employment opportunity. For example, Congolese interpreters, Jacques and Josue, were following in their father's footsteps by contributing to his Pentecostal parish in Nsambya and training to expand his ministry. While they were not wealthy by any measure, Jacques and Josue's family benefitted from his father's steady income and the social capital generated by their role in the community.

There were some interesting outliers in the Congolese community who belonged to churches other than the Pentecostal church. One of the most successful respondents I met, Divine, was a Jehovah's Witness (the only member of his denomination I met in Uganda), but she didn't seem to suffer any negative consequences for it. Davina, meanwhile, was one of the very few Muslim Congolese migrants I encountered in Uganda. Davina and her family consistently struggled with finances, and while it was unclear the degree to which her religious association contributed to this, I could sense a degree of social isolation. Davina seemed caught between her Congolese community, where her religion was prominent, and her religious community. She was unable to network with predominantly Ugandan Muslims due to language barriers. The Congolese, especially in Nsambya, also frequented Catholic charities like Jesuit Relief Services and noted that they did not feel any hesitation receiving services from a non-Pentecostal organization.

Non-religious associational links proved important for migrants as well. The Burundian, Congolese, and South Sudanese communities in Kampala all operated national associations of varying degrees of complexity. The Congolese and Burundian associations were operational when I arrived in summer 2019, and I was also able to join some of the first meetings of a South Sudanese association. Respondents reported that the primary benefits of national associations were the opportunities to network. Microfinance institutions like UGAFODE utilized association meetings as marketing opportunities for UGAFODE. Refugee interns (like my interpreters, Jacques and Josue) had existing relationships with association leaders and were granted an opportunity to present their savings and loan products to a wide audience. I interviewed the leader of the Burundian Catholic community, Sainte Therese de l'Enfant Jesus, which was established as a purely denominational organization in 2016 and has since expanded to provide social services like paying school fees and medical

expenses for its members. The organization's leader, Anthony, expects to expand services into job training and placement in 2020.

Finally, perhaps the most determinative element of a migrant's success in Uganda appears to be their original economic/class status. The most successful migrants I interviewed tended to have at least some university education and formal employment (typically well-paid NGO work) in their countries of origin. The Burundian respondents, in particular, reflected this pattern. Jeremy, Roland, and Anthony were all male Burundians and political dissidents of one flavor or another. All three worked for NGOs and made healthy salaries in Burundi. Roland even registered to run for Parliament prior to fleeing. These three men all received external assistance for their flight from Burundi, either from expatriate family members or international organizations, like Amnesty International and The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project. All three are currently employed, live in reasonably comfortable homes, and participate in informal finance, formal finance, or some combination of the two.

The Congolese and South Sudanese respondents provided a strong test for this theory, as some Congolese and South Sudanese respondents were upper-middle class, while others maintained subsistence livelihoods in their home countries. Victoria, for example, worked as a secretary for Bralima Brewery and her husband implemented education programs for Save the Children in Congo. In Kampala, she runs a very large Village and Savings Loan Association (Neema Group) and her husband sells goods on the street in the peri-urban area of Kampala, which is more expensive to access, but also presents a lower likelihood of Kampala City Central Authority confiscating his wares. Divine ran her own successful bar and beer store in downtown Goma, and now she operates a relatively successful tailoring business out of her home. Sarah was born into an upper-middle class family in Congo, where her mother worked as an accountant for an NGO and her father was a customs officer. She actually left her parents' home when they would only pay for her to attend medical school, rather than her true passion, engineering. She now operates a successful tailoring business, while her husband brokers construction materials between Congolese buyers and Ugandan suppliers. Adrian was the headmaster of a school in Congo, and now teaches social studies to secondary students at a Congolese school in Kampala. Fabrice studied community development in university, operated businesses (and likely money laundering operations) for General Mamadou in Congo, and now works as a very successful barber. Similarly, the South Sudanese who worked in paid positions for NGOs or operated as village, cluster, or zone-level leaders in Bidi Bidi Camp tended to have prior administrative or NGO experience; smallholder farmers could not compete with their upper-middle class countrymen.

These findings, which reveal a path dependency, suggest that those designing programs for migrants might do well to acknowledge existing class divisions. Organizations with a good grasp of refugee backgrounds could work to ensure that less-skilled migrants are not ignored for their formally trained peers, thus avoiding the replication in Uganda of class inequalities experienced in migrants' home countries.

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