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Refugee experiences in Cincinnati, Ohio: A local case study in the context of global crisis

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Abstract

We examined refugees' perceptions of their experiences living in greater Cincinnati, Ohio, USA and linked these findings to colonial context, coloniality theory, and decolonial psychology. We describe the process of developing a community based participatory research process with members of local refugee communities, and then discuss the findings of a survey completed by 280 local refugees that was collaboratively designed and administered. Noting historic and continuing disenfranchisement of the Black community in Cincinnati, in our survey analyses we compared the experiences of African refugees (Burundian, Congolese, and Somali) to the experiences of Bhutanese, Latinx, and Middle Eastern refugees residing in greater Cincinnati on several aspects of civic life. Analyses indicate that refugees from African countries reported more negative outcomes than other refugees residing in this area. Further, refugees residing in neighborhoods with a higher percentage of Black residents reported less satisfaction, likely due to neighborhood disinvestment. We discuss the costs and benefits of these findings and interpretation in the context of decolonial theory. Specifically, we connect racist colonial history to differences in treatment of refugees based on their physical appearance (i.e., Blackness) to the continued disenfranchisement of African Americans.

INTRODUCTION

By the end of 2018 there were more than 70 million refugees and forcibly displaced people worldwide, the greatest number the world has ever known (UNHCR, 2019). Refugees are people who have been forced to flee their homes because of ongoing and emerging global crises including war, violence, and persecution. Although the contemporary crisis has cast international attention on the scope and hardship of refugees, discussion, and debate regarding the realities of refugees is frequently divorced from historical context and the persistent geopolitical power imbalances that result from the colonial era (Pupavac, 2002). However, the lived experiences of refugees are powerfully shaped by colonial history. The material and psychological outcomes of colonial domination are reflected in the consistent inequitable distribution of resources globally as well as the perceptions people hold about refugees, asylum seekers, and other displaced communities. These outcomes further result in enduring conflicts that necessitate migration, national and international policies that impact the mobility of refugees, and dehumanizing treatment of individuals who are viewed as "the other" (i.e., people who are not descendants of Western or Northern Europe). In this context, there is great need for research and analysis into the contemporary realities of refugees from a decolonial perspective. Such insights can both unveil patterns of disenfranchisement and illuminate pathways towards resisting injustice.

In recent years scholars have increasingly asserted the need for decolonial approaches to understanding human psychology, including both the use of disciplinary methods that work against colonial logics, and analysis of how colonial realities shape individuals' experiences and perceptions related to enduring inequities (Adams & Estrada-Villalta, 2017; Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019; Dutt & Kohfeldt, 2019; Fernández, 2018; Kurtiş, Adams, & Estrada?Villalta, 2016; Pillay, 2017). Approaching psychological analysis from a decolonial lens involves resisting, and making apparent, the colonial violence inherent in mainstream processes of knowledge formation. In other words, a decolonial analysis in psychology involves explicating how systems of domination (e.g., colonial theft of land, exploitation, and enslavement of people) continuously shape perceptions about the value and subjectivity of all people, and creates enduring systems of advantage and disadvantage. These outcomes influence both how communities are structured (e.g., neighborhood segregation), and ideas about valid methods of knowledge accumulation (e.g., who is a legitimate researcher; Maldonado-Torres, 2017). Through analysis that seeks to illuminate and counteract these processes and outcomes, psychological research can contribute to decolonial goals that promote justice and equity.

Consistent with this goal, the purpose of this paper is to apply a decolonial approach to research, and to explore how colonial histories shape the experiences of refugees living in the United States. This study is an outcome of an ongoing community-based participatory research (CBPR) project with 12 members of local refugee communities. As part of this process, we examine the perceptions refugees hold about their experiences living in greater Cincinnati, Ohio, USA, via a collaboratively developed survey. We link findings from this survey to colonial context, racial segregation, and decolonial psychology. In what follows, we describe how our CBPR process sought to disrupt colonial and exclusive methods of knowledge development, provide an overview of the historical context of Cincinnati as it relates to racialized colonial history, and discuss the implications of this history for social and psychological outcomes. We then provide a decolonial interpretation of our survey findings and discuss the implications for community development and the role of participatory psychological research.

CBPR as a decolonial methodology

The current study is part of an ongoing collaborative research and action project uniting members of local refugee communities, leaders of community organizations that support refugees, and academic researchers. A central aim of this collaboration has been to reject exclusive notions surrounding who can formulate, design, and enact meaningful research. Thus, we sought to avoid prioritizing the questions, methodological preferences, and interpretation of research findings of those who have had better access to the academy (i.e., the faculty members on the team; Gill et al., 2012; Lykes et al., 2018; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Rather, we sought to disrupt this colonial pattern in traditional knowledge accumulation by centering the questions and research processes preferred by those who have the most lived understanding of refugee experiences in our region: refugees.

With an interest in organizing a research project that both prioritized equitable partnership with local refugee communities (Lykes & van der Merwe, 2019) and collaboratively working to improve the lived experiences of refugees in the Cincinnati region, in October 2018 we created a CBPR team with 12 refugee team members, representing seven refugee communities. CBPR is an approach to research that prioritizes equitable collaboration among partners while combining knowledge and action to produce justice-oriented social change (Vaughn, Jacquez & Suarez-Cano, 2017). Our process specifically sought disruption of various aspects of the colonial legacy in traditional psychological research by rejecting exclusive notions of expertise and uniting university resources with struggles for social justice (Adams et al., 2015; Lykes & van der Merwe, 2019; Maldonado-Torres, 2017; Sonn, 2018). Importantly, rather than treating refugees as a monolith, we sought to create a diverse team in regard to age, gender, and nationality of our team members. We also included as part of our research process a participatory evaluation to assess our team's collective ability to employ shared power and equitable decision-making, and to facilitate structures that built member ownership and solidarity (Dutt et al., in press). Moreover, our research process was grounded in linking findings to collaboratively developed actions aimed towards fostering just inclusion of refugees in our local community (Jacquez et al., in press). Through these efforts we sought to align ourselves with decolonial values and actions. Our goals were not to satisfy post-positivist expectations regarding how to ascertain truth, rather we aimed to dig into research findings and explore what is exposed when examining patterns of disenfranchisement in the context of local and global history, and work for just change (Maldonado-Torres, 2017).

In the current paper we seek to contribute explicitly to decolonial projects by uncovering connections between the racist history of the region where we reside and the enduring harmful influence of this racist culture in our contemporary local context. The larger research process has involved mixed methods including two community surveys, focus groups, researcher interviews, and collaborative actions to address identified barriers. For this paper we focus on the results of a community developed and administered survey that sought to gain insight into the experiences and goals of refugees from several local refugee communities. Furthermore, with a lens cast towards seeking understanding of the influence of the enslavement of African Americans in colonial US history we examine two specific questions: first, we compare the experiences of refugees of African descent with the experiences of refugees from Asia and Latin America, all residing in the greater Cincinnati community. Second, we look at the impact of enduring racial segregation in the area by assessing the relationship between the experiences of refugees as a group (regardless of region of origin) and the racial diversity of the neighborhood in which refugee participants in this study currently live. By examining these questions, we aim to contribute to decolonial

projects that promote human wellbeing by resisting ahistorical and acontexual interpretation of the contemporary world order.

Colonial history and its influence on contemporary sociopolitical context

Examining histories of colonial race relations can aid in understanding psycho-social processes that influence the contemporary treatment and experiences of diverse refugees in a particular context. Like the majority of cities throughout the United States, Cincinnati, Ohio has a long history of racial segregation that has deep roots in the era of legalized slavery. Although slavery was made illegal in the state of Ohio's founding 1803 constitution, its location just north of the Ohio River, a boundary that divided slave states from free states prior to the Civil War, rendered the state a contentious and dangerous setting for African Americans (Taylor, 1993). The U.S. Civil War, which lasted from 1861 to 1865, was fought between Northern states, where slavery had been made illegal and Southern states where slavery had not been outlawed. In addition to fighting over whether or not slavery would be legal, the US Civil War also centered on the degree of sovereignty states would have from the federal government. Historians note that cultural similarity and community connections among white individuals on both sides of the Ohio River resulted in the region becoming a ''borderland," in other words a location in which the boundaries between colonial jurisdictions were contested (Salafia, 2013). Racism in the region flourished because "white residents of the borderland learned that the border between slavery and freedom was nearly impossible to police, whereas racial boundaries were easier to enforce" (Salafia, 2013, p. 6). The politics of colonization that allowed for the enslavement of people were deeply connected to psychological processes of dehumanizing people based upon racial difference, that were evoked on both sides of the river.

The period after the Civil War further provides links between historic race relations in the region and the experiences of diverse refugees in contemporary times. The Great Migration occurred after the abolishment of slavery throughout the United States and lasted through the 1970s, and involved six million African Americans fleeing conditions in the rural South and moving to cities in the North, including Cincinnati. Racial justice activist and legal scholar Bryan Stevenson (2014) explains that African Americans during this time should be understood as refugees seeking to escape the terror of the South, who landed in the equivalent of refugee camps in the North where educational, political, and economic disparities abounded. Economic and social disinvestment in these regions by local, state, and national governing bodies ensued. Generational poverty and enduring marginalization of the African American community are a direct link to this history (Miller, 1983; Tolnay, 2003). Furthermore, the legacy of racist hostility towards African Americans in the region has continued throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century and is linked to persistent harsh and exclusionary treatment of members of the Black community (Miller, 1983; Taylor, 2005). In contemporary times, Cincinnati is highly segregated along racial lines. At the 2010 census, it was the 8th most segregated city in the United States. Nearly 40% of the African American community in Cincinnati lives below the poverty line, compared to 17.5% of the White population (World Population Review, 2019).

Where examination of the regions' history allows for an understanding of how racialized patterns of inequity were created and maintained, psychological interpretation sheds light on the impact of historic and enduring injustice on modern perceptions and treatment of African Americans, and any individuals who are portrayed as different from the dominant group. Indeed, a near century of research in psychology documents that internalization of racist ideology has led

to inequitable outcomes for communities of color in workplace and educational settings, legal settings and incarceration rates, health outcomes, mental health wellbeing, leadership opportunities, etc. (Bhui, 2002; Clark, 1986; Clark & Clark, 1947; DuBois, 1903; Fine, 2012; Knaus, 2014; McCluney et al., 2018; McMahon & Watts, 2002; Shavers & Shaver, 2006; Sweeney & Haney, 1992; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). Moreover, psychological research on racism illustrates that white individuals in the United States are less likely to have knowledge of racist history, and thus are more likely to deny the existence of systemic racism and instead view examples of racism as isolated incidents (Bonam et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2013). Ignorance of racist history allows racist ideology to become infused in the dominant culture, creating, but often invisiblizing, the enduring unjust consequences of colonial exploitation of the Black community (Guthrie, 2004; Salter, Adams & Perez, 2018).

In present day, greater Cincinnati is home to approximately 25,000 refugees and asylum seekers, originally from several regions including Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Though considered a nontraditional immigrant destination city, the region has experienced an increase in refugees and migrants over the past decade (Aust, 2020). Importantly, historic and contemporary racism is not limited to the experiences of the Black community in the United States. White supremacy culture is an outcome of colonial ideologies that purport white superiority, that has adverse implications for all communities of Color in the United States (Sue, 2006). Additionally, the intersection of racism and anti-immigrant sentiments are evidenced in numerous policies both historically and in modern times (e.g., quotas on immigrants from particular regions of the world, recent family separation policies imposed upon migrants seeking entry through the United States' southern border) that impact both dominant ideology and the wellbeing of recent migrants (Dutt & Kohfeldt, 2019; Langhout & Vaccarino-Ruiz, 2021; Yakushko, 2009). Examples of racist disenfranchisement experienced by immigrants in the United States abound. In Cincinnati, specifically, researchers document disparities experienced by Latinx immigrants related to healthcare (Jacquez et al., 2019; Topmiller et al., 2017). Media outlets also document harassment of Muslims (Murphy, 2018), and both mental health and economic challenges of Bhutanese refugees (Aust, 2020) in the city. Nevertheless, given the long history of disenfranchisement of the Black community in Cincinnati that may have unique implications for Black refugees, this paper gives specific focus to the experiences of refugees of African descent.

Refugees and coloniality

It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine each of the unique colonial histories that shape the contemporary violence, wars, and persecution that have led millions of people to flee their homes as refugees throughout the world. Nevertheless, decolonial scholars have laid out overarching patterns that connect legacies of colonization to the contemporary refugee crisis (Canas, 2017; Nasser-Eddin & Abu-Assab, 2020). For example, the majority of refugees originate from countries in the Global South that are former colonies, and thus endured decades to centuries of exploitive resource extraction (Nasser-Eddin & Abu-Assab, 2020). Additionally, civil wars within several countries that have direct ties to colonial imposed geographic boundaries and privileging of particular ethnic or religious groups have led to an increase in numbers of refugees (Jenkins & Schmeidl, 1995; Nasser-Eddin & Abu-Assab, 2020). These consequences are both in direct connection, and in addition to, the colonial legacies on human psychology that portray individuals from the Global South as weaker, less valuable, and less deserving of rights (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018).

Where colonization refers to an overt process of domination by an empowered group over a less powerful group, and the connected appropriation of property, space, culture, etc., coloniality encompasses the ongoing psychological effects of living in a global system created through colonial processes (Mignolo, 2011). In particular, coloniality theorists discuss how the hegemonic influence of the United States and Western Europe have enabled systems that have contributed to the growth and power of these regions (i.e., capitalism, empiricism, white supremacy culture, and Christianity) to be perceived as naturally superior (Grosfoguel, 2002; Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2000). This logic obfuscates systems of violence and dispossession that are inherent to the development of the contemporary world order and inhibits acknowledgement and appreciation of alternative ways of comprehending, relating to, and being in the world (Adams et al., 2015; Maldonado-Torres, 2017). The lived realities of both refugees and racially marginalized communities in the United States challenges colonial logic, exposes widespread myth and prejudices that stem from the colonial world order (Fanon, 1968; Maldonado-Torres, 2017), and offers an opportunity to seek decolonial transformation towards greater justice.

Indeed, many refugees, immigrants, and marginalized communities around the world actively subvert colonial expectations of acquiescing to cultures of occupation and exploitation. For example, Atallah and Dutta (2021) discuss how their grandparents from India and Palestine resisted colonial assimilation, and that the passed down narratives of resistance continue to influence the researchers' work in solidarity with communities seeking decolonial justice. Previous research also illustrates examples of agency, resilience, and joy created through community counterspace among diverse refugee groups (Esposito & Kellezi, 2020; Fader et al., 2019; Hassanli, Walters, & Friedman, 2020). These lived examples disrupt traditional narratives of resettlement that imply that individuals can move to occupied lands (e.g., the United States) and assimilate to dominant cultures, all the while ignoring the patterns of disenfranchisement that shape locations of resettlement (Garnier et al., 2018). Although communities who have been left out and oppressed by the dominant culture have long created community, meaning, creative resistance, and fulfillment despite residing in harsh and exclusionary environments (Esposito & Kellezi, 2020; Fader et al., 2019), the enduring disenfranchising contexts that result from colonial history incentivize collaborative investigation of barriers to wellbeing, equitable participation, and justice.

The intersection between several colonial histories, those that have led to the forced migration of millions of people in the contemporary refugee crises, and those that led to the enslavement and continued disenfranchisement of millions of African Americans, continue to shape the lived experiences of individuals in greater Cincinnati (and the United States more broadly). These histories result both in material disparity evidenced in communities of Color earning lower incomes and living in neighborhoods with greater policing, higher rates of violent crime, and lower performing schools. These outcomes reflect a culture of coloniality wherein communities of Color are continuously viewed as the other, are discriminated against, and are repeatedly subjected to dehumanizing treatment. Given this context, there is need to examine, voice, and document how racist colonial legacies that structure the United States shape the lived experiences of disenfranchised communities. Participatory research that prioritizes a decolonial analysis of findings may illustrate how enduring individualist and acontextual culture in the United States contributes to discriminatory and hostile environments that perpetuates both national and global inequities (Adams & Estrada-Villalta, 2017). In depth analysis of the experiences of refugees residing in Cincinnati, Ohio can serve as a case study of inequity that is rooted in enduring patterns of colonial domination.

TABLE 1 CARE: Cincinnati team demographic information

Community represented	First language	Gender	Years in USA	Age (yrs.)
Burundi	Kirundi	Male	12	23
Iraq	Arabic	Female	3	46
Congolese	French	Male	3	75
Somali	Somalian	Female	6	19
Guatemalan	Spanish	Female	5	27
Syrian	Arabic	Male	2	44
Bhutanese	Nepali	Female	7	23
Congolese	French	Male	3	29
Bhutanese	Nepali	Female	9	25
Somali	Somalian	Female	6	16
Bhutanese	Nepali	Male	9	18
Burundi	Kirundi	Female	12	27
City Government	English	Male	Born in US	41
Academic Partner	English	Female	Born in US	33
Academic Partner	English	Female	Born in US	43

METHOD

Partnership

The research was conducted by Civic Action for Refugee Empowerment in Cincinnati (CARE Cincinnati), a community-based participatory research team comprised of 12 refugee members from seven different countries, who reside in the Greater Cincinnati community (see Table 1), two university-based researchers, and a representative of the city government focused on immigrant welcoming initiatives. The primary aim of CARE Cincinnati is understanding of the strengths, goals, concerns, and barriers encountered by Cincinnati's diverse refugee communities to inform actions related to civic engagement. Although contributions to broader academic literature are an important by-product of the project, the primary driver of decision-making is community need and desire. As such, all decisions about research design and implementation were made collaboratively, with relevance and applicability to refugee communities prioritized. Our project functions at both the "collaborate" and "empower" levels of civic engagement outlined in the International Association of Public Participation's Spectrum of Participation, aiming to collaborate with the refugees on each aspect of decision-making and taking action based on what they decide (International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), 2018). When establishing the team, concerted effort was directed towards building a group culture upon trust and equity, that manifested in a sense of solidarity. All aspects of decision-making from determining research questions and methodologies that would be utilized, as well as interpretation of study findings and developing actions in response to findings, prioritize the goals and self-determination of refugee community members. Moreover, we are consistently mindful about power differentials as they relate to citizenship, racial, ethnic and religious identity, educational and employment status, and age. For more information on the development of our team analysis of our collaborative process see Dutt et al. (in press).

Measures

Data were collected using a survey tool collaboratively developed by the CARE team. In developing the survey, the team decided to emphasize a simple, straightforward response structure that could be easily understood by members of diverse refugee communities in multiple languages (Arabic, English, French, Kirundi, Nepali, and Spanish) and with varying educational backgrounds. To inform survey development, refugee researchers first had conversations with people in their communities about their concerns and goals regarding civic life in this region. The entire CARE team then met to discuss the topics that arose during these conversations. Academic partners created an initial survey draft to elicit perspectives on the breadth of topics generated in the community conversations, including social support, civic engagement and acceptance, healthcare, happiness, safety, transportation, employment, and navigating systems. After editing based on initial feedback from the team, refugee researchers piloted the survey with two individuals from their community, resulting in 24 completed pilot surveys. Additional edits were made based on feedback from piloting. The final survey included 23 items with five possible responses: yes, somewhat, no, don't know, or no answer. Each item was followed by the open-ended prompt, "What is the main reason you answered this way?". Demographic questions included asking the respondent's gender in an open-ended format, the age group that they belonged to (i.e., "are you between the ages of 18–25, 26–35, etc."), what refugee community they identified as a member of, how long they had resided in the United States, how long they had resided in Cincinnati, and their zip code. The formatting for these questions were collaboratively decided amongst team members to ensure they were asked in a clear and respectful manner. The survey was created in English and then translated by refugee team members into their language of origin.

Racial demographic data for participant zip codes was pulled from the 2017 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Racial demographic data for each zip code included percentage of the population that was Black and percentage that was white.

Procedure

The University of Cincinnati Internal Review Board reviewed the project protocol and designated the work "not human subjects research." Although our study met the first condition of the federal definition of "human subjects research," that the work must involve living individuals about whom data are collected, it did not meet the second condition, that the work be a systematic investigation designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge (Steneck, 2007). Specifically, our project was not intended to be generalizable but for the purpose of improving civic life for refugees in our city. Although our team considered our work together to be valuable research needed to promote civic engagement of local refugees, it did not meet the federal guidelines for "research" and therefore did not require continued IRB oversight. Throughout the research and action process, the CARE: Cincinnati team discussed the ethical implications of each decision that was made. This was particularly valuable in noting that team member were from the same communities the project aimed to partner with for the project, including developing actions in response to study findings.

University-based researchers provided survey administration and data collection training to the larger CARE: Cincinnati team via monthly meetings that have continued throughout the research and action process. After training was complete, refugee researchers approached members of their

own refugee communities and invited them to participate in the survey. Participants thus were recruited via the social networks of team members, including via connections in local refugee support organizations and religious organizations. Although this method of data collection reflects a convenience sampling approach, it also allowed for considerable diversity among participants. Researchers first explained that all questions were anonymous and that participants did not have to respond to any question they would prefer not to answer. Researchers then verbally administered the survey and recorded responses. After completing the survey, participants, including those who completed the pilot survey, were given a $10 gift card to a local grocery store chain.

Participants

We surveyed a total of 291 refugees who currently reside in the Cincinnati area. Responses from 11 people were omitted from analysis because they did not respond "yes" to the question, "Did you move to the United States as a refugee or to flee violence or persecution." Refugees identified as members of six communities: Bhutanese ($n = 124$), Burundian ($n = 24$), Congolese ($n = 28$), Latinx ($n = 28$), Middle Eastern ($n = 49$), and Somali ($n = 27$). In some instances, these communities refer to geographic regions (Middle Eastern and Latinx) and in others to a specific country, in part because local ethnic based community organizations are structured in this manner. For example, there are specific organizations within the region with considerable membership founded and organized for members of the Bhutanese and Congolese communities, whereas many members of the Latinx and Middle Eastern communities connect via organizations based on shared religion and/or language. Of the participants 55% identified as female, 44% as male, and three people did not report their gender. Although gender was asked as an open-ended question so as not to force responses into binary or categorical responses, participants were not required to answer this question to increase comfort related to anonymity. On average participants had lived in the United States for 6.74 years (SD = 3.85), and in Cincinnati for 5.49 (SD = 2.71) years.

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses

The overarching inquiry guiding this research was exploring how historic colonial inequities continue to influence contemporary society. More specifically, we aimed to assess whether and how historic and persistent racial inequities experienced by African Americans would impact refugees in the Cincinnati region. Consequently, we sought to identify whether there would be differences between the experiences and perceptions of refugees of African descent and refugees in the region who were not of African descent. Although a core value of CARE: Cincinnati as a research and action team is prioritizing solidarity across refugee communities with the intent of addressing systemic barriers to equitable civic participation that impact all refugees and disenfranchised communities more broadly (Duttet al., in press), the history of racial inequity in the region incentivized a specific look into how refugees from African countries were experiencing life in this region. Consequently, we created two groups for comparison analyses: African refugees including refugees from Burundi, the DR Congo, and Somalia ($n = 79$), and all other non-African refugees ($n = 201$). Although on one hand, this method of comparison could be viewed as reductionistic and divisive and thus antithetical to decolonial efforts, we opted to perform these analyses to

TABLE 2 Demographics

	African ($n = 79$)	Non-African ($n = 201$)	p
Number of years living in the US (M, SD)	5.56 (3.81)	7.33 (3.76)	<.001
Number of years living in Cincinnati (M, SD)	5.07 (4.19)	5.72 (3.65)	.217
Gender			
Female (%)	64.60	50	.008
Male (%)	34.1	49	.008
Not identified (%)	1.3	1	
Age (% in each group)			.371
18–25	31.60	32.30	
26–35	35.40	16.90	
36–50	24.10	31.30	
51–60	3.80	8.90	
61–75	5.10	6	
76+	0	4	

prevent homogenizing refugee experiences and overlooking differences that could exist based on racialized categories. There is no denying that these categories exist because of colonial imposed boundaries related to geographic boarders and identity cleavages. Simultaneously, the categorical differences continue to result in material disparities that impact lived experience and are important to examine and document when seeking to identify pathways towards just transformation. Group demographics for African and non-African participants are presented in Table 2. Time in United States and gender ratio differed significantly between the two groups and thus were controlled for in subsequent analyses.

Comparing experiences of African versus non-African refugees

Our first research question asked whether and how refugees' experiences in and perceptions of life in Cincinnati differed based on whether or not they were originally from African countries. Data were submitted to multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) controlling for gender and years spent in the United States. African refugees and non-African refugees differed in their responses overall, $F(19, 140) = 2.11$, $p < .01$. Data were then submitted to one-way analysis of variance controlling for time in United States and gender to determine on which questions African refugees differed from non-African refugees (Table 2, 3). For each question, responses were coded numerically, "yes" coded as 3, "somewhat" coded as 2, and "no" coded as 1.

The findings indicate that African refugees and non-African refugees have had different experiences in several areas related to both navigating living in Cincinnati and life satisfaction. African refugees were more likely than non-African refugees to report that they had difficulty communicating with healthcare providers and were less satisfied with their job situation. There was also a trend suggesting that African refugees were less likely to report feeling that they understand the rules in the United States. Collectively these findings suggest that African refugees experience more challenges than non-African refugees when it comes to navigating life in the region and ensuring their needs are met. African refugees were also less likely to report happiness with

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TABLE 3 Responses to survey questions by African versus non-African Race/Ethnicity

Question	*n*	African *M* (*SD*)	Non-African *M* (*SD*)	*F*	*p*	*d*
Do you know people who can give you advice about making connections or networking here in this area?	263	2.52(.74)	2.63 (.67)	1.48	.32	.173
Have you been able to get the healthcare you need?	269	2.69 (.65)	2.70 (.63)	.04	.95	.016
When you go to see a doctor or nurse, do you have trouble communicating with them?	267	1.67(.86)	1.49(.72)	4.96	**.03**	.227
Do you have trouble with transportation in this area?	278	1.59(.78)	1.69(.89)	2.63	.11	0
Do you feel good about your job situation?	243	2.17 (.87)	2.43 (.76)	4.30	**.04**	.318
Are you able to use your education or skills here in this area?	252	1.90 (.94)	2.07 (.89)	.30	.58	.186
Do you ever feel like you don't know the rules in US? (For example, laws, culture and norms)	268	1.98(.83)	1.91 (.81)	3.24	*.09*	.09
Is there a person you can count on at any time here in this area?	262	2.74 (.54)	2.76 (.55)	.09	.76	.037
Do you have places where you usually go to spend time with friends?	276	2.54 (.81)	2.61 (.73)	.01	.95	.091
Are you happy with the friendships you have here?	270	2.63 (.73)	2.79 (.51)	3.64	**.05**	.254
Do you ever feel like you are being treated unfairly here?	251	1.50 (.69)	1.58 (.75)	.68	.41	.111
Do you feel welcomed in this area?	261	2.84 (.43)	2.79 (.44)	.85	.36	.115
Are you happy with the amount of time you have to spend with your family?	268	2.61 (.70)	2.54 (.72)	1.51	.22	.099
Do you like your living situation? (housing, neighborhood, etc.)	275	2.60 (.71)	2.76 (.62)	3.69	**.05**	.240
Are you proud of the life you have created in this area?	256	2.60 (.70)	2.75 (.57)	3.26	*.07*	.234
Do you feel safe where you live?	276	2.75 (.59)	2.84 (.42)	3.00	*.08*	.175

Note. Significant differences between African and non-African refugees, $p < .05$, are bolded, and trends in differences between the two groups, $p < .09$, are italicized.

the friendships they had in this area, and less satisfaction with their living situation. Additional trends suggest that African refugees were less likely to report feeling proud of the life they had created in this area, and feel less safe in their living situation. Collectively these findings suggest that African refugees were generally less satisfied than non-African refugees with their life in this region. African and non-African refugees did not significantly differ in their responses to any other questions in our survey. This is particularly important to note because it illustrates that there were no questions on which non-African refugees were encountering more challenges navigating needs and resources, nor were they less satisfied with their lives than African refugees. Although

the overarching survey results highlighted many areas in which the majority of refugees experienced challenges in the area, the compounded marginalization based on racial identity appears to have exacerbated hardships experienced by African refugees.

Comparing experiences of refugees based on neighborhood racial demographics

In addition to examining the experiences of refugees based on their country of origin, we were also interested in understanding how existing racial segregation in the greater Cincinnati region related to refugee experiences. Cincinnati is highly segregated with some zip codes having almost exclusively white residents (>90%), and some with mostly Black residents (>75%). Thus, to assess the impact of existing racial segregation on refugee experiences, we ran a series of correlations to measure the relationships between the percentage of Black residents in a zip code and responses to the survey questions by participants in that zip code. Because of our specific interest in the impact of the culture of segregation in the region broadly, for these analyses we looked at the experiences of refugees collectively, rather than separating by region of origin. Importantly, there was no significant relationship between neighborhood demographics and the participants' country of origin, $r = .03$, $p = .68$. Results of the correlation analyses for each question are reported in Table 4.

Correlation analyses indicated that participants were more likely to report challenges or higher levels of dissatisfaction if they lived in a zip code with a higher percentage of Black residents. Living in a zip code with a higher percentage of Black residents was significantly correlated with having difficulty communicating with health care professionals, having difficulty with transportation, feeling less satisfied with the amount of time participants could spend with their family, feeling less satisfied with their living situation, and feeling less safe where they live. These findings indicate that regardless of region of origin, refugees living in zip codes with a higher percentage of Black residents had more challenging experiences navigating needs and resources, and experienced less life satisfaction than refugees in zip codes with fewer Black residents. These results point to the historic legacy and persistence of racial segregation that has resulted in disparate resources between majority Black and majority White neighborhoods (Rothstein, 2018).

DISCUSSION

In considering the impact of the language of decolonization in educational settings and the social sciences, Tuck and Yang (2012) urge scholars to remember that decolonization cannot be viewed as a metaphor. Moreover, they explain that "when metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future" (p. 3). Cincinnati, Ohio, was built on the lands of the Shawnee and Myaamia people. Through the settler-colonial process of establishing the United States, indigenous communities were dispossessed, Africans were stolen into the country as slaves, and a racial order was established in which political and economic power was concentrated almost entirely among white settlers and inhabitants. The social, political, economic, and psychological legacy of this process endures. Additionally, enduring narratives that portray the realities of immigrants and refugees as distinct from capitalist colonial processes of settlement obfuscate the patterns of dispossession and harm enduringly experienced by communities of Color (Chatterjee, 2019). In explicating consequences that continue to impact communities of Color in Cincinnati

TABLE 4 Correlations between question response and percentage of Black residents in zip code

Question	*n*	*r* with % Black residents	*p*	*d*
Do you know people who can give you advice about making connections or networking here in this area?	255	−.051	.42	.127
Have you been able to get the healthcare you need?	261	.01	.87	.053
When you go to see a doctor or nurse, do you have trouble communicating with them?	259	.125	**.04**	.52
Do you have trouble with transportation in this area?	270	.126	**.04**	.544
Do you feel good about your job situation?	235	−.112	*.09*	.402
Are you able to use your education or skills here in this area?	244	−.100	.12	.343
Do you ever feel like you don't know the rules in US? (For example, laws, culture and norms)	260	.037	.55	.091
Is there a person you can count on at any time here in this area?	254	.024	.71	.066
Do you have places where you usually go to spend time with friends?	268	−.013	.83	.055
Are you happy with the friendships you have here?	255	−.051	.42	.127
Do you ever feel like you are being treated unfairly here?	245	.109	*.09*	.398
Do you feel welcomed in this area?	255	−.004	.94	.05
Are you happy with the amount of time you have to spend with your family?	260	−.181	**.01**	.835
Do you like your living situation? (housing, neighborhood, etc.)	267	−.16	**.01**	.746
Are you proud of the life you have created in this area?	250	−.083	.19	.257
Do you feel safe where you live?	268	−.13	**.03**	.567

Note. Significant correlations, $p < .05$, are bolded, and trends, $p < .09$, are italicized.

we aim to contribute to the decolonial project that resists a palliative understanding of the contemporary social order and incentivizes social justice.

A core goal of this study was to highlight research driven by the refugee community through our CBPR process that sought to resist colonial patterns in research and document findings about the experiences of refugees residing in our region. There is no denying that the analyses described in this paper utilize logic around racial difference that, without care, can lead to essentialist portrayals of refugee communities that contribute to harm. Additionally, one could argue that the use of quantitative measures to assess differences in experiences based upon race too closely replicates methods that have been used to divide and marginalize communities, emphasizing difference and competition rather than solidarity. And yet, it was CARE Cincinnati's grounding in solidarity across refugee communities that allowed for the inequities described in this study to be identified. The team collectively decided that our initial task as a research and action team should be to learn more and document how refugee communities were experiencing life in this region. After deliberating potential research methods, the team chose the community survey method as the first research step so that community agencies and policymakers would have access to the perspectives of a large sample of Cincinnati refugees. The existing rich relationships with various refugee

communities allowed for discussion and analysis about specific disparities experienced by Black refugees. By historicizing, politicizing, and contextualizing the experiences of Black refugees in relationship to enduring racist history of the region we are contributing to a decolonial understanding of refugee experiences (Nasser-Eddin & Abu-Assab, 2020).

Our survey findings illustrate that when comparing the experiences of refugees from African countries with those from non-African countries, African refugees report experiencing more challenges and dissatisfaction, in the Cincinnati, Ohio region. Specifically, African refugees were more likely to report difficulty communicating with healthcare providers, feel less satisfied with their job situations and the friendships that they have in this area, and feel less positively about their living situation than non-African refugees. It is well documented that systemic racism leads to poorer healthcare experiences, employment and housing discrimination, and social exclusion that negatively impact communities of Color (Alwan et al., 2020; Feagin & Bennefield, 2014; Marchiondo et al., 2018; Rothstein, 2018). Thus, although refugees from every community reported some challenges on each of these questions, the specific racial history and enduring disenfranchisement of the Black community in Cincinnati likely exacerbates disadvantage for African refugees in these contexts. Trends in the data also suggest that with a larger sample size we likely would have noted that African refugees were more likely to report feeling that they did not understand the rules in the United States, were less likely to have a person they could count on residing in this area, were less proud of the lives they had created in this area, and feel less safe where they lived. Collectively these findings call for those seeking to improve refugee wellbeing to carefully consider, and work against, racist dynamics that shape refugee experiences.

Perhaps even more revealing are responses to questions related to health care, employment, and living situations on which African and non-African refugees differ and responses to questions on which they do not. Specifically, there were no group differences in responses to the question: "have you been able to get the healthcare you need?" However, African refugee were more likely to report having difficulty communicating with healthcare professionals. Additionally, there were no differences in whether or not participants were able to use their skills and education in their current employment; however African refugee were more likely to report that they did not feel good about their current job situation. These discrepancies suggest that although knowledge and access related to healthcare and employment may be similar across refugee communities, African refugees may be experiencing harsher, colder, or otherwise discriminatory treatment when interacting with others in these settings. The findings that African refugees were less satisfied with friendships in this region further suggest that racism experienced by Black communities may have influenced treatment of African refugees, potentially exacerbating the hardship of relocation. These findings highlight the legacy of racial inequity that specifically disenfranchises Black communities in Cincinnati. To create a more just experience for refugees in the region, it is necessary to consider the racist colonial history and seek transformation in solidarity with all communities of Color who reside in the region.

Further illustrating the links between the experiences of refugees and enduring racial disenfranchisement experienced by the African American community are our findings that residing in neighborhoods with a higher percentage of Black residents, regardless of the survey respondents' own racial or ethnic background, was correlated with several negative experiences. More specifically, residing in a neighborhood with a higher percentage of Black residents was significantly correlated with having difficulty communicating with healthcare professionals, feeling less happy with the amount of time one has to spend with their family, feeling less satisfied with one's living situation, and feeling less safe where they live. Previous research illustrates that neighborhood disinvestment is correlated with racial segregation in direct connection to stigma that is associated

with higher percentages of racial and ethnic minorities (Walker & Brisson, 2017). Thus, refugees who are provided with homes in neighborhoods with higher concentration of African Americans in Cincinnati are likely subjected to the consequences of disinvestment that is linked to racist beliefs. When considering the intersecting hardship and disadvantage experienced by both recent refugees and African Americans who have long resided in the region, these findings incentivize solidarity in working for justice.

In exploring the experiences of refugees in Cincinnati, Ohio via community based participatory research with members of the local refugee community we aimed to contribute to decolonial efforts both within the discipline of psychology and in US society, more broadly. We cast a light on the ongoing hardship communities of Color endure that directly connects to the history of colonial domination both in the United States and globally. Scholars have long critiqued the discipline of psychology for neglecting the impact of context and history on human well-being (Gergen, 1976; Ivey & Collins, 2003; Martín-Baró, 1994). However, when assessing the psychological impact of colonial disenfranchisement we reveal enduring costs of dehumanization and exploitation, and incentivize work towards justice. This is especially important when considering the implications for the contemporary refugee crisis. African countries continue to be among the most impacted by the refugee crisis, both in terms of the regions where refugees flee and the countries who hosts refugees (UNHCR, 2019). Additionally, during the period in which we have been working in this project, the Trump administration expanded restrictions on immigration to include four African countries: Eritrea, Nigeria, Sudan, and Tanzania (Kanno-Youngs, 2020). A decolonized world will only become a possibility when historical and continuing patterns of exploitation are made explicit broadly, and there is widespread agreement that change towards justice and inclusion is a priority.

By prioritizing the goals of members of the refugee community in all phases of developing and implementing this research process, we sought to resist hierarchal patterns regarding who is deemed a legitimate researcher that reflect colonial logic. Nevertheless, there are several limitations to the study. First, we opted not to use established measures in our survey. However, because we developed and piloted the research tools in collaboration with members of refugee communities, we are confident in the validity of the measures for members of our partner communities. It is essential that future researchers diversify the applicability of established research measures if we aim to make the discipline of psychology more reflective of the range of human experiences. Second our findings provide only a general overview of refugee wellbeing and concerns related to civic life in Cincinnati. Our study is not intended to be generalizable to other settings, and future research should attend to complex histories that shape a given locale. Additionally, qualitative interviews and ethnographic approaches could unveil deeper understanding of how racialized colonial dynamics shape the day-to-day experiences of refugee community members.

Finally, we remain sympathetic to Pillay's (2017) question: "can we really decolonize psychology?" Our study exposes inequity that both results from the colonial world order, and a colonial mentality that continuously shapes beliefs about race, research, inclusion, and justice. At the same time, all of the authors of this study currently reside in a country that recently imposed policies that are hostile towards refugees and harmful to the wellbeing of communalities globally (e.g., withdrawal from the Paris Agreement; Friedman, 2020). Although a truly decolonial psychology may feel similar to the dream of a decolonized world order, we aim for our research to incentivize action and transformation towards greater justice driven by voices that have long been neglected or overshadowed.

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Bryan Wright currently serves as the Interim Executive Director for Cincinnati Compass. Bryan is a dedicated connector and collaborator committed to inclusion, equity, and community building. His work focuses on creating a more welcoming and inclusive region for immigrants and refugees. In his role as Interim Executive Director, he advocates for social and economic inclusion; connects individuals and organizations to resources and to each other; and celebrates the cultural and economic contributions of immigrants and refugees in the Cincinnati region. He holds a Master's degree in International Studies from Florida International University and a PhD in Geography from the University of Cincinnati. His doctoral research focused on immigration, immigrant representation, and urban regeneration in the Cincinnati region.

Riham Alwan, is a board member at large at RefugeeConnect. She is an emergency medicine physician specialized in pediatrics. She also spent 14+ years in working on trauma-informed care, education, and program development in several areas of competence. She is a native-born American of Syrian decent and speaks Arabic. She is a health services researcher whose focus is the health behaviors and outcomes of victims of violence. Her expertise includes community-engaged research and the social determinants of health. She spearheaded the academic-community partnership that is now RefugeeConnect's Pediatric Refugee Health Collaborative, which was born from one of the Refugee Empowerment Initiative meetings. She co-leads the current care coordination health navigator study and intervention of newly arrived refugees.

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