

Congolese Attitudes and Acculturation in Northeast Missouri¹

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study examines levels of acculturation of Diversity Visa immigrants from the Democratic Republic of Congo in rural, Northeast Missouri. Qualitative interviews were conducted among six Congolese adults, who were selected through non-probabilistic snowball sampling in Kirksville, Missouri. Acculturation is evaluated through the lens of topical issues, such as opinions on comparative presidential elections, gender roles, and religion's influence on LGBTQ rights. Results indicate that participants were satisfied with the quality of life in Missouri, largely due to its infrastructure, safeness, the low cost of living, and educational opportunities, and despite the challenges of linguistic and social isolation, often exacerbated by workplace conditions at a pork processing plant. These results suggest that Congolese community, while diverse, should organize and pool efforts to obtain better access to resources, such as English classes.

INTRODUCTION

As new immigrants from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) arrive in Kirksville, Missouri each week, it is essential to discover the similarities and differences between Kirksville's population and the new settlers. In an increasingly globalized world, Kirksville is affected, and enclave communities such as the Congolese's adds diversity to a traditionally isolated area. This research aims to be an exploratory introduction into the acculturation and beliefs of the Congolese immigrant population in Kirksville, Missouri. Although a few local newspaper articles have been written, and undergraduate research was conducted at Truman State University in 2016 by Emily Thompson regarding the immigrants' challenges and motivations, more research is needed in order to determine how living in the United States has shaped their perspectives on topical issues.

In this paper, I examine subjects' backgrounds, including educational, professional, and linguistic histories. Participants compare 'the incomparable'; living in the DRC and the United States, and reflect on how their backgrounds shape their current beliefs. I examine three aspects of the immigrants' viewpoints, including what factors influenced them to leave the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), what acculturative stresses and successes they have experienced in America, and finally, policy recommendations for the Kirksville institutions charged with aiding this group.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Context of the Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is shaped by its colonial history. King Leopold II of Belgium instituted a Reign of Terror that resulted in the genocide of tens of millions, and the Belgian government relied on the exploitation and forced labor of the Congolese to extract the natural resources of ivory and rubber (Bobb and Kisangani 2010; Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002; Hochschild 1998). As late as the 1954, the Belgian government had no effective plan to decolonize the Congo. This led to a chaotic transition to independent statehood (Bobb and Kisangani 2010) and resulted in the legitimization the military coup led by Joseph Mobutu in 1967 (Schatzberg 1991). Mobutu consolidated his cultural power through the “Authenticity” program as well as his economic power through Zaïrianization, one of the continent’s most aggressive examples of africanization and nationalization, in which foreign investors lost control of their multi-national corporations to the Zaïrian government (Quinn 2016). The inward-oriented development policies that characterized Mobutu’s rule in the early 1970s “devastated the economy,” (Bobb and Kisangani 2014). Corruption became so widespread that the DRC is a leading example of a ‘kleptocracy’ (Quinn 2004; Reno 2006; Schraeder 1994). In the 1990s, the DRC experienced two civil wars and political tumult as the conflicts of its neighbor, Rwanda, spilled over its borders (Quinn 2004, 2014; Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). Laurent Kabila replaced the dictator Mobutu officially in 1997, and was then assassinated in 2001. His son, Joseph Kabila, replaced him, and the Second Congo War ended in 2003. Kabila was appointed as president after a runoff election in 2006 and has ruled since (Bobb and Kisangani 2010). The conflict has intensified in 2016, manifesting itself in deadly riots and street protests

(Gettleman 2016), as President Kabila delays gathering data to conduct a census, an integral part of the presidential election (Kazadi and Sesny 2015). In short, the DRC has suffered political and economic instability and human rights abuses since colonization to the present. Today, the unemployment rate is 33.8 percent and the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in 2011 was \$783.30, making it one of the five poorest countries in the world (United Nations Development Programme 2015). There are nearly half a million registered refugees from the DRC who have sought shelter in neighboring countries, such as Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Burundi, and these rates are only expected to increase due to the “ignored humanitarian catastrophe” that is only expanding (UNHCR 2016).

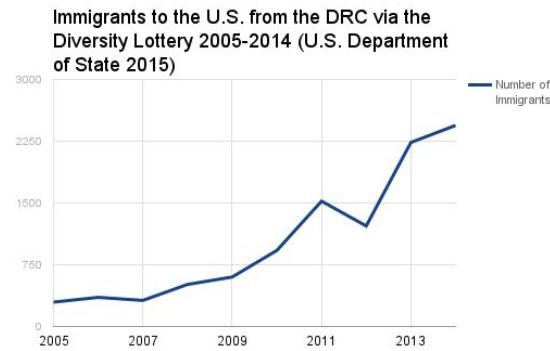
The political instability is reflected in the DRC’s linguistic diversity. The DRC is home to a total of approximately 200 languages and 450 dialects. In addition to speaking their tribal language, a typical Congolese citizen also speaks one or more of four national languages; Kikongo, Lingala, Kiswahili, or Tshiluba, and if he is educated, he will have a working knowledge of French, the only official language. French is a status marker in society because it is the exclusive language of secondary and tertiary education and it is used in all formal business, legal, and political transactions (Bobb and Kisangani 2010).

Congolese Immigrants in the Kirksville Context

From 2010 to 2014, 4.4 percent of the 18,000 inhabitants, or 792 people, in Kirksville identified as foreign born. Of this, 11.3 percent, or 90 people come from East Africa (Town Charts 2015) in Kirksville specifically. According to Thompson (2016) this number has risen significantly within the past two years, as immigrants continue to arrive each month. The

immigrants can be divided into three sub-groups; parents, children, and single men (Thompson 2016).

The majority of these immigrants moved to the United States in search of new professional opportunities, and many send a portion of their salaries to their extended family in the Congo (Thompson 2016). To legally immigrate to the United States, one must be sponsored by a parent with the status of a citizen or permanent residence, or by a future employer (Embassy of United States n.d.). Due to the difficulty in obtaining this, many immigrants in Kirksville come to the United States through the Diversity Lottery Visa, in which 50,000 permanent resident visas have annually been issued to citizens certain countries from which there is a weak rate of immigration (U.S. Department of State 2016). In 2015, 7,876, or 11.3 percent of refugees accepted into the United States were from the DRC (Batalova and Zong 2015), and 2,442 were issued a Green Card to come to the United States through the Diversity Visa Lottery Program (U.S.



Department of State 2016). There are strict eligibility requirements. Applicants must have at least a secondary education degree or at minimum two years of professional experience in a certain field. Therefore, the immigrants in Kirksville are often professionals, who worked as highly-educated nurses, doctors, or professors in the DRC. However, due to their difficulties in learning English, they are mostly employed at the meat-packaging plant, Smithfield Farmland, in Milan, where they earn about \$15 per hour (Thompson 2016). This makes sense in the larger

context of migration from Africa because university degree holders from Africa specifically “receive little, if any, reward for their degrees,” (Dodoo 1997) as compared to other ethnic groups. Furthermore, recipients of the Diversity Lottery Visa are typically part of the upper class in the DRC, as they must pay the price of visas, which ranges from \$220 to \$405 (Thompson 2016), a substantial amount for a person who comes from a country in which the average salary per year is \$675 (Thompson 2016).

According to Thompson, these immigrants have chosen Kirksville, a rural town of 18,000 in Northeastern Missouri, due to its affordable housing, good public school system, and because they have personal ties to other Congolese (2016). Indeed, according to Wong (1995), “subsequent arrivals from Africa have tended to flock to communities of Africans... finding within these communities benefits to help their adjustment and shared experiences and culture” (Desbarats, 1985). The size of this community is demonstrated by the fact that two stores, “African Food Business” and “Chez Nadine & Sandy African Food Market” have opened in Kirksville since 2014. Their search for affordable housing is typical in migration trends (Currie et al. 2011), and according to Thompson, the average rent in Kirksville is \$573 per month, as opposed to the average of the United States, which is \$920 per month (2016). In the Currie et al.’s (2011) study, other motivations for moving are the pursuit of family reunification, increased neighborhood safety, educational betterment, and less-urban locations.

Acculturation

The definition of acculturation is contested (Faragallah 2007), but according to one of the first studies of acculturation by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936), acculturation is the culture change which results from continuous, first hand contact between two distinct cultural

groups. Due to Thompson's exploratory study (2016) which outlines the challenges these immigrants face, so too will this study focus on the immigrants' changes and adaptations, as opposed to examining the changes of the immigrant population as well as original Kirksville population has encountered, though this is a recommended area for additional study.

Acculturation can be measured through changes in lifestyle dimensions, such as language, daily habits, living arrangements, ethnic norms, social relationships, political affiliation, and religious affiliations (Lam 1995). Language is critical, as acculturation is often measured through language proficiency and/or brokering, e.g., translating and interpreting (Lazarevic et al 2014; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001, 2008).

It is important to measure acculturation because according to Hall (2007), those with higher levels of acculturation saw additional economic gains. Conversely, negative consequences may occur from acculturative stress, or the reduction in the health status by individuals undergoing acculturation (Berry et al. 1987). People who were forced to flee from their homes, or refugees, have a higher mean level of acculturative stress in comparison to voluntary immigrants (Berry et al. 1987). Having communities of one's own ethnic background may help to shorten the adjustment period, provide protection against hostility and rejection, and maintain cultural traditions (Nann 1983).

According to Berry (1990, 2003), individuals adopt different acculturation strategies, which include the following: the separate strategy, in which the individual maintains strong positive ties with the culture of origin and does not associate with the new culture; assimilation, in which the individual rejects the culture of origin and embraces the new culture; marginalization, in which the individual does not relate to either the culture of origin or the new

culture; and integration, in which the individual relates well to both the culture of origin and the new culture. By defining which acculturation strategy(ies) the Congolese community has embraced, the original community can better meet their needs and work towards their integration into the community, in order to prevent secondary migration (Weine et al. 2011).

METHODOLOGY

Data was gathered by interviewing immigrants from the DRC who were over the age of 18. Participants were recruited from the Kirksville area using a nonprobabilistic sampling method. Prospective subjects were drawn from the participants served by the Truman State University club, “United Speakers,” otherwise known as “Hablantes Unidos,” an organization that offers weekly English as a Second Language (ESL) courses to non-native speakers in the area free-of-charge. The interviewer had taught the Advanced level of ESL classes since January of 2016. Additional subjects were contacted using a snowball sampling method. However, the subjects who had not previously known the interviewer were more hesitant and less likely to divulge their contact information or to participate.

Interviews were conducted after church and before their ESL classes on Sundays, the only day that subjects did not have work. Subjects were interviewed for approximately an hour each in the Pickler Memorial Library of Truman State University or at the subject’s home. Interviews were conducted in a mixture of English and French, depending on the participant’s preference. Quotations that were translated from French to English are marked as [translated] in the Results section.

Cultural differences regarding time and gender norms were the main challenges. Misunderstandings were common. One person who had agreed to be interviewed at 2:00 on a

Saturday was not at the agreed-upon meeting point and did not respond to any calls or texts until 5:00, when she was ready to be interviewed. Although I initially intended to have a balanced sample of male and female participants, this was not possible. Due to females' rare attendance at English class, their low proficiency in English, their lack of cell phones or methods of communication, and their disinterest in speaking with the female interviewer, only one female was interviewed, contrasting with five men who were interviewed, and the many others who had expressed interest in being interviewed.

The semistructured interviews were recorded with permission given by the participants. The interviews were organized from a historical perspective, moving from the past to present to future plans, but spontaneous topics were pursued as the interviewee wished.

The qualitative analysis was performed using (1) the transcription of interviews; (2) coding the text; (3) retranscription of information in each category, indicating the characteristics of the respondent (age, sex, and other characteristics); (4) qualitative analysis of content. Key recurring themes were identified.

RESULTS

Demographics

Three of the six participants are originally from Kinshasa, the capital, while one was born in Kenya and moved to the Eastern part of the Congo when he was 2 years old. One grew up in Tanzania because the subject's parents were Congolese diplomats there, and one, whose father was a soldier, lived in various parts of the country. The subjects are five males and 1 female. The age range is 23 to 49. Two parents were interviewed, the rest were single males. The parents interviewed had their nuclear family, including their spouses and children, in Kirksville. Of the

young single men, only one of them has his nuclear family here, including his parents and younger siblings, although his older brother had to be left behind in the Congo because the age restriction of bringing over children over the age of 21 with the Diversity Visa lottery. All participants came to the United States through the Diversity Visa (D.V.).

Educational background

All of the participants have at least a high school diploma. The only participant who did not continue with his education after high school is a single man, who was forced to quit school when his parents died of unspecified illnesses when he was 19. Two single men have some college education from the Congo, one, the son of an oil baron, in electronics, another in chemistry-biology. One single man pursued business management in Uganda before coming to the United States. The two parents had professional careers in the Congo, one as a professor, and another as a civil servant.

Language

The languages spoken by participants depend on the geographic location from where they were. Those with experience in the East could speak Swahili, while those who grew up in the capital spoke Lingala and Kikongo. As educated members of the populous, all participants speak French. As one subject elaborated, French is “the federal language, for institutions, for education, but in your hometown, you speak your mother language.” Another language spoken by one member was Chiluba or Tshiluba, a language spoken in the middle of the country. This summary of languages does not take into account local dialects. As one participant stated, the Congo is made up of or “many languages, which are not necessarily together” [translated]. They expressed

admiration that, “Everywhere, you feel at home in America because you speak only English, even though you don’t speak with the same accent, you speak English!”

Point of View on the Congo

Participants’ viewpoints of their homeland are overwhelmingly negative. They ranted about corruption at all levels of society, including government, education, and police. One participant’s short phrase summed up their level of pessimism, “There’s corruption everywhere, even in medicine. That’s why I hate Africa.”

Regarding government corruption, participants expressed certainty that, “There’s no good person in Africa who can lead the country… They go there for their own business to make their own money… you can take all the money from students, all the money they give for teachers, and teachers are not paid.” They also expressed certainty of why this corruption existed, saying “They don’t care about the people. They don’t care about others’ lives. They only care about their family.” One subject, who worked as a civil servant, laughed about taking part in corruption. Although the subject didn’t explicitly mention the word “corruption,” the participant explained that they were only paid \$100 per month, but that the school fees for their children were \$300 per child per trimester, and that they also had to take rent, food, and clothes for their children into consideration. Considering the situation, having people pay them \$500 to get a passport, quickly, in three days, was a logical, rational, normal and an even expected means of survival for their family. The participant said, “Mais quand c’est moi qui viens, il comprend que je suis de la même boîte, que nous sommes ensemble,” or “When it is me who comes [to help them with their passport], he understand that we are ‘of the same wood’, that we are together,” or in the same situation as one another.

Regarding corruption within the education system, many echoed the same sentiment as one participant, who said “In the Congo, no matter how smart you are, if you don’t have money, you are going to suffer in school. You can be an asshole, you can be a stupid man, but since you have parents that have a lot of money you can go to school and succeed.” All of the young single men interviewed came to the United States with the desire to get a diploma here, knowing that a degree from Kinshasa does not receive the same appreciation as those in the United States. The government officials, anyone who has money in the Congo, “they send their children to study in the United States, in U.K., in France, because they know everything is bad in Congo.” When the university professor was questioned about the state of education in the Congo, his response was defensive, saying “We try to do the best we can in order to produce intellectuals who can be celebrated, even outside [the Congo],” [translated].

This level of corruption also invalidates the legitimacy of educational achievements in the Congo. Consequently, participants cited corruption and nepotism as the primary means of becoming employed. One subject summarized the system of finding a job, saying that even after 10 or 20 years after completing a degree, people often remain unemployed because they are (1) not related to the boss, (2) part of the same religious community as the leader, and (3) if they are a woman, they “need to be the leader’s girlfriend.”

A theme that was reiterated time and time again was that one could not compare the Congolese education system to the United States, as they lacked giant libraries, or even inter-library book exchanges. For example, one participant described a situation of chaos in which university classrooms are full of people hours before a class begins, who are not there to learn, but instead to rent out chairs to students who arrive on time. The price of the seat depended

on its proximity to the professor, the time of the class, and the renter. Participants continuously described a system in which money was the key for success, saying, “You have to have money to have a chair. We buy syllabus, we buy homework, we buy quiz, we buy points.”

A similar situation was described in regards to the Congolese police and criminal justice system, or lack thereof. All 6 participants described a situation in which “The police can’t help you. They try to pull you down for no reason because he’s hungry, since morning doesn’t eat anything. Trying to find money in the pockets of the people,” and “Police and thieves, they know each other... You have to protect yourself by your own, you’re your own police.”

On Immigration

All six participants came to America via the Diversity Lottery Visa program, which allows them to obtain a Green Card and become a permanent resident. This permanent residency expires after ten years. At that time, people have the option to renew it up to ten times, in other words, for a total of 100 years, or to apply to be a citizen of the United States. Participants express gratitude that the lottery program existed, saying “The lottery is a position taken by the American government so that people, strangers, come to live in America with the possibility of one day becoming an American. This doesn’t exist in the Congo... So I believe that the American society is more open to diversity, to the world, than us others, our societies,” [translated].

However, participants were also realistic about the drawbacks of this program, including the Western limits the program imposes upon families, family separation, and the costs. One subject was able to immigrate with his immediate family when his father won the lottery, but his family was forced to leave his older brother, who was 23 at the time, in the Congo. Even though

the family interviewed at the American consulate together, the ambassador ultimately said that the participant's brother would have to "play the lottery on his own." Another described years of separation from the subject's spouse, who had to work in Chicago for three years to save enough money to bring the rest of the family to the States.

In addition to placing greater stress on families, the privilege of winning the lottery also places a great financial burden on winners, costing \$330 per person just for the visa (U.S. Visas n.d.). One participant described postponing his studies for a year in order to earn money to pay for a visa, documentation, and plane ticket. He said, "It's very expensive, you can't do anything else. You have to focus your mind on more money to get a card." Many people borrow money from friends, family, or acquaintances who are already in America, placing a strain on community relationships. One participant described a situation in which he bought a plane ticket for a friend, which can cost over \$1,500, and upon arrival, the friend could not pay him back.

On Kirksville and America

Despite the difficulties that the Diversity Lottery presents, all of the subjects were confident about their choice to immigrate to the United States. Among the milieu of reasons they gave for immigrating to the United States, a primary theme was hope. Some mentioned the global glamour of the United States, saying, "In Congo, in Africa, if someone is traveling to America, they are going to the paradise." Another said, "When you see the United States in photos, in films, it's good. People live well here, so that for us, an underdeveloped country, it's for a better perspective" [translated]. The young, single men, spoke about their academic and professional aspirations, saying, "This is why the whole world comes [to the United States]. There are also some Chinese who come to America to study, some Europeans," [translated]. The

parents spoke of their desires for their children. One said, “When one wins the lottery, one doesn’t hesitate. Because this is an unparalleled occasion so that our children can have a good education and be well-settled. It’s not really for us that we’ve come here, it’s to have a better future for our children,” [translated]. Another said, “I hoped to put my family in more security, to allow my children to grow in a secure country, that gives hope to youth. It’s for that; a better life,” [translated].

In the United States

Participants’ experiences in the Congo largely shape their perspective on living in the United States. Again and again, participants expressed a reluctance to even compare the two countries, saying “You have everything you need here. You have it easy. You don’t have any idea about where we’re from. That’s why you cannot understand what we are saying.” When further questioned, the differences ranged from the seemingly mundane, such as “We enjoy everything here, even FAFSA [the Free Application for Financial Student Aid],” to a sense of overall security, saying “Everything is organized in the United States. You study and you work hard, you know you get a job,” when comparing it to the nepotism and corruption of their motherland.

Participants overwhelmingly admired the general infrastructure and resources of the United States. They also enjoy the interstate-highway and the ability to travel relatively long distances quickly. One said, “In the Congo, there aren’t any roads. Here there are roads! There are certain roads that ask you to drive at 60 or 70 [miles per hour]! So drive! When you drive for 2 hours on a road here, you go far!” [translated]. Although the participants were part of the wealthy, educated, professional Congolese elite, only one had owned a car in the Congo, and it

“caused them to suffer,” so their family was obliged to sell it because “In the Congo, to have a car, one must work for a long time, have a really good job, save money, and one day hope to have a car,” [translated]. But in the United States “Having a car is not a dream. It is a small tool; even some students have cars.” Four of the participants were able to purchase a car in the United States, and those who had not yet purchased one do not suffer due to lack of public transportation. Instead, the Congolese community switches the responsibility of driving from Milan to Kirksville by establishing an informal ride-sharing system.

Regarding resources, participants enjoy stores such as Wal-mart, that are constantly open and are clean, with perishable food being refrigerated, and organized compared to the open-air markets of the Congo. They remarked on the prevalent use of the electronic payment system as opposed to cash. One participant even remarked that his friends in the Congo did not believe him when he had told them that “If you don’t have a meal, there’s a telephone number that you can call to have them bring you a meal. I learned that here you can go into an office and fill out a form to say that ‘I have nothing to eat, I don’t have money, I have nothing’, and in a bit of time... they lend you \$1,500 per month for three months while you find a job,” [translated].

Kirksville specifically

All participants learned about Kirksville, Missouri, through friends and relatives that were already established there. One’s spouse worked in Chicago for three years, before moving to Kirksville. Two participants stayed with family in Chicago for two weeks upon arriving to the United States, but moved to Kirksville after they were unable to find employment.

The parents interviewed intend to stay in Kirksville with their families for the rest of their lives, citing the peace of small-town life, the inexpensive rent (about 500 dollars per month for a

house with three bedrooms and a kitchen), and the availability of educational opportunities for their children. The single young men, while appreciating that Kirksville is “a quiet town, small town, nice town,” that has “no troubles,” seek educational opportunities elsewhere, and one already is pursuing a degree at a nearby community college.

Overall, the largest challenged that the Congolese face in Kirksville is the language barrier, which is exasperated for most by their employment at Smithfield Farmland, in Milan, Missouri. Smithfield Farmland, commonly referred to as simply “Milan” locally, is a pork processing plant. Five participants are either currently employed or were employed at Milan before moving on to professional or educational opportunities due to their improved skills in English. “As long as you don’t know English, you don’t have a choice to choose a job. They don’t care if you don’t know English or not, they just need your force, your strength,” said a former employee. Indeed, the type of physical, manual labor and the long hours pose challenges to the participants. Each described the physical toll the work induces, and one said:

We are cutting meat, then I was hurt, was not easy, so I’m working at the ham-boning department. They have the ham, the ham of the pork, they come to cut the bone up, to open, you got a knife, and it’s a big ham. You have to find, you have to see the bone to clean the bone, and the speed is too much. The pieces come too close. You have to be fast, and it’s not easy; eight hours a day, ten hours a day. My body hurts everyday.

Each participant, even the participant who has never worked at Milan but whose spouse does, described the mental toll of working long hours, explaining that those who work the morning shift must leave Kirksville at 5 AM each morning, work until 4 PM, and return to Kirksville at 5

or 6 PM, and that those who work the afternoon shift must leave Kirksville around 2 PM only to return at 1 AM.

For example, the cultural concepts of time spent at work are different. One participant described that eight hours of work in the Congo is “work six hours, and the other two, resting, lunch, talking to people,” whereas at eight hours of work at Milan “you can take a bathroom break, but sometimes, you can’t find someone who can give you a break.” One subject denounced many Congolese’s professionalism, saying, “Many [Congolese] people here come here with the knowledge of what they have studied in the Congo, as doctors, lawyers, teachers, but they cannot use all those skills because they don’t know the language, they cannot communicate. So they work at Milan. They are stuck at Milan.” Furthermore, “It’s not merely the physical time, meaning the minutes, but the mental time too. The mental energy to learn, to learn the language.” It’s difficult for the young men, who, at 6 o’clock, are “tired, want to eat, take shower, sleep,” when they return to their apartments, but it’s especially difficult for parents, who must “care for the family, to cook for, to do household chores.” Therefore, in sum, this type of work impedes the participants from learning the English that they need to find new employment, the professionalism that they were accustomed to. While the participants are linguistically talented, each speaking at least three languages of the Congo to varying degrees, learning English is the primary challenge they struggle with.

The Congolese are not the only ethnic group who are employed at Farmland. The pork production plant also employs immigrants from Mexico. The participants reported having amicable relationships with their fellow immigrants, saying “We are friends even though we don’t speak the same language,” and “We’re pals. We don’t talk a lot because everyday, we are

focused on what we're doing." In addition, the participants were aware of the differences between the groups, saying "They have like more years than we have here in the United States, so they get used to that environment, they have children, old children that were born here."

One said (in French), "I don't think I learn it [English] quickly... but when my son speaks, he already speaks like an American. For me, it's really difficult, it's the hardest thing about being here. Everything gets confused in my head," [translated]. Those employed at Farmland express frustration, one saying "with this kind of job, we don't have the time to meet people." Not only do participants wish to master English for professional reasons, they also wish to pursue personal relationships. "That's why they [the Congolese men] don't go chasing American girls," said one, "because most of them have a problem with language... if the American girls cannot understand me, we cannot talk, we cannot live."

Language is the most obvious cultural difference between the Congolese and Americans, but upon closer examinations, participants commented on additional cultural differences. For example, one participant cited Americans' insistence on eye-contact and handshake as new ideas that she embraced, saying, "If you talk with a large person, especially if you are laboring-serf, you have a tendency to lower your eyes [in the Congo]. If you meet with a person who is older than you in the Congo, it's not you who acknowledges them," [translated]. She said she enjoys that "Americans are also simple. They are not complicated, even in dress," whereas "In the Congo, I can't open the door without being dressed... we were colonized by the French and the Italians, who really like finesse," [translated].

On Colonial Histories

Indeed, the participants were acutely aware of their country's colonial past and reflected on how it has possibly shaped their lives today. Many expressed feelings of internalized inferiority through the lense of language, saying that "All those African languages are not really rich international languages like English or French," and that, "There are other parts in the Congo where they don't know French because their city's not very civilized (then corrected himself) or developed because people didn't go to school." Another describes "an inferiority complex," that many Africans have, saying "This complex can sometimes be expressed in a certain aggressivity in order to try to show that we are worth something. This aggressivity is good if it's expressed at the level of science and knowledge before a European or an American... but otherwise, no," [translated]. Another attributed the cultural differences between Congolese and Tanzanian people to colonisation, because anglophones colonized Tanzania whereas the Belgians and French colonized the Congo. While she mourned that the colonists thought that Africans were "animals and that they did not have their own civilisations," [translated] and created countries without accounting for existing civilisations, causing war today, she celebrated the educational instruction that the colonists imported as well as the "modernization, such as infrastructure like construction, roads," [translated].

On Race

Some participants report feeling unwelcome in the community due to their race, saying that sometimes people have been reluctant to respond to greetings or that "some people are sometimes afraid when they see me." Their explanation for this was that "When I came first in Kirksville there was not a lot of Africans, I can say only five, six people in all of Kirksville," and that "they [people in Kirksville] don't used to be with black people... so being with black people

is like a new thing in their lives.” Another expressed worry about being black prior to arriving in the United States, saying that “With the guns in the films that we see, I thought ‘Because my husband is black, surely he will live in a black neighborhood, and we will risk being exposed to violence’, and I was afraid,” [translated]. Additionally, participants remark on the racial differences between the United States and the Congo, saying that, “In the Congo, there is not the mixing of race. Therefore, everyone is black, if you meet a white, he’s a stranger. It’s different here! It’s not enough for me to be black to be a stranger. I can be black, I can be of any Asian morphology, but I am American,” [translated].

But despite feeling that they had been at the brunt of racist views as black men, the young single men themselves also expressed what I considered to be racist opinions. When asked about recent acts of police brutality against black men, participants overwhelmingly blamed the victims themselves while protecting law enforcement. One participant said, “I can’t condemn the police, because the police are learning how to protect the population, so the black guys, all I heard, all I see, is they like to make trouble, to sell bad stuff, to blame the government, and the police are not going to let you.” One said, “There are always good and bad people, so even a police is a bad man, but no matter how racist he is, no matter how bad he is, if you don’t want to get killed, you’re not going to get killed. Most of those people got killed because I mean like the black, the African Americans, most of them act so stubborn.” Another expanded on this point, saying “Most of the black people, they don’t want to go to school. That’s why they are doing bad stuff, selling bad stuff… The black people are crazy because they use drugs, they don’t go to school, and they try to fight with the police.” These young Congolese males expressed a belief that their actions would protect them from anything bad happening, saying, “I don’t want to die and I’m

not going to do something bad to get the police mad... when I get pulled over, I'm just going to do everything perfectly in order to get home safe."

All participants expressed a favorable view of local Missouri police, cheerfully recounting stories of minor traffic stops that were resolved without incident. One said "The police is not very visible in Kirksville," and "I have never encountered police who brutalise. This is why I like Kirksville... I hope that our arrival will not change anything," [translated]. In fact, many express admiration of the police here, saying, "Here, police assist you. I was happy to see that there is good police somewhere in the world," and "Police here is close to the people. He try to help people. When you see a police officer, like at night, you're not scared, you feel safe" and finally, "The police is my friend."

On Firearms

The participants expressed surprise in the fact that "In this country [the United States] they sell guns everywhere, that's why everyone can have a gun, and that's not good." They also made sure to note that "The Congolese community is not armed, which I like well... Today, I don't know a young Congolese who has a gun. It's not in our culture, fortunately," [translated].

Comparing the Presidential Elections in the DRC and the United States

Again, participants expressed that the two countries could not be compared, especially in regards to politics. Regarding the "presidential elections" in the Congo, participants expressed consternation and worry, saying that

There's not going to be elections in the Congo. Because the government don't want leave, the president don't want to leave, he just want to stay there. But he killed a lot of people, he's still killing people, so people are fed up to get killed everyday, to suffer

everyday. Other countries in Africa, they're getting better, but in the Congo everything is bad.

Many feared impending violence in their country, citing that 55 people were killed during riots in Kinshasa in September. Another cited external pressures on the Congo, saying that “the presidential election in the Congo is never free; it’s always guided by the outside,” [translated] and that he could not envision “Kabila walking in the streets of Kinshasa free but not as president,” [translated].

Participants expressed little concern about the American presidential election. While one noted that as an immigrant, he could not support a candidate who wanted to “put all the immigrants into a sack and throw them away,” he was the exception. Most participants seemed indifferent to both candidates, or alternatively, disliked both candidates. However, none were too concerned about the American presidential election, saying that “The United States will remain the United States, the changing of a president in the Republic of the United States will not change many things,” expressing confidence in a peaceful transition of power.

The Role of Religion on Opinions

According to one participant, “The Congolese community [in Kirksville] is formed on the base of certain small groups, sometimes around individuals, the friends of some person, but mostly around two churches that exist, a Congolese church and an American church that organizes a French service,” [translated]. Indeed, Christianity was a highly valuable part of all participants’ lives. They saw God as instrumental in their success, one attributing winning the Diversity Visa lottery to “His love.” Many cited praying to God as a primary means of hope, tying their belief into their hopes and aspirations for the future, saying “I pray a lot that God help

me. I know God is going to help me. I'm going to trust in Him that I get something better. I help a lot of people, one day I will go over there [the DRC] and come back. That's why I'm trying to learn English, find a new job, and I will help people."

This brand of Christianity helps to form their opinions of others, mainly Muslims and homosexuals. One subject describes how his time in the United States changed his point of view of Muslims, saying, "In the Congo, my mother cannot allow me to have Muslim friends because I'm Christian. But here [in the United States], we're together, Muslim, Christian, According to me, it's a good thing because we have to learn about Muslims... But in Africa we do not do that. We just avoid them." When questioned about gay rights, opinions varied. Participants expressed that people in the LGBTQ communities "Are not really welcome in most African countries," due to both Christian and Muslim fundamentalism, continuing that "Like our countries, they don't want to kill you [if you're gay or lesbian] but you feel ashamed. You don't want to show because no one would like you." When asked if their ideas had changed since arriving to the United States, one said, "I am Christian, and the [Assembly of God] doctrine today does not recognize these kinds of [gay] marriages... if I changed my ideas about that, I would change my form," [translated]. Others expressed "It's different here because first of all the US is not our country. We don't have the right to do anything because this is not our country," and another leaned towards acceptance, saying, "It's very weird, but we try to accept that. I have two gay friends. I met them at work."

On Gender Roles

The young, single men were asked if they were looking for an American or Congolese wife. One responded, "Loyal. Loyal wife, loyal girlfriend. it doesn't matter where you're from,

doesn't matter who you are, you ned to be loyal." But another said, "We came here, not old enough to forget our culture... we have food. If I get married to an American, I'm not going to eat! She cannot make fou fou for me! She cannot make matelenda! We get used to stuff like that in the Congo. Women in Congo are not like here."

When asked to elaborate on what men and women's duties are in the Congo, participants responded overwhelmingly that, "In Congo, take care of children, take care of house; it's not daddy's job," and that "In the Congo, since the man works, and the woman don't work, the man can do whatever he wants, like beat her, because he knows he is the only one who provides for the family." But when the young, single male participants were asked, "If you married a woman who had a better job than you, and she asked you to quit your job to take care of the house and the children?" they overwhelmingly agreed. Participants think that both men and women working in the formal sector is positive, saying "Here, the woman works, the man works. If a man tries to do bad things, wife can just leave." Many of them said that because they are now in the United States, they need to be able to change. For example, "We are living here, so we don't have to keep all the things from Congo, that would make our life very hard here," and "We need to change! Now we out of Congo. If we decide to come here, that means we decide to have family here, to have children here, to have a wife," and finally, "Yes! I will help her... You're going to watch and see that she doesn't have the time, she have better job, she's coming late home, I will help her. It's not a problem if she doesn't know how to cook Congolese food. Because sometimes I can't cook American food too."

Plans for the Future

Each participant except for the mother interviewed planned to return to school in the United States. Two also intended to return to the DRC for humanitarian purposes, saying

Anyway I can stop at Farmland, I will, because I need to study, to have an easy job... At that time I would help not only my family, I would help all the people who are suffering there... in all of Africa, too many troubles. They don't understand stuff, things are not going ahead. I am very much worried because I lost my friends. That's not easy.

Another said

My plan for the future is to get done with school and to travel a lot of the time in the Congo to preach the Gospel, to help them know, to help people to get a new mentality that will change everything. Praying for them, preaching the, showing them the way, showing them the good consciousness, to make a change.

One expressed hope for the subject's children, saying

We have this conviction that one day it [the situation in the DRC] is going to change. Yes, that's why our children are here, it's not for nothing. Maybe one day, with the change, with what they learn here, one will see a new world also at our home in the Congo, because we dream each day of returning home [translated].

Others decided to put their past in the DRC behind them, saying "Fortunately for me, I left from the Congo. I'm now established in the United States. The only thing that needs to be done is to make efforts to integrate myself, to have a diploma here, to have a good job here," [translated].

Another said, "If we accept to come here, it's like to live here; to live here is to have family here." Even though they missed their country, participants were each considering applying for American citizenship instead of renewing their Green Card after it expires.

On Truman State University

Participants expressed goodwill towards the Truman students and faculty who had helped them to integrate, saying “There were very kind with us. Truman has helped me a lot. They showed us to speak English, the few words that we learned, they showed us the manner in which Americans live,” [translated]. They appreciated the English classes offered by the organization ‘United Speakers’ saying, “Just thank you for English class. It’s so helpful for me. Just thank you,” as well as “It’s really helpful because even though we don’t learn too much, we learn something every weekend.”

Participants also expressed constructive criticism on how to improve the English classes, one saying,

I cannot practice with my Congolese friend. As soon as we leave Truman, we forget everything, we go back to our system, Lingala, our language, because we don’t have people to talk with, we don’t have people who know English close to us... If you can do some activities for us, like to be together, in the weekend, that would be helpful... We got a lot of verbs, we got a lot of words, but we don’t use it. I work 11 hours a day, but I do my best to go on weeknights like to Wrong Daddy’s just for people who speak English!

Another said that “The university could be organized slightly better, we must have professionals engaged with a budget, with the means in order to provide the necessary for these classes here,” [translated].

On challenges

When asked “What was one resource you wish you had had when you first arrived here?” participants unanimously responded “language.” Many described the isolation of struggling to learn English from lessons on Youtube, where “you can find something you didn’t understand, you don’t get it, you can’t ask, but when you meet with a native or a lot of native speakers, if you didn’t get something, you can ask… and your knowledge will keep growing.” Many had expected Kirksville to offer more English as a Second Language (ESL) opportunities. To them, language is the key to success, as “The mastery of English is a tool of work, a tool of promotion, if you master English, you can study… you can find a real job” [translated]. Another simply said “It helps to liberate language,” [translated].

Participants offered solutions to this conundrum, saying “There should be a project for people who want to help the Congolese community here, to create a conference, where people speak together, just be together.” Another described his dream to create a community-organization center with an office, a mailbox, a secretary, and volunteers to coordinate the community and organize some events, speculating that “One day you will see dozens of Congolese who are in the process of marching or of singing the American national anthem or with some American flags,” [translated]. He also thought it would be helpful to hire a lawyer in order to see if their text and activities obeyed the laws of the United States. Finally, one expressed his frustration with Americans not knowing about the state of the DRC, saying that

If people in Kirksville could get to know about it, they can help out the spread, to spread that news in all of the United States and all over they world, because there are a lot of people in the world who still don’t know about what’s happening in the Congo, know if

the Congo's a country... After knowing about that people are being killed, cause I don't know if there is a man in the world, no matter how bad he is, he can be happy about that... once the United States know about it, the world will know about it, and maybe there will be a way out, that solution.

DISCUSSION

The findings of previous researchers were supported by this project. Institutional corruption at the levels of government, education, and police, as described by Quinn (2004), Reno (2006) and Schraeder (1994) pervaded cultural norms even on the individual level, as demonstrated by the participants' recollections in this research project. Dodoo's (1997) findings that university degree holders from Africa received few rewards for their degrees were also confirmed in this project, as a former civil servant, university professor, and other professionals obtained employment in service sectors in the United States; jobs that rely on force or brute strength. Wong's (1995) findings that African immigrants tend to "flock to communities of Africans" were also confirmed, as each of the subjects heard about Kirksville through a family member or acquaintance. Lastly, Currie et al.'s (2011) findings that immigrants' motivations for secondary migration, such as increased neighborhood safety, educational betterment, and less-urban locations, were also supported, as subjects' main motivations for living in Kirksville were its perceived safeness and rural tranquility.

Despite difficult working conditions and isolation due to language barriers, the Congolese are grateful and content to live in Kirksville, viewing the government, education system, and infrastructure in rural Northeast Missouri, favorably. When questioned about instances of police brutality, despite being black, they did not identify with African American communities and

even looked down on them, perhaps in an effort to differentiate themselves from a marginalized group in society; in a form of self-protection. They celebrated American police, perhaps comparing them to what is in their frame of reference; despotic, corrupt Congolese police officers.

It is important to note that the Congolese population in Kirksville is not a homogenous community. There were striking differences in the points of views between the single young males and the parents interviewed, perhaps due to age or occupational differences or familial status. The single males were more likely to be willing to adjust their views on cultural topics, such as gay marriage and gender roles, in order to better integrate in the community. Three of the four single males showed signs of integration, as opposed to Berry's concepts of assimilation, marginalization, and separation (1990, 2003), as they learned English quickly but said that they might struggle marrying an American, as they are too old to forget where they come from. The single participants may have had better English abilities than the parent counterparts because they are more eager to meet white friends and possibly girlfriends who are native speakers of English, as well as their professional desire to continue educational opportunities in the United States. Alternatively, the other single male shows signs of assimilation, eager to completely embrace his new culture and reject the old, eager to marry a white American wife and immerse himself in English. Although the parents had a lower proficiency in English than the young men, they also showed signs of integration, perhaps using their children as vessels to relate to their new culture. Because all of the participants were voluntary immigrants, they may have had lower levels of acculturative stress than refugees in similar situations.

The participants' top priority upon arrival was language acquisition. Though multilingual, learning English is an isolating barrier, which in turn, limits acculturation. While having an enclave community with two churches, a grocery store, and familial ties offers a social safety net to the permanent residents, many indicated a desire to branch out. While thankful for the limited classes and aid provided by Truman State University and the public schools, they suggested more funding and organization would be helpful.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While this project was thorough in investigating the perspectives of single young men, the study was lacking due to the absence of single young women and older generation's perspectives. Additionally, the subjects who were interviewed were recruited through English class connections, leaving those who do not participate in the English classes voiceless.

Future research could involve including these missing perspectives qualitatively, or even randomly selecting Congolese community members to partake in a survey in order to verify the validity of the results through triangulation, in which acculturation, and in turn, acculturative stress, could be operationalized and measurable. Additionally, it would be advantageous to qualitatively interview the educators in the Kirksville public schools in order to evaluate the best methods to integrate the child Congolese population into the community. Finally, although this is a study of acculturation, only the Congolese acculturation to the original community was studied. Future research should include the study of the possible acculturative changes on the original population due to the Congolese community's presence. Does the original population know about the enclave community? Are constituents of the original population more accepting of diversity now than they were before the Congolese's arrival?

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