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Where Goes the Neighbourhood?

Refugee Resettlement and Urban Development in a Disempowered City

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The 'Global Voices' mural on Grant Street celebrates many generations of immigrants and refugees in Buffalo.

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the intersection of urban restructuring and refugee resettlement. Centring around a case study of Buffalo, New York (NY), USA, it adds to the small but growing number of studies on resettlement in post-industrial contexts. Buffalo is experiencing economic and population growth, termed by some as the city's renaissance (even the refugee renaissance), while others regard it as gentrification and exclusionary development. At the same time, the city has become one of the largest resettlement sites in the country. In politicians' statements and the media, refugees are credited with being one of the key drivers for this development in the city. Through interviews with various stakeholders, I explore how these phenomena are understood. I argue that this convening of factors creates a particular conception of the figure of the resettled refugee. In Buffalo, refugees emerge as a particularly valued form of other, capable of driving development in a way that fits ideally within the narrative of 'rust to reinvention'. As such, they become outside economic development agents, divorced from the challenges faced by struggling residents for decades. Resettlement actors navigate this conversation, recognising the challenges faced by refugees and other residents, while at the same time carrying forward prevailing narratives and frames.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part I: The Project

Introduction

I've just finished the workday in my job at the refugee resettlement agency. This afternoon I had an appointment with a refugee client from Iraq. She cannot work for medical reasons, and her social security income no longer covers her rising rent on Grant Street. I go through Craigslist with her, showing her how to use the website, but there is simply nothing within the city that fits her budget anymore.

For dinner I will have the spicy chicken ramen from Thang's Family Ramen, a restaurant in the West Side Bazaar on Grant Street, run by a Burma-born refugee, trained in Japanese cuisine in Malaysia. Walking into the bazaar, I see many friendly faces, stopping to greet Raine, who owns Zigma Naturals, and Nadeen, who owns Macramé by Nadeen. I feel welcomed and at home. This is what I love about Buffalo.

After dinner I will head down the street for a craft beer – at a quirky joint in a brand new building, with live music, a community garden and USD 12 toast. This is my experience of the multiple worlds of Buffalo. Do they collide? Compete? Coexist? This paper is part of my attempt to understand.

1. Introduction

1 The traditional tale of the American post-industrial city is a well-worn one of former glory turned to economic decline, hollowed out urban cores and concentrated poverty. In the recent decade, however, this narrative has turned to one of revitalisation and renewal. A part of this story has been the role of refugees. Many of these cities have

developed established resettlement systems, and become some of the largest resettlement sites in the country. This phenomenon has received extensive regional and national media attention, highlighting Buffalo, New York (NY), Utica, NY, St Louis, Missouri (MO), Lewiston, Maine (ME), and other sites as unexpected champions of refugee resettlement (La Corte, 2016; Chanoff, 2015; PBS Newshour, 2016; Hartman, 2014). The 60,000-inhabitant city of Utica, NY has even been dubbed 'the town that loves refugees' (UNHCR, 2005). Scholars have noted that this reflects a large-scale shift in resettlement geographies, away from traditional immigrant destinations such as New York and Los Angeles and increasingly to smaller or less traditional immigrant destinations (Bose & Grigri, 2017; Singer & Wilson, 2006).

2 In many ways, resettlement is viewed optimistically as the miracle salve for disempowered cities, refugees the perfect solution for cities reeling from decades of economic decline and population loss (McKinley, 2017). Embracing resettlement is one aspect of a move towards immigrant welcoming, a strategy increasingly engaged post-2008 by many disenfranchised cities hit hard by decline (Pottie-Sherman, 2018). Emblematic of this trend is the Welcoming Economies network, a network of Rust Belt cities established in 2013 to harmonise and hone best practices to 'tap into the economic development opportunities created by immigrants' (Welcoming Economies, n.d.).

3 While this new positive view on resettlement may be a welcome development for immigration advocates, we should be cautious about taking a superficial eye to this phenomenon. In Buffalo, NY, refugees have been credited with launching the city into the era of the 'Refugee Renaissance' (Adelman et al., 2019). At the same time, neoliberal development has increased in the city, and there is a concern for the fate of marginalised residents, both those displaced by exclusionary development, and those 'left behind' as the city's economic fortunes grow. Refugees, as economic and social actors in the urban fabric, play a part in this trajectory of change, but simultaneously risk facing the consequences of uneven urban development. In this context, what position does the resettled refugee hold, in the eyes of different stakeholders?

Image 1 The 'Global Voices' mural on Grant Street celebrates many generations of immigrants and refugees in Buffalo (Droze, 2013).

2. Choice of case study

4 This paper will consider the intersection of resettlement and urban restructuring through a case study of Buffalo, NY. Buffalo is a mid-sized city in upstate New York which has emerged as the largest refugee resettlement site in the state. Buffalo's mayor is vocal about his desire to welcome refugees and for the city to remain a preferred resettlement site under the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). Buffalo is also a member of the Welcoming Economies network. It is therefore an ideal case study of the intersection of neoliberal urban development in disempowered cities and ongoing refugee resettlement.

3. Relevance

5 As increasing numbers of refugees are resettled in smaller or peripheral cities (Bose, 2020), there is a need for honest discussion and evaluation of both the challenges and the potential of these destinations as resettlement sites and future homes for arriving families. Although the USRAP was drastically slashed under the Trump administration, President Biden raised the refugee admissions ceiling to 62,500 for the remainder of the fiscal year (FY) 2021, and promised a record high of 125,000 for FY 2022. Resettlement agencies were expecting a sudden increase in arrivals, potentially even surpassing the surge of Syrian refugees which overwhelmed many agencies in 2015 (Interviewee R1). Thus, cities like Buffalo seemed likely to soon host exponentially larger numbers of refugees. What does it mean to keep resettling in these cities, chosen in part for their affordability, when that affordability is no longer a certainty? The ways resettlement fits into, reifies, and conflicts with the mythos and trajectory of disempowered cities has implications for how refugees are received and perceived, shaping the opportunities available to them. Therefore, a critical evaluation of resettlement and where it intersects with geographies and inequalities of urban development is paramount to ensure that resettlement is not pursued blindly.

4. Theoretical basis and contribution

6 I situate myself between the literature on post-industrial restructuring in urban settings, and work on migration-development and refugee resettlement. I employ Çağlar and Glick Schiller's (2018) typology of the disempowered city to help understand the interrelations between regeneration projects in Buffalo and refugee resettlement and how they are navigated by stakeholders within the resettlement infrastructure. I aim to bring together this space between the bodies of literature, and add another case study to the small body of work which considers migrant and refugee welcoming in disempowered cities. Further, by taking a detailed case study approach and focusing on street-level bureaucrats, this work aims to add nuance to a little-studied issue.

5. Research question

7 As a starting point for exploration, I pose the following research question: In the context of urban restructuring, what role does ‘the resettled refugee’ play? This is divided into three sub-questions. First (1), how does resettlement itself, as well as narratives of resettlement, fit into both the narrative, policy and practice of development in Buffalo, and the city’s position and identity as a disempowered city? This aims to link my question with ongoing development efforts as well as the historical narratives couched in the idea of ‘rebirth’. Second (2), in this context, what are the ways that resettlement is framed? Lastly (3), how are frames, narratives, and tensions navigated by stakeholders? This final question aims to disaggregate the notion of a unified city and explore the ways that complexities emerge and are dealt with by different actors.

6. Structure of paper

8 The structure of this work will be as follows: Part I lays out the project and methodology. Part II gives background on resettlement in the United States (US) and in American cities, then reviews literature on disempowered cities and urban development, migration and development, and refugee resettlement. Finally, part III moves into the details of the case study, beginning with an analysis and discussion of development and resettlement in Buffalo. This is followed by a more in-depth analysis of themes emerging from data.

Methodology

1. Case study method and scale

1 The phenomenon of rising resettlement paired with urban redevelopment has been identified in multiple regions and nations, allowing for analysis of regional trends (Bose, 2020; Pottie-Sherman, 2020), as well as a handful of case studies (Housel et al., 2018; Adelman et al., 2019; Shrider et al., 2018). For this project, a case study approach was chosen to address this phenomenon. This is because the particularities of each urban context may reveal different aspects of interest. Further, a case study allows for a granular analysis of particular actors.

2 Therefore, this work addresses the research questions through a case study of Buffalo, and a particular lens on the Lower West Side neighbourhood. To address limitations arising from a bounded category of the local, it remains rooted in multiscalar dynamics (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018). Namely, integrating an understanding of regional and national trends, this paper aims to open a small window into the part that resettled refugees might play in the broad (re)structuring of the city, in both socioeconomic and ethno-demographic senses.

2. Research methods

3 This project was carried out using multiple qualitative data sources, namely (1) an analysis of secondary materials including media, press releases, official statements and city planning documents, (2) semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders, and (3) researcher observations. The choice to qualitatively address the research questions was driven by a recognition that this is a complex issue, of which no part is 'objective'. Therefore, the media and policy review is a starting point, from which interviews add nuance and allow the phenomenon to be explored from many angles.

4 I reviewed media sources and policy statements to understand firstly, the types and trajectories of development initiatives in Buffalo, and secondly, the ways that resettlement and refugees are framed in the popular media narrative. Focus was on the archives of the Buffalo News, the primary and largest newspaper in Buffalo. Articles

were selected by means of a search for ‘refugee’ in the local section of the paper, from 2008 to 2021. While this search was by no means exhaustive, it enabled me to observe repeated themes. Further sources included historical newspaper and photographic archives, other modern newspapers, press releases and official statements. Conversations with interlocutors further informed this understanding of the context.

5 The key component of this research was personal interview. This was chosen in an effort to understand the complexity and nuances of the linkages between resettlement and development, as well as how changes are perceived by different actors involved. Informants were recruited by a combination of cold emailing organisations, contacting previous professional connections, and making connections through shared acquaintances. 12 semi-structured interviews were carried out via Zoom or WhatsApp voice call, lasting 30 minutes to one hour. Questions centred around how interlocutors see the changes in the city, what role they believe refugees play in these changes, and what impacts they see in communities today (question list in **Appendix**). These questions were general starting points, from which most interviews took on a conversational style. Interviews are then interpreted within the context of the research questions, along the lines of how they relate to media and policy coverage, if they challenge existing narratives and how they carry or resist identified frames.

6 Finally, data also comes from the author’s own observations, both as a resident of Buffalo, and as an employee of a refugee resettlement agency (RRA) in Buffalo for two years. The author spent significant time shopping, eating, and socialising in the Lower West Side, as well as engaging in home visits and informal conversations with refugee clients and friends. As such, observations of the neighbourhood and the city, both as a young white professional living in the area myself, and through the lens of resettlement structures, informed knowledge of this issue. During this time, I also attended a Welcoming Economies conference (in Detroit) and a national Welcoming America conference (in Pittsburgh), giving my perspective on both the policy environment and narratives and frames around welcoming nationally, regionally, and in other cities.

3. Participants

7 A purposeful sample of 12 interviewees was selected, with a primary focus on Refugee resettlement agency (RRA) staff, as those who are ‘doing the act of’ resettling. To explore the phenomenon from a variety of angles, a range of other actors were also interviewed, all of whom interact with resettlement or development in their work. All informants live in the city of Buffalo and have resided there for a minimum of three years (ranging from 3 to 50+ years).

8 Interviewees were:

- Resettlement agency staff (n=6): RRA staff were either case managers directly involved in resettlement or service provision, or programme coordinators/ directors for such staff. Of the agency staff, one interviewee identifies as a refugee.
- Activists (n=3): Activists worked with non-profit organisations advocating for housing rights and/or inclusive development, doing work inclusive of but not specific to refugees.

- City employees (n=1): The interviewee from the city worked within the Office of New Americans, which liaises between the mayor's office and immigrant communities in Buffalo.[1]
- Refugee service providers (n=2): Both interviewees classified as refugee service providers are those who work outside the RRAs, advocacy NGOs, or the city, but work closely with various refugee communities. One individual founded an NGO that assists refugees after resettlement, and which has close ties to RRAs, typically receiving referrals from them. The other is a freelance interpreter who works with multiple RRAs and is also very personally active in helping receive new arrivals. Both identify as refugees.

Interviewee	**Agency type**	**Type of work**
R1	Resettlement Agency	Director, New American Integration
R2	Resettlement Agency	Case manager, Employment
R3	Resettlement Agency	Case manager, Resettlement
R4	Resettlement Agency	Coordinator, New American Integration
A1	Advocacy Organisation	Inclusive Development
A2	Advocacy Organisation	Housing and tenants' rights
B1	Public Office	Director, Office of New Americans
A3	Advocacy Organisation	Movement building, housing rights and inclusive development
C1	Refugee Services NGO	Refugee support services
C2	Freelance	Interpreter
R5	Resettlement Agency	Case manager, Resettlement
R6	Resettlement Agency	Case manager, Preferred Communities

4. A note on reflexivity

9 Having worked in Buffalo and in resettlement, the questions posed here are ones that I have considered before. That said, this project does not hope to reveal any kind of objective truth, but rather explore the ways the refugee relationship to the city is constructed, and what implications might follow, through the lens of the many actors involved.

10 Further, it should be noted that I had previous contact, to varying degrees, in a professional setting with some (8) of the interviewees in the past. Prior relationships

between interviewer and interviewees impacts what interviewees say and how they say it (Garton & Copland, 2010). In this case, previous relationships led to creating an interview environment that was quite casual with a conversational feel. Personal relationships also increased trust, minimising the challenge of 'building rapport', and shared experience could be drawn upon, even in the cases where the interviewer did not have a previous relationship with the interviewee, for example identifying a mutual friend, creating an initial environment of a casual setting. As the goal was to seek not only interviewees' professional knowledge, but their own perceptions and opinions, this set the tone for free speech and comfortability.

11 Further, familiarity with the interlocutors and with the city had significant benefits, as I was able to understand local specificities (such as particular streets, buildings, and businesses) to which interviewees referred. On the other hand, it also led to an interesting challenge wherein interviewees would defer to my assumed knowledge of the subject, leading to incomplete statements or answers lacking in detail (for example, when asked about his priorities a housing search, Interviewee R3 stated 'it's like how we did before'). This was mitigated by beginning the interview with a statement that the interviewer was looking for *their opinions*, and to not hesitate to reiterate anything. If this became an issue (as in the example above), asking the interviewee to explain their views further produced a more complete answer.

5. Research challenges and limitations

12 The most critical drawback in this work is the limited number of refugee voices. Three interviewees identified as refugees. In the original conception of this project, the intention was to speak with resettled refugees, as both subjects and agents of this resettlement-development nexus. However, due to COVID-19, the researcher was unable to travel, and all interviews were conducted digitally. This restricted options for feasible interlocutors, specifically making it difficult to speak with those less familiar with video calling or computers, and those requiring language interpretation. While interviews could have been carried out digitally nonetheless, establishing trust and rapport with interviewees may be more difficult, and lesser visual cues— especially in interviews which require use of an interpreter—can reinforce distance between the researcher and interviewee (Lawrence, 2020; Chiumento et al., 2018). Further, after consultation with refugee community members, I decided that requesting interviews would add an undue burden during an already difficult time.

13 Nevertheless, resettlement agencies and development actors play a pivotal role in the twin processes of urban change and resettlement in Buffalo, so I decided that their input would provide valuable insight into how refugees are received and perceived in this multi-layered context. The chosen interlocutors are familiar with video calls in a professional context, decreasing potential barriers emerging from lack of familiarity with Zoom which risks loss of some data (Chiumento et al., 2018). Some (n=3) of the interviewees are resettled refugees, who work either with an agency or closely alongside them in a professional setting, so they are familiar with conducting video interviews in English.

14 Thus I do not make any claims to the refugee experience of place or of the resettlement process, but rather consider the way that refugees and resettlement are constructed within narratives of the city's development. The institutional voice is an important one,

but would be bolstered by future research which additionally investigates the perception of refugees outside of those who work within the resettlement infrastructure. It is possible that refugees not working for or with RRAs may have a different perspective. Additionally, further research would benefit from taking a refugee-centred phenomenological approach, and exploring more directly the ways that the interlinked phenomena explored here are experienced by city residents.

15 The second challenge was the significant impact of COVID-19 on the lives and work of my interviewees. Due to COVID-19 lockdown and closures, life in Buffalo as well as resettlement is very different. While this research is about a general trend observed in the last decade, interviewees often referred to new or exacerbated difficulties within the last year. Factors related to COVID-19, including widespread lay-offs, accessibility challenges due to social services going online, decreased arrivals, and a state-wide eviction moratorium which was set to lift in July 2021, certainly impacted life deeply. In particular, financial hardship for many families increased. Discussions of general challenges, then, were (understandably) coloured by these immediate obstacles. Some of these differences are likely to be temporary – for example, changes to the rental landscape, with some landlords unwilling to rent until the eviction moratorium was lifted (Interviewee R5). Others will have more lasting impacts, for example COVID-19 has also slowed the pace of some of the development projects happening in the city (Interviewee A3). The challenge here was separating factors which were unique to the moment, and those which would continue to impact resettlement and development in Buffalo for years to come.

FOOTNOTES

1. A note on terminology: the term ‘New Americans’ has emerged in use in recent years, meant to encompass all international migrants in the United States, regardless of citizenship status.

Part II: Background

Geographies of Resettlement in the United States

1. The United States Refugee Resettlement Program

1 Officially established and standardised in 1980, the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) has historically been the largest resettlement programme in the world, until it was surpassed in 2018 for the first time by Canada, as a result of drastic programme cuts under the Trump administration.[1] The resettlement system can be understood as a public-private partnership, wherein initial processing is done at the national level, but the practical functions of resettlement are contracted out to national NGOs and their local affiliates.

2 How does a refugee end up in Buffalo, New York? The location where each family is resettled is determined by a range of factors at multiple scales. Unless they have family members already in the US, refugees do not choose where they will be placed. After a refugee is processed by the UNHCR and the State Department abroad, their case is allocated to one of nine private voluntary agencies ('volags') contracted with the State Department. Each volag has local affiliates, or resettlement agencies (RRAs), who are tasked with providing Reception and Placement (R&P) services for new arrivals (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). These basic services include securing housing and furnishings, enrolling clients in school and English classes, securing necessary identity documents, and enrolling in public services (U.S. Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, 2011).

3 Volags distribute accepted refugee cases amongst their local affiliates according to multiple factors. If a case member reports that they have a friend or family member in a particular city, they will be assigned there, as long as there is a resettling agency within 100 miles to manage their case. For 'free' cases without a family tie, there is an effort to place families in locations where existing national communities reside (Singer & Wilson, 2006). Each RRA submits a capacity statement, detailing their school system capacity, language access, employment opportunities, housing stock, transportation system, existing refugee and immigrant communities, any special programmes, and other details about their community. Volags then use the information in these capacity

statements to distribute cases among their local affiliates (U.S. Department of State, n.d.).

4 While placing families near co-nationals is an implicit priority, the State Department also aims to distribute refugees across sites so as not to place disproportionate 'burden' on any one location (Singer & Wilson, 2006). Spatial distribution strategies are nothing new – despite being widely criticised by scholars, dispersal strategies have been a common policy response towards refugees and asylees in Denmark, the UK, and other receiving countries, where clustering of asylum seekers and refugees in concentrated locations is generally considered a problem (Robinson et al., 2003; van Liempt & Mielet, 2021; Darling, 2016; Zetter et al., 2005). Similarly for other categories of migrants, Canada's Provincial Nominee Program provides province-specific visas for labour migrants according to identified skill gaps (Government of Canada, n.d.). This reflects the assumption that dispersal is the best strategy for maximising benefit and integration opportunities, while minimising supposed negative impacts.

5 In the USRAP, resources are allocated to this end through programmes such as Preferred Communities, which targets new resettlement locations. Among other goals, it aims for the 'enhancement of organizational capacity in resettlement locations where refugees may not have been placed previously' (ORR, 2016). To be eligible for this grant, sites should offer 'excellent opportunities for refugees with special needs to achieve self-sufficiency in their identified area/s of vulnerability', prioritising sites with low cost of living and an environment that allows for 'favorable quality of life' (*ibid.*). Buffalo has been a 'Preferred Community' for over a decade. The stated aim of this programme is not explicitly to distribute refugees, but by offering extra support to emerging sites for intensive case management services, it is assumed that the spatial priorities of the programme align with maximising well-being for resettled refugees.

6 Another reason smaller cities might be preferred for resettlement is financial considerations. Upon arrival, refugees are granted a one-time stipend to defray initial costs. This grant is allocated per capita, and aside from very small increases to offset rising cost of living, the amount remains quite stable. For FY 2022, the amount is USD 1,225 per capita (PRM, 2021). This award is not given directly to the refugee, but is managed and distributed by the agency, to be used for direct payments to cover the refugee's material needs and other service requirements (*ibid.*). As a fixed amount, this money can go much farther in locations such as Buffalo, as compared to costlier cities like Los Angeles.

7 Theoretically, then, the best effort is made to place refugees in a location where they will be well-supported and have the tools available to them to achieve self-sufficiency. Still, there is considered to be a 'lottery effect' in this system, due to the broad variation in services and opportunities at each resettlement site (Brick et al., 2010). A critique of this dispersal and privatisation is that it shifts responsibility to the local level, and refugees may find insufficient support in peripheral locales (Brown & Scribner, 2014; Singer & Wilson, 2006; Darrow, 2015). Additionally, placement in smaller cities, or farther from shared cultural groups, can heighten transition and integration challenges for new arrivals (Phillimore, 2020; van Liempt & Mielet, 2021).

8 These critiques highlight the critical importance of local contexts. While primary funding comes from the federal level, 'institutional' resettlement still relies heavily on community resources. An array of specialised service providers becomes necessary in

sites of resettlement for example, one of the services that must be completed in the 90-day Reception and Placement (R&P) period is a refugee health assessment, so resettlement sites must have public or private clinics which are familiar with administering this assessment. In most cases interpreters are required for all these services, creating a wide demand for interpretation services, at the resettlement agency as well as at clinics, schools, and public offices. This means that it potentially has more expansive impacts at the local level because it is not only a top-down national programme which places individuals at the municipal level, but simultaneously, it is intimately connected to the geography and sociality of the city.

9 Therefore, the USRAP is marked by tensions and complexities: it is driven both by humanitarian impetus and geopolitical concerns (Haines & Rosenblum, 2010), it is a national system but lacks standardisation both horizontally and vertically (Bose, 2018), and it makes assumptions about what refugees need, hoping to bring together these needs and the priorities of host communities. This overview makes clear two main points: first, at no point is refugee resettlement solely a humanitarian endeavour (if such a thing exists): from the beginning refugees are strategically allocated to best support host sites. Second, because of the multiscalar and fragmented structure of the USRAP, the local level becomes an important setting for narrative-building and frame-making, and involves a diverse field of actors who act and are acted upon.

2. Welcoming refugees in US cities

10 In early humanitarian immigration and in the first decades of the resettlement programme, refugees were largely placed in traditional immigrant gateways – long established destination cities with existing networks of immigrants and a reputation as sites of multiculturalism and diversity (Singer et al., 2008). However, scholars have identified a shift in the geographies of resettlement, noting an increasing presence of refugees in smaller destinations (Pottie-Sherman, 2020; Winders, 2006; Singer & Wilson, 2006). These cities have smaller foreign-born populations and are neither known as sites of economic growth nor multiculturalism.

11 In particular, the ‘Rust Belt’ city has emerged as a new and unexpected champion of resettlement. This new pattern is important because of these cities’ status as archetypical cases of decimated urban cores, segregation, urban poverty, and disaffected blue collar workers (Austin, 2017). The Rust Belt is a geographic classification, but primarily one that indicates a shared history and economic trajectory. It refers to cities that were once major manufacturing hubs, but due to global production shifts and the decline of the American coal and steel industries, their factories shuttered in the 1970s and 1980s. The abandoned mills and the cities around them were left to rust: declining locales reminiscing their glory days. Since then, the central shared characteristic of the Rust Belt has been significant population decline, with these cities losing as much as half of their populations. Further driven by white flight, discriminatory lending practices, and urban policy which prioritised highways and suburbs, the region is often characterised by disinvested inner-cities, vacant housing stock, and concentrated poverty (Pottie-Sherman, 2020; Massey & Denton 1993).

FOOTNOTES

1. Here I do not mean to take the category of ‘refugee’ for granted, recognising that it is a category constructed by the international humanitarian regime, and a label applied to diverse lives (Zetter, 1991). However, especially because US refugee flows are shaped by foreign and domestic policy and security concerns (Hamlin, 2012), within the resettlement system, individuals labelled as refugees take an interesting place as both humanitarian subjects and strategic assets. Even if the resettled refugee is a label, it still has implications for how and where these individuals move.

Literature Review

1 This section will review how key concepts such as the disempowered city, neoliberalism, and development have been considered in existing scholarly work. After situating these concepts, it considers how they intersect with migration-development scholarship in general, and studies of urban immigrant welcoming in particular. These links can then be explored through the dynamics of resettlement and urban change in Buffalo in the following sections.

1. The disempowered city

2 Within a context of globalisation and urbanisation, scholars have discussed the emergence of the city as a site for neoliberal restructuring (Short, 2006). Cities, understood as being in competition with each other, must be entrepreneurial to attract investment and success (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 2005). At its core, this framing of the city in terms of neoliberal competition is a fundamental shift in how one sees the city and its relationship to its geography and its residents. Indeed it leads to a wholesale 'rewriting of the urban experience and an enthronement of a competitive capitalism in the polis' (Short, 2006, 223).

3 In particular, these transformations have been much discussed in the context of a certain type of city, referred to by various terms including post-industrial or Rust Belt cities. To classify this city type, we can operationalise Çağlar and Glick Schiller's (2018) term 'disempowered cities'. This term describes cities with a particular economic profile, but also with a particular ethos. Disempowered cities have entered into the competition of neoliberal urban restructuring with limited assets. However, they also have a 'reference point of past glories and previously greater relative empowerment' (*ibid.*, 14). Therefore, not only are they limited, their leaders are also keenly aware of this loss of power and relative positioning: 'these are cities where leaders and residents can recall the loss of power while confronting the challenges to restructure and once again successfully compete' (*ibid.*, 13). Both socioeconomic realities and their historical narrative play an important role in how they participate in the national and international field. It also explains their impetus to seek 'redevelopment', or revitalisation, and shapes what form this might take. This term avoids some of the

limitations, including geographic, of the Rust Belt label and allows for a more open discussion of how and why these cities undergo certain processes.

4 In the last decade, disempowered cities in the US have gone through a significant period of transition. This has taken the form of deregulation, liberalisation, and if not the pullback of the state, a 'reorganization' of state intervention (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). For disempowered cities, regaining competitiveness has meant economic reshaping towards a service economy, as an industrial speciality becomes less relevant in their global position. In particular, many have focused on rebranding as centres of healthcare and education (Silverman et al., 2013). Secondly, emphasis on population loss and associated vacancy as a primary challenge has led to calls for 'rightsizing', entailing a focus on demolition and targeting development efforts in areas of the urban core (Silverman & Patterson, 2016). Tellingly, in 2007 urban economist Edward Glaeser criticised Buffalo for its place-based development spending, calling on the city to acknowledge that it is now a smaller metro, and to instead focus on 'shrinking to greatness' (Glaeser, 2007).

5 Another path to redevelopment answered the call of Florida's (2002) influential creative class thesis. This indicated that cities should aim to 'be cool' to attract population and capital, in particular, young mobile creatives and recent college graduates. This is done in part through an emphasis on lifestyle, chiefly the 'look and feel' of the city, including 'authentic neighbourhoods', green space and a general emphasis on aesthetics (Florida, 2008; Florida, 2012).

6 Researchers have also emphasised that many of the strategies employed in neoliberal urban development can result in uneven development and gentrification (Miró, 2011; Brown-Saracino, 2016). Gentrification can even be understood as an intimate part of the global capitalist impulse (Smith, 2002). Like other forms of restructuring, critics have pointed out the disproportionate consequences of rightsizing and austerity urbanism (both as forms of urban shrinkage) on marginalised and racialised groups (Pedroni, 2011). These processes can result in both physical and non-physical displacement (Perez, 2004; Davidson, 2008). Displacement can also be understood more broadly than just forced mobility, but rather as the impacts of broad processes of dispossession and deligitimisation (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018; Harvey, 2005).

2. Migration and development in disempowered cities

7 Now we turn to a second set of concepts on migration and development. While refugee and immigrant welcoming may be viewed as a novel and remarkable trend, history and scholarship demonstrate that this is in fact a continuation of the conceptual pairing of migration and development. Historically, migrants have been able to fill economic needs in destination countries; for example, guest worker programmes such as the *Gastarbeiter* programme in Germany and the Bracero programme in the United States sought to attract temporary immigrant workers to fill gaps in the labour supply. By positioning migrants as simply 'labour supply', however, these programmes also tended to overlook the human element: much to the frustration of both Germany and the US, who hoped that these workers would fill a gap until no longer needed and then return home, many stayed, brought their families, and settled long-term (Martin & Teitelbaum, 2001; Castles, 2006).

8 Scholars have long emphasised the role of migrants as agents of development; in particular, diasporas and transnational networks have been viewed as sources of remittances and 'brain gain' for sending countries (Faist, 2008; Kapur, 2004). However, this focus on remittances 'tends to elevate the comparatively small number of international migrants into an unwarranted instrumental role in development and diverts attention from the much more important obstacles to development located in home-country populations and institutions', in other words, shifting responsibility by making them a 'saviour' of their country rather than addressing other real challenges (Skeldon, 2008). Perhaps a parallel can be drawn in American cities, wherein immigrants can become lauded development agents, to the detriment of a wider or more complex discussion of what challenges exist and how development should look (if at all).

9 While migrants may have always been paired with development in various ways, there has undoubtedly been a more positive policy shift in recent years: amid anti-immigrant rhetoric from publics, think tank reports and policy briefs have emphasised the benefits of immigrants to host communities (New American Economy, 2017; Jawetz, 2017). In particular, we have seen increasing policy convergence among Rust Belt cities on immigrant welcoming as a fitting solution for a new way forward (City of Buffalo, 2016; Wainer, 2013). An emerging body of literature on 'development-inclusionary initiatives' in American disempowered cities considers how welcoming immigrants brings benefits to this particular type of city and speaks to the position of migrants in post-industrial urban restructuring. These authors have demonstrated that international migrants can fit into the particular needs of disempowered cities, by restoring population and an economic base, bringing entrepreneurship, and 'putting eyes on the street' (Filomeno, 2017; Pottie-Sherman, 2018; Shrider, 2019; Karam, 2017).

10 In many cases, then, welcoming is intimately connected with the development efforts of city governments. In Dayton and Cleveland, for example, programmes encourage immigrants to refurbish and occupy vacant homes, thus directly applying immigration to address concerns with high vacancy (Pottie-Sherman, 2018). In this way, immigrants are posited as a solution to post-industrial challenges, therefore becoming framed as neoliberal 'economic and demographic assets' (*ibid.*, 444). This also relates to a simplification of immigrants as 'off-the-rack tools for economic recovery that require little to no investment in austere times' (*ibid.*, 445).

11 Further, there is assumed to be an alignment of interests, immigrant welcoming presenting an opportunity for cities to improve their status and immigrants to seek upward social mobility (Pottie-Sherman, 2018; Filomeno, 2017). This is mirrored in the media which posits immigrant welcoming as a win-win solution for disempowered cities and immigrants (Hartman, 2014).

12 Another perspective on this intersection is through work on post-industrial restructuring and urban branding, which has highlighted the value of diversity and cosmopolitanism in rebranding efforts within a frame of global competition (Watson, 2019; Zukin, 1998). Culture can be a key asset in urban redevelopment, from museums to international cuisine, as a way to attract tourists and mobile publics, thus becoming a consumable urban product (Zukin, 1998). This reliance on urban consumption creates an urban economics wherein symbols of diversity and cosmopolitanism take on importance (Zukin, 1998; Watson, 2019). These are key tenets to being entrepreneurial and attracting the creative class (Harvey, 2005; Florida, 2002). Indeed, many cities have

drawn on diversity, 'ethnic entrepreneurship', and ethnic packaging in their rebranding efforts (Shaw, 2011; Hackworth & Rekers, 2005). Here, again, is another assumed convergence: the diverse cultures can be celebrated and incorporated while bringing economic benefits to the city (Rath, 2005; Shaw, 2011). However, cosmopolitanism, as it is traditionally understood, is based on power differentials and continues to cast some as 'other'. In fact, this otherness may be necessary for this particular form of urban regeneration (Irving & Glick Schiller, 2009).

13 This returns to the competitive positioning of cities – always understood as relational, disempowered cities are seeking a competitive advantage over others (Filomeno, 2017; Schiller & Çağlar, 2009). Where they may lack traditional economic resources, disempowered cities can use immigrants to draw on cultural wealth (in the form of diversity and transnational connections) as a form of capital (Watson, 2019). Pottie-Sherman (2018) has suggested that resettlement in particular can be a way for disenfranchised cities to regain competitiveness and attract investment by framing themselves as a 'global city'.

14 Therefore, in addition to economic and demographic priorities, the idea of cultural contributions is also instrumentalised and commodified. The economic focus and the focus on diversity are closely linked, and immigrants can be welcomed as demographic, economic, and cultural assets to fill the particular supposed needs of disempowered cities.

15 Watson's (2019) application of Zukin to immigrant welcoming in Pittsburgh raises questions about how concepts such as diversity, cosmopolitanism, and culture are performed in the city and what this means for the actors. The idea of cultural capital has close ties to gentrification: 'the origins of gentrification included the establishment of an urbane habitus that drew its identity from a perspective rich in cultural capital but (initially) weak in economic capital' (Ley, 2003). While Ley is here referring to the place of artists, it also applies to the role of 'ethnic entrepreneurs' and new immigrant communities (Stock and Schmiz, 2019). This idea of a culturally-rich, economically-poor neighbourhood mirrors descriptions of neighbourhoods such as the Lower West Side in Buffalo, which are simultaneously beginning to gentrify and acting as a refugee resettlement site.

16 A handful of authors have specifically looked at impacts of gentrification on 'immigrant enclaves' (Stabrowski, 2014; Murdie and Teixeira, 2011), Hispanic populations (Perez, 2004) and refugee neighbourhoods (Adelman et al., 2019) as victims of displacement, even double displacement. Migrant-driven neighbourhood change and gentrification tend to be viewed as separate types of neighbourhood change (Adelman et al., 2019; Hwang, 2016 is an exception). But as Çağlar and Glick Schiller (2018) highlight, very little attention has been paid to the ongoing role migrants play in this restructuring/city-making. This review suggests that immigrants both act as source of capital and driver of development, while being victim to exclusionary processes.

17 Finally, a return to Çağlar and Glick Schiller (2018) reminds us that many residents in disempowered cities have faced decades of processes of dispossession and find themselves in a place of precarity. Forms of exclusion and displacement reviewed in the previous section may link all marginalised populations in disempowered cities. When we move past strict categorisation of migrant versus non-migrant, we can see that migrants are linked to existing residents through shared challenges and experiences of displacement.

3. Exploring implications

18 If disempowered cities use 'development-oriented inclusionary policies as a repositioning strategy' (Filomeno, 2017), what does this mean for the way that migrants are welcomed? While the above review looks at why immigrants are welcomed, it is useful to also ask *how* and with *what implications*. Pottie-Sherman (2018) and Watson (2019) have highlighted the economic development-oriented frames used in welcoming, and how they clearly relate to the particular ethos and urban development trajectory of disempowered cities.

19 Watson (2019) argues that this has implications for new modes of immigrant incorporation: this is not necessarily disempowering, but rather, immigrants who contributed in certain ways find new avenues to power through participation in this 'symbolic economy'. Similarly, immigrant entrepreneurs may capitalise on ethnic packaging or tourist opportunities (Stock & Schmiz, 2019; Rath, 2005). However, any frame has the potential to exclude those who fall outside of its limited definition; this limited mode of incorporation may also act as a device to exclude those who do not fit the mould (Grace et al., 2018).

4. Refugee resettlement

20 Disempowered cities have not only engaged development-inclusionary initiatives to welcome immigrants in general, but have specifically turned resources towards refugee resettlement in recent years (Shrider, 2017). As compared to other cities which are the basis for much of this research, such as Cleveland and Detroit, Buffalo has paired its welcoming stance with a high volume of refugee resettlement.

21 Sociological scholarship on resettlement in the United States has critically highlighted the tensions and challenges present within an ostensibly 'humanitarian' system. Specifically, by a focus on economic self-sufficiency within the USRAP, integration easily becomes a device primarily oriented towards maximising a refugee's contribution, understood in economic terms, to their host city. Because of the programme's heavy emphasis on early employment as a principal indicator for 'successful integration', *market citizenship* has become the norm and shapes the ways that refugees need to act to claim 'citizenship' in the US (Nawyn, 2011; Grace et al., 2016). Thus, paralleling the development-economic framing of immigrants reviewed above, resettled refugees may similarly be viewed as successful by their participation in the neoliberal market.

22 Although these frames are initially constructed at the national level, they take shape at several scales, including the local. In particular, Hausermann et al. (2021) underscore the role of NGO staff in navigating the complexities and influence of broader geopolitical processes. Local staff may contradict or reify frames; for example, Frazier & van Riemsdijk (2021) found that while NGO actors personally understood integration in broader terms than market citizenship, they nonetheless reproduced neoliberal discourses.

23 This brings together an important linkage: existing work often considers development-inclusionary initiatives as a unified citywide strategy, or a regional trend (Watson,

2019; Filomeno, 2017), albeit with resistance from anti-immigrant groups (Majka & Longazel, 2017). Pottie-Sherman (2018) gives important consideration to the ways different local actors navigate regional economic development narratives. With this exception, however, most studies overlook the important role of street-level actors. Street-level bureaucrats, public service workers who act as liaison between the State and public life, play a key role in enacting policy, and thus shaping and creating it (Lipsky, 1980). Literature on street-level bureaucracy highlights that this work is deeply conflicted, as street-level bureaucrats balance their desire to do good with their professional responsibilities. In Hausermann et al. (2021) and Frazier & van Riemsdijk's (2021) works, we see these daily contradictions navigated by RRA workers.

24 This gestures towards possible particularities that may emerge in the narratives of cities that 'specialise' not just in migrant welcoming, but refugee resettlement in particular. Asking why and how resettlement relates to urbanism and restructuring in disenfranchised cities has to take into account not only how the city frames migrants, but the practices and narratives of actors within the resettlement system. It should also consider how the resettlement system integrates into the geography of society by its daily functioning. Is the resettled refugee just another urban economic actor? Özay (2020) suggests that 'resettlement urbanism' presents a promising opportunity for the integration of humanitarian impetus into urban development, and an expanded view of cosmopolitanism which is rooted in justice (apparently reversing the neoliberal turn).

5. My project

25 I propose to specifically explore the narrative of immigrants as solution for disempowered cities. In what ways does this emerge in Buffalo, and with what implications? Through exploratory conversions with differently positioned actors, I hope to better understand what this frame allows and obscures. Here I posit to make two contributions. First, by making a connection to the urban studies scholarship on the exclusionary impacts of the neoliberal turn, to allow more present and historical nuance to discussion of welcoming. Secondly, by looking at street-level bureaucrats, I disaggregate the notion of 'the city' as a unified actor. What complexities may emerge? Do alternative frames emerge among different actors? This reflects back on the small body of literature which looks granularly at actors, contextualised within broader processes, demonstrating that narrative frames are navigated and carried forward in complex ways (Frazier & van Riemsdijk, 2021; Hausermann et al., 2021; Lipsky, 1980).

Part III: Case Study

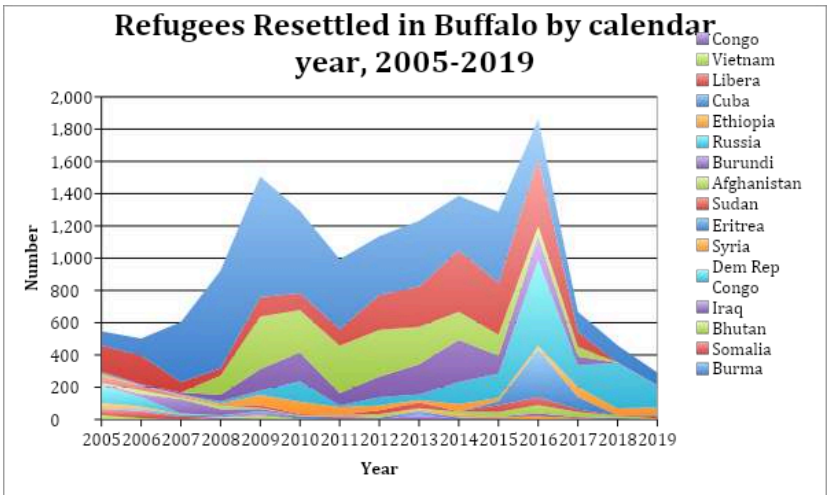
Refugee Resettlement and Development in Buffalo

1. A short introduction to resettlement in Buffalo

1 Buffalo is the top resettlement location in New York State, far outpacing New York City in terms of number of individuals resettled each year. A tabulation of all resettlement in the United States finds Buffalo ranking as the eighth largest refugee destination in the country since 2002 (RPC, 2021, author's own tabulations).[1] Resettlement in Buffalo saw its first sharp increase in 2007. After this, arrivals ebb and flow in response to international dynamics, but with an upward trend of increasing resettlement in the city. Numbers peaked in the final year of the Obama administration in 2016, then plummeted as Trump decreased the admissions cap to historic lows (**Table 1**). Since 2002, over 15,000 refugees have been resettled in Buffalo.

2 One notable feature of Buffalo's resettlement is the diversity of resettled populations. As **Table 1** shows, while refugees coming from Burma, Somalia, Bhutan, Congo, and Iraq clearly are the highest in number, individuals are resettled from a wide range of backgrounds.

Table 1: Refugees resettled in Buffalo, 2005–19 (RPC, 2021).



3 The city has a well-developed resettlement infrastructure, with four resettlement agencies each operating under a different volag. These four agencies (International Institute/U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants [USCRI], Catholic Charities/ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], Jewish Family Service/HIAS, and Journey's End Refugee Services/Church World Service [CWS]) each carry out resettlement services, in addition to an array of other specialised immigrant and refugee services under various programmes.

2. Concentration on the Lower West Side

4 Resettlement in Buffalo has been overwhelmingly concentrated on the Lower West Side (LWS), an area located along the Niagara River, and adjacent both to Buffalo's downtown and the trendy Elmwood Village area. The neighbourhood has a history as a destination for international migrants and remains the most diverse area in the city. It is also one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the city. Resettlement is therefore overlaid, and necessarily interacts with, a legacy of disenfranchisement and poverty along racial/ethnic lines (**Image 2, Image 3**).

Image 2: Racial dot map of Buffalo based on 2010 census data, demonstrating the rigid racial segregation of the city, as well as the relative diversity of the LWS (Partnership for the Public Good, 2017). Neighbourhood outline added by the author.

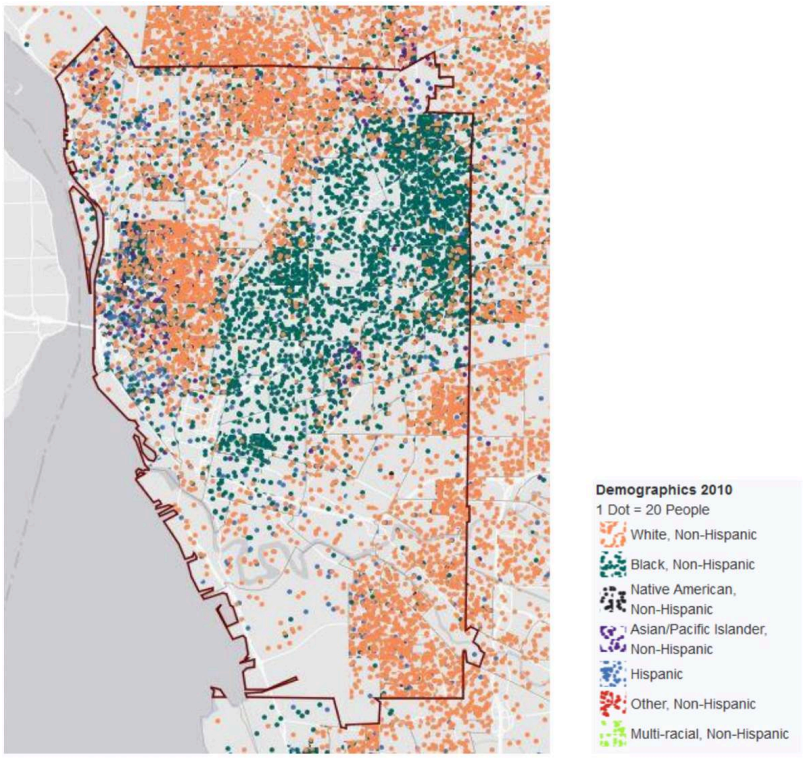
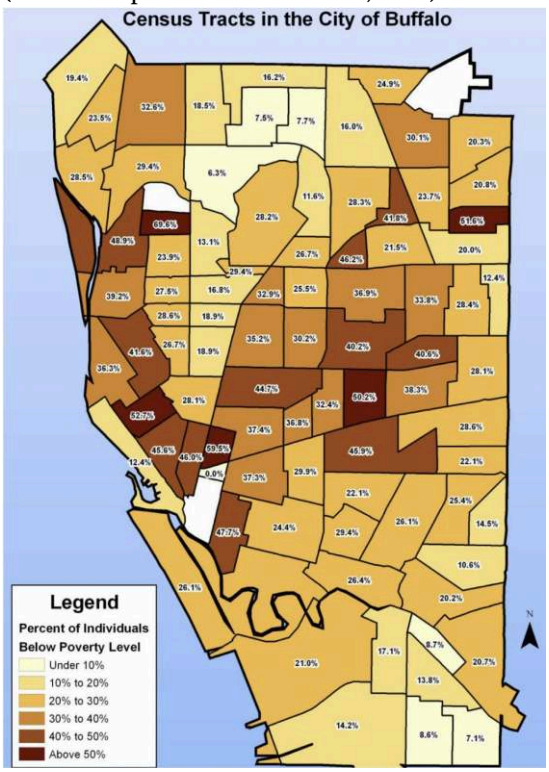


Image 3: Poverty rates in Buffalo, based on 2000 census data (Partnership for the Public Good, 2012).



3. Buffalo in the early twentieth century

5 With its advantageous location on the Erie Canal, Buffalo was once an industrial powerhouse and a hub for shipping and the grain industry. In the first half of the twentieth century, it was a wealthy city with buildings by star architects Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Sullivan, and a parks system by Frederick Law Olmsted, who also designed Central Park in New York. Bolstered by its proximity to Niagara Falls as a source of electricity, it hosted the Pan-American Exposition in 1901 (Goldman, 1983). Buffalo quickly became a prosperous and prominent metropole, 'America's great threshold between the Eastern Seaboard and the Midwest' (Christensen, 2020, 1). Its population peaked at 650,000 in 1950.

6 Buffalo's prime was closely tied to global shipping and commerce, but it was also linked to the world through its large immigrant communities. Work in the mills and on the docks attracted successive waves of immigrants to the city who played a large part in this economic success. While diverse groups of immigrants moved to Buffalo, they largely stayed clustered in tight co-ethnic communities across the city. In particular, the LWS became a popular destination for Irish and Sicilian immigrants, who were drawn to the area for its proximity to work on the docks and in canneries (Goldman, 1983). Within this tightly clustered neighbourhood, networks played an important role in these migrations, as often almost entire villages relocated to Buffalo, able to rely on those of the same ethnicity for support once they arrived (*ibid.*). Anchored by the commercial strip on Grant Street, the area was a bustling economic centre and residential community, hosting many small businesses (mostly owned by Italian families), so that a person 'didn't need to leave Grant to get everything he needs' (Sommer, 2020).

4. Economic decline

7 While Buffalo entered the latter half of the twentieth century a powerhouse, challenges were soon to come. Among other factors, the deindustrialisation of US cities in the 1960s and 1970s, new technology for transporting electricity which lessened the relevance of Buffalo's proximity to Niagara Falls, improvements in trucking and rail transport which moved traffic away from the Erie Canal, all converged to send the city into economic decline. In 1959, the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway diverted shipping away from Canal almost entirely, decreasing Buffalo's geographic importance for manufacturing. The biggest factory in Buffalo (and the fourth largest in the country), Lackawanna Steel, began slowing operations in the 1970s and eventually closed in 1983. It had employed 20,000 workers. The percentage of the workforce employed in manufacturing decreased significantly 1970–2000, offset only partially by small gains in service sector employment (Kraus, 2004). The city entered a period of economic and demographic decline, in which the population decreased by almost 50 per cent, reaching 350,000 by 2020. Deprived of its industrial base, it entered the twenty-first century short on economic capital.

8 Certainly the loss of jobs and economic activity associated with industrial decline was disastrous for the city. Additionally, exclusionary urban planning and disinvestment from the inner city also had negative impacts. Redlining cut off certain neighbourhoods from investment, particularly those with African American or immigrant residents.

Simultaneously, Federal Housing Authority loans encouraged white residents to move to the suburbs. Segregation was further cemented by the isolated locations of the public housing that was constructed. By 1958, planners identified trends of extensive white flight, suburbanisation and urban sprawl (Preservation Buffalo Niagara, 2020). Buffalo thus faced a 'quintuple-disaster [...] deindustrialization, racial conflict, suburban dispersion, capital flight, and globalization' (Shibley et al., 2016).

9 In the LWS, the 1950s began an era of urban renewal that tore up the West Side and deepened poverty for its residents. In 1964, the construction of the Interstate-190 highway was completed, cutting off the neighbourhood geographically and economically from the waterfront and downtown. On a larger scale, the construction of the I-190 and other highways at this time facilitated and accelerated white flight to the suburbs (Cadzow, 2018). Through the demolition-happy mid-twentieth century, 'newspaper dispatches on the area were suffused with the clichés of renewal: neglect, blight, change, and the surety that "you cannot build until you destroy"' (Wypejewski, 1994). This legacy remains: today, Buffalo is both one of the most segregated and one of the poorest cities in the country.

5. Redevelopment efforts in Buffalo

10 This is not the story we see today. By 2015, Buffalo was 'experiencing near-euphoria over what seems like a sudden change in fortune' (Shibley & Hovey, 2016). How did we get here? This section details the economic and geographic changes Buffalo saw in the first decades of the twenty-first century, as well as the city's redevelopment efforts. It explores the entanglement of resettlement with the economic trajectory of the city, and the way city leaders position refugees within their regeneration narratives (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018).

Table 2: Population of Buffalo (American Community Survey 1850 - 2015)

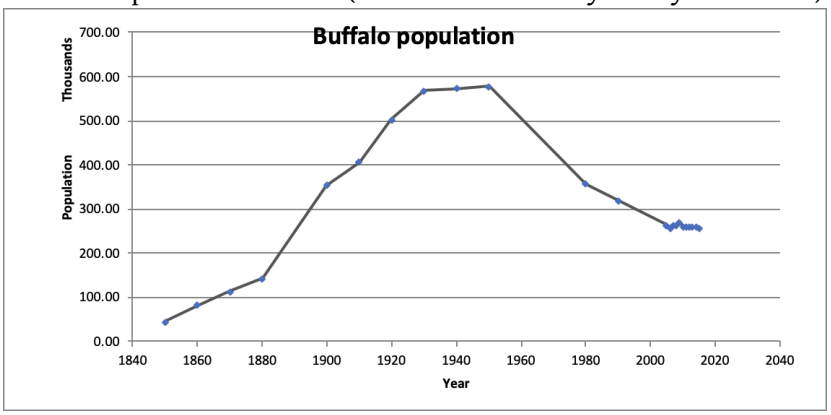
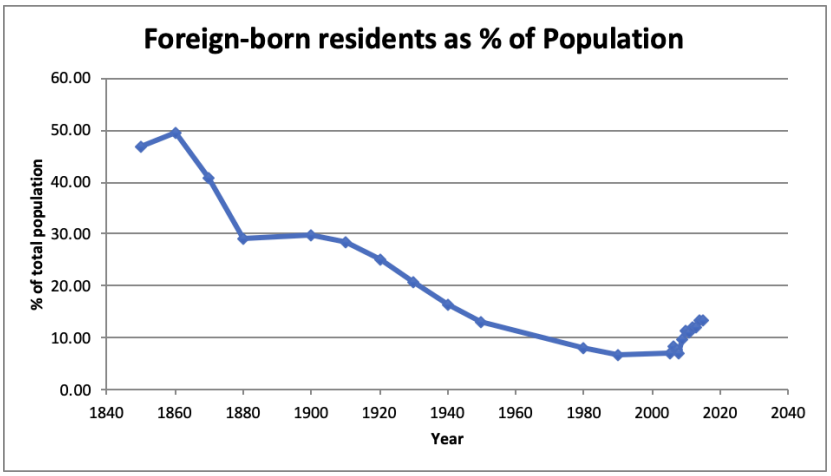


Table 3: Foreign-born residents as % of population of Buffalo (American Community Survey 1850 – 2015)



11 The first decade of the twenty-first century was an era marked demographically by the rise in the presence of refugees, and economically, by the first signs of today's development. In this decade, Buffalo's population loss finally began to slow (**Table 2**). Population data from the American Community Survey reveals that in 2005 the relative percentage of population that was foreign-born also began climbing again (**Table 3**).

12 Narratively, city plans for redevelopment in the new millennium reveal a desire to restore former glory: 'in 2030 Buffalo will be the Queen City of the Great Lakes once more, growing again, renewed, and rebuilt from its foundations, a model of smart growth and sustainability' (City of Buffalo, 2004, 4). Buffalo remembers its industrial past, proclaiming that leveraging its modern assets, including its location on the Canadian border, its green space and institutions of education, science and medicine 'will give Buffalo the economic leverage that the crowded wharves and glutted warehouses of its harbor and the Erie Canal provided in the 19th century' (City of Buffalo, 2004, 5).

13 Policy-wise, this first decade saw a particular form of rightsizing, although perhaps less straightforward as compared to Detroit's mayor's announcement of downsizing plans in 2010. In Buffalo, development concentrated around downtown, and most vacancy was in poor and minority city neighbourhoods (Silverman et al., 2013). The city publicly focused on vacancy as 'one of the most important issues facing our community', in 2007 announcing an aggressive '5-in-5 plan' to demolish 5,000 buildings within five years (Weaver & Knight, 2018).

14 In some ways, the trajectory of development in Buffalo echoes processes of urban restructuring and austerity urbanism outlined elsewhere (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Hackworth, 2015), articulated through large developments, public-private partnerships, and emphasis on entrepreneurship. Redevelopment has also been pursued via attempts to restructure the economy towards tech and health (Silverman et al., 2013). In 2012, New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo announced a plan for major State investment in the city, which focused on strengthening three sectors—advanced manufacturing, health and life sciences, and tourism—along three core strategies – entrepreneurship, workforce, and smart growth (New York State, 2016). The 'Buffalo Billion' funding led to mega-projects including SolarCity, a massive solar panel factory to be leased to Tesla, and the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, hosting six different medical providers and the University at Buffalo's medical school. These

projects were meant to re-use brownfield or vacant sites, bring activity to the inner city and create jobs for local residents. The Buffalo Billion funding also reflected the emphasis on innovation and entrepreneurship, for example creating 43North, a start up competition and business incubator.

15 Plans to welcome large-scale builds and welcoming private capital investments are indicative of this shift (Cope & Latcham, 2009). The city has been criticised for catering to private developers, giving tax breaks for the construction of pricey loft-style apartments (PPG, 2017). Further, a small handful of developers are awarded the majority of new projects (PPG, 2017, Interviewee A3). All of this reflects the idea that the *entrepreneurial city* must win out against other competitive cities to attract private investment (Harvey, 2005).

16 Another important aspect of development in Buffalo has been a focus on streetscapes and aesthetics. Buffalo Billion funds also went towards beautification efforts such as a new park and bike trails in the Outer Harbor. Revitalisation efforts focused on the waterfront, redesigning the Canal side area with the creation of new pedestrian areas and an outdoor ice rink, as well as the USD 170 million Harbor Center sports and entertainment complex. In 2006, the new Green Code was implemented, entailing a full-scale overhaul of zoning laws, allowing for new builds and presenting a new vision for development in Buffalo. The Code is form-based, addressing the 'look, feel and function of urban space as a whole', rather than separating areas by use (for example industrial, residential, mixed-use). The Grant Street Revitalization Project, which allocated USD 400,000 in a combination of public and private funding to the Grant Street corridor, took 'a two-pronged attack', prioritising streetscape (storefront revitalisation) and infrastructure improvements (Epps, 2019; Sommer, 2019).

17 This emphasis on aesthetics and streetscapes lends itself to attracting a particular type of resident and consumer (Florida, 2002). While this innovative framing has promising elements, reflecting criticisms of other creative class development, the focus on streetscapes can risk a 'latte cultural imperialism', where preferences for certain aesthetics and types of building use will crowd out others (Kinney, 2017). Critics also express concerns over uneven development –while the Green Code does not actively discriminate against certain neighbourhoods, it lies on a history of segregation and disenfranchisement, and fails to actively address equity issues by taking a 'neutral' approach (*ibid.*).

18 While much of the city's redevelopment efforts focused on downtown, some attention was also awarded to the LWS, and later to other struggling neighbourhoods such as the East Side. In the first decade of the twenty-first century small changes were led by individual entrepreneurs, such as local Prish Moran who bought seven apartments and five storefronts and rehabbed them to open Sweetness_7, a café with an artsy ambience worthy of Brooklyn. Then, the 2010s marked a new era of attention from State and larger development actors. Assemblyman Sean Ryan located his office in a new building on the Grant commercial strip, and has focused his attention on development along Grant Street, notably with the aforementioned Grant Street Revitalization Project.

19 The LWS certainly looks and feels different than it used to. In the last few years, many new storefronts have opened up, largely services such as corner stores and phone/tech shops, and groceries and restaurants catering to an international customer base. The impact of refugee communities is clearly visible in this neighbourhood, where formerly vacant storefronts now boast signs in Burmese, Somali, and Nepali (**Image 4**).

20 Rent prices on the LWS are also increasing, at a higher rate than other neighbourhoods (PPG, 2020). In terms of racial dynamics, the white population is increasing (Coley & Adelman, 2020). The LWS is also experiencing some of the aesthetic changes associated with gentrification – new bars, coffee shops, and businesses such as record stores catering to a particular socioeconomic and racial group (**Image 5).** Walking into Sweetness_7, one can enjoy locally made fare (my choice, a 'Spanish scramble' made of eggs, cheese, chorizo, tomato and hash browns (USD 10), and a real maple syrup latte (USD 4.50), and on Sundays, even be treated to a jazz brunch.

21 Particular acclaim has been awarded to the West Side Bazaar, a marketplace and small business incubator for refugees (**Image 6**). The mayor praised the Bazaar because it 'creates new businesses, new jobs and builds on Buffalo's efforts to stabilise neighbourhoods and grow its economy city-wide' (Buffalo Rising, 2017a). In fact, the West Side Bazaar has been the focal point of much of the local and national attention on Buffalo's rebirth. When Katie Couric, broadcast journalist famous for NBC's *Today Show,* travelled to Buffalo to create an episode of her series *Cities Rising: Rebuilding America,* she made three stops: 43N, a business incubator and part of the Buffalo Billion, the newly renovated waterfront Canal side area, and the West Side Bazaar.

Image 4: A Somali market on Grant Street (LaChiusa, 2014)

Image 5: A recently renovated storefront on Grant Street, hosting a vintage store (Paloma Exchange, 2021).

Image 6: Local representatives including NYS Assembly member Jon Rivera, NYS Senator Sean Ryan, Congressman Brian Higgins, Hope Knight of Empire State Development (NYS' economic development agency), and Director of Development in the Office of Strategic Planning for the City of Buffalo Lisa Hicks, stand with WEDI representatives at the groundbreaking for a new West Size Bazaar location (WEDI, 2022).

6. Official welcoming

22 In 2015, Buffalo's Mayor opened a new Office of New Americans (ONA) at City Hall, to 'ensure that Buffalo remains a welcoming city and a preferred resettlement site in the United States' (City of Buffalo, n.d.). According to its web page, the office acts as a liaison between city government and New American communities, ensures accessible services and meets with New American community members to understand how to best serve them. While they ostensibly work to support all New American communities in

Buffalo (immigrants, refugees, international students and others), most of their content and language has a clear focus on resettled refugee populations. In 2016 they published the *City of Buffalo New Americans Study: A strategic action plan to advance immigrant and refugee integration and success.* This document contains recommendations for better supporting refugee groups in the city, however no evaluation or follow up has been publicly released.

23 The city has embarked on symbolic gestures such as hosting and attending the Karen traditional wrist-tying ceremony on the steps of City Hall, or raising a flag proudly reading Refugees Welcome in the central downtown square. The mayor has also joined national welcoming networks and pacts, including Welcoming America, Cities United for Immigration Action, and the Building Welcoming Communities Campaign, and participated in an Immigration Summit hosted by New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio (City of Buffalo, 2016, 5).

24 Narratives about development often draw parallels to the historic contributions of immigrants. The account of the LWS as a diverse immigrant neighbourhood is a key part of the resettlement-for-development narrative in Buffalo. The Grant Street Revitalization Project states in a project backgrounder that 'Grant Street began its current pattern of growth as a vibrant neighbourhood commercial hub of the West Side, allowing successive waves of immigrants to build both homes and businesses, directly serving the community and building wealth from the inside out' (Preservation Buffalo Niagara, 2020).

7. Standing up for resettlement

25 The Mayor's Office echoes the leadership of the three case studies in Çağlar & Glick Schiller's (2018) research–Manchester, New Hampshire (NH), USA, Halle, Germany, and Mardin, Turkiye–who 'responded to the disempowered situation of their city and the challenge of restructuring by embracing a welcoming narrative that cast newcomers and returning minorities as crucial to urban development' (93). The importance of resettlement to Buffalo was made clear by the city's reaction to Trump administration cutbacks to the USRAP. The first year President Trump took office, he reduced former President Obama's ceiling for 2017 from 110,000 to 50,000. The subsequent four years saw the ceiling decreasing yearly to historical lows. In 2018, the State Department called for volags to decrease their number of local affiliates, consolidate offices, and mandated closure of any sites that resettled less than 100 refugees. Further, intensified vetting processes and bans on arrivals from specific countries complicated processes, and led to the expiration of health and security screenings for many cases who had already been approved for resettlement (RCUSA, 2019). This dismantling of the resettlement system at the local level caused great concern. Darrow & Scholl (2020) describe a relationship of resource dependency, wherein resettlement agencies rely on governmental agencies for clients and funding, leaving them extremely vulnerable to cuts at the national level. Indeed, Trump-era cuts were disastrous for agencies across the country: as of 2019, Refugee Council USA reported that 51 agencies had closed permanently, and 41 agencies had suspended resettlement services (RCUSA, 2019). Remaining agencies had to scramble to diversify funding sources to remain in operation.

26 In Buffalo, due to the fact that many agencies already hosted diverse programming beyond resettlement, they were able to stay afloat even as arrivals shrank to barely a trickle of new cases (Interviewee R3, Klotzbach & DePasquale, 2018). Beyond just the impact on resettlement agencies themselves, however, narratives coming out of Buffalo (and other cities) noted the toll that the cuts took on the city and society at large (Zremski, 2018c; Hill, 2018). Local politicians spoke out in support of resettlement, including Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz, and New York State Governor Cuomo, who responded to the 2018 cuts with a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (Tan, 2019). Cuomo asserted his wish to see resettlement continue in Buffalo, through all four agencies, stating '[w]e are proud to serve as a home for refugees across the state who are breathing new life into their communities as members of the family of New York, and we will always stand with our immigrant communities' (Cuomo, 2018).

FOOTNOTES

1. Author's own tabulations of data sourced from the Refugee Processing Center arrivals database. Data availability begins in 2002.

Interviews and media review – recognising opportunities, challenges and complexities

1. Sources

1 Taking into account the development efforts and visible changes to the city of Buffalo described in Chapter 6, this section draws on additional sources to explore more deeply the discussion around this development. The author reviewed articles tagged 'refugee' in the 'local' section of the Buffalo News from the years 2008 to 2021. Quotes sourced from local leaders in regional and national newspapers lend further perspective to the narrative and discursive practices of stakeholders in regard to resettlement. The final major source drawn on in this section was a 2015 study and series of working papers produced by the Office of New Americans (ONA). The ONA releases very few documents, so this study is the largest public piece of information to indicate the work and priorities of the Office. Based on an analysis of census data, 11 listening sessions with 185 refugee residents, and 60 interviews with service providers, these documents shed light on both the city's frames and priorities, and the situation of refugees in Buffalo.

2 The original contribution of this work is the data collected from personal interviews. 12 semi-structured interviews were carried out with interlocutors remotely. Each interviewee had different personal and professional characteristics which were drawn upon in different ways throughout the conversations. Most of the interviewees (n=8) worked with RRAs in a professional capacity, with a few exceptions. One interviewee was an employee of the ONA, and three interviewees worked for justice-oriented non-profit organisations. Each of these final three interlocutors regularly interacted both with resettlement agencies as partners, and with resettled refugees as beneficiaries, but were professionally situated outside of the resettlement 'bureaucracy'.

3 This section is organised along the themes that emerged in these conversations and in the media review. It explores both *what* was talked about in regard to refugees and regeneration, and *how* stakeholders talked about it. Building on Chapter 6, it expands

on ‘the way in which city leaders position migrants or minorities within their regeneration narratives’, and the way that street-level bureaucrats navigate this positioning (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018, 35).

2. Populating the city of Buffalo

4 First, Buffalo has long been haemorrhaging population, and resettlement is seen to be an opportunity to repopulate the city. This is one of the most commonly noted benefits of refugee resettlement in Buffalo, across politicians’ statements and news articles. In one article, Eva Hassett, executive director of one of the resettlement agencies, explains: ‘refugees have a positive impact on the economy and on the community. If refugees aren’t coming to Buffalo, they’re also not coming to Roswell Park [cancer institute], they’re not coming to 43North [business incubator] [...] it’s something that everyone in Buffalo who depends on the economy should be concerned about. Without that incoming population, we go back to that rate of decline that Buffalo saw in the '80s and '90s’ (Drury, 2018). Thus the need for population is closely linked with a desire to uplift the local economy and offset decline. Hassett’s warning that Buffalo could ‘go back’ also recalls the ethos of disempowerment and awareness of the city’s relative loss of power.

5 Population was also a key point emphasised in the ONA study. According to ONA Working Papers, much of the growth in the foreign-born population can be attributed to the city’s increasing prominence as a resettlement host community. They highlight the recent increase in populations from Burma, Somalia, Bhutan, and Iraq (City of Buffalo, 2015a).

6 Gross population increase came up explicitly in only three interviews, interviewee R2 joking that without the population increase from refugees ‘Buffalo would be gone’, and R4 noting ‘the only reason Buffalo's, like not haemorrhaging population anymore is because we're getting foreign born people to move here’.

7 The ONA representative was one of the interviewees who discussed population increase. Her initial answer to the role of resettlement in Buffalo reflected the statements in the media: ‘when you take a big picture approach to resettlement, it's been really good for Buffalo because Buffalo has been steadily decreasing in its native population for the last 50 years’ (Interviewee B1). However, she also described a personal conflict with this narrative: ‘I'm always conflicted because you have, that's very positive for Buffalo, right? We want them to come. But then in the same breath, you know, a refugee is coming to the United States with no real control over where, and often no control over the why. And it's not necessarily something that they had planned or foreseen or even wanted. So you kind of have this pull where it's like, yes, refugees, we want them to come. But do we? I mean, really, if they weren't in a negative circumstance, they wouldn't be in the situation of resettling. So I try to be really sensitive when I talk about population increase’ (Interviewee B1). She echoes the prevailing development logic in regard to population increase, but at the same time, she is cautious about lauding the benefits of resettlement due to her view of refugees as humanitarian subjects.

8 In the remaining interviews, interviewees referenced significant neighbourhood and street-level changes, such as the presence of businesses, and homes being bought or

rented, without explicitly connecting them with gross population increase. These themes will be further explored in the following sections. While perhaps the unspoken foundation for these statements is the assumption that repopulation is necessary to drive these changes, these links were not explicitly made during our conversations.

3. Saving an abandoned neighbourhood: narratives of disempowerment, vacancy and abandonment

> I'll tell you about this neighbourhood, Josephine Bonda says. We have Italians. Across the street we have Puerto Rican people. Down the block are blacks. Anyway, one day last summer a boy outside the house is using foul language. So I go outside and have a word with him. Another boy down the block comes over and tells him to stop it. But the troublemaker says a few more choice words. So my neighbours come out on one side, then on the other. The people across the street come out and start yelling. The whole neighbourhood is in an uproar, right? The troublemaker leaves. No, he was not from the West Side. – Buffalo Courier Express 1981

9 Another main theme that frequently emerged in my conversations was that of a clear 'before' and 'after' within the LWS and within Buffalo's narrative of rebirth. The 'before' is characterised by emptiness, abandonment, crime and insecurity. The industrial history is specifically called upon to this end: 'there wasn't really much going on. It was a very industrial city [...] abandoned buildings everywhere' (Interviewee R1). This theme consistently threaded through my interviews – most respondents noted the presence of abandoned buildings as a signifier of the apparent decay and desolation characterising the city.

10 Abandoned buildings were paired with a lack of people: 'before there's like parts of [the city] where like no one was really living or things needed to be fixed up' (Interviewee R3). One respondent, whose Italian grandparents grew up on the LWS and thus understood it as a part of his personal identity, was careful to note that 'there's always been people living there [along Grant Street]', but nevertheless, 'the perception of the neighbourhood has changed' (Interviewee R4). Most others, however, saw the neighbourhood as abandoned, empty, and characterised by vacancy.

11 Many Rust Belt welcoming initiatives focus on vacancy and rehabilitation, identifying a point where refugees are meant to be a solution and 'suggesting a convergence of interested between [...] volags and local growth coalitions seeking to reinvigorate local property markets (Pottie-Sherman, 2018, 442). In Çağlar and Glick Schiller's (2018) comparative analysis of three disempowered cities, they found a focus from city leadership on transforming spaces of abandonment as key to their regeneration strategy. This is in part rooted in the recognition that physical infrastructure acts as a material reminder of this memory of the city's former glory. In Buffalo, city development efforts did identify vacancy as a key issue and priority, in 2007 announcing a plan to demolish 5,000 properties over five years. There are some

narrative linkages between abandonment and immigration – for example, noting that one of the benefits of immigration is that 'vacant houses become occupied residences' (City of Buffalo, 2015a). However, this was not a strong link found in other policy or statements from local government. That said, it was a theme clearly carried forward in the narrative of RRA staff in their contrasting of the vacancy 'before' versus liveliness now of the city.

12 Through this focus on abandonment, the Rust Belt ethos of disempowerment emerged consistently throughout my conversations, with migrants as an 'alternative narrative' (Pottie-Sherman, 2018) – the line being that the city was empty and desolate, before incoming refugees filled the empty buildings, bringing life and diversity. Again this related to Buffalo's disempowerment: references to abandoned factories recall a time when the city was a manufacturing hub. This was carried forward in part by conversation on culture and diversity, which will be expanded on in later sections.

13 The implication of focusing on vacancy is that surely 'injecting life into the Rust Belt' requires a city that is already dead and needs saving (Wainer, 2013). This image of the rusted factories and abandoned lots is a poignant one, often repeated in the media. In a way, the city becomes a caricature; a hollowed out urban core devoid of residents and inhabited only by snow and rust. Writing in 2009, Cope & Latcham worried that the trope of a city 'whose glory days are behind it, whose steel plants are rusting on the waterfront [...] whose young people are migrating to more prosperous regions, and whose racial and ethnic tensions are still (or perhaps more?) deeply entrenched' erases both the challenges and the points of life/light among low-income and racialised city residents (154).

14 However, in the vignette above, a 1981 newspaper article indicates it has always been a lively and diverse neighbourhood, calling it 'possibly the most changing and the most changed of all Buffalo neighbourhoods' (Buffalo Courier Express, 1981). Residents described a neighbourhood that was diverse and had a deep sense of community. An active community ensured eyes on the street, and a local pride strongly bounded the identity of the neighbourhood.

15 Since Cope & Latcham's (2009) article was written over ten years ago, we now see wide coverage of a 'vibrant' city, in part attributed to refugees. Nevertheless, this new attention still reflects the simplified, obscuring, neoliberal narrative critiqued by Cope & Latcham (2009), albeit perhaps through different frames. Indeed, although Buffalo's population is half of what it was in 1950, disaggregated census data reveals that black and Hispanic residents have been moving *in* while whites move out. Instead of celebrating and encouraging this in-movement, instead planners and developers agonise over loss of white population. Black and Hispanics have 'not been welcomed as saviours of the city' (156). Instead, refugees have been welcomed as purveyors of diversity.

4. Culture and diversity: 'Bringing the World to Buffalo'

> I used to have to work with a lot of travel writers. [They would ask] what's the deal with Buffalo, I'd never been here before. And you know, people would just be shocked at like, what they walked into. I don't know what they expect to find – if

> it's just like some barren wasteland covered in snow. But... [instead they] see like these active, like bustling neighbourhoods and hear people speaking all these different languages.– Interviewee R4

Image 7 The West Side Bazaar on Grant Street, whose slogan claims to 'Bring the World to Buffalo' (WEDI Buffalo, n.d.).

16 My interviewees are all highly familiar with the LWS, through professional or personal interactions there, or current or past time living there. Many noted that the neighbourhood became visible when refugees started moving in – either to other city residents or those outside Buffalo. One interviewee reflected this perspective: 'nobody would have looked at the West Side before. If it wasn't for the refugees moving in and starting to revitalise it, I don't think anybody would still be looking at the West Side' (Interviewee R1). Along similar lines, another interviewee described: 'they moved into this neighbourhood, were placed in this neighbourhood, and then all of a sudden, the rest of the city found out about it and was like this is really cool, I want to live here' (Interviewee R4). Their presence, linked to this 'new diversity' gave the neighbourhood visibility, and allowed people from outside the neighbourhood to begin to see it as 'safe and walkable and active and cosmopolitan' (*ibid.*).

17 Thus diversity and cosmopolitanism emerged as key concepts in many of my conversations. Interviewees now view the city as 'cosmopolitan', one stating 'I moved here for the diversity'. (Interviewee R2, R4). If Buffalo 'became cool' as directed a decade ago (Florida, 2008), this new form of diversity is certainly a part of what makes it attractive. People from other parts of the region are starting to move to the city, those who left are beginning to move back. Local coverage highlights the attraction of

new international restaurants, as well as art and cultural events such as World Refugee Day celebrations which offer attendees a chance to be 'inspired by the refugee population in Buffalo' (Galarneau, 2021; Buffalo Rising, 2017b). The West Side Bazaar, a food hall hosting eight refugee-owned restaurants and stalls with international clothes and souvenirs, attracts hundreds of curious eaters daily, many coming from neighbourhoods outside of the city or even New York to taste the 'authentic' and affordable cuisine.

18 This impression is shaped in the spaces of encounter created on the streets of the LWS as well as some businesses, in which Buffalo residents can feel a part of this diversity. Interviewee R6, for example, described 'seeing different-looking people walk down the street and passing by different food stores' as a major draw for her in the city.

19 This diversity emerges as a foil to prevailing narratives about Rust Belt cities in the US. Interviewee R4 describes: 'I remember one time we [themselves and a reporter from an out-of-town paper] were standing outside of the [West Side] Bazaar, and these women just walked by, with like groceries on their head, like, just balancing and not even touching anything, like talking a mile a minute screaming at their kids, and this writer was just like, this does not feel like a Rust Belt city'. This is not an exceptionally lengthy or intensive encounter. It is a brief passing on the street with someone who acts differently than the speaker and (the speaker assumes) the journalist. But it takes on significance due to its assumed contrast with the experience that one expects walking the street in Buffalo. As a result of this new cosmopolitanism, linked both to new diversity and to the idea of people on the street and multicultural encounter, 'it almost feels like a city again', awarding it global relevance (Interviewee R4).

20 Therefore, multiculturalism emerges as something of value, which adds to the attractiveness of the city – a form of cultural capital. This is clearly a part of the city's narrative efforts. If Buffalo is 'shedding its rusty roots and experiencing a bona fide renaissance', as a *New York Times* tourism guide described, perhaps this is due to the draw of the 'the influx of immigrants from countries like Myanmar and Bhutan' or the 'international flavor' (Thomas, 2018). Calling to mind Pottie-Sherman's (2018) insights about cities in the Welcoming Economies network, through multiculturalism and rebranding as a city of diversity, Buffalo regains importance as a 'global city'.

21 When refugees emerge as a particularly valued form of 'other', framed in a narrative of diversity, Watson (2019) proposes that this creates new forms of participation available to immigrants, through participation in this 'symbolic economy' of diversity branding and cultural capital. The West Side Bazaar is here again a relevant example (**Image 7**). The Westminster Economic Development Initiative (WEDI) provides an opportunity for loans and business coaching for space in their business incubator, for those refugees looking to start a shop or restaurant selling international products. Nadeen, a refugee from Iraq, runs a macramé store in the West Side Bazaar. Well-spoken and a classic 'success story', she is a de facto spokesperson, always the first to be volunteered to reporters who come to the Bazaar. This has awarded her status as a household name: she is often consulted on projects and invited to sell her products at events – in other words, she gains access to a particular form of social capital (Nawyn, 2011).

22 However, just as the frame of market citizenship boxes refugees and creates challenges for those who cannot fit this mould, the ubiquity of the diversity frame may present challenges for outsiders. What about those who present less palatable or consumable forms of diversity? Will they still be welcomed within development rhetoric?

23 Another important implication is the ties that this language can have to gentrification (Watson, 2019; Stock & Schmiz, 2019). In our interviews, RRA actors expressed serious concerns about gentrification and its impacts on refugee communities, but nevertheless reified frames through their language choices. While interviewees are highly aware of challenges relating to gentrification or exclusionary development, they nonetheless use this vocabulary of cosmopolitanism, cultural capital and 'global city'.

5. Space, geographic distribution, and housing

24 It is also interesting to consider how housing, space, and geographic distribution are discussed throughout the data. Affordable housing was the primary challenge noted by every one of my interviewees, for both refugees and non-refugee residents. Activists highlighted a wholescale affordable housing crisis in the city (Interviewee A2, A3). This is due to both rent increases across the city, and increasingly limited availability of affordable units. Further, subsidised housing units have years-long waiting lists (Interviewee A2, R6). Buffalo has historically been considered affordable for both renting and homebuying, as compared to larger metropolises (Interviewee A2). This has been attributed to the population loss leaving a surplus of housing stock and lowering prices. With housing prices comparatively low, this rent gap has drawn investment, for as Interviewee R1 put it, buying property in Buffalo is 'a great business deal'. Now, home values have skyrocketed across the board: even 'neighbourhoods that have been traditionally kind of marginalized' with low housing costs, are seeing 'exponential' price increases (Interviewee A2, A3, R1). Section 8 housing choice voucher holders are finding less and less options within their price range, and housing organisation staff described spending more and more time assisting clients with housing searches (Interviewee A2).

25 In fact, this supposed affordability is part of the story of what makes it a good resettlement site and a 'preferred community'. If refugees are the perfect salve for vacancy, and a win-win because of affordability, what happens when everyone acknowledges that there is an affordability crisis? This does not come as a surprise: already in 2015, the ONA study noted RRAs complaining that the LWS was almost 'saturated', and therefore housing was becoming less affordable and more limited (City of Buffalo, 2015b). Similarly in Berlin, refugee resettlement takes place over a context of an existing housing crisis related to austerity urbanism, demonstrating the challenges faced by refugees when faced with a 'free' housing market squeezed by restructuring (Soederberg, 2019).

26 Variation lay in what this means and implications going forward. For activists, this is tied to a citywide affordability crisis of which refugees are only a part. There is a repeated call for more subsidised and affordable housing from advocacy groups (PPG, 2017; PPG, 2020). For RRA staff, this is both a citywide challenge, and a specific challenge to their work/ability to do their job. Finding housing for new arrivals is one of the key R&P services to be provided by RRAs to new arrivals. Case managers have a housing checklist which mandates safety, size, and cleanliness requirements for housing, such as having smoke detectors, or enough living space for the number of people. However, the available housing stock, within the limited budget of R&P money, means that case managers struggle to do this part of their job. One case manager explained, 'since I worked as a case manager, I have never found a matching house for

our clients', meaning one of suitable size and price (Interviewee R5). Other case managers reiterated this same challenge (Interviewee R3). While the intention is to find a house where each non-partnered adult has their own room (according to the R&P requirements), finding 'three bedrooms for three people, which is good' is practically impossible within the limited R&P budget. For RRA staff, then, this is tied to their ability to do their job.

27 This also demonstrates some of the institutional constraints of agencies, as well as divergences between what the agencies prefer and what individual clients may prefer. RRA staff describe a challenging situation in which their hands are tied by institutional processes and financial constraints. Further, they must place clients in housing judged suitable by their volag's requirements, or else face funding cuts for non-compliance. Just as refugees in Berlin were saddled with the near-impossible responsibility of securing housing in the midst of a housing crisis, here the RRA's face the responsibility of securing suitable (via their funding guidelines) housing within a housing crisis, trying to navigate between these duties and the individual wishes of clients is a challenge which sometimes results in spending extra money (using a hotel), or placing clients somewhere that they will likely move away from.

28 This trend is even more exaggerated on the LWS. As has been demonstrated, the LWS is the preferred neighbourhood for resettlement. This reflects both priorities of resettlement agencies and availability of community ties and resources in the LWS. However, finding affordable housing has become a major challenge. In the value judgements and responses to this challenge, however, we see a lot of divergence between conversations.

29 The ONA study noted '[c]lustering is important for newcomers, as they seek out familiar foods, customs and traditions, and news of their homelands' (City of Buffalo, 2016). However, they are not encouraging of this trend – the representative from the City indicated that refugees must follow market factors for supply and demand of housing: '[people say to us] I want to be near my family, I want to be near my community. But that's not how it works. You know, in most westernised nations, right, like, you don't get to say, well, this neighbourhood is going to be a particular ethnicity. Like, in fact, when that happens, we're not really supportive of that, you know, we want to make sure that things are open and available and accessible' (Interviewee B1).

30 In the same study they show interest in allocating resources toward supporting dispersal: citing some existing interest in the East Side, they noted that 'the movement of immigrants and refugees into this part of the city can be complemented by strategic planning'. It is unclear what this strategic planning might involve or have involved. However, respondents were hesitant about the East Side as a feasible option. All of the refugee respondents noted that the draw of the LWS is being near community, and it is a key factor in what makes Buffalo feel like a good resettlement site, and eases the transition for newcomers (Interviewee C1, C2, R5). Bengali immigrants have increasingly bought housing on the East Side to fix up, but some RRA staff remarked that due to past negative experiences with lead paint, broken heating systems and rodents, they are afraid to place new clients on the East Side (Interviewee R3, R5).

31 This discussion on housing is emblematic of the 'long-standing tension between cities as places to live and cities as units of capital production' (Cope & Latcham, 2009). In addition to physical housing, this issue takes on importance for spatial distribution and the right to the neighbourhood. The representative from the City described the harsh

laws of supply and demand: 'the West Side is full', and so people should look elsewhere. However, refugee respondents and some non-refugee RRA staff emphasised the importance of proximity to commercial and social resources on the LWS. For RRA actors, housing challenges also interfere with their ability to do their job – finding an apartment is one of the most basic services they provide to newcomers. They struggle to balance the wish to find a suitable and desirable home for their clients with the reality that their limited institutional and financial resources are insufficient in the current housing market.

Image 8: Agencies try to save some of the R&P stipend by relying on volunteers to donate furnishings. Here, 'home again' volunteers move donated furnishings into an apartment for an incoming refugee family. The houses on this street are typical of the LWS housing stock (Journey's End Refugee Services, n.d.).

6. Those left behind – challenges and criticisms of Buffalo's development

32 Another thing to note about Buffalo's revitalisation is that many feel left behind. Indeed, Buffalo is still both extremely poor and highly unequal. This fact was emphasised by activists, in some cases framing this as shared challenges between residents, in others as unequal development with some left behind (Interviewee A2, A1, A3). One representative of a development organisation from an adjacent neighbourhood was envious of the development on the West Side, complaining that her area has been left behind in geographically 'piecemeal' development efforts in the city (Interviewee A1). Many respondents identified ties to challenges for all residents, such as the need for publicly funded day care (Interviewee R5), a minimum wage and public assistance amounts too low for the cost of living (Interviewees R6, R4), and housing affordability challenges in the city (all interviews).

33 This complexity of responses reveals the challenges when resettlement overlays historical disenfranchisement and poverty. It highlights that resettlement needs to

take into account existing conditions, both of the urban context, and of the residents already living within it. Some staff are very aware of this tension: ‘on the surface [...] the intentions are all for the best [...] [but] you also have to be really aware of coming in and saying this housing is substandard, and we need X, Y, and Z, but you've already got community members living there that think their housing is substandard’ (Interviewee R1). Responses clearly point to a need to match refugee support with an awareness of the needs of existing communities. Resettled refugees can be seen as ‘lucky’ to receive their small sum of R&P money, which is more than other residents receive, faced with the same housing market and employment prospects (Interviewee R4).

34 Further, if the resources of the city are viewed as zero-sum, this has the potential to create competition or antagonism among current residents. Other case studies have highlighted refugees may be in competition with other low-income residents for limited housing stock (Carter & Osbourne, 2009). RRAs have to navigate this, otherwise ‘you can create some rifts within the community already if it's perceived that refugees are getting differential treatment. And they're the new kids in town’ (Interviewee R1). This speaks further to competition over the neighbourhood. Indeed, one interviewee, a refugee from Burma, described conflict in the LWS where he was resettled in 2008, where incoming Burmese refugees felt threatened by existing Hispanic gangs, forming their own gangs for protection until they eventually ‘kicked out’ the Hispanic groups (Interviewee R5).

7. The look and feel, for who?

> It is good to have a beautiful environment. But if you don't change people’s lives you know like in a good way, in a positive impact, then it [means] nothing. So for example, [if] you have a very beautiful garden full of flowers, but your life is very poor, if your life is ugly, it will mean nothing. So they [the city] update parks, trees, but the houses are bad, there's no jobs, no day care programmes, anything like that. So there’s a lot of things to work on. – Interviewee R5

35 What of the city’s redevelopment policies and initiatives directed at updating the ‘look and feel’ of the city? Many respondents found these activities to be irrelevant to their lives and work. City projects such as new buildings, money allocated to the waterfront and downtown area, and greening efforts are often viewed as superfluous, or directed towards outsiders. Two refugee respondents simply were unconcerned by the new builds and entertainment opportunities (Interviewee C1, C2). Similarly, Interviewee A1 noted that the development downtown didn’t affect her community and their concerns. This was contrasted with human services and social programmes, the implication being, instead of spending money on beautification, the city should allocate more money towards public assistance (which is currently too low to cover rent) or other programmes to help the daily lives of residents. On the other hand, one development activist (Interviewee A3) remained extremely concerned with any projects undertaken by the city or private actors, connecting them with possible rent hikes and exclusion in the future.

8. ‘All the “R” Words’ – navigating language and personal conflict

> It's hard because you enjoy those coffee shops you enjoy going to a bar, but at the back of your mind, you're like, ‘Oh, this is changing and not everybody can access this’. So yes, it looks prettier. Yes. It's more enjoyable. There's more activities to do and places to go. But if you're conscious, then you're like, at what cost am I going to this coffee shop?– Interviewee R6

36 In the face of these challenges, my interviewees demonstrated some of the prevailing narratives, while threading in and out of criticisms and contradictions. In terms of language, conversations shifted between usage of terms gentrification, development, and ‘all the R words’ (Interviewee R4): revitalisation, renewal, renaissance. The term gentrification was brought in some cases as a critique (or a critical way of describing the same process) by activists and some RRA staff. In other cases, it was considered a fact in an uncritical way, and in still others, the term took on fluid implications in the same conversation, shifting between a negative conception of forcing out, and a positive sense of development. This reflects a lack of consensus on an exact definition of gentrification, complicated by the fact that it tends to look different in different contexts (Lees, 2000). One RRA staff member called it a revival, going on to say ‘it's [the LWS] not like being gentrified, it's just difference’ (Interviewee R6).

37 Gentrification can be seen by some to bring benefits: even while challenging the way that development is pursued in ‘nodes’, leaving other neighbourhoods to ‘wait their turn’, while they absorb the poverty displaced from gentrifying areas, the activist from a neighbourhood adjacent to the LWS noted that her community feels left behind, leading her to seek ways to ‘do gentrification well’ (Interviewee A1). Thus, while there are problems, gentrification can be seen to carry some desirable aspects of development for certain groups.

38 Three respondents, all of whom identified as white and lived in the LWS, explicitly identified themselves as gentrifiers and ‘part of the problem’ (Interviewee R2, A3, R6). Highly aware of the rising costs through their work, they expressed guilt and the challenge of balancing this with their personal preference to live in the LWS.

9. A miracle cure?

39 The trope of refugees-as-miracle-cure, while extremely simplistic, does seem attractive to politicians. This was reflected when the mayor of a nearby town, after seeing frequent media reports touting Buffalo’s ‘Refugee Renaissance’, asked where he might benefit from the same. RRA directors met with him to discuss the possibility of expanding satellite offices into his city. However, while Interviewee R1 described the mayor as well-meaning, and applauded his desire to resettle refugees, he had no idea of the groundwork that needed to be set: ‘we need housing, we need infrastructure, we need to talk to the schools, it was very obvious that they weren't ready at all to have

any kind of conversations, and the housing stock was [really bad][...] Where are the ethnic grocery stores? What's your capacity to do interpreting and foreign languages? What do your schools have? There isn't anything' (Interviewee R1).

40 This anecdote highlights the risks of a simplistic narrative: it frames refugees as easy solutions to decline, who don't require significant support. RRAs, as the ones doing the resettling, are aware of the wide infrastructure and community support that should ideally be present to facilitate resettlement. Thus, many RRA staff are actively aware of and push against the saviour narrative. However, even those who do, still speak within some of the same frames. In a way this mirrors Frazier and van Riemsdijk's (2021) findings (albeit along a different line of questioning), wherein RRA staff, although they personally had more expansive goals and motivations, reified many aspects of market citizenship that came top-down.

Conclusion

1. Main findings

1 This paper has explored the interrelation between refugee resettlement and urban development in the case study of Buffalo, NY. Particular attention on the neighbourhood of the Lower West Side has allowed for a more detailed understanding of this intersection. It builds on the small body of literature that bridges the gap between work on urban restructuring and refugee resettlement, to ask: in the context of urban restructuring, what role does 'the resettled refugee' play? Through an overview of development policy and practice in Buffalo, it has explored the entanglement of resettlement with the economic and demographic trajectory of the city. It then analysed data collected from interviews, media, and policy review along thematic lines to interact with the research questions.

2 ***How does resettlement fit into the narrative, policy and practice of development in Buffalo, and the city's position and identity as a disempowered city?***

3 Resettlement is undoubtedly part of the demographic, economic, and cultural trajectory of the city of Buffalo, notably on the LWS. For the Mayor's office, welcoming is a priority closely tied to development. Quotes from local and regional leadership at events and in media outlets, symbolic (attendance at diverse cultural events) and discursive (narratives of welcoming) gestures reflect this priority. They also echo narratives in other disempowered cities which make connections between modern-day immigration and an immigrant-driven-growth in the past.

4 When it comes to the practice of development, development in Buffalo is taking place along lines of austerity and neoliberal restructuring, and aesthetic and entertainment changes directed towards attracting the 'creative class'. Development funding has been allocated to large developments, public-private partnerships, restructuring towards tech and health, and emphasis on innovation and entrepreneurship, as well as large-scale entertainment projects and revitalisation of park and tourism areas.

5 ***In this context, what are the ways that resettlement is framed?***

6 Prevailing narratives demonstrate the powerful ethos of the disempowered city. This is reflected in emphasis on population loss/gain, abandonment, entrepreneurship and

diversity. These aspects emerge as a foil to what Buffalo used to be and what people expect it to be – the bustling diverse neighbourhood as a contrast to a landscape of snow and abandoned industrial buildings.

7 For Buffalo, resettlement can be an opportunity to have a speciality again; something unique to proudly add to the city's image. By rebranding as a city of welcome, this gives Buffalo a new identity: one of multiculturalism. This reflects knowledge that the creative class is drawn to diversity and an ethos of cosmopolitanism; part of what makes Buffalo 'cool' is the presence of refugees. Diversity branding awards the city competitive positioning and global relevance (Watson, 2019; Pottie-Sherman 2018). The result of this narrative is that refugees are positioned as development agents useful for repopulation, opening new businesses, and providing cultural capital. In this framing, refugees are capable of driving development in a way that fits ideally within the narrative of 'rust to reinvention'.

8 ***How are these frames, narratives and tensions navigated by stakeholders?***

9 This narrative is often in conflict with a challenging reality. Interviews revealed challenges such as difficulty accessing reliable services and affordable housing, criticisms that the city is not doing enough to support its refugees, and concern that other marginalised groups are left behind in development. Thus, data allows us to see the many tensions and inconsistencies when urban change and refugee resettlement overlap. Conversations with individuals working in resettlement and development reveal nuances and inconsistencies. They recognise both challenges and opportunities in the trajectory of Buffalo's development, often directly expressing the difficulty of balancing the two within their work, along with their personal lives.

10 The interviews revealed tensions emerging along three lines: first, interviewees shift between using the discourse of market dynamics and development logics, and other times situating refugees as beneficiaries and humanitarian subjects. Secondly, there is both recognition of shared challenges with existing residents and erasure of previous residents, as refugees' function as consumable diversity and outside actors allows them to act as outside development agents. Finally, revitalisation and gentrification are terms often used to describe similar processes, even used interchangeably, but they are terms fraught with personal and professional tensions. Interlocutors, while partly caught in prevailing narratives and logics of redevelopment and resettlement, also express profound doubts and criticisms in their regard.

11 Given that my research interacted with those involved in some way in resettlement or social justice work, it is unsurprising that all participants considered resettlement to be an all-around positive trend in the city. However, the way it was discussed and framed diverged among different actors. Interviewees touted the benefits of refugees to the city, but took a more nuanced approach than the 'perfect salve' narrative, due to their deep personal and professional understanding of the challenges that emerge.

2. Critical reflections and implications

12 Prevailing narratives in media and policy frame resettled refugees as economic development actors. This is mirrored in the resettlement system, where refugees are framed as market actors who become 'successful' through their performance of market citizenship. This narrative implies that refugees can be dropped down and create

development without support, ideal for the city looking to cut its costs – 'off-the-rack tools for economic recovery that require little to no investment in austere times' (Pottie-Sherman, 2018, 445). It also implies a win-win arrangement, wherein the particular needs of both the city and the to-be-resettled refugee converge. However, this study highlights the limits of simplified, idealised win-win scenarios of urban renaissance and refugee (market) empowerment and self-determination.

13 A turn to a focus on refugees can easily function as a discursive shift to avoid addressing historical processes of disenfranchisement and instead move on to a new, outside force as cure. Marginalised residents of disempowered cities have faced years of poverty and been ignored by development efforts. When the population plummeted, it was those who stayed who faced the decades of poverty, insufficient services, demolition, and deterioration of infrastructure in Buffalo. Narratives of renaissance which describe a 'before' and 'after' imply a fresh start – but what about those who never left? Situating refugees as potential saviours of the city is in tension with the reality of the challenges faced and overcome by residents for decades.

14 Further, urban regeneration strategies have been criticised for resulting in uneven and exclusionary development. As the look and feel of the LWS changes, both due to a policy focus on streetscapes and to the visible presence of refugees on the street, symbols of cosmopolitanism, diversity, and ethnic entrepreneurship make it a more desirable neighbourhood for the creative class. The international food stores, eyes on the street, and visible diversity are part of what make the LWS a welcoming community for new refugees. At the same time, these same features can be packaged as cosmopolitanism which furthers gentrification. Already facing an affordable housing crisis, this poses challenges for resettlement going forward.

15 Therefore, the resettled refugee plays a multidimensional role, wherein urban restructuring affects resettlement and vice versa, intimately linked with urban geography and economy, providing one lens into Çağlar and Glick Schiller's (2018) exploration of mutually constituted city-making. Perhaps welcoming refugees has the potential to 'challenge stale urban narratives' (Özay, 2020, 251) by bringing the humanitarian into urban development, but it builds on the same economic logic as those essential to the disempowered ethos, and sidesteps historical issues of racialised poverty. Refugees may be lauded as contributors to urban development, but without a move away from framing refugees as 'economic and demographic assets' (Pottie-Sherman, 2018) characterised by their consumable diversity, their role is simplified, and their experience is siloed. In cities like Buffalo, where affordability challenges will continue, there is potential for community-wide coalition-building, through recognition not of the sameness of resettled refugees and other residents, but of shared challenges.

3. Opportunities for further research

16 While focusing on city and neighbourhood-level dynamics, this research has taken quite a broad look at many interlinking factors of this resettlement-development nexus. Thus, more detailed investigation of my points would be useful to justify (or further complicate) them. Questions along similar lines would benefit from taking a refugee-centred approach, and exploring how resettled refugee residents take in,

navigate, and experience (1) economic development frames, and (2) gentrification-revitalisation processes.

17 Comparative analysis of States with market-oriented immigration and integration policy, as compared to those with more 'socially oriented' policies would be fruitful, to see how this factor affects the resettlement experience. Another interesting tie is to the literature on spatial justice and daily life – if the resettled refugee becomes a neoliberal development tool, how might they reify or resist this through usages of public and private space?

18 A second group that would be interesting to hear from would be long-time residents of the city who do not identify as refugees. As tensions and similarities are identified here, further research should also ask how existing residents, of both marginalised and majority groups, perceive resettlement and their relation to it.

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Appendix–interview questions

1 **Resettlement:**

Describe the process of finding housing. How do you choose a neighbourhood and what are your personal priorities for things to look for?
If there is a particularly desirable neighbourhood for resettlement, if so, what about this neighbourhood makes it desirable?
What do you think are the biggest challenges new arrivals face?
Is resettlement the same as it was 5 years ago?

2 **Development:**

Buffalo is getting a lot of attention for going through changes lately, from national media which has touted it as a great place to live. In your own perception, describe how you have seen Buffalo change?
Are there positives and negatives?
What role do you think refugees played in Buffalo's development?
What have refugees brought to the city?
Are these (features mentioned above) a draw for people to move back in?
Have you seen changes in availability and affordability of housing?
If yes, what has this meant for your programme? How have you responded?
Do you have any sense of what the LWS has been like historically?