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WORCESTER THROUGH PREMODERN EYES

An Interactive Qualifying Project Report

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by

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Abstract

Contact with some of the 18 Sudanese "Lost Boys" who live in Worcester, inspired us to look into the situation of refugees in Worcester more generally and read about the culture clash issue that they face. The focus of the project was to ascertain what WPI could do to help them as an institution, if it decided to do so. However, dealing with the organizations trying to help refugees left us increasingly concerned about their plight. Some were just too economically unstable to be of much help, others with the best of intentions, were so focused on immediate needs they were as likely to foster dependency as help the Sudanese become adjusted to their new Gesellschaft surroundings.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Professor John Wilkes for all that he contributed to this project. His determination and desire to see this project through kept us going through thick and thin. He put a lot of effort into seeing our negotiations through. Special thanks also to his wife, as they hosted an excellent dinner at their home. Thank you, Professor Wilkes.

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Introduction

Inspiration, Purpose, and Mission Statement

This Interactive Qualifying Project began with this group being interested in the general plight of approximately eighteen Sudanese refugees. These refugees known as the "Lost Boys" began their journey to America due to a brutal civil war in Sudan. Over a thousand were orphaned at a young age and were warehoused in refugee camps in Kenya for about nine years. Eventually, they were placed in this country through various relief agencies, particularly the International Rescue Committee. The eighteen "Lost Boys" that came to live in Worcester, Massachusetts as young men had no documented educational background beyond grade school, only a few were fluent in English and they had few skills that could be applied to the labor force directly. However, several have big dreams, wanting to be UN administrators, electronic technicians, medical support staff, accountants, poets, which will require further education.

This situation came to our attention through Professor John M. Wilkes, a Social Science professor at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. We decided that the educational goal of this project would be to learn about our own Western, capitalistic society through the eyes of another who does not have the same assumptions and perceptions that we do, and for whom a bureaucratic organization and a "Gesellschaft" society would be a new experience.

However, we also desired a social action goal. In the end, we decided that WPI could probably help the Sudanese and other refugees, providing that a few conditions were met. If the refugees physically moved closer to campus, or had jobs on campus, they could "join" the international community of young people striving to build their futures

as honorary members of the WPI community. Incidentally, they would be able to use the local athletic and library facilities. Above all if they could take classes for free, they could try, and fail, and try again until they got used to the idea of class discipline and pace. When they passed it would effectively demonstrate their readiness for college. This is important since they have no paper credentials to support college admission. It became our mission to take their case for free classes before the leaders of WPI and the IRC. Getting their reaction to it became the main "social action" part of this project. While doing this we read about the problems faced by refugees and learned about African culture and the refugees' adjustments to the West by reading the stories of people who had successfully done so. Hence, this report reflects our growing understanding of African culture, the challenges rural refugees from there face entering an urban area here, and our ideas about what a concerned college community can do to help them.

Who We Worked With

In order to accomplish a task so foreign to our past experience, we utilized the expertise, knowledge, experience and advice of many different people. However, we also tried to focus on what we knew best, college life, college admissions and the WPI scene. Our goal was to see what WPI could do to help the Sudanese at low cost to the university, and risk should the institution take up or adopt their cause.

The first group we came in contact with was the Unitarian Universalists, and their Sudanese Partnership Network. They have the closest contact with the Sudanese around whom our project was originally centered around. Marjorie, Mary, and Heather were the leaders and core members of this small group. One other organization that we worked with was the International Rescue Committee. Our group presented three ideas for a

possible project to two IRC Worcester office staff members. Of these, they had a clear instant favorite, and they were supposed to identify about 20 relatively college ready refugees from their area files for us to interview, select six (three from Gemeinschaft, pre-industrial societies) and advocate for at WPI, to get them the opportunity to take a few free classes. In the end, the IRC never delivered the information or resources that were promised. We proceeded on the basis of "hypothetical" refugees modeled on the Sudanese "Lost Boys" that we had met. As our project evolved, we met and interviewed six WPI administrators, two IRC administrators and various people helping the Sudanese as well as three of these "Lost Boys" themselves. A partial list would include: Mirella Dupree of the IRC was the primary case worker, who, a former refugee herself, had the most intimate knowledge of the refugees in the area, and their particular characteristics and talents. Jennifer Ashley, who worked in both the Worcester and Boston branches of the IRC, also cooperated with us, and she now is employed in the Boston office of the IRC, due to the closing of the Worcester branch office. At WPI, members of our project group met with different administrators and staff. This included Philip Clay, Dean of Students, Calvin Hill, Director of Minority Affairs, Edward Connor, Associate Director of Admissions, Mike DiRuzza Jr., Senior Assistant Director of Financial Aid, Billy McGowan, Director of ESL, and Nikki Andrews, the Registrar of WPI. We held various meetings with the aforementioned staff and administration of WPI. Many were very accommodating, and made time to speak with us.

What We Achieved

What we achieved educationally was a whole new understanding of the power of culture and the impact of cultural diversity and culture clash. We also came to see the

social structure of our own society through new eyes as we developed a base of comparison through our study of African cultures and the challenge faced by those coming here from there. What we achieved in terms of social action was far more modest, but it is surprising how close to success we came. A lot of people at WPI liked the idea, and pledged their support. We failed in the end due to resistance at the highest levels at WPI, the Provost's office. The resistance we faced in the end could be overcome only be a concerted push from our partners at IRC or the Sudanese Partnership Network to allay certain fears and set aside some convenient excuses. Unfortunately, the IRC was in such financial and administrative disarray that it could not rise to the occasion. When we turned to the SPN, internal politics among the volunteers led to gridlock and they could not decide whether to support the plan or not, so they never even officially responded to the request.

In fairness, our plan was a threat to SPN members who had worked long and hard to do the same job another, more traditional, way. They had a scholarship fund, and were devoted to trying to get the "Lost Boys" the traditional credentials for college admission by having them prepare for the GED, take high school equivalency, and take the foreign language test – i.e. meet all the normal requirements over time. We were proposing an end run these hurdles that the IRC representatives loved, but the strategy was out of sync with the SPN group consensus. They were also mostly Clark University people, who were suspicious of WPI and the motives of its projects program. So, the fears of the WPI administration remained unanswered by the local advocate groups and the moment of opportunity passed. We failed, but not by much and with renewed IRC support, the plan could still succeed in the future.

The Project

Detailed Overview

This project was centered on the social structure and cultural differences between horticultural and agrarian societies and modernized America. The main focus was on the feasibility of bridging the socio-technical gap these Sudanese refugees faced coming from refugee camps to the urban-western lifestyle of Worcester, Massachusetts. While there were many possible roads to the completion of this objective, a certain few were selected as the most practical and were pursued wholeheartedly.

Based on contact with the Sudanese, we wanted to take advantage of the international and youthful college-town area near WPI. This heavily male community is technically inclined, and the Sudanese were expressing interest in learning about cars, computers, and other technological features of the society. Given the cost of owning and running cars, being in a walking community with bus access and local services had some merit.

Here, the initial project goal was to arrange a move of the Sudanese to the area around WPI. At the time they were living at three apartment sites, one in downtown Worcester, one in a poorer area in one of the more questionable neighborhoods on Clark University's side of town, and one in the Main South area, a virtual slum.

We were originally given the impression that they wanted to live closer together, and the Sudanese Partnership Network certainly was concerned about the ones in the least desirable place. However, we also heard that the last time they had moved was traumatic, given that full consensus of all residents was required and virtually impossible to get without tribal elders available to push the young men to be yielding. Theirs were not a democratic society in which majority rule is accepted.

Later on it became apparent that there were good reasons for the current grouping in to three apartments. The group that was interested in the more challenging careers was paying more per month for the midtown Worcester apartment. The others probably could not afford to take over a house near WPI without their participation, and they wanted to keep some distance between themselves and their less ambitious friends, however they did express interest in moving themselves to an apartment nearer to WPI. They expressed confidence that they could arrange this move themselves, but in the end could not and asked SPN people for help. The "helpers" were not from WPI and defocused their efforts by suggesting other nicer and cheaper locations, ultimately leading to deadlock on where to move to, and why, so they did not move.

Our plans shifted to what could be done to help them if they were not living nearby by the WPI campus and could not formally join the WPI community. These options were much more limited, as the project would now have to focus on the few Sudanese with college aspirations who could benefit from access to the formal side of WPI, classes and jobs, rather than access to the campus community and facilities more generally.

Our main goal became acquiring the support of the WPI administrators to allow local, college-age Sudanese refugees to audit classes. If they passed a class or two at WPI, this experience would allow them to gain admission into the Institute or another college more suitable to their specific aspirations. Another goal was to obtain reasonable housing at low cost and to pursue employment opportunities at WPI to reduce the cost of classes should they choose to enroll at WPI or Becker after passing some WPI classes.

A critical long term aspect of this project was to gain the support of the WPI community, but for now we only needed to find and convince the right administrators. Overtime the WPI community at large needed to hear the story of the refugees and understand the dire conditions they lived in while in camps as well as the adverse conditions they face here in America. Thus, the WPI student body would learn important lessons from their story and tune into world current events with more regularity. In the short run, we had men in their early 20's without a documented educational background. Without help to remove this obstacle they are seemingly condemned to lives of harsh labor, multiple jobs, and minimum wage salaries.

It was difficult to garner support for these people because the idea we were selling seemed like "favoritism," of not treating everyone alike. The idea of looking at the situation from their point of view and understanding a foreign culture before attempting to decide what is reasonable policy flies in the face of the typical, knee-jerk response of the American and Westerner. We assume that people coming here should adjust to us rather than vice versa. While working on this project, this team witnessed how well-meaning people in this country and abroad use their own system of values and culture (usually conflicting with the foreign values system) to judge the actions of others (ethnocentrism) and then wonder why the results of their "help" are "unappreciated" and negligible in effect. Specifically we had to ask administrators to see things from the standpoint of the other, decide they deserved a break, and create appropriate rules to their situation. Yes, they still had to prove themselves, but the paper credentials did not make sense in their case. Getting a college to set aside its admissions rules was a daunting task to say the least.

One of the group members worked closely with an organization called The International Rescue Committee to learn about the goals of the local refugees. He did this to try to obtain information on the refugees to see how many of the IRC's clients were good candidates for the academically intense atmosphere of WPI, and what percentage of the whole refugee pool the college ready group would be.

To try to learn more about the refugees' history and to understand the culture from which they came, the members of this group read texts of first-hand accounts of situations similar to those of the "Lost Boys," the common term for the young, male Sudanese who were orphaned during the early 1990's civil war in the Sudan. A wealth of knowledge was found in these accounts pertaining to African society and the different customs and traditions that would need to be accommodated to effectively work with the Sudanese.

The first group we came in contact with was the Sudanese Partnership Network (SPN) which had its weekly meetings in the basement of the Unitarian Universalist church in Worcester, Massachusetts. Professor Wilkes made the initial contact and constructed the original project around this existing group. He and George Matook attended a few of the weekly meetings during April and May of 2004. At that time, the monthly meeting was drawing about six people on a regular basis, but sometimes a few more. They were trying to get oriented to the problems facing the local Sudanese population.

There were approximately eighteen male refugees (part of the Lost Boys group) from Sudan who had been placed in Worcester. On some rare occasions, one or two of these Sudanese refugees would have the time to attend the meeting also. The main focus

of the group at that time was the housing that the Sudanese resided in. People complained about the housing situation of these young men. As noted earlier, we made a case for a move to the immediate area around WPI on grounds that it is a walking community, it is a community with a multitude of young people, not much younger than the Sudanese themselves, and since WPI is a predominantly male community, they would be more comfortable and would fit right in. Some of the interests the Sudanese were expressing meshed well with living near a college. A few of these interests were learning about cars, learning how to use computers, and even attending college themselves.

At that time, Professor Wilkes was fairly certain that WPI would allow the Sudanese to use the facilities of the college on a privileged basis as long as they had been issued an identification card by the Campus Police. Some of the Sudanese toured campus with Professor Wilkes and the members of the group and expressed interest in utilizing the gymnasium, computer labs, and the library. If the Sudanese were at WPI socially on a regular basis, it would be possible for them to be coached and tutored by WPI students. The plan was to concentrate on acquainting them with using email and succeeding in school at the high school equivalency level, or even college. One of the members of the SPN, Mary Kerr, said that moving the Sudanese at this time would be a terrible ordeal due to their communal decision-making process. She asserted that the situation would be too difficult because the men have lots of junk that people have dumped on them and to gather it all and sort it would be too much work. She discouraged the idea by any means/excuses possible.

Eventually, we found that the Sudanese were living in three dwellings that were radically different from each other. One group of the men (about three or four of them)

were living in a nice apartment in the middle of the city and were paying about $1,200 a month. Another eight were living in an apartment on Hollywood Street. The apartment was acceptable but the neighborhood around it was a little rough. They were paying about $1,000 a month for that apartment. The final six people were living in a cesspool of an apartment on Main Street near a liquor store. The rooms were infested with roaches and rats and the absentee landlord did not care how many people lived there a long as rent was paid on time. This allowed the men to offer free housing to any friends or relatives who were passing through the area. Even though the conditions were awful, they were reluctant to lose this safe house.

After discovering this information, two major events occurred. One of these events involved Professor Wilkes' grandiose visions of what kinds of housing the Sudanese could have if they simply pooled their resources. With pooled resources, there was suddenly the option for the Sudanese to purchase a home rather than just rent one. The members of the SPN essentially replied that the Sudanese were not ready to own a house of their own because they would not be able to handle the responsibilities. Wilkes' theory was that they should move up through society's classes as other ethnic groups had done in this country; one would purchase a large house, live in one portion of it and rent the rest to tenants, freeing up time and money to attend a school or only work one job as opposed to the two or three the men were currently working. Professor Wilkes spoke to John Deng, one of the more well-spoken refugees, and he said he would have no problem with basic maintenance but the financial aspects of home ownership would indeed be very daunting.

This group's first concept of what the project would be; buy a "fixer-upper" and

teach the men how to maintain and repair the physical structure while coaching the Sudanese that wanted to be an accountant on how to deal with banks and mortgages. If all the Sudanese lived in this house, the total payments (mortgage) would be greatly reduced. If only some of them lived there and rented out the rest, these few could have the rent pay the mortgage and they wouldn't have to pay a dime!

One other problem is that the members of the SPN were becoming increasingly negative and hostile in their reactions to Wilkes. They believed that they had already told him they did not like the idea of helping the Sudanese buy a home and that they would not pursue it. However, Professor Wilkes did not accept this as the final answer and continued to push the issue, addressing their specific concerns and objections one at a time as they arose. Wilkes also attempted to schedule appointments with local realtors and this is where he uncovered a major obstacle when working with the Sudanese: Wilkes could not get the Sudanese to commit to a time to meet with the realtors. They repeatedly missed meetings that had been arranged on their behalf. Professor Wilkes' wife was experiencing the same thing in terms of appointments the Sudanese had asked for to be shown how to use computers. The initial appointment in which she showed up and delivered them would happen, but after that making it to the right place at the right time was rare.

The Wilkes' learned that this was typical. The Sudanese' concept of time and concept of what it meant to agree to an appointment was not yet in tune with Western practice. They stood people up all the time, especially those who were not long standing personal/social friends. They were warm and open, but not yet feeling any obligation to "instrumental" relationships. For them business dealings required prior social connection

or they would agree to anything-but then not schedule a time or place. Calendar books and appointments were not yet part of their world and with the best of intentions something else would always "come up" or "go wrong" and they would not appear at the appointed hour.

The Wilkes' then withdrew from the SPN as they could not "waste" their time. Professor Wilkes tried one last time to advocate for the new rental housing and could not get an answer from the support group. He finally decided to deliver a letter to the Sudanese themselves urging them meet with him before the opportunity to move was gone since college area housing has vacancies only a few times each year. This "formal" communication was viewed very negatively by the Sudanese, due to their cultural background. Marjorie, a member of the SPN, emailed Professor Wilkes saying that his intensity and focus actually "scared" her. Wilkes soon received a letter from Dan Williams, one of the Sudanese, saying that they did not need help moving. He said that the other members of the Sudanese group were simply too different from each other and it would not be desirable to all live together and pool their resources. They would stay in three separate groups, for good reason.

What was disappointing about the development was that by now Wilkes had learned that a lot of people wanted to help the Sudanese. He had even found a broker who would not just deal fairly with the Sudanese but could help them purchase a house with special financing. He had located some potential properties in the area and the renting out a portion of the property to cover the mortgage payments was a distinct possibility. However, thinking about this situation in terms of the money that would be saved (interest rates were very low at the time) and other financial considerations were very

alien to the Sudanese's communal way of thinking and decision making. They did not know how to be helped yet – as they did not know what questions to ask of whom.

The division of labor in our society with all its specialists and how to deal with them in sequence baffled them. They needed an advocate but to accept one they would need to trust them – and that required a personal relationship first. Only Mary or Heather was in a position to go hang out for hours to develop the necessary rapport. There was no way Professor Wilkes could do that. However, he could recruit project students like us and make it our job to go be friends and social interpreters and learn to see society through our eyes until they felt comfortable and started to ask about the important stuff, houses, cars, jobs and education. That would be the teachable moment to make a difference in the lives of the Sudanese. The SPN group seemed very open to our participation when first asked by George about what we could do to help.

However, by the time we actually began the project in A Term of 2004, the SPN group had decided that they did not want a WPI project group if it meant that Professor Wilkes would be present at their meetings and in control of our agenda they would forego us as a resource if he could not be counted on to accept majority rule. He was implicitly critical of their policies as being too short term in nature, avoiding the big issues and fostering dependence rather than teaching independence. They began to shun and ignore him and were not responding to phone calls and emails. Eventually, we forced the issue and suggested an alternate project we could do with the Sudanese which we entitled "Background Logistics."

Background Logistics

The goal of this evolution of the project would be to see if several major

Worcester Institutions could be mobilized to act in concert on behalf of the 18 Sudanese "lost boys" to jointly ease their problems with obtaining jobs that allow for advancement, education, affordable housing and community support through local churches and community organizations. The players would have been WPI, International House at WPI, Becker College, the City of Worcester and the East Highland St Neighborhood Association, which has ties to the Mt. Olive Church and the Elm Park Elementary School.

The Players, in this case, have a joint problem. The Bravo Café has changed from being a local Mom and Pop Restaurant into a Nightclub that has offended the Neighborhood through a combination of noise levels, underage drinking, litter, vandalism, parking problems, trespassing, public indecent and violent. It is a threat to the future of the neighborhood as a residential area.

This is a neighborhood most likely to appeal to students of WPI and Becker as a place to live, were it not for this nuisance establishment. The city is loath to shut the place down for fear of appearing to be unreasonably anti- business but seems unable to get the owner to control the behavior of his patrons and so tensions were building. Currently he has been ordered to have a paid police detail on certain nights of the week and has complained to the city that this is cutting seriously into his business. Obviously underage drinkers are avoiding the place when there is a policeman standing at the door, though ostensibly he is there to be sure they do not exceed their occupancy permit or allow people to leave the premises with open bottles of beer. A recent drug bust in a house a few doors from the Bravo on Wachusett Street has heightened the tensions in the area.

Given that this situation has produced a Police Dept eager to get rid of a problem establishment, an organized neighborhood, a body of WPI students complaining about noise that keeps them from sleeping and studying in peace and a house that is being sold by the owner, who now resides at the county jail after a drug bust, it creates an interesting opportunity.

What if WPI used its financial muscle to purchase both the house and the financially troubled restaurant, thus securing the neighborhood, and rented the real estate at a modest rate, to a voluntary association trying to help the Sudanese "Lost Boys" get established in their new homeland? Housing costs could be held at a rate about half of the Sudanese Income levels and the institutions would thus become an interested party in their economic and social success as restaurateurs. WPI would be in a position to foster the success of a nearby restaurant associated with such a cause as helping Sudanese refugee survivors of the genocide overseas. The WPI and Becker food services could hire and train the unemployed Sudanese trying to learn the restaurant trade. Some of the Sudanese aspire to be businessmen, others accountants, lawyers and plumbers, but their educational background, obtained while in UN refugee camps for years, is thin. Tutors of various types would be needed, especially while the Sudanese are trying to further their educations. WPI is in an excellent position to help out with this and already provides financial aid on the basis of need and has established programs like EMSEP to assist minority students with weaker backgrounds than the norm on campus.

However, being part of a community of thousands of striving young people, being in a neighborhood where they could walk to both schools, taking on campus jobs that would offer tuition assistance as a benefit and having work nearby to their classes that

was flexible enough to be compatible with going to classes would all be a great help to them.

As local restaurateurs catering to a student clientele able to walk to their establishment, they would be both good neighbors and at a social center in which they would be meeting young people from around the world. As blacks in a predominantly white community and society, they also need to connect with the Black American community and the Mt Olive Church across the street from the Bravo (and its long time opponent) is a small intimate establishment with a black congregation. The Deacon there has assured Professor Wilkes that the Sudanese would be welcomed there.

If the establishment thrives, as it should, WPI can evolve from the role of landlord to banker and let the Sudanese pay off the mortgage and buy them out over time, WPI would be getting back its investment, with interest.

Once the Sudanese have a community base and gathering place, indulgent and grateful neighbor institutions and homeowners will let them draw on campus resources, and entry level jobs for newcomers where they can get vocational training. Soon they will attract other Sudanese and start to spot business opportunities, especially those providing services and housing for college students. As the 18 current Dinka tribe Sudanese men seek wives, (possibly from the UN camps) and word gets out to friends and other refugees that they can help their kinsmen get established, the Sudanese presence will grow in this part of Worcester.

The international flavor of the area is already evident in Elm Park School and their families would fit right in to that environment. Further, the relatively low rent neighborhood right behind the Bravo is currently shaky as a place for the 100 or so

children living there to grow up in peace and safety. As the Sudanese become homeowners and rent out the other units on their property to students and other immigrants, they will be resident landlords that really care about the property and neighborhood. Their presence would stabilize a shaky area of the city and help the school and police maintain order in the area.

The Sudanese protect and care for each other like war veterans that served together often do. No one will successfully threaten or intimidate them to allow undesirable elements to operate out of their homes and establishments. They will be supported in their neighborhood development efforts by the Neighborhood Association currently mobilized against the Bravo, which would probably shift its focus to support of the new immigrant community augmenting the ranks of law-abiding business and homeowners in the area.

The SPN absolutely hated this idea which only confirmed their views that Professor Wilkes was obsessed with the housing issue, which they had told him to back off from. It was far too grandiose and foreign to the everyday challenge of getting food, healthcare and so forth faced by the Sudanese. It would also distract from school and work to be running business and owning homes. Further, the institutions would never cooperate, but needing to deal with them would complicate everything.

They decided that the WPI project was a bad idea since the WPI influence was clearly not an honest impulse to give the gift of time, attention and help without strings. It was an attempt to exploit and use the Sudanese in the service of larger community and institutional goals. It was tainted by not being an unconditional help by people who would be there for the Sudanese in the long run. So they would not endorse the project to

the Sudanese. Instead, they suggested that we find another refugee group to work with; and recommended contacting the IRC, a group that we knew they really had no respect for at all. The IRC was blamed by the SPN group for having "abandoned" the Sudanese after bringing them to Worcester. None-the-less, we took their advice.

Warehoused Refugees

At this point, we made the decision that working with the SPN any further would be a waste of time even if we tried to work within their limited vision. They made it clear that if there was a report and credit awarded for any reason they would view the project as "exploitative" no matter what we did. We wanted to approach the IRC in order to gain access to and interview refugees who had been warehoused. Warehousing is a practice that is morally wrong and used by many to harbor refugees in places that are not much better from which they came. "Warehousing is the practice of keeping refugees in protracted situations of restricted mobility, enforced idleness and dependency -- their lives on indefinite hold -- in violation of their basic rights under the 1951 Refugee Convention". In essence, when refugees are warehoused, their lives become meaningless. The people who have done their jobs to get them there have not gone the extra step to give them quality of life. Merrill Smith, editor for the World Refugee Survey, noted "Encamped or not, refugees are warehoused when they are deprived of the freedom to pursue normal lives".

In the Sudan, there is constant political war. People are forced from their agrarian-based village society into refugee camps. That is assuming they make it to the refugee camps. There are stories about Sudanese boys traveling a thousand miles through African landscape, being cautious to avoid soldiers, dangerous animals, and thieves.

There was also the constant fear of starving to death. Once they made it to the camps in Kenya, they were not even totally safe and their quality of life was drastically diminished. Their only hope was to be rescued from these camps by organizations such as the International Rescue Committee or IRC, and that was sometimes ten or more years away. The Sudanese we met were there nine years, and if they married during that time they would not be considered for resettlement to the United States.

Refugee camps can still come under attack. Even if their attackers left them alone, the people could not work or travel due to security reasons. Starvation and diseases such as cholera and dysentery killed thousands. Seven out of the twelve million refugees in the world are warehoused. This is a daunting number, considering how these people live. Some actually make it to a host country only to be put into a slum. For example, one of the Lost Boys that our group talked with was shot at walking home in downtown Worcester.

Refugee organizations are plagued by IDP's, or Internally Displaced Persons. These are people who leave their homes and stay within their own country. They are very hard to keep track of. Sudan has approximately 4.8 million IDP's, which account for twenty percent of all IDP's worldwide!

According to the refugee committees that meet at the Geneva Conference, host countries, such as the United States, are responsible for providing certain necessities to refugees. These include opportunities for work, mobility, owning property, an ability to receive an education, and other such rights and accommodations that we Americans enjoy daily.

There is hope for the future of refugees though. A lot has been learned in the past twenty years about warehousing and how it can be prevented. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees analyzed the costs of warehousing. Warehousing became the focal point at the Geneva Conference in June because of the recognition this problem received. The U.S. Committee for Refugees made a statement that all refugees should be immediately granted work opportunities and travel privileges. The cost would go up a bit initially, but the long term cost would be lower overall.

Refugees are not just always warehoused for the sake of keeping track of them. Sometimes, militant armies take advantage of their lack of food and clothing and try to recruit them with bribes. Refugees are likely to be camped near borders of the hostile countries that made them refugees so the hostile relations continue. They are also used as a weapon, a tool in the sick game of warfare. Fidel Castro and Slobodan Milosevic have used a "Flood of Refugees" as a way to make countries comply with their wishes.

What has been happening for almost twenty years in Bosnia and the Sudan is wrong. People who escape conventional warfare should not be faced with an emotional and psychological battle of self-preservation. With this project, we hope to help out a few Sudanese refugees by giving them the opportunity to "try on" something new such as a college education. The IRC was especially enthusiastic about the educational opportunities that we hoped to offer some local refugees.

The International Rescue Committee

When the core members of the SPN decided that they would not endorse any project we did with the Sudanese that involved us receiving school credit for it they passed us onto the IRC, which they were sure would have no scruples about doing a short

term project and then abandoning those they were supposed to help. They said they believed it was unethical to do something for someone else and expect something in return. "Quid pro quo" quickly became their favorite phrase and we heard it over and over again. All this was just political cover for the decision to forego WPI project student support if it meant they could not control the way the new helpers were to be utilized. They had known about project credit in May and it had not been a problem then. However, having changed their mind, they decided that the easiest and least confrontational course of action would be to send us to the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the organization which had originally placed the Sudanese in Worcester.

The International Rescue Committee, or IRC, is actually one of the foremost organizations in world aid. Since 1933 they have provided "relief, rehabilitation, protection, post-conflict development, resettlement services and advocacy for those uprooted or affected by violent conflict and oppression." (What is the International Rescue Committee?) According to Reuter's Alertnet, which provides information for humanitarians on emergencies worldwide, the IRC's expertise is "Advocacy/lobbying/campaigning, Conflict resolution/monitoring, Education, Emergencies, Food/nutrition, Health, Refugees and IDPs, Shelter, Water and sanitation." (International Rescue Committee (IRC)-USA).

At work in 25 countries, the IRC provides "lifesaving aid in emergencies, rebuilds shattered communities, cares for war-traumatized children, rehabilitates health care, water and sanitation systems, reunites separated families, restores lost livelihoods, establishes schools, trains teachers, strengthens the capacity of local organizations and

supports civil society and good-governance initiatives." (What is the International Rescue Committee?) Much of this aid is provided in the host country where those in need of aid live. However, the IRC also provides aid internally across the United States to refugees offered sanctuary here. They provide a wide range of assistance to help refugees get settled, and eventually become self-sufficient. That's the public view. What we had heard of their support of the Sudanese was actually fairly critical. Basically, that they had given them a month or two of rent and then left them to fend for themselves afterwards.

Originally, the idea that we had in mind for a project with the IRC was an intellectual study of refugees who had and had not been "warehoused," and how they adjusted to an industrial society after being in a pre-modern culture. In fact, every time another project snag or delay was encountered, a library project began to look appealing, so we developed a backup plan. We dropped the warehousing idea when the IRC encouraged us to tackle the educational access question that SPN had not endorsed. Then, after discovering that the IRC was leaving Worcester for financial reasons, we opted to consider various facets of the library research possibility again, before deciding to finish inquiring about the possibility of WPI institutional support.

Our team's original plan for an intellectual study of refugees involved interviewing various refugees in the area. We had decided on interviewing some of the Sudanese, who we would still be able to contact, as well as interviewing a man named Gerard, who maintains housing in the vicinity, and who has had experience with refugees from Cambodia, and is very familiar with their story. He was suggested as a possibility as a go-between for contacting them. Our group was also interested in interviewing a woman who was of Palestinian background who is a graduate student at WPI, and whom

we thought we would be able to contact. We of course needed to find people who had been "warehoused."

The Sudanese languished in a Kenyan camp for nine to ten years and this impacted their education, job experience, opportunity to marry and settle down and many other things impacting their health and welfare today. Other groups, notably the Palestinians and Cambodians seemed to have experienced this sort of thing as well- and have been here long enough to offer some insights looking back on what their greatest challenges were.

The plan was to prepare a comparative interview study of warehoused and non-warehoused refugees that were in comparable situations on arrival. Our team is especially interested in people who had a big transition to make, pastoral-agrarian to urban industrial ways of life, gemeinshaft social organization to gesellschaft (impersonal, bureaucratic), things to that effect.

As contacting people became more difficult, our advisor presented us with a solicitation from the International Rescue Committee that he had received. Contacting the IRC proved to be more difficult than we had anticipated, as well. We were not aware of the existence of an office in Worcester. One of the members of our group, Thomas Rybka, attempted to contact the Boston office, the most local branch that we were aware of, in the hopes of discussing the cases in the Worcester area that we presumed were under their jurisdiction. This was very difficult indeed. Their phone menu system was atrocious, and it was next to impossible to talk to a real person. The automation was boggling, and involved a lot of confusing options; however the one that seemed like it would get Tom a real person to talk to was "Speak to the vice president." Thomas

actually did this, and got his/her secretary. She was very helpful and said that a Worcester branch existed which would be working with any cases that we were interested in. She actually was able to give me their phone number which he promptly called. After calling, a real person actually answered to whom he began to speak about our project possibilities.

We presented them with a proposal. Thomas and the rest of the group drafted a letter of intent, and explored the various possibilities for the study. We were open to suggestion as to other "warehoused" groups they were aware of in similar situations. If this kind of study was not possible, the opportunity for us to work on a simpler kind of project within our time constraints was open, as well. We had been willing to follow up some groups they had lost touch with that had arrived in the last 5 years, if that would have been useful to the IRC for planning purposes. Anything that would have given us a chance to talk to refugees and come to understand the challenges they face was fine with us. Yet, our group was still most attracted to comparing how the Sudanese are doing to a few other groups since we have met some of the Sudanese.

When our group met with the IRC, we were late, so our advisor, John Wilkes, met with Mirella Dupree and Jennifer Ashley before us. He presented our letter outlining the idea of a comparative interview study. However, he also mentioned another idea which we had toyed with, which was the educational opportunity plan, which dealt with attempting to get WPI to facilitate college admission by offering free audited classes for refugees. They were ecstatic about this idea and told us that they would help in any way that they could. The goal for the IRC was to find us refugees whom we could try to get admitted on some kind of tuition free auditing status with WPI. The idea was not to get

credit, but rather a letter of recommendation from Professors willing to attest to college readiness for someone who had attended and "passed" their class.

What our group wanted from them evolved as we discovered that they actually liked a second idea we had been considering previously, and expressed interest in doing more for us. This plan was where we would actually try to lobby for refugees (in our specific context, the Sudanese) to be able to take classes at a college for free, either by charity or by auditing the class. The office staff, especially Mirella Dupree and Jennifer Ashley, was especially interested in this project, and decided that they would like to help us find suitable candidates for our experiment.

Our group devised a set of criteria for the types of refugees that we were looking for, with 12 refugees in total. We wanted six refugees who had gone through a big change, preferably from a pre-industrial/horticultural society to an urban/industrial society, like that of Worcester. The other six should just be typical IRC cases from any country. At this point, due to our original interest in the Sudanese, we were hoping to focus on African cultures further. Our team was also looking for those refugees who have lived in U.N. camps for some time, or were warehoused. We were also looking for refugees with some college readiness. Of the six more pre-industrial refugees, we wanted three relatively strong candidates, perhaps with some documented formal education. The other three, we were hoping for candidates with credentials like the Sudanese, i.e. few if any credentials, but highly motivated. With these criteria established, our team began to explore this aspect of the project with WPI.

We soon discovered that the IRC staff could be very difficult to get a hold of at times. One of their case workers, Mirella, who has been in Worcester the longest, and has

the most intimate knowledge of the refugees, was the one most suited to help us with our project. Unfortunately, she was only available on certain days at certain times, and it was not easy to contact her and she was very busy as well. Hence, she was rarely able to return Tom's calls. Upon contacting them in January, after returning from Christmas break, we discovered that the IRC would be closing the Worcester branch office due to lack of funding. This severely hurt us, because with them closing, they had too much work to do to get all the cases organized and transferred to Boston to devote any time to setting up the promised interviews for us. This meant that they really were unable to help us with our project, after encouraging us to tackle the most ambitious alternative, in which we needed access to their files to make any progress. At this point, we lost hope of getting real contact with refugees to lobby for with WPI. However, the possibility of setting up a program in theory was still there, and we decided to continue to contact the WPI administrators we had targeted, while reestablishing contact with the Sudanese.

What we wanted from the IRC evolved once more. With their imminent closing, we decided that we would ask the IRC on their way out to try to gather data on the refugees that they were leaving behind in Worcester. We did not know what would come of their branch closing, but we were sure that the refugees they had brought here would be left alone. Thomas asked the one officer that would be transferring to the Boston office what would happen to the refugees, and she told us that the cases were going to be picked by the Boston office. With such an influx of cases a lot of Worcester refugees would suddenly find themselves without the aid of the IRC, or at least a caseworker they knew.

In March, the IRC closed. We never got a tally of the population they left in Worcester. The only aid that the IRC left behind for these people was the phone call away kind of help that those in the Boston office could offer. But this is very little, if any help. For refugees who live and work in Worcester, transportation to Boston is not easy to arrange, and a trip to Boston can also be an expensive trip for them. This leaves phone communication, which not all of the refugees have access to, and it requires strong verbal communication skills, which they do not all possess.

At this point, we really had no way to pursue the IRC angle any further. The one case worker who had been in Worcester for the longer period of time, and knew the general characteristics of the refugees, had found another job, and is living locally. Tom unsuccessfully attempted to contact her and try to at least get a feel for the number of refugees that would be left here by the IRC, as well as attempt to discover what we originally were interested in finding out. This was how many college-ready refugees there were locally whom might be interested in the possibility of taking classes as a way of building an informal record to support college admission at WPI or another school.

Gabriel at WPI

There was a glimmer of hope for this project early in B-term when Gabriel, one of the Sudanese "Lost Boys" was given a job in a janitorial position here at WPI! Because Gabriel's last job was met with many hardships due to his employer, he was very enthusiastic about his new assignment. The only downside was that the position at WPI was a temporary assignment, created to fill a vacancy left by a sick janitor.

One day, Gabriel appeared in Professor Wilkes' office and began talking with him. He mentioned that he was Sudanese and a relationship was almost instantly formed.

A routine was established and nearly every day, Gabriel would meet Professor Wilkes "for dinner"-usually a microwaved, frozen meal. He would then ask to read his email and Professor Wilkes would show him how to access his account and together they checked his e-mail regularly. Besides noticing his lack of a technical background, Professor Wilkes noticed that Gabriel did not bring healthy food to work, usually eating from the local vending machine. So, soon he had brought in a supply of frozen dinners that they would share and simultaneously talk about Sudanese culture, Gabriel's life in America, family, etc.

Even though these meetings would only last twenty to thirty minutes, the intrinsic value to Gabriel was vast. His technical awareness was increasing, he was even stunning his friends with his ability to answer e-mails! This is the type of casual social relationship on which Gemeinshafts communities are built, so Professor Wilkes took his time letting it develop. He tried to get the three of us to "stop in" informally to meet Gabriel, but we were still too appointment bound to make time for their kind of socializing, unless we knew exactly when he would show up. That was unpredictable.

When the vacancy here at WPI no longer needed filling, Gabriel was let go. He does not check e-mail anymore, so, getting in touch is almost impossible. A luncheon was arranged with him and a few others to celebrate a very important event in his life. This group, in conjunction with Professor and Mrs. Wilkes, organized a small feast to celebrate the name change of Gabriel, thus symbolizing his ascent to manhood. Professor Wilkes had contacted Gabriel prior to the event and encouraged him to also bring a few Sudanese friends who would want a good meal. Gabriel gave the impression that he would be attending our get-together.

We hoped to discover with their first-hand testimony just how things were working out – and hence see Worcester through their eyes. Also, we wanted to personally ask these men if they would be interested in moving to the WPI area, since it was clear that the key to a relationship with the Sudanese was casual unscheduled meetings. Professor Wilkes tried to invite the Deacon of the Mt. Olive Church to the lunch in order to facilitate this discussion of joining the neighborhood. He was unable to attend. Like our other attempts of meeting with Gabriel, this event did not progress as planned. We waited for about an hour before beginning our lunch and there was still no sign of Gabriel. Eventually, it was discovered that he had gotten a flat tire on the way back from Boston but had not thought it necessary to contact Professor Wilkes to alert him of a potential delay or cancellation. While this would be considered very rude by Western standards, this is perfectly acceptable in African society since he had a good reason. If Gabriel is to make any real progress in Western society, he must better understand calendars, time management, and the subtle social courtesies that most of us expect and take for granted. This is one of the main reasons that a physical move closer to the WPI campus would be instrumental in helping Gabriel and the other Sudanese form the Gemeinshaft style relationships to which they are accustomed.

Coming from an agricultural society with small villages, Gabriel was used to being able to walk over and see people with whom he had made tentative plans. Finding them at the appointed hour, two hours later, or even on the next day was rarely an issue. Their lives were predictably tied to their given location. The difference in social norms between the two cultures is stunning. Our lives, as Americans, are incredibly hectic

compared to the Sudanese way of life, which is slower and less constrained by time, as represented by clocks and calendars.

Key People and Their Reactions

During the course of this project, we met with various administrators and personnel at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. We originally broached the idea of the refugees auditing a few classes at WPI to Philip Clay, the Dean of Students. He seemed enthusiastic about the idea and thought it was definitely worth pursuing. However, he did caution us that there would be many steps required as we moved towards getting approval of the ideal. Looking back, we now understand that he was absolutely correct. Our next contact was Calvin Hill, the Director of Minority Affairs. We believed that he would be greatly interested in this project since the men we wanted to work with were from Africa and would certainly be among the minority group here at WPI. However, after meeting with him, we were disappointed with his level of commitment to our idea.

He believed that he was not in a position to help us as he was more focused on minorities present in this country. We discovered that there is some resentment about the attention which African refugees are receiving at present. Those in the African-American community have still not achieved their social and economic goals, yet assistance is being shifted to recently arrived refugees. However, the real problem was bureaucratic specialization. Hill was assigned to foster the Black American community at WPI. International students were the responsibility of another office.

We were not discouraged by this small setback and scheduled a meeting with Edward Connor, the Associate Director of Admissions. He seemed optimistic and pledged his cooperation and help. He also listed some names of other people within the

administration that we would need to contact to move the project forward. One of these people was Mike DiRuzza Jr., the Senior Assistant Director of the Financial Aid Department. Mike told us that, while WPI would not be able to provide financial assistant to the refugees (assuming that they attended the school), there are numerous scholarships and grants available from both the government and private organizations, which he could help locate.

We then met with Billy McGowan, the Director of ESL who agreed to have any of the potential students take his English exam to verify that they were indeed ready to handle college-level reading material. Our final hurdle was the most difficult: The Registrar's Office. We began corresponding with Nikki Andrews, the Registrar of WPI. We attempted to organize a few meetings together but this did not develop as we had hoped due to conflicting schedules. We then decided to explain our project to her via email. After reviewing our proposal, she decided that she did not have the authority to make such a decision. She then forwarded our proposal to William Durgin, Associate Provost and Vice President of Research and Lance Schachterle, the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs.

Both of them had some concerns about our proposal and did not endorse it. They cited such reasons as monetary compensation for classes, security, and that they did not believe the Sudanese or other international refugees would be able to handle the workload that WPI brings to bear upon its students. They actually claimed that we would be doing a disservice to the refugees by letting them try to pass classes at WPI. In Schachterle's view, we would be setting them up for failure rather than success. Even

though we disputed these claims, we were unable to progress any farther through the bureaucracy of the college until these concerns were addressed.

The crux of the problem was simple. We had met the Sudanese and knew of their mastery of English, determination, etc. The administrators were operating off of stereotypes that we had long since discarded, which are fostered by the media and self serving of the "helping" organizations when they try to raise funds. Only a face to face meeting and endorsements by people at the IRC or SPN who knew the Sudanese personally would get the 3 of our 18 Sudanese we had in mind through this obstacle and allow the experiment to be run. However, neither organization was both willing and able to take advantage of the critical moment of decision created by our climbing the WPI bureaucracy to the very top.

The Start of Major Obstacles

This entire process of contacting and meeting with the various administrators was extremely time-consuming and tedious, even though we "knew the system." A refugee attempting to do this would almost certainly be bewildered by the maze of departments and department heads that one would need to contact to make anything of this magnitude actually happen. On the other hand, if we'd had actual contact with key Sudanese at this time, we could have responded immediately with a request for a meeting and challenged the administration's stereotypes in person. Since we could not do so without the SPN group leaders or the IRC – we had to let the matter drop – as they'd never let us get past the barrier they had erected to prevent direct contact with their clients. We were so close to success, but were unable to continue to the next step without the people who could actually deliver a Sudanese to an actual appointment on the right day and hour.

Letter and emails were sent out asking for help, but Gabriel never responded; neither did Sudanese Dan Williams, Mary, Marjorie, or Heather. This decision probably cost the Sudanese and IRC refugees a special opportunity to better their lives. But, in retrospect, we chastised ourselves about letting the Gemeinschaft relationships erode while we focused on the Gesellschaft WPI bureaucracy and self-education via books. The expectations placed on us to receive college credit and finish this project by a certain time had undercut our ability to be good friends and be present in the lives of the Sudanese themselves, even when by chance one appeared at WPI.

The contacts that we had expected to find through the IRC did not materialize when we had finally fought our way to the critical decision point. The IRC was rolling back its Worcester presence and the SPN was hoping that we would eventually go away. In the end, no one helped and we were not able to personally vouch for the Sudanese or even get them to a meeting after so long a lapse in contact. Only Gabriel had a chance of saving this moment, and he too disappeared at the worst possible time. We had to give up and hope that others following would later be able to build on our efforts.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes are thoughts or ideas about certain people or objects that are not based on fact about them as individuals, but attributed to all members of a social group without distinction. At best, it is hearsay and at worst outright prejudice. Throughout this project, there were many stereotypic assumptions made about the Sudanese by us that led us to view them unreliable, discourteous, and having a time management problem. These perceptions have sapped the will of many people who wanted to help them via volunteering services for tutoring, making appointments with doctors, realtors, etc., and

helping them get better housing. Most of these damaging perceptions stemmed from inexperience both groups had working with each other. In their defense, the Sudanese undoubtedly view us as fair-weather friends who seem concerned but never are able to put any time and attention into developing a real relationship. Therefore, we don't really care about them but only are concerned with what we can get out of the relationship. According to their logic, since we seem to be fundamentally selfish and not trustworthy, they have to be cautious and proceed slowly in their dealings with us to protect themselves. Unfortunately, the SPN members helped foster this attitude toward us by rejecting us as self-interested and potentially exploitative.

As middle-class college students, we held several stereotypes about the Sudanese regarding what they would not know and also what they needed to learn to function in our society. We expected to coach them on how to interact with banks, insurance companies, realtors, college admissions officers, and the like. Impoverished, poorly educated people in this country have problems with these bureaucracies and specialists too, but we are middle class and familiar with their ways. We were not prepared to deal with a totally different notion of time, the nature of community, and basis for trust. In order to bridge their world and ours, we would need start with the more basic factors before addressing the question of the modern division of labor and how to find your place in it as a certified specialist of some kind. We thought the difficult part would be explaining how to pursue jobs such as United Nations Diplomat, Nurse, or Electrical Repairman, which the Sudanese aspired to hold. We never got that far of course—and even failed to deliver on the much simpler question of how to gain college admission without the usual credentials.

When working with people from different backgrounds, it is important to look past the stereotypes and assumptions that others make and try to start with a clean slate or attempt to thoroughly understand the world view of the other you are trying to help. A major lesson was learned with this project that can be summed up by the phrase, "Don't judge a book by its cover". In short, we began to research the African culture and it slowly dawned on us what we were really up against. What lies behind the "time management" symptom of culture clash is both fascinating and daunting, especially when considering what a refugee must give up to assimilate into our society.

Learning Through Literature

Literary Review

The Middle of Everywhere, by Mary Pipher, presents the average reader with remarkable insight into the world of refugees and their struggle in America. Pipher is a psychologist living in Lincoln, Nebraska who has received the prestigious American Psychological Association presidential citation. This book is mainly a collection of stories from the author's experience working with and helping refugees that have settled in the Lincoln area. She details the hardships the refugees endure, the relationships with which they struggle, and some of the "healing stories" that transpired in the course of her work with the refugees. The best feature of this book is the wide variety of cultures and countries of origin that are portrayed and how each group handles acclimating to the "culture" of America in their own fashion.

The author begins her book with the phrase "I am from..." (Pipher, 3) and fashions a free-verse poem detailing that from which she draws her identity; everything from her family heritage, to her religious upbringing, and even to authors of books she had read as a young person, anything that she believed had a significant influence on her

life. Looking back at this poem, it is now evident that the poem is an accurate reflection of what the refugees would describe as their own origins.

The major emphasis of this book was the "acculturation blues" as Pipher termed it. Many of the interactions that the author describes in the novel depict families and individuals who have trouble deciding what to do about American culture. The basic options were full acceptance of American culture (and thus denial/abandonment of their own heritage), carefully choosing pieces of US culture that would work with their own, and isolationism, when the refugee disregards American culture and stays totally within their own. This paragraph asks many questions that constantly confront new arrivals to this country:

> From the moment of arrival, families face dilemmas: Do they let their children drink Coke and watch cartoons? Do they try to speak English or do they stick with their native language? What kind of clothes do they wear? Do they wear shoes in the house? Do they shake hands with strangers? Do they encourage family members to be individuals or to maintain a family-based identity? (IBID, 223-224)

These questions and more plague the refugees as they try to understand this country's culture that, in most cases, is alien to their own. The author sees the effects of these decisions first-hand in her work with refugee children. Many times, children of the families that have abandoned their own culture in favor of American culture become caught up with gangs and drugs and premarital sex at a young age. Then there were those on the opposite side of the spectrum who still wore traditional clothes and (if they were girls) would not make eye contact with men. And of course, there were those that fell in between. These are the children that seemed to be both happy and well adjusted to life in these United States.

Pipher gives much attention to the role of the family in the transition from the "old country." Through her work, the author befriended a Kurdish family that consisted

of only women. Pipher helped them all to acclimate to life in this country and became very close to them in the process. It was very easy to see how important family was to these women; they did nearly everything together. In fact, when one of them went on a date, she brought a few of her relatives with her, something that would be almost unheard of in our society, even though it seemed perfectly normal to these Kurdish women. This is an example of a traditional family unit that remains intact even in the alien surroundings of America. Sadly, there are many other traditional families that have a great deal of trouble in this country; daughters begin to dress like American girls, a boy wants to date instead of waiting for an arranged marriage, and the typical patriarchal family style is disrupted when the wife wants to have a say in family matters.

One other interesting story in the book seems to be a typical occurrence with refugees in America. Pipher details an experience that she had with one of the Kurdish sisters; the sister had received a letter from the government requiring her to go to Omaha to be fingerprinted. Omaha is over an hour's drive from Lincoln and it was difficult for the sister to get time off from work. Pipher attempted to contact the Omaha INS office to see if it was possible to change the location of the fingerprinting but she could not get through over the phones; no matter when she called, the line was busy. She had heard that there was a local INS office in Lincoln and she attempted to find a phone number for it but could not. She then contacted her local state representative and was given a "secret phone number" by the representative's aid. Pipher was excited about getting this phone number and tried it, only to find that the number had been disconnected. She eventually got through to the Omaha office and found that the sister could get fingerprinted at the local police station in Lincoln. They went through all that trouble and wasted all that

time for such a simple answer. This seems to be a common situation with refugees and bureaucracy; there is so much red tape that even native English speakers and those who understand the "system" have trouble navigating it!

Pipher provides numerous examples of the hardships of refugees as they live in and adjust to the life in these United States. The bureaucracy and organizational coils through which the refugees must navigate on a daily basis is daunting even for those who have lived in this country all their life. While there are many organizations in existence with the goal of helping these refugees, there are still many problems that the refugees face; some of the organizations do not understand the culture of the people they are trying to help. Others are simply too unorganized and inefficient to have a significant and meaningful impact. Some are too restrictive and don't allow the refugees to become independent while others are not present enough and allow the refugees to founder and expect them to ask for help. These and other obstacles make traversing the maze of support organizations a most difficult and nearly impossible task.

Of Water and the Spirit by Malidoma Patrice Somé is remarkable look into both the past and present life of a traditional African villager. Sadly, the reader also becomes privy to the effect of European colonialism on the indigenous tribes of Africa. Somé details the memories of his youth with vivid imagery in fulfillment of the wishes of his village elders. Somé begins his book with stories from his childhood in a Dagara village in Africa. It is quickly evident that the Dagara place a heavy emphasis on family life, especially visible in the adoration of Somé for his grandfather. They have a special relationship in part because his grandfather is a Shaman who after observing him for a while decides he is the reincarnation of a famous ancestor. This close family unit (not just

the nuclear family, either) is in stark contrast to the attitudes towards child raising of many people in this country and in Western Europe as well. The West tends to place more of an emphasis on independence while the Dagara tend more towards the communal way of living.

Somé, while still a young boy, was abducted by the local Jesuit missionary priest. He and some other native boys were taken to a school/seminary and were forcibly indoctrinated with Roman Catholicism and Western culture (i.e. French language, European food, etc.). While this seems rather abnormal, it was apparently a common practice as European colonialism spread across the African continent. Somé relayed some stories of people from the villages being taken as slaves for the Europeans. Also, the seminary and school was filled of native Africans, most of whom were not there of their own free will. Somé and these other hostages were "taught" the ways of the West in a very brutal fashion including beatings and public humiliation. He was also subject to the sexual advances of one of the priests. However, Somé persevered and banded together with some other rebellious students to form the Garibaldis.

The Garibaldis were a group that gave these students an outlet for their frustration with the harsh treatment they constantly endured. Somé accepts his fate, and plans to become a Roman Catholic priest. However, one day, in an academic competition, Somé finally snapped and pushed one of the teachers (who is a priest) out of the window (not killing him though). He decided that he would never be forgiven for such a crime and ran away from the seminary, and thus began the long (walking) trip towards his village and his nearly-forgotten past. After eventually reaching the village, he discovered that there was a big problem; he could not remember how to speak the native language anymore!

He had been so effectively brainwashed that he no longer identified with the culture that he was born into and only his mother recognized him after more than ten years of estrangement.

This is a problem that many refugees of today face. When assimilating into American culture, there is a very real danger that the refugee's own heritage will be lost. This is especially true of children, who tend to assimilate more quickly. This danger needs to be in the minds of both the refugees who move to this country as well as those who want to help them. In The Middle of Everywhere by Mary Pipher, there are numerous examples that the author describes from her personal experience from working with refugees of children getting involved with drugs, having children at a young age, and alcoholism. Becoming "over-assimilated" into American culture can sadly lead to such situations as these.

One very important lesson that needs to be learned from Somé's story is that a culture cannot be effectively and fairly forced upon another society; it simply creates an environment of hatred and abuse. Somé relays many accounts of how French colonialism destroyed peoples' lives and identities. The author was on the verge of being in that situation himself; he could not remember his native language, had been estranged from his family for fifteen years, and could not remember the local customs of the Dagara tribe. He had been entirely Westernized except for a few faint memories of his grandfather that appeared during times of struggle. His spirit is what kept him alive in his captivity. However, this forced acculturation claimed many of his friends' spirits. They were permanently damaged and determined to inflict on others what they had suffered. This is to be avoided at all costs, especially in the training of priests and public

servants which is what the Jesuit school was trying to do. When teaching a refugee about American culture (with *teaching* being the operative word), one needs to understand that being an American does not and should not mean that the refugee must forget his past and give up his heritage. That is a form of ethnocentrism that is all too easy for a "melting pot" society to adopt.

Our country is enriched by cultural diversities and is a better place for it. Also, trying to force a culture on another generally alienates victims and turns them against the culture you wish them to embrace, so it is counterproductive. Celebration of diversity amidst tolerance for the ways of others should be the goal. Anyone who is serious about aiding refugees that have been placed in this country needs read this book to understand the cultural and societal differences they will be facing. Too many well-intentioned people barge in on the lives of these admittedly needy people without knowing the first thing about their cultural heritage.

Somé portrays his brutal captivity as a seminary student in the hands of French Jesuits as harsh indeed. The French imposed their own culture and beliefs onto the young African boys, creating an atmosphere of systematic abuse and led to the devaluing, abasement, and eventual desertion of the African culture by many of the students. These examples and the ensuing reactions of the Africans are examples of how *not* to work with members of a foreign culture. In this personal account, which took him ten years to write, Somé has begun his journey to enlighten the Western world, which treated him so cruelly, to the simple and spiritual ways of the African tribes he represents in articulate French and English writing.

There was a motif of culture clash throughout the account. Somé comes from a

very different culture than that of the West he must enter. The Dagara worship ancestors, have an extremely patriarchal society (although this can still be found in some modern societies), live an agricultural life that stresses community well-being above the individual need, they speak a nearly extinct language, and have an elaborate and dangerous initiation ritual that ushers the boys of the tribe into manhood. These and other aspects of Somé's cultural life as an African tribesman made his initial acculturation to the Western way of life very difficult.

However, he does report having gained some advantages as a Dagara dealing with Western schooling. One of these was the ability to read the minds of his teachers. If the person who wrote the test was present in the room, he was assured of an A every time. Until he was taken away by the Jesuit priest, he had never slept in a bed with a mattress before. He had never seen a brick building. The food that he was given was foreign to him. And, of course, he was forced to learn French. He was also told that all of the worship practices that he grew up with and was accustomed to were false and heretical. Despite all of these differences, he was forced to acculturate to the society and religion of the West.

After his long stay with the Jesuits, he was, for all intents and purposes, a Westerner. He had even forgotten his native tongue! Once he traveled back to his boyhood village, it was again evident that there would be problems with his fitting back into the vastly different community culture. He struggled to learn the language again but became frustrated as it took over six months. Eventually, after the elders of the village believed he was ready, Somé began the process of initiation. This mystical initiation lasted for weeks and was filled with tasks and events that almost all Westerners would

disregard as ludicrous hallucinations. His story of this initiation is, without a doubt, something that a Westerner will never experience yet it is the key to understanding the world view of a wise people.

The culture of the Dagara is alien to the outside world, just as others' societies are foreign to the Dagara. Other African cultures face the same dilemma when dealing with the West; their mannerisms, values, and customs are in stark contrast to those of the modern world; even if they are not as spiritual as the Dagara and as grounded in the magical and the supernatural. A good example of a more materialistic society, yet one with values akin to the West is that of the Maasai.

The Maasai of Africa can best be described as a nomadic herding society whose wealth is based on livestock and other possessions. They have many customs and traditions that other cultures are not familiar with due to their rural and secluded lifestyle. The society of the Maasai is a form of horticulture rather than the modernized industrial society that Westerners are accustomed to. One can think of their society as from a different time as well as place, when money, industry, and modern conveniences did not exist. Tempilit Ole Saitoti, the author of this novel The Worlds of a Maasai Warrior is a Maasai who ventures down his own path to become a person who is educated but also dislocated intellectually. In any case, he became competitive in today's fast-paced world, and had to decide whether to go home when his father and his tribe "recalled" him from the West. He went back to Africa, after having attended Harvard University.

When Tempilit was a young boy, he was given many responsibilities. His father was a very stern man with a very narrow life experience. He had never traveled from Maasailand, had never observed the customs and traditions of other cultures, and had not

had any formal schooling. Due to his rough nature and simplistic ways, Tempilit feared him, even though he was his father. Templit's mother was his steadfast protection from his father throughout his childhood. At a very young age, Templit's mother died and he found himself constantly being abused by his father's other wives. Life was very difficult for a child in Maasailand. The children had numerous responsibilities but had no authority of their own. When one of them either disobeyed an order or made a mistake, the consequences were generally severe. The child was usually whipped by a man using a freshly cut switch. Another form of punishment was to simply withhold the child's food for a given period of time. In any case, it was clear that when someone was selected to go away to school, he, with no local protector, would be the one sent way. In his case, he would be leaving what sociologists call the Gemeinschaft world, in which he had an assigned place based on age and sex, and be sent to the Gesellschaft world, in which he would have to earn a place based on educational-intellectual personal deeds.

So when Tempilit was around the age of eight, he attended school far away for the very first time. Many warnings came with the journey to school, one of them being from his father. He states, "Don't let them pour water on your head, because they will brainwash you and you will forget us." (Saitoti, 26) That warning may not make sense to us, but in Maasai-land, it is a big warning against Christianity. The water symbolizes baptism and the fear of religious change.

This was also the occasion of his first automobile ride. He likens this nerve-wracking adventure as riding a rhinoceros or another fierce and large animal. Traveling in the vehicle, even for a short distance, made him ill due to the vibrations and the smell of the gasoline. His first introduction to the Gesellschaft or industrial world did not begin

very well. He worked hard in school, but did not perform well enough to pass the very selective high school exam. Due to this failure he could read – a gift considered "magical", but he was still sent home and assigned to herding the animals. Even as a teenager, he did not command any respect from his peers or his elders.

In Maasailand, only warriors were respected as men. They could eat whenever and whatever they wanted, sleep with whomever they wanted, and were seen as the bravest of the tribe. "I heard stories about Maasai Warriors, how brave and proud they were. They were honored by my people. One who was brave could court the beautiful Maasai girls. They would dance and sing to him songs of conquest, lion hunting, beauty, and sadness." (Saitoti, 43) Templit decided that he would become a warrior. Eventually, he did so and was given respect and admired by those who had not yet attained this warrior status.

Tempilit used this newfound freedom as a warrior to finish the pursuit of His education. To accomplish this, he traveled to Germany and experienced his second major culture shock; in class, he was paired with people of different skin colors and with those who spoke different languages. This was also the first time he felt a sense of inferiority due to the color of his skin. He felt some racial tension when traveling around Europe. As Tempilit went to school, he would travel home during the summer months to be a park ranger in the Serengeti, one of the largest open plains in the world. While performing his duties as a ranger, he became acquainted with many people, one of whom was a filmmaker for National Geographic. Tempilit became the focus of a documentary and was able to get his whole village into the film. In return for his assistance, he was given the opportunity to travel to America.

America was a whole new world for Tempilit in more ways than one. To feel as if he were in somewhat familiar surroundings, he associated the tall buildings in New York City as the heads of spears that the warriors carried back home. All of the new sounds, smells, and sights actually made Tempilit physically ill. City life was very fast-paced and he had to adjust to a great extent in order to cope with it. When he finished with his promotional speaking tour along with the showing of the documentary by National Geographic, Tempilit traveled throughout the States to different universities to talk about being a Maasai Warrior and about the plight of the Maasai people. While doing this, Tempilit was given the chance to attend Harvard University.

Tempilit associated the college experience with that of the traditional warriorhood ritual performed by his tribe. In a way, he was leaving behind his past and pursuing a greater future. He was very worried about forgetting who he was as a Maasai. He mentions, "Would my prolonged stay in America influence me to such a degree that I would not be able to fit in at home when I returned? If I could master Western ways, would that make me forget Maasailand? Would I want to? I was becoming a cultural half-breed, knowledgeable in both cultures but living between them." (Saitoti, 129) This internal struggle leads him to realize that he is lucky for being able to experience the technological future of the world but sad as well. To some extent, one can see him preparing to introduce this lifestyle into the lives of the Maasai, and their future is as clouded as his own.

Tempilit would return home to visit his family once again. While there he would spread the message about education and the necessity of it for future success. The Maasai were threatened by his message at first, which is a natural reaction when a warrior

arrives denouncing the ways of the Maasai. However, they really have no alternative to change as restrictions of pasture and the loss of herd animals during drought is threatening their traditional livelihood. They have to listen to anyone who offers hope of a new future in which there is still a place for the Maasai. Hence, they soon realize that education *is* the lesser of two evils only means of coexistence with and gaining an understanding of the rest of the world. If they are to exist, Tempilit's path must be taken by others. He is still recognizably a Maasai, despite having lost some of his warrior ways.

One must realize that the Sudanese and Maasai of Africa are very similar in terms of their Gemeinschaft society and their prior lack of interest in education. The Sudanese "Lost Boys" are alive because they were out with the herds away from the villages when their villages were attacked. A look into how far back they are in terms of education can be seen through the statement, "For anyone growing up in an oral tradition, learning to read words on paper is like a miracle." (Saitoti, 34) This statement also relates to how they communicate with the rest of the world.

Plight of the Refugees

It is our responsibility as members of a wealthy western state to help these people out in any way we can. Many are brilliant, but have no way to convey the message because they are not familiar with our code system. The lack of education seems to be the Achilles heel for people from these cultures. They need help to preserve and share their wisdom accumulated over time, and it is our responsibility to find a way to provide it, or we shall all be the poorer for losing this link to the human past.

Refugees in the United States face many problems when they come to this country. The Sudanese specifically face some extra obstacles due to coming to the United States via United Nations refugee camps that warehoused them during key educational years. Refugees from pre-industrial, African nations face perhaps the greatest challenge, not only because of their vastly different culture, which shapes much of their behavior, but also because of their race. Due to strong racism in the United States, African refugees face larger challenges merely because of the color of their skin triggers stereotypes based on American Blacks.

One plight of pre-industrial refugees is the stereotypical expectations that are placed upon them. As a society, we assume that people without credentials are unskilled and uneducated. We believe that their way of life is somehow inferior to ours if it has less material wealth. We assume that coming to the United States is the quintessential opportunity for a new, better life as a "civilized" urban person. With the expectation of lack of skill or education, employers are sometimes unwilling to train a new employee based on the assumption that they will not understand the task or that they will be unable to learn the new trade, or worse that they will be lazy since they are not as time conscious as we are. One of the largest setbacks to the adaptation that the refugees face however, are these assumptions that people make about the motivation for "rude" actions, which create biases, lead to avoidance, and make the refugees feel unwelcome in our society.

Racism is an especially pertinent issue for immigrants from Africa and especially black African refugees. Xenophobia, defined simply as fear of strangers or foreigners, affects all refugees, even those from Europe, but Americans are far more wary of Middle Easterners and Black Africans. In the case of the Sudanese refugees, Americans fear the

unknown but also have stereotypes that derive from the struggle of ex-slaves to be accepted in American society. Black Africans do not have an enslaved past and do not fit the patterns of accommodation ex-slaves used to get along, so they are often more comfortable with American whites than blacks, but often do not feel accepted by them.

A prominent example of the culture gap between Africans and Westerners is the concept of time management. Western society has very distinct and elaborate systems with regard to time. The West can be viewed as inflexible and impatient with those that cannot follow a detailed time schedule. One significant criticism of some groups of refugees, especially the Sudanese, is their lack of time management skills. This becomes a severe issue, because if one cannot follow the guidelines of strict time management, especially for job interviews, they have little chance to survive and to succeed. Few good jobs are a matter of just being there all day, every day. To get autonomy from the supervisor, one must be able to time structure one's day and movements into discrete appointments. This presents one of the largest obstacles which rural village Africans will encounter living in the fast-paced societies of America and Europe.

Our society is also very focused on money and items and services that can be bought with money. One cannot get very far without money in such a world. Unfortunately, it is the driving force behind the machine of a modern economy. Everything has to be converted to a uniform medium of exchange – or one is stuck with a more limited "Barter" system. An illustration of how far the Sudanese are from thinking in these terms is a "famous" exchange between Professor Wilkes and Gabriel about the marriage process.

It seems that in Dinka culture, marriage is a family to family exchange expressed in terms of a "Bride Price." This would not be a problem except that the price is exclusively expressed in terms of cows. There is no monetary conversion that would be accepted. So how does Gabriel in Worcester, MA prove his worth to a father in Uganda when he has no cows – and even if he had a farm here, no way to deliver ten healthy cows to the Kraal of his beloved's father. In his view he is not marriageable until he solves this problem.

Here, of course, one requires money for food, rent, for transportation, and weddings. Further, they are all connected. Typically, it is very difficult to get a job without some means of transportation, a place to live, without a job, or sustenance to keep one in good health, without a clean, safe place to live and a regular income. Lacking any of these elements produces a cycle of poverty which many Americans find themselves in, and it is one more obstacle which refugees face on a daily basis. In some ways, this stumbling block is more difficult for the refugees because they do not have access to of many of the federal programs of which American citizens can take advantage. They also have other impediments such as the language barrier and a lack of education/skill which hinders them from getting jobs or finding out what programs do exist. This is where the failure of the IRC to provide a stable caseworker presence in Worcester is so hurtful to the refugees it settled here. Such problems face many immigrants, not just refugees. Without a job, they cannot get what they need to survive and the cycle of poverty sets in.

Stemming from the need for a job, for money, and for shelter, many organizations are in existence to help refugees. However, these organizations can also be huge

obstacles. There are two main types of organizations which we have observed interacting with refugees. The first type is a larger, non-profit establishment such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC). A group such as the IRC can often be hard to approach, with many impersonal barriers to overcome. The IRC, however, has many resources at its disposal, such as funding, connections with other organizations, large databases for tracking the progress of their clients, etc. But paperwork, automated phone menus, and people who are robotically executing their jobs can very quickly become frustrating when someone is expecting and used to intimate contact and support. Our own experiences with the IRC in other sections, detailing the obstacles we encountered when dealing with them, do not bode well for confused refugees getting the help that they need from this source.

The other type of organization which we have observed is a smaller, more tight-knit group of people who have personal contact with the refugees. An example of such a group is the Sudanese Partnership Network. The obstacle which they present is that their interaction with the Sudanese is so close and personal that it hinders their development into independent actors. Much like an overbearing and overprotective mother with a young child, they do it for you rather than show you how to do it yourself. In this way, they are stunting the Sudanese refugee's desire and need to become self-sufficient and independent in the sense that males in America are supposed to be if they will be able to function as employees and spouses down the road.

American society sees itself as a large, impersonal melting pot of people that are interconnected and networked, relying on time, technology and money. Western society has breadth, but lacks depth. Refugees coming from cultures and environments

drastically different from ours face a cold, unfriendly world which emphasizes efficiency and accomplishments, not values such as helping your fellow man and supporting the community. This is perhaps the greatest obstacle of all, trying to survive in a world where everyone is welcome, and yet no one is welcomed warmly, and in a personal way. You always have the tentative, testing greeting of a meritocracy, in which who you were no longer matters. For good or ill, you have to prove yourself worthy and competent every day in a competitive economy. For some that is a welcome fresh start. For others, it feels like they have lost everything in life that mattered.

The Future of the Project

What Can WPI Do?

WPI is in a very unique and powerful position with regards to helping refugees get a head start in this country; the school has the capital, the physical resources, and the community resources to offer a select group of international refugees a few classes that they can take for free. This small and simple gesture on the part of WPI will almost certainly change the lives of the refugees that are involved. After acclimating to coursework, they will probably succeed in passing a class after two or three false starts and learning curve experiences. Once that happens, these refugees will have documented evidence that they can indeed function and maybe even excel at taking college courses. This is the "credential" they would need to be able to get formally admitted to a college without a high school degree and subsequently earn a college degree. There are already two members of the WPI faculty, Lorraine Higgins of the Humanities Department and Pam Weathers who teaches biotechnology, who are willing to advise a WPI project with this goal in mind next year.

WPI has a moral obligation to these refugees, the dispossessed of Worcester. WPI could even consider such actions as an investment, as those refugees that are successful in this program continue their college career elsewhere, obtain a degree, get a high-paying job, and then begin to restore community life in the local Worcester neighborhood in which they live. Since WPI is a prominent land-owner in the area immediately surrounding the campus, the school stands to benefit if an international refugee community is established near the campus. As the area surrounding WPI becomes more beautiful and safe due to the influx of Sudanese and other refugees with dreams of owning a home in a nurturing community, these people will improve the local quality of life. We envision an immigrant community of people who serve the WPI-Becker college community by running Laundromats, boarding houses, restaurants and dry cleaning services at first, then travel agencies, realty offices, catering companies and the like later. As they succeed, their children will come to think of going to WPI as the ultimate sign of local success, and they will be familiar with this local institution and nearby Becker College. As the property surrounding the school increases in value, the community becomes stable, prosperous, and more attractive to the American black students and international students.

In return for such a simple and FREE gesture on the part of the school, WPI stands to make a significant amount of money in the future and generate even more good will and positive press. It would also be all the while living up to its goal of fostering international and global perspectives and cross-culture experiences among its regular students. Further, by helping people who were the victims of unprovoked attacks, allowing them restart their lives by finding a new community to join, WPI would

essentially be striking back at those who tried to destroy these people. Making sure that governments with genocidal goals do not win the day by destroying the lives of these victims, is a matter in which we all have a stake.

What Now?

This IQP study traversed a broad range of project ideas after our initial idea of working through the Sudanese Partnership Network proved to be a non-starter. After approximately two months of negotiations with the SPN, we turned to the International Rescue Committee. Our final proposal took the form of leveraging WPI's non monetary resources to help the refugees. We asked WPI to accept a limited number of hand-picked international refugees to audit a few classes in order to acquire a suitable educational reference. We encountered a multitude of difficulties both in creating a new project from the shambles of the first as well as in the execution of the new project and meeting its goals of social action and self education about African culture and the plight of refugees more generally.

We navigated the web of bureaucratic delays and brush-offs that the refugees experience every day of their lives here in America. As a team, we have has come to a partial understanding of the hardships that these displaced peoples face day in and day out. We had the benefit of growing up in this country and understanding the ins and outs of how things work here, that these refugees do not. They come from agricultural and communal societies and our monetary, industrial, and impersonal society is as foreign to them as ancestor worship is to us. While we have not accomplished our aforementioned social action goal, we have laid the foundation for future work in this area some of which has already been suggested to what we hope will be a successor IQP group to carry on

next year. If they follow through on the project they want to do with Gabriel, which will ensure that someone is helping those whose lives have been swept away by the turmoil of the modern world. Maybe they will also find a way to sweep away WPI's final reservation, focused in the Provost's office, to trying the experiment that we proposed back in the days that we had some faith in the IRC's ability to deliver on its promise of assistance. With luck, the IRC will recover its ability to support the people it placed in this city and one day a polite but determined, articulate and intelligent African will appear before the desk of the WPI Provost and ask for a chance to prove himself.

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