

BEYOND BORDERS: REPRESENTATIONS OF REFUGEES AND PLACE IN
CLARKSTON, GEORGIA

by

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ABSTRACT

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In the last thirty years, socio-political shifts within the city of Clarkston, Georgia, have led to an evolution in representations of the city and of its many refugee and immigrant populations. This dissertation examines the site-specific effects of the evolving policies and practices of refugee resettlement and integration within the city of Clarkston and the emerging immigrant gateway of the South. While the city itself has transformed, so have its representations of refugees, challenging imaginative geographies and complicating the mainstream dichotomic racial imaginative geographies and socio-political representation of the U.S. South. Using qualitative methods, I analyze materials from four years of research including city council minutes, media coverage, field visits, and interviews with key informants to examine the multiple representations of refugees and immigrants. Findings showcase the complicated nature of representations of refugees and immigrants within and around the city, as both assets and adversaries to local communities. Council members, resettlement organizations, and residents construct refugees as beneficial to the local economy and position their “diversity” as an economic advantage. Refugee reception has become increasingly institutionalized through stakeholders at the local scale, particularly through branding endeavors by the city government for economic gain and organizations with moral imperatives. In addition, council members use

coded language to portray refugees as racialized victims and transgressors. Inherent in the city's representation of refugees is a neoliberal multicultural representation of the city itself, which complicates our knowledge of the politics of scale and neoliberal multiculturalism at the local scale. Today, metro Atlanta's vision for the region and its economic development are inclusive of the representation of immigrants, yet city policies are often created and implemented without the contribution of refugees and immigrants. To highlight the need for attention to immigrants' voices, I draw on the lived experiences of refugees in Clarkston to demonstrate how identity and belonging are inextricably and mutually constructed through place and that place is constructed through lived experiences. This geographic research highlights the unique features of a gendered and racialized refugee community in the South and their interactions with the local state. These findings demonstrate the need to include the voices of marginalized communities within local decision-making and for more scholarly attention to the everyday experiences of refugees and immigrants.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Allen, and Hilda Ryniker

Thank you, Mom, for believing in me, telling me when it was time to get back to work, and always checking for spelling. Dad, thank you for all that you have done to support our family and me. Between the two of you, your dedication, argumentativeness, and perseverance are unmatched.

AND

To every first-generation college student dreaming about following her passions while weighing the consequences. Believe in yourself. You are worth the hard work.

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writing may be a lonely process, but you do not have to go at it alone. Mania and Elliott, you both went above and beyond, listening to me complain, offering insights, and always being there for me. Thank you for being you.

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Chapter I. Introduction

In 2022, the United States resettled just 25,465 refugees, 80 percent short of the set resettlement ceiling (Dhingra, 2022). This is just a fraction of the total number of displaced people worldwide: 108.4 million (UNHCR, 2023). When a refugee is resettled, they undergo extensive background checks and screenings and are expected to integrate into American society and be self-sustaining within 4-6 months (Halpern, 2008). While much attention is placed on refugees' journeys before and during their migration, there is less attention to refugees after this initial phase. What does life look like for immigrants and refugees as they attempt to integrate into American society? Through this research, I wanted to draw attention to these lived experiences and representations of refugees and immigrants.

I first learned about Clarkston's immigrants in 2017 while sitting in my office in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, through a fluff piece on Ted Terry, who was ramping up his Mayoral re-election campaign in Clarkston, Georgia, the "Ellis Island of the South" (Graham, 2017). This phrase incited in me an explosion of curiosity that no other dissertation topic had. As I dove deeper into the news and human-interest pieces surrounding the city and Terry's campaign, I learned more about the city and the immigrants who called it their home. Warren St. John's book *Outcasts United*, about a local soccer team made up of refugee boys named the Fugees, deepened my curiosity. I had been the same age as some of the boys in the book, living less than an hour away. Why had I never heard of Clarkston or these 40,000 refugees until Ted Terry went on *Queer Eye* and shaved his "hipster beard"?

As I read more, I knew there was a story here, about place, experience, meaning, and geography was at the heart of it all. It was bigger than Mayor Terry, although he played a significant role in Clarkston's refugee settlement renaissance. But he was not alone. In the next

chapters of this dissertation, I argue that Clarkston and Atlanta are part of a larger trend of new patterns of migration to the South, called New Destinations by some scholars (Winders, 2014). This immigration is shifting existing racial and ethnic binaries. Thus, my work adds to that of Jamie Winders (2014) and other geographers who have identified this trend and begun to analyze its implications for regional racial formation (Loyd & Mountz, 2018; Pulido, 2006). Second, I use a post-structural analysis of city council meeting minutes and other documents to draw attention to the “welcoming” discourses of immigration and neoliberal multiculturalism, shaped by local institutions, which pervade the city of Clarkston and situate refugees as both victims and transgressors. Finally, I use interpretative phenomenological analysis to share four immigrant families’ narratives of belonging, inclusion, and places of meaning.

In the next section of this chapter, I situate Clarkston as a case study for the reader. Then, I offer an overview of the theoretical framework used in this dissertation. Next, I provide an overview of the research design and methods used in this dissertation. Finally, I give an overview of the chapters, research questions, and project contributions.

Clarkston as a Case Study

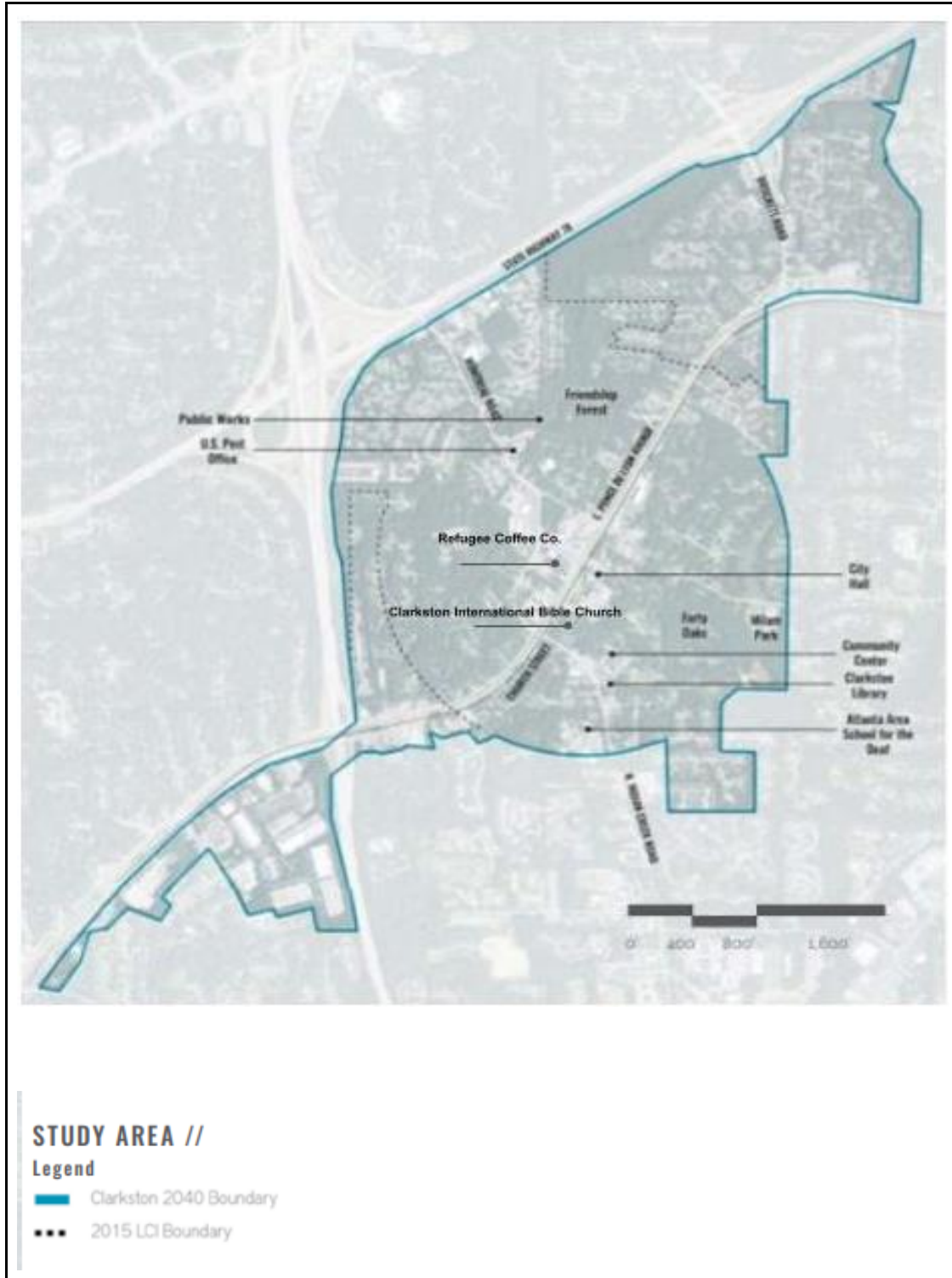
Clarkston, as an inner suburb receiving refugees, is actually not unusual. It became a place for refugee resettlement because of its combination of inexpensive housing and entry-level jobs, and thereby became a ‘starter city’ for refugees. I suggest Clarkston is an interesting case study because it offers an opportunity to investigate the impact of refugee resettlement on immigrant identity and place representations within real-world contexts and experiences. The theoretical implications about intertwined relationships of place, identity, and belonging for

resettled refugees that Clarkston offers can be extrapolated to other case studies, particularly in the U.S. South.

Further, Clarkston is not disconnected from its surroundings: What happens in Clarkston is part of the larger processes happening in Atlanta, and in the Southeast, as I explain below. More importantly for this research, though, is how receiving refugees has become part of Clarkston's identity for some, though it is contested. Thus, research on Clarkston can illuminate issues around refugee resettlement and migrant integration more broadly, including refugees' experiences of place in the resettlement process. Additionally, attention to Clarkston at the local scale can show how place identity is relational to national identity. In the rest of this section, I describe Clarkston's situation as part of Atlanta, including the growth and development of Clarkston over the past few decades.

Clarkston is a small municipality in the Atlanta metropolitan area, just 1.4 square miles wide, often dubbed "the most diverse square mile in America" (Shaer, 2017). As of July 2022, it had a population of 14,537 people, although the city expects future growth in population and physical size. Under Mayor Ted Terry, the city of Clarkston put together a 2040 Comprehensive Plan for the city that included text about refugees and immigrants within its first few pages: "Since 1990, the city served as an asylum for refugees from Asia, Africa, and beyond..." and includes a photo of Refuge Coffee Co. as one of the few images of Clarkston (City of Clarkston, 2021). In 2021, current Mayor Beverly Burks updated this plan, although much of the same language was kept. In this map, we can see the spatial relationships between important places for the city; these places become important to immigrants as well. Places with profound connections to refugees and immigrants are located centrally, such as Refuge Coffee Company, City Hall, and the Clarkston Community Center (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1. Clarkston 2040 City Boundaries



This map from the Clarkston 2040 Comprehensive Plan shows Clarkston's 2040 City Boundary with significant places overlaid.

Clarkston was not always the most diverse square mile in America—in fact, it used to be primarily composed of White farmers and gained attention as a stop on the railroad between Atlanta and Savannah. Clarkston’s proximity to the city of Atlanta and railway history made it one of the first true “suburban” communities of Atlanta (City of Clarkston, 2023). The city of Atlanta, conversely, is Georgia’s capital city and has always been a bustling large city, also stemming from its history as a railway hub with lines connecting it to the entire Southern United States as early as the 1850s. During the Civil War, most of Atlanta was set on fire by Union troops, but the city’s population grew back rapidly (City of Atlanta, 2023). The city’s racial makeup has been primarily composed of White and Black¹ people since its founding, with segregation starkly shaping where certain populations would live and work. By the 1950s, African Americans had begun to integrate into city neighborhoods, and desegregation continued into the 1960-1970s. During the 1960s, there was a great effort by local politicians to promote Atlanta as a racially progressive city, including giving it the moniker: “The City Too Busy To Hate” (Archives Research Center, 2018). Ninety percent of Atlanta is in Fulton County, but the other ten percent is part of DeKalb County. Atlanta’s history of racialization, its political and economic power, and its rich mix of cultures, including African American, Hispanic, and Asian communities, draws parallels to Clarkston.

Today, the city of Clarkston has resettled over 40,000 refugees from over sixty different nationalities (Kim and Bozarth, 2021). For this research, I conceptualized Clarkston’s migration history by dividing refugee resettlement and migration to Clarkston into three separate and

¹ I capitalize Black and other races throughout this dissertation as a rhetorical choice to show that this categorization is a socially constructed term imbued with history and representative of social identities. For more information on capitalization of Black, see Appiah (2020).

significant eras². The first begins during the 1970s, as refugee resettlement agencies initially selected Clarkston as a resettlement site for Vietnam refugees due to its location, access to transportation, availability of low-skilled jobs, and low-cost housing (Kim and Bozarth, 2021; Leymarie, 2014). According to the Atlanta History Center,

In 1975, The Atlanta Constitution reported on an American family repairing an old house in Clarkston for a Vietnamese family fleeing after the fall of Saigon. Several years later, newspaper coverage focused on refugees from Bosnia and other conflicts. These stories mark the start of a trend in news coverage regarding Clarkston—it became a reflection of the people who were relocating to Clarkston, themselves reflective of areas of global conflict. (Haley, 2019)

This early resettlement and transformation as a city represent the beginning of Clarkston's history as a resettlement site, the first of three major eras of migration to Clarkston. During the 1990s, a second wave of resettlement occurred, where refugees from all over the globe were settled in Clarkston. The third era occurs around 2010, when the city of Clarkston begins to use refugees and immigrants prominently in branding and marketing. Conceptualizing refugee settlement and immigration to Clarkston in this way helped to delineate multiple discourses, structural changes, and social and political shifts. Clarkston's total population grew during these eras: in 1970, the population was 3,127 people. Two decades later, the population was 5,385 people. In 2010, Clarkston's population was 7,554 people (U.S. Census, 2023). During these eras, different racial and ethnic groups transformed the Clarkston cultural landscape (See Table 1.1).

² I acknowledge there are critiques for conceptualizing migration in this manner. For a detailed critique on immigration typologies, see Boucher and Gest (2014).

Table 1.1. Selected Demographics for the Atlanta Region (ARC) and Dekalb County³

| Category | 1970 | | 1990 | | 2010 | |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| <i>Total Population</i> | | | | | | |
| Atlanta ARC | 1,503,122 | | 2,514,066 | | 4,107,750 | |
| Race | | | | | | |
| <i>White⁴</i> | 1,147,819 | 76.6% | 1,729,204 | 68.8% | 1,811,038 | 44.1% |
| <i>Black</i> | 320,470 | 21.3% | 677,559 | 27% | 1,489,804 | 36.3% |
| <i>Asian</i> | 0 | 0% | 48,439 | 1.9% | 231,377 | 5.6% |
| <i>Hispanic</i> | 32,155 | 2.1% | 52,377 | 2.1% | 480,529 | 11.7% |
| <i>Other</i> | 2,678 | 0.2% | 6,487 | 0.3% | 95,002 | 2.3% |
| Dekalb County | | | | | | |
| <i>White⁵</i> | 357,536 | 30.45% | 292,421 | 16.62% | 230,156 | 11.35% |
| <i>Black</i> | 56,877 | 17.44% | 230,532 | 33.87% | 375,725 | 24.79% |

³ The Atlanta region is defined here as the 10-county Atlanta Regional Commission planning area, similar to the Atlanta, MSA, which has changed over time. In 1970, the Atlanta MSA was composed of only 5 counties: Clayton, Cobb, Dekalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett. In 2020, the MSA contained 29 counties.

⁴ Census race categories and terms have changed over time. This table contains the data for non-Hispanic groups including Black, White, and Asian populations. In 2000, the Census allowed individuals to report more than one race for the first time. Additionally, the Census did not ask about one's Hispanic origin until 1980. The Census Bureau considers Hispanic an ethnicity and not a race.

⁵ Census data was not available for other races or ethnic groups at the county level during 1970 and 1990.

Data compiled from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022) and from Pandey and Sjoquist (2022).

These ethnic and racial changes have occurred because of the changing global political arena as well as state and local policies. In the United States, there are limits on the number of refugees taken from five global regions as well as a reserve number for war victims and for unforeseen emergencies. Under President Trump, the administration prioritized particular categories of individuals, such as those fleeing religious persecution, over the former region-based selection. The Biden administration returned to the former method of accepting refugees (Monin et. al., 2021).

Clarkston settles similar refugee populations to that of Georgia as a whole, with the five largest groups in 2019 coming from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Myanmar, Eritrea, Afghanistan, and Ukraine (Refugee Processing Center, 2019). For this dissertation, I interviewed refugees resettled from the DRC, Myanmar, and Eritrea. The social, political, economic, and ecological reasons for refugee resettlement change constantly and reflect the current conflicts at the time. In the following paragraphs, I will draw attention to just a few conflicts contributing to U.S. refugee resettlement in 2023.

In the DRC, a decades-long humanitarian crisis is taking place: as of 2022, over 5.5 million people were displaced within the DCR, and 1.1 million people fled the country because of violence. Political struggles and a lack of stability have contributed to socio-economic problems including wide-spread poverty and health hazards (Global Focus, 2023). The DRC is recognized as the second most ethnically diverse nation in the world, but there are shared cultural

values between conflicting groups that have been bolstered by political powers, foreign interests, and colonial forces (Karbo and Mutisi, 2011).

Similar to the DRC, Afghanistan is composed of many ethnic groups, including the Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara that are merged into one identity of “Afghan” (Ali, 2015). These ethnic divisions, paired with other issues in the region, have complicated Afghanistan’s history. While the U.S. war in Afghanistan ended in 2021, gaining access to humanitarian assistance has been complicated because of many challenges, including those surrounding the Taliban, women’s rights, and a recent earthquake. In 2022, UNHCR settled over 9,200 refugees across the globe—most were resettled in Iran and Pakistan (Global Focus, 2023).

Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, has endured a complicated crisis because of political and religious differences multiplied because of ecological degradation. Multiple ethnic groups including the Rohingya and the Zomi were forcibly displaced from their homes, and over 1.1 million refugees were forced to resettle in new countries (Global Focus, 2023).

Between 2010 and 2020, Clarkston’s population has changed drastically, almost doubling in population, with the largest increase in the Black or African American category (see Table 1.2). According to the U.S. Census data from 2020, Clarkston’s three largest racial categories were Black or African American (63.7%), Asian (32.1%), and White (8.4%). As of 2020, 52.5% of Clarkston’s residents were born outside the country, and 55.5% have United States citizenship (DataUSA, 2023). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2023), 59.8% of the population speaks another language other than English at home.

Table 1.2. Selected Demographic Information in Clarkston, 2010 and 2020

| Category/Year | 2010 | 2020 |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Total Population | 7,554 | 14,756 |
| Race | | |
| <i>White</i> | 1,027 | 1,225 |
| <i>Black or African American</i> | 4,413 | 9,622 |
| <i>Asian</i> | 1,632 | 2,871 |
| <i>Hispanic or Latino</i> | 120 | 480 |
| Gender | | |
| <i>Male</i> | 3,604 | 6,419 |
| <i>Female</i> | 3,951 | 6,328 |
| Median Age | 28.9 | 26.9 |
| Percent Working Inside County | 49.3% | 54.4% |
| Percent High School Graduate | 23.9% | 23.3% |
| Median Income (dollars) | 23,010 | 21,287 |

Data compiled from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

Table 1.2 shows important demographic changes occurring in the last two decades within Clarkston. While Clarkston’s White population has stayed almost constant, the Black population

has more than doubled, and there has been an increase in the Asian and Hispanic populations as well. Considering the demographic shifts in Dekalb County as a whole since 1970 in Table 1.1, the White population has decreased to less than 50 percent. Some of these demographic changes are the result of new refugees and immigrants settling in Clarkston, which has led to different structural and institutional matters than in the past. For example, because almost half of Clarkston's population must commute to work outside of the city, transportation and mobility factors have become highly important to Clarkston's residents. Additionally, these statistics show Clarkston's population is below the national median income, and less than one third of the population has received their high school diplomas, with little change over the decade. These categories shed light on immigrant needs and draw attention to how resources can be better dispersed in the city.

At times within this dissertation, I focus on the Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell metropolitan area (MSA), also known as the "Atlanta MSA" or Metro Atlanta, as well as the cities of Clarkston and Atlanta to understand the local and regional effects of immigration to the South. As of 2023, there are 29 counties within the Atlanta MSA. It is the most populous metropolitan statistical area in the state and the eighth largest in the United States. The region is 8,376 square miles, about the size of Massachusetts. The 2000 U.S. Census recorded that fewer than one in ten residents of the metropolitan area lived inside of the Atlanta city limits, demonstrating the sprawling nature of the region and its inhabitants (Atlanta in Focus, 2003).

This dissertation draws attention to the importance of the local scale, but it is important to note that the "local" is a socially constructed imaginative region that can vary by use and context. At times, the local scale may mean Clarkston, but at other times, local may encompass the Atlanta Metro area. As human geographers know, regions help conceptualize uneven

development and illustrate spatial relationships (Massey, 2001), but these divisions are only as good as our imaginative geographies. My emphasis on the local, as well as on Clarkston, Atlanta, and the Atlanta MSA is to show important relationships within and among this region. I will discuss Clarkston, Atlanta, and their relationship to the Atlanta MSA in greater detail in Chapter II.

Theoretical Framework

Place

Within geographic literature, the notion of place has been theorized to inform intertwined cultural, social, and political analyses of geographic processes captivating the attention of scholars and inspiring a multitude of theorizations. Geographers, rather than accepting ‘place’ as given, have theorized place in ways that help us understand a place like Clarkston. Edward Soja, a notable urban geographer, explores the social and political dimensions of place, arguing that place has a significant role in the performance of social life (Soja, 1986). Similarly, Doreen Massey, an influential feminist geographer, emphasizes the dynamic nature of place, proposing that “places are always open-ended, always constituted in relation to wider social relations” (Massey, 1994). Massey's influential work, “Space, Place, and Gender” (1994), examines the dynamic nature of place and its role in shaping social relations. Massey critiques the notion of place as a static entity and instead emphasizes its relational character. She asserts that places are open-ended and constantly evolving, molded by broader social, economic, and political forces. Massey’s (1994) perspective underscores the importance of understanding place as a product of intersecting power relations, challenging static, and essentialist, notions of geographic locations.

These diverse theorizations of place reflect the multifaceted nature of geographic literature, providing nuanced insights into the ways in which physical spaces intersect with human experiences, social dynamics, and power structures. I conceptualize place in multiple ways within Clarkston to provide a framework for understanding how immigrants and refugees interact and intersect with places of meaning and shape their inclusion to Clarkston's communities. By exploring the experiential, social, and relational dimensions of place, these authors expand our understanding of the intricate connections between people and their environments, urging us to critically examine the significance of place in shaping our lives and societies within geographical contexts.

Neoliberal multiculturalism

The concept of neoliberal multiculturalism has garnered considerable attention in academic literature, bringing together diverse perspectives to explore the complex relationship between neoliberalism and cultural diversity. Melamed (2006) examines the intersections of neoliberalism, globalization, and multiculturalism. She argues that neoliberal policies often foster the commodification of cultural differences, promoting a form of multiculturalism that commodifies identities. Scholars have used Melamed's (2006) conceptual framework to analyze neoliberal multiculturalism in different case studies (Woods, 2017; Hashimoto, 2018). For example, Hashimoto (2018) examines economic development in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, using a feminist perspective, to find that normative discourses fixed racial categories, while the City of Milwaukee's redevelopment plan used more dynamic racial categories. Socio-political representations of racial categories permeate daily life and in turn, these racial concepts become 'truths' embedded in society.

Multicultural neoliberalism provides a context to explore neoliberal agendas, allowing scholars to view how certain cultures, or certain aspects of particular cultures, are celebrated while marginalizing others. This selective inclusion reinforces existing power structures and perpetuates inequalities within societies. Within this dissertation, I use the framework of neoliberal multiculturalism to critically examine the ways in which neoliberal ideologies intersect with cultural diversity. In particular, the ‘diversity’ that refugees have come to represent in Clarkston has functioned both as a sign of inclusion and as a place marketing tool, as I will discuss in Chapter II.

Identity

Within this dissertation, I draw attention to the multifacetedness of identity and its social construction. The concept of identity has been a prominent theme in geographic literature, with scholars delving into its multifaceted nature and examining its spatial dimensions. Again, Massey’s (1994) work has been foundational here. In her book *Space, Place, and Gender*, Massey (1994), explores how identity is not only shaped by individual experiences but also by broader social and spatial contexts. She emphasizes the interconnectedness of identity and place, arguing that places are not static but are constantly shaped and transformed by social processes, which in turn influence individuals' identities.

This dissertation attempts to contribute to the rich discourse on identity in geographic literature by providing nuanced perspectives that challenge essentialist notions and highlight the complex and dynamic nature of identities. By exploring the spatial dimensions of identity at local and individual scales in Clarkston, I shed light on how identities are constructed, contested, and negotiated within specific socio-spatial and temporal contexts.

A note on terms used in this dissertation: I use the term “immigrant” as a broad term encompassing any person who has moved internationally to the United States. While several of the participants in this dissertation fall under the political status of “refugee,” I only use the term in certain situations because the participants in this study did not actively use this term to describe themselves—it was typically used to describe one’s political situation or status. In addition, the term refugee has an extremely strict political definition, and some of the participants did not feel they were entitled to the term. Similarly, there are other terms used in scholarly literature such as asylum seeker or permanent resident. Again, these describe a political status. Within Clarkston and in other New Destinations, the term “New Americans” is used to describe immigrants and refugees. However, the participants in this study did not use this term to describe themselves and this term is also imbued with political meaning. For these reasons, “immigrant” is the most inclusive and encompassing. However, there are pitfalls to using “immigrant” to encompass these different groups, none the least that it can minimize the trauma and experiences refugees and asylum seekers go through before, during, and after resettlement (Sigona, 2014)⁶. I discuss this terminology in greater depth in Chapter II.

Inclusion and Belonging

The concepts of inclusion and belonging have received significant attention within geographic literature, as scholars explore how individuals and communities interact with and are shaped by their spatial environments (McDaniel et al., 2019a; Staeheli and Nagel, 2008; Ahmed, 2000). At the local level, cities have begun to use welcoming and sanctuary practices and policies as tools to encourage inclusion (McDaniel, 2018). McDaniel et al.’s (2019a) recent work

⁶ For more information on the terminology and representations involved in using “refugee” and “immigrant”, see Torkington and Riberio (2019) and Karim (1993).

sheds light on the critical role cities and municipalities play in the reception and inclusion of immigrants. Local governments may influence integration and receptivity through policy and organizing. However, notions of inclusion and exclusion are embodied in everyday encounters by refugees and immigrants (Ahmed, 2000). Sites for meaning making, such as the home, may be a place of contradictions for refugees who have experienced severe trauma.

Within this dissertation, I contribute to the exploration of inclusion and belonging by highlighting the embodied, spatial, and socio-cultural dimensions of these concepts. I draw attention to the complex processes through which individuals and communities experience and negotiate belonging.

The concepts of inclusion and belonging have received significant attention within geographic literature, as scholars explore how individuals and communities interact with and are shaped by their spatial environments. Within this dissertation, I contribute to the exploration of inclusion and belonging by highlighting the embodied, spatial, and socio-cultural dimensions of these concepts. I draw attention to the complex processes through which individuals and communities experience and negotiate belonging.

Methodology

Research Design and Methods

Through this dissertation, I set out to identify and analyze what discourses structure Clarkston and Clarkston's representations of refugees. I did this by asking three guiding questions: 1) How are refugees represented by refugees themselves, institutions, and other key figures in Clarkston? 2) What discourses structure the city of Clarkston? And 3) What do those discourses do and for whom? To answer these questions about place and identity, I traveled to

Clarkston several times during 2018-2023 engaging in ethnographic fieldwork in the form of collecting archival materials, conducting interviews, and ethnography.

During fieldwork, I used interviews and participant observation to explore the relationships between people and place in Clarkston. I contacted key members of the Clarkston community between 2020 and 2023, and then used the snowball method to identify further participants, with the primary interview window of spring and summer 2021. I conducted eleven in-depth semi-structured interviews with city council members, nonprofit (or nongovernmental organization) representatives, refugees, and community leaders (a 29.28 percent response rate compared to the overall number of interview invitations). The COVID-19 pandemic played a large part in responses as the community was still shut down during this time and participants, especially refugees, were hesitant to talk to strangers. However, I did make sure participants were as safe and as socially distanced as possible. I offered to interview participants in places that were the most comfortable and secure for them, and everyone wore masks for the duration of the interviews.

Between 2018 and 2023, I traveled to Clarkston, Atlanta, Decatur, and DeKalb County many times and did field observation, went to farmer's markets, ate at immigrant-owned restaurants, and attended Clarkston's festivals. In addition, I attended several city council meetings and various other city and county-wide meetings virtually and in person between 2020 and 2023. For Chapter II, I examined the case studies of Atlanta and Clarkston and conducted a content analysis of archival records and media to analyze these places (and region as a whole) as new immigrant gateways. In Chapters III and IV, I draw on the fieldwork I completed between 2019 and 2022. For the analysis in Chapters III and IV, I transcribed the interviews and then

coded the city council meeting minutes and interviews by hand using thematic analysis. After reading for themes, I re-coded the data entirely at least three times using the codebook.

Feminist Methodologies and Positionality

Because I intended to center the lives of refugees in Clarkston, I drew on feminist methodologies, which guided me to pay attention to not only state discourses, but also the embodied stories of immigrants (Silvey, 2006, 2004; Ehrkamp, 2013; Mohanty, 2013; Lawson, 2000).

Feminist methodologies also prompt me to acknowledge my own positionality. I have situated knowledge socially constructed through my own experiences which shaped my research lens at every stage of this dissertation (Rose, 1993; Mohanty, 1997; Crenshaw et al., 1995). I created this research project knowing that my positionality would affect my research. I am a 29-year-old, White, female attending the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Although I lived in the South for most of my life, I was born in California and moved across the country when I was young. I chose to do my research on Clarkston and its refugees while in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, because I found out about the former Mayor's work with refugees, but also because it was a case study near my family who still reside near Clarkston.

I mention these aspects because they are pertinent to my experiences as a researcher and interviewer. For example, one participant told me that she only responded to my email because she was curious as to why "someone from Wisconsin would care about Georgia." At times, my experience moving around the United States made me feel like an outsider, something I could relate to when my participants spoke about their feelings. Other times, participants from Georgia seemed more willing to talk to me in person because I appeared remarkably like them. For

instance, participants often assumed I lived in Clarkston, asking early on in interviews which part of town I lived in, or where my family lived in the city. In another instance, while I was waiting for an interview at Refugee Coffee Company, two members from a local Baptist church sat down at my table and asked about my work. At the end of the conversation, they took my hands and said a prayer for me and my participants—never asking if I would like to say a prayer or if I believed as they did.

In addition, my background as an academic and researcher made participants with similar professional backgrounds more at ease. I also made it clear to my participants that I was pro-refugee, but was also an academic, so the conclusion of my research would be in paper or presentation form. In other words, I did not represent an organization or non-profit which would aid them in certain ways.

I also spent most of my youth in a Metro-Atlanta city about 45 minutes from Clarkston, but I never knew about the city or its immigrant population. My town was larger than Clarkston, but it had very similar mainstream racial imaginative geographies. In fact, I was very unaware of Atlanta's rich diversity until college. To me, this is evidence of how social and political planning and marketing by state governments and municipalities permeate daily life and in turn, shape everyday constructions of identity and place. It also demonstrates the strength and spread of regional ideologies and how critical it is to be aware of our own privileges and imaginative geographies.

Overview of Chapters, Research Questions, and Project Contribution

The next chapters in this dissertation take up a series of related questions around immigrants' settlement in Clarkston with attention to the role of local government, other institutions, and immigrants' and refugees' own experiences.

In chapter II, I address two main questions: first, how do institutions contribute to refugee reception? and second, how have institutions changed the representation of refugees and immigrants in new and emerging gateways? This research draws attention to site-specific effects and the importance of the local scale for refugees and immigrants.

In chapter III, I explore neoliberal multicultural discourses by the local state, particularly the Clarkston City Council. I ask: How did local government in Clarkston come to adopt a new image and narrative of the town as welcoming to refugees, and what have been the effects of this adoption? Thus, this chapter explores representations of refugees by various members of the local state within Clarkston and what the implications for the local state and for refugees have been.

In chapter IV, I ask: how do refugees and immigrants experience place? I use interpretive phenomenological analysis to highlight the everyday experiences of five immigrants in Clarkston. These interviews shed light on how individuals engage in meaning making through relational experiences and how specific places become important to one's identity. I draw on intersectionality to highlight the complexities of race, gender, and status for identity and representations. Within this chapter, I explore how Clarkston's immigration history has led to spaces of welcoming and inclusion.

In chapter V, I offer concluding remarks about this research. Within Clarkston, non-profit organizations, refugee agencies, institutions, and the local state have worked together (for the most part) to bring refugees and immigrants to Clarkston for the last two decades. Representations often market depictions of the city and its citizens as welcoming and content, but there is much work to be done by the local state. Immigration to the South will continue—and

will increase—thus, it is important for geographers, social scientists, and policy writers to understand the intersections of meaning and identity for immigrants.

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Chapter II. Atlanta, Georgia: Institutionalized Reception - How Representation of Refugees Changed Immigrant Receptivity⁷

As global events draw attention to refugees around the world, it becomes ever more important and timely for geographers to pay scholarly attention to refugee issues. Despite historical federal immigration jurisdiction shaping migration channels, new immigrant pathways following urban growth patterns in the U.S. South as well as the devolution of immigration policing powers have led to site-specific effects (Coleman, 2012; Varsanyi et al., 2012). Within geography, recent work has highlighted the complicated nature of resettlement and its multiscale effects, particularly drawing attention to the multiscale impacts of immigration federalism at the local scale (Varsanyi, 2010; Varsanyi et al. 2012; Furuseth et al., 2015). For example, Varsanyi's (2010) work details how cities and local governments have begun to create immigration policy at the local scale to address gaps in federal reform. Varsanyi et al.'s (2012) and Varsanyi's (2010) work finds that devolution of federal governmental authority creates more variation in local immigration policy, which may lead to policies that better fit the local populations; however, these localized immigration policies and their enforcement may lead to community and individual exclusion. Furuseth et al.'s (2015) research builds on these findings, arguing that the contexts of receptivity and spaces of exclusion and inclusion are created not only through policy but also through the localized response: neighborhoods are the product of many multiscale forces.

⁷ This chapter has been accepted for publication and is included here with minor changes as Ryniker, S. (ND). Atlanta, Georgia: Institutionalized Reception - How Representation of Refugees Changed Immigrant Receptivity. In McDaniel, P. and Rodriguez, D. (Eds.) *Changing Integration and Receptivity Experiences in Immigrant Gateway Metropolitan Regions in the Twenty-First Century*. Lexington Books.

To better understand these site-specific effects, refugee studies and the field of critical refugee studies provide us with a way to analyze the current day spatialities of neoliberal and global processes. Refugees are a window into marginalization and international relations. A refugee, categorized under the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, is “defined as one who is outside the borders of her nation-state due to violence or persecution, and displaced from what has become the centered norm of citizenship, or ‘placement’, within her country” (Hyndman and Walton-Roberts 2000, p. 247). As Espiritu (2014, pp. 10-11) observes,

[Refugee studies] begins with the premise that the refugee, who inhabits a condition of statelessness, radically calls into question the established principles of the nation-state and the idealized goal of inclusion and recognition within it. Critical refugee studies thus flip the script, positing that it is the existence of the displaced refugee, rather than the rooted citizen, that provides the clue to a new politics and model of international relations.

In other words, the concept of the refugee is a direct product of the nation-state model; by the very definition, refugees are linked to state-centered apparatuses for categorization and placement within a host society. However, geographers and other social scientists have critiqued this perspective, citing transnationalism and technological advancements as arguments for the shift of conventional immigration studies away from the nation-state model (Hyndman and Walton-Roberts, 2000; Appadurai, 1996; Hall, 1996). Recent work turns away from nation-state citizenship models to address questions of belonging, inequalities, and multiculturalism through the lens of ethnic citizenship (Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad, 2008). Within the last two decades, scholars have begun to focus more on refugee life after resettlement within host societies

(Ehrkamp and Nagel, 2014; Hardwick and Meacham, 2005; Brun, 2001), including the role of refugees as agents in place-making initiatives and community development (Schuch and Wang, 2015). Similarly, my work builds on previous scholarship that examines refugees at the local and individual scales to explore questions of belonging and power relations as they form through everyday social processes and local state performance. Refugees illustrate the complicated nature of human beings—they are not simply “victims of their situation,” but agents with agency, identities, and opinions. In addition, a localized perspective demonstrates the complicated multiscalar processes that occur through daily life.

Within this chapter, I group refugees and immigrants within the same category, although I recognize how different these terms are. I do this for several reasons. First, although the political definitions may be different, many migrants, regardless of status, struggle and emigrate for similar reasons. Second, refugees and immigrants often face similar issues after their arrival in the United States, such as racism, classism, and language barriers. Third, some of the refugees interviewed for this research chose not to use the term “refugees,” to describe themselves at all, but rather “New Americans,” because “refugee” held negative connotations and “New American” held hope for the future.

This chapter addresses two main questions: 1) how do institutions contribute to refugee reception? and 2) how have institutions changed the representation of refugees and immigrants in new and emerging gateways? To answer these questions, this chapter draws from geographic literature on immigrant integration, reception, and place branding. This chapter positions the Atlanta metropolitan statistical area (MSA) within the context of immigration and receptivity processes in the U.S. South, including branding initiatives by institutions. Next, the policy and practices of two case study cities within the Atlanta MSA, Atlanta and Clarkston, are examined.

Within these two cities, institutions, such as the city government and nonprofit refugee organizations, have led to the increased warmth and reception of immigrants. The chapter then proceeds with a discussion of findings followed by a conclusion and suggestions for future research.

Background and Context

Traditionally, immigrants arrived in the United States through gateways like New York City or San Francisco, through places like New York's Ellis Island on the East Coast, or San Francisco's Angel Island on the West Coast. With the addition of new modes of transportation and different pathways of migration, new destination settlement areas have emerged, particularly in the Southeastern United States. In recent decades, scholars have included the South in discussions of new destinations for migration and immigrant processes. Within the South, cities and local governments have taken diverse pathways for resettlement as there is an array of history, politics, and traditions, leading to site-specific effects (Coleman, 2012). Writing on the importance of attention to the local scale, McDaniel (2018, p. 256) argues, "...different places throughout the region have distinct responses and reactions to nascent demographic and cultural change brought about by broader processes of national and global-scale economic restructuring and neoliberal policy decisions." Thus, scholars must examine neoliberal processes at the local scale to address how national and global processes are implemented and possibly contested by immigrants and stakeholders.

Geographic scale, or the spatial extent of a phenomenon, is a critical framing device in geography for addressing both the abstract and real places as well as, "how people conceptualize and represent the geography of their lives" (Miller, 2000, p. 33; Silvey, 2006; Marston, 2000).

This tool allows scholars to draw attention to dominant scale discourses, uneven power relations, and where social practices take place. Throughout this chapter, I use “local scale” as a methodological device for examining distinct dynamic socio-political frameworks and individual agency deployed during everyday experiences. It is important to note, particularly within immigration studies, that multiscale processes exist and affect the local scale and vice versa, and as scales are socially constructed, they are contested and continuously reshaped (Silvey, 2006).

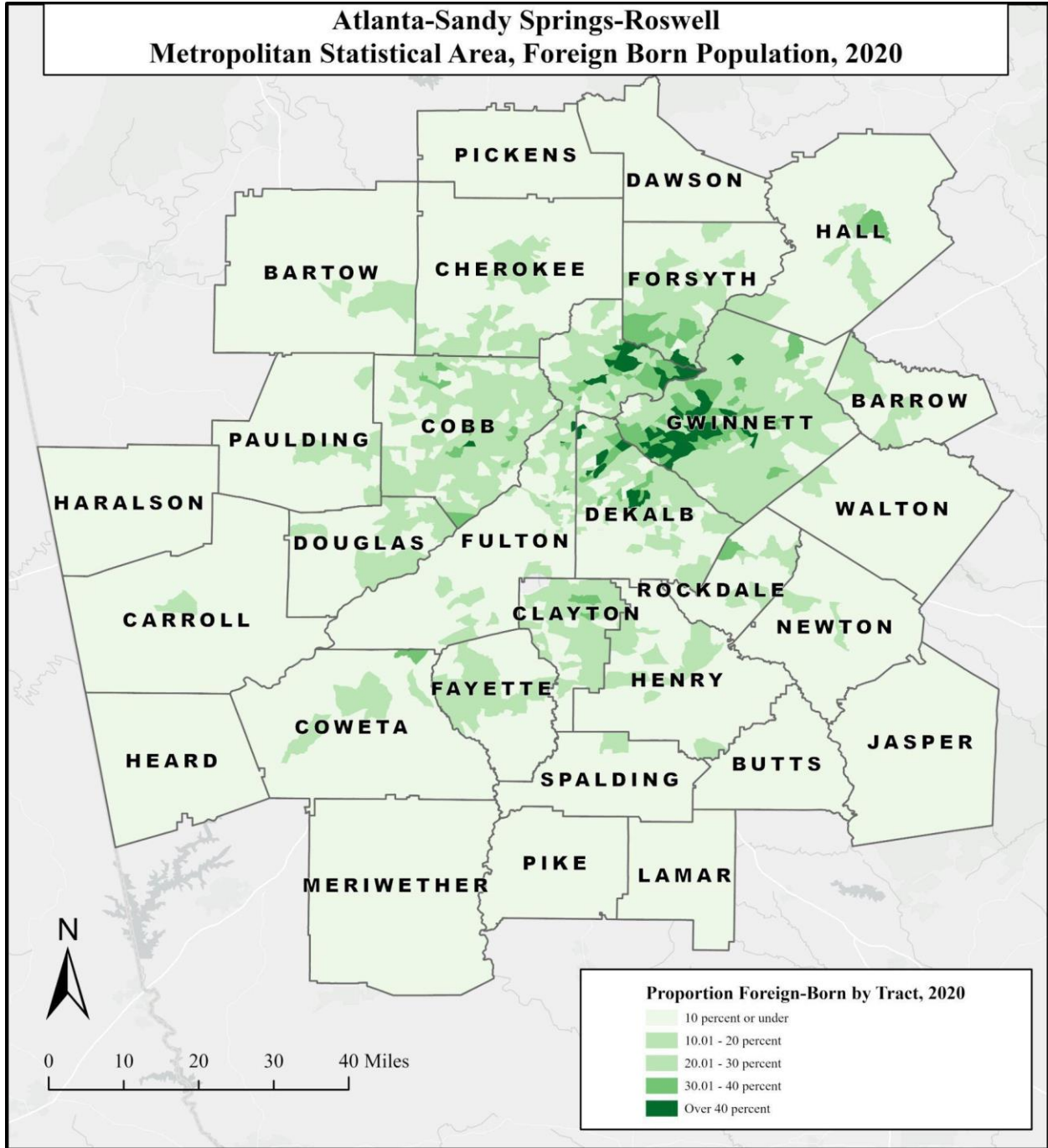
In the last twenty years, the Atlanta MSA has grown as a major-emerging immigrant gateway (Singer, 2015). For most of the 1900s, major-emerging gateways typically had smaller immigrant populations yet experienced massive immigrant growth during one of the last three decades of the 20th century, as well as a higher immigrant population than the national average since 1990 (Singer, 2015). Atlanta is not only considered a major-emerging new immigrant gateway (Singer, 2015; McDaniel, 2018), but also a “21st-century gateway” (Singer, et al., 2008) and a “Hispanic hypergrowth” metro area (Suro and Singer, 2002). Furthermore, there are also multiscale contexts often at odds with one another. Both case studies within the Atlanta MSA, for instance, exist within a federal and state immigration law and policy system that is often unfriendly towards immigrants. In addition, these local governments face tensions within their municipalities about their welcoming policies and initiatives. Since the 1960s, Atlanta, once known as, “the city too busy to hate,” has fostered a legacy built on diversity and civil rights, and global economic development (Dameron and Murphy, 1997, p. 43; McDaniel, 2018). This trend follows similar pathways of cities branding their representations of neoliberal multiculturalism by drawing attention to colorblind diversity, downtown revitalizations, and/or arts projects, and away from minority and class issues (Ryniker, 2022; Hashimoto, 2021; Florida, 2002).

However, while Atlanta has reached major immigrant gateway status, over ninety percent

of refugees and immigrants are settling outside of the city of Atlanta (McDaniel, 2018; Altaher et al., 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2020). Within the Atlanta MSA, they are settling in a few counties: Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, Hall, and Gwinnett (McDaniel, 2018). Among these areas, most refugees are resettled in the city of Clarkston (Kim and Bozarth, 2021), within DeKalb County (see Table 2.1).

Beginning in the 1990s, the city of Clarkston resettled over 40,000 refugees with over sixty different nationalities (Kim and Bozarth, 2021). Refugee resettlement agencies initially selected Clarkston as a resettlement site for Vietnam refugees due to its location, transportation access, availability of low-skilled jobs, and low-cost housing (Kim and Bozarth, 2021; Leymarie, 2014). Today, Clarkston is home to about 20,000 individuals according to the 2020 census. The city's refugees settle in crowded apartment complexes and begin their New American journeys among other refugees, immigrants, and long-time residents. Some start businesses, some bus miles to work at poultry farms and back, and some join the city council. Together, a comparison of these two cities draws attention to different pathways for integration and policies of refugee resettlement and within the same MSA. In the next section, I draw on recent scholarship on immigration to Southern cities, integration, receptivity, and branding to inform my findings in Atlanta and Clarkston.

Figure 2.1. Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell MSA, Foreign Born Population, 2020



Map of the Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell MSA showing foreign-born population census tract total population. Data source: 2020 American Community Survey 5-year estimates (Table B05002), U.S. Census Bureau. Map created by Elliott DeGuilme and Sarah Ryniker.

Table 2.1. Atlanta MSA's population in 2020

| | Population | % White | % Black | % Asian | % Hispanic | % Foreign born |
|-------------------|------------|---------|---------|---------|------------|----------------|
| Clayton County | 287,560 | 15.1% | 69.8% | 5.1% | 13.2% | 13.0% |
| Cobb County | 756,653 | 57.1% | 27.6% | 5.5% | 13.0% | 15.6% |
| DeKalb County | 755,287 | 33.5% | 53.3% | 6.2% | 8.4% | 16.0% |
| Fulton County | 1,051,550 | 43.4% | 43.6% | 7.3% | 7.2% | 13.4% |
| ☞ Gwinnett County | 926,414 | 45.4% | 28.1% | 12.1% | 21.2% | 25.3% |
| Hall County | 201,434 | 80.5% | 7.2% | 1.9% | 28.5% | 16.5% |
| City of Atlanta | 497,642 | 40.4% | 49.8% | 4.8% | 4.9% | 8.0% |
| City of Clarkston | 12,747 | 9.7% | 60.2% | 25.8% | 3.8% | 52.5% |
| Atlanta MSA | 5,947,008 | 51.7% | 34.2% | 6.1% | 10.7% | 13.9% |
| Total (State) | 10,516,579 | 57.2% | 31.6% | 4.1% | 9.6% | 10.2% |

Data from U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

Contextualizing Immigration to Southern Cities

Over the last few decades, domestic and international migration to the Sunbelt has been on the rise due in part to deindustrialization and post-industrial regional economic shifts in the U.S. This has increased pathways of migration to urban centers in the Southeast, like Atlanta and Nashville (McDaniel, 2021; Winders, 2013; Smith and Winders, 2008; Winders, 2006).

McDaniel (2018) argues that the local context can be just as important as the national context for discussions of immigrant integration and receptivity. Several Southern cities such as Atlanta, Nashville, and Clarkston have created innovative programs, policies, and practices that address immigration and changing economic landscapes due to shifting populations. At the local scale, rights are actively produced, contested, and reproduced (Mitchell, 2003). It is at this scale where community is created; where who has a right to the city and to which parts of the city are accessible. This scale is also where negotiations of what is public take place; within local and public spaces, there can be much disagreement about who belongs and should be included, and groups such as immigrants, women, and teenagers must claim space through legitimate or illegal means (Ehrkamp, 2013; Mitchell, 2003).

With the increase in population and economic growth, several cities, particularly those outside traditional immigrant gateways, have begun branding projects centered on the revitalization of downtowns and main streets. Some developed pro-immigrant programs, such as immigrant entrepreneurship initiatives to bolster their economic development; scholarship demonstrates that immigrants can help revitalize downtown districts (Huang and Liu, 2019; Winders, 2011). These projects, including Atlanta's and Clarkston's, use welcoming policies that center on diversity to attract economic growth (McDaniel, 2018). In Atlanta, recent projects have featured immigrants: a public art piece was created in 2016 through collaboration with Plaza

Fiesta, the Latin American Association, Freedom University, and the Latino Community Fund (Wilson, 2020). The Nonprofit, We Love Buford Highway, works to spread awareness of multicultural traditions and preserve the multicultural identity of immigrant businesses along the busy Atlanta highway (Mission and Vision, 2022). In 2014, Clarkston's newly signed welcoming resolution focused on economic prosperity for all residents and included Clarkston's goals as "enhancing its cultural fabric, economic growth, global competitiveness and overall prosperity for all individuals..." (Admin, 2014). While many of these projects have led to an increase in economic growth and revitalization throughout downtown areas, they have also received opposition from some residents and state politicians.

Immigrant Integration and Receptivity by Institutions

Recent scholarship draws attention to how institutions shape immigrant integration and how cities, and the institutions within them, represent immigrants (Winders, 2012; McDaniel, 2018). At the local scale, a variety of institutions may impact integration and receptivity, including the local government, but also educational institutions, faith-based institutions, and other cultural institutions (McDaniel et al., 2019a; Nagel and Ehrkamp, 2016). A community's reception of particular groups may influence inclusion for other groups (McDaniel et al., 2019a). The representation and integration of minorities, such as women or LGBTQ individuals, may influence belonging and integration for other communities within a municipality. These representations are implemented and deployed throughout the state, especially the local state, and related, state-sanctioned institutions such as NGOs.

The local government, a prominent institution in immigrant integration processes, plays a significant role in the integration and receptivity of immigrants within a city. Because the local

government can impact receptivity of immigrants for the entire city, it is critical scholars understand how local organizations craft and deploy integration and receptivity policies. Broadhead (2020) finds local immigration policy discourse falls into two categories: migration status and equalities. These discourses can isolate immigrants or draw attention to shared ways of life. Similarly, McDaniel et al. (2019a) highlight two ways local governments influence integration and receptivity: through organizing individuals and strengthening community bonds. As McDaniel et al. (2019a, pp. 1144-1145) explain,

A city's economic and business environment may be warmly receptive to immigrant settlement. Meanwhile, the same city's political leaders may be mute on the subject or outright cold toward the idea of immigrant settlement and integration, let alone welcome. The latter would make any policy formation activities around immigrant integration all the more difficult. Moreover, different areas within a city may be more or less receptive toward newcomer settlement and integration at different times.

Local governments must pay attention to existing levels of receptivity when creating integration initiatives and policies (McDaniel et al., 2019b).

Scholarly attention to immigration policy at the local scale has shed light on how multiscalar and complex immigration policy is (McDaniel et al., 2019b; Pottie-Sherman, 2019). When there is a mismatch between federal and local policies and their implementation, tensions between stakeholders arise (McDaniel et al., 2019b). While “a city is unable to do much about federal immigration laws and policies, even those that work to the detriment of thriving communities, or do anything about official immigration status of members of its community,” (McDaniel et al., 2019b, p. 1162) there are many aspects that cities and regions can make a difference within during the immigration process, such as through welcoming policy initiatives

or through branding strategies. Local immigration policies may aid in immigrant receptivity despite exclusionary policy at the federal level (Pottie-Sherman, 2019). This is evident within different cities in the Atlanta MSA, where local government policy has led to immigrant inclusion while state and federal policies may be unfriendly and unwelcome to immigrants (Ryniker, 2022; McDaniel, 2018). Overall, immigrant integration, “may be a smoother process in places exhibiting warmer receptivity compared with immigrant integration in a place with cool or mixed receptivity” (McDaniel et al., 2019a, p. 1145). Within the Atlanta MSA, cities and municipalities use different strategies for integration and receptivity but share a common goal of immigrant inclusion into local communities.

The Role of Place Branding in Immigrant Integration and Receptivity

One apparatus of integration and receptivity utilized by municipalities is place branding, particularly city branding. Within this chapter, I conceptualize branding using Masuda and Bookman’s (2018, p. 166) definition:

the symbolic or material practices of the state and/or private cultural producers who aim to enhance the appeal of local areas within the city to attract investment, promote consumption, reduce criminality, or to achieve social and cultural aims such as invoking civic pride.

Apparent in this conceptualization is the plurality of uses and stakeholders for city branding; there may be different stakeholders who use the same city branding for different purposes or competing goals. As branding creates dynamic relationships and a civic consciousness between consumers and a place, there may be a formal brand created by the municipality where local authorities disseminate official formal and informal communications to the community

(Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009). In addition, there may also be alternative brands within the same city. Within Masuda and Bookman's (2018, p. 172) research on Vancouver's branding initiatives, they note how branding often includes multiple actors creating a specific atmosphere or "vibe" and contributing to a specific performance through a variety of practices.

Bookman and Masuda (2018) call for more geographic attention to branding as it is a particularly useful theoretical framework for understanding power relationships for immigrants in neoliberal urban spaces. Using this framework, this chapter draws on branding as a powerful discursive tool that has economic, cultural, and social implications within cities and regions, particularly for immigrants and their integration and receptivity.

Branding works by triggering one's imaginative geography of place. The concept of imaginative geography is derived from Edward Said's (1995, p. 55) work, where identity construction situates what is 'theirs' and 'ours' in space. By inventing a "fictive place" as Murray and Overton (2016, p. 2) deem it, including narratives of a place's culture, history, and environment, the place may attract capital (Bookman and Masuda, 2018). These metaphorical spaces create a sense of place, where different publics are negotiated and debated between groups, including immigrants (Staheli et al., 2009). They utilize place-related meanings which create a sense of place attachment to a specific locale (Lindstedt, 2011). It is through these images and perceptions created and managed by the city that representations of refugees and the city itself are circulated.

Frequently, branding is utilized as a government strategy to increase economic growth, development, and contribute to neoliberalization of the city (Masuda and Bookman, 2018; McDaniel, 2018; Kavaratzis, 2004). Cities such as Atlanta, Clarkston, and Nashville, have begun to use immigrants within their place branding techniques, particularly for economic growth

(Ryniker, 2022; McDaniel, 2018; Collett, 2014). Welcoming policies are a common example of city branding, where they also serve a dual purpose for economic development and humanizing immigrants through integration (Winders, 2011; McDaniel, 2018; Pottie-Sherman, 2018). A shared humanity strategy seeks to humanize immigrants and long-term residents through common ground and community, whereas an economic strategy may stress economic success, labor opportunities, and global opportunities (Winders, 2011). An example of welcoming branding is Detroit's Global Detroit initiative. The city paired with a regional foundation to boost the city's economic development and immigrant-inclusive goals through local policy (Tobocman, 2021). Within urban centers, branding and welcoming policies may lead to increased feelings of inclusion and participation in the local economy for immigrants as well as an economic boost for the city.

While municipal branding is often seen in a positive light, scholars also draw attention to how branding reinforces discourses that create boundaries of who is "in place" and who is "out of place," spurring racialization and discrimination (Bookman and Masuda, 2018; Miraftab, 2012; Cresswell, 2002). This aspect of branding is particularly important among discussions of the geographies of inclusion and exclusion. Recent scholarship on branding has drawn attention to these issues through discussions on who has a right to the city (Harvey, 2008; Lefebvre, 1968). Lefebvre (1968, p. 158) summarizes the idea as a "demand... [for] a transformed and renewed access to urban life." Harvey (2008) adds that the right to the city is a collective power. This framework is particularly useful to draw attention to the struggles for space and place refugees and immigrants face within communities as well as the methods of resistance and contention. For example, within the South, Southern hospitality has often been linked to the exclusion of specific groups, including immigrants, non-Protestant, and LGBTQ populations

(Nagel, 2016). Those who represent the opposite of Southern evangelical views often face the most wrath: they are not accepted in public spaces, left out of community events, and state legislatures have proposed anti-Sharia and anti-immigrant laws (Nagel, 2016; Ehrkamp and Nagel, 2014). Tsavdaroglou and Kaika (2022) explore the multiple ways refugees in Athens, Greece, resist city-wide neoliberal urban policies by claiming the right to the center of the city and not just state-run refugee camps. Ehrkamp's (2013) work on Turkish migrants in Germany highlights how young immigrant women resist stereotypes and gender and religious expectations by challenging social norms, even in small ways, such as going to public events and using city sidewalks. In addition, as a tool of resistance or activism by minorities, alternative discourses may be used within the city to amplify a wider array of voices (Masuda and Bookman 2018). Other scholarship demonstrates how minority stakeholders engaging in place-branding and meaning-making can compete with mainstream discourses by developing cultural coalitions which cut across community and business interests (Farhat, 2019).

Further, the use of multiculturalism in branding can draw attention to—or draw attention away from—contributions by minority community members, particularly those which seem to celebrate diversity:

Public art, cultural installations and signage, and event-based strategies such as festivals that engage participants in culinary spectacles and artisan merchandise-for-purchase work to co-create a sanitized and faux-historical ethnic image that appeals to sentiments of 'multiculturalism' by embracing diversity only in so far as the food is tasty and the costumes are colourful. In this process of ethnic distillation, complex cultural histories and accomplishments are reduced to those aspects that are most easily narrated or digested into simple narratives of cultural 'heritage', where the historical plurality of

cultural experiences are homogenized and instrumentalized, while real people's histories of oppression and rights-based achievements are omitted." (Masuda and Bookman, 2018, p. 176).

In other words, branding distills certain aspects of cultural difference to produce commercialized images of multiculturalism that attract mainstream consumers, and sometimes at the detriment of refugees and immigrants. These events may appear to draw positive attention and community reception for diverse cultures, but they can also create silences. Local leaders and municipalities must be aware of the complex cultural histories of their residents when engaging in branding. These scholarly debates of inclusion, reception, and integration lead to one main question: who should have a right to the city (Masuda and Bookman, 2018; Harvey, 2008; Lefebvre, 1968)? They bring to the surface tensions and contradictions over the use of space: within cities, certain groups, including the local government, may profit while other groups suffer and are erased from public view. These questions of integration and place-making should be ever more important to human geographers, sociologists, and urban planners within the South as immigrants and other minorities settle and alter existing sociospatial relationships within cities. In the next section, I detail the research methods used in this chapter to explore questions of inclusion, reception, and integration within the Atlanta MSA.

Methodology

In this work, I use a post-structural theory to conceptualize subjectivity, representation, and discourse. This theory posits subjectivity at the forefront, where meaning is produced through discourse and relation. Within poststructuralism, "there is no fixed, unified, biological, essential or pre-discursive self. Instead, human subjects are born into language, culture and

discourse” (Filax et al., 2005, p. 82). Post-structuralists see discourse as fluid and contextual, thus constantly evolving (Gillen and Petersen, 2005). Critical and feminist poststructuralists are concerned with power and the social construction of knowledge and situate questions of equality and the empowerment of oppressed people at the forefront (Lawson, 2000).

To gather and analyze research materials, the main methods used in this study are ethnography and discourse analysis. Ethnography, as both a process and a product, serves to narrate cultural knowledge of a particular place and peoples (Britzman, 1995). Over the last five years, I have collected data through ethnographic methods, including participant observation, conducting interviews, and gathering archival materials and news materials. Specifically, I collected 222 archived Clarkston City Council Meetings from 2006 to 2022 as well as Atlanta City Council records from 2005-2022 and compiled them into a data set using Excel. In addition, the author attended several city council meetings and various other city and county-wide meetings between 2020 and 2022. I visited Clarkston multiple times and participated in different activities, such as volunteering to teach English twice a week through Catholic Charities of Atlanta during 2020 and 2021. I conducted eleven in-depth semi-structured interviews with city council members, nonprofit (or nongovernmental organization) representatives, refugees, and community leaders (a 29.28 percent response rate compared to the overall number of interview invitations).

In addition to ethnography, I used discourse analysis to analyze the data I collected (Gillen and Petersen, 2005). Discourse analysis can be applied to “...any language as it occurs, whatever the channel or mode” (Gillen and Petersen, 2005, p. 146). Discourse analysis draws attention to multiple layers of context and meaning within certain phrases. Barnes and Duncan (2013) argue that we must unpack the social context, the institutional setting, the genre, and the

historical context of the piece to fully explore representations and meaning within discourse analysis. To do this within my study, I included several distinct types of data and different stakeholders. These methods helped uncover different representations and themes within this work.

I pair discourse analysis and ethnography together to create a more holistic account of the representations at hand: within poststructuralism, using these methods of analysis can help account for silences and the “partiality of language” (Britzman, 1995, p. 230). Using these methods, I identified shared themes, such as the city as a welcoming place, unequal rights, and multiscalar politics. In the next section, I will discuss these themes within the context of the Atlanta MSA and within Atlanta and Clarkston as case studies for how these cities processed immigrant receptivity in similar and unexpected ways.

Changing Representations in Atlanta: Integration and Receptivity through Welcoming Initiatives

Discourses within the city of Atlanta and shared by the local government reinforce themes of equality and equity, through phrases such as “the cradle of the civil rights movement” and a city “too busy to hate” (Dameron and Murphy, 1997, p. 43). And yet, equal rights are not dispersed equally or fairly across the city, particularly for refugees and immigrants. Atlanta’s ethnic makeup is evolving: what was once a primarily Black and White city and metropolitan region is now a cosmopolitan hub with immigrants from all over the world (Winders, 2011). But at what cost? And for whom? Within this section, I provide an overview of Atlanta and Clarkston’s recent immigrant-integration policies and then analyze the local state’s responses to recent immigrant-related events to compare the two city’s policies on immigrant integration and

receptivity. While both cities exist within the Atlanta MSA and share a broader state and federal immigration context, they have taken vastly different paths for immigrant integration and immigrant receptivity.

In several immigrant gateways, cities and regions have spurred integration and inclusion through their use of sanctuary and welcoming city policies. Inherently political, the concept of “sanctuary city” implies a level of resistance towards federal immigration laws (McDaniel, 2018). On the contrary, as a less politicized term, “welcoming cities” strive to create inclusive policies and practices where everyone can prosper (McDaniel, 2018; Zúñiga and Hernández-León, 2005). Commonly, this term references immigrants, but local leaders use this discourse broadly to encompass all residents. For example, at an Atlanta town hall meeting, Former Mayor Lance Bottoms declared that Atlanta was a “welcoming city... [to] people who are looking for a better life, whatever label you want to attach to that” (Ruch, 2019). In another example, as part of the response to help recent immigrants become more familiar with worker’s rights, the city of Atlanta signed an agreement to join the Department of Labor’s Employment, Education, and Outreach coalition. In the 2018 State of the City address, Bottoms alluded to the coalition to make Atlanta more of a welcoming city for everyone (WXIA, 2018). At a different public event, Bottoms said, “Atlanta is a welcoming city for people of all faiths and backgrounds. Our diversity is our strongest asset” (Saporta, 2018). Here, welcoming discourses are synonymous with diversity and speak to discussions of inclusion and belonging for all.

When used by municipalities and institutions, welcoming discourses generally use positive language and imagery, as seen in 2013, when an initiative was passed in Atlanta to become a Welcoming City. By the summer of 2014, Former Mayor Kasim Reed had convened the Welcoming Atlanta Working Group, which included key stakeholders in the Atlanta

immigrant and refugee community, to gather recommendations to make Atlanta a more welcoming city for foreign-born Atlantans. About this new initiative, Reed said in a press release,

Atlanta's diversity and vitality has been built on the strength of immigrant populations that have come to enjoy new freedoms and opportunities. In partnership with Welcoming America, the City of Atlanta will continue to work on welcoming, including, and supporting the economic and social contributions of immigrants to enhance our city's cultural fabric, economic growth, and global competitiveness (City of Atlanta, 2013).

Following this, Christopher Sabatini, Senior Director of Policy at the Americas Society/Council of the Americas, continued in the press release, "We are excited to see Atlanta join a growing community of cities that are actively welcoming immigrants and their contributions to boost economic growth and ensure a more humane treatment and inclusion of newcomers" (City of Atlanta, 2013). Through both discourses, there are clear links to the inclusion and representation of immigrants for economic gain. These circulating discourses show representations of refugees to perpetuate the moral obligations of the host society and the economic value of refugees to the region.

However, there are limitations to discourses of positivity in rhetoric; welcoming discourses rarely benefit everyone in the municipality. Further, Atlanta's renewed commitment to a welcoming feel for all came at a time when conversations of welcoming and sanctuary cities were entering mainstream political discourse. During 2017, President Trump was quite vocal about immigrants and asylum seekers at the national scale, drawing attention to immigrant issues through various speeches and policies with an overall cold approach towards immigrants. In response, Mayor Reed released a statement: "Atlanta is proud to be a welcoming city. We are a

community which has stood up for the civil and human rights of every person and we will not waver now...As Mayor, [Atlanta] will remain open and welcoming to all” (Reed, 2017).

Immigration discourse continued to make national headlines during this era. In early 2017, Trump temporarily banned immigrants from seven Muslim nations and blocked 11 individuals from entering the United States upon arrival at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport through an executive order. Reed (2017) responded by referencing safety and public policy in the following press release:

...it is evident that President Trump’s executive order barring refugees and migrants from several Muslim countries has already caused chaos, confusion and irreparable harm...These orders promote dangerous public policy, eroding the trust between public safety agencies and the communities they serve, which will undermine public safety in the City of Atlanta and across our country. Our city stands shoulder to shoulder with those who have been unfairly targeted as a result of this executive order.

Here, these discourses underscore concepts of safety and trust between the people and their government. They attempt to reinforce equality and inclusion among immigrants and Atlanta residents and serve to influence immigrant receptivity in the city.

During the same airport encounter, when pushed to declare Atlanta a sanctuary city by the public, Reed responded,

If people want to compare a sanctuary city to a welcoming city, I’m happy to have that conversation, but I challenge anyone to identify a city in the Southeast that has done more to be welcoming to immigrants and refugees than the City of Atlanta. We shouldn’t be baited into arguments over sanctuary cities versus welcoming cities when there is a real,

genuine, authentic threat to the constitutional rights of people in the United States.
(Henry, 2017).

In this response, Reed draws attention to what the city has done for immigrants and toward federal immigration policies. His aversion to discussing welcoming cities versus sanctuary cities may stem from the inability to make these distinctions at a local scale: in 2009, Georgia outlawed sanctuary cities, and in 2016, a Georgia law further required local governments to certify that they were cooperating with federal immigration officials in order to get state funding (Redmond, 2017). State laws such as these and more around the country have made it difficult for local governments to pass immigrant-friendly policies. In addition, these discourses draw attention to the complicated and multiscalar politics surrounding immigration.

After Reed's administration, Atlanta's policies regarding immigrants remained supportive. In response to announcements that federal immigration raids would be conducted in Atlanta, Former Mayor Bottoms tweeted support for refugees and drew attention to the Southeast Immigration Freedom Initiative (SIFI), an organization that provides legal representation to detained immigrants (Redmon, 2018). In 2019, Bottoms halted the city's policy for detaining immigrants for the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in exchange for fees (Ruch, 2019). Bottoms argued, "I signed [the executive order] because I did not feel that the city of Atlanta should be complicit in the family separation that was happening at the [Mexican] border" (Ruch, 2019). These policies and positions are reflective of the moves that local governments can make to resist or contend with state and federal immigration policies. They also illustrate the complicated, multiscalar nature of immigration policy, and how the results of federal policy are encountered in everyday life.

In addition to political action through local governments, multiple organizations work in collaboration with local governments to support refugees and immigrants in the Atlanta region. A prominent example is the nonprofit Welcoming America in Decatur, Georgia, which helps develop independent city legislation and has also contributed to the growth of welcoming cities through its policy guidelines and economic support. For example, Welcoming America offers ‘certification’ to cities so that they can claim the title of ‘welcoming city’ (Welcoming America, 2022). While no cities or municipalities in Georgia are currently Certified Welcoming through Welcoming America, several cities, counties, and nonprofits are designated as part of Welcoming America’s welcoming network (See Table 2.2 below for details).

Table 2.2. Georgia Organizations and Municipalities in the Welcoming America Network 2022

| Title and Place | Type |
|---|------------------|
| City of Doraville | Local government |
| City of East Point | Local government |
| City of Stockbridge | Local government |
| City of Brookhaven | Local government |
| City of Norcross | Local government |
| City of Decatur | Local government |
| City of Clarkston | Local government |
| City of Avondale Estates | Local government |
| Welcoming Atlanta, Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, Atlanta | Local government |
| Athens-Clarke County | Local government |
| Gwinnett County | Local government |
| Civic Georgia, Atlanta | Nonprofit |
| Coalition of Refugee Service Agencies, Atlanta | Nonprofit |
| Corners Outreach, Peachtree Corners | Nonprofit |
| Scottsdale Learning Center, Scottsdale | Nonprofit |
| Latin American Association, Atlanta | Nonprofit |
| CDF Action, Clarkston | Nonprofit |
| Latino LinQ, Atlanta | Nonprofit |

The data in this table is from Welcoming America’s global network of nonprofit organizations and government members.

In 2017, Welcoming America partnered with the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta and other entities to create the One Region Initiative (McDaniel et al., 2017; McDaniel et

al., 2018; McDaniel et al., 2019b). According to the Executive Director of Welcoming America, Rachel Peric, the main goal of the project was, “to make Metro Atlanta the first major metropolitan area to adopt a regional welcoming plan” (One Region Initiative, 2021, p. 2). On the front cover of the plan, the organization describes its motivation as, “creating an inclusive metro Atlanta region in which all people, including immigrants and refugees have the opportunity to reach their greatest potential...” (One Region Initiative, 2021, p. 1). As part of the official welcoming plan, the organization plans to provide services that promote citizenship and immigration responses as well as support immigrant leaders through civic engagement programs. Within the “Municipality Commitment,” section, the representatives of the local government will, “engage both immigrants and receiving community members, as their voices are critical to developing a welcoming agenda” (One Region Initiative, 2021, p. 1). After the launch of the recommendations plan in August 2018, the One Region member municipalities (Atlanta, Brookhaven, Clarkston, Decatur, Doraville, East Point, Norcross, and Stockbridge) have begun implementing aspects of the plan and updating the broader One Region Initiative about how the implementation has unfolded at quarterly steering committee meetings. In early 2022, the leadership of the One Region Initiative transitioned from Welcoming America (although based in Decatur in the Atlanta metro area, Welcoming America is a global nonprofit with a broader focus) to Corners Outreach (a local Atlanta region-focused organization).

In addition to policies, several community organizations have sponsored events in support of refugees and immigrants which further drew attention to the city’s diversity and goals for inclusion, integration, and receptivity. In 2018, the Atlanta Rotary Club created a new Jordanian initiative: the organization vowed to raise money for Syrian refugees in Jordan (Saporta, 2018). This organization has worked to foster connections abroad, including

welcoming Dina Kavar, Jordan’s ambassador to the United States, to speak at a local Atlanta event and by partnering with international Rotary clubs to help displaced refugees create businesses (Saporta, 2018). In 2018, the city of Atlanta hosted an Iftar dinner to bring attention to Muslim cultural events and unify different religions within the city. At the time, Atlanta was the second city in the nation to host an Iftar dinner—the other was New York City (Saporta, 2018). Local events like these that are publicized on local news pages draw attention to refugees and immigrants and contribute to the “warm” receptivity of immigrants.

A community’s collective response can also be a measure of integration and receptivity within a city and region. Regarding the 2021 mass shooting of Asian immigrants at Atlanta massage parlors, the community responded with protests (Al Jazeera and News Agencies, 2021). Members of the protests drew attention to the intersectionality of the issue, highlighting that this was not just an Asian hate crime, but also one targeting women and low-income individuals. Several protest members held signs in support of the Black Lives Matter movement as well. In response to a question posed about why a Black Lives Matter Activist was present at the protest, one individual responded, “Atlanta is a civil rights city. This is what we do, we protect the people” (Hampton, 2021). These community-produced discourses are reflective of the city of Atlanta’s welcoming discourses, even using the exact same phrases at times. When horrific immigrant-related events create a shared community response and are portrayed on the local and national news, they may impact levels of reception for multiple groups and draw attention to various social movements, such as the Black Lives Matter movement in the instance above. These discourses can lead to higher levels of inclusion for minorities within cities and communities.

Over the last two decades, there has been a shift in immigrant-related discourses in

Atlanta and similar cities, particularly about public safety. For example, during the recent 2021 Atlanta mayoral election campaign, only one candidate, Sharon Gay, drew attention to welcoming policies in her campaign promises. Gay used welcoming discourses regarding public safety for everyone rather than just for immigrants and refugees. She said, “By working together, we can ensure that Atlanta is again a safe and welcoming city for all (Wheatley and Hurt, 2021). Recent federal immigration regulations have pushed illegal immigration enforcement onto the local state, even while municipalities push back. This demonstrates an important shift in geopolitics and social control at the local scale (Coleman, 2007).

Changing Representations in Clarkston: Integration and Receptivity through Welcoming Initiatives

Turning to Clarkston, the city’s municipal place-branding emphasizes both people and potential, expressly using representations of refugees and immigrants and their diversity and multiculturalism. However, the local government has been fully aware of the complicated nature of discourses surrounding refugee integration and reception within the city. In 2005, Clarkston published a community assessment and comprehensive plan for the next two decades that featured the integration of refugees and immigrants prominently but noted potential tensions around perceived differences. The plan states, “Household characteristics for Clarkston reflect the...successful integration of immigrant families into the community” (Georgia Department of Community Affairs, 2005, p. 2). The plan also details how refugees have settled into Clarkston and how their diversity may aid the city and region:

Due to the settlement of these refugees in Clarkston, the community’s ethnic mix is among the most diverse in Georgia. This diversity is one of the city’s major strengths, in

that it introduces a unique mixture of foods and goods, as well as faiths, customs and dress that cannot be easily duplicated in any other part of the Metro Atlanta region. This diversity creates the foundation for a distinct identity for Clarkston and an appeal to persons throughout the region seeking a rich multicultural community to visit or in which to live. (Georgia Department of Community Affairs, 2005, p. 5).

Regarding the possible tensions created by the influx of immigrants to Clarkston, the plan states, “While the community appears to have come together around its diversity, the next several years could see tensions arise over perceived differences between long-time residents and first-or second-generation residents” (Georgia Department of Community Affairs, 2005, p. 8). However, the assessment plan offered no solutions to the tensions.

Later, members of the Clarkston government circulated similar, yet more pessimistic representations of refugees in multiscalar discourses. In a 2010 report to the Committee on Foreign Relations of the United States Senate, former Mayor Swaney described Clarkston as, “a small community...that was shattered under the pressure of a broken refugee resettlement system” (U.S. Senate, 2010). Here, Clarkston’s refugees and the federal policies which brought them to town are characterized as strains on Clarkston. In this instance, this discourse was used to draw attention to the economic burden aspect of refugee resettlement. Discourses of refugees and immigrants in the Atlanta MSA during the early 2000s tend to depict refugees and immigrants as disruptive economic burdens to the region.

In 2017, the city of Clarkston passed a non-detainer policy in response to Former President Trump denouncing “sanctuary cities.” (I discuss this legislation in greater detail in Chapter III.) At the time, Clarkston’s Mayor, Ted Terry, said, “Clarkston wants to consider itself a city of refuge. We want to make sure there is as much comfort with still interacting with the

Clarkston police and not worrying about deportation” (Redmon, 2017). From the perspectives of the local police and federal institutions, this discourse situates the city as a place of refuge and safety, similar to discourses on public safety in Atlanta discussed above, but this discourse cannot and does not represent everyone in Clarkston.

In 2018, Clarkston’s city council voted to pursue certification as a welcoming city through Welcoming America. Through certification, the organization audited Clarkston’s policies to verify they supported immigrant communities. The welcoming certification audit was completed in January of 2020 (Krehbiel, 2020). The audit included multiple framework areas: government leadership, equitable access, civic engagement, connected communities, education, economic development, safe communities, receiving communities’ engagement, partnership, equity, diversity and inclusion, goal setting, monitoring, and impact. To receive a provisional certification, the city must have met 41 of 45 criteria. Clarkston met 31 of the 45 core criteria of the Welcoming Standard, losing points in government leadership, equitable access, and safe communities, which meant Clarkston had to create an action plan and complete the plan within six months of its approval (Krehbiel, 2020). It is unclear if Clarkston met this goal, however, they had still not received the Welcoming Certification as of October 2022. Clarkston’s pursuit to brand itself as a welcoming city through Welcoming America certification is an interesting case of a local state attempting to represent itself through the representation of its refugees. Its failure to achieve the certification situates the effort as part of a branding initiative and further illustrates the need for more research on the role the local state plays in representation.

Through institutions, organizations, and community-led events, the Atlanta MSA continues to evolve its policies and procedures on immigrants and refugees. While discourses characterize the region as welcoming, both organizations and municipal governments are

deliberate with their language and action in the decision to either feature refugees and immigrants prominently or craft a broad message of inclusion for all. Stakeholders use specific branding endeavors contingent on refugee representations of inclusion for economic development, whether refugees or immigrants are consulted.

Conclusion

Today, the Atlanta MSA leaders' vision for the region and its economic development are inclusive of refugee representation in terms of signaling inclusion through welcoming discourses. Still, city policies are often created and implemented without the contribution of refugees and immigrants. As different agents and institutions continue to struggle for resources in public, geographers and others should continue researching and highlighting the contribution of immigrants at the local scale (Staheli et al., 2009). This research is necessary as it addresses the changing integration and receptivity experiences of refugees within new immigrant destinations of the U.S. South. Further, more inclusion of refugees and immigrants into local politics leads to more overall inclusion and community as well as stronger refugee agency. These changes at the local scale have led to changes as we scale up. The annual "New Americans Celebration" at the Georgia State Capitol drew state-wide attention to immigrant-related bills including Georgia House Bill 120 on in-state tuition for DACA recipients, Senate Bill 29 on voting access, and House Bill 11 on maximizing Georgia's global talent, an initiative of Coalition of Refugee Service Agencies and the Business and Immigration for Georgia partnership, which passed unanimously (Advocacy Update, 2021).

This research addresses the importance of immigration research at the local scale and the critical roles municipalities and institutionalized reception can play in the welcoming of

refugees. For full integration and acceptance into the community, the needs of refugees and immigrants must be addressed by the local government. Further, municipalities can create inclusive environments by including minority voices within the city council and in the city's decision-making processes (Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad, 2008).

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Chapter III. Resettled Refugees in the American South: Discourses of Victimization and Transgression in Clarkston, Georgia⁸

In 2017, along with a newly elected city government, Clarkston settled on a pro-refugee branding that established the city's diversity and multiculturalism at the forefront: Clarkston, Georgia, would be known as "the Ellis Island of the South" (Graham, 2017; Lerner, 2017). As part of the "New South," as Jamie Winders (2006) describes, the inclusion of new immigrant and refugee groups transformed the city and drew attention locally, regionally, and nationwide. This "new image and direction" features the city as a model for refugee resettlement in the South, although key figures in Clarkston have not always supported resettlement (City of Clarkston, 2021).

In the past few decades, Clarkston has undergone a change from a small town to a diverse locale with residents from more than fifty countries and six continents (City of Clarkston, 2021). While Clarkston was selected by refugee asylum programs in the 1990s as an "ideal" refugee resettlement site, there has been much conflict over refugees within the city. In the mid-2000s, the city experienced internal conflict between those who supported refugees and those who did not. I argue that Clarkston has spent the past two decades grappling with its identity as a city, concluding that it works best when it embraces its diversity, or at least, becomes ambivalent toward it. However, this recognition—and eventual profit—does not come freely or fairly. Clarkston's refugees and immigrants have faced decades of racism and discrimination. Even today, the city's "positive" representation of refugees can be exploitative.

⁸ This chapter has been published and is included here with minor changes as Ryniker, S. (2022). Resettled Refugees in the American South: Discourses of Victimization and Transgression in Clarkston, Georgia. *The Aliens Within: Danger, Disease, and Displacement in Representations of the Racialized Poor*, 315-336.

Building on neoliberal multicultural literature, my discourse analysis of Clarkston's city council minutes shows the ways representations of refugees have shifted over time. In the early 2000s, the city council, other city officials, and residents who spoke at public meetings tended to portray refugees as both victims and transgressors, sometimes simultaneously and in competing, contradictory ways. Later, discourses shifted to construct refugees and immigrants as beneficial to the local economy while they construed refugees' "diversity" as an economic advantage. It is important to note these representations of life in Clarkston are colored by political stances and vested interests.

In the following section of the chapter, I lay out a framework for my analysis that demonstrates the shifting contexts of refugee resettlement within the United States, particularly in the U.S. South. Next, I highlight how previous literature on neoliberal multiculturalism can shed light on the various discourses surrounding refugees in Clarkston. In the subsequent sections, my argument is threefold: First, I establish the need for research on refugee resettlement and other immigration policy implementation by the local state. Second, I demonstrate how over the past twenty years, dominant representations of refugees have changed over time, contrasting and coinciding with each other at times. Key figures within Clarkston, and particularly within Clarkston's local government, have used specific discourses to represent refugees and immigrants for their own interests. Hegemonic notions of inclusion and belonging have shifted to reflect the local state's ambivalence towards refugees seen in Clarkston today. Finally, I address the implications and significance of this research.

Shifting Contexts for Refugee Resettlement

New research pathways explore immigrants and refugees throughout the migration process, from their time in camps to the adjustments in life after resettlement (Ehrkamp, 2017; Culcasi, 2017; Nagel, 2016; Ehrkamp and Leitner, 2006). This chapter focuses on refugee life after resettlement and the complicated and entangled discursive relationships between place and refugees. Refugees enter a socio-political space already filled with discourses produced at the local, regional, and national scales. Then a relational process takes place to produce new and different discourses, and these are accepted or contested, and the cycle repeats.

While the media at times portrays the refugee resettlement process as brief and inexhaustive, scholarship on refugees and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)'s policies on refugee resettlement demonstrate refugee placement as a careful, lengthy process including multiple United States governmental agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and other resettlement service providers (UNHCR, 2020; International Rescue Committee, "IRC," 2021). When a refugee arrives in the United States, it is the job of one of the nine non-governmental organizations, in partnership with the federal government, to find a suitable place to settle them. Usually, refugees are placed in urban centers near friends, family, or an established community with a shared culture (IRC, 2021). These organizations also consider numerous factors, including the cost of living and access to services (IRC, 2021). For many refugees, their resettlement and integration into American society are only deemed "successful" by non-governmental organizations and the federal government when they become economically self-sufficient (Fix et al., 2017). Thus, it is critical to pay attention to what discourses on refugees are produced and circulated by the state, including not only the nation-state, but local state agencies and non-governmental agencies.

As of 2020, there were approximately 26 million refugees worldwide, but the United States limited resettlement to 18,000 refugees. For 2021, the resettlement cap was set at 15,000 refugees—the lowest the limit has been since the Refugee Act of 1980 established caps (Monin et. al., 2021; National Immigration Forum, 2020). The United States admits refugees from over sixty countries, but most come from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, or Ukraine. In the past, refugees followed similar migration pathways as other immigrants to the US; however, new gateways have emerged, including Texas, North Carolina, and Georgia (Monin et. al., 2021; National Immigration Forum, 2020). Resettlement organizations, both nonprofit and for-profit, aid in assisting refugees after their arrival, with tasks from furnishing their homes to arranging medical services. The Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement works with states and resettlement organizations to encourage refugees to be independent by three months. After one year in the United States, all refugees are required to apply for a green card to become permanent residents with the ultimate goal to become United States citizens (National Immigration Forum, 2020).

Since the 1980s, scholars, such as Winders (2006), have argued that refugee resettlement has transformed cities and towns across the Southern United States, shifted ethnic and political compositions, and challenged prior understandings of race, place, and diversity. In her scholarship on Nashville and other Southern cities, Winders (2006) finds that the arrival of new immigrant groups to the South has shifted Black and White power relationships and defied cultural imaginaries. These new groups of people are racialized and othered within the South, which itself was once deemed an “internal spatial other” (Jansson, 2003, p. 295).

For refugees of color, racialization and racism are fundamentals of the resettlement process. Race cannot altogether be left out of the immigrant and refugee experience; we must

address social forces of discrimination and racism, particularly in the context of the racialized South. Drawing attention to racism, Bledsoe et al. (2017, p. 3) write, “Racism is not just a southern problem, but the political landscape of the South has long mattered in historical, social, political, and economic processes of racialization. So, too, have innovative practices of Black survival and resistance been inseparable from the production of southern spaces.” In agreement, Mollett and Faria argue, “Space also informs our *imaginations*” (2018, p. 568). As the social and political landscape of the South evolves, so do the ways racialization takes place. Thus, cultural geographers pay attention to spatial and temporal conditions as well as social relations and representations.

Scholarship on the intersection of race and immigration suggests “status” can sometimes be asserted over race in different situations to validate refugees’ sense of belonging, inclusion, and legitimacy. Once they had arrived, Waters’ interviews revealed that the West Indian immigrants related more to other immigrants with “foreign” statuses through their experiences of discrimination and prejudice than to those of Black Americans (Waters, 1991). Abdi’s research finds Somali immigrants resist “Blackness” in the same manner that generations of immigrants have strived for Whiteness (Abdi, 2020). Crenshaw’s piece on women’s shelters in Los Angeles minority neighborhoods demonstrated the complicated relationship among race, immigration policy, and violence while noting the importance of geographic scales of the body, home, and state (Crenshaw, 1993). Together, these studies show how the refugee and immigrant “status” can validate refugees’ sense of belonging, inclusion, and legitimacy while refugees learn to navigate new social, cultural, and political environments. Scholarship on intersectionality (Mollett and Faria, 2018) and new immigration pathways to the South (Winders 2006; 2007) provides a framework for understanding relationships forged on the ground in Clarkston.

Within the United States, scholars argue that government policies create new immigrant gateways that shape local responses (Furuseth et al., 2015). Local governments can contribute to inclusive environments by including immigrant and ethnic communities in their decision-making (Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad, 2008). Governments can empower immigrant and refugee organizations through political representation; research shows that local governments with a heterogeneous ethnic city council have more positive relationships with ethnic organizations (Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad, 2008). As scholars such as Winders (2008) argue, local governments should make attempts to address new immigrant populations because they play a significant role in developing inclusive communities within and around their cities.

In this chapter, I draw on Coleman's (2012) argument that despite there being federal contexts that shape immigration as a whole, it is important that we pay attention to the site-specific effects on vulnerable populations within the U.S. South. Drawing critical attention to these new gateways can offer insights into refugee resettlement and neoliberal multiculturalism.

Neoliberalism, Multiculturalism, and the State in Refugee Resettlement

Neoliberalism, across several disciplines, refers to a globalizing reorganization of the economy, social order, and governance that supports free trade, privatization, market and financial liberalization (Leitner et al., 2007; Melamed, 2006). In Peck's piece on explaining neoliberalism, he details how neoliberalism is never constant and must be examined among the institutions it resides in (Peck, 2013). Similarly, Dean (2012, p. 75) argues that neoliberalization is never "quite as simple as lining up a list of attributes of neoliberalism, such as privatization, deregulation and the limited state, and showing whether or not they correspond to the current 'institutional reality' of the state." In other words, neoliberalism is not static or found in only one

state or social form; this is evident in how neoliberal policies are visible through institutions at various scales, including the local. For example, Leitner et al.'s (2007) research highlights how cities faced with state and national pressures have begun to implement neoliberal urban agendas to maintain international competitiveness.

In this chapter, I use a definition of neoliberalism as defined by Melamed, “a set of economic regulatory policies which includes privatization of public resources, financial liberation, market liberalization, and global economic management” (2006, pp. 14-15). However, other scholars, such as Kymlicka (2013) and Brown (2003), take a more magnified view, focusing primarily on individual subjectivities, social relationships, and identities. In terms of identities, Melamed (2006) argues that neoliberalism and multiculturalism merged as an evolution of racial liberalism to become a tool used by the United States to legitimize neoliberal power structures and shape social and political order. Multiculturalism originated in the 1970s as a form of resistance towards European and American values and White racism and transformed into a political and cultural movement in support of cultural diversity (Melamed, 2006). Mitchell argues that multiculturalism is not just an acceptance of diversity but also a way to *achieve* diversity; at times, neoliberal multiculturalism uses cultural equality to cover, or provide cover for, economic inequality (Mitchell, 2004). However, as Patricia Richards maintains, “multicultural policies and discourses are frequently assimilationist in their effects” and can often refer to the efforts of liberal democratic governments to embrace ethnic differences (2010, p. 65). Further, Melamed’s research finds that neoliberal multiculturalism often masks racism while producing new privileges and encouraging inequality. In other words, multicultural discourses may be used to encourage diversity while reproducing existing power structures in a neoliberal nation-state.

Because of the state's critical role in establishing and reinforcing neoliberal structures, scholars such as Mohanty (2013) have argued that there is a great need to examine neoliberal power by the state. In their own independent research, both Pulido (2018) and Gilmore (2002) focus on state-centered racism and racialization of ethnic minorities, as well as how neoliberal multiculturalism has also led to increased discriminatory state activities, including security and policing. Pulido's (2018) research argues how ethnic studies, typically conducted from the White or colonial point of view, have led to overlooking race debates. On how these power relations affect minorities, Gilmore (2002) argues, "Racism functions as a limiting force that pushes disproportionate costs of participating in an increasingly monetized and profit-driven world onto those who, due to the frictions of political distance, cannot reach the variable levers of power that might relieve them of those costs" (p. 16). In this chapter, I focus on the local state's role in reinforcing power relations, particularly those that reinforce racial, gender, and class divisions.

Throughout the history of the United States, the federal government has perpetuated stereotypes and encouraged "othering" of people and cultures outside of the United States. Xavier-Brier (2016) maintains that the federal government attempted to amplify the United States as progressive while demonstrating that other countries were far more barbaric. Joshua Inwood's (2018) research details this, noting that through neoliberal discourses, governments and institutions relocated conceptions of race away from a privilege earned through racism to a right achieved through individual effort, shifting the blame for racist policies away from structures.

Turning to the local state, research demonstrates that neoliberal multicultural policies implemented by local governments discriminate as they attempt to manifest diversity and belonging. For instance, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the local state's addition of neoliberal

policies to bolster economic gain encouraged racial and economic divides that excluded populations (Loyd and Bonds, 2018). Loyd and Bonds (2018) analyze a specific zip code of Milwaukee, noting that discursive constructions surrounding the neighborhood purposefully conceal decades of segregation and economic restructuring. These policies unintentionally created long-lasting exclusionary effects, such as marking immigrants “permanently out of place” and situating them as “the other” as Smith and Winders argue (2008, p. 65). Ehrkamp’s (2013) study on spatial practices of female immigrants from Turkey demonstrates how difficult navigating gender roles can be through time and space, particularly as representations of immigrants, complicate spaces. This racialization and discrimination by the local state has increased in recent decades, and particularly since 9/11, since discourses that frame refugees and migrants as “security threats” have led to increased violence and hatred towards immigrants, affecting immigrants in their everyday lives (Ehrkamp, 2013; Staeheli and Nagel, 2008).

Case studies offer several examples of local state policies that illustrate how neoliberal multiculturalism adds to exclusion of immigrants and newly settled refugees; however, I turn to scholarship on community policing to inform my research on Clarkston. Williams (2007) details how Montreal’s local government turned to community policing when neighborhoods began to shift because of Black immigrants. In a similar vein, Rutland (2020) builds on these findings, arguing community policing has a long history of appearing as a racialized strategy by local governments. However, cities assert they use community policing to mitigate police racism with community dialogue. But an alternative interpretation comes from critical policing studies, which see community policing as having a counter-insurgency logic, “in which the police mobilize their relations with some community members to wage a more thorough war on other

community members” (Rutland, 2020, p. 9). In my research, these insights are crucial for reading city documents on police-refugee encounters in the locality of Clarkston.

My research takes a case study approach to a municipality to understand the ambivalent effects of representations of refugees on the locality and on the refugees themselves. My work is informed by Park and Richards’s (2007) study of indigenous workers in Chile, who argue that the effects of neoliberal multiculturalism are more complicated than many scholars believe; highlighting policies at the municipal, regional, and national levels, they claim these policies can offer spaces for indigenous peoples to engage in resistance and consent in their daily life. Further contemplating neoliberal effects, Richards asserts that “the process of creating neoliberal multicultural citizens is not only composed from above, but is actually informed by local-level social relationships” (2020, p. 60). Kymlicka (2013) agrees that there is too often a focus on large-scale neoliberalism and calls for research on how multicultural policies “shape the social identities, networks, narratives, and cultural resources available to individuals and groups” (p. 106).

Constructed as an ideology and social organization that contributes to racial contradictions on a national and international scale, neoliberal multiculturalism replaced older anthropological notions of race (Melamed, 2006). In its newest forms, scholars argue that rather than explicit racism, neoliberal multiculturalism uses *antiracism* to brand some forms of humanity, such as the working class or minorities, less worthy while still managing to exploit difference. As Kymlicka (2013) argues, “the defining feature of neoliberal multiculturalism is the belief that ethnic identities and attachments can be assets to market actors and hence that they can legitimately be supported by the neoliberal state” (p. 109). Neoliberal multiculturalism has

continued to shape social and racial order throughout the US, to undermine achievements since the civil rights movement (Melamed, 2006).

Within neoliberalism, racism does not take the form of Black and White mainstream imaginative geographies (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Darder and Torres, 2004). Instead, Darder and Torres (2004) argue that racism must be examined through structural lenses and that race holds little value without the social, cultural, and political context. Similarly, Barber (2006) argues that multicultural policies reflect national differences and colonial histories. Bonilla-Silva (2004) grapples with the concept of a bi-racial stratification in the United States, emphasizing recent Latin American immigration changes. Regarding neoliberal multiculturalism through the lens of colonization, Nagel (2011) writes, “[cultural differences] are often folded into discourses of multiculturalism and cultural diversity, and at times are looked at favorably by elements of dominant societies who see cultural differences and exotic spaces as marketable commodities” (p. 9). Regarding the exploitive role of immigrants in neoliberal multiculturalism, Kymlicka opines, “Neoliberal multiculturalism for immigrants affirms—even valorizes—ethnic immigrant entrepreneurship, strategic cosmopolitanism, and transnational commercial linkages and remittances but silences debates on economic redistribution, racial inequality, unemployment, economic restructuring, and labor rights” (2013, p. 112). Thus, cherished aspects of minorities’ cultures, such as food or clothing, become pieces that entertain and delight the ruling class and allow them to reap the benefits as minority groups suffer.

Some feminist scholars focus on how neoliberal multicultural policies at different scales affect minorities, including women, people of color, and immigrants. Dobrowolsky and Tastsoglou (2006) argue that as Western states develop more neoliberal policies, the effects land on the backs of women, particularly in healthcare and education areas. Larner (2012) critiques

neoliberal multiculturalism by exploring the impact of the “New Zealand Experiment” policies of the 1980s-90s. While the policies were internationally renowned as a neoliberal success, they situated New Zealanders as “human resources” and increased class differences for women (Larner, 2012, p. 158). Specifically, the Māori women faced challenges because of the loss of benefits and the rise in poverty.

Inherently, the term “refugee” is imbued with political meaning; the word is state-centered and implies specific socio-political commitments by nation-states (Ehrkamp, 2017). The label itself stigmatizes individuals before they even arrive in the US. Further, the discourse of refugees as victims has contributed to a sense of “the refugee condition,” whereby refugees are reduced to passive, racialized “others” perpetually out of place (Ehrkamp, 2017, p. 818). In other words, refugees enter a neoliberal multicultural system in which existing power structures have already placed racialized minorities and immigrants at the bottom.

Competing Discourses in Clarkston

The materials for this piece come primarily from the city of Clarkston’s monthly Council Meeting Archive of meeting notes from 2006-2021. These materials include meeting agendas, transcripts of city council meetings, and specific committee meeting transcripts. Most of these materials can be found on the city of Clarkston’s website. I also attended (virtually) eight meetings between May 2020 and May 2021. I gathered material from media sources, U.S. Senate hearings, local websites, and newspaper archives, including local papers such as *The Neighbor*, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, and DeKalb County’s newspaper *The Champion*, and national and international news sites, including *USA Today* and *The Guardian* between 2000 and 2021.

Using Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's (2012) methods for thematic analysis, including identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns, I used thematic coding when analyzing the materials, including field notes, media, and archival data, first doing *in vivo* coding, and then conducting multiple re-readings for latent codes. Next, I grouped pieces into categorical themes by hand and selected the themes most prominent. In doing so, it became clear that there was a temporal aspect related to the discourses in Clarkston.

Throughout the materials from the city of Clarkston, I found competing constructions of refugees presented as both victims and transgressors at contrasting times during Clarkston's history as a refugee resettlement site. In this section, I demonstrate how the dominant representations of refugees have changed over time within Clarkston and discuss how the neoliberal multicultural strategies deployed in Clarkston reinforce the ambivalence towards refugees.

Refugees Are Clarkston's Burden

This subsection explores the first main theme in how city officials, local elites, and city residents construct Clarkston's refugee representations. Particularly during the 2000s, representations of refugees and immigrants as dangerous, illegal, burdensome, and unsafe were hegemonic in the city's discussions of the local economy. These depictions are a product of the public's perception of refugees either consciously or unconsciously and ultimately served to "other" refugees as separate from American-born residents to delegitimize refugees as citizens of Clarkston and maintain the status quo. These discourses were typically produced by the mayor, the city council, residents, and local institutions and circulated through multiscalar policies, the news media, and even hometown plays (Smith, 2013). While much of this discourse occurs in

the early 2000s, there are overlapping and competing discourses during this time. In addition, discourses that support the theme “Refugees are Clarkston’s Burden ” can also be found later into the 2010s and some are even still present in statements by city leaders within Clarkston.

Several representations of refugees produced during city council meetings imply that refugees need to know how to do things for themselves, perpetuating multicultural neoliberal ideals that refugees are only successful when they are self-sufficient and independent. For example, during a council meeting in late 2006, a resident asked a question about after-school childcare for the Vietnamese community. A chairperson of the Planning and Development Commission responded, “It is not the City’s responsibility to fund such programs but that the parents should look for solutions” (“Minutes,” 2006).

At the same meeting, during the citizens’ comments portion, a member of the community explained that he felt there was a problem with communication between the Clarkston government and the refugee community and that different refugee and immigrant groups had felt left out of the process. Mayor Lee Swaney responded that he was always available to anyone who had questions or concerns, and the council’s response was twofold: One member said she had plans to hold a town hall meeting, while another stated they had personally informed ethnic business owners and community members in the past. Then a resident stated, “if anyone wants information on what is going on in the City that they need to go to City Hall [...] if [I] lived in another country they aren’t going to form a special committee to invite [me] to communicate, that is an individual’s responsibility [...] Everyone needs to educate their communities and to stop waiting for the government to do all the work.” The Planning and Development chairperson then restated, “the refugee community needs to take responsibility for seeking the information that has been made available” (“Minutes,” 2006). These neoliberal multicultural discourses shift

structural problems onto individual minorities and have unintentional exclusionary effects which stop members of the community from obtaining the aid they need.

Former Mayor Swaney, who served two terms during 2002-2009, is an essential agent for the antipathy seen towards refugees by the Clarkston City Council. The discourses Swaney used during this time are reflective of the ones used by others on the city council and within the city. Swaney often called himself the “Champion for Old Clarkston” and was hostile to refugee resettlement within the town (Hansen, 2020). Swaney commonly described immigrants negatively, justifying this animosity by invoking a politics of scale that claims municipal exclusion from other scales of decision-making, particularly the state level. Swaney repeatedly blames the State of Georgia, the federal system, and local decision-makers for Clarkston’s economic woes due to the added hardship that refugee resettlement has placed on the city. Swaney argues that his hostility towards refugees is not racism or prejudice, but a miscommunication at the local scale in that resettlement agencies did not warn the city about refugees being placed in Clarkston (St. John, 2007).

Swaney also used the power-laden discourse that refugees are an economic and social hardship to the city. Emphasizing the excessive cost of refugees for Clarkston, Swaney suggested the “refugees placed excessive burdens on already scarce resources” because “the city did not receive extra money to address the special needs of this population” (United States, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, 2010). These discourses are common among local communities that are compelled to carry the extra onus of cutbacks and funding shortfalls at the federal level and reflect the federal government’s findings in the early 2000s (Fix et al., 2017). For example, in the report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, refugees are differentiated from other immigrants because they lack community support networks to enable social support

(United States, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, 2010). These discourses construct refugees as burdensome and needy, and, ultimately, unable to assimilate.

Swaney's comments on refugee resettlement reinforce othering discourses, particularly in his use of "we" and "them" in the following example, representative of many of his comments on refugees: "*We* were not part of the process of bringing *them* here. *We* were told after the fact that *they* were coming" (United States, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, author's emphasis, 2010). He uses familiar immigrant tropes, such as to imply that refugees do not understand apartment living or would overcrowd the city ("Minutes," 2009). In another example, Swaney portrays Clarkston as "a small community [...] that was shattered under the pressure of a broken refugee resettlement system" in a report to the Committee on Foreign Relations of the United States Senate (United States, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, 2010). Here, Clarkston's resettlement program and the national policies that brought them to town are characterized as burdens on Clarkston.

While Swaney is a key figure in the local government, these representations of refugees were found in other parts of the city and were quite common within Clarkston. For example, in first-generation Egyptian American Suehyla El-Attar's play based on her experiences in Clarkston, a faceless cast member shouts from among the audience, "I just want to know one thing: How do *we* stop the refugees from coming here?" (Smith, 2013, author's emphasis). Such "we/them"-discourse, critiqued by El-Attar in her play, perpetuates notions of Orientalism and contributes to the "othering" of refugees. This discourse serves two tasks: first, it helps unite Clarkston's residents under a banner of economic hardship, and second, it purposefully excludes refugees from the community and represents them as strains to the city.

This theme continues during the next decade: City council meeting minutes are marked by discourses constructing refugees and immigrants, specifically Black and Brown refugees from Africa, South Asia, and South America, as dangerous and out of place. There is a pattern of city council members and non-refugee residents using discourse that refers to refugees and immigrants as criminals, and city elites rarely refute or contradict these constructions. At a meeting during a discussion on Clarkston's resources for crime prevention, a council member boasts: "I want to make a statement that we will not tolerate those who come to our community to make diversity an opportunity to commit a crime" ("Minutes," 2010). When multiple residents discuss gang violence and gunshots in the city, the chief of police states that most of the criminal activity is coming from within the Somali community, and he is working with the FBI on the issue ("Minutes," 2009). These examples illustrate how Clarkston's city officials are complicit in circulating discourses that describe refugees as deviants or criminals, serving to demonize, criminalize, and exclude refugees (see Pickering 2001; 2008).

During this period, the preeminent way city officials said they were attempting to strengthen ties with refugee communities was through community policing. In support of community policing, Clarkston's city manager says he feels citizens should know officers by their first names. The chief of police follows with, "the Police Department is all about community policing and has already made a promise to the citizens that they are going to know our police officers" ("Minutes," 2013). At another meeting, the city manager notes the council had asked police officers to walk around apartment complexes and businesses and meet the residents. The Chief of Police pointed out that officers were told to leave cards on cars to notify the community of the patrols. Multiple non-refugee residents mention their support for this ("Minutes," 2008). During a separate council meeting, city officials discuss how a new FBI unit

will foster relationships with the refugee community to prevent crime (“Minutes,” 2008). Within Clarkston, community policing serves to “other” refugees, constructing them as both victims in constant need of protection and transgressors who need continual surveillance. Clarkston’s deployment of community policing strategies reinforces existing socio-spatial hierarchies of race and racism (Rutland, 2020).

In 2008, in conjunction with the community policing initiatives, the city of Clarkston instituted crime mapping software, by which recent crime data became publicly available online. Data on the time, location, and incident are available at the street level (Central Square Technologies, 2008). During several city council meetings, the crime mapping project was discussed in terms of public safety, including instances of the council and city officials asking locals to be vigilant of crime. It is also commonly mentioned in reference to “family” at the meetings (“Minutes,” November 2010). Here, the council uses public safety and family rhetoric to shift police responsibility onto the public by creating an emotional attachment to place, home, and community. Clarkston residents were tasked with becoming defenders of the city—they must be always vigilant, and anyone could be a threat. These discourses are similar to community policing discourses through which police seek to mobilize residents for information on suspicious behaviors in places refugees are not welcome (Rutland, 2020). However, in 2010, during the time the crime mapping software was first implemented, the software found that most victims of crime within Clarkston were refugees (“Minutes,” 2010). These results show how destructive neoliberal multicultural policies can be.

Refugees Can Make It on their Own, with Clarkston's Help

A second theme that is prominent is that refugees can make it on their own, with Clarkston's help. This type of discourse is found most often during 2000-2010 and is often in conversation or in conflict with the previous discourse. Within this theme, there is evidence of multiple, competing discourses encircling Clarkston's refugees, including those that impute criminality and those that emphasize refugees' roles in the local economy. I argue that the addition of these discourses was driven by the city's move toward strategies for deriving material benefit from the rebranding of refugees and thereby the city as 'diverse,' which is indicative of neoliberal multiculturalism. The city council's discourses follow two main threads here. First, refugees need the city's help for success. Second, a distinct but interdependent, even contradictory, discourse is that refugees should become economically and socially independent residents of Clarkston to be successful citizens, and with successful citizens, Clarkston will be successful.

Examples of this discourse include a council member detailing how a refugee from outside of Clarkston approached her for assistance. Within 36 hours, "carloads of items were collected [... and residents] provided household items for a family of four [...] which had no means of support and a sick child" ("Minutes," 2009). Another time, in his Mayor's Report for the month of March, Mayor Tygrett takes time to note how he worked with a company to supply a refugee children's sports team with sleeping bags so they can go camping during their spring break and that he has also worked with the company to supply other equipment for a trip with refugees that he will participate in at a later date ("Minutes," 2010). In one instance, a city council member describes how she attended DeKalb County Board of Health Center's United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture and told the city council members in

attendance they could never assume they knew what a person has gone through when they settle in Clarkston (“Minutes,” 2009). Though seeming to inspire sympathy, rarely do these discourses help integrate or include refugees. Instead, they further isolate refugees by constructing them as helpless victims cemented in crisis and perpetuate colonial legacies of Orientalism (Burrell and Hörschelmann, 2019).

During these years, representations of refugees also became integral to representations of the city itself. At one meeting, council members discussed the need for aid for refugee services because, “This will have a big impact on the City of Clarkston, on the Community Center” (“Minutes,” 2011). It became typical for residents to speak of Clarkston and its growth and to demonstrate support for more refugees to come to town. Council members repeatedly extolled themselves for the inclusive positions the city was taking, and the active role Clarkston had in communicating with its residents. Mayor Ransom noted his interest in creating coalitions with council members, local and state politicians, and regional business owners to “discuss how Clarkston has become a model for integrating the refugee and immigrant populations into our city” (“Minutes,” 2012).

These interdependent discourses remove any sense of agency by refugees and immigrants and collectively exploit their experiences. The city positions itself within a hierarchy powered by refugees who nevertheless are at the bottom. During this time, the city council’s racism and racialization of refugees appear in patterns that attempt to support refugees but justify an uneven dispersal of aid.

Clarkston as a “Welcoming” City of Refuge

The third and final theme I will discuss in this chapter is “Clarkston as a ‘Welcoming’ City of Refuge.” This discourse was most evident during the 2010s, but different figures have used it at various times within Clarkston. As cities and local governments have continued to face pressure by new federal policies on immigration, some cities have begun to adopt inclusive immigrant-related policies, particularly those that intend to support immigrants through social and economic means rather than those focusing on law enforcement (Huang and Liu, 2018). Some of these policy positions are admirable, in cases where cities might face real sanctions by federal or state agencies. Nevertheless, some cities see immigrant-inclusive policy as not simply a principled position, but good for business.

During the 2010s decade, it became common for the mayor and city council members to mention the local, state, and federal events that they participated in related to refugees and immigrants during city council meetings, such as in the following example: At the July 2018 council meeting, councilwoman Andrea Cervone reported on her participation with the Taiwan Mosaic Fellowship program, “at no expense to Clarkston” (“Minutes,” 2018). Each year, Clarkston’s diversity is honored at the local Culture Fest, sponsored in part by the city government (“Minutes,” 2017). The city council has recognized multiple events and multicultural celebrations for immigrants and refugees, going so far as to proclaim February 14 as “Clarkston Loves Refugees Day” during the February 2017 council meeting and celebrate it annually (“Minutes,” 2017). These events, many of which were held on municipal property, celebrate and boost refugee and immigrant presence within Clarkston and draw regional and state attention while advertising Clarkston’s diversity for profit. Such planned occasions demonstrate a clear link to neoliberal multiculturalism, where ethnic identities are molded into

profitable commodities (Melamed, 2006). While these occasions show significant support for refugees and other minorities within Clarkston, the city needs to reflect on its events and policies to ensure they reflect the objective needs of the refugees they continue to profit from. For example, in recent years, the city has started to hold language, citizenship, and business classes. It is through these types of support that refugees and immigrants are expected to become active citizens within Clarkston.

Currently, two immigrants hold positions on the city council. An immigrant from Eritrea, Councilman Awet Eyasu has been present on the council since 2015, and in his role as Vice Mayor, has contributed to many pro-refugee policies. Council member Ahmed Hassan, an immigrant from Somalia, was elected to the council in 2013.

As a response to the terror attacks in France in 2015, the Governor of Georgia, Nathan Deal, signed an executive order to declare that no Syrian refugees would be allowed to enter Georgia. There were multiple issues with this order, particularly that the Constitution places the federal government in charge of immigration and deportation, not individual states, and that it contributed to racism while it ignored the careful screening process Syrian refugees go through to arrive in the United States (Crawford, 2015). At the time, about one hundred Syrian refugees resided in Clarkston. On the topic of the executive order, Mayor Ted Terry stated, “If we decide to take in more Syrian refugees, or more refugees from other parts of the world, Clarkston will do our part. We’re a compassionate and welcoming city” (Crawford, 2015). However, Terry added, “The reality is, within six to eight months, these people have jobs, their kids are in schools, they’re paying taxes, contributing to the community, in some cases they’re creating new businesses and creating more jobs” (Crawford, 2015). In this example, Clarkston is represented

as a welcoming place while refugees are once again positioned as assets to the city through their economic value.

In 2017 President Donald Trump publicly denounced “sanctuary cities” that did not fully comply with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement [ICE], and he attempted to block funding to local municipalities that did not support his policies. Across Georgia, undocumented immigrants were being swept up and arrested, including in Clarkston. In May 2017, the council debated whether they should pass a policy that limited cooperation with federal officers.

Members of the city council and residents discussed the policy at a town hall meeting, in a Public Safety Meeting, with ICE agents at the Ocilla facility, and during multiple city council meetings. Backed by several immigrant rights groups, including Project South, the policy would stop Clarkston authorities from detaining people to be transferred into ICE’s custody.

At the time, Terry said, “Clarkston wants to consider itself a city of refuge. We want to make sure there is as much comfort with still interacting with the Clarkston police and not worrying about deportation” (Redmon, 2017). Other council members discussed the policy regarding support for the entire city and its residents (“Minutes,” 2017). Under the policy, “City officials and employees shall communicate and cooperate with ICE with regard to reporting immigration status information, but that the City of Clarkston would not detain or extend the detention of any individual at the request of ICE unless ICE first presents the City of Clarkston with a judicially issued warrant authorizing such detention” (“Minutes,” 2017). However, Clarkston’s Chief of Police said her department had not received any ICE detainers since she had been in command in the last five years (before President Trump’s election). Further, the Clarkston Police Department did not ask about legal residency status and did not operate a jail or detention center (“Minutes,” 2017). Ultimately, the policy passed.

Thus, this non-detainer policy is little more than a gesture to quell fears within the refugee community and public notice that the city will not attempt to stand in the way of federal immigration legislation—possibly to ensure the town keeps its federal funding. While this policy appears to support refugees on the surface, it represents more of a symbolic gesture than a form of resistance. Clarkston’s approach to ICE and President Trump’s declarations are examples of scalar politics—these federal neoliberal multicultural policies are reworked at the local scale for Clarkston officials to attempt to shift accountability and frame the ICE controversy as under control within the city (Van Lieshout et al., 2012).

Clarkston’s Future as a Refugee Resettlement Site

In this chapter, I examined the neoliberal multicultural discourses involving refugees and immigrants employed by Clarkston’s city council over the last two decades, identifying the racialized representations of refugees. At times, these discourses were competing and contradictory, shifting hegemonic notions of inclusion and belonging. Often these discourses are power-laden and serve either social or political purposes. Neoliberal multicultural policies “other” refugees and mark them “out of place.” Through this work, I drew attention to how Clarkston’s neoliberal multicultural policies use ethnic identities as commodities to market the city during social and cultural events. These representations cement refugees into perpetual legacies of colonialism and Orientalism. While attention to this topic may create more questions than answers, it is necessary to explore the geopolitical understandings of immigration and resettlement by the local state.

Recent waves of refugees and immigrants to the South are altering understandings of race, ethnicity, and everyday life. New frameworks need to include research on diversity,

inclusion, and belonging during daily life and in public spaces. Scholars will need to grapple with the duality of discourses surrounding refugees and immigrants as criminals and victims. The onus of a “successful resettlement” has been placed on individual refugees (Fix et al., 2017), while still ensuring rights were gained through individual effort (Inwood, 2018), even as city officials sustain representations of refugees as victims. Refugees cannot maintain a “refugee condition” and be expected to become economically independent within a national context criticizing ethnicity, citizenship, and race. It is critical that municipalities intending to profit from diversity take steps to ensure communities are not further divided by race and wealth gaps and that scholars continue to emphasize the role of neoliberal multiculturalism at the local scale.

This research also has important implications for conceptualizing how neoliberal multicultural policies contribute to racialization in local institutions. These are best illustrated, I argue, through attention to specific case studies, such as through Clarkston’s police department’s policies. Community policing and crime mapping led to racism and racialization of refugees throughout the community. The addition of new groups of people challenges the complex geographies of racialization and existing social and political legacies.

Geographers must continue to examine immigrant destinations in the “New South” through research interrogating municipalities that have different institutional and racial contexts than other parts of the United States. New immigrant destinations, like Nashville and Clarkston, will continue to see new growth over the next decades. The racialized representations of refugees in Clarkston still exist within a historical context in which legacies of racism and othering flowed from mainstream racial imaginative geographies and are different from traditional urban gateways. As the South continues to grow economically, immigration to the South will continue, and so will cities’ use of representations of refugees in place marketing for economic benefits.

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Chapter IV. Constellations of Place and Identity: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of lived experiences by immigrants in Clarkston, Georgia

Almost twenty years ago, Daniel Solomon stepped off the plane at Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport to start his life over in Georgia. He had arrived on a student visa and his plan was to spend some time in Clarkston with his uncle who lived in one of the many apartment complexes. He did not know how long he would be in Clarkston, but he knew he could not go back to his country in Africa—they were amid a bloody civil war. Little did Daniel know, he would make his home in Clarkston: get married, have a family, and run for local office.

For Daniel, Clarkston now means home. It means belonging. But it has not always felt like that. In the last forty years, the City of Clarkston has resettled refugees from over fifty different ethnic groups. Under certain leaders, the local state developed policies to ensure there would be specific conditions to make Clarkston a welcoming place for immigrants and refugees. However, there is more to belonging than policies. An individual is a constellation of place, experience, and self-narration of those which cannot be constructed solely by outside forces. At the local and individual scale, place matters in remarkable and unique ways. Drawing on five exemplary interviews from my time in Clarkston, I argue that identity is socially constructed through experiences in place. Each person brings a set of lived experiences, consisting of thoughts, emotions, and memories, to a place where belonging and inclusion are negotiated.

In this chapter, I draw on geographic theorizations of race, place, and identity to situate these five narratives of the lived experiences of immigrants in Clarkston, Georgia. The aim of this chapter is to explore the constructions of place identity by community members in Clarkston, Georgia. Cresswell (2009, p. 2) writes, “Space becomes a place when it is used and

lived. Experience is at the heart of what place means.” Building on this conception, I examine the embodied experiences of people in Clarkston to understand how place is socially constructed through people’s experiences and highlight the richness of place meanings. I analyze interviews with immigrants to explore the lived experiences of five participants using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and understand their perceptions and representations of identity and place. I argue that the resettlement of refugees and immigration to the Clarkston area has greatly impacted Clarkston’s identity as a place, and thus, more research on how Clarkston can aid its citizens is necessary. Further, I argue that as community members engage in meaning-making processes and negotiate their roles in the city, the city evolves to belong to its citizens through various social constructions.

This chapter addresses how place imaginaries come together to shape and reshape a city. Refugees, city officials, and other residents construct Clarkston to fit their needs and wants, often with conflicting ideas and struggles. Through these interviews, processes of inclusion, racialization, and identity construction are visible. Constructions of collectivism and exclusion are at the forefront. In addition, this scholarship details a city and region at the apex of change; as more people move to new Southern destinations, cities will continue to evolve in new and interesting ways. It is important that geographers explore these changes as they happen, particularly for vulnerable minority populations who struggle to access necessary resources. In what follows, I contextualize the pertinent recent history of immigration to the United States, and then to Clarkston. Second, I turn to the literature on race, identity and belonging, and place to situate my argument firmly within geographic debates. I then share five immigrants’ stories of lived experiences within Clarkston through interpretative phenomenological analysis. IPA’s goal is not to offer a complex theory, but to understand specific experiences and contexts. These

interviews reflect the subjective truth and meaning making of the participants and the researcher. Finally, I offer a discussion and conclusion, drawing theorizations of place and meaning-making processes for immigrants in Clarkston and offering the steps for future research.

Contextualizing Immigration and Racialization within the United States

Built into the laws of the United States are existing racial hierarchies and spatialities of power which shape migration and mobility (Silvey, 2004; Lawson, 1999). In 1965, the U.S. Congress passed the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act ending the national quotas system which had been in place since the 1920s. Under this act, the United States created a preference system that strategically welcomed an influx of immigrants and refugees from all over the globe while limiting immigration from the Western Hemisphere. This act moved families and those with specific occupational skills to the front of the immigration queue and it created a category for the admission of refugees. Later, the 1980 Refugee Act further codified refugee resettlement and asylum when it created a formal definition of a refugee identical to the 1967 UN Protocol (Humphries, 2009; Kanstroom, 2007; Waters et al., 2007). The tragic events of September 11, 2001, further shaped immigration to and within the United States by restricting federal border regulations and generating fear and apprehension toward Muslims and other people with brown bodies. In the context of these laws and policies, recent scholarly attention has turned to questions of identity, place, and belonging for immigrants within the United States (Creese, 2011). It is within these conversations that I situate this chapter. To provide context for the migration stories in this chapter, I will focus on recent African and Asian immigration in this section.

Race is understood as a social construction based on historical and contemporary processes (Omi and Winant, 1986; Inwood and Yarbrough, 2010). This construction depends on racialization, which involves sorting people into categories based on biological criteria for exclusionary and exploitative purposes, where categories have different and unequal power and wealth. Since its formation, the United States has racialized different groups through exclusionary policies and institutions at different scales. Because “White” is the largest and most privileged racial group within the United States, other races are often constructed in opposition to Whiteness (Creese, 2011; Kelly, 1998). For example, there is a social imagination of White dominance, colonization, and privilege that exists and shapes discourses of Blackness (Creese, 2011; Ibrahim, 1999). As geographers deepen scholarship on race and place, there has been more attention to racialization and the intersectionality of different subjectivities like gender, class, and sexuality (Valentine, 2007).

In addition, new lenses have applied racialization concepts to immigrant groups at different scales (Yarbrough, 2010; Goulash-Boza, 2006; Pulido, 2006; Winders, 2005). Processes of racialization shape identity in that people claim similar values, traditions, and ways of life which often reflect those of other African migrants (Creese, 2011). These same values and traditions may not be found in other groups with different socio-historical backgrounds, so African immigrants may choose an immigrant identity over a Black identity in some negotiations (Creese, 2011; Humphries, 2009). Studies show that immigrants are racialized in separate ways than their American-born counterparts, as well as being racialized through their “Americanness” (Yarbrough, 2010; Goulash-Boza, 2006). Similarly, in Toronto, Creese (2011) finds that race and ethnicity are particularly important to immigrant migration narratives.

The United States has a lengthy history of exclusionary laws created to control the flow of certain Asian migrant groups, including the Chinese exclusion acts which prevented the migration of Chinese women, while supporting the immigration of Chinese male able-bodied workers, and the internment of Japanese immigrants during World War II (Lowe, 1996; Dill, 1988). Today, the U.S. Census estimates there are more than 23 million Asian people within the United States and Asian Americans have the fastest population growth among all racial and ethnic groups in the United States (Ruiz et al., 2023; Budiman and Ruiz, 2021). It makes sense that with a complicated racialized history, there would be much diversity in how members of the group represent themselves and their identities.

Recent immigration debates have spurred conversations about racialization and inclusion of the racial and ethnic category of “Asian” within the United States. Historically, Asian immigrants represented themselves by national origin. It was not until the activists in the 1960s began to reject colonial terms like “Oriental” in favor of the categorization of “Asian American” which emphasized a shared U.S. experience (Pulido, 2006, p. 48). Indeed, the category “Asian” is a geographic imagination inclusive of a wide variety of ethnicities, nationalities, and peoples who each have their own set of cultures, norms, and migration diasporas (Watkins et al., 2017). However, this categorization may be problematic or misused for several reasons, such as through the erasure of certain groups and cultural traditions. For example, in a bid to break up the broad categorization of “Asian,” the U.S. Census divided Asian populations into smaller “ethnic groups” such as “Asian Indian,” “Chinese,” or “Cambodian” confusing race and nationality (Hoeffel et al. 2012). These ethnic and racial distinctions are essential to be aware of because Asian people have a long history of racialization and discrimination in different ways over time within the United States.

Chinese and other Asian ethnic groups have historically been deemed the “model minority;” the group best suited for economic success in the United States. Lin’s (2000) work on Chinese immigrants in New York City demonstrates a continuation of this myth, where labor is still gendered and racialized; Chinese immigrant women still largely remain trapped in exploitative low-class positions. Moreover, as Pulido (2006, xiv) writes, “the idea of Asian Americans as ‘model minorities’ exists only in relation to ‘less than model’ Black, Latina/o, and American Indian minorities. Thus, it is critical to understand racialization within the context of how each racial and ethnic group experiences race and how the groups’ histories, cultures, and representations influence these racializations.

Scholarly work that addresses Asian immigration to the United States tends to address ethnic settlement patterns, examining political and economic factors. Mitchell’s (1993; 1995; 1997) work examined the Chinese in Canada, analyzing the relationship between Canadian-born individuals and immigrants, transnationalism, and race and space. Lin (2000) and other geographers call for scholars to move towards an understanding of race and ethnicity in the United States that highlights the diversity of racial and ethnic groups and their different historical and contemporary migrations to the United States. Asian immigrants make their homes within existing American racial and ethnic hierarchies and spatialities of power. These laws and policies have consequences for identity, place, and belonging for immigrants within the United States even at local and individual scales.

Turning to African immigration to the United States, there is a similar, yet unique immigration history. In the United States, racial and ethnic group identities have always been very important, however, for minorities, racial distinctions were often erased through homogenization (Clark, 2009; Omi and Winant, 1986). At times, scholars have used racial

identity as a tool to minimize ethnic identity. This is problematic, particularly in terms of immigrants and refugees, as it applies ethnic, historical, and cultural differences to a non-homogenous group (Clark, 2009). Clark (2009) argues that if we consider African Americans as an ethnic group instead of a racial category, there is more visibility for multiple identities and more room for the acceptance of African immigrants into American society.

Africans have been arriving in the United States through forced migration and/or by their own free will for hundreds of years, but the 1980 Refugee Act led to an enormous increase in migration from Africa. For the first time in U.S. legislative history, African immigrants were coming freely in waves. This increase of African immigrants and refugees led many American-born Black people to challenge their existing racial and ethnic identities (Clark, 2009). Similarly, the overarching “Black” umbrella of ethnicity and culture started to fracture into subgroups based on ethnicity, nationality, and culture, in new and different ways (Veney, 2009; Clark, 2009). Recent work by scholars that approach these research questions using a local or individual lens is drawing attention to the lived experiences of racialization (Clark, 2009; Humphries, 2009; Veney, 2009). How people identify themselves—and how the government identifies them—have clear implications for the flexibility of racial formation (Omi and Winant, 1986). By highlighting the racialization processes of African immigrants at the local and individual scales, geographers can glean answers about how race and intersectionality are produced in daily lives. Further, it can help illustrate how immigrant identities, racism, and state-structured policies work together to form spatialities of racism at the local scale (Lin, 2000; Pulido, 1996).

The North American African heritage is constitutive of native-born people as well as Black immigrants from Africa and from the Caribbean; this group consists of a spectrum of multiple values, histories, and experiences (Creese, 2011; Humphries, 2009). African

immigrants' conceptions of race before migrating are shaped by their home countries' histories of colonization, imperialism, and/or Black leadership. In other words, as Humphries (2009, p. 275) says succinctly: "Immigrant Africans are both Black *and* immigrant" (my emphasis).

African immigrants experience racialization in different and unique ways in comparison to other races and ethnic groups because of the United States' history with Blackness and its relationship to Whiteness (Creese, 2011). Recent scholars in geography have argued that "racialization of place is a process of constructing particular geographic landscapes that help define and reinforce racialized social hierarchies" (Inwood and Yarborough, 2010, p. 300). Examining hegemonic discourses in the United Kingdom, Ifekwunigwe (2003) argues that within Blackness, there are processes of dis-Africanization and de-territorialization. Creese (2011) sees a similar pattern in Canada. Within U.S. society, African immigrants who are racialized as Black are placed at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. Because of this, African immigrants may negotiate their identities in different contexts, leaning into their immigrant identity at times: "The extent to which African immigrants can deploy an immigrant identity may facilitate their ability to negotiate and mediate this racializing process" (Humphries, 2009, p. 275). At other times, they may lean into their African American legal identity (Clark, 2009). What may be important to geographers is when and where these negotiations of identity take place.

Because African immigrant racial identity is situated through American conceptualizations of Blackness, African immigrants will experience racial discrimination differently than African Americans (Humphries, 2009). To navigate through these experiences, Creese (2011) finds that African immigrants have created a localized pan-African diaspora and choose to identify with other African immigrants while remaining separate from the general immigrant community as well as the larger Black community in Vancouver, Canada.

Before African migrants arrive in the United States, many identify with their ethnicity or nation as there was no need to address their Blackness, especially as a political category (Creese, 2011; Okeke-Ihejirika and Spitzer, 2005; Hall, 2000). This pattern is similar with other ethnicities and races as well: Yarbrough (2010) finds that before migrating, immigrants are not likely to identify with the terms “Hispanic” or “Latino;” they identify more with their neighborhood or country of origin. It is only after they spend time in the United States and experience the existing racial formations that they switch the terms they use. At some point after arrival to the United States, migrants’ preeminent identity changes, and they begin identifying as “African” first and their nation second (Creese, 2011, p. 256). After migration, scholars see a shift in how immigrants begin to negotiate their identity: to fit the existing racial formations.

After migration, migrants then “become Black” by negotiating differences and figuring out where they belong within different socio-political contexts (Creese, 2011). This can look very different, as belonging is negotiated in material spaces, including neighborhoods, workspaces, and schools. These spaces come with their own gender, class, racial, and sexual norms (Creese, 2011). Geographers have begun to examine experiences and processes of inclusion and exclusion within everyday lives as well as through the legal system (Mansson McGinty, 2020; Hoelscher, 2003). However, processes of racialization may not be enough to overcome barriers of homogenization: in Creese’s (2011) study, participants noted that common values and traditions among those from Africa created more commonalities than connections with Black men and women from North America or the Caribbean. In other words, shared common experiences can be more valued than race, creating exclusions.

Black immigration to the United States is on the rise, with the increase of African immigrants to the United States now being referred to as the “new African diaspora” (Clark,

2009, p. 257). The numbers are striking: more than fifty percent of Black immigrants came to the United States after 2000. Birthplace matters as well: seventy-five percent of African-born Black immigrants arrived in the United States since 2010, while many Black immigrants from the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico, or South America arrived before 2000 (Tamir, 2022). These distinctions between place are important because they impact identity and inclusion into society.

Clarkston as an Immigrant and Refugee Resettlement Site

Within the last two decades, Clarkston, the Metro-Atlanta region, and the South as a whole, have become new gateways of immigration (Ryniker, 2022; Winders, 2014; 2007; 2006; 2005; Price et al., 2005). Beginning in the 1980s, refugee resettlement agencies and non-profit organizations sought out the South as an opportune destination for migration and refugee resettlement because of its relatively low-cost housing and abundance of low-skilled labor positions on farms and agricultural plants (Ryniker, 2022; McDaniel, 2021). Similarly, Clarkston, a 1.4 square mile municipality located near East Atlanta, was selected by refugee resettlement agencies because of its proximity to Atlanta, its transportation access, and the affordable and available housing. The first refugees to settle in Clarkston were from South Asia, but today, over 40 different countries are represented in Clarkston.

Clarkston, Georgia, needs to be understood in the context of how national changes in immigration policy and refugee resettlement have affected the U.S. South and the Atlanta metropolitan area. While all the United States is informed by racial processes, class, race, and gender structures are experienced at the regional and local scales (Pulido, 2006). One notable change arising from immigration into the South has been a change in the regional racial

formation (Loyd and Mountz, 2018). For example, recent Latinx immigration to the South has begun to shift notions of race. Lippard and Gallagher (2011) find that Latinos are racialized separately from Black and White people, existing somewhere between the binary. They also argue that Latinos' treatment by U.S. institutions is affected by race, ethnicity, and foreign status (Lippard and Gallagher, 2011). Currently, Atlanta is home to more Latino/Hispanic-identified residents than any other urban area in the Southeastern United States (Yarborough, 2010). Winders (2006) argues that Latino residents are challenging the existing notions of difference and race in Nashville. Shifting racial constructions of the South, and of Clarkston more specifically, have implications for race, ethnicity, and legislation.

While the demographics show clear shifts in race and ethnicity within the South, some geographers argue: “the racialized assumptions and practices that have long fractured southern locales like Atlanta” have not shifted as well (Yarborough, 2010, p. 254). Winders (2006) argues that Latino residents are challenging the existing notions of difference and race in Nashville. My work continues to build on this scholarship. Through my research, I argue that there have been changes in institutionalized, racialized assumptions and practices, specifically towards that of immigrants who are Black and Brown. There is also relatively little scholarship on East and Southeast Asian immigration to the U.S. South but see Guerrero's (2017) work for one of several exceptions. The South's once Black and White mainstream imaginative geographies are now a concatenation of power relations that require more scholarly attention.

These recent immigration streams to the South have begun to shift notions of race and ethnicity at the regional and local scales. The thematic shift away from a racial binary to that of a multicultural, multiethnic space and the processes—and consequences—require more attention from geographers. Race is socio-politically constructed. However, studies on the emergence of

other ethnic and racial groups that reshape the traditional Southern racial binary are critical for understanding race and racialization.

Relevant Geographic Conceptualizations of Identity and Belonging

Within geography and other social sciences, identity is understood as a social construction malleable for different purposes and social and political contexts (Clark, 2009). Identities are forged through relational experiences and interactions (Klocker and Tindale, 2021; Massey, 2004). Negotiations of identity can take place in a variety of situations that are personal, but also political. Historically, what it meant to be Black was politicized. There were conversations about how much blood one needed to be Black and if biracial people could claim multiple identities (Clark, 2009). Experiences as “Black immigrants” have created a sense of community as the group attempts to seek opportunities and political freedoms (Creese, 2011). In Creese’s (2011) study, participants noted that questions such as “Where do you come from?” could spark different answers depending on who was asking the question. These questions of identity have only become more complex as higher numbers of African immigrants arrive.

In recent years, geographers, particularly feminist geographers, have looked to intersectionality as a guide to understanding the complexities of identity (Valentine, 2007). I draw on conceptions of intersectionality and the social categories of gender, race, and ethnicity, among others, to demonstrate the complex power dynamics and relationships within identity construction by immigrants through their lived experiences. The themes in this chapter are not ordered by importance but reflect significant and meaningful aspects of immigrants’ daily lives. They overlap and intersect with each other at various times and in different social situations, however, these themes call for geographic attention to social and political inequalities.

Within geographic discussions of inclusion and belonging, some scholars have turned to memory and/or emotion to understand relational identities (Jones and Garde-Hansen, 2012; Horton and Kraftl, 2012; Pile, 2005). Jones and Garde-Hansen (2012) note how the performative construction of memories happens as processes within place, noting that identities are always being made and unmade. Memories and emotions can function as bridges for past experiences to enter the present consciousness (Horton and Kraftl, 2012). This is particularly important when there are past traumas or exclusions embedded in one's memory. In their work on refugee resettlement processes for Iraq refugees, Ehrkamp et al. (2019) argue for a conception of trauma as an important discursive practice that can be relational and emergent from social environments or legal procedures. Even as this chapter attempts to focus on the lived experiences of immigrants within Clarkston, aspects of identity shaped by an individual's past may impact their ability to feel included in place.

Recent geographic work on immigrants and belonging has begun to explore theorizations of 'home.' Home can exist at many scales: a residence, a neighborhood, a city, and/or a country (Black, 2002). Home can be where a person is from or where they feel most at home. For refugees, their everyday experiences in creating home often illustrate the changing roles of place (Smith, 2015). Examining the many iterations of home for refugees can expand research on place making, belonging, and identity.

Intertwined in conceptions of identity and belonging, homemaking is both an individual and social process. For many immigrants, establishing connections with fellow immigrants from their country of origin can be a way to establish home and become visible in the broader community, through festivals, celebrations, and community activism (Tastsoglou, 2006; Gilmartin, 2008). The refugee community is represented within the city and local areas through

these public gatherings, which can be a practical and celebratory way for refugees to meet and engage with each other, with members of the “host community,” and with city officials.

However, scholars argue that the concept of home is not always a positive one for many refugees and immigrants. For refugees, the home can often become a place of contradictions of inclusion and exclusion (Staheli and Nagel, 2008). Even as refugees attempt to make a new home in a new place, they may face discrimination and be told to “go home!” by those that feel their homes are being encroached on (Gilmartin, 2008). In conceptions of placemaking, researchers find that spaces of the home are often overlooked, which contributes to certain populations like women and those who work in home-health care being left out (Ehrkamp, 2017, 2013; Dobrowolsky and Tastsoglou, 2016; Dyck, 2005). The concept of home, which for many is supposed to be a place of comfort, becomes a place of difference. Paying careful attention to how refugees represent ‘home’ is necessary in this dissertation.

Place Matters for Both Geographers and Migrants

Migrants are inherently constituted by their movement between places, but place matters to identity construction as well (Cresswell, 2004; Lawson, 2000). As a conceptualization, place may be one of the most complex concepts in the social sciences. In its simplest form, place is a location imbued with meaning (Cresswell 2004; Agnew, 1987; Soja, 1986; Tuan, 1977). The term has gone through multiple theoretical conceptions across the social sciences, including geography, anthropology, social science, architecture, and planning (Relph, 1976, Seamon, 1979; Massey, 1994; Lefebvre, 1991). This chapter utilizes several conceptualizations of place as a social construction within a multidisciplinary discussion to explore the various conceptions of place by immigrants (see Berger, 2016; Harvey, 1996; Massey, 1994; De Certeau, 1984).

Geographic work on place has understood it to be a “repository of meaning” that is not fixed by time or specific people (Entrikin, 1976, p. 626). Massey (1991; 1994) focused on place and the sense of place, arguing that place is a socially constructed, set of imagined histories and connections that at times, can be a site of conflict. This approach is deemed a “global” sense of place (Massey, 1993; 2004.) In a critique of Harvey’s (1996) depiction of a place as socially constructed but stagnant and tied to the capitalist system, Massey (1994) argues that place is a product of interconnected flows, open and progressive. When we understand place as socially constructed progressively, places can be made and remade to welcome others.

Taking place a step further, Massey (1994) embeds place with histories, layers and layers of linkages, which can serve as a site of conflict for multiple identities; “each ‘place’ can be seen as a particular, unique, point of...intersection” (p. 27). Following this notion of site conflict, Dikeç (2005) argues, “space is neither naturally given nor immutable, but rather is a product of interrelations always in the making, and never ‘a totally coherent and interrelated system of interconnections,’ and, thus, is both disrupted and a source of disruption” (p. 181).

Places described with this definition can also be understood as active constituents in meaning-making. Multiple scholars support Massey’s (1991; 1994) views of place and space, further theorizing them as “neither given nor immutable...a product of interrelations always in the making...both disrupted and a source of disruption” (Dikeç, 2005, p. 181). There are important aspects of Massey’s (1991; 1994) definition of place here: one being that it is socially constructed by a variety of identities, and another being that place can be a place of conflict and disruption. When scholars examine place as a social construction, processes and networks of power become obvious and crucial: depictions of place as a social construction show how individuals and institutions experience place. Groups have various levels of power in certain

situations, which can lead to situations where there are hidden or ignored discourses of place and the processes of place-making (Dyck, 2005). Researchers find this occurs when local governments “brand” their cities, promoting expensive and flashy projects, while ignoring the needs of ordinary people (Friedman, 2010). Additionally, scholars can see the spatial distribution of hierarchical power relations and its ties to broader institutions, like neoliberalism or colonialism (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992).

However, Massey, while a keystone scholar in place research, does not go without her critics. One of the most prominent critiques of Massey’s definition of place is that it emphasizes social construction too much and overlooks the physical aspects of place. For example, Agnew (2011) describes McDowell and Massey’s (1984) work as “American Romanticism à la Thoreau” which is a “transcendental idealization of place” (Massey and Thrift, 2003). Presently, it is understood by many place scholars that place is both experienced by individuals concretely and as place is socially constructed (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992; Entrikin, 2003; Pierce et al., 2011). An understanding of place as socially constructed means that place can be reactionary and used to exclude others who do not belong (Harvey, 1993). Cresswell’s (2004; 2008) definition of place is one that includes location and meaning. Places are not fixed in space; they do not have to be stationary. Conceptually, place can be used to relate experiences throughout the world during the humanistic turn in geography during the 1970s (Cresswell, 2008). Cresswell (2004, p. 39) writes: place is made and remade on a daily basis...an unstable stage for performance.” Here, place is both the built environment and constituted through social practices and activities. It is this use of place, as both part of the built environment and a social construction, which I use to inform my research in this dissertation.

Critical geographers have added to discussions of place by exploring power relationships (Paasi, 2011; Rose, 1993; Keith and Pile, 1993). Places at all scales exist as meanings are related through the exchange of power. The construction of places is built upon social processes, which means place is neither something that is inherently good nor bad, but that place echoes the meanings socially constructed by society.

In Arendt's (1943) piece, "We Refugees," she writes, about how her identity became unstable as she moved, shifting from one rooted in nationality to one rooted in ethnicity. This is the case for many refugees; their identity is shaped by their lived experiences and their transitions to new settings; they are shaped by broader institutional and cultural practices. It takes time for a new identity to settle, but their histories are not removed, just adapted. These patterns can be seen in the narratives of refugees, which illustrate how meaning is constructed through experience (Alarcón and Reguillo, 2007).

Sociologist Brown-Saracino's (2015) exceptional work on LBQ women in four cities has provided scholars with a wealth of information on how place shapes identity. Brown-Saracino's (2015) work explores neighborhood effect, place distinction, and regional identity to find that place explains the variations found in different structural positions; specifically, the numbers and acceptance, place narratives, and encounters with the city. Stemming from literature that conceptualizes both place and identity as static yet acknowledges variation, Brown-Saracino (2015) argues that there are two frameworks that may explain variation, neighborhood effect and place character, but neither provides her with complete satisfaction. She critiques the neighborhood effect because it isolates place elements, while place character scholars, such as Paulsen (2004) and Guenther (2010) also do not look at place holistically, instead only focusing on culture, politics, and location. Brown-Saracino (2015) is right to call for an expansion,

arguing: “Actors do not simply respond to place character. Instead, they construct and partially constitute character—not once...but always and ever” (p. 10). An alternative, geographic framework rooted in the spatialities of place may explore the complexities of place and identity.

Place, for most geographers, exists at multiple scales; in my research I focus on the local scale and how it informs—and is informed by—a variety of other scales (Dyck, 2005, Friedman, 2010). While it is possible to look at multiple scales at once or to highlight a scale other than the local, using the local scale allows for the use of ethnographic methods and the exploration of discourses of the “everyday,” on-the-ground experiences. Sarah Ahmed, a prominent feminist geographer, has contributed to discourses of the everyday through interrogating the notions of inclusion and exclusion, highlighting how they are not just abstract concepts but are experienced and embodied in everyday encounters (2000). Her research demonstrates that spaces can be both enabling and exclusionary, shedding light on the complex dynamics of inclusion and belonging (Ahmed, 2000).

Through these experiences, we can explore how meaning is constructed and remade through intersectionalities and power relations. For example, some geographers argue that regions, as a local scale, are institutional structures and processes which reflect “wider constellations of power” (Paasi, 2011, p. 11; Allen et al., 1998). In addition, the local scale emphasizes the “routine” and draws attention to typical power relations, which can create entry points for exploring different scales, from the body to the global (Dyck, 2005).

Places can also represent intersections of memory and geography. Gupta and Ferguson (1992) write “Remembered places have often served as symbolic anchors of community for dispersed people. This has long been true of immigrants, who use memory of place to construct imaginatively their new lived world” (p. 11). Places can be physical, identifiable, and stable, but

they can also be understood as “ongoing temporal processes where all manner of things combine in unique unfolding formations which remain interconnected to the wider world in terms of flows and connections” (Jones and Garde-Hansen 2012, p. 86). Recent work has begun to conceptualize place as a temporal process (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Massey and Thrift, 2003). Conceptualizing place in this way can help illustrate how places are memorialized in the minds of immigrants and refugees and how trauma can impact place memories. In this vein, Porteous and Smith (2001) explore displacement and diaspora as processes where memories of place are juxtaposed against the current physical landscape.

For Gupta and Ferguson (1992), power is tied to colonialism, but conceptions of race and gender are integral too (Massey, 1994). Spatial distributions are directly tied to hierarchical power relations, and “we can see that the identity of a place emerges by the intersection of its specific involvement in a system of hierarchically organized spaces with its cultural construction as a community or locality.” Putting it succinctly, Dikeç (2005, p. 181) argues that “politics takes *place*.” Within every place, there are negotiations of power and struggles over inequality worth exploring.

Within conceptual work on place, the notion of geographical imagination has become very valuable for understanding how people perceive different places and construct meanings. Said (1978) first used the term “imaginative geographies” to argue that non-western cultures, particularly those of the “Orient” were represented as backward and exotic. These images were constructed against images of Europe as progressive. Said’s (1978) conceptualization of the “other” as a social construction opposing the preeminent culture is useful for understanding how difference manifests at various scales.

In addition to how imaginative geographies may shape cultural meanings, they can also shape one's sense of self and have been deemed "part of the common experience of man" (Cosgrove, 1979, p. 43; Driver, 2005; May, 1996). Within this work, I use Marcus' (2009, p. 482) definition of geographical imagination: "the spatial knowledge—real or abstract—that allows individuals to imagine place." Marcus' (2009) ethnographic fieldwork on Brazilian immigration to the United States highlights how transnational migration flows impact immigrant experiences, highlighting how Brazilian immigrants have moved for financial or work factors, but that these reasons are embedded in deeper geographical imaginations. Some immigrant and refugee groups build communities with social capital at the core; groups with similar ethnic backgrounds have already settled in that area. On the other hand, some network to create a community in other ways, through sports or religion (Hyndman and McLean, 2006; Ehrkamp and Nagel, 2014).

Methodology

The aim of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is to explore how participants make meaning through lived experiences (Larkin et al., 2021; Martinez, 2002). It is quite common to use IPA to explore identity changes during major life transitions and are usually sociological or psychological in nature, which makes this a particularly useful lens for the study of immigrants (Smith and Nizza, 2022). Others note the importance of place in IPA and phenomenology (Seamon, 2012). Seamon (2012) finds that place identity is important to understanding the nature of place as well as the relationships and complexities of place and experiences. Scholars who focus on ethnicity, race, and immigration from other disciplines such as healthcare and sociology have used IPA to analyze experiences related to migration. Tessitore and Margherita (2021) study five female Nigerian asylum seekers in Italy to examine their

experiences. They find that the integration process puts gendered pressure on mothers. Martinez (2002) uses a phenomenological lens as a critical method in her book *Phenomenology of Chicana Experience and Identity: Communication and Transformation in Praxis*. She explores gender, ethnicity, and race as an autobiographical study on Chicana identity creation at the U.S. border. Martinez (2002, p. 4) argues:

Taking up phenomenology to study race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and power can be paradoxical in that the phenomenological effort requires a suspension of taken-for-granted categories such as race, ethnicity, and so on. Yet, if it is truly possible to suspend these categories, it can only be so by virtue of having traveled all the way through them—that is, by virtue of having interrogated and exorcised if you will, every possible way in which racial, ethnic, economic, and sexual codes create contexts that preconsciously provide persons, groups, and cultures with ready-made significations about people and their circumstances that appear simply, naturally, to be true.

Through this method, I aim to interrogate the notions of race, nationality, gender, and ethnicity that appear in the participants' narratives and understand how they are negotiating these categories in the context of Clarkston.

In this method, fewer interviews are used to understand contexts. Typically, semi-structured interviews are used. Smith and Osborn (2003) highlight four parts of this method. The first stage is to read the transcript closely and establish emerging themes. The second stage is to group together emergent themes. In the third stage, the researcher uses the themes from the first interview to guide the rest of the transcripts. In the fourth stage, the researcher organizes the themes into a structure with narrative extracts included. These themes structure the researcher's

interpretation (Gill, 2015). The intention here is not to form a theoretical explanation but to provide an account of an experience.

My first interview was conducted at a significant place for the Clarkston community, Refuge Coffee Company. This location is central within Clarkston and a well-known meeting spot for residents, the cafe is open air, and some proceeds of sales go to refugees, so it made sense as an interview location. While I was interviewing Daniel Solomon, a middle-aged politician originally from an African country, multiple people who recognized him came up to chat with him, walking up and greeting him in a friendly manner. I also conducted an unstructured interview with Paul Banza, a middle-aged man originally from an African country at Refuge Coffee Company. The other interviews were conducted in my participants' homes. Kan Win, a middle-aged man originally from Myanmar, and his wife, Myia Win, kindly welcomed me into their apartment in Clarkston for our interview. Zeya Khine, a young adult originally from Myanmar, also hosted me at her apartment in Clarkston. Some studies suggest that situating interviews within the participants' homes positioned them as experts (Warren, 2017; Elwood and Martin, 2000); these locations seemed to help make the participants feel more comfortable sharing information with me in their own space. Table 4.1 notes details about the participants that may be important for this study. I did not ask participants about or include immigration status to protect participants from potential harm. I have given the participants of this study pseudonyms and taken out any information that may identify them.

Table 4.1 Participant Demographic Information

| Type of Interview | Pseudonym | Age | National Origin | Gender | Occupation |
|--------------------------|------------------|------------|----------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Semi-Structured | Daniel Solomon | 40s | Eritrea | Male | Politician |
| Unstructured | Paul Banza | 30s | Democratic Republic of the Congo | Male | Service worker |
| Semi-Structured | Kan Win | 40s | Myanmar | Male | Clergy |
| Semi-Structured | Myia Win | 40s | Myanmar | Female | Stay-at-home mother |
| Semi-Structured | Zeya Khine | 20s | Myanmar | Female | Stay-at-home mother |

This table shows the demographic information of five participants interviewed for this study in 2021.

Each interview was about an hour to an hour and a half in length. I recorded the interviews as well as wrote notes. Then, I transcribed the interviews by hand. I followed an adapted version of Smith and Osborne’s (2003) method for analyzing data through interpretive phenomenological analysis. To begin, I read the first interview. Then I re-read the interview,

coding for commonalities on the left side of the page. I re-coded a second and third time looking for themes on the right side of the page. Next, I grouped themes by topic rather than chronologically. When I felt I had explored all the themes for the first interview, I moved on and did the same technique for participants 2-7. Sometimes important new themes arose, so I would return to the first interview and re-code again.

Immigrant Experiences with Identity, Belonging, and Place

The following section explores the construction of identity and place by presenting thick descriptions of interviews with exemplary participants within Clarkston, Georgia. Identity is deeply intertwined with participant's lived experiences through constructions of personal, everyday experiences of memory and emotion. Identity, much like place, is situational and constantly created and re-created; thus, there is no single permanent identity. It is constantly in flux with new experiences and power relations. The representations of identity and place in the next pages are snapshots of five individuals' lives during a certain time and place.

Zeya Khine's Narrative

Zeya Khine's life revolves around her kids and family. She is a 26-year-old woman, originally from Myanmar, who arrived in Clarkston eight years ago. When Zeya was ten, her father left Myanmar for work at a refugee camp in Malaysia and eventually found himself in New Delhi, India. Without him, Zeya's family traveled to New Delhi with the intent to come to the United States. While waiting for resettlement, her grandfather passed away. Eventually, Zeya, her five siblings, and her mother were resettled in Clarkston. Her father stayed with her grandmother in New Delhi, eventually being relocated with other family members to Tulsa,

Oklahoma. Over time, all of Zeya's family members moved to Tulsa. She has traveled to see them a few times and says one day her family might move out there. But right now, she says she is happy in Clarkston.

While in New Delhi, Zeya was introduced to the Seventh-day Adventist Church which she became incredibly involved with. After arriving in Clarkston, Zeya continued to attend church, becoming regularly active in the local ministry. During Zeya's first year in Clarkston, she met a fellow Myanmarian refugee at church, and they fell in love and got married. Her husband works two jobs as a chef in town and her children are enrolled in a faith-based private school.

Zeya loves her house of worship, but from what she tells me, it is more about belonging than a strong religious tie. She says about her and her husband,

“We are not really Adventist at the time when we were married. He's not into it. But we all go to church, we always hear [the message] and then we read the bible. We read the books. We believe...I think.”

Zeya's house of worship has a service in Burmese, where she knows Kan Win from. They live in the same apartment complex. In fact, Zeya tells me she lives near several Zomi families and some of her husband's relatives. They all go to the same house of worship.

When Zeya is not at church, she is usually doing something for her two young children or her husband. About her relationship, she says,

“It's very different from here, in Burma, the husband...but...yeah, now they cook, but before, the culture is the husband doesn't cook, the husband doesn't work the home. Right now they did everything, but in Myanmar, like, very very, like some someplace, they still have that culture. Yes.”

Zeya also notes some of other Myanmarian families share home work between spouses. This quote shows Zeya's relationship with gender and place; she is very aware of the gendered expectations of her home nation, but she chooses to act within a distinct set of norms here in the United States. Some of Zeya's patterns and habits have stayed very rigid since coming from Myanmar, but other aspects of her identity are malleable as she spends more time in the United States.

Zeya says the hardest part of living in the United States is the language barrier. At times, she's simply avoided going places because of it. Zeya said, "It's very hard to us. You don't want to go to the hospital, won't understand. Even if we have the problem, we don't even understand, but...yeah, we can talk with the interpreter." Zeya later noted that her husband was hospitalized with COVID-19 for several days, but she never went to visit him because she was afraid of the language barrier at the hospital.

Zeya and her family primarily speak their ethnic languages, Burmese and Zomi, at home. This often creates strife between her and her children, who would prefer to speak English. But Zeya feels that their first and second languages are valuable parts of their culture and necessary for her children to know. It also helps them communicate with family and friends around the United States and in their former countries. Zeya said,

"I'm not teaching English [at home]. I always force [my children] to speak Zomi.

Because, because they, they always speak English. And they even talk in school, English, so they forgot our own language."

Zeya is quite upset by the thought that her American-born children might lose their Zomi-language abilities. She thinks the language and cultural signifiers help connect her and her children to their homeland even when they are in Clarkston. She encourages them to contact their

cousins and grandparents in Tulsa who speak only Zomi often. Her emphasis on the family using the Zomi language highlights how ethnic languages are a valuable tool for belonging transnationally. Zeya does not mention how important learning English for her children is, but it is clear to see that she believes it is important by how she has pasted her walls with her children's English homework and awards.

While Zeya enjoys living in Clarkston, one event has cast a shadow on her feelings about the city. Five years ago, while it was still dark outside in the early morning, Zeya left her apartment to start her car to go to work. A man with his face partially covered stopped her at gunpoint and carjacked her. Her daughter watched from the window. I ask for details about what the man looked like, and she says, "I'm not really sure, he has a cap, just a man." Zeya explains that this event made her quite fearful, and she is still apprehensive about her surroundings and glances over her shoulder whenever she's in a parking lot. In addition to the trauma related to this event, it also took her more than a year to earn enough money for a new vehicle, straining the family's finances quite a bit. I ask Zeya if she feels safe and welcome in the city now, and she says, "Before that time, I can go everywhere. I can look at every person. But after that time, I look at every person, I am very scared. I feel so scared."

Zeya did not know much about the United States before arriving. She says, "We said that [the United States] is the second heaven in Myanmar...And yeah, yes, it's very, very good."

Paul Banza's Narrative

I first meet Paul as he's working at a Clarkston coffee shop, but this is unsurprising, as he spends much of his time at the coffee shop. Sporting a t-shirt with the coffee shop's name on it, Paul is a middle-aged bald man with a thick African accent and broad shoulders. Before coming

to the United States, Paul was a teacher. Now he works in the service industry, at a non-profit coffee shop that provides job training and personal development to resettled refugees and immigrants in Clarkston.

When Paul first came to the United States, he worked long hours at a chicken processing plant because he had almost no English language skills. Now that Paul works in the service industry, his favorite part of his job is his ability to practice English. He says his job helped him learn about American ways of life. Since he started at the coffee shop, Paul moved up the ranks from a trainee to a manager. He is a well-known face around the city: you can find him around town at different refugee and immigrant-friendly events speaking about his experiences before and after he found his home in Clarkston. His place is in Clarkston, working at the coffee shop, practicing English, and sharing his story with others.

Paul was settled in Clarkston as a refugee almost a decade ago, but he makes it clear that he no longer considers himself a refugee when I first meet him:

Interviewer: “So I was just talking to those people over there, and they told me that you were a refugee from Africa?”

Paul: (*chuckles a little bit) “Well, I used to be, yeah.”

Interviewer: “Oh? Where are you from?”

Paul: “I’m from Congo. But I’m from Clarkston now...I’ve been here...8 years now.”

Paul distances himself from the identity of a refugee; that was something he was in the past.

About his experiences before coming to the United States, he says, “First I went to Swaziland. I was in the town, not the camp, I was there for 9 years...but I always participated with the refugees, but I did not live there, in the camp. I wasn’t a refugee there.” Paul’s home in Africa was war-torn and the political events within his country made him flee temporarily to a second

country before eventually being resettled to the United States. What Paul says about his experiences in Swaziland sheds light on how inclusion and belonging impact one's own representation: he is careful to align himself with refugees in Swaziland but does not want to be seen as a refugee within the camp (although he does come to the United States as a refugee from Swaziland later). Paul positions himself alongside other refugees, but not as a refugee. Paul's reluctance to identify with the term refugee implies a completed stage in his life. For Paul, the term "refugee" is inclusive of a tumultuous and trauma-filled period in his life, and he has since gone on to construct a new identity forged from experiences within the United States.

Paul has since found his home in Clarkston, although life in the United States can still be difficult at times. He describes living in Clarkston: "It is really wonderful...because it is such a diverse place. We are from everywhere. But sometimes it feels like I am living upside down." When pressed further, he says, "...Everything can be so confusing, or it used to be...Just like feeling like the world is upside down...or it used to be." Paul's daily life is contextualized through a lens of difference: he has norms, cultural values, and a history from another part of the world that shapes his present. From the outside, immigrants are judged as different by their "foreignness," visible through their choice in clothing, accents, or racial appearance. He says people assess him based on his accent occasionally: "When I speak, people know I am not from here. Sometimes they ask if I am from Africa. Maybe they tip different, I do not know." For immigrants, these symbols of otherness are only part of the story: they carry their lived experiences through their daily life with them everywhere.

Kan and Myia Wins' Narratives

Kan and Myia Win are happy in Clarkston. You can tell this by how often they smile and laugh when they talk about their life in the city. In fact, since they settled in Clarkston more than eleven years ago from Myanmar, they have not thought about leaving. It has not always been easy: Kan says there are many aspects of the United States that still feel foreign and overwhelming. Kan and his wife use humor and patience as they go through daily life. Kan says, “Change, change, and we start a new lifestyle, so that's why USA, that means, for a long time, ‘You Start Again,’...USA,” then they both laugh. The Win family has had more than their fair share of struggles in life, but they stay resilient through their connections to church and family.

I met the Wins in their apartment in Clarkston on a Sunday afternoon. I was first introduced to the Wins through a connection at Friends of Refugees Providing Education and Empowerment (F.R.E.E.), a local faith-based refugee organization. The Wins welcome me into their living room, and we sit on the couch. The walls are covered with children’s drawings and awards—they are obviously proud parents. Kan Win is curious about how I know our shared acquaintance: right away, he asks me if I am part of their religion and if that is how I contacted them. Kan seems slightly dejected when I tell him, no, I contacted them by looking into Clarkston’s refugee organizations. Kan’s religion is extremely meaningful to him. In fact, he is the pastor at a house of worship in nearby Decatur where he preaches in Burmese and English.

The Wins were religious before arriving in the United States, but they have become even more so since. Their connections to the church have provided the Wins with a much-needed community as they tried to navigate by raising their children in a foreign country. Both of their children receive an education sponsorship to a private Christian school in Decatur. In addition,

they say their church community proved invaluable when Myia began suffering from a rare brain disorder, but they do not go into detail about her condition.

Sometimes, immigrants tend to spend much of their time with fellow immigrants from similar regions of the world, but this is not the case for the Wins. Through Kan's position at his house of worship, he engages with immigrants from all over the world, but communication can be a barrier to community. Kan volunteers with his house of worship to bring goods and food to other immigrant families around Clarkston. He says,

“Because the language barrier for everybody, some Ghanaian, and we Zomi, we want to talk, but we need to talk, we need to use the English, but they didn't know the English, I don't know the English, very difficult, so we just give each other a smiling face, yeah.

Sometimes that's very...But God is amazing, God is so good, without speaking, we can understand what he wants, [what we need].

Here, Kan explains his struggle to make connections with other immigrants. This is a common theme among immigrants in Clarkston, who live in apartments surrounded by immigrants of other ethnicities. Immigrants try to include others by greeting each other politely with shy smiles. The lack of a common language can be a barrier to deeper relationships.

While Kan is often out of the house, engaging with other immigrants and Clarkston community members, his wife, Myia is more of a homebody. Myia, a middle-aged, stay-at-home mother, speaks very little English, but she says she can understand me. While Kan does most of the talking during our interview, Myia nods enthusiastically at certain points and corrects him when he gets dates wrong. Kan shares the story of how Myia and their daughter came to the United States. Early in their marriage, Kan received military orders to serve in the war under uncertain conditions and they had little contact while he was away. Myia did not hear from him

or know if he was alive for years. Then, suddenly, she heard from officials that the family would be resettled to the United States with about a month's notice before the move. Without Myia's knowledge, Kan had fled their Southeastern Asian country and gone to another country, where he sought refugee status and was resettled in the United States. Myia packed up what they had into three suitcases and moved with her young daughter to the United States, knowing no English and almost nothing about the United States. They spoke of this transitional time as "chaotic" and "frenzied." Myia and her daughter had little agency over their lives, whether they would have made a similar choice. They also had no say in where or when they were moving.

For the Win family, their previous country represents a place of struggle and strife, which makes their living situation in Clarkston seem much better. Kan, said:

[In our former country, when we want to cook] we can find firewood...in America, if we have money, everything is in sight. The water, the light...food...Everything inside our house here. Yes. So electricity, cook. Electricity is safe, the light...Electricity...hot. Everything over here. But in our country, you will have money, but anything is not inside the same area. So we need to go far away.

This feeling that anything is better than their former situation is not unique to the immigrants of Clarkston. Immigrants arrive with a certain set of expectations and imaginative geographies about their host society. Participants in this research had little knowledge of the United States before their arrival, however, they did have geographic imaginations that depicted the United States as a place of economic grandeur. These imaginations, paired with the harsh realities of their living situations draw distinct dualities of place in their minds.

Before their move, the Kans knew little about the United States, and nothing about Clarkston. About what he knew of America before arriving, Kan says, "Oh, this standard is too

high. Education is too high, like second heaven. You have to learn a lot of things. We weren't scared, we wanted to come." Kan's religiosity bleeds into his everyday life: even his geographic imaginations of the United States are formulated in religious terms.

While the Wins say they are happy and proud to be in the United States, there are times when the frustration of being an "other" arises. Kan completed part of a master's degree in his home country and is in the process of finishing it in the United States. To finish the degree, he was required to take an English examination. He says he feels like they made him take the test, "because I'm a foreigner, that's why they asked." He says sincerely and surely, "[I] passed the test." Discussing his hardships, Kan explains his family and his religion kept him motivated as he overcame the barriers.

The Wins try to eat a diet full of corn and rice similar to what they would have eaten back in Southeastern Asia. They tend to stay away from American fast food. Kan tells me he's never had a burger and would not know what to order from McDonald's, but their son interjects from the other room: "McDonald's! I love McDonald's. I like the cheeseburger!" Kan and Myia laugh, but they assure me he does not get McDonald's often. As more refugees and immigrants settled in Clarkston, local grocery stores started carrying more ethnic options. Now, immigrants in Clarkston may shop locally for foods from their countries of origin, only traveling to the large international market in Decatur to stock up on bulk goods a few times a year.

To the Wins, maintaining a cultural connection to their home nation is essential. They do this by celebrating traditional festivals and holidays in Clarkston with other Zomis. They tell me about Zomi National Day, celebrated every 20th of February to commemorate the end of colonialism and imperialism. Kan gets very animated when he talks about the Khadou, an Autumn Harvest Festival. Each year, the Wins gather with other Zomis who they have not been

in touch with to eat, drink, play drum music, and dance. The Wins show me special attire for the festival: handmade linen patterns passed down generations: a *Thahdo*, or Zomi long skirt for the girls, and a *Puan Laiisan*, a beautifully woven red and White cotton shawl for the men. They make traditional alcoholic wine from fermented corn. Describing the festival events, Kan says, “The woman give the man [some drink], the man gives the woman some drink and oh, on this night there is no God. We will talk to God in the morning!”

Daniel Solomon’s Narrative

Twenty years ago, Daniel Soloman did not come to the United States as a refugee, although he could have, and sometimes refers to himself as one. Instead, he came on a J-1 student visa. He left an African country wrought with internal conflict for better opportunities abroad. Knowing only a few people in the United States, Daniel finished his degree and moved to Clarkston, where his uncle, a refugee by the legal definition, lived. Before he knew it, he told me, Clarkston became his home.

On the surface, Daniel’s immigration story fits representations of the ideal and “successful” refugee by the state and the city. He came to the United States under uncertain terms, fell in love, started a family, found a career in public service, and has dedicated his life to making Clarkston a welcoming place. But under the surface, Daniel’s story reveals how identity constructions are a labyrinth of constantly remade representations and entangled endeavors.

Regardless of his immigration status, Daniel is a Black man in the American South. He tells me regardless of what he calls himself, his Blackness is the first impression anyone makes of him. He says, “So whoever sees me, whether it is the police or...some people, their first impression is they look at you, and they make up their mind. But not all people. Of course, there

are good people like you.” This statement is enlightening for a few reasons. First, even though Daniel does not say it, he implies that when people, including the police officers, first meet a Black man, they already have a negative image in place. He also implies that this makes them bad people. Second, he suggests that this does not include everyone, and not me, a young White researcher. In the same breath that Daniel uses to describe his own racialization, he racializes me as well. I am not sure why Daniel speaks of me as a good person—after all, we have just met forty-five minutes ago. But without saying it, Daniel has illustrated the literal binary of race relations in the U.S. South. Physical depictions of race are only one portion of the racial imaginative geography; feelings and perceptions are entwined in these constructions of identities as well. I believe Daniel, who has been in the United States longer than the other participants of this study, shows how he has internalized his conceptions of race as a binary to match the conceptions of race similar to American-born citizens of the United States.

While Daniel is a Black man in the American South, he is also African, and these experiences have shaped his identity as well. He says:

I come from a culture also that I know that there is always prejudice in a lot of other societies. So, this is not just exclusively [in the United States] that you will face. I mean, I really wish things would improve. But for me, I do have a different perception about what, what does it mean to be Black? I certainly cannot be the same as African Americans, because I did not grow up here, I do not want to portray myself as that. However, having lived here for 20 years, 20 plus years, I think I do now identify myself as African American because I am of course, an African, my background...And I'm also American. However, I do have a lot of respect to African Americans and their

experience. And I do appreciate the roles that they play. If it wasn't for their struggle, I probably wouldn't be here.

Here, Daniel demonstrates how complicated questions of identity can be. Even to himself, Daniel wavers on whether he fits into the categorization of African American. Through this quote, he explains how history and experiences are just as valuable to constructions of race as phenotypes, but also how flexible and situational racial identity can be.

Daniel's feelings about race and identity are also important to how he views refugees. Daniel is one of a few people I met in Clarkston who refers to refugees as "New Americans." This term centers the current geography and experiences of immigrants and is imbued with political meaning. Daniel uses the term to describe his inspiration for running for political office:

"There were a couple of New Americans, refugees, who arrived, on city council...And I wanted to motivate New Americans, or, and particularly, like, let me say, like people from [an African country] who never have seen any democratic process."

Daniel's use of the term "New Americans" highlights traditional pathways of integration and one he believes in strongly: one comes to the United States, becomes an American citizen, and then becomes involved with the nation's democratic processes. Daniel's use of the term "New American" situates Daniel's identity firmly in the present.

In some ways, Daniel has internalized feelings of difference as well, as illustrated in how Daniel explains how he first became aware of local politics over a decade ago: "I saw something...a peculiar name, that was not a typical American name, you know, on the yard signs [for a candidate], and it kind of piqued my attention. And although I was saying, whoa, wow, I don't think that somebody, a refugee, can actually, I did not think that this was possible. So, I can

also ignore it in a way. But I did really get interested...I started going to the city council meetings.”

Daniel’s experiences in Clarkston are shaped by his perception as a refugee or immigrant, and an ‘other’. This representation has the potential to create barriers to inclusion into society. About the people in Clarkston, he says, “They see the spelling of my name. They can see my accent, can hear my accent, and they know that I am an immigrant or refugee here.” He adds, “Most people were happy to talk to me and I never felt like, like, I’m not [welcome]. But I have faced some few exceptions who really pushed back...I think most people are really friendly. But you will always find that one exception.”

Undeniably, Daniel feels like he belongs in Clarkston, but he still feels connected to his former home. “I’m originally from a small town called [African country], in East Africa. I was born in this small town. North-central part of it, it’s called [African city].” Daniel describes both his former country and city as “small towns,” even though the city he was born in is the second largest in the country and its current population is more than ten times the size of Clarkston, a city in the Atlanta-metro area with a fast pace of life. where he resides now. Daniel’s use of the phrase “small town” is representative of the characteristic feelings of a small town, such as a slower pace of life and more family-oriented events. From his use of the phrase here and other comments throughout our interview, the deep connections, and feelings of belonging to his hometown are obvious. Yet even as he still feels a connection to his hometown, the signaling of the phrase “originally from” situates him away from his country of origin.

During his decade-long political career and as a Clarkston community member, Daniel has worked arduously to make Clarkston a welcoming place. But he is quite direct when he tells me that it was not policies that made Clarkston welcoming, it was the people and their actions:

I don't think you can make a city welcoming using a policy. You can do it by practice and by actually getting people together just like, you know, working with like a refugee nonprofit...I feel like I think beyond resolutions, the city council has not really done much. The people of Clarkston, who actually you know...I mean people like a family, they are the one who are making the city welcoming and making people welcomed...I mean, overall, you really find people are pretty friendly. I've never seen anybody with protest signs saying that refugees are not welcome, I mean, we have signs here that say welcome. So, I think this is not politicians, although we like to take credit.

But even with all his work, there is still a divide among different ethnic and racial groups in the city. He says,

So, if you go to a restaurant, or an Eritrean restaurant, it's seldomly that you will see, people even from [other] African countries, that go to the restaurant, and some of it must be probably because it's more of the same thing...I really wish we could go there to get a cup of coffee, or to just socialize. So, in a way, no, it's self-made segregation. I think it is self-isolation. And yeah, so even though the city has been very diverse, but I think people need to be direct. I hope people will interact in the future.”

Here, Daniel describes how ethnic restaurants in Clarkston are usually only frequented by people of the same ethnicity. Even though Clarkston is a small city and is marketed as “diverse and multiethnic” by the local state, some places and sites of meaning in the city are only visited by certain ethnic groups and there is not much interaction between different ethnicities. In recent years, local agencies and the Clarkston City Council have sponsored events, such as the Clarkston Story Walk at Friendship Forest Wildlife Sanctuary to encourage public engagement,

but many refugees and immigrants, like the Wins and Zeya Khine, either are unaware of these events, or choose not to engage in them.

Discussion and Conclusion

Gupta and Ferguson (1992, p. 17) write, “Changing the way we think about the relations of culture, power, and space opens the possibility of changing more than our texts.” In the last two decades, social scientists have explored culture, power, and place, but there is much more to be done to address the inequities of highly marginalized groups. Within geography, there is much to gain from studies of representations of place and identity, particularly at the local and individual scales. This research examines the lived experiences of resettlement and life after resettlement for five immigrants in Clarkston, Georgia, drawing attention to the complexities of identity and place and the relationships to gender, race, and experience. Within this chapter, I have shown that different facets of identity may surface at different times, and that while aspects of identity may intersect such as gender and ethnicity, they may not always. Identity is remarkably situation based. This chapter contributes to the geographies of the everyday and to migration studies, exploring facets of power relationships, inclusion, and belonging, as well as identity construction for immigrants in Clarkston. Within the next pages, I connect the five exemplary immigrant narratives presented in this work to the literature on place, race, and identity. Then, I offer concluding remarks and suggestions for future research.

Constellations of Place and Identity

Geography’s emphasis on people and their relationship to place provides a useful lens for exploring identity and belonging. This research highlighted several intersections of place and

identity. Immigrants reflected on places of meaning at different scales and the material and imaginative connections to identity and belonging. This section draws attention to the various places and uses by participants.

In this chapter, all participants discussed the United States, either as their new residence or in relation to immigrant politics. Each of the participants had been in the United States for different lengths of time. These lengths impacted the way that they saw themselves and others, as newer refugees seemed less familiar with United States constructions of race, class, and gender. In addition, the time that a refugee or an immigrant had been in the United States impacted their language abilities. The immigrants who had been in the United States for just a few years had more communicating and discussing complicated issues of identity and belonging. Participants commonly discussed America in juxtaposition with their former country of origin, as Kan said,

I want my children to stay in America. Because America can do everything we want. In our country, we need to do something, we need money. But in America, you need a house...Maybe the next generation, they can choose which one [country] is good and bad. And...now the frustration in the United States is everything is good. Because we know our country. So that's how we compare and... (sighs).

Through this quote, Kan struggles with his identity and connection to the United States: while Kan demonstrates a strong relationship to his former country of Myanmar using the phrase “our,” he wants his children to grow up in the United States because of the opportunities it can offer. Zeya also refers to Myanmar as “her country.” These answers show deep relationships forged through time and experience and reflect similar thinking to that of Said’s (1978) work, where he describes how imaginative geographies are used to depict representations of place through constructions of the ‘ours’ and the ‘others.’ Kan and Zeya’s possessive feelings

demonstrate how representations of places and belonging can manifest on an individual scale. On the contrary, Paul's experiences and relationship with his country of origin are different from Kan's and Zeya's experiences. When I asked Paul where he was from, he said, "I'm from Congo. But I'm from Clarkston now." Through this quote, we can see how identity may depend on context, time, and situations. Self-identifying can cause othering, but it can also demonstrate transnational connections and networks.

Often, migration to another country is related to difficult economic situations and financial hardship. The participants in this study drew attention to financial struggles by comparing their living situations in Clarkston to their former homes, repeatedly using imaginative geographies when doing so. For example, Kan told me he came to the United States with an imaginative geography of what the United States would be like. He said, "The streets and the bridge, everything gold, but the bad thing is that we know that you need to work every day." This imagery is common for immigrants from poorer countries who believe in representations of the American dream, as Marcus' (2009) research with Brazilian immigrants finds economic and financial aspects shape core representations of immigrants' imaginative geographies; this appears to be a similar case.

Daniel's choice of Clarkston reflects a similar intention of finding a home where social, cultural, and economic needs can be met. About why he chose to live in Clarkston, Daniel said, "it's not far from downtown Atlanta and we have pretty much everything that we need here, we have a lot of Eritrean/Ethiopian foods that we can buy and usually like we tend to continue to eat the same foods...and we try to get the same things...and the thing is Clarkston is pretty convenient in terms of access to MARTA, I like the fact that we have a farmer's market and I think that's one of the first places that I came to."

For the participants, racial, ethnic, and national identities were important to inclusion and belonging. Daniel discusses his racialization as a Black man at great lengths, but Paul, also a Black man, seems to place more importance on his country of origin and his experiences in Clarkston. This may be because of the length of time they have been in the country: Daniel has been in the United States for much longer and is heavily involved in local politics, so it makes sense that he would be more aware of patterns of racialization in the United States. However, it also demonstrates how flexible and socially constructed identity can be at times. During our interview, our topics of conversation led to particular aspects of Paul's identity surfacing, such as his connections to his place of employment and residence, but not his race.

The Zomi participants followed typical patterns of racialization for recent immigrants. Neither Kan, Myia, nor Zeya ever describe themselves as 'Asian' or 'Asian American.' At times, they identify with the country of Myanmar, and never as "Burmese." Much of the time, they call themselves Zomi. In India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, Zomi are a minority ethnic group that has faced persecution, forced labor, and torture, starting with British colonial policies that drew borders based on political grounds in the 19th and 20th centuries (Haokip, 2010), but continuing into recent years when leaders have persecuted anyone outside of the policy of "One race, one language, one religion" (Ngo, 2012). This persecution has caused many Zomi to band together and celebrate their ethnicity. In a similar fashion, Arendt (1943) discusses how her identity was no longer fixed through nationality and changed to reflect ethnicity after her migration. The exorbitant pressure the Zomi faced to minimize their ethnicity and religion may in fact have had the opposite effect on them; both Kan and Zeya speak excitedly about Zomi National Day, a holiday created in 1950 to celebrate national unity and political representation. To stay connected

to their country of origin and honor their heritage, both families have been able to seek out other Zomi in Clarkston and actively celebrate Zomi holidays.

For the Zomi participants, religion is also an important factor to their identity, but in alternate ways. For Kan and Myia, who are strong believers, religion is extremely meaningful; their livelihood depends on it. Kan also depends on his faith to reach out to other immigrants in the community and develop volunteer networks. For Zeya, her faith is more of a tool for belonging and inclusion; her church is a place of meaning to connect her with other Zomi in the community. Ehrkamp and Nagel (2014) and Nagel and Ehrkamp (2016) have studied immigrants and Christian faith communities in the U.S. South, finding these spaces can often be inclusive for immigrants, but they come with their own set of boundaries on race, politics, and gender norms. These institutions can be valuable tools for belonging, particularly in the South, where there has been intense political pressure on immigrants, but they can also reinforce power dynamics, and be reflective of class, gender, and racial privilege, contributing to further isolation.

Through institutions, organizations, and civic work, the city of Clarkston has become a welcoming resettlement site for some refugees and immigrants. Clarkston is known by city officials as a stepping stone for immigrants, but it can also be a permanent home. Sarah Ahmed's (2000) work on lived experiences draws attention to the complexities of migration and the notion of home as a material space, but also one of constructed feelings and subjectivities, which can often be a difficult subject for migrants. Within this study, most of the participants said they would like to continue to reside in Clarkston permanently, except for Zeya, who told me she was happy in Clarkston, but one day would like to move to another city in the greater Atlanta area, or out of state, where other members of her family were located. All of the participants noted that they were now living in Clarkston, with some implying that Clarkston was their home, such as

Paul who said, “When I think about [Clarkston], I think it really, it feels like home.” While Clarkton is officially designated a 1.4 square mile town, conceptualizations of the city by immigrants demonstrate that it is much more than a literal location on a map. For the women of this study, their homes are some of the places with the most importance, because they spend much of their time at home.

Female immigrants may face a more difficult time adapting to a new culture, particularly those who come from countries with more traditional gender roles, such as Latin America or the Middle East (Johnson et al., 2019; Hurtado-de-Mendoza et al., 2014). Zeya and Myia spend most of their time in their homes with their children in their role as homemakers. When they do leave their homes, it is usually to run typical family errands, like grocery shopping. They rarely interacted with the general public. Because of this, both women had not had many opportunities to practice their English and their English language skills suffered. Some refugee organizations are aware of this and have started programs to teach English one-on-one in homes (Catholic Charities, 2023).

Language barriers may lead to compounding issues for female migrants. Daniel described an example where police were involved in a domestic violence situation, but the husband, the perpetrator in the situation, was used as the translator for the wife for the police. Daniel said, “...somebody you are trying to avoid is used to translate for you. So I think it's really unfair.” Because it is common for refugee women to be stay-at-home mothers, they do not have the same opportunities to practice English or earn sustainable wages. This can create a barrier to inclusion in communities and further isolation. Volunteer organizations have begun to combat this by offering in-home English classes or work-from-home jobs, but these still take time away from family duties and require a great time commitment, as well as a plethora of volunteers. In

addition, discourses of unwelcoming places, safe spaces, and danger tend to be structured by conceptualizations of home and community, which female immigrants may struggle with (Ahmed, 2000).

Clarkston may represent a place where refugees and immigrants can make their homes, but it also could become an unwelcoming space through encounters with others. Refugees or immigrants who may have experienced hardship and tragedy before coming to a place may have pasts shaped by traumatic events that are seared into people's lived experiences (Ehrkamp et al., 2022). In addition, stereotyping, racism, and exclusion can contribute to feelings of unwelcomeness. Zeya's carjacking experience was a traumatic event that shaped her perceptions of safety within the city; while she feels that most people are friendly and welcoming, she still feels unsafe and unwelcome in Clarkston at times.

In addition, Daniel noted his feelings of self-segregation within Clarkston. Rather than segregation, I would suggest that immigrants in Clarkston have found groups with similar interests, ways of life, and experiences. This may contribute to individual or group isolation at times. For example, Kan preaches at his house of worship in Burmese. While this can contribute to feelings of belonging and connection to the Zomi community in Clarkston, it can also lead to isolation of the group from other immigrants and English speakers. Indeed, there are constellations of sites where certain ethnicities spend more time, but this is quite common in most cities with large immigrant populations.

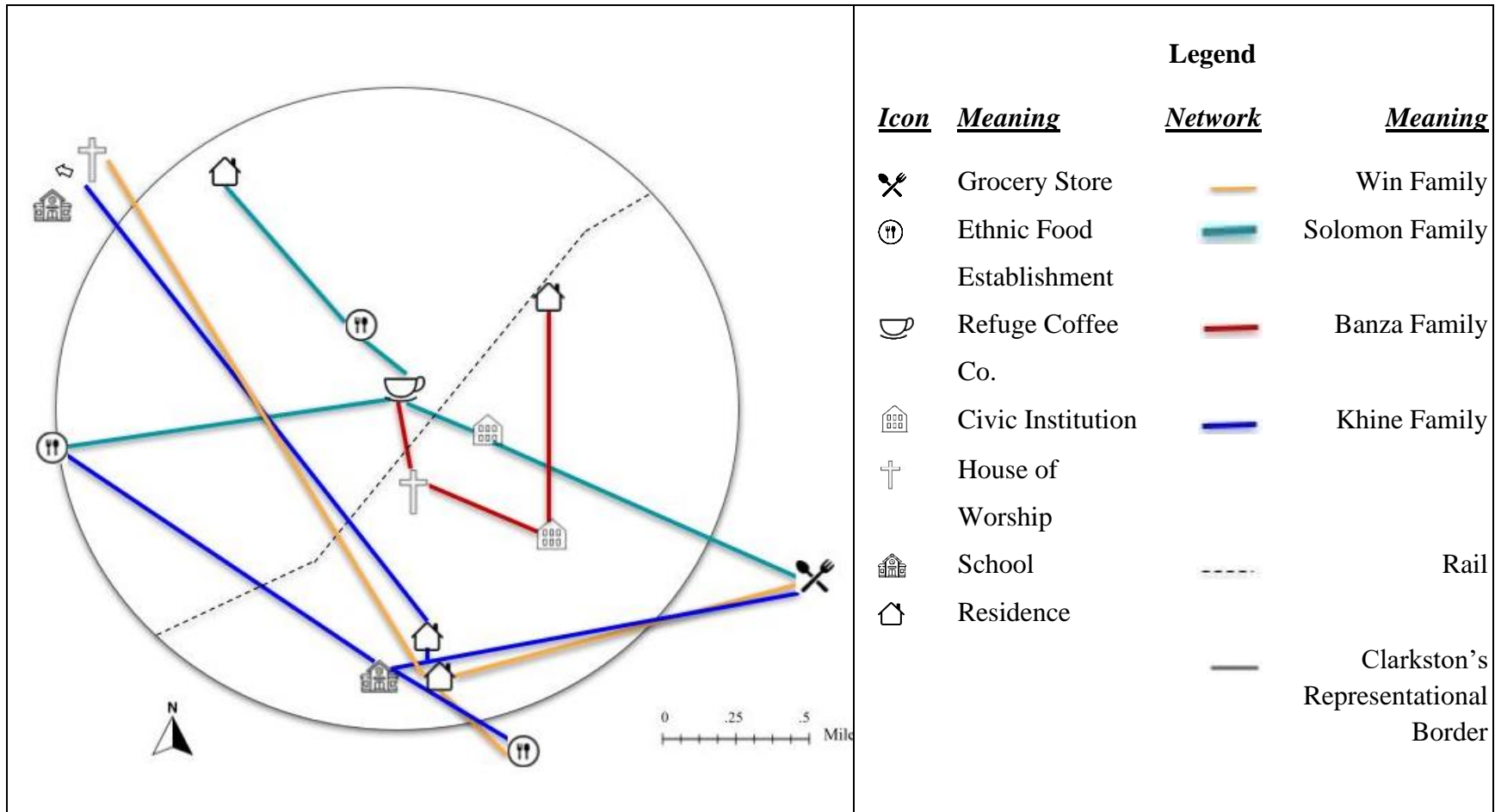
The following figure (4.1) shows constellations of place and identity in Clarkston. This is an illustration of immigrant networks with significant places and their relative locations displayed on the map. As Creswell (2004, p. 39) writes: "Place is made and remade on a daily basis...an unstable stage for performance." Through this figure, we can conceptualize places as

part of the built environment and as constituted through social practices and activities. Within Clarkston, there are places that are significant for immigrants' inclusion and belonging, although these places are socially constructed through interactions and can have different meanings to different people. For example, one of the main sites of inclusion is Refuge Coffee Company, a place Paul, and many other members of the community, use as a gathering space. For Daniel, it is both a community gathering space and his place of employment.

This figure also shows that there are very different physical and material places of meanings for immigrants in Clarkston. There are intersections and overlaps between families: for example, the Wins and Zeya Khine share similar places of meaning in Clarkston. On the other hand, some of the networks never meet: the Banza family's significant places have to overlap with those mentioned by the Wins or Khine. The city council and the local state should take this into account when planning transportation, cultural events, and other events. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that this is a snapshot of these participants' lives in 2021; their patterns of mobility and sites of meaning may change.

Figure 4.1 Constellations of Place and Identity in Clarkston

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This visualization is representative of the networks of place and identity construction for the participants in this research during 2021.

Figure created by Sarah Ryniker.

In this chapter, I have sought to draw connections between everyday experiences of identity and place through exemplary cases in Clarkston, Georgia. Immigrants interact with places and people through everyday experiences and are racialized or gendered, and these experiences make and remake constructions of identity. These narratives show the intersectional identities of immigrants throughout daily life and draw attention to how place is socially and individually constructed. Immigrants construct place themselves, through their religious practices, ethnic festivals, food practices, and family traditions. Thinking about place and identity in these ways offers geographers a lens to understand geopolitics at scale of the everyday, as socially constructed through encounters and experiences. More research is needed, particularly on female immigrants. Future research should also be careful to examine the ways dominant frameworks have represented marginalized groups in problematic ways and how we can best honor participants' voices.

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Chapter V. Conclusion

“We cannot read the street straightforwardly,” Keith and Pile (1993, p. 8) write as they describe how the urban experience consists of diverse experiences, bits of knowledge, spatialities, and representations. What might look like a simple street, or a simple town, in Clarkston’s case, has a far more complex story behind it. This dissertation has shown the complexities of Clarkston and its residents especially in relation to its recent receiving of immigrants. I have offered an examination of an emerging immigrant gateway within the South and explored how the city of Clarkston has represented itself as diverse and friendly to refugees in branding and marketing endeavors. I have demonstrated the how neoliberal multicultural discourses of refugees and immigrants by local institutions have evolved over the last two decades. I have also analyzed personal narratives of refugees and immigrants as they experience place and shape their identities.

In Chapter II, I have highlighted two new gateways of immigration, Atlanta and Clarkston, to show how institutions affect immigrants’ inclusion in their daily life and at various scales. I argued that Clarkston and Atlanta’s vision for the region and its economic development are inclusive of refugee representation, and yet city policies are implemented without the contribution of refugees and immigrants. In addition, the state of Georgia produces multiple contradictory “welcoming” discourses, such as when politicians use “welcoming” rhetoric to encourage economic and urban development, and when the same politicians discourage migration and critique “welcoming” city policies. Even with critique from the state and federal government, some cities in Georgia, including Atlanta, Dalton, and Clarkston, continue to brand themselves as “welcoming cities” for immigrants and refugees (Zúñiga and Hernández-León, 2005). Within Atlanta and Clarkston, institutions, such as the city government and nonprofit

refugee organizations, have led to the increased warmth and reception of immigrants. Inclusion of refugees and immigrants into local politics leads to more overall inclusion and community as well as stronger refugee agency, and lead to more representation at higher scales. Municipalities need to create inclusive environments by including decision-making processes.

In Chapter III, I argued that Clarkston's neoliberal policies, which have encouraged multiculturalism at the expense of refugees and migrants, were created to bolster the city and region. These discourses were used by the city to derive material benefit from the rebranding of refugees and brand the city as 'diverse,' which is indicative of neoliberal multiculturalism. Often neoliberal multiculturalism masks racism while producing new privileges and encouraging inequality (Melamed, 2006). Further, racial capitalism situates race as "essential" to capitalism and its reproduction (Loyd and Bonds, 2018; Melamed, 2011). In this chapter, I highlight the multiple, contradicting discourses of immigrants found in Clarkston, such as immigrants as victims and criminals, or burdens and business owners. These discourses ultimately affect the daily lives of refugees, shaping the way refugees are represented at the local, state, and national levels.

In Chapter IV, I drew on everyday immigrant narratives to explore the fluid constellations of identity and place. Both identity and place are socially constructed and depend on relationships and representations for meaning making. These five narratives offer an illustration of immigrant lived experience in Clarkston. Through this research, I highlighted how race, gender, and class impact identity and may shape feelings of inclusion and belonging. I examined how immigrants use ethnicity and nationality in different ways because of temporal aspects and inclusion in mainstream society. I also showed material and social constructions of networks for immigrants and drew attention to places of meaning that vary based on refugee

needs and wants. This research furthered scholarship which finds place is a dynamically and socially constructed set of histories and connections (Massey, 1994). Through this research, I have drawn attention to how these social constructions of place and identity help understand how meaning is constructed through experience, but I have only offered a brief image in time. There is more to learn from the exploration of identity and place.

Examining place from below, as I have done in Chapter IV, has implications for neoliberal multiculturalism. Frequently, multicultural neoliberalism has been used as a framework to understand racial formation at the national scale, but my findings add to scholarship showing that multicultural neoliberalism happens at various scales and particularly the local scale, through local institutions such as the city council (Peck, 2013; Parks and Richards, 2007). Through various representations of refugees and diversity, the city of Clarkston constructed a specific image and imaginative geography of place. Much of the literature finds that refugees are represented as invisible, or too visible, racialized, gendered, and powerless and out of place (Ehrkamp, 2017, Ehrkamp, 2013; Miraftab, 2012). In the U.S. South, scholars find immigrants and refugees, specifically Latino/as, have been rendered reliable, productive, affordable, male, and disposable (Smith and Winders, 2008). However, this neoliberal representation is not sustainable or ethical and many immigrants resist these characterizations (Smith and Winders, 2008). While these representations may aid some refugees, it also can contribute to isolation and racism. Local governments need to be aware of the consequences of their branding and marketing practices.

In Chapters II and III, I focused on the state and local institutions, but I made the explicit choice to center refugees' stories in Chapter IV. It was important for me to explore Clarkston from a variety of angles. In doing so, I discovered specific ways that the city, the region, and the

state have represented refugees and immigrants that differ from the needs and wants of refugees and immigrants within and around Clarkston. Examining Clarkston from the perspective of the local state illustrated discourses of multicultural neoliberalism and the need for refugee agency. Centering refugees' stories helped to identify places of meaning and sites of inclusion and belonging for refugees. As Anderson (2019) argues, "representations do things—they are activities that enable, sustain, interrupt, consolidate or otherwise (re)make forms or ways of life" (p. 112). Examining representations allows us to see power relationships and understand the impact of place on refugees and vice versa. At times in Clarkston's recent history, key figures in the city were at odds with each other. But identities are not fixed, and refugees and immigrants have feelings and emotions that may change in different situations, or even have multiple opinions on a particular topic. In addition, with over 50 different ethnic and racial groups, there is not just a single representation of Clarkston's refugees. Clarkston's refugees arrived at different times and have different narratives, experiences, religions, races, classes, and genders.

In this dissertation, I argue that local governments and organizations can contribute to inclusive environments and geographies. Governments can empower immigrant and refugee organizations through political representation; research shows that local governments with a heterogeneous ethnic city council have more positive relationships with ethnic organizations (Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad, 2008). As scholars, such as Winders (2008) argues, local governments should make attempts to address new immigrant populations because they play a large role in developing inclusive communities within and around their cities.

This dissertation contributes to geographic research on immigrants and refugees in the U.S. South by exploring identity, belonging, and inclusion at the local and individual scales. This research had a few necessary limitations: this research should not be considered generalizable.

The findings are based on specific conditions and experiences at a specific time in Clarkston. In addition, the sample size of participants in this research could be expanded. I have spoken about my positionality as a researcher, and I do believe that my ethnicity and gender are responsible for some of my findings. A researcher with a similar background to their refugee or immigrant participants may shed light on different aspects than I was able to. This dissertation has offered insights into representations and experiences of immigrants, but the next steps for inclusion may lie in the hands of refugees themselves, immigrant agencies, and local politicians.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: IRB Approved Interview Protocol

Interview Questions 1 (Refugees)

INTERVIEWER: Before we begin, I'd like to say thank you for taking the time out of your day to speak with me. The purpose of this interview is to get some basic information about you, your household, and your time in Clarkston. I am trying to explore how identity is connected to where people live. These questions will be about your life, family, friends, and time in Clarkston. I will not share your information with anyone outside of the study. Please read the consent form so that you understand more about the study and can decide if you want to participate.

Do you want to read it, or have it read to you?

(GIVE FORM)

INTERVIEWER: Are you willing to go on with this interview?

Is it okay if I record this interview?

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Participant name: (Pseudonym)

Interviewer: Sarah Ryniker

Interpreter:

Date: Start time and end time of interview:

Interview recorded?

Nationality:

Age:

Income Level:

Education Level:

BACKGROUND

What other places have you lived? What was life like in those places?

How long have you lived in Clarkston?

How would you describe yourself?

IMMIGRATION HISTORY

What brought you to the United States? Tell me as much as you feel comfortable sharing.

What surprised you when you arrived in the United States?

Are you a U.S. citizen? If so, for how long? If not, would you like to be? Why or why not?

REFUGEE ORGANIZATIONS

When you first came to the United States, did you come through a refugee organization, like Catholic Charities? If so, which one?

Can you describe your experience with the organization?

Did you stay in touch with anyone at that organization? If so, for how long?

Was there anything you would change about that organization?

PLACE

How do you feel about Clarkston? Do you like it?

What do you dislike about Clarkston?

Where's your favorite place outside your home?

Where's your least favorite place?

What are some activities you might do outside the home?

Do you feel like you are a part of the Clarkston community?

What kind of events do you attend in Clarkston?

Do you feel like you are included in local events, like town picnics or sporting events?

Do you feel like you are welcome in Clarkston?

Have you felt unwelcome in the United States? If so, can you describe an experience where you felt unwelcome?

FAMILY

Can you tell me a little about your household and family? For instance, who do you live with?

How long have you lived in this home?

Are you married? If so, when did you get married? Where is your spouse from?

What languages do you and your family speak?

How many siblings do you have?

Do you see them often?

How many children do you have?

Do you have relatives who live in Clarkston? If so, who?

FRIENDS

Do you have many friends here? Can you tell me about a few?

How long have you known them?

Do they live nearby?

What kind of activities do you do with them?

Do you often interact with other refugees?

Do they share similar backgrounds with you?

DAILY LIFE/HOUSEHOLD

Can you tell me a little about your everyday schedule? For example, what does your typical day look like?

Who does the chores? How are they divided?

Who cleans your house?

Who does the shopping?

Do you cook? If so, how often?

What type of food do you cook? What's a typical breakfast/lunch/dinner meal like?

EDUCATION

What level of education do you have? (Or, until what age did you attend school?)

Have you attended school in the United States? If so where, how long?

Do you feel comfortable speaking English?

Interview Questions 2 (Government Officials and Organizational Leaders)

INTERVIEWER: Before we begin, I'd like to say thank you for taking the time out of your day to speak with me. The purpose of this interview is to get some basic information about you, your household, and your time in Clarkston. I am trying to explore how identity is connected to where people live. These questions will be about your life, work with refugees, and time in Clarkston. I will not share your information with anyone outside of the study. Please read the consent form so that you understand more about the study and can decide if you want to participate.

Do you want to read it, or have it read to you?

(GIVE FORM)

INTERVIEWER: Are you willing to go on with this interview?

Is it okay if I record this interview?

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Participant name: (Pseudonym)

Interviewer: Sarah Ryniker

Date: Start time and end time of interview:

Interview recorded?

Nationality:

Age:

Income Level:

Education Level:

BACKGROUND

How long have you lived in Clarkston?

How did you find out about Clarkston?

What made you come to Clarkston?

LABOR

What type of work do you do?

Where are you currently employed?

Is your position here paid or unpaid?

How long have you worked there?

Can you describe a typical workday?

How often do you encounter refugees during your work? In what ways?

DAILY LIFE/COMMUNITY/POLITICS

How often do you interact with members of the refugee community?

Can you give me an example of an interaction you have had with a refugee in Clarkston? Please be as detailed as possible about the specific experience.

Do you feel as if you are a part of the local community?

What typical community events do you attend?

At these events, would you say that refugees or immigrants are usually in attendance?

Are there other events you would like to see in Clarkston?

Is there anything you dislike about Clarkston?

REFUGEE ATMOSPHERE

How do you think the local community feels about refugees?

How would you describe the atmosphere for refugees in Clarkston?

Have you had complaints about refugees?

Have you received complaints from refugees?

Interview Questions 3 (Non-immigrant residents)

INTERVIEWER: Before we begin, I'd like to say thank you for taking the time out of your day to speak with me. The purpose of this interview is to get some basic information about you, your household, and your time in Clarkston. I am trying to explore how identity is connected to where people live. These questions will be about your life, experience with refugees, and time in Clarkston. I will not share your information with anyone outside of the study. Please read the consent form so that you understand more about the study and can decide if you want to participate.

Do you want to read it, or have it read to you?

(GIVE FORM)

INTERVIEWER: Are you willing to go on with this interview?

Is it okay if I record this interview?

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Participant name (Pseudonym)

Interviewer: Sarah Ryniker

Date: _____ Start time and end time of interview: _____

Interview recorded?

Nationality:

Age:

Income Level:

Education Level:

BACKGROUND

How long have you lived in Clarkston?

How did you find out about Clarkston?

What made you come to Clarkston?

How would you describe yourself?

LABOR

What type of work do you do?

Where do you work currently?

In your work, do you work with refugees? If so, what is a typical task you might do with someone who is a refugee?

DAILY LIFE/HOME

On a typical day for you, how often do you encounter someone who is a refugee?

What would a typical interaction look like?

Where do you live?

Do you live near any refugees? If so, what has your experience been like?

COMMUNITY

Are you religious?

Do you attend a local religious service?

Have you noticed any refugees also in attendance?

Do you participate or volunteer in any local organizations? If so, which? How often?

Do you encounter any refugees at these organizations?

How often do you use public spaces with particular ethnic backgrounds? For example, the Ethiopian Yeshi Food Mart?

Do you know of others? If so, which? How often do you use these spaces?

What is a typical experience like for you in these spaces?

POLITICS

Have you participated in a City Hall Meeting?

Did you vote in the last local election?

How satisfied are you with how your local government is doing? How could they improve?

APPENDIX B: Individual Consent Form



Informed Consent for Research Participation

IRB #: 20.005

IRB Approval Date: 9/26/19

Study title: Beyond Borders: Place, Politics, and Belonging in Clarkston, Georgia

Researcher: Sarah Ryniker/Ph.D. dissertator/Geography

We invite you to be in a research project on identity, belonging, and place. Please read this form before verbally agreeing to be in the study. You can ask questions at any time. This study is conducted by Sarah Ryniker (graduate student) and her advisor, Dr. Kristin Sziarto. We are part of the Department of Geography at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

What is the purpose of this study?

This study explores place and identity for refugees in Clarkston. The research focuses on three areas, the local government, the Clarkston community, and refugees in public spaces. This study uses interviews as the main data. There will be about 80 participants in total. There will be about 10 civic leaders, 10 refugee organization leaders, 40 refugees, and 20 host community members.

This interview will take about 30-45 minutes. The questions will be about your daily life, job, family, and community. I will ask about your previous immigration history (if relevant). I will also ask about your time in the United States and your time in Clarkston. There will be questions about religion and what clubs or organizations you are part of. I will take notes and use an audio recorder if you allow it. The interview does not have to be audio recorded. The total time for each interview will be about 45-60 minutes.

Follow-up Interviews

I may need a follow-up interview to clear up some information. If you would like for me to be able to contact you, I will take your phone number down. To protect your privacy and identity, I will save your contact information with a pseudonym (a fake name, like a code) on a private password-protected laptop so that I can contact you for follow-up interviews. This data will be deleted when the study is complete.

Risks/Benefits

It is your choice to be part of this study, or not to participate. If you agree to participate now, you can always stop later. There are no negative consequences, whatever you decide. You are free to not answer any questions or stop participating in this research project at any time. These questions may cover sensitive topics or negative experiences. Some questions may be personal or upsetting. You do not have to answer questions that you do not want to. You will have no direct benefit other than helping with the research on understanding refugees in Clarkston. The identifying data from this process will be kept secret or replaced with fake names.

A document that contains your contact information (only the fake name given to you during the study and a phone number) will be kept during this study. This document will only be used if it is necessary to contact you. No real names will be stored. This information will be deleted at the end of the study. All contact information, interviews, transcripts, and audio tapes will be kept on my private password-protected laptop. All paper copies of interviews and transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet in my office at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Only my advisor and I will have access to the data. Transcripts with your information removed may be used in future academic research after this study concludes until December 2026. All other data will be deleted after December 2022.

During the interview, you may be asked to share your citizenship status because it may help me understand the association between nationality and identity. If you choose to answer the question, your answer will be confidential, and not linked to your name (only to the pseudonym/fake name in my records).

Contact

For questions about research, contact: **Sarah Ryniker at sryniker@uwm.edu or 678-702-9772**. For questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB (Institutional Review Board) at 414-662-3544 or irbinfo@uwm.edu. For complaints or problems, please contact the IRB at 414-662-3544 or irbinfo@uwm.edu, or Kristin Sziarto at sziarto@uwm.edu or 414-229-3941. If you experience distress, please contact the Clarkston Community Health Center, a local free clinic at 678-383-1383.

Their address is 3700 Market Street, Suite E, Clarkston, GA 30021. For questions regarding the refugee community, please contact Friends of Refugees, a local non-profit refugee organization at 404-292-8818, through their website at <https://friendsofrefugees.com/about-friends-of-refugees/>, or write them at PO Box 548, Clarkston, GA 30021.