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Re-imagining Portland, Maine: Urban Renaissance and a Refugee Community

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“Change is the hallmark of American Society, as its cities and urban neighborhoods demonstrate” (Keating et al., 1996, 7).

The evening of April 25, 2009 saw a tragic scene in Portland, Maine. The events took place on Weymouth Street, a small and unassuming thoroughfare straddling the West End and Parkside neighborhoods—one a gentrified community, the other, once the second largest White non-Hispanic ghetto in America (Whitman et al., 1994). Blocks of wood-frame triple-decker tenements lined the street, a ubiquitous typology in lower-income New England neighborhoods, while a Latino bodega abutted its upper corner, an edifice of Portland’s changing ethnic face. A 7:37 p.m. phone call to the Portland Police Department reported a seemingly intoxicated African-American male brandishing a firearm in the open street. The man described was David Okot of Portland, a 26 year-old Sudanese refugee who had come to America in his teens. Police officers arrived on the scene and confronted Okot. They targeted him with their service weapons and ordered him to show his hands. The Police report indicated that Okot turned away from the officers, placed his hand under his shirt, drew a .22 caliber handgun from his waistband and pointed it at them. The officers fired a total of 16 rounds, most of which struck Okot, who died on the scene. Eyewitness accounts, however, claimed that Okot did not draw for or attempt to grab his gun in any manner (for further details concerning this incident, refer to MacQuerrie, 2009). Despite the contested sequence of events, the result was unequivocally tragic—David Okot lay slain, and an already deteriorating relationship between the Portland Police Department and the city’s growing Refugee community was further exacerbated. The discharging of firearms in the open street is a



Figure 9.1. Weymouth Street, Parkside—the setting of the Okot shooting. (Ezra Moser)

scene far more familiar to war-torn corners of Okot’s native Sudan than to Portland, Maine, a progressive “citadel of blue America,” with one of the nation’s highest rates of residents with college degrees (Conforti, 2007, 323).¹

This shooting betrays the idyllic Portland, the face the city extends towards the world—one of cultural and historic heritage, maritime New England charm, and an artsy destination replete with independently owned businesses and a variety of urban amenities. The David Okot shooting occurred at the border of Parkside and the West End, two communities that highlight competing visions of the “new” Portland. A portrait of contemporary Portland exposes the dissonance between its re-imagined self—the post-industrial success story of urban renaissance, and its lived self—the one experienced by its everyday citizens. Michel Foucault argues that examinations of power and justice, and in this case, urban planning, should not be “concerned with forms of power at their central locations, but rather with their forms of subjugation at the extremities, the peripheral loci...” (Hinkle, 1987: 50). Therefore, to learn anything about the normal is to examine its outlier. Examining the integration and experiences of the refugee community provides an index for the way in which Portland is re-imagining itself. The emergence of a substantial refugee community reflects a new, more diverse Portland, and it is imperative to study whether the city is embracing, navigating, or truly providing for this future.

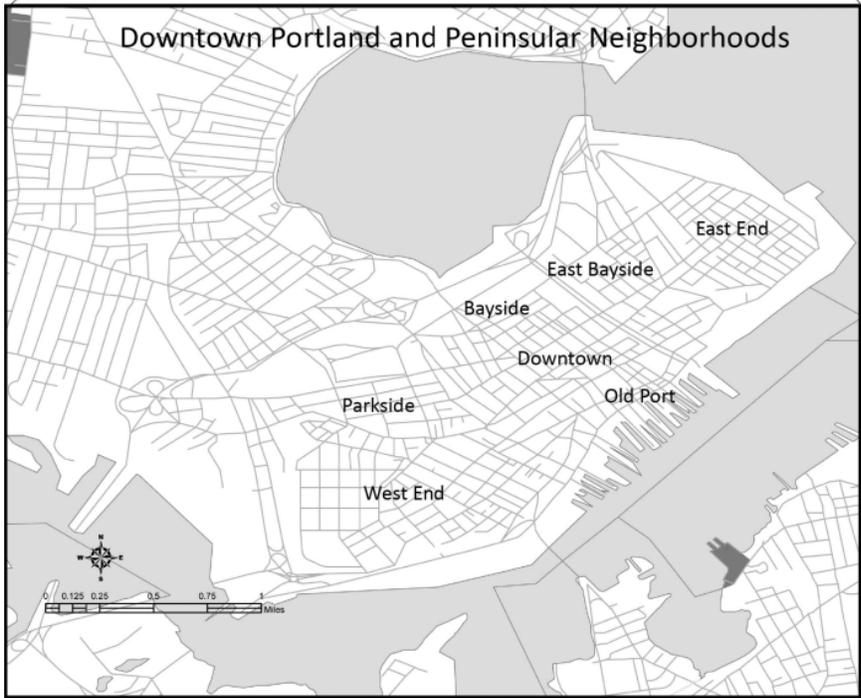


Figure 9.2. Population of Portland, Maine and the Urban Peninsular, 1990 and 2009. (Ezra Moser)

It is both apt and ironic that in 2009 *Forbes Magazine* named Portland the most 'livable' city in America (O'Mally-Greenberg, 2009). On one hand this accolade solidifies Portland's status as a city of 'renaissance,' the culmination of a several-decade trend of economic growth and regeneration that transformed this economically stagnant former port into one of Frommer's top twelve destinations in the world (Frommer's Staff, 2006).

As Conforti (2005) notes, "commercial prosperity and geography endowed Portland with assets that acquired new value in the postindustrial economy: a scenic coastal location, maritime heritage, and distinctive built environment," (322). Portland capitalized on these endowments through regenerative strategies that emphasized a conscious re-imagining and re-engineering of the city as a center of urban diversity, heterogeneity and vitality.

Richard Florida (2002) posits that in the postindustrial era, "diversity and creativity work together to power innovation and economic growth," (262). This supposed "synergy between production and consumption," has, according to Susan Fainstein (2005), promoted the concept of 'diversity' as the guiding mantra for policy makers looking to facilitate urban revitalization (12). Likewise, Sharon Zukin (1995) contends that "culture is more and more the business of cities," (2). Holding these philosophies to be true, Portland developed and followed a seemingly infallible business strategy that transformed the city into the poster child for urban renaissance.

By 1970 Portland was something of a relic. Its economy had declined precipitously following World War II and widespread deindustrialization. The Downtown and Old Port—jewels of the city's contemporary renaissance crown—were all but abandoned, unable to compete with commercial activity in suburban shopping malls. On the other hand, the absence of pro-growth coalitions and a highly racialized landscape left Portland comparatively spared from extensive urban renewal, and community activism during the 1960s and 1970s halted any further destruction to the city's historical cityscape.² Early waves of gentrification fueled by this well-intact built environment helped ignite a speculative real estate boom in the 1980s, producing one of the nation's 'hottest' housing markets. The amount of class-A office space in Portland's downtown doubled during this decade, with 1,000,000 square feet constructed between 1985 and 1988 alone, securing space the emerging dominance of FIRE industries (Finance, Insurance and Real Estate) (Knopp & Kujawa, 1993).

The boom turned bust in 1988, however, halting FIRE and construction industries in their tracks, and within three years vacancy rates for downtown office space climbed to a record high of 23% (Diesenhouse, 1996). To jumpstart its economy, the city focused its redevelopment efforts on cultivating 'culture,' investing in its arts and entertainment institutions to stabilize the faltering FIRE industries. The city established a designated 'Arts District,' and pledged to support local arts groups with public money, through grants and property tax rebates, (Lees, 2003, 620). Local philanthropist and Intel microchip heiress Elizabeth Noyce poured millions of dollars into the Portland Museum of Art, the Maine Historical Society, and similar cultural institutions (Rimer, 1999). Noyce's investments were vital in establishing the nationally acclaimed Portland

Public Market, an indoor farmer's market and retail space, which earned Portland the Downtown Achievement Merit Award from the International Downtown Association (Lees, 2003, 618). Beyond investing in arts, entertainment and cultural venues, Portland carried its philosophy of creating culture and cosmopolitanism over into its city planning documents, where concepts of diversity, livability and urban vitality took center stage as the explicit key to its next phase of regeneration. Portland's primary planning document during the 1990's titled *Downtown Vision: A Celebration of Urban Living and a Plan for the Future of Portland*, is one of the earliest and strongest examples of a conscious engineering of cosmopolitanism and urban heterogeneity on City Hall's part. The plan espouses a "Downtown for People—where people of all ages and all socio-economic groups find an exciting, friendly and compassionate atmosphere," and a "Downtown for Opportunity—where a bustling office and retail economy combines with a thriving and diverse cultural, entertainment, and visitor economy to provide a prosperity shared by the whole community," (City of Portland, 1991, 4). As Loretta Lees (2003) notes, the concept of 'diversity' is invoked several different times throughout the plan, touting "diverse job opportunities, ... diverse arts, cultural and educational offerings... diverse citizenry" and a "culturally and ethnically diverse community that values its shared history, is proud of its cultural diversity and is working together for a cohesive community," (621). Portland has realized a substantial portion of this 'vision' for itself, evidenced by the Old Port's vibrant cobblestone streets and boutiques or Downtown's numerous lofts and thriving art galleries. Any edifice of a 'culturally and ethnically diverse community,' however, remains elusive to the casual eye.

Portland's contemporary urban fabric has been supplemented and reconfigured by an estimated 10,000 refugees hailing from a variety of nations in Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, the majority of whom arrived from 1990 onward (Cadge et al., 2009, 10; Mangain, 2003, 113). Given its rapid increase in numbers, to a visitor, this demographic would appear conspicuously absent from much of the landscape of the idyllic Portland. However, to anyone living in virtually any peninsular neighborhood or attending a Portland public school where some 53 languages are widely spoken and enrollment in English as a Learned Language (ELL) programs exceeds twenty-five percent, the presence of the refugee community is impossible not to notice. Portland is considered a prime destination for refugees, as its small size and relative safety make it an ideal place to raise children, while its extensive social services infrastructure help their transition to life in America. In 2000 Portland had the seventh highest ratio in the nation of refugees as a percent of its recently arrived foreign-born population (Singer, 2006, 21). The Portland to which these refugees have arrived has been quick to embrace this newfound diversity,³ but is also a city facing crucial challenges.

Gentrification-induced increases in real estate value and an inadequate supply of new affordable housing construction led to an acute property crisis in the mid 2000s, with vacancy rates dipping below one percent. Peninsular neighborhoods have seen the most pronounced impacts of these processes, home to the highest concentrations of rental housing and poverty in the city, but, simultaneously, a tripling in median

Table 9.1. Population of Portland, Maine and the Urban Peninsular, 1990 and 2009

	1990 Census	2000 Census	2005–2009 ACS Estimates
City of Portland			
Population	64,358	64,249	63,395
% White, Non-Hispanic	96.0%	90.6%	85.0%
% Foreign Born	5.1%	7.6%	10.5%
% Living in Poverty	14.1%	14.1%	17.6%
Median Gross Rent at Percentage of Income	28.4%	26.1%	30.8%
Median Home Value	\$109,874	\$125,200	\$250,035
Urban Peninsula (Census Tracts 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13)			
Population	23,405	23,168	22,390
% White, Non-Hispanic	94.2%	86.9%	79.4%
% Foreign Born	6.4%	10.2%	14.6%
% Living in Poverty	25.6%	23.8%	32.1%
Median Gross Rent at Percentage of Income	29.2%	26.1%	32.3%
Median Home Value	\$102,708	\$127,234	\$312,595

home value since 1990. Refugees, who invariably arrive in Portland with little financial means and glaring needs, are largely relegated to these peninsular neighborhoods where rental housing is more abundant. Affording these rental units has become increasingly difficult, often necessitating earnings of over \$17.00 an hour, a wage far out of reach for these populations. Subsequently, one of the most common situations for newly arrived refugees is to be housed in one of Portland Housing Authority's public and subsidized units, the majority of which are also found in socioeconomically polarizing peninsular neighborhoods. As the city experiences an influx of young urban professionals and creative types that stoke the demand for what they see as relatively inexpensive, urban, market rate housing, it is simultaneously home to a growing a refugee demographic in need of affordable units, with both groups jockeying for space in the exact same neighborhoods.

Critiquing Florida, Fainstein (2005) argues that the abstract notion of diversity has become an unquestioned “mantra for public officials aiming to foster urban resurgence,” but one that, as even Florida himself admits, favors a “diversity of elites” (12). Furthermore, scholarly literature (Lees, 2008; Fainstein, 2005; Wylie & Hammel, 2002) emphasizes that gentrification—a concept virtually inseparable from urban renaissance—has increasingly become a tool for de-concentrating and dispersing poverty in order to push forward revanchist and neoliberal agendas favoring the middle and upper classes. However, one former mayor avows that an ethos

of civic mindedness has continually been central to contemporary City Hall politics, as evidenced by the city's extensive welfare and social service infrastructure (Interview with Informant 1, 2010)⁴.

Despite Forbes' accolade, Portland, as of 2000 had a median household income less than that of its own state, itself relatively poor. Do the benefits of the nation's most 'livable city' extend to its refugee populations crowded in the city's housing projects, huddled in the literal shadows of downtown's emblematic postindustrial success? Through the use of scholarly literature, city planning documents and local interviews I seek to examine the relationship between Portland and its refugee community in order to determine whether this engineered cosmopolitanism and "celebration of diversity" is an empty gesture. Recalling Foucault, to learn anything about the normal is to examine its outlier, and the experience of the refugee community reveals any dissonance between the city's re-imagined self and its lived experience. Furthermore, considering Portland to be a comparatively blank canvas potentially makes these implications universal. The case of Portland will reveal whether the city of urban renaissance is any closer to the ideal of a socially just city, or merely a distinct morphology of the neoliberal city, disguised by romanticized notions of urban vitality and heterogeneity.

A NEW PORTLAND: THE PROBLEMS FACED

Portland has no illusions about its contemporary reality. The influx of some 10,000 refugees is impossible to ignore in a predominantly white, native-born city. A closer examination of the city's spatial and economic landscape appears to indicate that refugees would be inherently excluded from the benefits of the nation's most livable city. The city's renaissance landscape has made fitting in for this demographic a challenge in the critical realms of housing and employment.

Portland's peninsular neighborhoods are magnets for gentrifying classes and low-income populations both groups drawn, albeit for different reasons, by the benefits of an urban housing stock. ACS census estimates for 2005–2009 indicate that in less than a decade, median home values in these areas rose almost \$200,000 while median gross rent as a percentage of income and poverty rate increased 24% and 35%, respectively. These neighborhoods may be hotbeds of gentrification, but they are also home to the highest concentrations of refugees, who arrive in Portland in need of affordable housing and access to centrally located social services. Homeownership for newly arrived refugees is virtually out of the question. In 2000 homeownership rates were a fraction of their national averages across all racial categories, but particularly low for minority-headed households, a statistical category that represents the majority of Portland's refugee population (Allen, 2007; City of Portland, 2005). This demographic could only afford 39% of the citywide median home sales price, and 72% of the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment. With few available options, refugees

subsequently occupy approximately 60%-70% of Portland's public and subsidized housing units, and comprise the majority of the 1000-plus families on the waiting list (Interview with Informant 2, 2010).

Access to viable employment opportunities is fundamental to mitigating this unequal access to the city's spatial landscape. It would appear, however, that Portland's renaissance economy is as exclusionary as its housing market. Despite the emphasis on cultural capital and creative industries, the postindustrial urban economy is primarily marked by the dominance and bifurcation of the service sector. This phenomenon is equally evident in contemporary Portland. The five largest industries by employment were in the service sector (as were nine of the top ten), which themselves accounted for 43.4% of total employment. As Table 9.2 indicates, the majority of these industries are predominantly high skill, with FIRE industries accounting for more than 10%.⁵

The wages of corresponding low-end services offer little consolation, and are often less than half of their high-end counterparts in the same industries.⁶ To an extent this is unsurprising, as academic literature posits that the restructuring associated with the transition to a service sector economy not only exacerbates inequality, but does little to boost the earnings of the lower-income demographics (Logan and Moloch, 2007; Sassen, 1996).

Portland's economy may have flourished in contrast to the rest of Maine, but the city still affords considerably less economic opportunities for low-skill workers than many other American cities. Allen (2007) notes that many of the low-skill jobs in Portland, especially much of the accommodation and retail industries, are connected to tourism and therefore seasonal, providing inconsistent employment opportunities that yield very low average earnings (18). The implications of this are particularly problematic for refugee populations. While many refugees were professionals or attained high levels of education in their nations of origin, such qualifications rarely

Table 9.2. Top Ten Industries by Employment in Portland, Maine (2008)

<i>Industry</i>	<i>% of Employment for Portland, ME</i>
Health Care	10.7% (3,757)
Accommodation and Food Services	8.8% (3,103)
Educational Services	8.4% (2,942)
Finance and Insurance	8.0% (2,813)
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	7.5% (2,653)
Construction	4.1% (1,453)
Administrative Support and Waste Management Services	3.5% (1,231)
Public Administration	3.0% (1,057)
Food & Beverage Stores	3.0% (1,042)
Social Assistance	2.7% (949)

Source: City data, 2008.

translate in America. Many refugees also arrive with little proficiency in English, hindering them from entering the job market directly or re-attaining their professional credentials. Research by Allen (2007) revealed that refugees who managed to find consistent employment earned a monthly wage of \$1,790 (an annual salary of \$21,480), a dismal 44% less than the average Portlander. Furthermore, this income would hardly be sufficient to afford Portland's average monthly rent of between \$850–\$1000. It is telling that in 2000 approximately one-third of Portland's impoverished population were not U.S. citizens, yet foreign-born populations at the time constituted less than 10% of the population. This can be construed as generally indicative of refugee populations in the context of Portland, a city whose social geography otherwise largely homogenous and native-born.

As if refugees have not already overcome incredible adversity by making it to America in the first place, they subsequently find themselves in need of supplementary incomes, short of affordable housing and sufficient employment opportunities, and are often relegated to neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of poverty. Furthermore, refugees' educational and professional qualifications rarely translate in the American system, dramatically diminishing their human capital and employment potential. Mamgain (2003) asserts that "occupational integration is key to overcoming poverty," (115). It is difficult to discern exactly how feasible "occupational integration" is for the refugee community in Portland. Does occupational integration constitute simply finding employment or does it imply opportunity for advancement? The economic dominance of the high-end service sectors makes the latter interpretations highly unlikely given that refugees' human capital often does not translate.

Portland's urban renaissance appears to have produced a more polarized than equitable socio-spatial and economic landscape, the effects of which acutely and disproportionately afflict a population as vulnerable as the refugee community. Examining the ground-level realities of this relationship will illuminate precisely how dissonant Portland's re-imagined self is from its lived experience.

A COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF POLICY?

A ground level examination and interviewees' perspectives reveal that there is not a collective experience of refugee-oriented policy and services in Portland. Interviewees whose line of work was furthest removed from the refugee community itself were less critical of how well the city has provided for it. City-affiliated organizations were associated with stabilizing services, and consequently tended to be most satisfied, believing themselves to be doing their best within budgetary constraints. Community-oriented nonprofit and faith-based initiatives expressed far less satisfaction than city-affiliated agencies, as these organizations tackled complex issues of socio-cultural transitions and socioeconomic integration, which cannot be facilitated by any single provision, such as housing or General Assistance. The refugees and immigrants interviewed believed city

services to be misguided or only temporarily necessary, either way, out of touch with the community's long-term needs.

Interviewees associated with City Hall were primarily concerned with budget and allocation of resources, indicative of Portland's complicated political reality. Even before refugees arrived en masse, an extensive network of social services were in place, programs that drew "homeless adults, substance abusers, troubled teenagers and disabled people," from communities all across the state and region where "such social welfare programs do not exist," (Conforti, 320). In the 2007 city government payroll, welfare service was the second largest division in terms of full-time employees and was third highest in funding (City Data, 2008). While poorer rural municipalities in northern and western Maine rely heavily on state funds, "property rich" Portland garners little sympathy from the capital and receives modest state funding, forcing the city to install high property taxes in order to finance its overextended social services (Conforti, 320). Initiatives that affect a broad range of constituents, such as housing, welfare or creating jobs, naturally take a central role, the benefits of which ostensibly extend to the refugee community as much as any other demographic. Refugee-specific initiatives, meanwhile, are forced to rely on federal grant funding to keep their services running.

Nonprofit and faith-based organizations voiced the greatest frustrations, having to provide for long-term needs of their clients, and having limited or inconsistent access to funding. Interviewees cited the three greatest areas of need to be resources for cultural education and language initiatives, employment skills training and youth programs. These organizations occupy a difficult middle-ground, forced to both supplement and navigate City Hall's stabilizing, welfare oriented services which themselves are constantly threatened by rollbacks. In having to provide for the subsequent issues of acculturation facing refugees, they are keenly aware of this community's specific challenges, but are similarly constrained by budgetary headaches.

In contrast, refugee and immigrant perspectives are far less concerned with fiscal aspects of services available to them, and instead have a clear opinion of which initiatives are necessary or successful and how they can all be improved. Immigrants involved with the refugee community expressed the strongest disapproval with social-service initiatives, believing them to be misguided and overly paternalistic. Refugees themselves, however, invariably utilized these services at one point, and deemed them to be necessary. One informant, director of the city's Office of Multilingual and Multicultural Affairs and herself a Filipino immigrant, believes the city's welfare services-oriented approach relegates refugees to recipients of aid instead of key actors in their own success. Refugee families are "very proud," she says, and do not want to be constantly associated with General Assistance. She claims that "the reality is, if you talk to many of the leaders [in the refugee community], they'll say 'no we don't use [services]... somebody else is getting the money but it's definitely not me'..." (Interview with Informant 3, 2010). One refugee informant cited that city services helped stabilize his own family, but that many refugee families do not understand their temporary and transitional nature, an issue of cultural differences

that would be easily mitigated by community engagement, an underemphasized aspect of the city's social services.

Both groups concurred that formulating refugee-specific services without involvement from the constituents themselves is problematic. The director of the Office of Multilingual and Multicultural Affairs asserts that the city's approach is a "white" mentality, assuming that their notions of how to provide for the refugee community will effectively integrate them into Portland's social landscape (Interview with Informant 3, 2010). Instead, both groups cite mutual education and exposure between refugee and native born families as simple, imperative solutions. A fundamental realm for implementing such measures would naturally be the city's public schools, which interviewees professed are highly segregated. They cited that ELL programs often serve to further isolate multicultural students, many of whom are kept there until graduation, leaving them with a seriously inadequate education. The ELL initiatives are representative of the refugee experience in Portland: a discord between a vital, well-intentioned service and its implementation.

A study conducted by the Brookings Institution found that "the successful incorporation of refugees into the economic, financial and social mainstream requires local leaders to create an environment both informative to the receiving community and also culturally sensitive to the refugees," (Singer, 26). While the refugees' opinions are vital in formulating political avenues and initiatives that best serve themselves, their differing perspectives exhibit that policy is not necessarily a shared experience in Portland. Furthermore, the opinions from City Hall and the variety of community and faith-based organizations reveal an unclear system of hierarchy and relations in which the latter groups ultimately provide many refugee-specific services. Intriguingly, this indicates underlying and emerging elements of neoliberal urban governance.⁷

Any indication of neoliberal leanings would literally turn Portland's re-imagined self on its head, as the city has long prided itself as a bastion of welfare services. Portland's real estate market was one of the driving forces of its urban renaissance, but its success ultimately cut it off from state flows, forcing the city to become self-sufficient in financing its extensive services. By facilitating the transition to a service-sector and consumption-based economy characteristic of global neoliberal capitalism, Portland acquired neoliberalism's most problematic legacy—a public sector with limited capacity to provide for a comprehensive range of social service needs and a fragmented hierarchy of urban governance.

An oddly appropriate maritime analogy illustrates this phenomenon in the context of the city's refugee community. Having been cast adrift by state funding, Portland's proverbial ship is sinking under the tremendous weight of its own pre-existing institutional frame of services, its hull riddled with the holes left by neoliberalism's structural deficiencies. As Portland sinks deeper, the dissonance between its re-imagined self and its lived experience becomes increasingly apparent, and the refugee community, riding third class in the cargo hold, will be first to drown.

City Hall and its extended coalition of nonprofits and community organizations—the acting captain and his crew—are frantically bailing the water out, but the problem is instead with ship's frame. It is at this juncture that Portland is being examined. To understand the lived experience of the refugee community, the city's outliers, it is essential to examine the grave conditions in the cargo hold. Observing how effective the city's solutions are will further illuminate the lived experience of the refugee community, and whether the captain needs to formulate a better plan, and fast.

STRUGGLING WITH SOLUTIONS: HOUSING AND SERVICES

The city's solutions take the form of housing and social services. Their implementation, however, reveals that the market-oriented strategy of regeneration through gentrification and urban renaissance has created a framework in which government and social services are increasingly unable to mitigate market failures and provide for the refugee community.

According to a PHA estimate, refugees occupy between 60%-70% of the nearly 3,000 public and subsidized housing units spread across the city (Interview with Informant 2, 2010). Refugee service organizations such as Catholic Charities or the Department of Refugee Services actively funnel refugee families into these units when possible, as they provide the most affordable, immediate options. The five largest complexes, however, contain more than 165 units each. They disrupt the urban fabric, are spatially isolated, and have only served to concentrate poverty. Many of these complexes, such as East Bayside's Kennedy Park, expose refugee residents to crime, gang activity and other negative influences.

Contemporary patterns of subsidized housing construction follow an integrated, mixed-rate model, many of which contain 15 units or less.⁸ The emphasis on mixed rate development theoretically allows the housing market to flourish (by providing market-rate units in centrally-located neighborhoods) while keeping its volatile consequences, such as displacement, in check. Scholarly literature, however, indicates that lower-density mixed-income communities often subvert such lofty ideals (Lees, 2008; Wyly & Hammel, 2002). Lees (2008) suggests that the gentrification it necessarily facilitates "is part of an aggressive, revanchist ideology designed to retake the inner-city for the middle classes," and "leads to displacement and socio-spatial segregation rather than alleviating social segregation," (2457). Furthermore, de-concentrating impoverished demographics through socially-mixed housing initiatives undermines the vital networks of social capital that such communities may have established (Lees, 2008: 2461).

Perhaps by emphasizing future growth in its housing initiatives, the city is not taking into account the severity of current circumstances for low-income populations. In fiscal year 2009, the city's family-specific homeless shelter experienced a 53% increase in secondary migrant refugees requiring its facilities, totaling 300 individu-

als (City of Portland, 2010: 77). The Department of Refugee Services indicated the arrival of 549 secondary migrants to Portland over the same period. For every two incoming secondary migrants to Portland in 2009, there was essentially one that was homeless for a period of time. Unless temporary shelters are considered adequate housing for Portland's newest arrivals, the provision and construction of affordable housing needs to become an even higher priority. While refugees and city politicians alike agree that spatial integration of subsidized housing is imperative, it appears that these smaller and mixed-rate developments do not satisfy their current demand.

Secondary and non-profit organizations work to provide a variety of social services, but their relation to the City itself can be complicated. For example, the Office of Multilingual and Multicultural Programs and the Department of Refugee Services were vital initiatives developed with City Hall but receive little or no direct funding, relying instead on a variety of federal grants that require a continual re-application process.

The Office of Multilingual and Multicultural programs provides the crucial service of running and managing the Portland Public Schools' English as a Learned Language programs, of which some 26% of the enrolled student body depends upon. In 2009 alone these programs experienced a net increase of 430 new students, indicating that their reliance on auxiliary federal funding is unlikely to diminish (Interview with Informant 3, 2010).

The City of Portland Department of Refugee Services is arguably the most refugee-specific organization in City Hall. Strictly geared toward secondary migrant refugees, the organization's primary responsibilities include securing housing and providing follow-up services, employment training and placement and helping clients navigate the city's general assistance bureaucracy.

With public and subsidized units at capacity, securing housing requires the office to hunt in the private market, a task further complicated by the prevalence of large families in the refugee community. The department's director explains that housing a refugee family of ten often necessitates taking two neighboring units out of the market because of the family's size. This exacerbates the already tight market for affordable housing, and many refugee families would have trouble affording one of these units at \$1,000 per month, much less two. The Department of Refugee Services is not allowed to subsidize these extra units to appease stubborn landlords, who would have little incentive to rent two units for below-market rates (Interview with Informant 4, 2010). Clearly a "hot" real estate market confers the majority of its benefits to demographics privileged enough to exercise choice in where they live. Sometimes there is literally nowhere to fit her clients. Even when she is successful, many are ultimately evicted for non-payment. This likely reflects the disturbing rise of secondary migrant refugees, her very own clients, in Portland's family shelter.

Despite consistent grant funding—and servicing 1,459 unduplicated clients in 2009—the Department of Refugee Services can only afford to employ three of its six employees full time. According to its director, the economic downturn of 2008 has severely affected the city and state's budget, as revenues from excise taxes have sharply

declined. She predicts that 40 city employees will lose their jobs in 2010. Two years earlier, the city was forced to lay off 96 employees, with 76 of those positions never being replaced (Interview with Informant 4, 2010).

Her experiences highlight that providing these services requires her to constantly navigate a spatial and socioeconomic landscape littered with legacies of prior policy decisions, precariously tight housing markets and fiscal debt. She is forced to find room for her clients in a pre-existing urban framework that affords little space to accommodate them, despite any cosmopolitan and egalitarian convictions on the City's part. Every refugee client that the city, social services or the housing market ultimately fails contributes to the dissonance between Portland's re-imagined self of postindustrial success, and a harsh reality of daily struggle, poverty and unfulfilled American dreams for the New Mainers.

The shortcomings of these efforts illuminate that working against the neoliberal economy's flow is a difficult task for an overextended city government. By investing in a consumer driven, service-sector economy during its urban renaissance Portland fashioned itself a framework that would invariably be prone to leaks. The refugee community finds itself vulnerably exposed to both the failures of the market, and the increasingly imminent failures of a city government struggling to provision fundamental services such as education. However, if the theoretical neoliberal city supposedly mitigates such failures with a strong coalition of non-profit organizations, then perhaps Portland has an ideal patch at its disposal.

The State of Maine Department of Health and Human Services (2007) website lists over forty organizations that serve multicultural families in the Portland area including religious and ethnically-specific organizations, consulting firms for multicultural enterprises, mental health services, legal advocacy groups. These organizations are the refugee community's unsung heroes, primarily handling the difficult task of facilitating socio-cultural transitions for their clients. These responsibilities would likely fall outside of the city's stabilizing framework of services, but are nonetheless invaluable. Their community-based nature is more palatable to refugee demographics, because, as an employee of one such organization relays, "It's very difficult to translate into American language how valuable community is to [them]," (Interview with Informant 5, 2010).

Interviewees highlighted that more assimilated younger generations increasingly eschew cultural traditions and customs such as wearing Hijabs or Burqas, observing religious holidays or conforming to strict standards of relations with the opposite sex, the effects of which severely strain many refugee families. Gagnon and Lonsdale (2006) imply that "parents and children [are] speaking two different languages, culturally that is," (22). Parents believe that the local school system undermines their efforts to maintain cultural traditions, exercise discipline and mend this intergenerational gap by supporting the rights of the children over the rights of the parents (Gagnon and Lonsdale, 2006: 24).

City Hall would view such socio-cultural conflicts as less of an exigent need and a lower priority than housing, general assistance, or employment training. However,

neglecting these issues is highly problematic. One interviewee maintained that the absence of a functioning family unit frequently propels young refugees towards the streets leading to elevated levels of gang activity, a rapidly growing problem in the community (Interview with Informant 6, 2010). Gagnon and Lonsdale (2006) discovered that the erosion of these communities' strong cultural capital has led, in part, to a high prevalence of substance abuse in the youth populations of Portland's refugee community, an issue to which parents were unaware of, uneducated about or powerless to stop. One informant, himself a Sudanese refugee, relates an anecdote:

"My Mother is active in the Sudanese community and used to always invite other African mothers over for dinner... She would ask them 'how is your son doing?' and they would break down crying...they would say 'my son is dealing drugs,' or 'he's in trouble with the law'... this would happen with nine out of every ten families that would come visit," (Interview with Informant 7, 2010).

He has seen several childhood friends end up in prison, and firmly believes that his close-knit family helped him stay on a path towards success. Issues of violent crime and gang activity have become increasingly prevalent in the refugee community, which led to a period of elevated tensions with the police department. This came to a head in 2009, following two tragic and high-profile shootings in which young Sudanese men lost their lives. In one case, the victim, James Angelo, was gunned down outside Mercy Hospital in the West End while on duty as a security guard. Police failed to identify or arrest the shooters, and an outraged Sudanese community wrote a formal letter to city officials saying that "they no longer viewed Portland as a safe city," (Bell and Kim, 2008). This incident was preceded by seven separate unsolved cases involving shootings of Sudanese Portlanders. The David Okot shooting, outlined in the introduction, has highly politicized and controversial as well. Its location at the border between the West End and Parkside highlights that issues with crime literally threatened to spill over into the 'idyllic' Portland of urban renaissance. These incidents indicate that Portland's renaissance framework has failed to provide for its refugee community in a very fundamental manner, and certainly calls into question precisely how 'livable' the nations most livable city is for all of its members.

This failure, however, indicates an ideal role for community-based organizations, whose non-affiliation with the city, but knowledge of its systems provide for a vital link for refugee populations. Interviewees believed that the more grassroots the organization, the more attuned it is to its constituents needs and will likewise be successful in providing for them, one stating that without local and community organizations such as hers, the refugee community would be 'in a lot more trouble.' The aforementioned Brookings Institution study expounded on the fact that nonprofit and community-based organizations play leading roles in the process of successfully incorporating refugees into American communities (Singer, 2006: 18). One grassroots organization, the West End's LearningWorks is a \$2,000,000 per year social service provider that operates language education and job training programs for refugees of all ages, and maintains 56 local units of subsidized housing (Hench, 2009).

Other similar initiatives such as Bayside's African Culture and Learning Center and East Bayside's Somali Community Center—the latter of which required \$500,000 in fundraising and personal investment to open—were formed by refugees themselves, and seek to specifically address the community's needs (Ross, 2007; Maxwell, 2006). Until Portland allows similar organizations to become leading agents in providing for the city's refugee population—instead of forcing them to be the proverbial cleanup crew—the dissonance between its re-imagined self and lived experience will only grow stronger.

These are not the only avenues for self-empowerment, however, as the experiences of refugee communities facing similar circumstances in other American cities indicate. Somali refugee communities in Minneapolis, Minnesota and Columbus, Ohio have found considerable success in establishing ethnic indoor “malls,” which spatially imitate their native bazaars and marketplaces (Ali and Arman, 2008). Entrepreneurs lease booth space from which they sell their products, and rent is thus made affordable by the high density of vendors. In Minneapolis, Southeast Asian and Latino refugee communities have carved thriving economic niches through similar practices (Taylor, 2000). In Worcester, Massachusetts, Clark University launched a progressive academic program in which students work with local refugee establishments implementing microfinance loans. This community-university partnership was made possible by \$100,000 grant from Lutheran Social Services, the city's pre-eminent refugee resettlement program (Dayal, 2010). Even in smaller case studies such as Burlington, Vermont and Concord, New Hampshire, microfinance loans that facilitate entrepreneurship have been the most successful methods for fostering socioeconomic self-sufficiency for refugee communities, a key to integration (Rathke, 2006; Conaboy, 2007).

In Portland, one of the most successful and empowering programs for refugees stems directly from the private sector. Barber Foods, a large food processing plant on the West End's periphery, employs refugees as 44% of its 750-member workforce. The company privately finances an English as a Second Language program for refugee employees along with courses in math and computer science and in 2001 established a college scholarship program named Pathways to Higher Education. This level of commitment to its foreign-born employees is seen as an investment, hoping that the recipients will make their career with the company and become empowered, contributing members to Portland society (Murphy, 2007). Small-scale initiatives that derive from outside the preexisting coalitions of service providers can be the most potent remedies for success and often provide more direct avenues to self-empowerment.

CONCLUSIONS

The sixteen gunshots fired at David Okot echoed in the evening air for a matter of seconds, but the dissonance they represented reverberates to this day. This dissonance

is between the city of Portland's re-imagined self of urban renaissance, cosmopolitanism embedded liberalism, and its lived experience, the latter of which came to an untimely end for Okot. Examining the focal point of this dissonance, the experience of the refugee community and its relationship to city hall and its renaissance politics, exposes several important conclusions. First, and most evident, is that Portland's urban renaissance did not manage to produce a more socially just cityscape, despite having a comparatively 'blank canvas,' a politically receptive environment, and an extensive welfare and social service infrastructure. The dissonance indicates that the refugee community's interests are not optimally provided for or being incorporated into the city's socio-political framework. Furthermore, this examination reveals that City Hall's political-economic model of urban renaissance exhibits many qualities of a neoliberal city clad in political progressivism and aspirations of cosmopolitanism. Portland is discovering that when an added layer of complexity—a rapidly growing refugee community—is added to its model of urban renaissance, its underlying neoliberal tendencies emerge, and its once successful regenerative framework begins to literally and figuratively tear at the seams.

Investing in a high-end service and consumption based economy, while throwing as many social services as possible at the demographics left in the shadow of its success, is neither an effective nor sustainable solution. Unsurprisingly, the ethnic and cultural diversity the city sought to 'celebrate' has been largely unable to emerge from these shadows and partake of the festivities. That is not to undermine the efforts of organizations that work doggedly at bridging this gap, but they face the challenge of orchestrating miracles with limited and shrinking resources. Capitalizing on this postindustrial success invariably means tapping into the flow of an increasingly globalized, neoliberal economy, and the city needs to creatively adapt to its pressures and demands.

The most evident implication is that the traditional welfare model needs to be reconfigured in order to adapt to these demands. Mohamed (2001) extensively studied the socioeconomic and political integration of Somali refugee populations in Toronto, Ontario, and his results have significant implications for Portland. Canada provides its citizens with an array of generous social welfare services that would be impossible to find in even the most progressive American cities. Under the precept that stabilization via social services is the key to effective integration, Mohamed's case study demographic should have flourished. His findings, however, indicated the opposite, that Somali refugees did not achieve "significant structural integration, into the social, economic and political structures of Canadian society," and were afflicted by many of the same problems facing Portland's refugee community (Mohamed, 2001).⁹ These findings reflect the opinions of Portland's interviewed refugees, whose main desire is simply to have a greater stake in their future. The Office of Multilingual and Multicultural Affairs' director attests that social services that don't emphasize and engender self-empowerment will invariably fail to move beyond the stage of stabilizing its clients. She asserts that "if you don't give [refugees] the tools [to succeed] in the first six months, how do you expect them to stand on their

own two feet?” (Interview with Informant 3, 2010). Stabilizing services essentially aim to ‘maintain’ the refugee community in an increasingly neoliberal, renaissance cityscape with waning available space. Thus, the most imperative avenue for self-empowerment is giving this community the ability to directly participate in the socioeconomic landscape, allowing them to create their own space.

Bolstering initiatives that facilitate self-empowerment through entrepreneurship and the opportunity for socioeconomic integration will allow the refugee community to be the key actors in creating their own success. Portland may have become a distinct—and partially in denial—brand of the neoliberal city, but, intriguingly, exhibits some of the most positive qualities of its theoretical ideal, such as one of the nation’s friendliest environment for small businesses (Thomas, 2005). If the abstract notion of ‘culture’ is one of Portland’s contemporary sites of production around which consumption is based, then refugee entrepreneurs have much to offer consumers.

If the Economic Crisis of 2008 effectively halts conspicuous consumption in its tracks, then Portland may be in trouble, as it specializes in producing “culture,” which requires a very specific consumer base. However, According to one former mayor, past recessions in Portland merely ratcheted development back as opposed to changing its trajectory altogether (Interview with Informant 1, 2010). If fabricated versions of urban vitality were sold wholesale to young professionals during the process of urban renaissance, perhaps Portland can capitalize on the opportunity to create an authentic version, this time replete with cultural diversity.

Refugees bring valuable youth and dynamism to an otherwise aging and economically stagnant state. They possess survival skills and have real life experiences that most Americans could not begin to fathom. The city of urban renaissance can undoubtedly harness these assets. In an increasingly globalized world this population provides the global connections necessary to make Portland a truly multifaceted, cosmopolitan, and livable city. Perhaps the presence of the refugee community in Portland has provided Portland in turn with a vital service—a proverbial wake-up call and the opportunity to continually re-imagine and reinvent itself as a city more perfectly in tune with all of its constituents.

The implications of these findings extend beyond Portland. Fainstein (2005) argues that “developing an appropriate physical setting for a heterogeneous urbanity... can only go so far in the generation of a just city. Most crucial is a political consciousness that supports progressive moves... toward respectfulness of others and greater equality,” (16). Portland planned for diversity in a top-down manner and subsequently failed to fully realize its re-imagined vision for itself. Nevertheless, the accolades are far more likely to remain the face of Portland, Maine in the near future, not the struggles and experience of the refugee community. Likewise, it is unlikely that the paradigm of resuscitation through urban renaissance is likely to diminish as the unquestioned modus operandi of urban planners and politicians, despite its shortcomings.

Examining the case of Portland and the experience of its refugee community demonstrates that planning for diversity requires investing in its interests, listening to its

needs and fostering direct participation. The richest tapestry of urban fabric is woven with its entire population, and the largest threads are not always the most vibrant.

NOTES

1. In introducing the concept of the refugee community, it is of paramount importance to understand that this terminology is by no means intended to construe this demographic as a monolithic block. Conversely, the most distinguishing characteristic of this population is its diversity. While certain patterns of settlement and spatial realities have materialized, it is important to recognize that attempting to consolidate such a vast array of cultures and experiences into a single “community” is ultimately inaccurate.

2. For reference and more information concerning Portland’s economic historical trajectory, urban renewal in Portland and the early stages of the city’s renaissance, refer to Fishman (1980), Barry (1982), Bell (2009), Conforti (2007) and Bauman (2006).

3. According to research by Cadge (2009), Portland provided an exceptionally welcoming political environment for its immigrant and refugee communities. Cadge (2009) asserts that Portland “wholeheartedly included immigrants in its political and economic agenda,” and integrated them “as part of working to recreate itself as a multicultural, welcoming, and tolerant place to live,” (2–4).

4. All interviewees retain anonymity per standard sociological practices and have been given informant numbers.

5. Real Estate (not depicted in table 9.2) accounts for 2.6% of total employment in Portland, ME (928 persons), and is the eleventh largest employer by industry (City Data, 2008).

6. For example, in health care, the largest sector in Portland, the mean salary of practitioners and technicians was more than twice as much as that of “support occupations” (\$56,350 compared to \$21,580)(Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001).

7. A characteristic of the contemporary “neoliberal city” is a diminished municipal government flanked by a coalition of nonprofit and community-based organizations to provision social services. For Reference and more information, refer to Eick (2007).

8. The PHA database cites 58 individual housing developments that include units subsidized on the peninsula, of which, 32 contain 15 units or less (Interview with Informant 2, 2010).

9. Mohamed’s study found that “as recent migrants, Somali refugees have not achieved significant structural integration into the social, economic, and political structures of Canadian society. Dependence on social welfare assistance, a high rate of unemployment, limited educational pursuits, and social and residential segregation are features common among Somali refugees in Toronto... factors that hinder their effective integration...” (Mohamed, 2001).

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