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HOW MUSLIMS HELP:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF MUSLIM VOLUNTARY ASSISTANCE FOR SYRIAN
REFUGEES IN LOUISVILLE, KY

By
Irene Levy Yates
M.A., University of Louisville, 2017

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A Thesis Approved on

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ABSTRACT

HOW MUSLIMS HELP:

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Irene Levy Yates

July 12, 2017

This thesis examines Islamic faith-based organizations' involvement in Syrian refugee resettlement in Louisville, KY with special attention to the impact of an Islamic Relief USA community engagement grant awarded to Kentucky Refugee Ministries in 2014. A description of local Muslim community support for newly arrived refugees was constructed via participant observation and semi-structured interviews with former and current resettlement agency employees, a diverse set of Muslim community volunteers, and refugees who participate in and/or are supported by Islamic faith-based organizations. Muslim communities in Louisville approach refugee resettlement in ways that are significantly different from both resettlement agency staff and past co-sponsors and volunteers. Muslim faith-based assistance is constituted through a myth of Muslim community history, a trust in highly personal and flexible methods of assistance, and a series of obligations based on community belongings. Resettlement agencies should recognize these particularities in future program development and community outreach efforts.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic center that I'm visiting today used to be a church. There are little hints in the architecture – the roof over what is now the prayer hall comes to a point that is reminiscent of a steeple and the prayer mat-patterned rug is installed at an odd angle to orient worshippers toward Mecca. Today, there are chairs on top of the rug oriented towards a table where two representatives from the local chapter of the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) are sitting. A microphone weaves back and forth between the sisters on the right and the brothers on the left.¹ They ask: What will happen now that the travel ban is being challenged? Is it safe for me to leave the country? Will my daughter-in-law be able to travel from Tunisia? What will happen to refugees already in the country? At the end, one sister takes the microphone and begins a passionate speech. She says she went to Americana Community Center, a nonprofit organization that serves refugees and immigrants in Louisville's South End, to volunteer recently. "There are so many volunteers, but none of us," she told the crowd, challenging them to take action and support their fellow immigrants and refugees.

Since 2014, when Kentucky Refugee Ministries (KRM), a refugee resettlement agency in Louisville, KY, received a one-year community engagement grant from

¹ Observant Muslim men and women often refer to fellow Muslims as "sisters" and "brothers" in religious contexts.

Islamic Relief USA (IRUSA), an international faith-based aid organization, Muslim groups in Louisville have been increasingly active supporters of refugee resettlement. Prior to the grant and the active attempts to involve mosques and Islamic centers in refugee co-sponsorship that came with it, Muslim FBOs (faith-based organizations) had not provided significant aid to refugee resettlement. This new engagement has had a particularly robust impact on Syrian refugees, who started to arrive in Louisville in February 2014. The developing relationship between Muslim FBOs and KRM has since faced many challenges and achieved many successes. Muslim communities in Louisville approach refugee resettlement in ways that are significantly different from both resettlement agency staff and past church co-sponsors and volunteers. These differences are rooted in distinct narratives of migration history, organizational patterns within religious communities, and increasing entanglement between charitable work for refugees and the emergence of new solidarities among Muslim communities.

The “Muslim community” that KRM seeks to engage with is not one unified whole, but a diverse and segmented collection of groups that identify collectively in certain contexts. In a fascinating twist, charitable support for refugees has triggered the formation of certain communal linkages that were not previously present. Using ethnographic methods, this study examines the solidarities and tensions between professional staff and Muslim community volunteers and among sectors of an emerging Muslim community that developed during and after KRM’s Islamic Relief community engagement grant. It identifies the methods and motivations by which Muslim volunteer groups choose to assist Syrian refugees. It also seeks to explore how refugee resettlement

agencies in Louisville can best work with Muslim groups for mutual advantage and create a strong, lasting relationship.

In line with current trends in social sciences literature, this analysis must consider the local impacts of humanitarian and faith-based models of aid, especially since both Muslim FBOs and KRM are faith-permeated, if to different extents. It also expands scholarship on the impacts of local religious organizing on the process of refugee integration by including populations that have been underrepresented in previous studies and exploring new developments in their community involvement. The following literature review describes the academic works that this study builds on in more detail. Next, the background section contextualizes current trends by exploring the history of Islamic charity, particularly since the rise of Islamist politics in the 1980s, the changing role of the mosque in the US, religious engagement in the US refugee resettlement program, and Louisville as a context for Muslim migration and refugee resettlement. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the data collection methods used in this study. Chapter II: “Refugee Experiences in Narration,” explores how narratives about past majority-Muslim refugee populations in Louisville shape Muslim volunteers’ responses to and expectations for Syrian refugee resettlement. Chapter III: “Material Assistance and Resettlement Agency Collaboration,” is a detailed discussion of the period immediately before, during, and after the IRUSA grant and the ways in which contrasting approaches to refugee aid contributed to tensions between KRM and Muslim volunteer groups. Chapter IV: “Emerging Communities and Voluntary Assistance”, examines how faith-based charity has created unlikely solidarities across class, national, and ethnic divisions in response to international, national, and local pressures. Finally, the conclusion reflects

on the distinctive characteristics of Muslim voluntary aid in Louisville and makes recommendation for future collaboration with Muslim FBOs.

Literature Review

An inquiry on the involvement of Muslim groups in refugee resettlement must engage with developing understandings of the connections between humanitarianism, faith, and refugee integration. Neoliberal patterns of privatization increasingly de-fund, diminish, or eliminate governmental social services, leaving a vacuum that NGOs, many of which are faith-based, are filling. Concomitantly, a growing body of social science literature addresses the role of faith-based organizations (FBOs) and how they differ from or resemble transnational organizations operating on humanitarian principles such as Médecins Sans Frontières, the Red Cross, and the various United Nations aid agencies and programs. Recent works take on what FBO involvement means for humanitarian neutrality and what advantages they might have in projects to aid displaced persons. Evidence from a variety of studies indicates that FBOs can facilitate local integration in ways that secular NGOs find difficult and links refugee participation in a religious community to more positive social and economic integration outcomes. Religious groups are often at the center of emergent ethnic or national communities. Although some accounts suggest that involvement in mosques and Islamic centers does not lead to positive community integration, these accounts arbitrarily and erroneously exclude Muslims from the bounds of “host community.” Muslim volunteer groups in Louisville, in line with evidence from previous studies of immigrant religious communities, play an important part in refugee adaptation and community building.

Anthropology, with its long disciplinary history of interest in the links between reciprocity, altruism, and power in human interactions, and its tradition of scholarship grounded in fieldwork in the Global South, is well-placed to consider the social implications of charity in the contemporary world. Marcel Mauss's essay *The Gift* (1990[1950]), perhaps the most foundational work on gift-giving, altruism (or lack of), and reciprocity in anthropology, established the idea that gifts create social bonds and obligations that can create or reinforce social structures. Mauss, his contemporaries, and many of his academic successors, were interested in the study of non-Western societies as bounded entities, often ignoring the impacts of, or in active collaboration with, colonial powers.

Over the course of the 20th century, reflections on the persistent impact of colonialism and emerging modern global economic systems became increasingly central to anthropological inquiry and theory. Since the 1980s, when structural adjustment plans introduced neoliberal economic policies to the Global South on a massive scale, the study of NGOs that have stepped up to fill the gaps left by decreased government funding for public services and social welfare has become widespread (Fisher 1997; Ticktin 2014). Specifically, anthropologists have devoted a great deal of study to describing the global ethos of humanitarianism and its implications for the relationship between aid providers and aid recipients, especially in responses to disaster, conflict, and displacement (Fassin 2012[2010]; Redfield 2013; Ticktin 2014; Malkki 2015). Their work describes humanitarianism as an ethical position characterized by a belief in the universal value of humanity and a preoccupation with the alleviation of suffering. It is associated with

nongovernmental organizations, but has wide-reaching influence in government and the private sector (Fassin 2012[2010]).

Within this anthropological endeavor, a sub-field of researchers are now taking an interest in faith-based aid as a way to understand how local meanings and forms of aid intersect and meld with the universalizing, secular philosophy of humanitarianism (Bornstein 2009; Hefferan and Fogarty 2010; Benthall 2011). While humanitarianism is understood to be a very new phenomenon, often associated with contemporary institutionalized and professionalized civil society, charity is an older system of altruism with strong religious connotations (Bornstein 2009; Fassin 2012[2010]). Erica Bornstein (2009) argues that the shift from charity to philanthropy in the modern sense is an attempt to turn from altruism rooted in charitable feeling and a religious compassion for the poor to an economically rational model concerned with quantifiable outcomes. While charity and humanitarianism both involve a strong desire to alleviate suffering, humanitarianism is more strongly linked to the governance of altruism in the form of defining proper humanitarian objects and demanding accountability to donors.

Although modern humanitarianism has strong historical links to Christian missionary activities during the colonial era, secular humanitarians often associate faith permeation with charity, usually understood as giving momentary reprieve in the form of gifts, services, or hand-outs as opposed to long-term presence and community collaboration. Reflecting on the work of *Medicins Sans Frontieres*, Peter Redfield writes, “Charity offers only minor ameliorations, not justice” (2013, 243). Charity, from this perspective, is the provision of things that responds to current conditions, not actions that address root causes and systematic problems. Charitable work motivated by religious

compassion is therefore often relegated to what Liisa Malkki (2015) would call the status of “mere” – sentimental, domestic, trivial – in the shadow of the modern transnational humanitarian system, without the recognition that many of the actions that constitute humanitarian aid are part of that same category. Even within strictly secular NGO settings, Malkki asserts, staff members are often motivated by the same emotional or religious affect that these organizations disdain. Despite the distance that transnational NGOs try to define between mere charity and the work that they do, there is often little substantial difference between the aid that they provide and the aid provided by faith-based charities beyond their institutionally recognized inspiration for giving.

In the US, President George W Bush popularized the term FBO as part of his effort to outsource more social services projects to religious organizations by allowing congregations to apply for government contracts directly, but faith-based NGOs existed long before the term did (Adkins et al. 2010, 4; Ferris 2010, 607). Gerard Clarke and Michael Jennings define an FBO as “any organization that derives inspiration from and guidance for its activities from the teachings and principles of faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within a faith” (2008, 6). This definition is extremely popular in development literature and many typologies of FBOs use it as a starting point. It is also extremely broad, which can be an advantage and a disadvantage in that, while it is more descriptive of this diverse category, it can be used to lump together organizations like lobbying groups and churches that may have very different purposes.

Adkins et al. (2010) presents an alternate typology which not only recognizes the diversity within the category FBO, but places organization on a spectrum based on the extent to which faith permeates mission statements, project goals, and philosophies

toward community engagement. At one end of the spectrum, faith-permeated organizations include mandatory faith content in their programs and employee leadership, staff, and volunteers of a particular religious orientation. On the other end, secular organizations actively avoid faith-based content in their programs and require no faith commitment from their staff. The spectrum perspective is very useful as the role of faith in aid work seems to be in constant flux and negotiation over time, within different spaces, and on different scales.

The level of faith permeation that can be considered acceptable and professional by international humanitarian standards is a point of significant deliberation. Most scholars and aid professionals, recalling the problematic linkage between 19th century missionary projects, colonial regimes, and early humanitarianism in the Global South, agree that proselytizing as a part of any aid program is coercive and unethical. Many go one step further, concluding that any level of faith permeation at the programmatic level risks violating the humanitarian values of neutrality and impartiality. From this perspective, proper, professional humanitarianism is secular.

This is not an unreasonable position, as FBOs' past and present ethical failures are well documented in the literature on aid for displaced persons both in camps and during third country resettlement. Lynelny Long (1993) writes that, despite the Thai government's commitment to expel any organizations that proselytized among the Hmong in Ban Vinai refugee camp, religious activities to encourage conversion were not unknown and groups accused of proselytizing and ejected from the camp often found their way back in at a later date. Protestant organizations providing medical aid were also intolerant of the Hmong's shamanic medicine, which they associated with "heathenism"

and “devil worship” (Long 1993, 127). Nancy Smith-Hefner (1994) reports that the Khmer Christian minority, a result of missionary efforts in refugee camps, established patron-client relationships with church leaders to receive additional aid upon arrival in the US. Even Buddhist Khmer took advantage of these benefits, attending church services for periods of time when they needed assistance. Paul Kenny and Kate Lockwood-Kenny (2011) identified a similar pattern in the Karen refugee community, in which churches provided the necessary aid that resettlement agencies were unable to give due to funding shortfalls. This encouraged even non-Christians to attend churches and, in at least one case, convert. This case study demonstrates that even in cases in which direct coercion to convert is not present, the material advantages of affiliating oneself with a religious community when facing adverse conditions can make refugees feel that they must convert whether or not that was aid workers’ intention. A strictly secular approach to aid seems reasonable in this light.

The advantages of faith-based aid have often been overemphasized or misidentified. Proponents of the “cultural proximity” hypothesis, the proposition that aid workers who share the same faith as their clients will find it easier to provide appropriate assistance, may oversimplify the realities of field-based humanitarian projects (Palmer 2011). Religious similarities between clients and service providers may also add an unwanted element of proximity in cases of sectarian conflict that can prove dangerous for aid workers and make trust difficult to establish (De Coudier 2009). Additionally, Bruno De Coudier suggests that while “Religion and religiously inspired solidarity *can* enhance and solidify trust and trustworthiness,” empowering faith networks can have the inadvertent effect of empowering local elites, who may co-opt projects to solidify their

control in a community (ibid, 619). Considering these considerable misapprehensions and disadvantages, why might some experts recommend partnering with FBOs?

Some scholars have challenged the frame of secular neutrality, arguing that secularism is itself a system of beliefs and practices, not a neutral middle ground (Ager and Ager 2011; Ferris 2011; Peterson 2012). Alastair and Joey Ager (2011) argue that functional secularism in humanitarian work fails to uphold the principle of neutrality because it enforces an artificial separation between humanitarian and faith discourse and privileges secular models. Thus, in a sense, it becomes “not so much a system for managing a diversity of beliefs as it is a mechanism of promoting specific ones” (ibid, 462). Lisa Malkki makes a similar observation, writing “an unblinking, absolute commitment to neutrality (as to universality) involves its own kind of zealotry” (2015, 197). In line with popular critiques of developmentalism, Ager and Ager see this trend toward venerating liberal materialist constructions of proper humanitarian behavior as a way of excluding alternative worldviews, especially those originating in the Global South (2011, 464). In the field, FBOs are “expected to reproduce discourses and practices of development and humanitarian aid” (Peterson 2012, 137). Any challenge of the status quo may be seen as unprofessional.

Pressure to conform to international standards of secular humanitarian neutrality may nullify many of the well-documented advantages associated with FBOs (Ager and Ager 2011; Palmer 2011). FBOs can harness existing faith-based social networks to strengthen services for displaced persons. People often seek refuge in places of worship where religious leaders may provide initial support and protection (Clarke 2010; UNHCR 2014). After flight, respected religious leaders can be ideal partners when attempting to

provide support in communities where aid workers may be distrusted and aid organizations with similar religious affiliations to displaced persons are often better able to establish trust and assess material and spiritual needs (De Coudier 2009; Clarke 2010). When voluntary return is possible, religious organizations are invaluable partners in peace-building initiatives and the process of rebuilding communities (Kirmani and Khan 2008; Knapp et al. 2013; Mahony 2014). During and after third-country resettlement, religious organizations provide significant material aid and social capital to refugees (Smith-Hefner 1994; Allen 2010; Bauer and Chivakos 2010; Eby et al. 2011; Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011). A recent study of best practices for approaching psychosocial challenges among a diverse group of refugees in Jordan supports incorporating discussions of faith into existing programs (Zoma 2014, 45-47). In short, there is an overwhelming amount of evidence that, despite the previously discussed neutrality issues, there are significant advantages to working with FBOs during every phase of refugee protection work.

Linking these conversations about the basis of proper, professional aid to conversations about immigrant and refugee integration and adaptation can complicate and expand our current understandings of “host community”. The widely agreed upon ultimate goal of resettlement is legal, economic, and social/cultural integration; this makes integration key to two of UNHCR’s three main “durable solutions” (repatriation, local integration, and resettlement). According to UNHCR, “the integration of resettled refugees occurs at a highly localised level in the communities, workplaces and institutions of the receiving society,” including, they specify, faith-based organizations and ethno-cultural groups (2002, 218). In policy documents, there are constant references

to the “two-way” processes of integration with the final goal of “a socially cohesive and harmonious society” created through community engagement (ibid, 215). This simple and optimistically articulated goal belies the messy complexities of human social organization as well as the significant discussion within the academy as to what the social process of integration looks like.

Psychologist John Berry’s (1997) model of acculturation is currently one of the more popular interpretations of immigrant and refugee social experience and is a good starting point because its definition of integration shares many similarities with the one utilized by UNHCR. He identifies four outcomes of acculturation, which he defines as the interactions between groups or individuals that identify themselves as culturally distinct, often involving a difference of power that makes one dominant or hegemonic. Integration, which involves the maintenance of some form of cultural integrity while adopting or adapting to new practices and values, is linked to the best outcomes in terms of sociocultural and psychological adaptation, while assimilation, separation, and marginalization involve a refusal to adopt “the value of cultural diversity” on the part of one party and/or structural exclusion on a societal level, leading to poor adaptation. Berry’s model identifies a tension between cultural maintenance and contact and participation in other cultural groups that must be balanced to achieve integration.

Other scholars have made similar observations, identifying ways in which organizing around ethnicity, religion, or another identity group can promote either cultural maintenance or contact and participation (not always using Berry’s terms). Most of this work is grounded in studies of immigrants, not refugees. Based on historical case studies from 20th century Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant immigrant groups, Charles

Hirschman concludes that “the centrality of religion to immigrant communities can be summarized as the search for refuge, respectability, and resources” (2004, 1228). He stresses the socioeconomic resources that churches and temples provide as well as the ways in which they may become ethnoreligious oases from the stresses of an unfamiliar land. In his work on religious groups in Portland, Ryan Allen (2009) discusses the important roles that religious organizations can play in bonding and bridging between immigrant communities and non-immigrant locals as well as within national communities riven by ethnic or clan divisions. His study included a multicultural church attended by both Sudanese refugees and non-refugee locals and a nationally (but not ethnically) homogenous Somali mosque. He observed that, in the mosque, clan tensions are set aside and worshipers enact both Somali and Muslim belonging, bonding them at least temporarily into a cohesive community.

According to sociologists Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut (2014), ethnic solidarity and resilience are key adaptation mechanisms that allow some immigrant and refugee groups to persist and thrive. These bonds are not ahistorical imitations of preexisting social networks brought from their countries of origin, but “a distinct emergent product” forged from shared histories and migration experiences. They note that these bonds often link individuals or groups that would not have interacted or thought of themselves as sharing a common identity previously, but are unified by common experiences in countries of migration. In other words, cultural maintenance does not necessarily mean social or cultural replication as much as the maintenance of some form of identity or practice that is distinct from the dominant group. Indeed, many scholars have theorized the ways in which such solidarities in the U.S. are influenced by

dominant forms of social stratification, such as race. Anthropologist Aihwa Ong (1996) claims that the intersection of racial and cultural hierarchies in the U.S. with class leads to ideological “whitening” or “blackening” of non-white immigrant groups. Essentially, immigrants with less potential for producing capital are marginalized in similar ways to African Americans while upper class immigrants enjoy some of the privileges of whiteness. In this way, immigrants become incorporated into dominant hierarchies without challenging them to such an extent that they collapse.

Charity, as something that is internal to and, in some cases, essential to the constitution of society, could play an important role in community-building processes in a post-resettlement context. Anthony Oliver-Smith (2005) argues that, in the wake of disaster, the successful reconstitution of community must involve material and social components that are dialectically linked. This involves, in his view, creation of appropriate housing and the provision of economic resources to minimize social tensions and allow displaced persons to develop structures of mutual support. However, he dismisses similarities between the instances that he is discussing in which whole settlements are displaced and attempt to recreate a community in exile and resettlement of “individuals or families in totally new environments into which they must be assimilated” (ibid, 65). He need not limit his analysis in such a way; as Lisa Malkki (1992) demonstrates, refugee identity and community formation are fluid processes that incorporate shared histories and experiences for material and/or social purposes whether or not populations are resettled as communities or in small, diffuse groups, as in the case of the US refugee resettlement program. We can hypothesize, then, that resettlement and

building community in Kentucky might also require dialectically linked material and social components and that charity, as a material and social act, might play a part in this.

Immigrant assimilation and acculturation have become particularly contentious in the case of Muslims due to the current popularity of Islamophobic rhetoric, the “Clash of Civilizations” narrative, and a new increase in xenophobic nativism. Concerns that foreign, often Muslim, refugees will fail to integrate socially and economically and will become a burden on the US welfare system are largely absent from the academy, but are still influential in US politics and popular anti-refugee rhetoric. In her ethnography of Somali Bantu refugee resettlement in Lewiston, Maine, Catherine Besteman (2016) chronicles the conflict between refugee communities and their helpers, who imagine an integration process involving mutual transformation, and assimilationists, who narrate a past in which previous immigrants unconditionally shed their language and culture and adapted with no government assistance. She writes, “Integration, for the helpers and immigrants alike, is about feeling safe and taking care of each other, not about neoliberal conceptions of personal responsibility or conformity to mainstream American norms and values” (Besteman 2016, 287). Opponents of Somali Bantu resettlement, on the other hand, criticize black, Muslim Somalis as outsiders, undeserving of aid in contrast to white, unemployed locals (ibid). Why should their tax dollars, they ask, be paid to people who are outsiders to their community and their country?

The current form of the refugee resettlement program, as many scholars have pointed out, is a product of 1980s welfare reform aimed at closely governing welfare recipients and removing as many people as possible from government assistance (Smith 2013; Koyama 2014; Besteman 2016). This lives on in the mandate for economic self-

sufficiency in 90 days, a period that most agree is insufficient. In the rush to remove refugees from public assistance programs, already marginalized refugees continue to be marginalized and subordinated in the workplace due to a lack of training and support. Religious organizations, representing alternative organizing principles and values, could play a part in advocating for better aid and mediating conflicts with resettlement agencies when clients believe that their autonomy is being unfairly compromised. Such action has been observed in Hartford, CT, where Muslim FBOs helped to organize a response to deficient housing provisions and support mosque members after they are no longer eligible for government aid (Bauer and Chivakos 2010).

Current scholarship has little to say about Muslim FBOs' role in encouraging (using Berry's terminology) "contact and participation." In fact, several case studies claim that while mosques, especially ethnic mosques, play an important part in communities' cultural maintenance or the creation of ethnic solidarities, they may be an impediment to integration with the larger local community (Allen 2009; Bauer and Chivakos 2010). How accurate is this conclusion? Although they admit that widespread anti-Muslim discrimination creates an adversarial environment for those immigrants and refugees who organize around Islam, Portes and Rumbaut found no evidence based on a variety of data sources that mosque attendance creates barriers to integration (2014, 341-345). Even if one argues that the barrier to integration is the creation of ethnoreligious mosques, data on ethnic organizing in a variety of American immigrant communities suggests that immigrants who have a strong sense of ethnic pride and are involved in transnational politics naturalize at a high rate and show promising markers of economic and social integration (2014, 212-213).

Churches and non-Muslim volunteers working with Muslim refugees are recognized in these same case studies for their ability to bridge the gap between refugee and local communities (Allen 2009; Bauer and Chivakos 2010). Eby et al. (2011) challenges the Christian benefactor/Muslim beneficiary trope by talking about the benefits of refugee co-sponsorship with faith communities and encouraging engaging with a variety of religious groups, yet all the examples of successful co-sponsorship in the article are about churches. A larger body of literature about Christian and Jewish benefactors is to be expected considering the long history of Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish involvement in US refugee resettlement and the relatively short history of Muslim FBOs in most US cities. However, this small scope of studies of mosques leads to some clear weaknesses. Not all mosques are ethnoreligious centers; the many multicultural mosques present in the US that are attended by longtime residents make few appearances in the current literature. When taking these centers into account and recognizing the ethnoreligious churches also exist, greater similarities between mosques and churches might be expected in terms of supporting both cultural maintenance and contact and participation.

A more nuanced analysis of Muslim communities in the US shows that Muslim FBOs are not non-native, separate from, or counter to the dominant cultural group by default. Documented debates within mosques and literature from Muslim intellectuals reveal communities grappling with questions of integration. How much should Muslim immigrants accommodate Western lifestyles? To what extent can or should religion change? What is the function of a mosque? While these conversations have received more attention in the European context, they are still relevant in US immigrant

populations. As early as 1987, a study of Muslim immigrants in the US concluded that, while many welcomed assimilation, some felt that becoming more American might compromise Islamic values (Haddad and Lummis 1987, 171). Many public intellectuals have stepped up to address these concerns, calling for a place for Islam in American religious pluralism and exploring what an American or Western Islam should look like (Haddad 2011). Influential Swiss philosopher Tariq Ramadan, for example, proposes a complete reevaluation of Islamic law and religious interpretation in a modern Western context. He writes, “a believing consciousness must live within his own time, at the heart of his society... and put his energy into this constant dialectical movement between the essential principles mined by Revelation and actual circumstances” (Ramadan 2011[2004], 71-72). He argues that, while there are essential Islamic values that must be preserved, Muslims must integrate new realities of life in the West into their religious practice. Intellectuals like Ramadan imagine an integration process in which Muslim immigrants assimilate in some ways without abandoning essential parts of their religious heritage.

Researchers and aid workers are increasingly recognizing that the overlapping nature of displacement leads to integration processes involving not just a displaced community and a local community, but groups that Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh calls “refugee-hosts” (2016, 26). These are refugees who have found themselves in a protracted state of displacement and share the same spaces and resources as newer arrivals. While they cannot be considered fully “integrated”, they constitute a part of the host community. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh cites the solidarities and tensions between urban communities of Palestinian, Iraqi, and Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Might we identify

refugee-hosts in the U.S.? With an over fifty-year history of government-sponsored refugee resettlement, it would be surprising to *not* observe previous displaced populations playing key roles in refugee integration. Taking this a step further, it is reasonable to predict that one might observe a larger category of immigrant-hosts – populations with migration histories that distinguish them from dominant native groups. The recognition that host communities are diverse groups of people with overlapping migration histories challenges essentialized understandings of being “local”. Religious, ethnic, racial, and national plurality is the rule rather than the exception when we consider American host communities. The omission of minority groups reflects a possibly damaging disempowerment of refugee and immigrant groups in their own process of adapting to and joining the local community.

The current literature highlights ethical debates around the role of religion in humanitarian aid and immigrant and refugee integration. While it is clear that FBOs play an important part in the growing global nonprofit sector, scholars debate whether organizations that are inspired by religious calls to charity can be neutral enough to provide services without overt or implied coercion. Evidence suggests, however, that FBOs have significant advantages in working with client populations for whom faith is a more familiar organizational and ethical system than humanitarianism. Current studies of refugee and immigrant integration suggest that religious engagement on the part of immigrants can promote integration through the creation of ethnic solidarities within ethnoreligious communities and religious solidarities between newcomers and locals. Although some scholars have hypothesized that Islamophobia in the US might limit the utility of mosque involvement for promoting local community integration, there is not yet

any evidence to suggest that Muslim religious engagement will be less helpful for integration outcomes than engagement in other religious groups. Muslim FBO involvement in aid provision at the local level has been minimally studied, but studies of Christian and Jewish FBOs' work in US refugee resettlement suggest that Muslim FBOs could enhance local integration through their work.

Background

Setting the stage for a discussion of Muslim charity (in Arabic, *al-‘amāl al-khayriyya*, literally “good works”) as it occurs in one American city requires a wide breadth of historical background, which is organized here starting at the global level and ending at the local level. This section begins with a very brief discussion of charity as it has been practiced in Muslim faith traditions across time and space with some focus on the forms utilized within the Ottoman Empire. This is followed by a description of the late 20th century rise of international Muslim FBOs and increasing Muslim immigrant organizing during the same period. Next is a summary of the U.S. refugee program’s faith-based history and recent program goals for religious community engagement. Finally, a discussion of Louisville’s particular migration and resettlement history ends with some comments on how current political debates regarding migration and security are impacting Louisville’s Muslim and refugee communities.

Charitable work has a long history in Muslim faith traditions. Various charitable contributions, such as *zakat*, a pillar of Islam, and *ṣadaqa*, a voluntary form of charity, are incumbent upon all who can afford to give. There is also a tradition within Islamic societies of donating money or land to a *waqf*, a kind of charitable endowment that uses

proceeds to distribute food to the poor and fund public service and building projects. Anonymous charitable contributions are generally preferred based on Qur'anic advice to give in secret and give all glory to God, but, historically, rulers and nobles made massive public contributions on special occasions. For example, Ottoman leaders would sponsor large public feasts to celebrate weddings and births, citing these as part of their Muslim duty. Although patterns of giving and receiving varied significantly based on the social context, focus has generally been on projects that provide subsistence and relief, not social mobility. Historian Amy Singer (2008) frames the history of charitable giving in the Muslim world as one of reciprocal acts that created particular rights and responsibilities and maintained power structures. The right to aid and the type and amount of aid given was contingent on expected social standing; for example, a formerly wealthy individual could be particularly entitled to aid and an orphan girl's condition could be remedied by providing a dowry (Singer 2008, 159; 166).

In the 19th century, the era of the Ottoman Tanzimat Reforms², the central government took control of the large and powerful Ottoman waqfs so that they might use their revenue to implement modernization projects. European investors had long complained that the waqf system tied up too much land that they might buy in trusts and the Ottoman central government had come to resent the fact that waqfs could not be taxed (ibid, 187). Western European ideas about managing pauper populations in institutional settings were also adopted during this era in many parts of the Middle East and South Asia. Philanthropic associations based on the Western model emerged, some of which

² A series of government reforms and infrastructure projects aimed at modernizing the Ottoman Empire based on a Western model.

were later incorporated into mid-20th century waqf law based on a combination of the waqf tradition and American foundation law (ibid, 191).

In the early 1980s, many new international Muslim FBOs formed to respond to conflicts in the Middle East and East Africa. This period coincided with the failure of secular nationalist movements and states in the Middle East and North Africa and the rise of global Islamist politics. Natural disasters and conflicts in Muslim-majority regions presented opportunities to demonstrate “Islamic solidarity.” Early aid efforts were funded by immigrant communities in the UK and other areas of the Global North and oil money from the Gulf States. In Afghanistan, many Islamist organizations openly allied themselves with the mujahidin³ and some combined relief activities at the Afghanistan-Pakistan border with proselytizing and paramilitary activity (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003, 83). During the 1990s conflict in Bosnia, some Muslim FBOs refused to aid Serbs and Croats, believing that solidarity with Bosnian Muslims precluded aiding their enemies, while others aided all sides, but saw their efforts as an opportunity to exhibit their faith to possible converts (ibid). Alongside these highly politically engaged Islamist groups, faith-based humanitarian organizations based in the UK like Muslim Aid and Islamic Relief also grew rapidly based on their work in Bosnia and the Horn of Africa. Islamic Relief, still in its infancy as an aid provider, saw its donation revenues quadruple in support of its Bosnia program (ibid, 133).

The involvement of paramilitary and missionary Islamist organizations in the conflicts of the 1980s and early 1990s haunt these relief-oriented, non-missionary Muslim FBOs that emerged during the same period. Such organizations, especially those

³ The Afghan mujahidin were groups of Islamist fighters engaged in a rebellion against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the Soviet-aligned Afghan central government starting in the late 1970s.

headquartered in the Global North, have gone to great lengths to distance themselves from more faith-permeated groups and to disavow connections to “Global Terror”. Accusations of links to militancy multiplied after the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and Washington DC, which many believed were funded by charitable fronts (Peterson 2011, 134). Zakat (much like jihad) has increasingly been falsely associated with terrorism, especially in the US. Although the UK Charity Commission encourages Muslim participation, in recent years, several Muslim charities in the US and UK have been charged with aiding terror groups and many have been added to the US State Department’s “designated foreign terrorist organization” list (Benthall 2011). In the Middle East and South Asia, Islamist political groups with charity wings were subject to crackdowns during this same period, as their activities were seen as threatening to the political order (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003, 77).

In the U.S. during this period of growth in international Islamic charity, the immigrant Muslim community was growing rapidly. Before the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which eliminated many of the quotas that previously limited immigration from non-European countries, most Muslims in the US were African-American reverts⁴ and converts of other races and ethnicities (Nyang 1999; Smith 1999). Muslim organizations and spaces of worship experienced accelerated growth in the 1960s. Immigrant Sunni Muslim leadership coalesced around Muslim Student Associations (MSA), whose educated immigrant alumni, having secured visas in the 1960s and 1970s, established both local and national institutions (ibid). As of 2014,

⁴ The term “revert” here reflects the self-identification of many Muslim African-Americans who consider their Islamic practice to be a return to the faith of their West African ancestors who were forcibly converted to Christianity during enslavement. Historians agree that the first Muslim Americans were African slaves (see Nyang 1999, Smith 1999).

an estimated 61 percent of all Muslims in the US were first generation immigrants and an additional 17 percent had at least one foreign-born parent (Pew Research Center 2015, 54). Rising Muslim populations include significant numbers of refugees. The post-Cold War period has witnessed conflict and displacement impacting Muslim communities in Iraq, former Yugoslavia, Uzbekistan, Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Myanmar/Burma, and, most recently, Syria. In fiscal year 2015, majority-Muslim Iraqis were the second largest population of refugees resettled in the U.S. and majority-Muslim Somalis were the third largest (ORR 2016).

The project of creating an American Islam and the Muslim community's role in the immigrant experience have had a considerable impact on the function of mosques in the US. Mosques in the Middle East and South Asia are generally not social or community-building spaces, but purely places for worship. Women rarely pray at the mosque and little takes place there other than the call to prayer and Friday sermons. Since the late 1990s, scholars have observed that American mosques and their leaders are increasingly taking on non-traditional roles more like those of Christian and Jewish leaders and organizations, including providing pastoral care, facilitating wedding and funeral ceremonies, educating young people, and publicly representing their community in venues like interfaith programs (Nyang 1999; Smith 1999; Badr 2000). Women often take the lead in community-building and fundraising activities, reflecting the mosque's reconfiguration as a social center open to entire families and the acceptance of women's traditional role in social networking, particularly where sharing food is involved (Smith 1999; Badr 2000). Hoda Badr's case study of Al-Noor Mosque in Houston even describes

a halal “food stamp” and cash assistance program implemented by a formal “zakat committee” (2000).

These changes to the mosque in the American context are a source of significant tension within some congregations. These debates usually divide recent arrivals and more established groups and can become particularly contentious when they involve “imported imams,” foreign religious scholars hired to lead mosques in the absence of qualified locals, especially those with desired language skills (Nyang 1999, 66). Trained outside of the US, these imams are often less sympathetic to reformist scholars who call for the adaptation of Islamic practice to the local context and/or are unprepared for additional responsibilities. For some, adoption of American customs seems to compromise the preservation of a distinct Muslim identity (Haddad and Lummis 1987, 68). Changes, then, often emanate from congregations, with young people and long-time members agitating for a different American Muslim practice and taking inspiration from popular public intellectuals.

With Muslim FBOs providing broadening social and community services, despite some internal resistance to change, they are becoming more accessible partners in the refugee resettlement process. The U.S. refugee resettlement system has long recognized the utility of working with FBOs, designating voluntary agencies (known colloquially as “volags”) as partners in services for refugee reception and placement. This system originated in piece-meal responses to displacement during post-WWII reconstruction and the Cold War (Nichols 1988). It is notable, however, that government support has generally been allocated to FBOs representing the “Three Faiths” (Protestant Christian, Catholic, and Jewish). Of the nine voluntary organizations currently participating in the

U.S. Refugee Reception and Placement Program, four are affiliated with Protestant churches or missions, one with the Catholic Church, and one with the Jewish community. Two of the remaining three are explicitly secular and the last is associated with the Ethiopian community.

Burgeoning religious diversity in the U.S., partially due to migration, is creating opportunities for groups outside of the “Three Faiths” to expand their charitable engagements. As early as 2003, a Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) primer for providers serving Muslim refugees advised that “Resettlement offices can reach out to local mosques and Islamic schools and look for ways to collaborate on projects that will strengthen the resettlement network and provide a more coordinated support system for newly arriving refugees” (39). A recent article argues that faith-based actors play an important role in the successes of the U.S. refugee resettlement process because they constitute organizations based on deep commitments to service with preexisting ties to local community resources that can advocate for refugees (Eby et al. 2011). The authors cite statistics and ethnographic evidence that indicates that community co-sponsorship improves job prospects and feelings of positive integration. It also seems to improve perceptions of new refugee groups within religious communities.

Muslim migration and resettlement trends in Louisville seem to reflect national trends. The first mosques were established in the early 1980s by South Asian and Arab Muslims, most of whom came to the U.S. for work and education after changes in immigration law in the 1960s. In the 1990s, these communities were joined by refugees from Bosnia and Kosovo, Iraq (in small numbers compared to later trends), Libya, and Somalia (starting with the Banadir and Bravan minority groups, then the “Somali

Bantu”). The 2000s brought greater numbers from Somalia (including ethnic Somalis), Meskhetian Turks from the former Soviet Union, some Sudanese from the north (especially from the Darfur region), and the beginning of the most recent forced migration out of Iraq.

Louisville’s highly segregated racial and socioeconomic landscape has had a profound impact on the local geography of resettlement. A 2010 report from the Metropolitan Housing Commission states that “race, gender, disability, poverty, poor housing conditions, and poor health conditions are concentrated in the same areas of... [Jefferson] county” (4). These conditions are the legacy of a complex system of discriminatory housing policies implemented throughout the 20th century that resulted in disinvestment in African-American neighborhoods and the concentration of multifamily residences in particular parts of the city. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter II and Chapter III, segregation in Louisville has made cooperation between Muslim immigrant professionals and refugee populations more challenging; the community is spatially divided, replicating and perpetuating broader socioeconomic segregation. Muslim professionals tend to reside in Eastern Jefferson County, while refugees are housed in lower income neighborhoods in South and West Louisville.

KRM is one of two resettlement agencies, the other being Catholic Charities, that take refugee cases in Louisville. KRM functions as an affiliate of two national voluntary organizations, Church World Service (CWS) and Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM). Founded in 1990 by a member of Highland Presbyterian Church working from her kitchen and animated by the Christian call to welcome the stranger, KRM has expanded into one of the largest refugee resettlement organizations under the jurisdiction of the

Kentucky Office for Refugees. It now has an office in Lexington and a growing presence in Northern Kentucky. The Louisville office, located in an aging former nursing home tucked into a trendy neighborhood, is a disorienting maze of offices full of harried staff members and refugee clients speaking dozens of languages. Refugee mothers and fathers lead or carry young children or, on some days, children old enough to walk wander bored in the waiting room or the hall while their guardians sort through paperwork. KRM's rapid growth means that few offices are private. Instead, donated desks and filing cabinets are shoved in every corner and staff work within talking distance of each other. The hallways and offices are busiest during breaks between daily English classes, as the second floor waiting room fills with clients jockeying for a chance to talk to their caseworkers and others relax with a bite to eat or a cigarette on the porch.

Voluntary agency affiliates like KRM are barred from proselytizing or discriminating based on religion in their services, but they do have strong links to religious organizations. KRM has a strong relationship with Protestant churches in Louisville, especially the Presbyterian church, the Episcopal church, and some liberal Baptist churches. Staff members have a variety of reasons for feeling the need to serve refugees and, for many, religious faith is an important but generally unspoken part of that. Others see their work as part of a career path as a nonprofit professional. These two ideas are not mutually exclusive and the tension between these motivations is under the surface in KRM's everyday workings.

Based on national standards for Resettlement and Placement (R&P) Services, resettlement agencies are required to provide certain types of assistance during the first 90 days after the arrival of a refugee. These initially include procuring a rental apartment

or house of suitable size, furnishing it based on a list of required items, picking up the newly arrived family or individual at the airport, and providing a warm, culturally appropriate meal. Refugees are subsequently provided with aid in applying for public assistance, enrolling children in public school, enrolling in adult English classes (in Louisville, provided by the agency), and finding jobs for employable adults. In order to provide cost-effective and suitable services, even after the initial 90 day R&P period, which is often insufficient in the search for work and English education, KRM relies on private donations, grants, and volunteers. KRM also coordinates co-sponsorship programs in which a local organization, usually a church, agrees to help a refugee family by taking over some responsibility for R&P Services. The co-sponsors prepare the apartment or house, often with items donated by members, to save R&P money for more pressing expenses, pledge to donate an amount of money to supplement the federal allowance, greet the family at the airport, and provide them with local connections and social support.

The current moment is a contentious time for the U.S. refugee program and immigrant Muslim communities across the U.S. As fieldwork for this study was conducted, the newly inaugurated President Trump issued two nearly identical executive orders in January and March 2017 temporarily banning nationals of seven majority-Muslim countries from entering the U.S. and suspending the refugee program for 120 days pending investigation of security procedures in the vetting process. The orders also sought to reduce the cap on refugee arrivals from 110,000 to 50,000. During this fieldwork, both orders were stayed pending court rulings on their constitutionality, but on June 26, 2017, the Supreme Court issued a decision allowing the 120 day suspension of

refugee arrivals to begin, but exempting “foreign nationals who have a credible claim of a bona fide relationship with a person or entity in the United States,” (International Refugee Assistance Project v. Trump 582 U. S. 12 (2017)). Muslim immigrants and refugees have become wary of travel and fear rumors of future Muslim internment camps. The refugee program is in a state of limbo and it is unclear whether declining arrival numbers will continue to justify current infrastructure. Refugee resettlement agencies across the country have frozen hiring and are considering or implementing layoffs. KRM has been able to maintain its budget so far because it has diversified its funding sources over the years, but it is unclear what the future will hold, since President Trump’s Fiscal Year 2018 Proposed Budget specifically names refugees as overly taxing on the Department of Health and Human Services’ funding (Office of Management and Budget 2017). Recent events have further cemented the political entwinement of Islamophobic and xenophobic rhetoric that came to the fore in response to a series of terror attacks in Paris in November 2015 in which suspects were initially rumored to have entered France along with a group of Syrian refugees. At that time, media attention was fixed on refugee resettlement as it had never been before and a strong association was built between “refugee” and “Muslim.” This connection was so strong that individuals began to regularly write checks to Louisville mosques to “help the refugees.” This phenomenon is discussed in more detail later.

Methods

Data collection for this project consisted of ethnographic methods in the form of a combination of participant observation and semi-structured interviews over a period of

six months (January 2017-May 2017). I observed and took part in volunteer work and public events at the offices of Kentucky Refugee Ministries as well as four large Islamic centers⁵ (three Sunni centers and one Shi'a center) and a local Turkish cultural center that is often used as a gathering and worship space. These methods provided valuable information on the dynamics of relationships between employees, volunteers, the resettlement agency, and clients.

A total of nineteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with three sets of participants. The first group were three employees of KRM who had been directly involved in partnerships with Muslim communities. This included a Muslim community leader, as KRM employs individuals of all faith backgrounds and some of them are leaders in their religious communities. The second group of participants were thirteen Muslim community leaders and volunteers who have collected donations and participated in co-sponsorships with KRM. "Community leaders" included both individuals with formal standing and titles and well-respected, active community members. These leaders represented a variety of community groups segmented by sect, race, ethnicity, and class. The third group were seven refugees and former refugees (overlapping with the other two groups) who participated in and/or directly benefitted from Muslim community support, and encompassed individuals from Iraq, Somalia, and Syria. These three groups were chosen because they have demonstrated a willingness to seek support from the Muslim community, likely because their populations are majority Muslim, and they represent

⁵ Although all four of these organizations use the designation "Islamic center" in their official names, participants often referred to them interchangeably as "Islamic center" and "mosque". The usage of "mosque" and "Islamic center" in this thesis reflects that usage.

variation along perceived racial, ethnic, and sectarian lines. Three of these individuals were recent arrivals from Syria.

Potential interview participants were identified during participant observation and invited to participate in person with an explanation of the purpose of the study and an exchange of contact information. The snowball method, which involves the use of referrals at the end of each interview, were also used to expand recruitment while also serving to identify social networks. This method was chosen because the study group was small and diffuse and thus locating important group members required networking with group members and KRM staff. The snowball method is also an effective sampling method in this case because connecting through references builds trust between the researcher and the participants.

Interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to an hour and a half and sought to answer the following descriptive questions: How is the relationship between KRM and mosques/Islamic centers structured? How has the relationship changed over time? How effective do stakeholders perceive their relationship to be? What challenges have they witnessed in developing and maintaining the relationship? What advantages or disadvantages does the current system display as compared to the past? What do stakeholders think could be improved about KRM and mosques/Islamic centers' partnership? (See Appendix A for a full interview schedule.) Consent for participation in this study was obtained orally before beginning interviews with the use of a preamble. Interviews were documented using an audio recording device and later transcribed. When necessary and possible, follow-up interviews were conducted to clarify data and solicit additional information. Following standard anthropological ethics, all participant names

have been replaced with pseudonyms and some identifiable information has not been disclosed. This allows participants to speak freely without fear of consequences.

Following data collection, I identified themes relevant to the previously identified research questions and coded the notes and transcripts based on those themes using QDA Minor Lite. Then the coded data was analyzed based on relevant theoretical frameworks. Follow-up meetings with stakeholders to collaborate on possible courses of action and policy recommendations based on the findings are anticipated.

My positionality as a white, American, non-Muslim woman and a former employee at KRM is an important factor to consider as part of this fieldwork. KRM employees were often familiar former co-workers and friends, which made them extremely open to discussing sensitive topics. At the same time, it often meant that they felt it unnecessary to explain agency processes. In most fieldwork settings, I was readily associated with KRM and refugees and Muslim volunteers assumed, despite my attempts at clarification, that I was attending events as an agency representative. To my knowledge, this was always a positive association; as an English instructor, I was rarely associated with tough casework decisions and I occasionally provided basic interpretation support for Arabic-speaking clients. At times, this meant that interlocutors asked me policy questions as an assumed “expert.” I was not always able to meet their expectations. Participants still seemed quite willing to critique KRM’s services in my presence, but it is likely that their criticisms would have been more pointed and harsher if I was not associated with the organization.

As a woman entering gender-segregated Muslim spaces, I spent far more time interacting with women during participant observation. Some public events were less

segregated than others, but my field notes still speak less clearly to men's roles and participation. There is a positive side to this: as I elaborate later, the most active Muslim volunteers are women and young adults who, having grown-up in the U.S., are less sensitive to gender divisions than first generation immigrants.

CHAPTER II

MUSLIM REFUGEE EXPERIENCES IN NARRATION

I met Adan at an event organized by KRM to promote the co-sponsorship program. A young man at the mosque where he serves on the executive board had encouraged him to attend. With his dark skin and colorful prayer cap, he stood out in the mostly white group of attendees. As a former refugee, a member of the Bravan ethnic group from Somalia, and a Muslim community leader, he was clearly in the minority. He considered the proceedings with a serious air, thoughtfully nodding and talking very little. Later, he tells me about when there were no ethnic groceries in Louisville, few mosques, and not many people who looked or sounded like him. As an interpreter for several languages, he has witnessed how Louisville has changed over the years. When I ask him about Somali community groups, he shakes his head and tells me a story about the Meskhetian Turks. He was interpreting for a group of Arabic speakers one day and a group of Turks approached him and excitedly started asking him questions in broken English. They had seen his prayer cap and were desperate for information about other Muslims. A community member had died unexpectedly and they didn't want to bury her in a Christian cemetery. He helped them arrange a burial in the Muslim cemetery and eventually connected them with the mosques in town. Ending the story, he said that these people had worked very hard, "most of them live in very nice areas, huge buildings, those

who were living in Dena Drive, those who were living in Southside, everybody moved to a nice house because they are more civilized than our people; our people, their priority is saving money.” In expressing his disappointment with the Somali community’s propensity for sending money away to extended family without improving their own living conditions and their comparative poverty, Adan compared them to another Muslim refugee group.

Throughout my fieldwork, these sorts of comparisons were common, especially those that celebrated the relative success of the Meskhetian Turks and Bosnians in comparison to the considerable struggles that Iraqis and Somalis continue to face. These narratives are key to how locals, especially observant Muslims, understand the processes of resettlement and adaptation and how they set expectations for new groups. They also shed light on how they define “making it” and what indicators they look for when determining what groups have been successful and why. After a brief historical overview of the largest majority-Muslim refugee and immigrant groups that have arrived in Louisville since the 1990s, this chapter describes and explores three major themes about the refugee resettlement experience culled from stories that Muslim community members tell: housing struggles and quality, community organization, and workforce professionalization. Refugees’ success at moving into better housing conditions, creating community groups, and achieving a level of education that allows for a class of educated professionals is key to their recognition as model migrants in the Muslim community.

These three themes are eminently linked to desires to move beyond self-sufficiency to wealth. Refugees, like other migrants to the US, strive for the material trappings of the American dream, things that show that they are not just able to get by,

but that they are thriving and building a better future for their children. While resettlement agencies focus on social and economic stability and a degree of independence from state aid as part of their programmatic goals, denoted in their terminology as “self-sufficiency,” community members tend to have longer term and more ambitious goals and expectations in line with more broadly American hopes and dreams. After the initial resettlement period, success means upward mobility.

Determining the objective veracity of the many narratives explored here is beyond the scope of this project and is not the goal of ethnography. Some of these narratives are second or third hand accounts about events that took place over twenty years ago. There are many robust written accounts of these groups’ struggles in their country of origin and in exile as well as their American journeys (see: Besteman 2016; Hansen 2003; Mirkhanova 2006; Sassoan 2011). What is important for this account of charitable responses is the different ways that these refugee experiences are perceived and narrated. They both reflect and shape the ways in which Muslims in Louisville, representing contrasting migration experiences and divided in terms of race, ethnicity, and class, have attempted to create a collective approach to supporting new refugee populations.

Muslim immigrants to Louisville before the 1990s, as mentioned previously, were mostly part of a national trend of immigrant graduate students and professionals from the Middle East and South Asia who came to the US after the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Some had likely arrived among the mostly Christian Lebanese and Syrian immigrants of the early 20th century, but these immigrants were few in number and it does not seem that they organized around their faith. In 1980, after years of worshipping in homes and rented spaces, a group of these professional immigrant

Muslims constructed Louisville's first purpose-built mosque just down the street from the Lebanese American Country Club on River Road. Professional opportunities continue to attract immigrants from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and many other countries with large Muslim populations to Louisville. In their own migration experiences, these immigrants have used their education and strong English skills as an entrée into the middle and upper classes.

According to long-time community members and KRM staff members, the first Bosnian refugees arrived in Louisville in 1992 fleeing civil war in what was then a disintegrating Yugoslavia. They were the first majority-Muslim group to be resettled to Louisville in large numbers with arrivals continuing until 2002. In 1999, they were joined by Kosovar refugees, many of whom were also practicing Muslims with shared languages and traditions. Both groups had high average levels of education in their country of origin. Almost all adult Bosnian and Kosovar refugees had at least a high school education and a large number had attended university or technical school.

Somali resettlement started in 1994 and proceeded in waves based on membership in vulnerable groups or groups of special interest to the US. A small number of Somalis who had worked in embassies arrived in 1994 and 1995 fleeing civil war, followed by members of the Banadir ethnic group in 1996, ethnic Bravans in 1997, and "Somali Bantus"⁶ starting in 2004. Ethnic Somalis arrived later, and are still represented in Louisville's caseload, coming through both Catholic Charities and KRM; community members report that some ethnic Somalis had arrived earlier along with the Banadirs,

⁶ "Bantu" is a term that was coined by Italian colonizers to describe riverine agriculturalists in southern Somalia who had originally been brought to the area as slaves. These groups had no shared ethnic identity until persecution during the Somali Civil War and marginalization in Kenyan refugee camps brought them together (Besteman 2016, 79-81).

Bravans, and Bantus. Banadirs and Bravans are mostly from coastal cities where they were involved in maritime trade and the fishing industry. Most Somali Bantu are from rural areas and many had no access to secondary education in Somalia. Somali refugees have experienced extremely protracted displacement due to continuous conflict in the region since the early 1990s. Many young adults were born and raised in Kenyan refugee camps where Somalis have no right to work and no right to travel outside of the camp borders.

The first, small group of Iraqi refugees came to Louisville between 1996 and 1997 through a US military evacuation program aimed at protecting those associated with the US government in Iraqi Kurdistan from an Iraqi military incursion. Most Iraqis arrived in Louisville after the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and subsequent sectarian conflict, with numbers increasing in 2007 and continuing to the present. Louisville receives a significant number of SIV (special immigrant visa) cases, or families granted permission to come directly from Iraq to the US because a family member was employed by the US military and is now in danger due to that affiliation. While SIVs are not refugees based on the standards of international law, they experience many of the same challenges as refugees and receive the same support afforded to refugees during resettlement. Iraqi refugees are unique among Muslim refugees in Louisville in that there are both large Iraqi Sunni and Shi'a Muslim communities. There is also a significant linguistic and cultural divide in the resettled community between Sunni Muslim Arabs and Kurds.

A small but significant migration of Meskhetian (or Ahiska) Turkish refugees from the Krasnodar region of Russia, where they had experienced discrimination and statelessness after a history of repeated displacement, occurred between 2004 and 2006.

In Russia, Meskhetian Turks were unable to pursue most types of vocational training or other forms of education because of widespread discrimination. Their job prospects were limited to agriculture and unskilled labor. Since their arrival in Louisville, their community has often collaborated with and received assistance from the Bosnian community as their shared Ottoman history means that they have many traditions and linguistic features in common.

Other than the close relationships between Bosnians, Kosovars, and Meskhetians and widespread organizing between different immigrant professional groups, social contact between different Muslim refugee and immigrant groups was very limited until recently. Still, brief contacts and rumors led to the following, surprisingly coherent set of narratives and beliefs about which refugees were successful, which were not, and why that was the case.

Housing

The physical location where resettlement begins has taken on special meaning in Louisville. The neighborhoods and, to some extent, the apartment complexes where refugees live on arrival have not changed considerably since the late 1990s. This is unsurprising when one considers the barriers that resettlement agencies face when attempting to find affordable housing; landlords must agree to rent to a family before they arrive with no credit, no social security number, and no secure income. Landlords who will agree to these terms are few and tend to be in low income neighborhoods. Resettlement agencies often develop a relationship with certain landlords, or certain rental companies, to guarantee housing for future refugees. These apartment complexes

have taken on connotations of poverty and struggle. If you are successful, you move. If you are not successful, you stay.

When immigrants and refugees talk about the success enjoyed by the Meskhetian Turks or the Bosnians, they often talk about their homes. This is evident in Adan's account of the Meskhetian Turks moving into large homes. A Turkish immigrant who knows many of the Meskhetian refugees gave a similar account, saying "When I first came here that was their fourth year or fifth year and they all have nice cars and nice houses in this really short amount of time... they all live in the same big house like everybody's working like man, woman, everybody." Bosnians, they say, worked their way into similar accommodations.

Moving out of these poorer neighborhoods is a key part of many former refugees' hopes for the future. When discussing housing conditions for new arrivals, Marwa, an Iraqi woman who came to Louisville to join her husband many years ago, commented that she would like to move to the East End someday. She says that the environment in her neighborhood and the other neighborhoods where new refugees live is not good for their morale and that their children pick up bad influences from these places. She qualified her statements with a familiar refrain, "Iraq is a rich country". This phrase is often used when Iraqis from wealthy families, especially SIVs, attempt to understand the dissonance of moving from a country where they were well-off and well-respected to a country where they live in relatively poor conditions and work for low wages. It is also a reaction to fellow refugees from other countries who do not seem to be as shocked or disappointed by housing or employment conditions in the US.

The current conditions that resettled Somali refugees experience complicates this picture of successful families escaping poor neighborhoods. While some Somalis share the same ambition of leaving the apartment complexes and neighborhoods where they are placed, they face additional barriers to moving into more affluent neighborhoods because they are doubly marked as Black and Muslim in an American context. For example, a young Somali man who participates in charitable work recalled a time when he and his wife went to look for an apartment in Jeffersontown, a middle class, mostly white and South Asian suburb. He saw a “for rent” sign at one complex, but when he inquired about the apartment at the office an employee told him that the apartment was no longer available. Suspecting racial discrimination, he asked his wife, who had been waiting in the car, to call; the same employee told her that an apartment was available. There are clearly reasons beyond financial success or failure that prevent Somalis from moving to different areas.

Furthermore, some of the strategies that Somalis use to support their families actively disincentivize moving into wealthier neighborhoods. First, most Somalis prioritize transnational ties with family members in Somalia or Somali refugee camps and support one or more other families with remittances. Some go as far as to invest in businesses or real estate in Somalia, hoping that they will one day return to peace and a secure income in their country of origin. This is no small feat considering the average size of a Somali family; not taking extended kin into account, it is not uncommon for a Somali couple to care for five or more children. These financial priorities make for a small household budget and incentivize staying in low rent apartments. Even Adan, who frowns on the practice of sending so much money out of the country, admits that relatives

expect remittances and the money goes much farther in Somalia or Kenya than it does in the US. He is still frustrated that so many families with sufficient income tighten their belts and send their money away instead of investing it in Louisville. He feels that this makes them look “uncivilized” and “disreputable.”

In addition, proximity can outweigh the disadvantages of living in an undesirable area. Mukhtaar, a former member of Somali Youth of Louisville who arrived as a teenager, explains that many Somalis prefer to live in the same neighborhoods, even if the apartment complexes are not safe or well-maintained, because they can share resources more easily. For example, he remembers that before he had a car, he would walk from school to Somali Mall, a building where Somalis rent spaces to run businesses in a market style. He would chat and drink coffee with other young men then, when he was ready to leave, he would catch a ride home from anyone driving to his neighborhood. Until they can afford a car, many Somalis use a similar method to carpool to work or the grocery store. He criticizes KRM for settling Somalis in new and different neighborhoods because this makes it more difficult for them to meet other Somalis and take advantage of their support. As far as he is concerned, housing conditions are immaterial as long as people live close to each other and are able to build and maintain good social relations. Staying in these neighborhoods is not failure; it is adaptation. Talking about a recent visit to an apartment complex with many Somali residents, he smiles while describing clothing hung to dry on every surface. It reminds him of the refugee camp where he grew up in Kenya. “This apartment needs a laundry room,” he remarks. What for some is a mark of a continuing struggle for survival that shouldn’t properly be thought of as success can seem advantageous from an alternate perspective.

Despite these alternative narratives, the most popular narratives hold that moving out is the first step in a refugee success story. There are clearly aspects of this rooted in the realities of living in low-income housing in Louisville. As I discuss in more detail in the next chapter, apartments in these neighborhoods are often plagued by pest infestations, negligent landlords, and high crime rates. Just this year, a young Somali girl was critically injured while watching TV in her family's apartment when a stray bullet came through a window and struck her. The bitter irony of refugees fearing everyday violence and bearing poor living conditions in the US after fleeing violence and poor living conditions in their countries of origin is not lost on KRM staff or Muslim volunteers. Despite the advantages of pooling resources in ethnic or national enclaves created through placement on arrival, moving out remains a salient indicator that a refugee community is moving up in the world.

Organizing Community

The ability to organize formal community events and spaces is narrated simultaneously as a cause of refugee success and a sign that refugees have become successful. While refugees often start connecting informally with members of their ethnic, sectarian, or national communities soon after arrival, it usually takes many years for community members to organize formal gatherings and many more to pool the money necessary to rent or buy a space in which to gather. Two former refugee community members guessed, based on their experience, that it takes about five years for refugees to settle in and become stable enough to invest time, energy, and money into organizations. Both agreed that the investment was worth it and filled basic social and material needs.

Meskhetian Turks were again identified as the model group by this standard. One Turkish interviewee called their community an “unbelievable support mechanism” built on meeting collective needs. It is notable that the Meskhetian Turks arrived in Louisville to an already present community of immigrant Turkish professionals who became a huge resource during their initial period of resettlement. In 2006, only a year after the most of them arrived, a national Gülenist⁷ organization established a Turkish cultural center that they still use as a gathering place for social, educational, and religious activities. Turkish immigrants dominate leadership positions in the center, but most families that utilize the center are former refugees. Narratives about the Meskhetian Turks praise their strong work ethic and their willingness to work together to solve problems and educate the next generation, attributing their success to these factors.

Following a slightly slower trajectory, the Bosnians are still lauded as a success story. Bosnians in Louisville started gathering for celebrations and traditional activities in the late 1990s and, in 2001, they founded the Bosniak American Islamic Center, hiring an imam from Bosnia so that they could listen to religious sermons in their mother tongue and teach the language to their children. Taking advantage of the large number of skilled tradesmen in the local Bosnian community, leaders recently decided to demolish the Islamic Center building so they could build a purpose-built mosque in its place. Continuing their strong relationship with the Meskhetian refugees, Bosnians now worship and hold meetings in the local Turkish center. These two communities have a uniquely

⁷ This refers to the organization’s affiliation with the popular Turkish cleric and opposition leader Fethullah Gülen, whose foundations fund many educational, religious, charitable, and political groups in Turkey and abroad. Gülen and an increasing number of his followers live in exile in the US.

entangled migration history in which they have often turned to each other for assistance and collaborated on events and projects.

Shortly after the beginning of this fieldwork, it became clear that I would hear very little about Iraqis in Louisville from Sunni Muslims unless I asked about them directly. The stories I heard were vague and, apart from a couple of Arab women, everyone seemed either uncomfortable with the topic or not very knowledgeable. For reasons that they could not explain, Iraqis didn't organize themselves well and they reported that many families were disconnected and struggling on their own. Finally, one woman said what everyone else had danced around, "Oh, the Iraqis are mostly Shi'a. They do their own things." The sectarian divide in Louisville's Muslim community, and particularly in the Iraqi community, remains a strong but rarely articulated undercurrent.

Coming from a largely secular country, many Iraqis are simply not observant Muslims or, having witnessed increasing religious sectarianism and radicalization in Iraq, have become wary of religious organizations. This confuses the issue for former immigrants and refugees for whom faith is central to a national or cultural identity. Adan told me the story of meeting an Iraqi doctor by coincidence while taking his son for a check-up. He said that when he told the doctor that there were many Iraqi refugees in Louisville, "He told me they're not supposed to be here, I said 'What do you mean?' He said, 'We are a rich country.' I said, 'You know what happened, what's going on?'" The doctor said he had lived in Louisville for 40 years and Adan said with disapproval that he had never seen him at any mosque or event and never saw him again. The implication of this and many other similar narratives is that when educated professionals fail to

participate in their national, ethnic, and religious communities, other community members suffer and the whole group's reputation is damaged.

While observant Iraqi Sunnis attend various large and small Arab-majority mosques around the city and, like their secular counterparts, do not engage in much ethnic-based social organizing, Iraqis constitute the majority population at local Shi'a Islamic centers. In these centers, they actively seek to create Iraqi national community. Even the small number of Lebanese, Egyptian, Iranian, and Pakistani immigrants who attend the largest center say that religious observances there mostly follow Iraqi religious traditions. One day a week, the center holds classes in which the children of refugees learn Arabic with an Iraqi public school curriculum, then practice English while learning about religious topics. Although the Shi'a community has significantly less resources in general, those resources are distributed more evenly and Shi'a of multiple ethnic, national, and class backgrounds collaborate to build community. Iraqi Sunnis do not benefit from these community building activities, giving an impression from the Sunni perspective that Iraqis just never organize and suffer the consequences of this.

Somali communities in Louisville and elsewhere have also struggled with profound ethnic divides within their national group and general organizational dysfunctionality (see Besteman 2016). Informally, ethnic Somalis take responsibility for local families that have fallen on hard times based on their clan, with more financially stable individuals from the same clan providing loans and advice. If people from your clan are not doing well, it is considered shameful for you to neglect them. In contrast to this fairly successful informal system, early attempts at official organizing ended in distrust and power disputes. Group members often assumed that leaders were paid

whether or not they were and felt that those with titles did too much without consulting the rest of the group. On top of these tensions, older Somalis were often unwilling to work with members of different ethnic groups, despite their common nationality, because of memories of persecution and conflict in Somalia and in the refugee camps.

More recent attempts by younger Somalis who grew up in the US or Kenya have been more successful and there is now a group for Somali young adults and one for Somali women, both of which have attracted members from Bravan, Banadir, Bantu, and ethnic Somali backgrounds. A group of Somalis recently raised enough money to buy a small building in the West End and make it into a Somali-language mosque. Members of the community who did not understand English had spent years attending Friday prayers at mosques where they were unable to understand the sermon and unable to communicate effectively with mosque leadership. When asked why it took so long to establish the mosque, one young Somali made a direct comparison to one East End mosque, which he said had cost \$2 million dollars, “That money doesn't come from someone who makes \$1200 a month, it comes from someone who makes more than that.” Somalis, with their low average level of education and high prioritization of remittances, struggled for years to put together the \$100,000 that it took to buy and renovate their worship space. This slow pace as compared to Bosnians and Turks was read by both outsiders and some Somalis as an indicator of Somali backwardness and inadequacy. Thus, popular narratives again idealize Bosnian and Meskhetian Turkish resettlement and hold up Iraqis and Somalis as groups that have not yet “made it,” examples of what trajectories and behaviors to avoid.

Workforce Professionalization

Creating educated professionals is another high priority on the path to successful community advancement. I have placed this priority last because it generally concerns refugee children and young adults who grow up in the US, not refugees who arrive in the US in middle age. Young people, the narrative claims, will finalize upward class mobility by becoming doctors, engineers, lawyers, and other types of professionals. This will reflect well on their community and result in more resources for the community in general, allowing for greater acts of charity, better facilities for ethnic organizations and worship groups, and a better quality of life on average. Ambitions of the second generation getting a good education and achieving success in well-paid fields is not notable in and of itself, as these goals have become core to the American dream for a variety of immigrant and refugee groups. What is notable is the way in which talking about education, or its absence, has become a proxy for discussing class and prestige.

Yet again, the Meskhetian Turks and Bosnians take the lead in this indicator. Bosnians had mixed levels of education on arrival, with many people trained in skilled trades or with university degrees. Many young Bosnians have successfully completed university degrees and even some adults have succeeded in recertifying in their previous fields of study or earning new credentials, which is no small feat in the US. The Meskhetian Turks, unable to secure the right to consistent education in Russia, mostly arrived with trade skills, but some members of the second generation are now becoming more educated and entering professional fields. In one case, a Meskhetian man lied that he had a high school diploma from Russia, but it had been lost, so that he could enroll in Jefferson Community and Technical College instead of struggling through starting high school as an 18-year-old. He eventually transferred to the University of Louisville and

recently graduated from medical school. Turks in Louisville hold up his success as a model for making it in the US and express deep pride for the Meskhetian kids now graduating from American high schools and entering university. Their success, they feel, is a sign of their community's success.

Interestingly, in the Meskhetian case, the community has carefully constructed an outward image that privileges a high level of education. Although the vast majority of Turks in Louisville who participate in nationality-centered organizing are Meskhetian refugees, leadership positions are held primarily by Turkish immigrants with middle and upper-class backgrounds and professional degrees, many of whom have been in Louisville for far less time than the refugees. In interviews, these immigrants made it clear that they had been asked to take these titles specifically because of their educational background and how that reflected on the community. This is likely important not only for Turks' local reputation, but for the Gülenist image, as encouraging a well-rounded education is one of the core priorities emphasized by the movement.

Somalis face similar obstacles to academic advancement as the Meskhetian Turks, but lack the guidance that could be provided by an immigrant professional co-national community. Comparing Somalis to the Syrians, Adan, himself well-educated and from the city, lamented "We didn't have anything here, nobody to provide us advice or to support us." When people talk about the weaknesses of the Somali community and the difficulties Somalis have had, they say that "Somalis are not professionals." They take low wage warehouse and factory positions. A Turkish volunteer expressed his frustration that there were not enough Somalis with master's degrees, who, as he described it, had "made it," to act as mentors and role models for Somali children. Although many young

Somalis are now in college, few have graduated and fewer still are pursuing those coveted professional positions like doctor or engineer. This is the progress that many in the community anticipate, but they believe that it will take a long time because there is just no time for education – in most families, every adult must work to make ends meet and some take multiple jobs so they can send more remittances. Here, lack of education is narrated as both part of the problem that perpetuates Somali poverty and an indicator of deficiency.

Analysis

KRM staff members and refugees often talk about what “expectations” mean for the resettlement process. Refugees with high expectations, they hold, are less satisfied with resettlement services than those with low expectations or those who do not know what to expect. The same, they say, applies to co-sponsors and volunteers. Co-sponsors who have never seen or experienced poverty because of a prosperous upbringing or have never spent time with people from other countries are more likely to protest and complain about resettlement services. One long time KRM employee said of some co-sponsors that, no matter how much you try to prepare them, “They don't have any place to hang that information.” What about Muslim volunteers? Discussions of other refugee groups that I encountered during fieldwork show that, in contrast, Muslim volunteers have many places to “hang” information about resettlement.

These narratives highlight the differences between Muslim volunteers and previous groups of volunteers and co-sponsors, many of whom had never encountered a refugee before their work with KRM. Members of Muslim volunteer groups, which consist of mostly immigrant professionals and their families with a few former refugees

who arrived in the 1990s, have preconceived ideas about who Muslim refugees are and what that means about their future. They can imagine a path to success in more detail because they can combine the details of their journey or their parents' journey with anecdotes about past refugee groups and their experiences with meeting members of these groups at mosques and community events. As I describe in more detail in Chapter IV, Muslims working with Muslim arrivals feel a strong, personal obligation to make sure that the refugees make correct decisions and project a good image for others from the Middle East and other Muslims. This makes them less likely to accept the path that KRM arranges within the bounds of the US refugee resettlement program without reservations.

Taken in aggregate, what conclusions do Muslim community members draw from these narratives and how might they be applied to the Syrians? First, they learn that refugees who succeed leave poor neighborhoods to escape the bad environment in which they have been placed. Therefore, they infer that Syrian refugees must move to better areas as soon as possible. Second, they learn that refugees who are connected to each other and to other members of their national community in both formal and informal ways are more successful. This leads them to prioritize enhancing Syrians' connections to co-nationals and co-ethnics. Third, they learn that educated refugees and refugees that become educated gain higher prestige and experience a higher degree of social mobility. This leads them to encourage Syrian young adults to pursue higher education instead of employment. In many ways, these priorities are not significantly different from those of the refugees themselves, but they are beyond the parameters of KRM's program goals on arrival. As the next chapter discusses, while this prioritization of specific long-term goals

is a seemingly minor difference, it can lead to significantly different understandings of what aid should do in the context of resettlement.

CHAPTER III

MATERIAL ASSISTANCE AND RESETTLEMENT AGENCY COLLABORATION

Sister Ameera is retired, but she isn't the sort of person who takes breaks. Every few minutes, the former teacher turned community organizer looks sheepishly at her phone and asks me to wait while she answers. Patiently maternal but visibly frustrated, she assures one caller, then chides another while looking at the clock over my shoulder, "Aren't you on your way, *ḥabībī*? The driving test is at 2:00! You'll be late!" Sighing as she hangs up the phone, she explains that this is this Syrian man's second chance to take the test and the volunteer she contacted had promised to drive him. They would call with the result. The first time, he failed because he couldn't understand what the police officer was telling him; she has learned over the years that some officers are nicer and easier to understand than others and hopes he is lucky this time. Ameera came to Louisville from North Africa over forty years ago when her husband was accepted into a graduate program at University of Louisville. She is one of very few volunteers who has been active since the 1990s, working with every Muslim refugee or immigrant group at some point or another and donating generously to local Islamic centers, schools, and individual refugee families. These days she spends her days organizing women's *halaqāt* (Qur'an/religion study groups) in people's homes, drinking tea in refugee families' living rooms, and accompanying families who have timed out of resettlement agency support to the doctor or the food stamp office. When women have a problem that they don't want to

bring to the imam, they bring it to her and she passes it on. When she speaks in a meeting, the room gets quiet and people listen. Yet, communication with the resettlement agencies has become tough. They used to tell her and the other sisters when a Syrian family arrived and now it's a mystery. Recently, a Syrian woman ended up in the hospital shortly after arrival and no one could visit her for several days because the news took time to spread. Another time, a family arrived on Friday and ended up stuck alone in a cold apartment all weekend. What good does it do for the new refugees to be disconnected like this? The call finally comes and it's good news. Not only did the Syrian man get to the test on time, but he passed! Ameera excuses herself. She needs pay a visit to congratulate him.

This chapter discusses the period before, during, and immediately after KRM received its community engagement grant from Islamic Relief USA. It chronicles the forms of support, especially material support, that members of the Muslim community provided and how that support changed with the grant and the arrival of the first Syrian refugees in Louisville in 2014. In exploring KRM's relationship with the Muslim community and the forms of aid provided by Muslim volunteers, I argue that the essential differences between KRM and Muslim community groups' models of support for refugees can make it difficult for them to establish mutual understanding. The volunteers observed in this study prioritize long-term success and respectability over KRM's more short-term goal of self-sufficiency. They create close, personal relationships with Syrian refugees that go beyond the bounds of professionalism as it is usually understood in a social services office, which gained them the highest levels of trust. These differences, as well as these groups' lack of formal organization, can make them challenging for a

resettlement agency to work with, but informality is also a strength in that it gives them the freedom and flexibility to allocate resources with few restrictions, filling service gaps when KRM cannot.

Before Islamic Relief

The educated Muslim immigrant professionals who had established the earliest worship spaces near the University of Louisville and in the wealthy East End remained mostly unaware of the challenging circumstances in which their refugee neighbors were living until recently. Refugees who arrived in the mid-1990s remember being visited in their homes after their first visit to the mosque or after showing interest in attending. One early Bosnian arrival recalled being invited to an *ifṭār* dinner during his first Ramadan in the US and meeting men who he would later learn were university professors. He took great pride in greeting them on campus when he later studied at University of Louisville. A Somali man who arrived only a couple of years later was visited by two men, a doctor and a university student, after he attended Friday prayer at a mosque near the university. They advised him that there was a small mosque in Buechal, closer to his home. Confused by the transportation system in Louisville, he called a taxi to make the short drive and ended up asking an Indian man in the parking lot to help him break a \$20 bill and pay the cab fare. The man turned out to be a professor at Bellarmine and when he found out about the Somali man's transportation problems, he offered to drive him from work to the mosque and home every Friday. This sort of interaction became less common as both the Muslim community and the refugee community in Louisville grew and mosque attendance became more segregated by class and ethnicity.

By the late 1990s, mosques and Islamic centers had been established in areas close to where most refugees lived and, as described in Chapter II, refugees and working-class immigrants were diversifying their worship spaces to accommodate those who did not speak English and those who were interested in preserving regional traditions. Linguistic, class, and spatial barriers started to confound attempts at unity and mutual assistance. The multicultural mosques that early immigrant professionals had established, with their Friday sermons in English and locations in wealthier neighborhoods, distant from refugee housing, were inaccessible for most refugees.

There was little organized, collective effort to welcome and support the newcomers; instead, some individuals in the know became points of contact and rallied support in cases of emergency. Aameera recalls that when word spread of a death or a disaster like a house fire, she and a handful of other individuals would check in with the family, gather money, and help with funeral arrangements. She recalled the time when a young Meskhetian Turkish woman died soon after arrival and a recent incident in which a Somali woman was struck by a train and killed.

The main point of contact across class barriers during this period centered on buying plots of land in Louisville and southern Indiana where Muslims could be buried and raising funds for needy families to properly bury their dead. Community leaders struggled for many years to find affordable spaces where they could establish small Muslim-only graveyards, at times collaborating with groups in Bowling Green and southern Indiana. Many felt that a Muslim cemetery was as core of a need as a place to pray on Fridays and were mortified when they heard that some community members, including wealthy, religiously disengaged individuals, were buried in Christian

cemeteries. Part of their motivation for getting involved with cases of accidental death was to make sure that the deceased's devastated low-income family could choose a proper burial arrangement.

An early sign that Muslim donors were becoming more interested in local charity was changing patterns of giving during the Ramadan season and on Eid al-Fitr, the holiday that ends and celebrates the Ramadan fast. Traditionally, Muslims who are financially able give a gift of at minimum one day's supply of food for one person to mark the last day of the holy month of Ramadan. This gift is called *zakat al-fitr* and is believed by many to be an obligation for all Muslims. When the Meskhetian Turks arrived in Louisville, one participant remembered that they wanted to give *zakat al-fitr* during their first Ramadan, despite their own position as new arrivals. Some ended up giving cash gifts to struggling Somali families. Similar events have taken place with Iraqi and Syrian families who insisted on giving regardless of their own financial circumstances. To not give would be admitting to their own poverty and need, which they are often too proud to do. The Ramadan season is also a popular season for distributing *ṣadaqa*, voluntary charity that can be given at any time and is believed to earn God's favor. During the Ramadan season, giving often takes the form of large *iftār* dinners, symbolically important fast-breaking gatherings at the end of each day, or supplies meant for cooking family *iftār*. These large public *iftār* dinners are also often held as social gatherings at the mosques.

Many Muslim immigrants in Louisville prefer to send money to charities working in other countries, usually countries with a Muslim majority, for their *zakat al-fitr* and *ṣadaqa*. This option is popular because many people believe that Muslims are less needy,

that “At least they have food stamps if they don't have jobs.” Others believe, or have started to believe, that giving to people who are closer is preferable. This has led to several organized giving projects in Louisville during Ramadan. These projects are not associated directly with a particular mosque or Islamic center, but are instead coordinated by social groups, especially of young people and women. Until recently, these projects involved little formal coordination and were not even official enough to have names. No one seems to remember when some people started calling the annual tradition of organizing boxes of sugar, oil, lentils, rice, and other basic foodstuffs to give to needy families during Ramadan “Sadaqa of Louisville”. Many still do not use the name, but they know that it happens each year and that members of the three largest Sunni mosques participate and suggest beneficiaries. Although nothing about this program specifically targets refugees, former refugees make up a large portion of the recipients. Project Downtown, an organization with a similar mission organized by young people and connected to a national nonprofit, eventually morphed into a charity aimed at helping local refugees before dissolving when the leader moved to a different state.

Among local Shi'a, similar programs have emerged. A branch of the national organization “WhoIsHussein?” has distributed food at local homeless shelters and collected clothing donations during Ramadan. A member boasted that when they brought Iraqi food to the shelter, all the people there complimented the dishes and wanted to know if they could get similar food more often. Last year, they chose to target their giving to local refugee resettlement agencies, donating large amounts of clothing and household goods to Goodwill on KRM's behalf. The largest Shi'a Islamic center also holds massive outdoor *iftār* meals and invites anyone who needs to eat. For Shi'a, the

month of Muharram in the Islamic calendar is also an important time because Hussein ibn ‘Ali, who they recognize as the third leader of Muslims after the death of Prophet Muhammad, was killed in battle on the tenth day of that month. In recognition of the events leading to Hussein’s death, and as an outreach effort, Shi’a give both symbolic and substantial gifts in his honor.

Prior to the arrival of the first Syrian refugees in Louisville, Muslims in Louisville were giving generously to charities for displaced Syrians abroad, especially during Ramadan. Widespread media coverage of the Syrian Civil War and the accounts spread by prominent Syrian-American community members about the dangers their relatives were facing meant that everyone knew something about the refugees. In addition, national and international Islamic aid organizations like Islamic Relief had taken to social media to advertise opportunities to send *zakat al-fitr* and *sadaqa* to the Syrian people. A group of Muslim youth, some still in high school, started an organization to raise money for Syria and held fundraising events. Narratives that encouraged Muslims to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Syria were heavily circulated far before the refugees arrived in Louisville and people were already scrambling for ways to respond. A few months before the Syrian refugees started to arrive, Aya, a Syrian-American teenager, wrote to KRM pleading for the agency to bring Syrians to Louisville. About two months later, she received a reply, explaining that, while local affiliates have little control over their refugee case allocation, KRM was expecting the first Syrian family to arrive in about a month. Aya and her family were ecstatic and started to spread the news. Thus was the stage set for the start of KRM’s Islamic Relief USA Grant, Syrian refugee resettlement in Louisville, and all of the changes that came with those two developments.

Islamic Relief Grant

In 2013, after an event at the Muhammad Ali Center where representatives from KRM met a representative from IRUSA, the agency applied for and received a one-year grant aimed at engaging Louisville's Muslim community in supporting refugee resettlement. The IRUSA representative had heard about KRM's co-sponsorship program and was very excited about getting mosques involved. According to IRUSA's publicly available tax return for 2013, the \$52,000 grant's purpose was to "create, train, and manage co-sponsorship teams to provide resettlement services for newly arrived refugees." KRM staff members say that the indirect goal for IRUSA was to encourage Muslims to get involved in local charitable activities.

In a moment that a staff member called "serendipitous or like divine intervention," the grant started in January 2014 and the first Syrian refugee family arrived in Louisville about a month later, to great fanfare. The same staff member said, "It was a way for us to rally the Muslim Community... Okay we have these new Syrians who are coming and at that point... as far as KRM was concerned we needed them to be there in every way that they could." Staff anticipated a challenging start to the new resettlement as there would be no established Syrian refugee community for newcomers to turn to and it was unclear if Syrians would be willing or able to build useful connections with Iraqis, the largest Arabic-speaking refugee community in Louisville.

Under the auspices of the Islamic Relief grant, KRM organized a Muslim community donation drive and invited members of every local mosque to bring lightly used items to a central location. The response was massive – the drive collected truckloads of furniture, clothing, and home goods. Even the Shi'a Islamic center, which

no one had really expected to participate in a majority-Sunni event, sent a representative with several bags of clothing. One KRM staff member reflects, “I think that got people like really sort of hyped, like we need to organize... they can mobilize people, things, and money when they need to!”

As more Syrians began to arrive, various Muslim groups planned their own donation drives and collected money and items to give directly to the new Syrians, in particular those who had timed out of KRM’s program or had needs that the resettlement agency couldn’t meet. For example, volunteers helped families who lost all the furniture that they had bought with their Resettlement and Placement money to bedbugs and were unable to replace it. Groups also identified less urgent but still important needs like additional blankets and warm clothing for refugees from southeastern Syria, where the temperature is much higher on average than in Louisville. One Islamic center became crowded with large items like furniture, which ended up causing a distribution problem. How could they bridge the physical disconnect between the Islamic center with eager, wealthy donors and relatively plentiful storage space in the East End and the refugees living in Buechel and the South End? Volunteers started to address this by transporting goods as needed to another Islamic center with less storage space but located closer to where the refugees live.

At the same time, KRM staff were attempting to persuade mosques and Islamic centers to co-sponsor families. Co-sponsorship, as described previously, is a program in which a religious or community organization commits to help furnish a refugee family’s home before their arrival, pay part or all of their rent temporarily, help with transportation to appointments and childcare, and provide social connections to the greater community.

Until fairly recently, only churches in majority white areas had participated in KRM's co-sponsorship program. The co-sponsorship program, with its roots in church and synagogue sponsorship as early as the late 1940s, is in many ways not well suited to current Muslim religious organization in Louisville. As discussed previously, unlike churches in the US, mosques are generally considered only a place for prayer and religious instruction. While this is changing, for example, "Islamic center" implies a wider range of services and interests, the practice of "importing" imams from countries where places of worship and places that provide charity are usually separate means that the official source of religious authority often has little interest in using mosque space and funding for charitable work. Mosque executive boards, generally made up of older, first generation immigrants, often have similar opinions about the purpose of mosques. Previous efforts to engage Muslims in co-sponsorship failed because KRM employees used the same recruiting methods that worked for churches – they called the religious leader, assuming that imams and pastors or ministers played a similar role. More recent efforts have engaged with mosque attendees, some of whom were already doing volunteer work with KRM's Youth Mentoring Program or the Cultural Exchange Program (a similar program catering to adults).

In addition, co-sponsorship is generally seen as an agreement between a named, incorporated organization and KRM on behalf of a sponsored family. In almost all the Louisville cases of Muslims becoming involved in a co-sponsorship with KRM, members of the team were not all members of or exclusively involved with a single mosque or Islamic center. Team members had usually worked together in the past to organize charitable events and *zakat* or *ṣadaqa* distribution during Ramadan or had met in

women's *halaqa* groups. They were simply groups of engaged community members pooling their own money and resources and using the name of a mosque or Islamic center to qualify as co-sponsors. This accounts for their almost universal hesitancy to sign an official co-sponsorship agreement, a phenomenon that could be frustrating for KRM staff because it made reporting rates of co-sponsorship difficult. For some, the standard monetary commitment seemed prohibitive, but the resettlement agency negotiated modified agreements to address their worries. This flexibility made co-sponsorship more appealing to Muslim groups.

A group of Bosnians, mostly women, co-sponsored the first Syrian family, using donations from all the large mosques and Islamic centers in town. A Turkish group unofficially co-sponsored a family in the first year as well. A group of well-connected women at one East End mosque has helped or been in contact with every one of the seventy Syrian families resettled in Louisville in one way or another, as an official co-sponsorship team, assisting another team, or providing unofficial help. This team, unsatisfied with the limitations that they felt that co-sponsorship imposed, took on a broader, less official role, following up with families as a group of "Arab representatives" and canvassing for additional aid on behalf of families whether or not they were still being helped by a resettlement agency. Both the Turkish group and this group of mostly Arab women assisted church co-sponsors who did not know much about Syria or Islam and wanted help with things like buying halal food, pronouncing unfamiliar names, and practicing basic greetings in Arabic to make families feel more welcome. On the arrival of a new Syrian refugee, one KRM employee said, there were key things at which they were expert:

They had developed this system because they know the right places to go to where as soon as clients came they were able to get their phones switched over with the SIM cards exactly and they would still be able to have Arabic on their phones and it's funny because they come to the house, they would bring the guy to the house who would do it, so they had set up this system. No other co-sponsor could do that.

Reflecting on the early period of their relationship with the resettlement agencies, one of these women remembered:

KRM sponsored the first family and we were so happy and organizing all this stuff and, like, I swear, the stuff we put in their houses everything was new!... At the beginning, it was really good. At the beginning KRM and Catholic [Charities] were providing them so many things... Even with us when we co-sponsored families at the beginning it was like heaven honestly heaven! Better than now.

As this quote implies, as time passed and more families arrived, conditions changed. On the agency side, some tensions developed with the unofficial co-sponsor-like roles that Muslim community members were playing. Part of the goal of the co-sponsorship program is to develop intercultural relationships that benefit both the assisting congregations and the participating families. People who would not otherwise meet refugees develop friendships that can lead to better cross-cultural understanding, create more welcoming communities, and solicit generous donations of time and money for the agency. A long-time KRM employee went so far as to say that sponsors often get more out of the program than the families they help. KRM and the church sponsor teams started to feel that Muslim volunteers were overstepping their proper role and making it difficult for the church teams to develop relationships with the families they were sponsoring:

Sometimes folks from the mosque would come to the airport arrival because they wanted to be there and meet them at the airport. Well, how odd is that because you want them to meet their co-sponsors but then these other folks are here who they're going to be in contact with anyway!

What's more, KRM had set a precedent that employees would later regret – the agency had been notifying Muslim community leaders when new Syrian families arrived. At the beginning, this seemed reasonable. There was no established Syrian refugee community and arrivals were coming slowly, so families would not have the benefit of meeting other Syrian refugee families in English class or at the Arab grocery stores. Calling Muslim leaders meant connecting the newcomers with a group of Arab immigrant families who were eager to help, putting them at ease. This move, however, was directly counter to humanitarian ethical standards of impartiality and privacy. No other group gets called every time a new arrival of a certain nationality or religious background arrives, so as the community in Louisville began to grow and refugees were better able to meet each other on an everyday basis, this practice seemed unnecessary at best and invasive at worst.

What if a family that did not want anything to do with the Islamic centers arrived?

Caseworkers were also becoming worried because they were noticing what they see as unhealthy or troublesome co-sponsor behaviors. Co-sponsors often try to take on responsibilities that are beyond their mandate and, in KRM staff's opinion, are better left either to the casework staff or to the refugees themselves. One staff member called this a "cradle to the grave" mentality, the feeling that the family's success is completely in your hands as the co-sponsor and that you have a responsibility to be their caseworker, their parent, their best friend, and everything in between until they meet your standard of success. KRM's institutional understanding of how refugee adaptation works holds that refugees are resilient enough to succeed on their own given time and connection to peer groups. Although they feel that a good co-sponsorship should end in a long-term, respectful relationship, they think that an overly active co-sponsor encourages

dependency and makes it difficult for refugees to achieve the programmatic ideal of self-sufficiency. It also leads to co-sponsor stress and burn out. Because of these factors, staff believed that the relationship that KRM had shared with members of the Muslim community would have to change.

At the same time, volunteers started to hear about and witness significant deficiencies in refugees' housing. Several families experienced pest infestations that landlords failed to address. One volunteer joked that some families had a competition to see who could catch the most mice. In one case, KRM found a rental house for a reasonable price to house a family with mosque co-sponsors. When the co-sponsorship team entered the home, they were disgusted; it was filthy and bug-infested and the front door was off its hinges. The team spent two days cleaning every inch of the house and spraying for bugs, only rushing to move in furniture at the very last minute. One of the helpers remembers, "in our tradition we take off our shoes but I couldn't even take my shoes off in that house." The volunteers felt that if refugees moved closer to the Islamic centers and wealthy donors in the East End, housing quality would be better and it would be easier for them to support the new arrivals. Representatives from the most active Muslim groups approached KRM to try to persuade the agency to rent apartments in the East End, arguing that they were closer to the most supportive mosques, cleaner, and safer. A staff member who was involved in the discussion recounted her interpretation of what happened next:

I actually went with them to a few apartment complexes and... the landlords have to agree to accept clients without social security and a job and credit and all that and so we explained that to them but they're like 'Oh, I'm sure they'll agree.' Well they didn't!

The lesson she believed that the volunteers took away was that good housing with access to public transportation is difficult to find without a credit history or proof of income. A conversation with one of the involved representatives tells a different story. He sees landlords' unwillingness to consider refugee applicants as a form of anti-immigrant and classist housing discrimination that needs to be addressed legally. He found KRM staff's apparent sympathy for such landlords infuriating.

After this incident, housing continued to be a challenge and a point of contention between KRM and Muslim community volunteers. Two disputes in particular came up in nearly every interview. The first was the case of two young brothers, one of whom had lost both of his legs in a bomb attack. Prior to their arrival, KRM had searched for an accessible housing complex for them to live in with little success. Finally, a landlord agreed to make modifications to an apartment to make it wheelchair-accessible. On the brothers' arrival, however, the changes were not complete. For weeks, the landlord continued to delay, forcing one brother to lift the other up and down stairs whenever he wanted to leave and carry him in and out of a tiny bathroom. While KRM hoped to stick with the complex because housing staff were having trouble finding an alternative, community volunteers were horrified by the situation. They demanded new accommodations and, when staff told them that they were trying but that it might take time, the volunteers put the brothers up in an extended stay hotel. They then found an accessible apartment in the East End (close to the mosque) and co-signed the lease so that they could move them there. One of the brothers related his frustration with the whole incident, "It's injustice to put someone who's in a wheelchair in a small and bad area, so I forget about the bad area, but the restroom! Any one of us has to use the restroom!"

Although this case was the one that respondents described most commonly, it was only one of many cases, according to volunteers and refugees, in which the resettlement agencies were unable to place families with special medical needs in appropriate housing. Syrian refugees coming to Louisville have intensive medical needs at a particularly high rate as compared to other groups and volunteers and refugees report that, as in the brothers' case, many refugees with disabled family members have ended up in apartments with accessibility issues. In another case, a family with an adult child who has severe intellectual and developmental disabilities and cannot walk was placed in an apartment with stairs. The parents were only able to move the child in and out of the apartment with significant difficulty.

The second incident involved a Kurdish family, a widow with several children, that experienced horrifying harassment from neighborhood teens. Children in the family were physically bullied while playing outside. On multiple occasions, rocks were thrown through their windows. When they called the police, officers arrived, but said that they couldn't do anything since no one could prove who had thrown the rocks. Hearing that the mother and children were so scared at night that they could barely sleep and the youngest child had started wetting the bed, two prominent Muslim volunteers started sleeping at the apartment on alternating nights to help them feel safer. KRM worked with a local church to host a community meeting, hoping to introduce refugee families to the neighborhood and end the incidents without severing ties with the apartment complex. Understandably, the family still didn't feel safe and wanted to move, but they had already signed a lease and KRM staff advised them not to break it because of the cost. Turkish community members took up the family's cause and raised enough money to move them

to a new complex, paying all the necessary fees and moving costs and even cosigning their lease so that they could move into a nicer apartment.

The volunteers who worked with these cases are still annoyed that community intervention was necessary to fix things that, in their view, should have been quickly and easily resolved by KRM's caseworkers. At the same time, they are proud that they took a stand and firmly believe that their advocacy on behalf of refugee clients is a necessary check on the resettlement agency's authority. Some KRM staff on the other hand felt that, in cases like these, volunteers once again overstepped their boundaries. Staff prioritize their relationships with landlords even when they are slow to respond to maintenance requests or spray for pests with the understanding that housing conditions in low income areas are often poor and landlords who will rent to refugees are scarce, so they must rent with the same landlords repeatedly. They strongly discourage refugee clients from breaking a lease because the client must pay for the move, including a new security deposit, penalty fees, and other expenses, and landlords become less willing to rent to KRM when refugees leave before the lease is over. By removing the financial barriers to moving, Muslim volunteers had empowered these refugees to make a decision that was against the long-term interests of the resettlement agency.

Amid these conflicts over housing conditions and Muslim community interventions, the relationship between KRM and these community groups changed in ways that frustrated community members. KRM stopped informing Muslim leaders when a new Syrian family arrived and became less willing to communicate with the most active Muslim volunteers about cases, even when refugees requested their help as mediators with the casework team. In the context of contemporary events, this policy change

appeared to be a punitive measure aimed at shutting out whistleblowers. Rumors started to fly and mistrust started to develop, with community members unable to understand what had happened or why the level of communication had changed.

Eventually, KRM called a meeting with local leaders to discuss the change and why staff felt that it was necessary. Those who attended the meeting can easily recite the talking points that they heard – privacy is important, there are many refugees and limited resources, KRM and the co-sponsor’s roles are very limited, KRM has primary responsibility for many aspects of each case – but they do not necessarily understand what they mean in practice or within what institutional constraints staff are working. Many still feel betrayed or disappointed, often on a personal level because they had developed close working relationships with individual staff members. One volunteer recalled with nostalgia how she and some friends spent afternoons working in the KRM warehouse with one staff member, “we would go help her even organize the stuff you know as friends.” Another laughed at how two staff members called her, using their personal, not work, numbers, every hour or so as a family’s flight was progressively delayed later and later until their final arrival time had moved from 9pm to 1am. Being told that that personal connection was merely professional was deeply saddening for these volunteers.

Instead of modifying the quantity of work they were doing, these groups started to depend less on KRM for information about new families. Newer families were often related to families who were already in Louisville and, if not, they met other Syrians in social services offices or in English classrooms. One of the volunteers started a Whatsapp group to connect Syrians with each other and locate new families and families with

urgent needs. They took up more of the advocacy role when dealing with the agency, communicating challenges that refugees were having and needs that long-term clients had. At times, this has been more collaborative and at times it has been more oppositional. On some occasions, an older woman from the community has come into the office to air clients' grievances and communicate rumors in a casual way. Caseworkers could then respond to complaints that the clients might not feel comfortable saying on their own. On the more oppositional end of the spectrum, some Islamic center members have escalated arguments over casework details that individual staff members cannot control into larger conflicts that frustrate busy staff.

The conflicts between KRM and Muslim community groups are rooted in different models of refugee assistance that are negotiated internally as well as externally in relations with other charitable organizations and the greater community. KRM's institutional origin myth starts with a single woman working at her kitchen table with a compassionate heart and a strong work ethic. The office culture emphasizes personal connections forged between staff members as well as clients, the "KRM family." At the same time, the agency now has offices in both Lexington and Louisville, employs over 90 people, many of whom are professional social workers, and is one of the largest resettlement agency affiliates in the US. Reminiscing about the transition from less than 5 employees to over 90 and the increasing numbers of refugee arrivals that came along with that, one employee says, "You lose that personal touch." The agency has professionalized over the years and, in doing so, has become more concerned with issues like privacy, impartiality, the maintenance of professional boundaries, and meeting agency, as opposed to individual refugee goals.

Being flexible and trying to meet many individual client needs can sometimes run counter to this professional model, leading to internal ethical conflicts or strange incongruities in service provision from an outsider perspective. For example, volunteers often feel that staff reactions to housing problems are incongruous with the severity of the situation. Staff on the other hand feel misunderstood; they try to react with professionalism and compassion, but a roach infestation, for example, seems like less of an emergency when you have resolved a similar situation many times before. In these cases, the warm concerned friend and the cool professional staff member who does not make badgering a neglectful landlord his or her top priority and urges a client to stay in poor housing are the same person. Incorporating aspects of a caring personal relationship into the professional relationship of casework is integral to KRM's institutional self-image and yet what staff members do is a job, with all the behavioral constraints that come with that, and part of that job is to secure the continuity of the refugee resettlement program in Louisville.

Muslim volunteers have built their aid model on truly close, personal connections as opposed to cordial professional connections under the shadow of program compliance. In contrasting their willingness to ask for help or rely on KRM or the Muslim community, interviewed refugees said that they trusted the resettlement agency and the refugee program in general because they had to. When I prompted them, they said that they had no choice but to trust because the agency had so much control over their social services and they were thankful that most staff members did a good job, even if there were some bad apples. Their trust for Muslim community members was less tentative. One refugee said with no hesitation that if he needed help, he would go straight to his

friends from the Muslim community or his volunteer English tutor and he would not bother with anyone else, “I have enough people.” Many refugees and the volunteers who helped them described each other with kinship terms beyond those normally used in Muslim circles. Describing one particularly active volunteer, a young Syrian man said, “She’s our mother.” When a young Syrian Kurdish mother visited during a volunteer meeting, Ameera greeted her and her baby with hugs and kisses and introduced her as her daughter. A refugee woman explained the need for these close connections, saying that Syrians who come without their extended family must rely on the Arab community as their kin. These fictive kin references can be patronizing at times, for example, when one volunteer described the refugees as like the community’s children because they could do so little on their own upon arrival. Still, despite the implied power gap between “parent” and “child”, refugees value the close bond that these terms imply and this strengthens the ability of Muslim volunteer groups to identify needs and address them.

Often only affiliated with a religious organization in name and thus independent from many institutional constraints, the groups of Muslim volunteers that have been most active have relative freedom to allocate funds and donations in any way they choose. This should not imply that they work under no constraints or that what they do is somehow easier; not being incorporated or grant-funded carries significant risk. They are at the mercy of donors and must constantly fight against compassion fatigue as the Syrian civil war rages on and refugees continue to arrive. They make significant sacrifices of time and capital. One long-time supporter is currently the cosigner on six refugees’ leases, a risky arrangement that would be impossible in an institutional setting, but has allowed those families to secure superior housing despite the structural constraints that push

refugees into poor conditions. To facilitate a Saturday tutoring program for refugee children, a loosely organized group of Turkish volunteers drives upwards of thirty participants in their personal cars every week. Most nonprofit organizations would discount these methods as unsustainable or legally dangerous. What if multiple families were unable to pay rent? What if someone crashed their car and an angry parent blamed the tutoring program organizer? Informality gives these groups the power to respond to and advocate on behalf of refugee needs in more flexible ways if they accept these sorts of risks.

Muslim volunteer groups in Louisville are now experimenting with more formalized organizational structures, but these structures still incorporate a great deal of flexibility. The most engaged Islamic center has a “refugee committee”, a group of three women and two men, all of whom are senior Arab community members, who meet as needed to distribute financial aid out of donations for refugees that are given to the center. Either refugees ask for assistance directly through a volunteer or the imam or word spreads that a family is in need and one of several “trusted families” reports that need to the committee. These trusted families are generally early arrivals and the volunteer group that is most directly affiliated with the committee has identified a few of them from each highway exit on the Watterson Expressway, the route that they take to visit them. In interviews, this group often referred to “a family off of exit 10” or “the apartments near exit 9”. They use the exits as units for needs assessment in the field and this function carries over to the refugee committee. Committee members vote on how money should be allocated, providing discretionary assistance for everything from rent payments to washing machines. Although the committee’s decisions could become

suspect in the long term, so far, they have gone unquestioned, possibly due to the inclusion of the imam in the decision-making process.

Institutional models of refugee adaptation, as discussed earlier, hold that clients should be doing things independently as early as possible; for example, they should be taking the bus to doctor's appointments instead of getting rides every time if they hope to become self-sufficient. On the other hand, KRM endorses support networks within refugee and ethnic communities like carpools and ethnic community-based organizations. In that sense, many of the volunteer groups fall into a gray zone that challenges the boundaries between donor groups and ethnic community groups. Until the Syrian arrivals, ethnic community-based organizations that KRM had worked with had small budgets and limited resources that made it difficult for them to provide significant material aid. They could not fit into any official role in casework, but they could guide the resettlement agency on certain issues and assist refugees without the involvement of the resettlement agency. Co-sponsors, on the other hand, can provide a great deal of material aid, but linguistic and cultural barriers generally bound their ability to incorporate refugees into their larger social community. Still, they have an official role in refugee cases that entitles them to a different level of access for their sponsored cases. How then should a co-sponsor team in which most participants are Syrians or Arabs helping a Syrian Arab family be bounded ethically? Or a Turkish group with many Kurdish members helping a Syrian Kurdish family? What about the unofficial co-sponsorships with no paperwork signed and no official agreement? When these groups get involved beyond the bounds of co-sponsorship, is this dangerous over-dependency or ethnic community empowerment? In the end, KRM staff decided that professional

impartiality required treating Muslim co-sponsors like any other co-sponsor team and encouraging them to maintain a degree of distance. Also consistent with previous policy, when there was no agreed upon co-sponsorship, groups would be treated like any other community group and a special relationship would not be developed.

Most Muslim helpers believe that they are obligated as community members to assist refugees who communicate their inability to do something. They believe that, without this community intervention, the refugees in question would be incapable of functioning independently in such an unfamiliar and confusing setting with no family. Many referred repeatedly in interviews to the refugees' lack of education and rural upbringing and how, if they were not instructed on the correct way of living in the US, they would not only fail to adapt but they would reflect poorly on the Syrian, Arab, and Muslim communities in general. While a lack of faith in refugees' capabilities is typical of co-sponsors, the fear that failure would mean a blemished reputation is not. In addition, these volunteers had a far more developed sense of what long-term success would look like, forged from the stories and rumors discussed in Chapter II. Syrians, they had decided, must become integrated into the Arab Muslim community and, in order to represent that community well, they must move as quickly as possible to good housing and enroll young people in higher education in order to produce a generation of educated professionals.

In conclusion, rapid changes under the IRUSA grant and in its wake birthed novel patterns of Muslim community engagement in the resettlement of Syrian refugees. This aid surprised KRM staff both in its scale and the tensions that it caused. The clash between KRM's professional model of refugee service provision and Muslim

communities' less formal and more flexible approach highlights the strengths and limitations of both models. The Sunni Muslim groups that are most engaged in assistance for Syrian refugees have the connections and motivation to move massive stores of material resources and distribute them without significant restrictions. The advantages of a strong relationship are clear for KRM, with its restricted budget and large caseload and for Muslim groups, who have a vested interest in the quality of formal resettlement services. Yet there are aspects of the professional model, like workplace boundaries and programmatic requirements, that KRM cannot compromise for the benefit of a community relationship. The challenge facing both groups is to come to a mutual understanding and maintain a level of respect for their respective attempts at meeting their goals. This must start with a recognition that, although they share the goal of integrating refugees into the local community as productive citizens with a degree of independence, Muslim community standards of success reflect belief in more ambitious futures in which Syrians beat the odds and experience significant upward mobility, enhancing their reputation. The next chapter explores these beliefs in more detail through the lens of developing solidarities and Syrian refugees' symbolic place in the Muslim community and Louisville as a whole.

CHAPTER IV

EMERGING COMMUNITIES AND VOLUNTARY ASSISTANCE

Aya, the young, Syrian-American volunteer who had called the meeting to plan a public Syrian cultural and fundraising event made it clear – one of the main purposes of the event would be to introduce Syrian culture to Americans, so absolutely no politics allowed! There would be pictures of a beautiful pre-war Syria, delicious food, calligraphy, a henna artist, a photo booth with colorful hijabs and ornamented thobes, and no mention of the war or Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad. When I arrived to help set up the event, everything seemed as neutral and nostalgic as planned, except a few pieces of art for sale propped up for display on a bed of cloth. Labelled “art by Syrian orphans”, all but one piece depicted scenes of government tanks and airplanes, men in fatigues firing guns, and victims bleeding profusely in a disturbingly colorful childish style. When one of the organizers arrived, she immediately protested the arrangement, moving the more violent scenes to the back and bringing the other painting, a childish attempt at calligraphy, to the front. Even in their new, less visible location, every painting was sold after two hours.

At first, the links that Muslim community members share with Syrian refugees seem obvious. The Syrian refugees who have been resettled in Louisville are majority Sunni Muslim and Arab. There is a large Sunni Arab community in Louisville. There is a significant Syrian Kurdish minority among the refugees. There are a number of Sunni

Kurdish families in Louisville from Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. Most Muslims in Louisville are immigrants or refugees or the children of immigrants or refugees. When one starts to explore beyond these national and ethnic affiliations, however, the story becomes more complicated and “cultural proximity” starts to seem like a more and more distant ideal. Volunteers and refugees have little in common beyond their national origins. The story of Muslim faith-based volunteer work with the Syrian refugees is not merely one of a national or ethnic community’s inevitable merger or one of simple, selfless altruism. Instead, this work is better understood as part of a constant negotiation that seeks to reconfigure communal linkages and come to terms with new public perceptions of group members. Although Muslim volunteer groups struggle to project humanitarian neutrality, bill the Syrian refugee crisis as a purely human rights issue, and package a nostalgic, depoliticized Syrian nationalism, this ideal has been repeatedly torn from their grasp. Mobilizing under the umbrella of Islam does not erase the significant diversity within the so-called “Muslim community” and the way in which groups bound their membership and prioritize their objects of aid is highly contextual and fluid, not strictly impartial. At times, modes of aid distribution highlight tensions between Muslim groups from different national, ethnic, and class backgrounds and problematize simplistic ideas of community. Working to assist Syrian refugees links local Muslims to nationalist politics in the US and abroad, US immigration debates, and city-wide interfaith networks. This chapter explores how Muslim communities’ organizing and volunteer work around the Syrian refugee crisis incorporates ideas of belonging at international, national, and local scales and how this has led to unlikely solidarities across class, national, and ethnic divisions.

For many immigrant Muslims, interest in the Syrian refugees is part of active transnational involvement in their country of origin's politics as well as a sense of national pride that links their actions to their countrymen's reputation. In the case of former immigrants whose countries of origin currently host Syrian refugees, helping the Syrians shows solidarity with their family and friends who are experiencing the challenges caused by the refugee crisis in the Middle East. Jordanian- and Lebanese-American immigrant professionals and their families, for example, have been among the most active volunteers. This motivation is especially meaningful for Turkish-Americans in Louisville, who often made reference in interviews to the large number of Syrians in Turkey and the support that the Turkish people have provided. This was a key factor in local Turks' decision to co-sponsor a family with KRM, "We have more than two million refugees in Turkey, Turkish people are doing this so we should do this here." Previously unfamiliar with the average refugee allocations that the US allows each year, they were shocked and disappointed to find out that President Obama was increasing the arrival cap to only 110,000 individuals and that this increase was receiving major pushback from many politicians. Comparing this to Turkey, one related:

We just opened the doors because if you don't open the doors they will be killed, and I'm not saying we had very solid refugee plans no we don't and maybe hundreds of thousands of Syrian kids they cannot go to school in Turkey, really because we don't have schools enough, but at least they are safe, nobody's bombing them, you know?

Many Turkish-Americans feel that this state of affairs makes them especially obligated to help Syrians in exile.

The large number of refugees in Turkey also link Turks to the Syrians in other ways. Many refugees coming to Louisville lived in exile in Turkey for many years. Some

refugees said that they had sought out Turks in Louisville because they could not speak English well, but they could speak Turkish. Among those who had fled to Turkey, a large number had previously lived near the Turkish border and often used the Turkish language or interacted with ethnic Turks and ethnic Kurds from the other side of the border. Before the Ottoman Empire dissolved and, following the borders drawn in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the League of Nations created a French Mandate in Syria in 1920, movement across what is now the border was even more common, meaning that people from this region have shared ancestry and cultural heritage. During my fieldwork, I witnessed instances of Syrian and Iraqi Arabs using Turkish to communicate with Syrian Kurds, whose Arabic is often not very strong. Some Kurds from northern Syria feel that they have more in common culturally with Turkish people than with Syrian Arabs. A small cohort of Syrian Kurds often attends public events at the local Turkish center and worships there on Fridays.

Organizing around Kurdish ethnicity and Kurdish nationalism seems to create additional links of social obligation with the Syrians. Ercan, a leader in the local Turkish community, estimates that a little less than half of the Turkish immigrants in Louisville are Kurds. Reflecting on his experience of growing up Kurdish during a time when fear of militant Kurdish nationalists was at its height and Kurdish language was outlawed, he commented that, “I don’t feel like I am in my country in Turkey.” Compared to his experiences before, he feels more comfortable with his Kurdish heritage and passing down language and traditions to his children in the US. Unlike in Turkey, it is safe to organize around Kurdish ethnicity and national pride. Kurds in Louisville already knew each other when the Syrians started to arrive and checked in with each other regularly.

When the Kurdish widow who the Turkish community later helped to move out of a challenging housing situation arrived, Ercan's wife heard about her from a friend and she and a couple of other women went to visit and see how the family was doing. He and his wife felt that, as fellow Kurds, they were obligated to help welcome her.

The Syrian-American response to Syrian refugees is, as should be expected, highly complex and expresses the mixed emotions that the Syrian conflict has caused for those who maintain a nostalgic Syrian nationalism from afar. Given the opportunity to speak as one of several faith leaders at a pro-refugee rally in Frankfurt, a Syrian imam spoke at length about how Syria had hosted refugees from Armenia, Palestine, and Iraq and treated them with courtesy and kindness. Should not the international community, he argued, return that favor to the Syrians who are fleeing war? Unlike the other religious leaders, who talked about faith-based guidance that encourages welcoming refugees, he spoke from his experience as a Syrian national and made an argument that celebrated the Syrian nation's past generosity in a nostalgic manner. The crowd's muted reaction demonstrated that this argument was not very relatable for the activists in attendance; they expected religious discourse but instead heard a type of political discourse to which they could not relate. While most Americans knew little about Syria before the recent conflict, Syrian-Americans and immigrants from other Arab nations remember when Syria was stable and relatively prosperous. This has led to a frustrating situation in which Americans who they encounter in everyday life imagine a Syria defined by war. Redefining Syria's image while still emphasizing the severity of the humanitarian crisis there has thus become part of their goal for assisting Syrian refugees.

As far as many of the Syrian professional immigrants are concerned, however, the refugees do not make this an easy task. The average Syrian in Louisville before the refugees started to come was highly educated, wealthy, and originally urban, while the average Syrian refugee in Louisville has a low level of education and comes from a rural or small town, working class or agricultural background. The very existence of Syrians like this undermines the national image for which the professional immigrants strive. One of the most active Syrian-American helpers aired her frustration with the average level of education among Syrian arrivals:

They're giving [us a] bad reputation like, ok, you have to understand... it doesn't have to be about religion or the countryside or anything, wherever there are low-educated people, whoever they are, they are going to be a little bit dumb, right? And they're going to give a low reputation to whoever they are. So now when you're giving me sixty-nine families, most of them with a very bad reputation, you are going to ruin the reputation of whoever is here before and that's why whenever they would tell me, "Yeah, we have Syrian refugees and they don't know how to, even Arabic, they don't know how to write at all," like these are the exception, I swear! I swear! I have a huge family in Syria and my husband has a huge family. We're not related, me and my husband are not related, ok? We have two huge families in Syria, two separate ones. None of us are illiterate, I swear! They won't understand that there are educated, college people there.

This quote encapsulates common Syrian immigrant sentiment towards the refugees. The volunteer names or implies several traits of the Syrian refugees that she feels reflect poorly on the "educated college people". The first and most important in her view is their lack of education and, in some cases, illiteracy. In her experience, Syrian people are mostly highly educated, which demonstrates their intelligence. Earlier in the interview, she complained that she had always told her children about how educated Syrian people were and, when the refugees came, they were confused and asked her what happened. How could these people who could not even write in Arabic come from the same country she had described? Her last comment about not being related to her husband is a

reference to first cousin marriage, a practice that was once common in many Arab communities, but now carries a stigma outside of rural areas. This is not a random reference, but commentary on the fact that many of the Syrian adults who have arrived in Louisville are from areas where the traditional practice is still considered acceptable and a few married couples are first cousins. These traits, she and other Arab professional immigrants agree, perpetuate harmful stereotypes about the Middle East and reflect poorly on other Arabs.

These prejudices extend beyond the helpers. A Syrian asylee from a wealthy family expressed similar confusion at the low level of education in the Syrian refugee community, explaining that Syria has free public education and it is possible to work and go to school. When I asked her why she thought that so few of the refugees had attended secondary school, she shrugged and said that they must not have wanted to do it. In the idealized Syria, there are no barriers to education and lacking a diploma or college degree is inexcusable. It seems that these stereotypes and justifications lay bare structural inequalities in Syria that do not fit neatly into the Syrian nationalism that upper class Syrians have constructed. With the arrival of working class Syrians in Louisville, they can no longer completely deny their existence and this threatens to destabilize their deeply held beliefs about the social order in pre-war Syria.

Charity is a key part of giving materiality to Syrian nationalism in exile. In order to maintain national pride and the charitable order of things, the refugees must become model citizens. They must become integrated into reputable parts of the community and achieve high levels of education. They must, like other model refugees before them, move out of poor neighborhoods and experience social mobility. Any less would be

wrong because Syrians are well-educated and hardworking people. In honor of this ideal, the community must come together to lift them up with social guidance and financial support. There is a special focus on young people in this regard, because they are more likely to be able to attend a university and some community members say that they are more likely to change “backwards” beliefs with good mentorship. Volunteers take special pride in the young adults who are already attending technical school and who they hope will elevate Syrians’ reputation in the future.

The conflict in Syria itself is also a deeply meaningful issue both politically and personally and the act of helping refugees, even if they are not the sort of people with whom one would normally fraternize, is a charitable, religious, and political act. Syrian-Americans almost universally have family and friends who have been directly impacted by the war; they know people who are now political prisoners, people who are under daily threats of bombing, people who have fled to various parts of Europe and the Middle East, people who have lost their lives. Sunni Syrian-Americans are more likely to have friends and family who supported the rebel cause and suffered because of it. Although the conflict in Syria is not strictly sectarian, it does have some sectarian elements, as the membership of anti-Assad rebel groups is mostly Sunni and members of the Alawite religious minority and various Shi’a militant groups have bolstered the pro-Assad loyalist movement. Giving assistance to Syrian refugees and condemning the bombing of civilians is an effective indirect way to show support for the rebellion against Assad. The Syrians who have come to Louisville, often witnesses to government atrocities and generalized violence, are symbolic martyrs for the cause.

These political issues have been muted in most public settings, but often come up in conversation and debate about organizing approaches. Leaders of Muslim volunteer groups agree that political rhetoric and open references to human rights abuses by the Syrian government should not be part of fundraising events or public outreach targeted to Americans. Young volunteers, who are more open about their political leanings, attribute this hesitance from their immigrant parents to coming of age in countries where speaking openly about your political beliefs could lead to detention. According to community leaders, these subjects are off-putting and improper in the context of charitable planning and community engagement and it is better to focus on refugees' needs independent of their pre-migration experiences.

It is likely that common practice around charity in the Muslim tradition also contributes to the silencing of political motivations. It is believed that charity, especially aid provided in a religious context, should be given for the sake of God, not for personal reasons, and should be concealed from the public if possible. This is referenced in several parts of the Qur'an, with the most explicit verses stating, "If you give charity openly, it is good, but if you keep it secret and give to the needy in private, that is better for you... Whatever charity you give benefits your own soul, provided you do it for the sake of God" (Qur'an 2:271-272, trans. M.A.S. Abdel Haleem). Traditionally, the ideal form of zakat or *ṣadaqa* is an anonymous monetary gift. For example, one year in the early 2000s, a Pakistani doctor anonymously paid for Christmas gifts for every refugee child served by KRM. Group donations or volunteer work do not make anonymity easy, but, even in these cases, admitting personal investment in one's philanthropy expresses motivations beyond faith in God. Yet, how can these personal and political issues be properly

separated from responses to the refugee crisis? Like the graphic paintings by Syrian orphans described at the beginning of the chapter, political motivations are present and not well hidden, but remain unspoken and little advertised. Here, Arab Muslim groups face the same challenges as formalized NGOs as they attempt to project impartiality and neutrality to attract a broader base of support and satisfy ethical qualms.

On the level of US national politics, there are even more issues that create unlikely solidarities around refugee resettlement. In the years leading up to the first Syrian refugees arriving in Louisville, the Syrian civil war received a great deal of media attention and international aid organizations oversaw massive fundraising and public awareness campaigns for displaced Syrians. The migrant crisis in Europe also received press in the US, including pervasive debates about Muslim integration and the possibility of Islamic State militants entering the EU among Syrian refugees. After the November 2015 Paris attacks, Republican politicians sparked a public debate that questioned the safety of the US refugee program. The Paris attacks were a series of fatal assaults coordinated by Islamic State militants who investigators believed had entered France using fake passports amongst a group of undocumented immigrants and refugees. Could refugees from conflict zones like Syria, some politicians argued, be properly vetted using the current security checks? Questions of refugee security quickly led to commentary from the many presidential candidates who were in the process of campaigning at the time. Donald Trump in particular sparked controversy when, in the weeks after the attacks in Paris, he voiced support for and then retracted statements on a national “Muslim registry” (*New York Times*, 20 Nov 2015, A1). Later, he opined at a rally that a database of Syrian refugees in the US should be created and that certain mosques should

be surveilled (*New York Times*, 21 Nov 2015, A24). Letters to the editor published in *The Courier Journal*, Louisville's local newspaper, just days after the Paris attack reveal the rapid developments in the national and local conversation. One letter reads, "It is the height of naivete to think ISIS would miss a chance to infiltrate the U.S. among the refugees" (*The Courier Journal*, 18 Nov 2015, Opinion). Another Louisvillian wrote, "We do not need more mouths to feed, Or the danger they bring with them. Worry about the people of Kentucky" (*The Courier Journal*, 19 Nov 2015, Rants and Raves).

Although their arguments often targeted the refugee program in general, critics of US refugee resettlement following the Paris attacks were specifically concerned, like their European counterparts, with Muslim integration and the specter of Islamic extremism. In another letter to the editor, a local woman extended a hypothetical scenario in which a Syrian family arrives in Louisville and, twenty years later, young family members "become radicalized" and bomb the KFC Yum Center. "No amount of vetting in the world could have predicted this. It's not worth the risk," she concludes (*The Courier-Journal*, 18 Nov 2015, Opinion). Through these public conversations, refugee resettlement was increasingly linked to the fear of Muslim "infiltration" in the US; in short, refugee resettlement became highly politicized. On both sides of the debate, refugee, Syrian, and Muslim became linked categories in a way that they had not been previously. On a local and interpersonal scale, this eliding of categories had significant consequences. A Palestinian doctor remembers that a coworker asked her if she was Syrian because she was wearing a hijab. Muslim refugees, who had often reported discrimination in the past, experienced more blatant instances of Islamophobic street harassment. Supporters of refugee resettlement donated generously to both local

resettlement agencies and to local mosques and Islamic centers, some of which had never distributed monetary gifts and had never been connected with the Syrian refugees on an institutional level. The assumption that members of these three groups were strongly linked or one and the same dragged into the fray people who might never have paid attention to the Syrian refugee population in Louisville otherwise.

These political and social links became stronger after President Trump was elected and, as one of his first acts in office, instituted Executive Order 13769, titled “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States.” This order temporarily suspended all refugee arrivals pending a review of the security screening process and barred entry to the US for all nationals of seven Muslim-majority countries that had been previously denied access to the US Visa Waiver program under an amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act (Trump 2017). The scope of the order further galvanized links between anti-Islamophobia activism and supporters of the US refugee resettlement program. The day after the order was signed, an event that had been planned as a workshop about Islamophobia and racism and a networking lunch transformed into a standing-room-only rally protesting all aspects of the order.

For many in the community who had not worked to support refugees in the past, this was a highly embarrassing and mobilizing moment. Muslim refugees had slowly become more and more visible as members of Louisville’s Muslim community and it was becoming clearer and clearer that, with the exception of the mostly Arab and Turkish groups helping the Syrians since 2014, Muslims had taken little collective action to help these refugees. With Muslim refugees as a category now a serious political issue linked to Islamophobic rhetoric and what many saw as the first step toward a full-scale Muslim ban

or Muslim internment, this seemed to be an shameful mark on their record as a community. Individuals who had been previously reticent to participate scrambled to donate and hold public events to demonstrate their support for the Syrian community. At times, these attempts have not been well-received, revealing persistent tensions between Muslim community groups. For example, a Somali community leader visited a popular Somali grocery store to set up a donation box for Syrian refugees on behalf of a primarily South Asian philanthropic group. A man in the store asked him why he should donate to the Syrians while Somalis are dying of famine. Should we not, he reasoned, take care of our own first? The community leader argued that Syrians are fellow Muslims and neighbors and that the community should support both causes. Yet it is hard not to sympathize with this challenge considering how infrequently wealthy community members have helped struggling Somalis since they started to arrive in the late 1990s. Muslims in Louisville have not yet come to terms with this history, but, with recent events, there is hope for solidarities across class, race, and ethnic divisions based on shared political concerns.

Finally, recent efforts to support refugee resettlement are linked to projects aimed at making mosques and Islamic centers more “open” and thus more modern. Conversations about openness can have a multiplicity of meanings in the local context, but usually refer to outreach efforts aimed at creating interfaith alliances and engaging with the local community. They may also refer to reforms aimed at changing mosques and Islamic centers to fit the American context. These include internal debates over how the roles of these gathering spaces might broaden to encompass things like charity and social functions. As discussed previously, roles for mosques beyond being spaces for

worship can be controversial within Muslim communities, but this expansion is becoming quite common in the US, with mosques and Islamic centers taking cues from American churches. This meaning of openness is not unrelated to the more common meaning of increasing local engagement. People organizing a mere worship space have little need for interfaith cooperation. It is only when Islamic centers and mosques start to fill other congregational needs and become sites for building solidarities beyond religious observance that connecting to other communities makes sense and internal tensions rise to the fore.

The physical space of the mosque is the battleground for those who disagree over changes to mosque organization. What should happen in the mosque? How should resources in the mosque be used? When collecting donations for the Syrian refugees, volunteers often had to persuade mosque boards to give them access to storage space. Space and resources in the mosque could also be a point of contention when holding events. At one event, an argument ensued after organizers used tables from a room where Qur'an lessons were taking place and they had to move some back and make do with less table space. Some mosque boards, made up of mostly older and more conservative members, prioritize highly faith-permeated activities like religious education and *da'wa* (missionary work) over interfaith engagement or charitable efforts. The most active volunteers, on the other hand, are not shy about expressing their admiration for the large number of social services that churches provide in the US, describing their amazement at the size and features of some church buildings. Mosque members disagree over whether service expansion is an appropriate adaptation to the American context or an inappropriate and unnecessary innovation.

Reaching beyond the congregation was a profound change of direction for some Islamic centers in post-September 11th Louisville, as many Muslim groups had drawn inward so as to remain inconspicuous and safe in response to growing Islamophobia. One long-time KRM employee said that, when the Kosovars arrived, there were some efforts to get Islamic centers involved that seemed to be off to a good start, but after the September 11th terror attacks in 2001, refugee arrivals decreased significantly and Muslim communities put refugee issues “on the back burner.” Turkish community members related at length their recent efforts to actively connect with more ethnic and religious groups, which started with their decision to connect with the Syrians. They were very happy with how successful their outreach efforts have been and how much support they have received in the recent US political climate, but they stress how much of a risk they felt they were taking initially:

When I first came to the United States my fellow Turks told me don't go other nations' mosques or anything because they were scared. They said we don't want to be close to potential terrorists, we don't know other people, you know? We don't want to be like seen in pictures like this was a concern.

This risk, multiple individuals stressed, was not just an individual issue, but a concern for the national Gülenist group of which they were a part. What might happen to the organization if a member was associated with a terror suspect? The most active Turkish volunteers are still very uncomfortable with individuals and groups that follow more conservative schools of Islam, people who they describe as less open with the connotation of being less willing to change in a Western context. For example, a group of Somalis invited to a Turkish Thanksgiving celebration complained that the holiday is un-Islamic, which made the Turks uncomfortable with and suspicious of them.

Charitable work is part of a larger assemblage of public outreach activities in which local mosques and Islamic centers are engaging, including open mosque days and speaking engagements sponsored by the numerous interfaith nonprofits in Louisville. It is no accident that those individuals who are most engaged in charitable activities for refugees and other needy people living in Louisville are also the people who are regular attendees and organizers at various interfaith gatherings. While refugee resettlement is not inherently an interfaith activity, it has become understood as such. In part, this is because almost all outreach activities initiated by Muslim communities in Louisville are interfaith since Muslims are in the minority. In addition, this can be attributed to the names and affiliations of the two resettlement agencies in Louisville, Catholic Charities, which is an affiliate of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and Kentucky Refugee Ministries, an affiliate of Church World Services (CWS) and Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM). What these names and affiliations mean can be incredibly confusing. Are the resettlement agencies part of the government? Are they part of a church? Most of the resettlement agency staff members are American non-Muslims, but there are some staff members who are definitely not Christian and there is no religious programming. A Muslim staff member explained how challenging it can be just to translate the name “Kentucky Refugee Ministries” without using a word that implies a stronger religious affiliation than is actually present. It is no surprise then that working with the resettlement agencies is often lumped into the category of interfaith activities.

Beyond their direct interactions with resettlement agencies, Muslim groups have enhanced other interfaith aspects of the refugee resettlement program. Promoting intercultural and interfaith exchange is a key strength of the co-sponsorship program, but

cordial relationships that Muslim communities developed with church co-sponsorship teams that they assisted added another layer of community cooperation. These modifications to the traditional co-sponsorship program model fit neatly into larger Muslim community efforts to become open.

Muslim charitable activity centered on Syrian refugees in Louisville is grounded in complex and multifaceted motivations, some of which are more overt than others. Charitable giving to the less fortunate in God's name is a key requirement of Muslim religious practice, but this is far from the only reason why Muslims in Louisville feel a particularly strong call to help Syrian refugees. Many Muslim volunteers, especially immigrant volunteers from the Middle East, act on a sense of national obligation based on social and political ties with Syrian refugees. Some feel the need to support those who are, like them, part of the Muslim religious minority in the US and thus are targets of anti-Muslim discrimination. There is also a popular feeling that Muslims and Middle Easterners will be judged based on the behavior of these new arrivals and so it is in the interest of wealthy, educated immigrant families to "lift up" the poor, uneducated new Syrians. Many of these motivations are based on or strengthen new modes of belonging around which Louisvillians are now mobilizing.

This aid work has profoundly shifted the contours of Muslim community groups. For immigrants from Middle Eastern countries, giving and sharing resources reinforces transnational political ties and national community. The Syrian community in particular is quickly becoming a diaspora that encompasses multiple ethnicities and classes. Syrian immigrant professionals have attempted to use their aid as a tool to make Syrian refugees match their aspirations for a Syrian national image. US political debates about the safety

of the refugee program have changed the ways that both non-Muslims and Muslims perceive the boundaries of their communities. Refugee resettlement, once a fringe issue for anti-Islamophobia activists in Louisville, is now a core concern and Muslim refugees are a symbolically important part of the Muslim-American community in the political sphere.

At all of these scales, volunteer work has been key to how mosque members define their place in society in relation to other Muslims and non-Muslims. In his early 19th century description of the qualities of American democratic society, Alexis de Tocqueville was so impressed by the novel American love of voluntary associations that he wrote, “Nothing, in my opinion, is more deserving of our attention than the intellectual and moral associations of America,” (2002[1835], 585). In his opinion, these associations were a model example of American civil society. It is appropriate, then that voluntary engagement is such a defining feature of American Muslim community creation. Volunteer groups are key forms of political and social engagement that, if they continue, can become a strong basis for further Muslim immigrant integration.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Aya's brow furrowed slightly and she spoke cautiously, "You should know when you meet Hanan, she's legally blind, ok? I'll call her and tell her about you." If Aya hadn't told me, I'm not sure I would have noticed. Hanan walks at a normal pace without a cane and her eyes aren't visibly damaged. When she got in my car to drive to the coffee shop, a welcome excursion while the children were at school, it took me a minute to understand why she was struggling with the seat belt. Her confidence had made me forget already. It had been nearly six months since Hanan's family arrived in Louisville and I was far from the first stranger to call, then show up on her doorstep. First came the caseworkers driving them here and there to countless appointments and showing them the bus routes. Then came a group of Arab ladies from the mosque with dishes, forks, knives, spoons, and meat. Hanan came to rely on these ladies in the coming months to transport her to the grocery store or to the laundromat; she can't distinguish colors and shapes well, so it's hard to memorize bus routes on unfamiliar streets. She and her husband had managed to put together enough money to buy a van and soon she wouldn't need quite so many rides. Her new concern was summer clothing for her children. I suggested that she might ask the people from the mosque, since I knew that they had bags and bags of clothing gathered as donations. She shook her head. No. I can't ask for this. They're my friends; I can't ask for too much like this. As I drop her off at home, her children have

just gotten off the bus and they stop to say hello. Oh, another stranger driving our mother around.

The resettlement process requires a great deal of blind faith. Get on this plane. It will take you to a city you have never heard of far from all your friends and family. When you get there, strangers might be there to meet you. They will help you get food and shelter. Later, they will come to your home and take you to appointments and English lessons. Please trust them. After a week or so, you will be taking the bus on your own on these streets that you do not recognize. Welcome to the United States! When KRM was staffed by three very committed women, staff did not stay strangers for long, but things have changed. Forging any sort of personal connection with every staff member involved in your case is essentially impossible. The person who is taking you to the food stamp office might be an intern who you never see again. There may be twenty or more students in your English class interacting with one teacher. But what about the women who visit for tea every so often? The ones who speak your language and can sit and chat about life. When you need help, they treat you like a friend or a family member. Those people stop being strangers very quickly.

Yet in a sense, while individual Muslim volunteers are more knowable, Muslim communities are far less knowable units. One woman coming to your door with a box of household supplies represents a massive group of anonymous donors and supporters that you may never meet. This network, unlike a resettlement agency with a clear mission statement, employees with bounded tasks and duties, and a place in an institutional hierarchy, is a loosely organized grouping of people with varying, overlapping motivations, a lack of clearly articulated goals, and no real name to identify them.

Repeatedly throughout my fieldwork, I asked who was helping the refugees and received vague responses, like “the Muslim community” or “some Turkish people” or “some Arab people”. Simply understanding what community KRM had engaged with as part of the IRUSA grant became central to my analysis. Who were these people? Why did they help?

These complex questions are key to the puzzle of Muslim community engagement in Louisville, but even those individuals who feel that they are part of the Muslim community have trouble defining what that is and what it means. Often, “Muslim community” just means the Muslims who are most like the person who uses the phrase in terms of class, ethnicity, or nationality. At other times, volunteers are invoking solidarities across these barriers that are most powerful in the context of charitable work. These definitions may at times have more to do with aspirations for community than the actual reality of the moment.

It is notable that people rarely talked about Muslim community outside of the context of coming together to do good works, whether that happened during Ramadan, in response to an emergency, or as part of welcoming a new refugee family. Community is constituted through material and social aid and the networks they flow through. Even fundraising and community outreach events often play the additional role of bringing community members, including refugees, together. As Liisa Malkki writes, “The benefactor’s own need to help those in need may generate actions that in fact help the benefactor him/herself in surprising and vital ways,” (2015, 8). While both KRM staff and Muslim volunteers are driven by a “need to help,” these needs are constituted in

profoundly different ways and the obligations that go along with these needs are understood differently.

This study suggests that Muslim FBOs have a significant impact on integration, but not exactly in the way that one might expect based on previous research. Community engagement through support of refugee resettlement, based on this data, promotes integration for both the helpers and the people who are being helped. This charitable work has encouraged several local Muslim groups to work together in ways that they never have before. Relative to this, refugee integration into the social fabric of the wealthier mosques has been minimal. Refugees have become incorporated into national and ethnic communities through occasional social gatherings and resources like the Syrian Whatsapp chat group, but they are still absent from East End congregations because of a lack of proximity. Despite the connections that refugee aid has forged, class continues to be a significant barrier to community unity.

In addition, significant ethnic divides persist. However, the Muslim volunteer groups that were most involved in the Syrian resettlement are now attempting to create stronger relationships with other refugee groups like the Somalis and are planning a fundraising and community outreach event, a multicultural market, to which all refugee groups will be invited. Is this too little too late? There seems to be a theme in local organizing of “we will try it with the Syrians first, then with everyone else”, rooted in the novelty of Muslim organizing around refugee issues. Some see this as Arab-centric thinking. Time will tell if community members can come to terms with their historic lack of engagement and work beyond these tensions.

Data from this study suggests that, although Muslim FBOs in Louisville do adhere to different ethical standards from resettlement agencies and their motivations are far from neutral, there is no evidence that this leads to proselytizing or other types of coercion. Evidence does seem to indicate that some refugees prefer working with Muslim community members, with whom they develop closer relationships. It is also clear that they have connections that allow for better access to funding and other material resources. Also, although there has been some tension with local resettlement agencies, Muslim volunteers have developed resources and opportunities that do not necessarily conflict with those that KRM provides. Their methods would not be an effective replacement for professional resettlement services, but they provide effective supplementary services.

If KRM is to make these benefits more accessible, the agency must continue to actively develop a relationship with local Muslim groups. In order for future outreach to be effective, it will be necessary to pay close attention to the differences between the discourses they use and the goals that they set and those of community groups. When training Muslim co-sponsors or collaborating with Muslim FBOs, KRM staff should keep in mind that Muslim immigrant professionals often enter their interactions with resettlement agencies with many assumptions about what integration and their relationship with Muslim refugees will look like. Educational outreach is particularly important in this community to clarify the place of the resettlement agency in the refugee resettlement process. This could take the form of donor information meetings, possibly taking place both at KRM's offices and in meeting spaces at mosques, Islamic centers,

and/or cultural centers. It would also be helpful to prepare clear written materials on KRM's responsibilities to be supplied to prospective co-sponsors, volunteers, and donors.

In the future, KRM should also consider setting more programmatic goals beyond those required by funding sources. This would ideally involve a broad community consultation process that would include the emerging Muslim voluntary organizations among other local stakeholders. Refugee resettlement agencies like KRM would do well to listen to critiques that they receive from community groups, as alternative perspectives may highlight serious problems that need to be addressed. For example, the substandard housing conditions in Jefferson County have become so common and every day for most staff members that they no longer give them much thought. Complaints from clients and volunteers should be a reminder that this form of everyday structural violence is not acceptable and requires some form of action. KRM already holds community consultation meetings, but their role could be broadened and their frequency could be increased.

KRM and Muslim FBOs need to establish better communication practices to facilitate refugee access to new Muslim social services. Although these groups have so far served mostly Muslim populations, the same groups that encouraged them to get more involved, all said that they would be willing to help others if they knew how to contact them. When a refugee client needs financial assistance or donated items, it would be helpful if either KRM or the refugee could request help directly. Many churches have clothes closets, food banks, or English classes that clients already receive information about. Having regular enough services to clearly advertise and invite refugees and other needy people to receive direct aid would require a bit more organization on the part of

Muslim groups, but there are some promising initiatives already starting. One mosque already has a clothes closet that is open once every two weeks, but, so far, the organizers have not made flyers or communicated the opening times clearly to KRM staff. Better communication could mean that independent Muslim charitable initiatives could reach a larger audience.

With the future of the refugee resettlement program in question and refugee arrivals currently suspended, now may not seem like the best time to pour more resources into donor and co-sponsor outreach. Free-cases (cases without family ties) are the cases that generally receive support from co-sponsors and none will arrive for four months under the current Supreme Court decision relating to Executive Orders 13769 and 13780. Yet in the wake of this reduction in arrivals and in anticipation of proposed budget cuts both to the programs that resettle refugees and the programs that support low-income residents of the US with and without refugee status, more non-governmental assistance will be vital to sustain important support services. Muslims are likely to be sympathetic to the hardships caused by the executive orders that they refer to as the Muslim Ban. Mobilizing FBO support for refugee resettlement may be the way for resettlement agencies to obtain the funding needed to weather the current political climate and emerge intact.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Schedule for Kentucky Refugee Ministries Employees

- 1) Tell me about your involvement with refugee resettlement agencies.
 - a) When did you first become involved with a refugee resettlement agency?
 - b) In what capacity were you involved?
 - c) Has your role changed since then? If so, how?
 - d) How has the agency changed since you first became involved?
- 2) In your experience, what services, if any, do local Muslims provide for refugees?
 - a) When did you first hear about these services?
 - b) Are these services effective? Why or why not?
 - c) How do these services compare to those provided by KRM and KOR?
 - d) How could these services better complement KRM's services?
 - e) How could KRM's services better complement these community-provided services?
- 3) What do you think about local mosques and Islamic centers?
 - a) Do you trust them? Why or why not?
 - b) What do mosques and Islamic centers do well?
 - c) What do mosques and Islamic centers do poorly?
- 4) Tell me about partnerships with the Muslim community.

- a) What is the relationship between KRM and local mosques and Islamic centers like?
 - b) How has this relationship changed over time?
 - c) What challenges has the partnership faced?
 - d) Is this partnership effective? How so?
 - e) What part of this partnership are you most proud of?
 - f) What do you think could be improved about the partnership?
- 5) What if anything have I not asked that you think is important to my project?
 - 6) Would you be willing to participate in an additional interview in the future?

Schedule for Volunteers

- 1) In what religious organizations are you currently active? How long have you been involved?
- 2) Are many members of [*religious organization*] refugees or immigrants?
 - a) If so, when did they arrive in the US? What agency helped them during resettlement?
- 3) How do you feel about helping refugees?
 - a) Why do you help refugees?
- 4) Tell me about [*religious organization*]'s work with refugees.
 - a) When did [*religious organization*] start working with refugees?
 - b) To what needs did [*religious organization*] respond? How did [*religious organization*] respond?
 - c) What challenges has this work faced?
 - d) What part of this response are you most proud of?

- e) Was this response effective? How so?
 - f) How have [*religious organization*]'s responses changed over time?
 - g) What do you think could be improved about [*religious organization*]'s response?
- 5) Have you ever officially partnered with a refugee resettlement agency? If so...
- a) When did you first become involved with a refugee resettlement agency?
 - b) In what capacity were you involved?
 - c) Has your role changed since then? If so, how?
- 6) What do you think about local refugee resettlement agencies?
- a) Do you trust them? Why or why not?
 - b) What do local agencies do well?
 - c) What do local agencies do poorly?
- 7) What do you think about the US refugee program as a whole?
- a) Do you trust the people who administer the US refugee program nationally? Why or why not?
 - b) What does the national program do well?
 - c) What does the national program do poorly?
- 8) Is [*religious organization*] currently partnering with Kentucky Refugee Ministries or Catholic Charities? If not, why? If so, tell me about the partnership.
- a) What work are you doing together?
 - b) When did [*religious organization*] start working with [*resettlement agency*]?
 - c) How has their relationship changed over time?
 - d) What challenges has this partnership faced?
 - e) Is this partnership effective? How so?

- f) What part of this partnership are you most proud of?
- g) What do you think could be improved about the partnership?
- 9) What if anything have I not asked that you think is important to my project?
- 10) Would you be willing to participate in an additional interview in the future?

Schedule for Refugee Beneficiaries

- 1) Tell me about when you first arrived in Louisville.
 - a) When did you come to Louisville?
 - b) What agency took your case?
 - c) What was your favorite thing about Louisville when you first arrived?
 - d) What was the most challenging part of your first year in Louisville?
- 2) Tell me about the people who helped you when you arrived in Louisville.
 - a) Who did you turn to when you needed help?
 - b) What did you need?
 - c) How did you hear about these people or organizations?
 - d) How did these people or organizations help? Did they provide what you needed?
If not, why?
- 3) What do you think about local refugee resettlement agencies?
 - a) Do you trust them? Why or why not?
 - b) What do local agencies do well?
 - c) What do local agencies do poorly?
- 4) What do you think about the US refugee program as a whole?
 - a) Do you trust the people who administer the US refugee program nationally? Why or why not?

- b) What does the national program do well?
 - c) What does the national program do poorly?
- 5) What do you think about local mosques and Islamic centers?
- a) Do you trust them? Why or why not?
 - b) What do mosques and Islamic centers do well?
 - c) What do mosques and Islamic centers do poorly?
- 6) From what Muslim organizations have you received benefits?
- a) How did you hear about [*religious organization*]?
 - b) Tell me about the first time you received or requested their help.
 - i) What did they provide? Was it what you needed? If not, why?
 - ii) How did you feel about asking for help?
- 7) In what religious organizations, if any, have you been involved?
- a) Are you still involved? If so, what is your role?
 - b) Why did you choose [*religious organization*] over other options?
 - c) Is [*religious organization*] important to you? Why or why not?
- 8) What if anything have I not asked that you think is important to my project?
- 9) Would you be willing to participate in an additional interview in the future?

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