

# **Orientalism and Congolese Unaccompanied Refugee Minors in the Global North**

by

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## **Abstract**

Identifying the pertinent needs of displaced and parentless refugee children who resettle to the Global North is a challenge. War-affected, unaccompanied refugee minors are an especially vulnerable group, as they navigate both life in a new country and past experiences of armed conflict without parental support. This article explores the resettlement process from refugee camp to life in an industrialized country for Congolese unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs). Employing components of Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, the paper argues that the refugee process, for this population, is embedded in notions of colonialism and marginalization, which are often ignored. The constructions of race and power between the industrialized Global North and Global South are significant to the resettlement experience. To address the association between components of Orientalism and Congolese URMs resettled in the Global North, this theoretical paper consists of three sections. First, a succinct summary of (Post)Colonial Theory and Orientalism will be outlined. Secondly, the paper illustrates direct and indirect, micro and macro level, associations between aspects of Orientalism and the resettlement process for Congolese URMs residing in the Global North. Finally, the paper suggests that if refugee resettlement agencies from the Global North incorporate a less Eurocentric framework, and instead a refugee-centered and Afrocentric paradigm, the experience for URMs could be greatly improved. This paper provides a theoretical framework for future empirical studies exploring the connection between Orientalism and Congolese URMs living in the Global North.

Identifying the salient needs of displaced and parentless refugee children who resettle to the Global North is an arduous task. War-affected, unaccompanied refugee minors are an exceptionally vulnerable group. They must navigate both life in a new country and past experiences of armed conflict without the support of their parents and, often times, families (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008). The resettlement process from a refugee camp to life in an industrialized country appears steeped in colonial notions of oppression, marginalization, and subjugation, which are routinely disregarded. The historical and unjust constructions of race and power between the industrialized Global North and the less economically advanced Global South are pertinent to the resettling experiences of (DRC) Congolese unaccompanied refugee minors living in the Global North. In order to accurately conceptualize the experiences of Congolese unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) living in the Global North, it is essential to employ particular components of (Post)Colonial Theory when researching or working with this population. Since “Post-Colonial Theory” is a controversial term (Shohat, 1992), which presupposes that colonialism has ended, I have chosen to place the word “post” in parenthesis, considering colonialism persists. There is value in reading the URM context in tandem with (P)CT because it analyzes the lasting detrimental and oppressive effects of colonialism and how they directly impact the resettlement process for Congolese URMs.

Due to the complexity of (P)CT, this paper will not attempt to explore the various components of this dynamic theory. Instead, it will draw upon “Orientalism,” a major theme of (P)CT, and how it specifically relates to Congolese URMs resettled in the Global North.

To address the association between Orientalism and Congolese URMs resettled in the Global North, this paper will consist of three distinct sections. First, I will provide a succinct summary of (P)CT and a more elaborate exploration of the evolution of Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism. This section will also identify relevant scholars and additional key theoretical concepts within (P)CT. In addition, this component of the paper will make connections to everyday aspects of social work including research, theory, and practice. Secondly, the paper will illustrate direct and indirect, as well as micro and macro level, associations between Orientalism and the resettlement process for Congolese URMs residing in the Global North. This paper, using Orientalism, will provide critical avenues for conceptualizing the experiences of Congolese URMs living in the Global North, while cautioning against using Orientalism as a panacea for holistically appreciating the experiences of all Congolese URMs. Finally, the paper suggests that if refugee resettlement agencies from the Global North incorporate a (P)CT lens, combined with an Afrocentric collectivist paradigm, the resettlement experience for URMs could be greatly improved.

## Evolution of (Post)Colonial Theory

Without colonialism (P)CT would not exist. Identifying colonialism's enduring impact, therefore, is vital to the development of (P)CT. Colonialism, a recurrent, systematic, and widespread attribute of human history, is defined as the Global North's domination, conquest, and subordination of other peoples' (i.e. Global South) lands, goods, livelihoods, and culture from the sixteenth century onwards (Gandhi, 1998; Loomba, 1988). Although colonialism was not an identical or universal process in varying regions of the world, a common theme throughout was that it locked newcomers and indigenous inhabitants into a grueling and unjust relationship (Childs, Williams, & Williams, 1997; Loomba, 1988) whose legacy can still be measured today.

In the 1950s and 60s, the colonized of the Global South began physically resisting decades of domination and, therefore, slowly but steadily gained sovereignty, while the ruling Global North's colonial powers receded. Immediately following "formal" or "political" colonial dominance was a precarious aftermath characterized by charged cultural moods and attitudes, which preceded polemical transformations via the writings of colonization's victims (Gandhi, 1998; Quayson, 2000). Both non-fiction and fiction literature written during this time ranged from anger to sadness to vengefulness. Examples of such writing include Chinewizu's *The West and the Rest of Us* (1975), Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1969), and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1958; Quayson, 2000; Rhoads, 1993). A list of authentic and passionate writers during this time period include George Lamming, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, and Wilson Harris (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995; Quayson, 2000). Although varying in degree, it can be argued that all writers during this period contributed to the ensuing development of (P)CT. Additionally, writers during this period were not simply passive participants of colonialism's inhumane practices; instead, they all uniquely contributed by overtly dismantling the myriad injustices via artistic expression (Nisco, 2005).

It would be unethical to exclude Frantz Fanon from a list of influential contributors to the eventual creation of (P)CT. A psychiatrist from Martinique, Fanon advocated for collective violence against the colonial invaders of indigenous territory (Fanon, Sartre, & Farrington, 1965; Gandhi, 1998; Macey, 2012). While describing the dehumanizing effects of racism during colonialism, Fanon claimed, "It has been said that the Negro is the link between monkey and man... meaning, of course white man" (Fanon, 1967, pp. 30).

The numerous thinkers and writers during this time period, who produced anti-colonial literature, organically formed what is often referred to as "Post-Colonialism" (Ashcroft et al., 1995; Loomba, 1988). As previously mentioned, "Post-Colonialism" is a term that signifies a period after colonialism, and because colonialism currently exists, applying a concept such as "Decolonization Theory" is more ethically appropriate than "Post-Colonialism" or "(Post)Colonial Theory."

However, this paper employs aspects of (Post)Colonial Theory and, thus, will use (Post)Colonialism when referring to this process. Although, I encourage readers to critically deconstruct the underpinnings of what constitutes “Post-Colonial” and “(Post)Colonial Theory” (see Shohat, 1992).

In mainstream academia, an ongoing debate in the field of (Post)Colonial Studies persists regarding what actually constitutes (Post)Colonialism – i.e. a specific time period following official colonialism, literary manifestations of colonialism, etc. (Ashcroft et al., 1995; Loomba, 1988; Mishra, & Hodge, 1991). This debate goes beyond the scope of this paper and, therefore, a loose working definition of (Post)Colonialism will be provided. (Post)Colonialism involves the studied engagement with the past and present experiences of colonialism; it constitutes the expressions and manifestations of enslavement, migration, suppression, and resistance of colonial powers along race, gender, and historical components (Ashcroft et al., 1995; Quayson, 2000). Although not discussed in this paper, (Post)Colonialism also inherently exists among dominant and oppressed groups in the Global North, such as unjust hierarchal relationships favoring White, heteronormative identities above all “others.”

Perhaps the most noteworthy contribution of the evolution from (Post)Colonialism to (Post)Colonial Theory was the phenomenon of “Orientalism” coined by Edward Said. Prior to providing a detailed exploration of Orientalism, a brief biographical sketch of Said will offer insight into his revolutionary theory.<sup>1</sup>

Said was born in the mid-1930s in West Jerusalem, British Mandate Palestine (Kennedy, 2000). Although Said did not reside in the United States until later in his life, his family obtained U.S. citizenship thanks to his father’s involvement in the U.S. Army during World War I (Kennedy, 2000). Following the establishment of Israel in 1948, Said and his family sought refuge in Egypt. He later emigrated to the U.S. to continue his studies, where he flourished in academia and eventually attained professorship at Columbia University. The Arab-Israeli War of 1967 was a colossal event that dashed any hope of returning home for Palestinians living abroad (Said, 2000). This pivotal and metamorphic moment shifted Said’s ideology, which generated his fierce political, national, and cultural Palestinian identity (Kennedy, 2000; Said, 2000). Recalling the event, Said posited, “The 1967 war seemed to embody the dislocation that subsumed all the other losses, the disappeared worlds of my youth... I was no longer the same person after 1967” (Bayoumi & Rubin, 2000, p.xxi). Due to events in 1967, as a Palestinian living in the U.S., Said conceived the focal theme of Orientalism (Kennedy, 2000; Said, 2000).

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<sup>1</sup> Orientalism was not only the name of a central theoretical component of PCT, but also the title of Said’s ground-breaking book, written in 1978. Unless otherwise mentioned, this paper refers to Orientalism as Said’s theory as opposed to the title of the book.

## **Orientalism**

Generically speaking, “Orientalism” refers to Europe’s representation of the Eastern world. Said claimed that this image was predominantly composed of East Asian countries (Said, 2000). Thus, the “Orient” is the Eastern world, and “Orientals” are the indigenous members of the “Orient” (Said, 1979; Wang, 1997). Anyone who teaches, writes, or researches about the “Orient” is an “Orientalist,” and this action connotes “Orientalism.” “Orientalists” are commonly Global Northerners. The crux of Said’s theory is that “Orientalism” is a negative and socially constructed phenomenon in which the “Orient” merely exists in the eyes of the “Occident” (Global North); the “Orient” is constructed as the “other” (Said, 1979; Wang, 1997). Said speculated that the “Orient” was developed by the “Occident” in order to construct what it means to be from the East versus the West (Global North), and that this construction, is formed through the West’s own rules and modes of knowledge. “Orientalism” provided a justification for continued European colonialism based on the construction of the “Orient” by the “Occident” as particularly inferior and therefore in need of Western intervention (Alsultany, 2011). The terms “Orientalist” and “Occidentalism” are used interchangeably, as both denote Global Northerners writing about the “Orient.”

Orientalism dates from the period of the European Enlightenment and the colonization of East Asian society (Alsultany, 2011; Said, 1979). It is exemplified in paintings, photographs, and images of the Orient produced by European artists of the 19th and early 20th centuries. These images and writings, including those of Francoise-Rene de Chateaubrian and Gerard de Nerval, denote a European invention of the Orient that portrays the Arab World as a land of romance, mystery, exoticism, haunting memories, and landscapes (Alsultany, 2011; Said, 1979). Alsultany (2011) illustrates an example of Orientalism via French-produced postcards of Algerian women that circulated in France in the early 1900s. Alsultany posits that Algerian women were depicted in these photographs as if they were in a natural Algerian context but the photographs were taken in the French photographer’s studio. The photographs were dispersed through France as evidence of the exotic and bizarre culture of Algeria (Alsultany, 2011). This typifies the eroticization, exoticism, and “othering” of Arab women for the sole benefit of the European male voyager (Alsultany, 2011).

Two additionally imperative and interdependent features of Orientalism are its relation to ontology and epistemology, as well as the Occident’s dominance and power over the Orient. Said claims that Orientalism is a style of thinking engendered from an epistemological and ontological divergence, constructed between the Orient and Occident (Said, 1979). In other words, according to global discourse the Western world is indisputably geographically, culturally, and politically centralized in the earth; this culturally and politically suggests the Orient remains on the margins, vulnerable to the powerfully centered Occident (Wang, 1997). Because of this, the Occident is able to create its own theories of knowledge about the Orient.

Secondly, Said claims that Orientalism is played out in the Occident's dominating style, which establishes power and hegemony over the Orient (Said, 1979). Said affirms, "The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be 'Oriental'... but also because it could be, that is, submitted to being, made Oriental" (Said, 1979, p.6).

Said's theory of the Occident's power and domination corresponds to Michel Foucault's perceptions of knowledge and power, which go beyond the scope of this paper. However, the relevance between the two is worth noting. Said describes Orientalism as a *discourse*, which is a significant component of Foucault's work. Foucault defines discourse as a complex set of discursive practices and as a valid perspective for the agent of knowledge, which creates and shapes norms for the expansion of concepts and theories (Foucault, 1981). For instance, those in power (Orientalists) generally dictate what constitutes "true" knowledge for the Orient.

Said's application of Foucault's theory of discourse to Orientalism indicates that Said does not view Orientalism as a simple system of lies created by the Occident about the Orient. Instead, Said interprets Orientalism as an objective system of knowledge regarding the Orient (Williams & Chrisman, 1994). He claims that due to the power of the Occident's racist behaviors, cultural hegemony, and political imperialism, Orientalism depends more on the Occident than the Orient (Said, 2000). This power dynamic establishes an all-powerful Occident versus an inferior Orient in order to justify the Occident's domination over the Orient.

It is nearly impossible to overestimate the momentous impact Said's Orientalism created upon both the Global North and Global South (Kennedy, 2000). The translation of the book *Orientalism* into more than 25 languages (Said, 2000) enabled the major theoretical concepts to reach interested parties across the globe. Therefore, Orientalism's influence rippled through not only the Global North but also the Global South. Gayatri Spivak, a significant contributor to the continuously developing (P)CT, was one of many thinkers that credited Said and Orientalism as foundational instruments for her work on the marginality of oppressed populations (Quayson, 2000). It is important to recognize that although components of Orientalism existed in academic literature prior to Said's theory, by incorporating the philosophies of Michel Foucault (power and knowledge) and Antonio Gramsci (hegemony), Said's Orientalism differed markedly from its predecessors (Said, 2000); this helped revolutionize the theory.

A major premise that surfaced following Orientalism was the deconstruction of texts and narratives of Orientalists, especially from members of the Orient. Pathak and colleagues (1991) demonstrate the importance of Orientalism for examining the Occident's modes of producing knowledge, myths that imperialism created, and the ways in which power dictated knowledge. Orientalism also influenced professors' pedagogy at universities across the globe, challenging them to critically explore Orientalist literature (Pathak et al., 1991).

Additionally, Orientalism engendered a multitude of complex concepts that comprise contemporary (P)CT. Some of these include appropriation, allegory, essentialism, hybridity, metanarrative, mimicry, and the subaltern (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998). Rather than simply addressing the Orient, or East Asia, (P)CT expanded the borders of East Asia. Although most contributors of (P)CT are indigenous to East Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Caribbean, subjugated victims of colonialism from across the globe accounted for (P)CT's development. The deconstruction of dominant/normative perceptions of gender, sexuality, and feminism has gained wider publicity since Orientalism, although Said failed to focus on such issues. Critical Race Theory, which includes intersections theory, germinated from aspects of Orientalism and (P)CT, as well (Thomas, 2000).

Advocating for the core values of Orientalism and (P)CT in contemporary social work research, theory, and practice is fundamental to social work as a discipline. Values from both the U.S. National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) advocate the use of the theory of Orientalism. Both NASW and CASW demand respect for the inherent dignity and worth of persons (Assembly, 2008; CASW, 2005). Value two of CASW mandates that social workers pursue social justice: "Social workers [must] oppose prejudice and discrimination against any person or group of persons... specifically challenge views and actions that stereotype particular persons or groups" (CASW, 2005, p.5). Finally, with the current evolution of "international social work," employing components of Orientalism and (P)CT is more commonplace in social work curriculums (Mills, 2014; Razack, 2009).

On the contrary, Said and Orientalism were abhorred by many. Said intermittently received death threats and his office was ransacked on multiple occasions. Though the book *Orientalism* may have ultimately revolutionized mainstream thought, major publishers refused to support a book whose politics contradicted mainstream views of the state of affairs in the Middle East (Said, 2000). Today, literature exists accusing Said of being a fabricator of facts in order to fit his theories (Karsh & Miller, 2008). Included in such criticism is that Said's claim to victimhood of oppression as a Palestinian is essentially imaginary, considering he resided in Jerusalem for only a brief period of his life (Karsh et al., 2008; Weiner, 1999).

With regard to his theory, Said was criticized for failing to acknowledge his debt to Marxism, and that Orientalism painted a monolithic image of the Orient and the Occident; it ignored the intersecting factors of resistance from the colonized people while dominant forms of knowledge were being produced about them (Quayson, 2000). In other words, some claim that Orientalism failed to acknowledge the possibility of differences within the Orient (Gandhi, 1998). Additionally, Orientalism spoke specifically about the East Asian context without adequately focusing on other oppressed contexts. Finally, the disregard for the oppression of women in the Orient was a major flaw of Orientalism (Yegenoglu, 1998).

## **Orientalism and Congolese URMs**

Prior to succinctly outlining the political climate of present-day DRC, identifying commonalities between Said and V.Y. Mudimbe's work is essential. Mudimbe, a Congolese-born scholar, shares a similar ideology to Said, but he focuses exclusively on Africa. Mudimbe argues that studying Africa is embedded in colonial discourses that attempt to represent real or authentic African truths (Mudimbe, 1988). In his renowned book, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, Mudimbe traces the "invention of Africa" back to the oppressive explorations of Westerners' exploitations of sub-Saharan Africans (Mazrui, 2005; Mudimbe, 1988). Throughout his works, Mudimbe examines the convoluted and pertinent questions regarding the underpinnings of knowledge and power in Africa (Mudimbe, 1988). In a similar fashion to Said, Mudimbe theorizes that universality is rooted in European/Western ideology, and that "others" partake in this universality (Okechukwu, 2014; Mudimbe, 1988). Although a more comprehensive comparison of Said and Mudimbe will not be explored in this paper, a deeper understanding of Mudimbe's work would benefit service providers working with Congolese URMs.

Various aspects of Orientalism can be detected in the resettlement experiences of Congolese Unaccompanied Refugee Minors resettling to the Global North. The following section will provide links between Said's theory of Orientalism and the Congolese URM resettlement process via a macro and micro social work lens. Much of the succeeding information was engendered via my experiences as a White social worker working with Congolese URMs for a resettlement agency in the United States.

## **Congolese Context**

An in-depth exploration of the DRC's colonial history would exceed the boundaries of this paper. It must be acknowledged, however, that the Global North's colonial and imperial powers greatly influenced contemporary DRC politics, religion, and culture (Muraya & Ahere, 2014). In his eventual "ownership" of the DRC, Belgium's King Leopold ravaged the country with inhumane, racist, and oppressive ideology which included creating artificial boundaries of what became present-day DRC (Muraya & Ahere, 2014). This inevitably shifted relationships between various ethnic groups creating identity issues that would fester for years following DRC's independence (Muraya & Ahere, 2014). The structural legacy of ethnic discontinuity in the DRC can be traced to the colonial rule of Belgium (Wright, 2008). Furthermore, remnants of colonialism currently exist in Eastern DRC (Muraya & Ahere, 2014), where a great majority of Congolese URMs resettled to the Global North originate. Ethnic issues in the Kivu regions of Eastern DRC have divided communities and supported the development of armed groups in the regions (Muraya & Ahere, 2014).



The decades long violent conflicts in Eastern DRC have disrupted and ravaged hundreds of thousands of lives, and caused an estimated 5.4 million deaths over the past 15 years (Stearns, 2011). Armed conflict often causes separation between families or death of some family members, leaving many children by themselves – unaccompanied. Due to significant bursts in armed conflict, the number of Congolese fleeing their homeland has exponentially increased by more than 350,000 in recent months (James, n.d.). Because of this great movement, URM from the Democratic Republic of the Congo are not only the largest number of URM entering the Global North, but the number of Congolese URM in this region is expected to rise in the coming years (BRYCS, 2013).

## **Macro-level Social Work Connections**

Macro-level social work constitutes large systems that develop programs, create and analyze policy, conduct program evaluation, advocate, and engage in planning and community organizing (Brueggemann, 2013). In the refugee resettlement process, macro-level organizations include: the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the governmental departments responsible for refugee resettlement in the Global North, the (often times) faith-based organizations which receive the URM, and the federal, provincial, state, or county social service agencies accountable for providing financial support to URM and foster families.

Refugee resettlement is an often grueling process for URM who are usually alone, vulnerable, and must share their story in order to be granted URM status (UNHCR, 2012). A UNHCR official conducts interviews with unaccompanied Congolese children who seek refuge in camps or urban settlements in neighboring African countries. Based on the “best determination” of the UNHCR representative, the child is categorized as either one who meets URM criteria to be resettled to the Global North or one who is rejected. The decision is deduced from surveys and interviews which seek to ascertain vulnerability of the URM (UNHCR, 2012), but appears more so from the subjective decision-making of a UNHCR agent(s).

Subsequent to delineating URM status, the UNHCR contacts governments of the Global North and inquires which country is able to accept the URM. Once a Global North government accepts, national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of the Global North must concur and allocate one of their regional/provincial offices to resettle the URM. The interaction(s) between the UNHCR agent and the URM varies according to each individual case (UNHCR, 2011), and during the decision process, the refugee youth has no interaction or contact with representatives from the resettling organization in the Global North.

With the exception of the UNHCR, each macro-level system (National Governments and NGOs) makes authoritative decisions for the refugee child without ever meeting or communicating with him or her. Moreover, the child has no agency regarding the geographical location of where s/he will be resettled. The lack of interaction or collaboration with the refugee child parallels Orientalism's concept of authority. Said (2000) claimed, "Orientalism was a kind of intellectual authority over the Orient within Western culture... this authority must in large part be the subject of any description of Orientalism" (p.86). In this case, the Occident (government/NGOs of the Global North) embeds ultimate authority over the Orient/Oriental (DRC/Congolese URM) "not simply by [any] empirical reality" (Said, 2000, p.74), but instead by a battery of images and projections based on subjective information. In other words, prior to the URMs arrival in the Global North the Occident (Global North) governments employ an authoritative Eurocentric framework when making instrumental decisions for the Congolese URMs without ever communicating with them.

It can be argued, based on Orientalism's *European invention* ideology, that macro-level decisions regarding Congolese URMs are grounded in Occidental's writings, images, and media. For instance, Western-based literature almost habitually purports Congolese refugees and internally displaced Congolese as suffering from mental health impairments. A recent study conducted by Kohli and colleagues (2014) ascertained that 672 out of 701 (roughly 96%) of Congolese women who experienced a "traumatic" event in the DRC suffer from PTSD.

Furthermore, Bass and her team (2013) piloted an intervention for Congolese victims of sexual violence based on symptoms of PTSD and Depression. Both studies exemplify how Orientalists (researchers) from the Global North (Occident) often perpetuate a "history of tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given reality and presence" (Said, 2000, p.71) for both the Occident and Orient. The authors of these studies act as Orientalists who contribute to the dominant discourse by maintaining that Congolese (Orientals) who suffer from war are in need of help or an intervention due to their "PTSD" and "Depression" statuses. Although both studies illuminated the injustices faced by Congolese sufferers of war, both pathologized the Congolese and indirectly conceptualized them as victims.

Additionally, the aforementioned studies utilized rudimentary cultural adaptations of (Western-based) the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire to assess PTSD and Depression in Congolese populations. Based on the implications of these data in the literature (illustrated in the succeeding section), it is fair to postulate that such studies are not politically neutral (Said, 2003). Although beyond the scope of this paper, scholarly debate exists cautioning Orientalist researchers about universally applying Western mental health concepts, such as PTSD, that endorse a Western ontology and value system in non-Western contexts without a comprehensive exploration of cultural variables (Bracken, Giller, & Summerfield, 1995; Craps, 2013). Finally, the mere fact that Orientalists enter the DRC (the Orient) and conduct and disseminate Occidental information aligns identically with Said's major underpinnings of Orientalism.

As mentioned, Orientalists (Global North researchers) often portray refugees as victims who are inherently passive and powerless (Denov & Bryan, 2012; Rajaram, 2002). More specifically, many researchers primarily focus on pathologizing refugees as helpless victims, which presents a skewed view of their realities and commonly overshadows refugees' agency and resiliency (Denov & Bryan, 2012; Rajaram, 2002). Rajaram (2002) describes Occidental NGO's representations of refugees as, "Objectification... the identification of refugees [is] not in terms of their individual humanity but as a group whose boundaries and constituents are removed from historical context, reduced to norms and terms relevant to state-centric perspective" (p.251). Pathologizing Congolese URMs appears to exacerbate a *European invention* (of the Orient) of the lived realities of Congolese URMs. Conversely, when providing displaced and unaccompanied youth with agency and an independent voice, one learns that many of these youth are anything but powerless victims, and instead courageous, strategic, and thoughtful (Denov & Bryan, 2012).

### **Micro-level Social Work Connections**

Once Congolese URMs arrive to the Global North, their indigenous cultural identity quickly diminishes when they are commonly placed in foster care settings with Occidental White families. Often times, foster families only source of "knowledge" of the Congolese URMs (Orientals) stems from Orientalism (i.e. literature, aforementioned empirical studies, images, media). Preceding the URM's arrival to the Global North, no prior engagement exists between the URM and foster parent(s). Foster parents' general ignorance to cook Congolese food, encouragement for URMs to attend Christian church ceremonies, and desires to "rescue" (Alsultany, 2011) the "poor children" are all commonplace during resettlement. This phenomenon relates to Orientalism's "corporate institution" (Kennedy, 2000, p.21) or the Occident's style of dominating and restructuring the Congolese URM (Oriental). This is embedded in the foster parent's (Occidental) power of "parenting" the URMs by authorizing views of them, describing them, and "teaching" them (Nodelman, 1992).

Congolese URMs are not only randomly assigned to countries in the Global North, but more specifically geographical regions within those countries. Instances occur where Congolese URMs are resettled to rural regions of state/provinces in the Global North, where access to familiarity is far less than that of a metropolitan area for a Congolese minor. Although access to Congolese food, music, language, and culture is limited in the Global North, being resettled in a rural geographical location further pushes the URM to the margins. The rural regions of the state/province that Congolese URMs are resettled to often constitute significant majorities of White Occidentals who are frequently inexperienced and naïve to challenging both overt and subtle forms of racism (Supples & Smith, 1995). A Congolese URM in a rural context, therefore, may be more exposed to individual, institutional, and systemic racial inequalities in schools and social settings, which engenders additional stressors for the child (Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012).

During the progression of resettlement, Congolese URM are encouraged to seek professional support for the incidents of trauma they experienced during the war. Although an attempt is made to provide culturally competent psychosocial support for Congolese URM, the therapeutic interventions for Congolese URM in the Global North include “evidence-based” “Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy” (TF-CBT) and “Sandplay Therapy” (USCCB, 2013). Some of these approaches may assuage emotional discomfort for URM, however, comprehensive collaborations between mental health professionals from the Global North, Congolese URM, and Afrocentric psychosocial supports are often nonexistent. Afrocentric approaches constitute Africans seeing themselves as agents or actors in controlling their own destiny in a Eurocentric-dominated society; it is a collective process in conjunction with individual approaches in creating their own Congolese cultural identities (Ndungi, 2013).

Trauma-Focused CBT and Sandplay Therapy are rooted in individualized, one-on-one relationships between a therapist trained in the Global North and a URM from the Orient. In lieu of establishing communicative networks (via Internet communication or travel) between Congolese helping professionals in DRC or neighboring African countries, Orientalists proclaim an all-knowing paradigm that perpetuates what Said claims as a “recurrent or rerepresentation” (Said, 1979) of an Occidental definition of resiliency for Congolese URM. In other words, establishing Congolese URM in an individualized and Eurocentric therapeutic formula facilitated by Orientalists attempts to Eurocentrically define “resiliency” or “recovery,” as opposed to conferring with Congolese helping professionals or the URM themselves. Therapeutic collaboration between the Global North and DRC may holistically provide indigenous interpretations of such weighted concepts (resiliency/recovery) and provide a platform to deconstruct Orientalism’s dominant mental health discourse.

Through bureaucratic and administrative practices of the Global North, the Congolese URM resettlement process is essentially created via a world of meanings based off of a Eurocentric and (post) colonial framework (Mbembe, 1992). Its lack of collaboration with Congolese helping professionals and URM suggests that the resettlement process exacerbates Eurocentric pathological stereotypes of Congolese sufferers of armed conflict. The aforementioned macro and micro level social work connections to Orientalism contribute to the Global North’s “surplus of meanings which are not negotiable and which one is officially forbidden to depart from or challenge” (Mbembe, 1992, p. 4).

## **Moving Forward**

The exemplified links between Orientalism and contemporary Congolese URM resettlement in the Global North inherently perpetuate an already isolating and daunting experience for the URM. Particular techniques to lessen the damages created by Orientalism are what Said identified as strategic location and strategic formation. According to Said, strategic location is a technique for the author to describe his or her approach to the material he or she is writing about (Said, 2000).

Strategic formation represents the ways in which analyzing the relationship between texts, literature, or media affect the culture of both the Orient and the Occident (Said, 2000). If Occidental researchers, social workers, governmental organizations, and NGOs implement both strategic location and strategic formation methods, with Congolese URMs, they may be forced to acknowledge the avenues in which their authority, domination, and Orientalism adversely impact those they aim to “help.” Without exercising such strategies, Orientalism will continue to dominate the Congolese URM resettlement process.

Further qualitative research should be conducted where Congolese URMs are considered the experts of “true knowledge” that Occidentalists are seeking. Instead of relying upon Orientalists to create “expert knowledge” for Congolese URMs, focusing on refugee-centered, participatory research can benefit all parties involved (Doná, 2007; van der Velde, Williamson, & Ogilvie, 2009). Participatory research constitutes participation and collaboration in which decision-making, organizing, and responsibility are shared and developed among all participants (Meyer, 2000; van der Velde et al., 2009).

Participatory research can provide social workers and foster parents with a clearer framework on how to effectively interact with Congolese URMs, while gaining a more accurate understanding of this population. Additionally, policymakers could ascertain relevant information identifying risk and protective factors for URMs before, during, and following resettlement. Finally, refugee-centered participatory research can provide Congolese URMs with a sense of empowerment, agency, and accountability in the resettlement process (van der Velde et al., 2009).

Refugee-centered research may also assist Congolese URMs to support other Congolese URMs during the resettlement process (Sernaker & Stocks 2015). When refugees are given the agency to support other refugees similarly navigating their new surroundings, advantageous and valuable results can be expected (Sernaker & Stocks 2015). If Occidental social workers and foster parents fail to place Congolese URMs at the center of their own resettlement process, we can only expect Orientalism to continuously cloud an already foggy URM resettlement process.

## **Limitations**

Orientalism also has limitations with the Congolese URM resettlement process. Using strictly an Orientalism lens dismisses the fact that African researchers are currently conducting Afrocentric research, in both the Orient and Global North, which contributes to enhancing African immigration and refugee experiences (Ndungi, 2013). In addition, Orientalism fails to account for agency or the appreciation of Congolese URMs as individuals who are capable and noteworthy agents of change. In order to be in their current positions, Congolese URMs are familiar with advocating for themselves. Orientalism assumes that Orientalists (i.e. social workers and foster parents from the Global North) are not interested in the subjective narratives of Congolese URMs.

Can we be so sure of this? Additionally, Orientalism does not account for gender inequality or how intersecting variables of identity may impact refugee resettlement. An exploration of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and Feminist Theories (Enns, 1997) may, therefore, be beneficial.

## Conclusion

As a White social worker/researcher from the Occident, I must constantly acknowledge how Orientalism affects my work and relations with Congolese URM's. (Post)Colonial Theory and specifically Orientalism are integral theoretical concepts to consider while working with this population. The harsh journey for Congolese URM's is littered with oppressive and subjugating features that perpetuate the underpinnings of Orientalism. Although certainly not an exhaustive list, this paper provides an initial exploration of the avenues in which Orientalism intersects with both macro and micro level approaches to Congolese URM's plight. As (P)CT evolves and broadens, the deeper its connection to the structuring of the Congolese URM experience becomes. It is, therefore, pertinent that researchers and helping professionals from the Global North are familiarized with Orientalism; if not, its detrimental impacts will only exacerbate the refugee resettlement experience for Congolese URM's.

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