“South Africa Belongs to All Who Live in It”: Congolese refugee notions of belonging and social cohesion in Durban, South Africa

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................ 3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................................. 3
INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................................ 4
LITERATURE REVIEW ......................................................................................................................... 6
    TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION THEORY ....................................................................................... 7

METHODOLOGY ................................................................................................................................. 10

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS .................................................................................................... 13
    QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS .......................................................................................................... 13
        Demographic of Respondents ................................................................................................. 13
        Age Distribution ..................................................................................................................... 14
        Education, Previous Occupation and Occupation in Country of Origin .................................. 15
        Marital and Family Status ....................................................................................................... 17
    QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS ........................................................................................................... 17
        Inclusion, Social Cohesion and Integration ........................................................................... 18
        Citizenship and Belonging ...................................................................................................... 27
        Searching for Peace ............................................................................................................... 29

CONCLUSIONS .................................................................................................................................. 31

LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY ........................................................................................................ 32

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY ................................................................................ 34

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................................................................. 35

APPENDICES ...................................................................................................................................... 36
Abstract

This research applies the theoretical framework of transnational migration theory to conceptualize Congolese refugees sense of belonging, participation and inclusion in Durban, South Africa. This is especially significant as the data for the study was collected following Durban’s second large-scale wave of xenophobic attacks on foreigners, occurring in March of this year. The term refugee in this study is used to include individuals identified by the 1951 UNHCR Refugee Convention as, ‘someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular group, or political opinion,’ as well as those individuals seeking asylum awaiting refugee status. I argue that although demographically South Africa is a melting pot country, and despite forming livelihoods and networks, the ability for refugees to integrate is seemingly unachievable. This is made visible by acts of xenophobia perpetuated by structurally oppressed black South Africans who fear sharing limited resources with refugees in social, political and economic spaces.

Data for the study was compiled through ten in-depth interviews with Congolese refugees, along with participant and non-participant observations conducted while interning at the KwaZulu-Natal Refugee Council. The largest themes presented surround issues of a challenging of the South African concept of ‘The Rainbow Nation’, economic instability and structural exclusion as the root causes of xenophobia, notions of belonging and citizenship, interpretations of social cohesion vs. government action toward integration, and a reimagining of ‘home.’

The purpose of this research is not to vilify any specific group as perpetrators of anti-foreigner sentiments, but it is significant in that it underscores the effects of limited remedying of structural inequality and social cohesion initiatives by the State on refugees senses of belonging and identity. Furthermore, in a geopolitical context, this study draws attention to the transnationality of the refugee experience. Limited social cohesion and integration efforts in South Africa has led individuals to feel unwelcomed—they neither belong here nor there, dislocated from home but living on the fringes of social, political and economic life in the host country.

Acknowledgements

I would like to send my deepest gratitude to Baruti Amisi and all of the wonderful people I met while working at the KwaZulu-Natal Refugee Council, this project would not have been possibly without your guidance, friendship and knowledge. I would also like to give immense thanks to the individuals who participated in this study and opened up their lives to me both on a research level as well as on a personal one. Thank you to the Lampert Institute for making this study possible, and to my Colgate advisor Mary Moran for being available every step of the way.

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Introduction

South Africa, regarded as a safe-haven for migrants, incorporates basic principles of refugee protection into its constitution, including freedom of movement, the right to work, and access to basic social services (UNHCR). Composed in 1955 by the African National Congress and incorporated into South Africa's 1994 democratic constitution, the Freedom Charter states that, “South Africa belongs to all who live in it” (ANC, 2011). With 243,948 pending applications for asylum, and 112,192 recognized refugees as of 2014, South Africa in the past several years has positioned itself as one of the leading recipients of refugees and asylum seekers in the world (Slate). The largest group represented originating from a single country consists of those from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with 16,000 refugees and 9,000 asylum seekers (UNHCR South Africa, 2015). Although demographically South Africa is a melting pot country, the ability for refugees to succeed, integrate, and create prosperous livelihoods is seemingly unachievable. This is made visible acts of xenophobia perpetuated by structurally oppressed black South Africans who fear sharing limited resources with refugees.

Arguably, South Africa’s open-door refugee and asylum policy\(^2\) has been one of the country’s most polarizing issues, with some quarters raising the concern of refugees undermining the job prospects of South Africans, and questioning the positive contribution they make to the country (Sibanda and Zuberi, 2004: 1463). With a skyrocketing unemployment rate of 25%, an overwhelming sentiment views refugees as taking over

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\(^2\) Prior to the 1998 Refugee Act, the 1995 Aliens Control Amendment Act was enacted to attract skilled foreign laborers to the country (The Economist, 2002). This stipulation was removed from the 1998 act and has heavily impacted on the waves of both legal and illegal migrants entering the country (Sibanda and Zuberi, 2004: 1465).
jobs, the land and its people. The instability of the economy coupled with prejudices against foreign nationals spawns a publically xenophobic attitude toward refugees and prevents them from entering political, social and economic spaces. As a result of anti-foreigner sentiments, refugees of all nationalities are often targeted and experience some form of xenophobia while living in the country, with the largest violent uprisings occurring in May of 2008 and again in 2015. Presently, the experience of refugees in South Africa is one of survival. With no legal status and little support outside of their communities, refugees in South Africa see themselves as transient members of their host country with little incentive to integrate or claim citizenship in South Africa (Amisi and Ballard, 2005: 2).

As one of the largest groups of foreign nationals seeking refuge in the country, the goal of this project is to give voice to the stories of Congolese refugees to allow them to share in their own words the experiences and challenges they face while seeking refuge in South Africa. In the interviews, I asked questions surrounding themes of personal background and the journey to Durban, economic position and livelihood in the city, notions of belonging and social cohesion in the local community, issues of integration, structural exclusion and discrimination, and future aspirations. The participant and non-participant observations are a culmination of internship experience at the KwaZulu-Natal Refugee Council—notes taken at meetings, hearing first-hand accounts of issues from refugees seeking the assistance of the Council, and through informal conversations at one of three refugee camps that were opened in Durban following the violence in March. These meetings, and the current focus of the Council, are geared toward implementing social cohesion initiatives and trainings in Durban as a means of preventing future xenophobic outbreaks as well as addressing refugee fears and hesitations of being reintegrated back
into the Durban the communities they fled in March. Ultimately, the objective of this project, and the reasons for which these particular methods were used, is to gain a better understanding of how the South African ideal of social cohesion, as laid out in the Freedom Charter, makes room for the integration of refugees, as well as to explore the ways in which Congolese refugees in Durban navigate this in combination with their own identities and citizenship of origin.

**Literature Review**

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees defines local integration of refugees as being a multifaceted process between refugees and their receiving countries in which refugees as individuals and as groups become integrated members of their new societies socially, legally and economically. As laid out in the UNHCR 1967 Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, refugees entering a country should have access to the same rights as nationals of the host country, i.e. access to public services, public assistance, public education, the right to employment or self-employment, legal and property rights, etc., without discrimination as to sex, age, race, sexuality, ability, religion or country of origin; nor should they be penalized for their illegal entry (UNHCR). In considering the plight of the refugee, while reasons for migration are clear, the refugee story does not end once an individual, group or family reaches a destination. How refugees are able to integrate into function in their new societies is equally important. This literature review serves to define transnational migration, as it is applicable to this study in conceptualizing the ways in which Congolese migrants are able to integrate and in a South African context. The selected literature will briefly review transnational migration theory
as a means of explaining how people attempt to build new homes when returning to their own is not a possibility, and how they respond if the new space is not open to welcoming them.

*Transnational Migration Theory*

Anthropologists Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc, though they do not speak specifically to the migration of refugees, define transmigrants as ‘immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation state’; ‘the transnational migration is the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement...immigrants construct and reconstitute their simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society’ (Basch, Blanc & Schiller, 1995, 48). Applying this definition specifically to the migration of refugees seems almost matter-of-fact, as these are individuals who do not leave by choice, but for fear of their lives, maintaining ties physically, emotionally and ideologically to their countries of origin. The International Organization for Migration perhaps sums up the predicament of the refugee best by describing the transmigrant experience as a state of 'being neither here nor there’ (IOM, 2010, 1). Though it speaks to migrants in a general definition, the report continues on to emphasize the importance of the individual’s connections back home, including familial, religious and political convictions as playing an integral role in the migrant’s sense of individual and collective identity in a new space. These authors attribute these connections back home to ability for those in the country of origin to economically benefit from the migrant—this assumption leaves space only for the economic in their analysis and
disregards the experience of forced migrants. ‘Migrant’ as an overarching term for emigrants is limiting to the discourse of human migration, which can include forced migrants such as refugees, economic migrants who purposefully leave home for increased economic mobility, internally displaced persons who leave their homes for similar reasons as refugees but do not leave the boundaries of their countries, etc. For this specific study, it is important to distinguish types of migration and how transnational migration theory functions differently when applied to the movement of people migrating to seek refuge.

Horst points to this distinction in her 2006 book, *Transnational Nomads: How Somalis Cope with Refugee Life in the Dadaab Camps of Kenya*, by making a case similar to that of my introductory claim, she writes:

The academic discourse and practical efforts dealing with refugees continue to be informed by the assumption of a rigid separation between the exile’s country of origin and country of asylum. First, this reflects longstanding academic divisions between refugee studies and migration studies, where the first discipline supposedly deals with political or forced migration and the second with economic or voluntary migration. (Horst 33)

She follows this point by highlighting the connection between transnational migration studies and diasporic migration—the diasporic migration falling under the discourse of transnational migration yet refugee migration has been left out (Horst 34). In defining diasporic migration as relating to forceful or traumatic displacement and including it within the discourse, refugee migration by default of its predication is to be included as well. In considering this, Horst does not fail to acknowledge the reasons for which refugee migration may be left out of transnational discourse. Horst explicitly recognizes the drawbacks as laid out by migration theorist Crisp that refugees are left out of the discourse because with little social capital they do not serve to benefit from transnational networks (Crisp 1990a).
While refugees may not have the ability to accrue the social capital necessary to participate in the exchange of remittances that Crisp and Horst identify as a limiting factor in legitimizing their role in transnational migration theory, this offers a very limited scope of what transnationalism as a discourse offers. Ignored in this analysis are the importance of trust networks and the exchange of cultural capital in transnational migration. As a discourse, the social significance of transnationalism is just as significant, if not more than, its economic significance. While the diffusion of monetary and material goods across borders through transnational processes is of importance, so is the diffusion of norms, cultural practices, ideas, etc. Charles Tilly in “Trust Networks in Transnational Migration” writes of these trust networks, ‘People rely especially on these networks when they are carrying on long-term, crucial enterprises, such as procreation, child rearing, religious or political commitment, long distance trade, and of course migration’ (Tilly, 2007, 5). As evidenced in my own time in the field, refugees rely heavily on these trust networks for various reasons including to help other Congolese individuals make the journey to South Africa. It can even be argued that as these transnational refugee networks find success without a heavy economic influence, the processes by which they function are more successful and encompass true transnationalism more so than a traditional transnational migrant network.

This applicability of transnational migrant theory to the lived experience of refugees is furthermore evident in the mass diffusion of norms that occur cross-border. Prominent political scientist and transnational scholar Sikking defines norms as, ‘standards of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity;’ Catherine Willis continues on this same thread by clarifying that a norm lifestyle has three main stages, norm emergence,
norm cascading and internalization (Willis, 2005). This is most notable in the way that refugees have transformed South Africa’s informal economy. Morris and Bouillon attribute the vast size, array of economic activity and competition in South Africa’s informal economy to the rising influx of Francophone migrants in the late 1990’s (Bouillon and Morris, 2001, p.94). With the increase in both the economic migrant and refugee population, limited availability to enter the formal economy led many migrants to opening up informal shops as a means of acquiring livelihood (Bouillon and Morris, 2001, p.94); this includes, but is not limited to the Senegalese domination over the selling of leather goods (Hunter and Skinner, 2003: 308), or the overwhelmingly Congolese presence in the hairdressing and barber shop industries. With the success of migrants in these spaces, local low-skilled and/or unemployed South Africans soon realized they too could engage in these economic activities. This diffusion of migrant informal activity soon became a norm and for this reason the informal economy in South Africa exists in a constant state of competition as space is quickly reaching saturation.

**Methodology**

Aside from gathering demographic data from each participant, this field study is a qualitative analysis of refugee’s narratives. The success of the project was predicated on my ability to intern at the KwaZulu-Natal Refugee Council, a small grassroots community organization that advocates for the rights of refugee populations in Durban. To complete the study, I utilized a semi-structured interview method as well as participant and non-participant observation while working through the Council. Formal and semi-structured interviews took place at the Council while my observations were a result of time directly
spent as an intern, sitting in on various meetings and visiting a refugee camp in Chatsworth, a Durban township. The camp was one of three that opened following the xenophobic attacks in March, and remained open the longest before shutting down at the beginning of July. While South Africa had prided itself on its ability to receive and maintain influxes of refugees in the country without the existence of refugee camps, these were opened as a direct but temporary response to the attacks. They were designed to give people protected space away from the threat of harm in their dense, diverse urban neighborhoods in Durban. While the camps met the goal of temporarily relocating refugees out of violent spaces, they ended up functioning more like internment camps, with upwards of a thousand people crowded into one fenced, open space with little food, resources or access to space outside of the camp boundaries.

I conducted ten in-depth interviews with adult (ages 18+) Congolese refugees in Durban who arrived between the years of 1997 and 2013. As a means of acquiring comprehensive data, five participants were female and five were male, living in different areas in Durban and occupying varying economic and social niches within their communities. The interviews were structured with closed questions to start as a means of quantifying the demographic profile of each participant fit, i.e. the neighborhood in which each participant lived, level of education achieved, marital status, age, family size, employment status, etc. Following introductory questions, the remainder of the interviews utilized open-ended questions surrounding themes of economic livelihood, belonging and social cohesion in Durban, challenges of integration, structural exclusion and discrimination, and future aspirations. All meetings with participants were arranged through my supervisor at the Council, Dr. Baruti Amisi. As a Congolese permanent resident
who arrived to Durban in 1997 and a respected community member amongst the refugee populations, Amisi had many trusting colleagues who were willing to speak with me. Prior to beginning each interview, the participant was asked to sign a consent form in which he/she was able to read before hand and ask clarifying questions to either myself or to Amisi in one of their native languages of either French or Swahili. The interviews lasted between 30-90 minutes and were conducted in English. Amisi sat in on most to aid in translation and clarification. On a few occasions I was made to rely on my own conversational French to clarify or reinterpret questions and responses. No personally identifying questions such as name or family name were asked to protect the anonymity of each participant. The interviews were recorded on my phone, transcribed shortly after under a coded number and the recording was then deleted from the device. In addition to recording, I took notes throughout the interviews as a guide to ask follow-up questions that were not indicated on my preset list of questions that were then discarded following each interview. Transcribed interviews were identifiable only by number and saved in a password-protected folder on my personal computer. In addition to

As supplementary to the interviews, and as recommended by Dr. Amisi, I took handwritten notes during various meetings and interactions while working with the Council. These were non-official in-office meetings and official meetings with other local NGO’s and religious organizations including the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) a peace building civil society organization, the KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council and others. Non-official meetings with individuals coming by the office offered great insight into the day-to-day activity and responsibilities of the Council. Though these were not particular to the needs of Congolese individuals, it was helpful in
understanding in comprehensive detail the challenges of refugees in Durban. The official meetings with other local NGO’s and community organizations were all focused on the reintegration of refugees back into local Durban communities prior to and following the closing of the Chatsworth camp by looking at what issues were making individuals and families hesitant to return to their homes, ways to ensure their security, and what procedures needed to be implemented as next-step solutions should people refuse to leave the camp. These meetings occurred both at the camp itself as well as at local churches and organizations.

**Results and Data Analysis**

*Quantitative Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An equal number of interviews were conducted with men and women. This is uncommon in qualitative research on Congolese refugees as the population of men overall is larger than that of women. An equal distribution would have been unlikely without the use of such a small sample and without the aid of Dr. Amisi. Refugee women are generally less willing to speak to strangers than men (Amisi, 2006, p.8), they were however more willing to participate in this study perhaps because I am woman but in large part because
of the pre-existing trust each individual had with Amisi as a friend, community leader and advocate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% Of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-38</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39-48</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49-58</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though that data coincides with the National Survey of the Refugee Reception and Status Determination System in South Africa conclusion that the average age of refugees in South Africa is 30-years-old, this sample size is not large enough to be statistically significant. The average age/gender distribution of for this study shows that the average age of men interviewed was 40 years and 41 for women.
A large part of a refugee’s inability to integrate successfully in South Africa is due to not being able to find work in his or her specialized field. All participants interviewed acquired at least a high school diploma in DRC, many furthering their education to the tertiary level or beyond acquiring Master’s or law degrees. Despite formal training and education, only one participant held a wage-employment position in a field of their specialty. Not one individual with secondary degree status held a position in the formal economy, and only 50% of those with secondary schooling held employment in the
informal economy. It is also important to note that due to the xenophobic violence, those who reported being self-employed with secondary degrees were not working at the time of the study. Only 30% of participants, no matter the degree were still in their field of their choice whether working as volunteers or for a paid wage. 50% of respondent were either unemployed or volunteered for no wage. 40% of males were working for some wage whereas 60% of women received some wage for their work.

Amisi’s research also shows the high skill level of Congolese migrants in South Africa in terms of skill and education levels (Amisi, 2006: 12). Despite high levels of education each participant found their qualifications to have no or little contribution to procuring employment in Durban and limited opportunities for continuing a formal education and acquiring local qualification in Durban. Hence, we see such a large presence of skilled and educated francophone migrants filling informal sector employment or volunteer positions without the hope of forward mobility.
Marital and Family Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Children born in DRC</th>
<th>Children born in SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Married (in SA)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Married (wife in DRC)</td>
<td>2 (still in DRC)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1 (DRC), 1 (en route)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This data indicates that only 10%, or 1 participant married in South Africa. 80% of respondents are married and 80% have children. This can be attributed to cultural and religious marital and family planning practices of the culturally conservative DRC population. The frequency of children born in South Africa is higher than that of children born in the DRC, this can possibly be attributed to warlike conditions at home and the proximity of the eldest child’s birth to the participant fleeing the country.

Qualitative Analysis

This section will examine the qualitative themes that provided the most insight into understanding what circumstances in Durban determine Congolese ability to integrate successfully into South African society and what this means for
or how their identity is shaped in a new space. The qualitative data is analyzed in three sections: The first being Congolese refugees sense of inclusion, interpretations of social cohesion and integration in Durban, The second a look at the notions of citizenship and belonging, and the third the Congolese refugee search for peace. The analysis for this section relies heavily on data from the ten participatory interviews.

Inclusion, Social Cohesion and Integration

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has faced ethnic and political tension as far back as 1993 following highly contested parliamentary elections, and since then has experienced two civil wars in the last two decades with the first occurring from 1996-1997 and again in from 1998-2003 (Refugees International). The country still faces political and ethnic violence as rebel forces continue to pressure the elected government. Participant 2 quotes her brother as her reason for leaving the DRC, ‘I will never sell my conscience. I can never be corrupted nor sell my conscience;’ after her brother refused to join the rebel army against the government he was killed and soldiers began looking for her so she fled.

Fearing persecution, and in seek of survival, as of 2014 the UNHCR has recorded that 584,133 Congolese have fled the DRC since 1996 with the majority leaving from the hotbed of conflict in the eastern region of the country; this number includes both refugees and asylum seekers.\(^3\) While many of these individuals have fled to the neighboring

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\(^3\) What distinguishes refugee status from asylum seeker status is where an individual is in the process of being recognized as a refugee by the South African state. Refugees are those who have been granted protective refugee status by the South African government and asylum seekers those still awaiting action regarding their refugee status. Those with asylum seeker status must update their asylum status every three months, and at this time they meet one of three options: 1) a granting of refugee status under the conditions that the
countries of Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania (UNHCR), those seeking shelter as far away from DRC as possible find themselves seeking refuge in South Africa. Despite its distance from most countries on the continent, South Africa remains a popular choice for refugees, an appealing choice given its high level of development, its reputation in addressing and mending the human rights violations that occurred as a result of Apartheid, and its previous stance on renouncing refugee camps prior to the 2015 xenophobic uprising as mentioned before out of a sense of pride that the state ideally is able to receive and protect refugees by integrating them into their local communities. While this was true for some participants, like participant 2 who claims: ‘and then I knew that South Africa is a developed country, I knew that South Africa must be a peaceful country and where I could be. As a democratic country, I could gain all the human rights. But on the ground I just found the just the country, yeah.’

A more common theme that emerged placed South Africa as a destination of circumstance rather than desire. A more frequently occurring response from interviews was one of getting on a truck and ending up at the South Africa-Mozambique border days

state objectively feels the individual is vulnerable enough that their desire for protection is well-founded, 2) if the Department of Home Affairs, feels that the individual’s sense of threat is legitimate but their fear of persecution is not well-founded, they will renew asylum seeker status but not grant the person all of the protective rights of a refugee as laid out in the UNHCR 1951 Convention, or 3) Acknowledge that the asylum status is up, objectively decide that the threat to the person’s life is not well-founded and deport them from the country under the assumption that they are able to return home. Those with asylum seeker status face more social and structural limitations when compared with those accepted refugees in having full access to state benefits, employment and housing opportunities, etc. While this may seem like a hierarchical distinction, the actual experience of recognized refugees in the country is on par to that of asylum seekers due to the inequality and xenophobia foreign nationals face in the country. That being said, the process of re-interviewing every 90 days and the fear of deportation pushed people to continue to apply for recognized refugee status which over time makes one eligible for permanent residency, theoretically opening up the door for even more state benefits.
later, or attempting to get as far away from DRC as possible and running out of money upon reaching Durban. Denis Kadima offers a different narrative, attributing South Africa as a destination to being a springboard to a future in the US, either through its cheaper travel documents, resettlement, or the increased cultural capital that comes with living in South Africa such as the opportunity to learn English (Bouillon, p. 95). While the desire for resettlement came up during participant observation at the Chatsworth camp, it was never indicated by any of my participants as a reason for choosing South Africa. Though it does not come from a Congolese but a Somali permanent resident who has had her fair share of experience with xenophobia and discrimination, perhaps this quote will best clarify South Africa’s supposed role as a haven for refugees, ‘No one chooses to be here. No one wants to leave home. Home will always be home.’

‘You are a ‘kwerekwere,’ you are a foreigner’: Congolese refugees sense of belonging

All participants interviewed described experiencing anti-foreigner sentiments in Durban, often marked with the discriminatory slur, ‘kwerekwere,’ a word used to describe foreigners who do not belong. Some experienced this discrimination as early as upon their arrival to Durban; participant 2 who arrived in 2005 claims, ‘It was hard for us we were hiding, some they were saying we don’t like to see kwerekwere. Then we can be three days in the house with no getting out.’ All of the participants has either been a victim of, or knows someone who has been a victim of discrimination ranging from verbal abuse, sexual assault, or violent attack. In adhering to the objectives laid out for this project in specifically addressing narratives of belonging, it is important that I briefly share the responses of each
participant on the question of inclusion. When asked if each participant feels welcome in

Durban, participants responded with:

‘No, because they attacked me in 2012. That’s why I’m like this; I can’t talk, I can’t do
anything anymore.’

‘I can say I feel welcomed because when we arrive here we found other foreigners
who was happy to see us.’

‘Not that much...we are here, we are friendly with people but many of them they
don’t like us so what can we do. So we cope with any situation which comes to us.’

‘No and yes. Yes because we have to go and they give you the paper to stay...but the
way people approach you, the way some people talk to you is very harsh.’

‘No, no, no because after, before xenophobia they was telling us, ‘you, we gonna see.”

‘We are facing some problems ...it’s not easy to integrate the community, the South
African community.’

‘Before, yes. Now, eish...in South Africa they want to kill us.’

[translator] ‘No because they tried to kill her.’

‘In all my life here, I just say that it is in danger, even more than when I was in Congo
because in Congo it just come once and we see that oh, there’s a war, but here
everywhere I go I fear because I know that maybe I can be attacked.’

The majority of participants pinpointed interactions with local black South Africans
as the root cause of these feelings. Some participants specifically using the terms ‘blacks’
inserted this into the conversation or ‘Zulus’ when speaking about discrimination or
xenophobic violence they face in Durban. One woman claims, ‘I do not cooperate with
black South Africans because they are very hypocrite. They will say they love you but deep
down they don’t love you and if there’s any incident they’ll turn against you. So I can talk to
them, try to be nice because we are living together but I don’t want to befriend them.’ This
was a general sentiment expressed by individuals throughout the interview process. For
those that used only the term ‘South Africans’ when speaking to the root cause of the challenges they face, they made a clear distinction when talking about ‘South Africans’ and when talking about ‘whites.’ Bouillon attributes this unwelcoming sentiment to ‘a culture of exclusive ethno-linguistic identity instituted and developed by apartheid’ (Bouillon, p. 113). In adhering to the viewpoints of traditional migrant theory, Bouillon suggests that because these separate groups and their respective cultures are contained in impermeable borders, their lives are too distant to understand one another. This antiquated mindset limits the notion that ideas, culture can be shared, diffused and exchanged if both groups are willing to interact; that Congolese identities can continue to exist and interact outside of the controlled borders of francophone Africa.

‘This place is Hell’: interpretations of social cohesion and integration in Durban

Doug Massey speaks to the benefits of organized social cohesion within migrant groups, the benefit of this, creating a familiar sense of identity and inclusion within a new community (Bhachu and Light, 1993, p. 26). While Congolese refugees in Durban have been extremely successful at forming networks within their own communities, both geographically by creating Congolese pockets in multi-ethnic neighborhoods and also in an imagined sense of community of reliance on each other regardless of geographical location in the city, they have been faced with many difficulties in terms of integrating into local South African society despite concerted efforts. While all participants immediately began learning English upon arrival to South Africa as a primary means of integration, they are often harassed by South African Africans in Durban for not speaking Zulu; a nurse expressed the following sentiment:
'Yeah, where I’m working I have patients; all the time that I’m working sometimes they are talking to me in isiZulu… ‘Hey sister, look for me this and this’…And I say, ‘can you just speak a little bit in English’… ‘Aye, you must learn isiZulu sister cause sometimes we are forced to talk to you in isiZulu,’ so even patients don’t accept English. I’m trying to catch on; I have some words in isiZulu.’

Though all participants have been open to self-integration into Durban society through methods of learning English or Zulu, furthering ones education, living in mixed neighborhoods, etc. social and structural barriers continue to limit social cohesion between these two group of refugees versus Zulu South Africans. Outside of other non-South African ethnic groups, Congolese refugees interact most frequently with black South Africans or Zulus due to the interconnectedness of race and class, meaning that due to post-apartheid structures, black South Africans in Durban are often competing in the same social, political and economic spaces as refugee groups—the crux of Congolese refugee’s ability to integrate.

Michael Neocosmos in *From ‘Foreign Natives’ to ‘Native Foreigners’* speaks to the politics of xenophobia in stating, “The politics of xenophobia are therefore the outcome of struggles in society and to simply go along with state propagated ideologies—and hence to assert the authenticity and naturalness of nativism- is to fail to exercise a choice beyond the limits of these ideologies when such a choice is indeed possible (Neocosmos, 2010, p.xiii).” This same logic can be applied to what I observed as the reasons for which social cohesion initiatives between refugees and South African’s, most often initiated by local NGO’s and not government programming, are occurring at a rate that will never be able to stand up against the rate at which xenophobic violence occurs. On the question of the efficacy of social cohesion, one woman expressed the viewpoint that as a concept it is a good idea, but that ‘people who are supposed to do social cohesion with non-South Africans, their minds
are different so they don't share the same vision to some extent with the government.’

While social cohesion proves to be a top issue for the South African government, on paper, and in their rhetoric toward refugees in the country, their actions prove to be just that, rhetoric. As observed while completing this field study, social cohesion initiatives tend to be prioritized following outbreaks of xenophobia, but are much lower on the government’s list of priorities after a cool down period. Following the late-2008 attacks, the Department of Social Development released a government plan for increasing social cohesion and inclusion in South Africa, with a section of the plan dedicated to “how social cohesion related to migration in South Africa and the situation of foreigners. (Cloete and Kotze, 2009, pg. 38).” The document acknowledges that, “failure to successfully integrate immigrants into society can in the longer term, lead to tension and conflict that have a significant impact on stability at local community level, and at a broad societal level and that it can ultimately undermine social cohesion and the ideals of, and the ability to achieve and maintain, an inclusive democracy (Cloete and Kotze, 2009, pg. 39)” but shared nothing on strategic approach. Little information is publically available on the tangible outcomes of the government acknowledgement that a social cohesion program is necessary. Moving forward, the government published a Medium-Term Strategic Framework, a five-year plan for the country, which emphasizes a “diverse, socially cohesive society” (“Medium-Term Strategic Framework 2014-2019,” 2013) but does not include any rhetoric on the rights of migrants or refugees in the country.

Local NGO’s such as the Nelson Mandela Foundation are seen as having the largest impact on effecting tangible change in prioritizing the integration of refugees in South Africa. In 2009, following the first wave of attacks, the foundation launched an initiative to
advance social cohesion I local communities that were affected by the violence. The goal of this program was to “identify and address the underlying causes of anger and frustration in communities affected by recent incidents of violence, through facilitated community conversations, in order to promote local problem-solving and to advance social cohesion” (Abrahams, 2010, pg. 2).

Though not all participants interviewed were aware of the term ‘social cohesion’ those that had heard of it saw it only as something discussed in academia, or failed attempts by the government to save face and appease those outside of the country with invested interest South Africa. They reported little tangible success in terms of concrete action. A Congolese volunteer at the Council shared an exhaustive response on the lack of success seen in social cohesion initiatives in Durban:

Social cohesion is a nice word, we have tried many but the problem is now it’s the government that needs to take the initiative. It will stay up there, it’s like coming from top down, while it should be from the grassroots to the top because the problem that people are facing, the problems start on the grassroots levels. Although today we are finding that some people at the top they are like putting fire down here in order for things to explode. Problems start on the grassroots. If the social cohesion could be done in a proper way and not a once off, on the grassroots level, I think it could contribute much more to the understanding and acceptance of foreigners in South Africa. But again, the problem still, the resources, resources are very scarce and most of South Africans think that foreigners are here to take their resources. Because if you go around people are creating jobs for their own selves, their initiatives. So, they are even employing South Africans themselves. There is a misunderstanding, but also there’s corruption coming in and the fact that unemployment is high so there’s that kind of competition....You see, politicians are politicians; they will come with their own agendas although they will call it social cohesion. Is it social cohesion? And, when it is coming up, see the country is divided also in political parties. Some would say, some will say this is not coming from our part. They will not attend. When if it’s done by civil society, by churches on the grassroots level, everyone will feel comfortable to be there; because they will not have this political connotation. If it’s coming up there with connotation, some will say no, they’ll stay away and say, ‘I’m not going there, he’s an ANC,’ ‘he’s an IFP’...he’s this. So, it won’t really contribute toward what you are trying to do.
While social cohesion initiatives by the government have seen little attainment, local NGO’s, churches and grassroots organizations in Durban have been moving forward in conducting strategy meetings and hosting community-training programs. The programs are designed to first train leaders in the community on social cohesion initiatives, sustained dialogue and community building so those trained can work to facilitate programs in their neighborhoods. While the training in theory has the potential to be successful, organizations are struggling with funding resources and pooling interested participants.

_Xenophobia or ‘Afrophobia’? Discrimination and violence as more than a refugee problem_

Professor of sociology, Cawo Abdi writes a 2013 opinion piece in Al Jazeera, “Xenophobia and its discontents in South Africa,” commenting on the structural xenophobia in the country. She comments that the chance for migrants to attain success and comfort in the country are limited as result of the heightened victimization of foreigners that occurs (Abdi, 2013). Though she speaks specifically to the Somali migrant population in South Africa, Amisi corroborates her findings and claims xenophobia to be a problem faced by Congolese migrants daily (Amisi, 2006: 1). I found this to be true in my own research, hearing recurring stories of xenophobia and xenophobic acts committed against migrants in every interview before a prompt was given on the subject matter. While Congolese refugees avoid things as basic as wearing their traditional clothing for fear of being attacked or discriminated against, they admit that they have seen or heard stories of Zulu South Africans being targeted as well for not looking traditionally South African dismissing the fact that there is no single phenotype of a black South African in Durban.
The term ‘Afrophobia,’ used by a prominent South African church leader at a meeting I attended on the subject of integration, describes his view of xenophobia in South Africa and in Durban—South Africans don’t have a problem solely with refugees, they have a problem with anyone who is different from them occupying their space economically, socially and politically in their country. Despite the fact that the South African people are extremely diverse, there still exists a monolithic view of what a Zulu man and a Zulu woman should look, act, speak, dress, etc. This idea was corroborated by participants who cited stories of South Africans from other provinces outside of KwaZulu-Natal being attacked or South Africans being attacked because they physically do not fit the characteristics of a typical South African by having a different skin tone, more body hair, etc.

Citizenship and Belonging

‘Proud to be a Congolese’: notions of citizenship

Despite being unable to live in DRC and facing extreme discrimination in Durban, all participants reported being proud of their Congolese nationality. When mentioning the potential of being naturalized, almost all respondents favored their DRC citizenship to naturalization, except in the case of their children. All people interviewed that had families hoped that children they had in South Africa would be recognized as South African citizens. Those that did wish for naturalization did so with the hope that being a South African citizen would decrease the burden of living in the country.


**Challenging the ‘Rainbow Nation’ concept**

Coined by Bishop Desmond Tutu following the end of the apartheid government, the concept of South Africa as a rainbow nation was used to describe the diversity of South Africa's races, cultures, and ethnicities within its borders (South Africa's Rainbow Nation, 2015). Challenging this notion are the ways in which refugees are treated, discriminated against and attacked for the same differences the state prides itself on upholding. One woman living in Durban for fourteen years said, ‘They can say it’s a rainbow nation to the public but when you are inside you can see another reality,’ before going on to describe her experiences with xenophobia. Another individual, a man living in Durban for seventeen years, said:

‘It’s different to everyone how he feels or how she feels and what the Rainbow Nation means for her or for him. I think now, most of, by observation, most of foreigners in this country, they are not happy. They won’t even call it a Rainbow Nation because for them they are excluded, there are not accepted and if it’s a rainbow, if you check what they call, even in the constitution where they say, 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it,’ but does it belong to foreigners, the way they are killed? First they are called foreigners. It means they don’t belong. So there’s no acceptance, there’s no integration. But other than that I would call it a Rainbow Nation because it is a Rainbow Nation.’

Following the 2015 attacks, Tutu remarked on the state of the Rainbow Nation, “Our rainbow nation that so filled the world with hope is being reduced to a grubby shadow of itself more likely to make the news for gross displays of callousness than for the glory that defined our transition to democracy under Nelson Mandela” (Rainbow Nation Betrayed as South Africans Attack Immigrants, 2015).
Searching for Peace

‘Let go and let God’: Religiosity and the refugee experience

The importance of the church in refugee life is significant. These churches cannot offer much by way of material support but they offer spiritual guidance. This serves to help individuals persevere and continue working and living in Durban despite it’s little chance for social mobility and surpassing of a threshold of socioeconomic status in the country. God was expressed in each interview as playing a major role in where each refugee is now and where they will be in the future. The importance of the church and religious life has become increasingly vital to the refugee experience following the waves of xenophobic attacks. Participant 5 said about his church, ‘the time when xenophobia broke down, our [church] brothers coming to comfort us, to encourage us. The say if there is something wrong they will protect us.’ Some local Durban churches, of mixed congregations of South Africans and other national groups, have even been known to open their doors to refugees who fear returning to their neighborhoods, providing them with a safe place to sleep on occasion. At the time of the interview Participant 8 had been spending nights at his church for a month, ‘since last month...I don’t have the house. I’m staying at the church.’

Future goals and aspirations

An extremely important theme that came out of this study was a reimagining of the word ‘home’ for Congolese refugees and what impact this vision had on where they see themselves building homes and livelihoods in the future. When asked where they aspire to be, or what to call home, in ten years, an overwhelming majority of respondents hoped to
be out of South Africa and even off of the continent, in places like Europe, Australia and the US where they felt that human rights were upheld and respected. When asked if South Africa felt like home, the responses were nuanced depending how long the individual had been in the county, but even those who had been living in South Africa for upwards up ten years expressed a sense of complacency in accepting Durban as their home—coming to terms with possibly never having the means to leave South Africa, especially considering that almost every person is travelling with a family. One man who had been in the country for over ten years answered the question of South Africa feeling like home with:

‘Mostly. 17 years being here, it has become a home. Although the difficulties are here—the xenophobia, the unemployment—but it has become a home. You see, now myself, I’m found in the middle of the situation. I was in Congo last year and could not find some people, you see, because there’s a generation gap, almost a generation gap now and so it was very difficult for me. Coming here also, I’m not really very accepted so it’s also a problem but this has become my second home.’

While a different narrative of home from a woman that had been in the country for exactly ten years did not express the same sentiments toward Durban as being a home for her:

‘When I think of home I feel like somewhere where you are free, somewhere where you enjoy your rights, human rights. I mean, where you can work, where you can enjoy your country’s resources, that’s where I can say ‘this is my home,’ I can’t say this is my home, no.’

Within these narratives exists a transforming of the meaning of home as a means of reconciling with the idea that although they are Congolese, calling DRC a home again may not be an option that is in neither the far nor distant future. This highlights the transnationality of their experience—imagining home as the DRC through national identity, home as Durban through spatial relationship and home being neither of these places at the same time.
Conclusions

The South African Freedom Charter lays out the following:

1) There shall be equal status in the bodies of state, in the courts and in the schools for all national groups and races 2) All people shall have equal right to use their own languages, and to develop their own folk culture and customs, 3) All national groups shall be protected by law against insults to their race and national pride and 4) The preaching and practice of national, race or colour discrimination and contempt shall be a punishable crime (The African National Congress, 1955).

The state of the country post-apartheid called for an overhaul of the previous regimes response to multiculturalism and diversity in South Africa and a focus on the social, political and economic integration and social cohesion of all South Africans. Not considered in this discourse, but extremely relevant to the state today, is how the post-apartheid zeal toward creating and opening up spaces for all groups represented in the country applies to migrants and specifically refugees in South Africa. While on paper the government has made tangible strides in improving the lives of multicultural groups in South Africa, many black South Africans continue to face inequality despite the new constitution, the Freedom Charter, social cohesion initiatives, etc. This leads to competition between incoming refugees and economically disadvantaged blacks, resulting in distrust of foreign nationals and xenophobic attacks (Misgun, 2007, pg. 97).

Specifically in the city of Durban, where the unemployment rate amongst South Africans is 30% (Ulwazi), I argue that the correlation between economic insecurity of black South Africans and rates of xenophobia ultimately translates into refugees’ ability to attain a stable livelihood and feel some semblance of belonging in the country; meaning, the structural inequality that black South Africans face in Durban, limiting job availability, has a direct impact on refugee ability to seek employment, find a livelihood and integrate.
Due to overt xenophobic attitudes and responses to refugees and limited response by the government, Congolese national identity continues to strengthen and sense of belonging in Durban continues to weaken by social exclusion despite their efforts to integrate; meaning, as Congolese refugees continue to be pushed to the outskirts of South African society, they are forced to rely on their own communities in Durban and continue to feel further disenfranchised from the space they hoped to find safety, humanity and livelihood in. This navigating of Congolese identity in Durban while wanting to integrate and live successful lives in South Africa with limited opportunity to go elsewhere illuminates the transnational experience of refugees in South Africa, leading individuals to feel they neither belong here nor there, dislocated from home but living on the fringes of social, political and economic life in the host country.

Limitations to the Study

As all human interaction and qualitative fieldwork comes with limitations, especially when working with a vulnerable population, I feel that I faced relatively few problems in completing this study. Perhaps the most frequently occurring limitation was a language barrier. As the most common languages spoken in DRC are French and Swahili, it was a reoccurring theme that most, not all, participants began learning English upon their arrival in South Africa through informal processes like learning on the job or in everyday interactions. Though most of the individuals knew English well enough to speak with me and share their stories, there were many instances where both the participant and I depended on Dr. Amisi for interpretation, or I had to either rephrase questions or use my elementary knowledge of conversational French for clarification on questions and
responses. There were also points at which the participant could not think of the English translation and answered in French. Because the interviews were recorded, I was able to catch small details I may have missed by replaying and translating the French responses during the transcribing period.

The size of the sample is limiting in that it depicts the narratives of a very small portion of Congolese refugees. Though responses to interview questions were similar across the board between men and women, the backgrounds of those interviewed were not as representative as they could have been. While Dr. Amisi worked to get as many male perspectives as female perspectives, individuals working in different industries and living in different neighborhoods, their individual experiences outside of quantitative demographics showed little nuance thematically. While this can be considered a limitation, I feel that it strengthens my argument about Congolese refugees in Durban by highlighting that despite their differences, varying ages, levels of education and arrival times, all of these refugees face the same discrimination and challenges as non-South Africans.

On a personal level as the researcher, while I feel that I did my best to gather data without harming or re-traumatizing participants in asking such personal questions as relating to an individual’s refugee experience (their experiences with xenophobia and discrimination, etc.), I do not feel that I was emotionally prepared as a researcher to process the responses I was receiving and observing, and this offered up its own kind of limitation. The interview process became emotionally draining and for that reason I missed out on the opportunity to expand my participant pool. That being said, I feel that in interviewing one specific refugee group I reached saturation rather quickly. While interviewing more participants would have added to the nuances in stories, I am confident
that the same general themes would have emerged, as the responses were consistent with already existing literature on refugee migration and refugees in South Africa. Additionally, time spent not interviewing refugees was dedicated toward observation and note taking which contributes equally to this study.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

In furthering this study I would encourage supplementary interviews with South Africans as a means of sharing an alternative perspective--not to delegitimize the experiences of Congolese refugees or to vindicate the actions of the perpetrators of crimes but to add to the perspective on the reasons for which refugees experience xenophobia, a lack of belonging and exclusion in South Africa. This would also include speaking with government officials, to determine state action in further addressing issues of xenophobia following the two periods of attacks--looking at possible solutions that exist outside of the realm of social cohesion and a potential reshaping of the integration process. For a long term project, to fully comprehend the multifaceted experience that is the Congolese refugee experience in South Africa, I would recommend including additional themes to be researched, including but not limited to: the experience of Congolese permanent residents on issues of social cohesion, integration and identity as they have resided in the country for a longer time period and with a different legal status. Related to this would be the stories of second generation Congolese in South Africa, looking at whether the stories of children who were born in-country but whose parents have refugee or permanent resident status differ from those of the first-generation.
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Appendices

Interview Guide

Demography
1. Name, age, employment, highest level of education achieved, family size, marital status.
2. How long have you been in South Africa?
3. Do you have children here with you?
4. If yes, how old are they? Were they born in South Africa?

Economic/Livelihood
5. Where do you live?
6. Describe your community
7. What activities do you participate in? Where do they take place? (i.e. church, school)
8. Describe your friends in Durban

**Belonging/ Social Cohesion**
9. What does being Congolese mean to you?
10. Why did you come to South Africa?
11. Do you feel welcomed here? Why or why not?
12. Do you feel like this is your home?
13. What does ‘home’ mean to you?
14. What efforts have you made to integrate/assimilate? (i.e. learning English, building networks with SA institutions which may support application for naturalization-education, etc., marring South Africans)
15. Why do you feel that these steps are important?
16. How far are you in this process?

**Challenges of Integration**
17. Describe your experience in South Africa.
18. What did you know about South Africa before coming? How has this view changed or remained the same?
19. What do you find favorable about South Africa?
20. If given the opportunity would you choose to be naturalized?

**Structural Exclusion and Discrimination**
22. What incidences of discrimination have you experienced?
   a. If xenophobia doesn’t come up—how do you define xenophobia? Experiences?
   b. Do these experiences happen on a regular basis
   c. How different from then to now? (‘08 and ’15)

**Aspirations**
23. Is South Africa your final destination? Why or why not?
24. Where do you see yourself in the next 10 years? Please elaborate.