2023

Teaching the American Dream: How U.S. Refugee Resettlement Responsibilizes Refugees

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Submitted May 1, 2023

Acknowledgements

My research would not have been possible without the support of a multitude of people whom I feel very lucky to have in my life. Thank you first of all to Jenna Rice Rahaim, my wonderful advisor, who met with me every week during my writing process, and offered endless encouragement and advice. To my loving friends who cheered me on while I worked on my thesis. To Susanna Drake and to Hilary Chart for being sources of inspiration and role models throughout my time at Macalester, and for helping me become a better researcher and writer. To Professor Arjun Guneratne for serving on my committee. To Professor Christina Hughes for meeting with me as my ideas were still taking shape, and for giving me many reading recommendations and taking interest in my work. To Professor Olga Gonzalez for providing me with suggestions and meeting with me before I began conducting my research. To Talia Nadir and Beth Hilleman for spending hours with me in the library, coaching me on how to conduct literature reviews and navigate databases. To Angela Steuss for meeting with me and providing support and reading recommendations. To my family for being loving and supportive throughout my research and my time in college. To my mom for reading a full draft of my work and giving me constructive feedback. Most importantly, I would not have been able to conduct any of my research without the support of my former JRS co-workers and informants, and without a warm reception from many JRS clients. Thank you.

Abstract

My project, grounded in three months' work and research with Jewish Resettlement Services (JRS), shows how US resettlement responsibilizes refugees through policies that teach independence and self-sufficiency while demonizing dependency. Yet, as I illustrate, refugees often *want* to be dependent on JRS. I combine ethnographic insights and discursive analysis to elucidate the contrasting ways in which JRS workers and refugees frame "successful" resettlement. I apply an anti-oppressive lens to show how US resettlement produces "responsible" citizens while evading its own responsibilities to properly support people whom the US has had a major role in displacing. I propose a new framework for resettlement, rooted in solidarity with refugees and in social justice.

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Introduction

On a hot afternoon in mid-July I received a call. Jake, a co-worker during my summer internship at Jewish Refugee Services, was on the phone. He had a favor to ask me. Shema--a young man and recently arrived refugee--was on the bus alone. "I'm going to call him and tell him to get off the bus right away. Can you go pick him up?" Confused, I asked why. "Shema had a few seizures this month, and we don't want him riding the bus alone," Jake answered. "Okay, I understand, but you might ask him what *he* prefers," I told Jake. "You're right, I will. But if he doesn't want to get off the bus I'll just have to be honest and say 'look, we don't want you by yourself.' It's tricky, because it's really dehumanizing not to be able to be independent." Jake hung up to call Shema. Minutes later, he called me back. Shema had not yet boarded the bus. He was going to walk back to his apartment, where I was to pick him up and bring him to an appointment across town.

My brief conversation with Jake made me curious: How was Jake imagining "independence," and why did he view lack of independence as "dehumanizing?" Over the course of my internship I learned that not only did all of my co-workers reference "independence" and "self-sufficiency" as integral to refugee resettlement, but that clients whom they viewed as lacking these traits were treated with varying degrees of suspicion. In my paper, I explore the reasons for these beliefs, and the policy that the resettlement agency enacted based upon the ultimate goal of instilling "self-sufficiency" in refugees. Though my informants did not talk about this in terms of the "American Dream," they painted "independence" and "self-sufficiency" as universal values, and used pedagogical methods to teach these values to refugees. Because of this, I have chosen to title my research "Teaching the 'American Dream."

My Anthropology honors project centers on the original ethnographic research I conducted over the summer of 2022 at Jewish Refugee Services,[1] a social service agency located in a midwestern city. The agency assists clients in finding housing, employment, and accessing basic resources. From June through August, I worked as a resettlement intern, and, in addition, conducted ethnographic research, including participant observation and interviews with full-time resettlement staff. I worked as an interpreter for Spanish-speaking clients, assisted caseworkers on home visits with clients, connected clients with public benefits and conducted research and developed resources for caseworkers on public benefits and immigration policy. While I was initially interested in focusing on what "successful" resettlement looks like across the state and investigating relationships between rural communities and refugee populations, I shifted focus to what "success" means to staff at Jewish Refugee Services (which I will refer to as JRS in this paper).

Jewish Resettlement Services is located on the west side of the city, in a brick office building. Attached to the agency is a Jewish day school, where one caseworker sends her two young children. The office is just a few blocks from a strip mall that is home to a Chinese and Mexican restaurant, two favorites amongst JRS staff. Jewish Resettlement Services' office is on the ground floor of the office building. The door to the office is always kept locked, and each staff member carries a key at all times, even when leaving the office to walk down the hall to the bathrooms. During my orientation, one co-worker explained that this policy was born out of fears about anti-Jewish and anti-immigrant violence. "Just to be safe," he explained, "we always lock our doors." Inside the office is a small sitting area with two padded chairs. Clients often take a seat in the waiting area before meetings with caseworkers. Separated by a short wall, the rest of the room is L-shaped and holds a large, rectangular table that seats ten people. Off of the main

[1] I have changed the name of the resettlement agency to protect the anonymity of my informants.

room are three smaller offices, where each of the agency's eight employees (except the director) shares office space with co-workers. Down the short hall from the central table is a closet-sized kitchen space, just big enough to hold a mini-fridge and a handwashing sink.

Most days, Jewish Resettlement Services is a bustling place. Staff often work and chat together at the big coworking table, and clients come and go from meetings with caseworkers. The feeling in the office is convivial and supportive, and co-workers dart in and out of each other's offices to ask each other questions about cases and to catch up. The team consists of a resettlement director, a housing coordinator, four caseworkers and two case aides. There are three main programs JRS clients can enroll in, and each caseworker is responsible for working with clients in one of these programs. Every Thursday the team comes together at the co-working table for a staff meeting, to fill each other in on current happenings, and to ask questions and provide support for each other. Over the summer I sat in on staff meetings, which were usually scheduled to last fifteen minutes, but invariably lasted closer to half an hour, as staff chatted with each other and told stories.

Of the eight resettlement workers, the director, housing coordinator, and four caseworkers are white Americans. The two case aides, responsible for helping caseworkers with work and interpreting for clients, are Burundian and Afghan. The ages of JRS staff range from mid-twenties (Abdul, a case aide), to mid fifties (Rachel, the director). Most staff members, though, are in their early thirties to mid-forties.

Jewish Resettlement Services receives funding from the federal government (as do all U.S. resettlement agencies), as well as from private donations from local community members. The agency partners with local churches and community organizations, whose constituents often

serve as volunteers. At JRS, volunteers provide the bulk of ride assistance, taking clients to and from appointments all over the city.

In the United States there are nine major refugee resettlement agencies. These agencies provide funding for smaller resettlement programs like JRS, which are located around the country. I interned at a resettlement agency funded by HIAS (formerly called the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society). This is the oldest refugee resettlement agency in the world and was founded in 1902 to facilitate immigration for Jewish refugees. Whereas I initially set out to study Jewish approaches to resettlement, through my research I discovered that Jewish values, culture and forms of generosity had little to do with the resettlement program. Most resettlement staff were not Jewish, and in our interviews most people told me that they didn't think Jewishness had much to do with their jobs. Instead, I chose to narrow the scope of my research to another of my initial inquiries: What does "success" mean to JRS staff? What are the tensions that arise when staff and clients have different ideas of what successful resettlement looks like?

Before beginning my internship I had no idea what to expect. I didn't anticipate much conflict between resettlement workers and refugees, and I assumed that the workers' role was to provide the type of support clients might ask of them (like help finding housing and jobs, I thought). I also assumed that the goal of resettlement was to help refugees make connections and get the tools they needed to lead fulfilling lives in a new country. I was taken aback when I learned that, instead, "successful" resettlement meant that refugees became "self-sufficient." The benchmark of "success"--"self-sufficiency"--is both written into U.S. resettlement policy and adhered to by individual workers at JRS. In my project I am guided by a few inquiries about "self-sufficiency" and "success." What happens when clients do not want to be "self-sufficient?" How is "self-sufficiency" measured? Where does this idea come from? How does the goal of

"self-sufficiency" affect refugees who are resettled at JRS? How is "self-sufficiency" taught to refugees? How does the emphasis on "self-sufficiency" limit the ability to fully appreciate the United States' obligation to refugees (particularly those whom the country has had a hand in displacing)? What are possibilities for anti-oppressive approaches to refugee resettlement that take seriously the full scope of refugees' humanity--both neediness and agency?

U.S. resettlement is structured to produce self-sufficient, responsible citizens. Using an anti-oppressive approach, I argue that rather than view refugee resettlement policy in terms of the obligation of refugees to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps," that just policy centers the obligation of the United States to adequately support people whom the nation has had a major role in displacing. Lack of support for refugees at Jewish Resettlement Services is due, in large part, to structural constraints related to lack of funding, as well as resettlement policy that is based on instilling economic self-sufficiency. I argue for an increase in government funding for resettlement agencies in order to allow for better financial support for newly arrived refugees. Similarly, it is necessary to extend the Reception and Placement period for refugees so that they may continue to access aid beyond their first ninety days in the country. These changes would decrease the pressure refugees encounter to find a job as quickly as possible (which limits many JRS clients' ability to attend English classes and gain economic mobility). Expectations for refugees are taught through Cultural Orientation lessons. I argue that JRS engages in cultural imperialism through the promotion of Cultural Orientation, which is geared toward Americanizing refugees' values and behavior. To remedy this, I believe it is necessary to develop Cultural Orientation materials based on U.S. laws that may be given to refugees to help them make informed decisions about how *they* want to live their lives in a new country. I believe that U.S. refugee resettlement must be restructured to produce policy rooted in solidarity with

refugees, and recognition of the nation's obligation to support people as they work to establish lives for themselves in a new country.

Methodology

I relied on participant observation and interviews with agency staff members to develop my research. Two of my co-workers came to the United States as refugees and now work as case aides to the resettlement program. Through interviews with these two case aides, I was able to gain a dimension of understanding I wouldn't have had if I only interviewed staff members born and raised in the United States.

Over the course of my internship I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each of the agency's eight staff members. I used Otter.ai to transcribe and edit my interviews. Each day I took field notes, including notes about my own duties as well as my conversations and interactions with coworkers. I draw on these notes throughout my project and incorporate ethnographic vignettes that I wrote during my internship. Before I was hired as an intern, I informed the agency of my project, and they agreed to support my research. I use pseudonyms in this paper to protect my informants' confidentiality, and I do not reveal the location of the resettlement agency. I have kept all of the information I gathered during my fieldwork password protected, and upon completion of this project I will delete audio recordings from my interviews with resettlement staff.

Positionality

My position as an intern at the agency allowed me to gain a deep understanding of how the resettlement process works. I was able to build relationships with co-workers and clients that

deepened my understanding and guided my developing research questions. As a Jewish person I was initially interested in learning about Jewish forms of aid and generosity. I was further invested in understanding this particular agency because it is located near where I grew up and serves my own community. Many of my peers in public school were the children of refugees who had been resettled in the city. Researching the resettlement process in my city was important to me to be able to better understand my own community and the experiences of my peers and their families. As a white U.S. citizen from a middle class family working at the resettlement agency, I was wary of taking advantage of my privilege to extract information from refugees. Asking people currently receiving resettlement services from the agency to participate in my project while I was involved with the organization could have entailed a power imbalance in which people may have felt compelled to talk to me. Because of this, I decided not to interview clients, and instead focused on interviewing co-workers.

Throughout my internship, I noticed aspects of the resettlement process that frustrated me. I often felt critical of the ways in which staff members would interact with and talk about clients, and worried that staff could be overbearing. Because my research depended on maintaining a positive relationship with resettlement staff, I was wary about expressing critical opinions. As I synthesized my research, I worried that my lens had been overly critical and misplaced blame for mistreatment of refugees on individual staff members. Through the process of conducting a literature review, I was able to contextualize my criticisms within a broader historical context. In my project, I situate this agency's policies within a context of neoliberalism and xenophobic national policy. I include anecdotes from my internship in which I vehemently disagreed with my co-workers' approaches. However, I sincerely wish to humanize my informants, who welcomed me into their workplace and generously gave me their time. My

purpose is to provide context for and constructive criticism of structural issues rather than to present vilified accounts.

Overview and Theoretical Framework

I have organized my project into three chapters focusing on different aspects of "success." My first chapter focuses on JRS resettlement workers' ideas about "successful" resettlement, which are rooted in the Refugee Act of 1980 and center on the overarching goal that clients attain "self-sufficiency." I explore what "self-sufficiency" means to staff, and how the agency enacts policy based upon this goal. In my second chapter, I explore the tensions that arise between staff and clients when ideas about self-sufficiency clash, particularly when clients are deemed overly "dependent" on JRS. My third chapter centers on the fifteen modules of Cultural Orientation that JRS case aides provide all clients within their first ninety days in the country. I examine Cultural Orientation as a pedagogical tool of "self-sufficiency," and I analyze its contents, interweaving my analysis with ethnographic vignettes from lessons I sat in on and helped create. My conclusion offers suggestions for an alternative, anti-oppressive model for refugee resettlement that centers clients' desires and avoids an assimilation-based approach.

I approach my research using a critical anti-oppressive and social justice theoretical framework (Sakamoto 2007; Ngo, 2019) to push against JRS and national resettlement policies that seek to responsibilize refugees. Through this framework, I argue that we can better understand that many of the challenges refugees encounter during and after resettlement are a result of structural flaws rather than refugees' inadequacies, as neoliberal refugee resettlement policy suggests. I will engage with various acculturation and integration theories to highlight the ways in which "self-sufficiency" is an inadequate goal of resettlement and to illustrate how U.S.

resettlement policy and on-the-ground resettlement function to assimilate refugees under the guise of empowerment, agency and multiculturalism. I do not wish to present refugees or resettlement workers as a monolith. Though I did not encounter refugees who employed discourses of "self-sufficiency," I believe it is probable that some people may aspire to ideals of independence. However, I believe that through understanding dependence as moral and neediness as valid, we may work to reframe resettlement policy and establish more humane practices rooted in an acknowledgement of the deep obligation the United States has toward refugees.

How U.S. Refugee Resettlement Functions: Background and Scholarly Critiques

Refugee resettlement policy in the United States is rooted in a xenophobic history and is currently grounded in assimilationist theory. During the Trump era, the "Great Replacement Theory" gained traction. The conspiracy theory holds that non-white immigrants, many of whom are from Muslim-majority countries, are bringing over foreign cultural practices and replacing the white majority. This idea is merely a new iteration of fears that have always shaped U.S. immigration law. Born from fears that white Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture in the United States could be muddied by an influx of immigrants, the United States has historically prioritized cultural homogeneity through assimilation policy. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, for example, was predicated on the idea that Chinese culture was too different from American culture, and that Chinese immigrants would not be able to assimilate (Harris and Conley, 2019). After World War II, immigration quotas were adjusted. The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 limited immigration for non-whites and set higher quotas for Northern European immigrants. McCarran stated, "[W]e have in the United States today hard-core indigestible blocs who have not become integrated into the American way of life but which, on the contrary, are its deadly

enemies." (Harris and Conley, 2019, 66). The rhetoric used to justify the exclusion of non-white immigrants relied on the premise that these groups would not be able to assimilate into "white culture." The nation's first law on refugees (the first time the country distinguished between "immigrants" and "refugees") was enacted in 1948 to allow hundreds of thousands of displaced Europeans into the country, and later to accept refugees fleeing communist countries (Harris and Conley, 2019, 76).

Today's refugee resettlement policy is rooted in the Refugee Act of 1980, which established the Reception and Placement program to serve new arrivals in their first 90 days in the U.S. and set the goal of resettlement to be that refugees gain economic self-sufficiency within a short period of time. The act uses the following language:

> AUTHORIZATION FOR PROGRAMS FOR DOMESTIC RESETTLEMENT OF AND ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES "SEC. 412. (a) CONDITIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS.—(1) In providing 8 use 1522. assistance under this section, the Director shall, to the extent of available appropriations, (A) make available sufficient resources for employment training and placement in order to achieve economic self-sufficiency among refugees as quickly as possible, (B) provide refugees with the opportunity to acquire sufficient English language training to enable them to become effectively resettled as quickly as possible, (C) insure that cash assistance is made available to refugees in such a manner as not to discourage their economic self-sufficiency, in accordance with subsection (e)(2), and (D) insure that women have the same opportunities as men to participate in training and instruction. (Refugee Act of 1980, Sec. 412a).

This section of the act establishes "self-sufficiency" as the goal of resettlement, and sets cash-assistance programs in opposition to "economic self-sufficiency." As I discuss later, on the ground this means that clients are placed in jobs as quickly as possible and often denied extra

financial support. In her master's thesis on the failures of the U.S. refugee resettlement system, SaraJane Renfroe writes that emphasis on self-sufficiency is born out of a neoliberal policy era that "aimed to reduce dependency on public assistance" (Renfroe, 2020, 25). The goal of resettlement is not a "career or sustainable employment support," but mere job placement (Renfroe, 2020, 25). This goal is evident in JRS policy and rhetoric that emphasize the need to hold a job, regardless of hours, working conditions, pay or skill level, and the importance of self-reliance rather than reliance on public benefits.

The Refugee Act of 1980 relies on international law, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as a guiding framework. The UDHR lists political, social, civil, economic and cultural rights as protected areas of human rights. U.S. resettlement policy, however, ensures only civil and political rights. Social, economic and cultural rights, according to U.S. refugee policy, do not "correspond with duties of state protection" (Renfroe, 2020, 10). The emphasis of U.S. refugee policy on instilling economic independence in refugees has been critiqued by many scholars, who call for a more holistic approach to resettlement. In her thesis, Renfroe uses an international law lens, calling for stricter adherence to UDHR frameworks that guarantee social, economic and cultural rights.

Other analyses have offered similar critiques. Scholarly literature on resettlement often focuses on the Reception and Placement program (R&P) and employment, in particular how R&P neglects proper time and care in connecting refugees with long-term career options. These critiques often highlight the ways in which structural issues negatively affect refugee integration into U.S. society. Jessica Darrow (2018), for example, critiques the ways in which resettlement forces refugees into a low socioeconomic class with little social mobility by measuring success in terms of job acquisition rather than "holistic integration." For Darrow, this means a

rights-based approach, where U.S. policy would prioritize refugees' rights, rather than job acquisition. She terms the process by which refugees are rapidly channeled into unskilled work "administrative indentureship," which explains,

> the routine patterns of refugee resettlement policy implementation in which resettlement workers push their refugee clients to quickly accept low-wage jobs with limited opportunities for movement up the labor ladder, train refugees how to behave by motivating compliance and punishing noncompliance through the control of resources, and constrain opportunities for refugee clients to make claims…" (Darrow, 2018, 37).

Darrow argues for an approach she terms "administrative inclusion," which she defines as "a process in which resettlement workers create conditions for refugee clients to make claims in regard to their service delivery" (Darrow, 2018, 37). Benson and Panaggio (2019) make a similar argument."Work" they write, "which is often dirty, dangerous, and demeaning, becomes a primary duty or obligation for citizenship, in exchange for rights to membership and belonging" (Benson & Panaggio, 2019, 50). These scholars draw our attention to the intersection of compulsory work and the right to membership in society.

Other scholars have written about the importance of English language skills in accessing skilled jobs. Ives (2007) and Haines (2010) draw attention to the ways in which English classes are deemed necessary by resettlement agencies but unattainable for many refugees, whose long work hours limit their ability to attend English classes, thereby continuing the cycle of low-paid work and poor working conditions. Lack of access to child care, these analyses argue, also limits refugees' ability to attend English classes. When parents cannot find someone to care for their

children, they are often unable to leave the home to attend class. Both of these critiques were trends I noticed in my own work at JRS.

I believe that my project is important in combating xenophobic refugee policy in the United States. My work comes from my own belief that the U.S. culture of individualism (and the belief that we can "pull ourselves up by our bootstraps") is not only misinformed; it is not conducive to creating a culture in which I want to live. Living in Oaxaca, Mexico, with my family during my junior year of high school and growing up in public schools with large immigrant populations has made me critical of U.S. individualism, and has instilled in me a firm belief in the value of community founded on obligation to one another (as Robin Wall Kimmerer writes, "all flourishing is mutual" [Kimmerer, 2013]). My own life experiences have led me to believe that the United States would do well to lessen its grip on rugged individualism and turn toward community. My research is therefore not only rooted in the desire to transform U.S. refugee resettlement, but also to transform U.S. culture not only through acceptance of diversity, but in fact through an embrace of many of the values and worldviews refugees bring to this country.

My project sheds light on the ways in which refugee resettlement, contrary to popular belief, has not moved very far away from an assimilation model that serves to Americanize refugees. Though many well-intentioned people who value multiculturalism and diversity believe that contemporary U.S. resettlement policy seeks to help get refugees back on their feet, the ways in which U.S. resettlement policy functions to responsibilize refugees for their own plight is not popularly known.

While other scholars have written about the responsibilization of refugees through resettlement policy in the United States. (Uehling, 2015; Wilber, 2019), there is little literature on

how this plays out *on the ground* through resettlement workers' rhetoric and through agencies' policy and practice. I believe that analyzing JRS rhetoric and policy best highlights the ways in which the goal of self-sufficiency not only falls short in terms of providing deep and meaningful aid to refugees, but also the ways in which it does harm by removing responsibility from resettlement agencies and the United States more broadly, placing this responsibility on the shoulders of refugees. I believe that my project, therefore, will be of interest not only to those interested in anthropological research or Refugee Studies, but to any person who is dedicated to social justice and to the wellbeing of foreigners in this country.

In my first chapter, I examine JRS resettlement workers' rhetoric around "success," and what "self-sufficiency" means to staff members. In my second chapter, I explore the tensions that arise when JRS clients have different ideas about "success" and "self-sufficiency," and, in fact, *want* to be "dependent." Oftentimes, this is expressed through demands clients make on JRS for extra financial support. In this chapter, I focus in particular on how staff members respond to these demands. In my third chapter, I analyze the history of Cultural Orientation as a pedagogical tool to teach refugees "self-sufficiency." I explore the implications of these required lessons, and write about my own experiences creating a lesson. Through my research I hope to provide not only a constructive critique of the way in which refugee resettlement functions to responsibilize refugees, but also hope for the possibility of transforming resettlement in a way that recognizes refugees' full humanity.

Chapter I: Responsibilizing Refugees: "Self-sufficiency" as "Successful" Resettlement

"Everyone in the U.S.A. needs to be independent… no one is gonna take care of you; you have to take care of yourself!" -Gloria, case aide

In this chapter, I examine JRS resettlement workers' ideas about "successful" resettlement, which are rooted in the Refugee Act of 1980 and center on the overarching goal that clients attain "self-sufficiency." I explore what "self-sufficiency" and "independence" mean to staff, and in my next chapter I apply these understandings to case studies to examine how the agency enacts policy based upon this goal. Before this ethnographic section, I analyze how my overarching arguments fit into the broader scholarship on responsibilizing refugees.

Responsibilizing Refugees

In recent years there has been an increase in scholarly attention to the ways in which U.S. resettlement policy "responsibilizes" refugees. In my project, I use the term "responsibilization" to refer to the ways in which refugees are held responsible for duties that would otherwise be obligations of the U.S. government (and, by extension, government-funded refugee resettlement agencies). In her article "'This IS what you want! This is what you signed up for!': How Agencies Responsibilize Resettling Refugees," Kelsey Wilber highlights the pressure for resettlement agencies to "transform the 'dependent refugee' into an economically viable citizen, an individual free from the coils of public assistance and able to bootstrap their way to success" (Wilber, 2019, 57). This goal is accomplished, Wilber argues, through rhetorically positioning "self-sufficiency" as "self-care," where "self-care" is enacted and exhibited through taking on (economic) responsibilities, such as getting a job. Rather than recognizing the agency and even the U.S. government's roles in protecting refugees' rights and wellbeing, economic self-sufficiency is instead attained through "properly motivated self-care" (Wilber, 2019, 59).

The importance of self-care is taught through the agency's moves to "shift the mindset" of refugees away from dependency (Wilber, 2019, 57, 59). Not only are refugee mindsets shifted through the resettlement process, but their "character," too, is transformed into "acceptable, self-reliant subjects who earn money as quickly as possible" (Wilber, 2019, 57). Volunteers who work with resettlement clients are often told to teach skills rather than to perform tasks, and to "give time and not money." This facilitates lessons on the importance of learning independence and "protect[s]" volunteers from "being taken advantage of" (Wilber, 2019, 59). This idea also harkens back to the old adage, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime," which perpetuates the notion that teaching people in need how to care for themselves is better and more moral than providing them with a service or item they need to get by. This relies on a false dichotomy: People in need can both work/be searching for a job, for example, and still benefit greatly from social welfare programs.

In her article titled "The Responsibilization of Refugees in the United States: On the Political Uses of Psychology," anthropologist Greta Uehling uses Michel Foucault's history of governmentality as a framework to understand agencies' responsibilization of refugees. Uehling answers Foucault's question of "how to govern individuals who are invested with freedoms that must be respected" by arguing that it is through the responsibilization of refugees that this government is possible (Uehling, 2015, 999). Both Wilber and Uehling argue that, while much of contemporary literature on refugees positions refugees as subjects of biopolitical control, in fact refugees are made responsible for their own plight through resettlement. The neoliberal state, argue both scholars, in fact exerts biopolitical control on refugees by "shifting societal problems (like unemployment or poverty) onto refugees." Foucault's theory of "conduct of conduct" helps these scholars understand the mechanism by which the state renders refugees governable.

Viewed through this theory, power is a "mode of action" that "does not act directly and immediately on others" and "instead…acts upon their actions" (Foucault 1982b:221). Resettlement work operates as "conduct of conduct" by forming a refugee subject who begins to think "of itself and its actions and choices in terms of crude, short-term economics" (Wilber, 2019, 62). For example, rather than make decisions based on values, desires and life aspirations (such as community, connection and general fulfillment and wellbeing), refugees are trained to aspire to get a job as soon as they are legally eligible, and to stay in that job. Other benchmarks and aspirations refugees might use to make decisions, like salary, job satisfaction and general fulfillment, are painted as immoral by the resettlement agency.

Wilber's and Uehling's work responds to the mainstream scholarly critique that refugees are treated as "bare life," as conceptualized by Giorgio Agamben (1995). Agamben, heavily influenced by Foucault's theory of biopower, argues that refugees are an example of biopolitical subjects who are controlled by the state, and reduced to bare life through being stripped of political agency. Rather than "bare life" stripped of political rights and social power, Wilber and Uehling argue that refugees are made into governable, self-sufficient citizens imbued with responsibility and independence through the resettlement process.

I use these conceptions of responsibilization to understand on-the-ground resettlement: Whereas Wilber and Uehling complicate theoretical notions of refugees as "bare life," I extend their arguments that refugees are responsibilized through the resettlement process by examining case studies from one particular agency to highlight the ways in which responsibilization serves to obscure and deny *obligations* that the state, JRS, and individual caseworkers have to refugees. This is accomplished not through a rhetoric of "self-care" (Wilber, 2019), but through rhetoric of "teaching" self-sufficiency and through the moralization of refugees' work. In this chapter, I

explore workers' conceptions of client "success," "independence" and "self-sufficiency," and analyze the extent to which these ideas uphold rhetoric and policy that responsibilize JRS clients. In chapter two, I extend this to examine tensions between JRS conceptions of "self-sufficiency" and clients' demands for additional aid.

Workers' Conceptions of Successful Resettlement: Self-Sufficiency

In my interviews with JRS workers, all staff members defined "success" in terms of "self-sufficiency." This can look a variety of ways to staff members, but I noticed that all staff members spoke about the importance of ceasing to rely on JRS for aid. In the following section I will analyze rhetoric employed by JRS staff members to describe the importance of self-sufficiency, and what this means for clients.

When I interned at JRS, the agency was still recovering from blows the Trump administration had dealt them,[2] and most of the eight-person staff team had been hired within the past year to respond to an influx of refugees fleeing Afghanistan. Most clients were Afghan or Congolese, and JRS ran a few programs to meet particular needs of refugees: the Reception and Placement program (R&P), run by a social worker named Charlie, is a nationwide program that all refugees must enroll in during their first 90 days in the country in order to receive assistance. The federal government provides $2,375 per refugee to the resettlement agency to cover necessities such as rent, food and housing. During the first 90 days, Charlie helps refugees sign up for public benefits, enroll in employment services, register children for school and apply for Social Security cards. Charlie works with Asa, the housing coordinator, to find housing in the

[2] Trump's Executive Order 13769 banned people from seven majority-Muslim countries from entering the United States. Other orders cut funding for resettlement agencies and capped the total number of refugees resettled in the United States at 15,000 people per year. For comparison, President Obama set the 2017 cap at 110,000 refugees before leaving office. Across the country, resettlement agencies saw their funding slashed, and programs significantly weakened.

city, and volunteers with JRS assist with furnishing the apartment or house, and stocking it with groceries for families before they arrive. Charlie often goes to pick up his new clients from the airport once they land in the city.

Cultural Orientation is one integral component of the Reception and Placement program that refugees go through after they arrive in the United States. At JRS either Abdul--a young case aide from Afghanistan--or Gloria--a case aide from Burundi--are normally responsible for delivering Cultural Orientation to new clients (a phenomenon I analyze in my third chapter). Abdul and Gloria provide support to caseworkers, and serve as interpreters for Pashto-speaking Afghan refugees, and Kinyarwanda, Swahili and French-speaking East and Central African refugees. The R&P period culminates in "economic self-sufficiency" (as written in the Refugee Act of 1980). JRS expects refugees to have attained "self-sufficiency," meaning that, if they are able to work, they have at least enrolled in job-readiness training at the local "job center" if they have not already been hired at a job that can cover the cost of rent.

JRS provides special programming and support services for refugees who are unable to work or face "barriers to self-sufficiency."[3] This nationwide program is called Preferred Communities (PC), and provides long-term case management services to refugees who have mental illness or physical disabilities, are LGBTQ, are single parents, or are elderly. Refugees may stay enrolled in the PC program for up to five years, but there is no cash assistance component to the program.

Refugee Support Services (RSS) is the third nationwide program JRS offers clients and provides up to five years of case management and referral services to refugees who need assistance with career advancement. However, as stated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, refugees should "preferably" attain "economic self-sufficiency…within a year

[3] Wording taken from JRS' website

of being enrolled in the program."[4] Clients in the program create an "employment plan," which often includes referrals for English classes and other job readiness programs, as well as support with searching for a job, interview preparation and/or support for planning an advanced degree.

All three programs at JRS center around the goal of "economic self-sufficiency." In my research, I sought to understand how resettlement workers inculcate self-sufficiency in clients, how workers' moralizing rhetoric illustrates deeper beliefs about who is deserving of aid, and what tensions arise when clients do not buy into the goal of economic self-sufficiency. In this chapter, I begin by exploring workers' definitions of, and ideologies behind, "self-sufficiency," which I analyze here as a folk concept with many meanings attached.

I. *Asa*

"This person isn't helpless--that's something we always work on. The goal is self-determination and being self-supporting"

Asa, the JRS housing coordinator, is a young activist and non-binary person. One summer morning when I arrived at JRS, Asa was sitting in the office they shared with Ariel, the Preferred Communities caseworker.[5] I stuck my head in to say good morning, as I did most mornings, and we began chatting. I always enjoyed our conversations: Asa is empathetic, open, and good at listening. Over the summer they were in the process of giving up their smoking habit, and kept the office updated on their progress. On this particular morning, the office was empty. Although we were supposed to come into the office to work in-person most days, many of my co-workers were still in the pandemic-era habit of staying at home until noon, and slowly rolling into the office for meetings with clients later in the day. As I checked my emails, as was

[4]"Office of Refugee Resettlement, Department of Health and Human Services." February 4, 2016. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/office-refugee-resettlement.

[5] This program is open to refugees deemed particularly vulnerable, such as those with disabilities, single mothers and LGBTQ people.

my morning routine, Asa arrived. They began telling me about their time working as a chef, and that they had begun their position at JRS after being involved in food security work and community organizing. Since neither of us was busy, I asked Asa if I could interview them for my project. They were happy to oblige. We walked to the upstairs of the shared office building, past doors decked out in big signs asking us to "vote Republican" (I quickly learned from these signs that JRS shares space with Republican campaign offices, though I rarely encountered our next door neighbors in the building). Asa and I found an empty meeting room and sat down together at a long, wooden table. I remembered the last time I had been sitting at the table, interpreting a phone call between Jake, a caseworker, and his client, a Central American woman who needed help bringing her children to the United States. I cried as I translated her story of being separated from her daughter at the U.S.-Mexico border. A week later I was still receiving texts from the client sending me thanks and blessings, *"que dios le bendiga."* Her story was fresh in my mind. Setting my thoughts aside, I told Asa I wanted to understand how they thought about "success," and I asked them to talk about examples of "successful" resettlement with JRS. Asa began talking about the importance of membership in a broader community, emphasizing connection, independence, and access to resources:

> Successful resettlement means having that trust, that feeling that you are a part of a community. Having independence, but, you know, there are also people in that community who can provide support. Whether that's sharing employment opportunities with one another or letting each other know if there's a new grocery store that carries the foods that they love. That to me means we're doing our job, when we're hearing people say, like, 'Here's this community I'm part of.' Like, we are offering these services that are needed, certainly, we have a role there. For sure. An important role. But I think the thing is going from 'we need the support of the agency' to 'everything we need, our community has.' That to me is successful resettlement. And that also means the

> redistribution of resources, more access to health care--all the societal stuff. The community feeling fulfilled, provided for, and well-resourced--that to me is successful resettlement.

Here Asa touches on a few themes I would like to draw out. They highlight that JRS' role is to provide essential services to new arrivals, but that true success means community membership, and the shift from relying on JRS for support to relying on "our community," which they clarified to mean both the network of refugees in the city as well as neighbors (both from the United States and/or from elsewhere). To Asa "success" means not only realizing that "everything we need, our community has," but, importantly, that the community does in fact have everything refugees might need. Asa acknowledges structural inequalities that leave some communities under-resourced, and highlights the need for all communities to have access to resources in order for resettlement to be successful and in order for refugees to in fact be able to access the supports they need within their own communities.

Asa also spoke to me about the importance of shifting commonly held ideas about needy refugees and instead viewing refugees as agents who actively contribute to the local community. They reverse the question that many "liberals" in the city ask, of "what can we do for refugees" and invite city residents to notice the ways in which refugees are actually contributing to their community:

> Branching out beyond [the refugee community] to like the neighborhood that you live in. That neighborhood might be diverse. On that note, I think successful resettlement is also very much people who have been here a while longer that haven't immigrated here, recognizing that value that the person who is resettled here holds, and what they have to offer them, and that that person is really contributing to their community. And maybe they can even go to that person for support or things they need. That's also successful resettlement. It's blowing up what I think--people still

> have that idea that it's okay to be paternalistic--that conception that a refugee who arrives here *needs* them, like they have something that's gonna make their lives better and provide for them--flipping that on its head and being like, nah, this person isn't helpless--that's something we always work on. The goal is self determination and being self-supporting. And guess what? They're making your neighborhood better. That's also successful resettlement: How our culture views refugees. And like, refugees shouldn't have anything to prove. I feel that very strongly. And, like, they don't owe gratitude. I feel very strongly about that. People learning that, yeah, they don't have anything to prove, but what they have to show is extraordinary. Or totally regular. You know, get to know people. That's my point.

Here, Asa argues that JRS clients are not needy new members of the community who could use assistance, but active agents who actively provide new services and richness to the community. Asa is pushing against popular understandings of refugees in the United States as "helpless." They deem the idea that refugees "need" host-community members to be "paternalistic," and invert this idea by emphasizing that it is *refugees* who are "making your neighborhood better." Through this rhetoric, they set "self-determination" and "being self-supporting" in opposition with being needy and "helpless." Asa is adamant that refugees are valuable and that positioning refugees as contributing value to the community is an empowering approach that recognizes refugees' "self-determination." Asa's rhetoric points to an underlying idea that dependency is negative, and that the association of refugees with neediness is not only incorrect but dehumanizing. Therefore, their labeling of refugees as being "self-determin[ing]" and "self-supporting" is not just empowering but actually humanizing, from their viewpoint. As Wilber writes, U.S. resettlement sets "abject dependency" and "ideal self-sufficiency" as mutually exclusive polar opposites. This reinforces the idea that dependency is immoral, and that full membership in society means independence (this is the ideology behind Wilber's ironically

cheery title “This IS what you want! This is what you signed up for!” taken from an anecdote where a resettlement worker celebrates a client’s food stamps being cut, even though this brings the client increased financial stress [Wilber, 2019, 60]).

Though Asa’s statements echo rhetoric of responsibilization, where refugees are expected to “succeed” on their own, they are also reminiscent of Dina Nayeri’s (2019) critiques of the ways in which refugees in the United States are expected to be “grateful.” As she writes in *The Ungrateful Refugee,* refugees in the United States are often considered to “owe” it to their adopted society to make positive contributions (Nayeri, 2019). Asa’s statement that “refugees shouldn’t have anything to prove” pushes back on this idea and argues that refugees do not owe any debts: According to Asa, refugees can be “extraordinary” or “totally regular,” and both are equally valuable to society. Through these statements, Asa seeks to humanize JRS’ clients while simultaneously promoting the idea that being “self-supporting” is both moral and empowering.

When I asked Asa how JRS fit into their vision of refugees as engaged community members, and whether the resettlement agency plays a role in helping refugees make connections with local residents, they emphasized the importance of a “client-led” approach:

> Yeah, well, I think the relationship-building should be client-led. I think we have a role in connecting individuals, but that will just happen. With housing, for example, if there’s a neighbor outside and an introduction hasn’t happened, maybe we can facilitate an introduction there. If I get a call from a neighbor who’s concerned about the kids playing outside, I could say, ‘Oh, I was over there today, and we were standing in the living room and the kids were within eyeshot, don’t worry. Have you had a chance to meet each other?’ So, supporting that. But I don’t think we should create their relationships, you know, it’s again, really important for them to make their own decisions, and for us to give them space to make that choice. And they can choose how they want to integrate into the community.

Here Asa elaborates on their definition of "successful" resettlement to mean that *clients* lead the way in choosing what their resettlement will look like, and to what extent and how they would like to integrate into their new community. Asa explains that JRS can play a support role, if necessary, in introducing clients to community-members and neighbors, but that clients ultimately have the autonomy to choose their own experiences and relationships.

Though Asa mentions the need for redistribution of resources to communities who lack access to health care and other necessities, they maintain the focus of our conversation on "successful" resettlement on rhetoric of "self-determination" and "choice," emphasizing that refugees have agency, independence, and control over their own resettlement.

Asa's staunchness that refugees are valuable to communities and their resistance to "paternalistic" impulses resonated with me during our conversation. On the other hand, their rhetoric of "choice" and "self-determination" obscures structural issues that are out of JRS clients' control and shape their resettlement process. Rhetoric of "choice" and a "client-led" approach could also obscure obligations that JRS has to clients. Asa implies that clients have the power to write the terms of their resettlement experience, but in fact both national refugee policy and JRS policy dictate what resettlement looks like. Additionally, Asa's statement that viewing refugees as needy is dehumanizing renders invisible the multitude of actual needs refugees do have. In this way, Asa's ideologies around "neediness," "self-determination" and "choice" serve to responsibilize refugees, obscure real need, and, as I explore in the next chapter, real demands that refugees make on the resettlement agency. As I discuss in the next chapter, JRS workers employ moralizing rhetoric of "self-sufficiency" and "self-determination" to deny clients additional aid. In the next section, I analyze another JRS worker's definitions of "success" and "self-sufficiency."

II. Sarah

"I understand that the job is not what you're looking for, and you're working the night shift, but you have to keep it"

Sarah is a caseworker in her forties. She is friendly and always takes a moment to engage in conversation with co-workers. She worked in experiential education and adventure therapy for underserved youth, as well as event coordinating. After getting a master's degree in social work, Sarah worked as a case manager elsewhere before getting involved as a volunteer at a military base that housed Afghan refugees in 2021. This work inspired her to apply for a casework position with JRS. Before talking to me about "self-sufficiency," Sarah told me about growing up in a Jewish family and hearing stories about ancestors coming to the United States as refugees. These stories deeply inform her work at JRS. Though Judaism is not a part of the resettlement process, she sees her family's history as connecting her to refugee resettlement. "Extreme" religious views, though, are challenging for her to grapple with. Many of JRS' clients are pious Muslims. This has provided Sarah with an opportunity to practice being "more tolerant and more empathetic."

> I'm very pro-choice, pro-contraception--I could go on and on and on. But [our clients] have been raised in very different environments than I've been raised in, and a lot of these beliefs are taught to children from a young age, so I kind of just support clients where they are and I've learned not to put my own views on our clients and respect where they're at and how they feel…even if there are things I don't necessarily agree with…I'm a Women's Studies major…sometimes it's really hard to not project my beliefs and my feelings when I want to make sure that women everywhere have equal opportunity as men, but that's not what happens in a lot of other cultures. There's a fine line between wanting to inform our clients on the opportunities here but also being really respectful because things look different in other cultures.

Sarah describes the most difficult aspect of her job as working across ideological differences, particularly when it comes to the treatment and status of women, and she states her own desire to serve her clients without pushing her own ideologies on them. She positions her learning "not to put my own views on our clients" as an act of "respect." Sarah's rhetoric of respect for difference, I believe, fits, to some extent, within Ngo and Sakamoto's anti-oppressive framework for resettlement. Sakamoto argues that an anti-oppressive approach to cultural competence means raising "critical consciousness" of the ways in which resettlement workers of all identities may be enforcers of cultural hegemony (Sakamoto, 2007, 528). In our interview, Sarah talks about the importance of providing for clients "where they are" rather than pushing her own ideologies on them. However, her statement that as a "Women's Studies major" she "wants to make sure that women everywhere have equal opportunity as men, but that's not what happens in a lot of other cultures," leaves room for problematizing: As Lila Abu-Lughod writes, Muslim women's popular portrayal as "oppressed" was curated after 9/11 and used to justify the War on Terror (positioned sardonically as "white men saving brown women from brown men" [Abu-Lugod, 2002, 784]). It is important to seek to understand Muslim women's experiences through their own contemporary and historical contexts, and to join them in solidarity rather than attempt to "save" them from their own cultural and religious practices. Abu-Lughod writes;

> Veiling signifies belonging to a particular community and participating in a moral way of life in which families are paramount in the organization of communities and the home is associated with the sanctity of women. The obvious question that follows is this: If this were the case, why would women suddenly become immodest? Why would they suddenly throw off the markers of their respectability, markers, whether burqas or other forms of cover, which were supposed to assure their protection in the public sphere from the harassment of strange men by symbolically signaling

> to all that they were still in the inviolable space of their homes, even though moving in the public realm? Especially when these are forms of dress that had become so conventional that most women gave little thought to their meaning. (Abu-Lughod, 2002, 785).

Abu-Lughod problematizes the assumption that the veil is proof of Muslim women's oppression, contextualizing the practice and posing the rhetorical question; "why would women…suddenly throw off the markers of their respectability…?" I find this particularly useful in applying to Sarah's statements on "equal rights" and her trouble with "extreme" religious views: Many JRS clients are Afghan women who veil. Upon arrival in the United States, they do not "throw off" their veils, and this should not signal to JRS workers that they are oppressed, but, rather, that they are conducting themselves in the way they find most appropriate and natural.

In the next section, Sarah moves on to talk about obstacles to successful resettlement:

> We've had clients that are having a hard time keeping a job, and I think that's really tricky. A lot of Afghan clients feel like they need to be sending money home and they're having trouble meeting their needs here…Some of our clients have been working at a laundry service and the pay is decent but it's really physical labor and one of the reasons is they don't need to speak English to work there. I can't imagine if I were qualified for work elsewhere to have a pretty physical job because that's all you can do if you don't speak English. So being happy in jobs is hard. And clients need to make money because public benefits they get will only get them so far…Some clients are able to do the labor they need to do to make money. There have been some conversations I have had about 'I understand that the job is not what you're looking for, and you're working the night shift, but you have to keep it until we figure out a new path…you need an income.

Here Sarah names the obstacles to successful resettlement as clients' inability to hold down a job, and their desire to support their families back home in Afghanistan. Supporting family members back home, she says, detracts from their ability to support themselves. Clients who cannot speak English are unable to work skilled jobs, and are often stuck in jobs that require physical labor and difficult hours. Sarah empathizes with the difficulty of their situation, saying that she "can't imagine" being in their position. However, it is important to note that the overarching issue that Sarah identifies here is clients' inability to hold down a job and their state of unhappiness, rather than economic pressures or pressures the agency puts on clients to find a job quickly regardless of conditions and pay. Instead, she views refugees' situation as a difficult reality that they must learn to navigate, because they simply "need an income" since "public benefits they get will only get them so far." I term this a "get-real approach," in which caseworkers unwittingly enforce refugees' oppression through rhetoric and policy that stem from the idea that clients have no option but to operate within oppressive systems. Caseworkers who take a get-real approach often do so in their attempt to help clients attain "self-sufficiency" and "independence." Ironically, in taking this approach, workers actually strip clients of agency through their positioning of oppression as inescapable and inevitable. In reality, it is actually this very framing that *enforces* oppression and *makes* it inevitable.

Sarah's get-real approach is clear when she talks about her own conversation with a client who had quit his job, which required physical labor and working the night shift, in which she told him "you have to keep [the job]." Though Sarah acknowledges her client's hardship, she presents this hardship as an inevitable reality, and enforces his oppression by telling him he must continue to work in oppressive conditions because he has no other option. Through this rhetoric she in fact creates a reality in which her client's oppression is inevitable (he will have to work a

dehumanizing job against his will until he may transfer to another unskilled job, which will likely have similar working conditions). An anti-oppressive framework, here, is important because it would allow Sarah--an empathetic and well-intentioned person who sincerely wants to be of service to clients--and JRS as a collective, to identify the ways in which refugees operate within oppressive systems. Rather than responsibilize them through rhetoric that enforces oppression ("you have to keep [this job]"), an anti-oppressive approach would see caseworkers openly discuss structural issues of socio-economic hardship and oppression, position caseworkers as "allies" rather than upholders of oppression, and would actively advocate change through collective "social action" to restructure the resettlement process (Sakamoto, 2007, 528).

Despite her get-real approach, in our conversation Sarah complicated the definition of "success" and expanded it to include not only "self-sufficiency" and holding down a job, but also having "a support network and community" and being happy:

> We talk about food safety and all the basic needs, but I feel like a support network and community is just so vital. I don't think we can have success until we help people really thrive and not just survive. In our service plan we talk about goals, which is a good conversation to have…Basic stuff, food, shelter, safety, I don't think that's success…it's so important that our clients don't feel isolated and that they have access to the same things that you and I have access to for our wellbeing. That's what I think is success. There's more that's needed. I think our clients deserve to be happy. That looks different to everyone. I don't know how that can possibly happen if your entire family is in Afghanistan. But we have to continue to work with clients to process trauma and figure out how to support them and constantly do more so that they're living the best life they can while dealing with these incredibly hard, recent, emotionally traumatic events.

In order to help clients "process trauma," Sarah has begun coordinating support groups for Afghan and Congolese clients. When I worked at JRS she was in the process of starting this program, so I did not have the opportunity to explore this facet of JRS resettlement. What I would like to focus on here, however, is the rhetorical move Sarah makes to displace responsibility from JRS onto clients. She expresses empathy and pity for clients' trauma and the anguish many people experience because of the separation from their families who are stuck back home. Importantly, she also argues that clients need to be able to "have access to the same things that you and I have access to for our wellbeing," implying, like Asa, that access to resources is an integral part of successful resettlement. Sarah positions JRS' role in helping clients achieve happiness--which she positions as true "success"--as processing trauma with refugees and providing them mental health support. Seen through an anti-oppressive lens, helping clients achieve "success" would mean not only empathizing with clients, but also engaging in advocacy to restructure the resettlement system so that clients no longer have to operate under the oppressive conditions that *create* unhappiness and mental health struggles. Through a rhetoric of mental health care, Sarah shifts responsibility onto clients, obscuring the factors that have caused poor mental health (being forced to work night shifts at a low-paying job, for example). Using a get-real approach and rhetoric around helping clients work through symptoms, rather than root causes, of unhappiness, Sarah defines "success" as "connection" and being "happy." Though worthy and understandable goals, these benchmarks do not fully and adequately address the ways in which JRS enforces oppression through sympathetically naming oppressive conditions as "hard," while refusing to join clients in solidarity to change oppressive situations (such as supporting clients who wish to quit their jobs). I do not wish to criticize Sarah as an individual: she is a kind person, and a good co-worker. Instead, through this chapter I wish

to make visible the way JRS rhetoric (a product, I believe, of national policy) works to make refugees' struggles and oppression appear inevitable. Rhetoric of "self-sufficiency," in particular, is valuable in understanding how refugees are made responsible for their own plight. In the next section I continue my analysis of this rhetoric, analyzing an interview I conducted with Gloria, a JRS case aide.

III. Gloria

"Everyone in the U.S.A. needs to be independent…You have to take care of yourself"

Gloria is a jovial woman in her 30s who arrived in the United States years ago as a refugee. She now works as a case aide at JRS. She is from Burundi and speaks Kirundi, Kinyarwanda, Swahili and French, which are also commonly spoken languages of JRS clients. She frequently serves as an interpreter for clients who don't speak English. Gloria has a way with people, and is skilled at putting clients at ease with her easy-going, friendly demeanor. In our interview she talked about the importance of understanding how to navigate a new environment, including physical environment and culture.

> One thing that they have to do is understand the weather. Because the weather is really different--even to other states. You will say 'it's cold here!' And then the other thing to understand is that everyone in the USA needs to be independent. So they need to know because no one is gonna take care of you; you have to take care of yourself! You need to know how to manage your schedule, you have to know how to manage your stuff. You are the number one.

I was interested that Gloria talked about adjusting to the weather and to U.S. culture as two aspects of the same process, both new and surprising for newcomers. A refugee herself,

Gloria has had to go through the process of adapting to life in the United States. Because of this, she is often responsible for Cultural Orientation lessons given to JRS clients during the Reception and Placement period (this is a main focus of my third chapter). As Gloria sees it, just as clients will be surprised by the cold, so too will they have to adjust to a culture in which people are expected to be independent and to "take care of yourself." Gloria implies that it is the responsibility of clients to adjust to their new physical and cultural environments, and takes a similar "get real" approach to Sarah, saying "no one is gonna take care of you" so "you have to take care of yourself!"

Over the course of the summer, Gloria and I had conversations about her experience coming to the United States, and I know her advice and technique as a case aide to be informed by her own experience of culture shock upon being confronted by foreign cultural practices and values. In particular, Gloria highlighted community as an "African" value, setting it apart from the value of individualism in the United States (where "no one is gonna take care of you; you have to take care of yourself!") In contrast, when she lived in Burundi, Gloria told me that she used to send her child to her family members' and neighbors' houses after school, and relied on others to take her child to appointments. In the United States, she has found it necessary to manage her own scheduling, and to be there for her child after school. Adopting an "American" mode of conduct, in Gloria's view, is necessary to be successful in the United States. Therefore, in her role as case aide she emphasizes the importance of learning skills such as managing one's own schedule, and prioritizing one's own needs above others' ("you are the number one").

Teaching "independence" is positioned through JRS rhetoric as what is best for clients. When I asked Gloria if clients often see being independent as something *they* want, Gloria talked about the need to train people to be independent because in the long run it will benefit them:

> Some of them [want to be independent]. It's kind of challenging, because when they have other people here living here like siblings, or when they have someone like a case manager or an organization that's helping them, they want to be dependent on those people, which is not okay, because they have [public] benefits, but when those benefits are cut off, and when they keep coming and say 'I still need this, I still need this,' when you say, 'no, you are no longer eligible for these benefits,' they become angry. Like, 'oh, why don't they like to help me?' It's hard to know that now you have to be independent.

Gloria positions the need to encourage independence in clients as important because if clients become accustomed to relying on JRS caseworkers and public benefits, when they no longer qualify for resettlement services or their benefits stop, they will "become angry." She states that because it is "hard to know that now you have to be independent," it will be easier on clients in the long run if they learn independence sooner rather than later. Of course, as a JRS resettlement worker, it is also easiest for *Gloria* if clients do not become angry. From Gloria's viewpoint, clients' wish to be "dependent" on JRS is not acceptable. For one thing, public benefits will eventually be cut off: Ironically, once clients' attain the official mark of "economic self-sufficiency" and begin working full time, they will often make just over the threshold to qualify for public assistance programs. Rather than acknowledge this structural constraint, however, JRS rhetoric positions this challenge as *clients'* deficiency (in Gloria's view, clients' lack of drive to depend on themselves rather than on community and family members or caseworkers). Furthermore, for Gloria, clients' emotional reaction when faced with the prospect of being forced to rely on themselves is problematic: Clients' anger is inappropriate and misplaced, as it is *their* responsibility to become "independent." For resettlement workers, Gloria

recommends a culturally-informed approach that will help workers ease refugees into "independence:"

> The way you're gonna help American people is not the same way you're gonna help Afghan people…What you are providing to them, it's good to one but for the other one, it's a challenge…One example is to be independent: American people are independent from kindergarten. In kindergarten you know where your lunchbox is and your day's schedule. But for people from Africa, when they struggle, I can go to my aunt. I can go to my uncle. I can go to my sister, and I can get help from them…Some people just keep wanting to be dependent on the case manager…Back home for them, they share with families. So, say, I have kids, and my sister will take them to school. And when they come back home, my neighbor takes my kids. But here, nobody is there to take your kids, you have to take care of them yourself. There, if I have to pick up medicine, anyone can pick up my medicine. That's not normal here.So having the case manager pushing them to be independent is not 100% positive, in fact. It will be hard…So you are pushing them to be independent, but just be patient.

Here Gloria points to the importance of providing culturally-sensitive aid to refugees. Rather than take a one-size-fits-all approach, she believes that clients will best respond to aid that is tailored to their needs and their belief systems. However, she still emphasizes that clients need to be taught independence. "It will be hard," she says, because clients are accustomed to supportive communities that step in and share responsibilities. Though caseworkers must learn how to provide aid to clients with a diverse set of experiences, in the end the outcome must be the same, because, in Gloria's opinion, all clients do need to attain independence (since this is "normal" and "American people are independent").

Through her statement Gloria tacitly positions oppressive policy (such as deficiencies in U.S. public assistance programs) as unchangeable. From her perspective, it is clients who must

alter their behavior--and even deep-rooted values of community and connection--to be successful. As I discuss in my second chapter, this rhetoric, when it informs on-the-ground policy, legitimizes and reinforces oppression. However, like Asa, Gloria acknowledges the structural constraints that JRS clients face. When I asked about obstacles to successful resettlement, Gloria answered that clients need better access to affordable housing, and that resettlement workers need to better understand clients' cultures:

> We need more people--we need more staff. We have a huge community [of clients]. We need housing--more affordable housing. And we need to have an image of who we help. When new people come in we don't know their background. We need to know who's coming, what's going on in that country or region. What's going on? You can look [that] up…to give you an image of the culture.

Pointing to structural issues, as did Asa and Sarah, such as the lack of affordable housing for refugees and a shortage of caseworkers at JRS, Gloria expands the definition of "successful" resettlement not only to mean that refugees become "independent," but also that JRS staff members provide culturally-informed services. Gloria's acknowledgement of the need for "more affordable housing" also implies an understanding that clients cannot merely become "independent" and "self-sufficient" in a vacuum, but that this is dependent on the resources available in the broader community. Gloria's statement lays bare fallacies in the reasoning behind rhetoric of responsibilization: Paradoxically, refugees cannot become "independent" by themselves. Lack of affordable housing, for example, means that clients are forced to pay steep prices to rent apartments and houses, leaving them with less money for other necessities. Of course, this could be one reason that JRS workers find clients "angry" when their requests for

assistance are denied. Structural barriers to financial security--from housing insecurity to lack of continued access to public benefits--burden refugees and result in claims on the resettlement agency. However, JRS emphasizes the need to overcome these burdens by becoming "independent."

JRS' role in pushing clients to become "independent" is, according to Gloria, a dynamic akin to a "parent-child" relationship:

> [Clients] view JRS as a parent. When they're new and they don't have anyone else, and it's just JRS helping them. Then it changes image when they say 'okay, now I can go to the clinic. Now I can go to school. Now I can--so, it's kind of connections to other organizations and other people who can provide the things we are not able to provide. So they realize, okay, JRS agents are here to receive us, but there are other people here to help us. And then they move on…Not everyone [likes this dynamic] especially when you're a grown up. Your parents push you and say hey, you're a grown up. When clients' case managers change after three months, they're like 'oh no, now I'm not a baby again.' Or when the new arrivals come in and it's like 'oh, you're a baby so I'm a grown up now. You've pushed me to go to another place. So I can say it's kind of parents who help you know where to go, and who is good and who is bad. When they come to us and need advice, their case manager advises them. When they do something wrong and need advice, their case manager gives them advice. So it's kind of like a parent.

Gloria's imagination of a "parent-child" metaphor is interesting when compared with political uses of metaphors of U.S. citizens as "children" and the president or nation as "parent." George Lakoff writes that both Republicans and Democrats employ these metaphors to imagine relationships between the nation and its citizens. While Republicans imagine the government or president as a "strict father," Democrats construct an image of a "nurturing parent" (Lakoff, 2002). Republicans' "strict father" metaphor identifies the duties of a father as being strong,

protecting his children from dangers, telling them what is morally right and wrong, disciplining them when necessary, and instilling a strong ethic of self-reliance. While other countries employ "strict father" models for governance, the United States' is unique because children are expected to become independent and leave the home once they reach adulthood (Lakoff, 2002). Democrats, in contrast, rely on the "nurturant parent model" in which the parent(s) are constructed as empathetic and supportive, and the relationship between parents and children is one of mutual care. Nurturing parents must protect their children from harm, and children are taught to be responsible, to learn to be self-reliant and to be able to deal with hardship. However, in contrast with the "strict father" model, nurturing parents inculcate these values through a relationship founded on moralized empathy and care.

The parent-child relationship Gloria imagines here does not fit neatly within the frameworks for either the "strict father" or "nurturant parent" models. Gloria's definition of JRS as parent is both supportive and disciplined: She states that clients learn that "JRS agents are here to receive us, but there are other people here to help us. And then they move on," implying the importance of intensive support during the Reception and Placement program, and then the shift to becoming "self-sufficient," which is marked by a necessary turn to other forms of support, and ceasing to rely on JRS. Like the "strict father" model, Gloria presents JRS' role as weaning children off assistance so that they may rely on themselves instead, imagined as pushing the child to leave the home and to stop relying on the parent for support. Gloria's understanding that JRS, as a parent figure "help[s] you know where to go, and who is good and who is bad" also aligns with the "strict father" metaphor, in which the parent is responsible for inculcating morals and teaching children to distinguish between "good" and "bad" (Lakoff, 2002). However, Gloria's construction also imagines the "parent's" patience: rather than discipline the "child"

when they "do something wrong," Gloria states that JRS caseworkers "give them advice." Rather than a "strict father" or "nurturing parent," Gloria imagines a firm parent who pushes their children to become reliant on other forms of support, but still is available to offer advice to their children as they transition into adulthood/independence.

Conclusion

Though Kelsey Wilber argues that agencies responsibilize refugees through rhetoric of "self-care," where refugees show they care about themselves through attaining "economic self-sufficiency" and an individual's struggles represent moral failure (Wilber, 2019), this framework does not map completely onto my own research. For one thing, I find that JRS workers do highlight the challenges refugees face, and acknowledge the need for structural change *along* with the need to inculcate "independence": Asa, Sarah and Gloria all highlight their clients' lack of access to resources--such as lack of affordable housing--as an obstacle to "success." Refugees who face financial difficulties, from their perspectives, need not necessarily rely *solely* on themselves, but, rather, self-sufficiency may be attained through ceasing to rely on JRS and turning to other forms of support.

Seen through an anti-oppressive framework, JRS rhetoric and policy would recognize that access to resources--such as affordable housing and humane working conditions--is the right of all refugees, and lack of access to resources suggests a deep need that the United States must address. Similarly, rather than framing the choice to quit difficult jobs as immoral based on the logic that if refugees are *able* to work then working is the *moral* choice, an anti-oppressive framework would help to understand that the pressure to find a job as quickly as possible funnels refugees into unskilled labor that often entails poor working conditions, physically painful work,

low wages and few possibilities for promotions or future socio-economic mobility. Seen through this framework, quitting these jobs is not immoral, but a way of coping with extreme difficulty, and a removal of the self from inhumane and degrading conditions. Through my informants' emphasis on refugees' *choice,* they push against rhetoric that portrays refugees as needy and helpless. In doing so, however, they also construct an understanding of "dependence" as immoral and undesirable. In my next chapter I will explore the ways in which this understanding is applied to policy and informs workers' interactions with clients who make claims on the agency.

Chapter II: Dependency and the "(Un)deserving Refugee"

One morning in mid-June I arrived late at the office. I was supposed to get to work each day by 9am, but on this particular morning I had been outside enjoying the early-summer sun and I had gotten a late start. When I walked into the office, anxious about the time, Asa and Abdul were sitting in the central room, at the long table we used for co-working. They were on the phone with a Pashto-speaking client, and Abdul was interpreting. The atmosphere was slightly tense, and Asa sounded stressed. Abdul nodded to me, and filled me in: they were on a call with a client who wanted help finding better housing. As I sat down, Asa explained to their client that "the idea is that in the future you won't depend on JRS. We want to help you out but you need to rely on your community contacts, because the goal is that in the future you will be able to do this on your own." Abdul passed Asa's message along, before turning to look at Asa. "He's frustrated," Abdul said. "It's challenging, but it's so possible!" Asa replied in a cheery tone. "You can do it!" Asa and Abdul said goodbye to their client, and got up from the table. I wondered how the client was feeling, and whether they were satisfied with Asa's advice to find "community contacts" to help them find an affordable place to live. I thought about Asa's belief that self-reliance would be best for their client, and I wondered what the client thought about this--did they share Asa's belief that instilling an ethic of self-reliance was best for them?

In my last chapter I analyzed JRS staff members' rhetoric around "successful" resettlement as rooted in ideals of independence and self-sufficiency. In this chapter I explore tensions that arise between staff and clients when ideas about self-sufficiency clash. Though staff position being "self supporting" and "independent" as an empowering facet of "self determination," ironically, clients often embody their agency through claims they make on JRS and requests for additional aid. Here I explore tensions that arise, in particular, when clients are

deemed overly dependent on JRS. I highlight the ways in which JRS' goal to teach clients independence causes anxieties for both clients and workers, and how this stems from a history of social workers' suspicions about poor people. I draw on James Ferguson's (2013) work to propose a reframing of "dependency" as empowering.

Dependency as Power

Though "self-sufficiency" and "independence" are emphasized as important goals of resettlement by JRS staff, in this chapter I wish to further complicate the notion that these are universal principles: I am interested in exploring the following questions: do all people, everywhere, seek "independence?" Are there other values and desires that guide JRS' clients lives, besides--and that even contradict--goals of "independence" and "self-sufficiency?" As I analyzed in my first chapter, JRS workers construct "dependence" as dehumanizing and immoral. What are the possibilities for reframing "dependency" as powerful and agentful?

In his article "Declarations of Dependence: Labour, Personhood and Welfare in Southern Africa," James Ferguson suggests the possibility of viewing "dependence" as justice and freedom. The "emancipatory liberal mind," he writes, associates independence and autonomy with dignity and freedom. This is particularly true in relation to the history of slavery and colonialism, and the push for independence and freedom from the bondage of dependence. In his article, however, he proposes an alternative framework for thinking about dependence as a "mode of action." The Ngoni people of southern Africa, who conquered many peoples and successfully incorporated them into their communities, conceptualized people not as "independent units," but as "nodes in systems of relationships" (Ferguson, 2013, 226). "Relations of hierarchy and obligation," writes Ferguson, "did not diminish or fetter the

attainment of full personhood, but rather constituted and enabled it." Within this framework, the ability to "make claims" on others through a position of dependency was desirable. (Ferguson, 2013, 231) The ability to be dependent on those with more resources, in particular, was sought out. In his conclusion, Ferguson connects his case study to the plight of poor people, suggesting that *interdependence*, not *independence*, may be a source of liberation: Like it or not, he writes, "the poor are dependent." (Ferguson, 2013, 234). Dependency is not taught or encouraged, rather, it simply *is.* According to Ferguson, rather than debate whether people should be dependent, policymakers should keep in mind that, rather than encourage "autonomous independence," they should center citizens' desires "for attachment--for incorporation, even under highly unequal and often dangerous and humiliating terms, into a social body." (Ferguson, 2013, 235). This means that, rather than demonizing dependence and constructing it as immoral, social policy should instead "construct desirable forms of it." (Ferguson, 2013, 237). After all, the real concern is not that "those with resources" should "extend patronage to those who lack them," but rather "the greater danger may be that they will not." (Ferguson, 2013, 238).

In this chapter, I argue that we should frame aid as humane, obligatory and as part of our interdependence. I frame dependence as justice and freedom, and independence without sustained support as injustice. When I interviewed my co-workers over the summer about "successful" resettlement, everyone talked about self-sufficiency. People defined this in a few different ways, but many pushed back on the emphasis of individuality in American culture by emphasizing that self-sufficiency looks different for each client, that nobody is *truly* independent, and that self-sufficiency can mean not just relying on the self but on community support systems, too. I came to realize that resettlement workers thought of self-sufficiency as clients ceasing to rely on JRS, specifically, for support.

I saw this in practice over the course of the summer. When clients would ask for better housing, or help finding a new place, the housing coordinator and other resettlement workers would often tell them they needed to try to figure it out on their own first, that there were many people "in the community" (meaning the refugee community, neighbors and the city more broadly, according to Asa), that knew how to go about finding housing, and/or that affordable housing in the city was really difficult to come by, and that JRS had helped all they could. There is an interesting tension here: The resettlement program's overarching goal, and marker of success, is that clients cease to rely on them, and become "self-sufficient." This is positioned as empowering, and in the best interest of the clients. However, many clients of JRS *do* want to rely on the resettlement program, and are not always shy about making demands on the program. This position of dependency, although constructed through JRS' rhetoric as undesirable for clients, I suggest could instead be thought of as a powerful position.

Enforcing Independence: "A tough love situation"

At the end of my internship, I sat down to interview Rachel, the director of the resettlement. Rachel is a middle-aged woman who served in the Peace Corps and spent a decade of her life doing development work in East Africa. She has a stern demeanor, but is quick to laugh--especially at Abdul's constant joking. The longest-serving member of the resettlement team, Rachel had been working at JRS for eight years at the time of my internship. Assuming Rachel would tell me about "self-sufficiency," I asked her how she thinks about "successful" resettlement. I was surprised and fascinated as she began explaining the idea that clients are "taking advantage" of JRS by asking for more (financial) support than JRS is willing to give. She told me:

> I think the drive to learn [is important]--the drive to solve their problems, the drive to be independent. When people have that, rather than sort of expecting to stay on benefits for as long as possible--we do see people who are sort of thinking like that, but they're not likely to really get very far with that…sometimes it looks like really tough conversations that staff have with these clients that they need to understand that we're not going to support them indefinitely. And at some point, when my staff is saying, 'I think they're taking advantage of us, you know, we paid a whole month extra rent more than we normally would.' And if they're still not taking this seriously, they need to pay their bills. Then, you know, sorry, we can't pay--we're not gonna pay any more of your rent. And it's a tough love situation. Like not enabling that kind of behavior. If you're not willing to share, you know, what is really going on, like if they have a disability or if they're struggling with mental health, that's something that they need to tell us. But if it's 'I want to see how much JRS could really pay' or 'JRS has a lot of money to pay my rent,' we can't, you know, even if we do have enough money at that point to help that person…we don't have the funding to be able to enable that sort of thing.

Rachel's assertion that clients "take advantage" implies a certain level of power clients hold over JRS. Rachel frames "taking advantage" as a choice by clients to unfairly milk JRS for financial support, and JRS' decision to show "tough love" as a choice that takes back power and that will help clients in the long run (since, in her view, clients who depend on benefits too much will not be successful). Although JRS might have the funds to help one client, she sees giving extra financial support to clients who are trying to "take advantage" as setting dangerous precedent, since JRS doesn't "have the funding to enable" all clients to make additional financial demands. Rachel seems to be worrying that clients have sinister intentions--that they do not *want* to work, and want more money than they are entitled to, or merely are curious to see how much money JRS has to give out. Through her statements, Rachel sets "[refugees'] drive to solve their

[own] problems" and "the drive to be independent" in opposition to the mentality of refugees who expect "to stay on benefits for as long as possible." According to Rachel, "independence" and "drive" are qualities that "successful" clients will possess. On the opposite side of this spectrum are clients who lack "drive" and who want to rely on public assistance rather than support themselves. According to this viewpoint, refugees who face barriers in becoming "self-sufficient" do so because of personal failings and shortcomings, rather than lack of support or access to resources.

Rachel's imagining is reminiscent of anthropologist Oscar Lewis' "culture of poverty" theory: Lewis argued that poverty creates cultural patterns that are replicated over generations, regardless of whether or not economic conditions change. Characteristics of the "culture of poverty" include low levels of aspiration and high levels of dependency (Lewis, 1959). Sociologist Hylan Lewis and anthropologist Carol Stack have critiqued this theory, arguing that it is in the interest of the wealthy class to buy into the idea that poor people remain poor because of cultural and moral factors rather than because of structural inequality (Stack, 1974). Rachel's argument that refugees who "are sort of thinking like that" and who want to remain dependent on public assistance struggle because of mentality rather than because of structural challenges aligns with the "culture of poverty" argument that poor people remain poor because of character rather than circumstance.

Rachel was not the only JRS worker who sought to enforce "independence" through "tough love." Moves to instill independence in clients were made by many workers at JRS. During my last week of working at JRS, I had a conversation with Asa, the housing coordinator, about housing issues. Our conversation was sparked when they told me, "we aren't going to help people in R&P fill out public housing applications anymore." Public housing is in high demand

among JRS clients, and other affordable housing options are hard to come by. I asked Asa why this was going to become JRS policy. They seemed hesitant and uncomfortable. “Well,” they said, “this is Rachel’s idea, but maybe I should talk to her about it.” Asa told me that Rachel wants people to be in the Preferred Communities resettlement program (the program reserved for refugees with particular struggles such as those with disabilities, single mothers and LGBTQ people) if they need help with public housing applications. Another reason for this policy, Asa explained, is that “we don’t want people to move into public housing in order to not have to work.” Asa told me about a JRS client who did not want to work his job anymore because it involved manual labor that hurt his body. He quit his job without informing Dan, his caseworker. “It’s fair,” Asa said, “and it’s totally valid that he quit, but he didn’t tell Dan and then he wanted to apply for public housing, but he could get another job and afford a more expensive place.” People like this man “need to work,” Asa said, and pay the extra cost of private housing, and leave public housing for those who actually “need it because it’s so competitive and takes a long time to get accepted.” The public housing waitlist is two-three years long. I asked Asa why, in light of high demand for public housing and a long waitlist, JRS didn’t apply for everyone to get into public housing upon enrollment in Reception and Placement. They agreed that this seemed like a possible solution, and said perhaps they would raise this with Rachel.

Asa also expressed concern that many clients for whom JRS has found other housing options in fact want to be moved into public housing. I shared my own perspective: Public housing, I believe, is valuable to many families not only because it is affordable, but because of the close-knit community it often entails: Kids are able to play outside together, and families live close to one another and can spend time together and help each other out. “I totally get it,” Asa said. “But there are not a lot of options for affordable housing. It’s really challenging to find

good options. We have ins with certain management companies and try to build relationships with the ones we think are good." One landlord, for example, is lenient on occupancy rules and allows nine-person families to stay in three bedrooms. Most landlords are strict, however, and sometimes JRS splits families up in order to find housing.

Asa and Rachel position clients' desires to access public housing in tension both with JRS expectations that clients work, and that they do not use affordable housing as an excuse to remain unemployed. Asa expresses the idea that if clients are *able* to work, then it is *immoral* not to. Furthermore, if clients who are able to bring in an income live in public housing, they are taking this option away from other, more worthy refugees. This rhetoric is one facet of JRS' responsibilization of refugees. The constraints around housing--that affordable housing is scarce and that the cost of living in the city is inaccessible to most refugees, as well as the issue of strict landlords who do not want large families living on their property--are understandably difficult to negotiate for the JRS housing coordinator, who, I believe, sincerely wants to help refugees get by. However, JRS staff members' use of moral language (that affordable housing is an amenity reserved for the deserving few and that clients must qualify for through membership in Preferred Communities) rather than shed light on structural issues of injustice and inaccessibility, places responsibility on refugees.

Who Deserves Aid?

Though she argues that some refugees are not "successful" due to their own dependency-oriented mentality, Rachel notes that certain refugees do deserve aid. She states that individuals with "a disability" or those "struggling with mental health," though they might be hesitant or ashamed to speak with caseworkers about personal issues, must inform JRS workers

because, from her perspective, these people do deserve extra support from JRS. This is not only Rachel's opinion; this is JRS policy. When I spoke with Charlie, a young man with a gentle demeanor who serves as JRS' Reception and Placement (R&P) caseworker, he told me that few people qualify for rental assistance: For one thing, most people are employed and able to pay their rent after the first four months of being in the United States. However, sometimes clients have not begun working and are unable to pay rent. Charlie told me that "if there's a good reason why they're not working, like a pregnant, single mother and they're going to be due soon or something like that, we can enroll them in PC, where there's additional rental assistance available and help them cover those future months of rent." Enrolling clients in PC can open opportunities for additional rental assistance, but not all clients are eligible for the PC program. Charlie draws a distinction between those in PC with "a good reason why they're not working," which, as he states, depends on factors such as parental status, and those who *choose* not to work.

At JRS, clients are unable to access rental assistance unless they enroll in PC. This is not national policy, but, rather, it is unique to JRS. Charlie explained to me that in the past, they "provided additional rental assistance after [the first] four months for people. But it's something we really try to avoid because word gets out quickly and then all of a sudden it's like, 'well, why did this person get five months of assistance and I got four?' and then all of a sudden we're on the hook for providing additional rental assistance to everyone which we just don't have the funds for." Charlie explained that:

> It's something Rachel really wants to avoid, but we have done it. I mean, one case, the clients didn't really have a need to be in PC. They're self sufficient, but they were very, for one reason or another they were being like, pretty picky about where they weren't going to work or like

> certain job opportunities just didn't end up working out at the time and when the rent was due, and it was kind of like, well, they're either gonna get a five day notice from the landlord, or we're going to pay the rent. We want to avoid that. So we provided an extra month's rent for them and just kind of said this is the last time this is happening. You really need to work with us or you can ask around in the community, but you really need to find some kind of employment. What's gonna happen next month if you aren't able to pay the rent? I was kind of like, "we don't do this normally, and we aren't going to do this again."

Charlie points to the possibility of providing extra financial aid to clients who would otherwise be facing imminent eviction, but highlights JRS'--more specifically Rachel's--belief that word will get out among clients and JRS will "be on the hook" for providing more aid to everyone. This points to the power of dependency: At the very least, from JRS' point of view, clients want to make claims on the resettlement program in order to be in a position of increased financial security. To mitigate clients' power, as Charlie has described in this section, caseworkers make determinations on who gets to be in this position, and who needs to be working toward financial "self sufficiency." Charlie also signals the issues of "fairness" and avoiding perceived inequality among clients. He suggests that having volunteers give directly to clients actually is not helpful in the long run because it causes other clients to perceive unequal treatment since they might think aid is coming from JRS. I was interested to notice that Charlie's reasoning relies not only on his idea of what is best for clients, but just as much on what is best for JRS as an organization: Charlie alludes to JRS' reputation, particularly as it relates to how "fair" JRS is perceived to be toward clients.

Once clients inform JRS of a "good reason" why they are not able to work, caseworkers can then evaluate whether or not clients' reasons merit extra financial support. Rachel and Charlie do not appear to think of sustained financial support as an obligation JRS has to all

refugees, but rather a case-by-case decision based on the legitimacy of the refugees' neediness. As Jessica Darrow (2015) argues, caseworkers engage in "cherry-picking" clients. Whereas in her work Darrow refers to workers' choice to provide additional aid to those whom they deem most employable, here I use her term to refer to workers' classification of clients as either morally deserving/undeserving of additional aid based on ability, age, marital and parental status, sexual orientation and/or gender identity (characteristics that allow clients with particular identities to participate in the Preferred Communities program).

JRS' positioning of financial aid as based on the perceived legitimacy of refugees' claims, I argue, is also facet of the rhetoric of responsibilization that the U.S. uses to escape obligation to refugees: refugee status does not automatically qualify individuals for extensive financial support, but, rather, this is something only *deserving* refugees may access. During my internship I spent a significant amount of time learning about public benefits, and helping refugees navigate the bureaucracy of signing up for benefits, like the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. I was upset to learn that individuals and families living in poverty cannot merely qualify for aid to receive various public benefits, but then must "earn" them by meeting certain behavioral expectations. For refugees who wish to receive TANF, for example, they must also participate in English language classes and job readiness programs. By positioning public benefits or cash assistance as something people must earn--by having a disability or serious mental health needs as a JRS client, or, for all refugees on TANF cash benefits, by participating in English classes and job readiness programs--rhetoric and policy work to fashion a distorted narrative in which the U.S. government does not *owe* basic aid to people in need, but rather gives it to those who are deemed worthy, or who have "earned" it.

Ideas around "deservingness" are deeply ingrained both in U.S. imaginings of public welfare and ideas about refugee resettlement. As anthropologist Seth Holmes (2016) and novelist Dina Nayeri (2019) have argued, political discourse around the world has constructed a binary between the "deserving refugee"--who is *forced* to leave their home--and the "undeserving migrant," who *chooses* to leave home. The refugee, because they have been displaced through no fault of their own, is "deserving" of aid. The migrant, however, because they have chosen to leave, is "undeserving." As anthropologist Khiara Bridges writes, there is also a long history of a socially constructed dichotomy between the "deserving poor" and the "undeserving poor." The idea of "deservingness," she writes, "has always been racialized. That is, the deserving poor have always existed within the cultural imaginary as indigent white people, and the undeserving poor have always existed within the cultural imaginary as indigent people of color" (Bridges, 2017, 1053). The binary of "deserving" and "undeserving" exists to draw distinctions between those who are impoverished because of their own deficiencies--moral or behavioral--and those who are impoverished because of forces outside their control, such as from disability (Bridges, 2017). Historically, these categories have been used in the United States to justify programs--such as class-based affirmative action--designed to give poor white people a "leg up" (Bridges, 2017). According to Bridges, "Americans, as a general matter, support public assistance programs that help children, the disabled, and the elderly" (Bridges, 2017, 1072). However, programs seen as aiding the "undeserving poor," such as TANF, are generally disliked, even across political lines. General assistance programs like TANF, writes Bridges, are "thought to benefit those who can be blamed for their poverty: they are lazy or unwilling to work (i.e., general assistance), or they have become pregnant while poor or while unattached to a male wage earner on whom they can depend, and they have given birth to children that they cannot independently financially support"

(Bridges, 2017, 1078, 1079). Bridges' work highlights the ways in which impoverished people of color and single mothers have been constructed as immoral and undeserving of aid. Here I apply her argument to my own research in order to better understand the ways in which JRS clients are constructed as either "deserving refugees" or "undeserving refugees."

At JRS, I saw how rhetoric and policy--shaped around the idea of the "deserving refugee"--instilled suspicion in staff members over "undeserving refugees," who were seen as "taking advantage" of the agency by asking for more help. What was often lost in my conversations with staff was the dire situation that refugees were in: Rather than highlight the ways in which refugees have faced immense struggle and have been uprooted by violence from their home countries, are resettled in a new country and must begin a life entirely from scratch, workers highlighted the various demands clients made on the program and labeled them suspicious. Refugees who asked for extra support were often considered lazy or trying to escape self-sufficiency, or did not have enough motivation to take responsibility for their own situation. This thinking also created many anxieties in caseworkers, who did not want to "enable" dependency, and were in charge of determining legitimate claims from claims from clients who were "taking advantage."

One illustration of this line of thinking is from a conversation I had with Rachel during my internship. I had just learned that in order to collect the $635 many refugees qualify for under the TANF program in the state, people must attend job preparation events, including English classes. I felt angry that refugees who qualify for cash benefits have to do anything at all to "earn" a meager $635/month besides *needing* it. I told my coworkers about my outrage, specifically that families receive the same amount regardless of the number of people in their households. Rachel disagreed, and told me that in New York TANF cash amounts do vary based

on family size, but that is not a good solution because if families are given more money it is more likely they will become dependent on cash benefits and will be less likely to want to get a job. I found this troubling, and shared my opinion that we are obligated to give basic public benefits to anyone who needs them, no strings attached.

As I have written about in my first chapter, many of the ideas of self-sufficiency and suspicions of clients who want extra aid stem from the rise of neoliberalism and the ensuing responsibilization of refugees. However, the suspicions that social workers have about clients is also important to situate within a long history of paternalism in social work in the United States. In her chapter on the history of cash assistance in social work, Viviana Zelizer (1994) writes about the history of social service agencies' shift from direct services to cash assistance and back to direct services, and the ways in which this shift was marked by suspicions about poor people as well as the desire to instill "self reliance" and "independence." According to Zelizer, in the 1910s the rhetoric in social work encouraged social workers to begin giving out money to clients rather than providing services (such as buying groceries). The rhetoric around this decision highlighted the importance of not destroying poor people's "self reliance" and "independence." To better help clients "retain…self respect," for example, the Newark Bureau of Associated Charities encouraged cash assistance for clients (Zelizer, 1994, 145). In part, this shift was predicated on the realization that people are not always poor because of their own choices. In fact, the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, writes Zelizer, sparked the beginning of an acknowledgement that "the mass of worthy, honest and economical poor" should "not be treated as thieves and paupers," and should be able to access cash assistance rather than usual forms of relief (Zelizer, 1994, 158).

The turn to cash assistance in the 1910s, however, was met with resistance, particularly with the concern that cash would be "spent unwisely" (Zelizer, 1994, 147). With the rise of consumerism, many people believed that poor people were "incompetent consumers" and that poverty did not necessarily come from lack of money, but from misuse of income (Zelizer, 1994, 150). One organization switched back from cash assistance to grocery orders when clients bought "luxury" items like sugar and butter (Zelizer, 1994, 151). Organizations also began to create budgeting lessons to teach clients how they should spend their money (how much money should be reserved for food, how much for rent, etc.). Zelizer writes that "the 19th century dole and alm had to be eliminated," because "randomly offered, such sentimental monies carried no moral markers, no lessons in spending. Nor could charitable cash be passed off as a wage, to be used without restrictions." (Zelizer, 1994, 154). Instead, social work agencies turned to a practice of giving out heavily monitored cash assistance (which she describes as cash assistance but "with strings attached," the practice for which her chapter is named). Zelizer points out that the micromanaging of clients' spending habits entailed social workers' practice of "distinguishing 'neurotic' requests for relief from real deprivation" and that, paradoxically, the hyper surveillance of clients' spending (in the name of instilling "independence") "may have intensified as agencies dispensed an allegedly free currency instead of commodities" (Zelizer, 1994, 169).

As Zelizer highlights, cash assistance has long been debated. At times this form of aid has been constructed as necessary for clients to attain "self-sufficiency," and at other times cash assistance has been demonized as immoral and counterproductive. For JRS, providing cash assistance is considered as blocking refugees' self-sufficiency. A result, I believe, of national policy that prioritizes speedy job acquisition and "economic self-sufficiency" (Refugee Act of

1980), anti-cash assistance policy operates to the detriment of refugees, depriving them of valuable resources and implying that if refugees cannot pay for necessities on their own that they are deficient and/or immoral.

At JRS, the paradox of clients' demands on the agency and the agency's response of engaging in surveillance and enacting policies rooted in supervision in the name of instilling "independence" caused contention and, I argue, was the cause of anxieties for both caseworkers (who were afraid of getting taken advantage of and of not properly teaching "self sufficiency") and for clients (who simply wanted more help to get on their feet in a new country).

One afternoon I walked into JRS after dropping a client off at a doctor's appointment. The client was a woman who had recently arrived in the country with three children, all young adults. Like many JRS clients, the family spoke Kinyarwanda, and very little English. When I drove them to appointments we often spent the car rides pointing to objects and telling each other how to say them in our native languages. My first introduction to Kinyarwanda, my pronunciation was hilarious to the family, who cracked up at my accent when I repeated the words they taught me. It often felt to me that laughter was a meaningful way to connect with people with whom I did not share a common language. I found that, over the course of my internship, a constant source of delight for me were the many laughs I shared with JRS clients (most often over my Kinyarwanda or Pashto accent).

On this particular day, as I arrived back at JRS from the doctor's office, Asa and Rachel were sitting in the common area. I sat down at my usual spot and we chatted about our days. I told them about the doctor's visit, and they told me about their days. Rachel explained that a local church had begun giving "free money" to JRS clients in the Reception and Placement program. "What does that mean?" I asked her. The church, it turned out, had received requests

from some JRS clients for financial support. “It’s really generous of them,” Asa said, “but they’re going to become dependent on that money and then they’ll expect it from the church, so it’s better not to give them money.” Rachel and Asa began talking about tentative plans to meet with the church to discuss this. I was taken aback. It struck me as overbearing that Rachel and Asa would go out of their way to tell church members not to give money to refugees who had recently arrived in the city. Why did they see cash assistance as wrong? Why did they think clients would “become dependent” on the generous donations of local churchgoers? What was the perceived danger in “dependency,” anyway?

Some of these anxieties, I believe, may have stemmed from the idea that clients would “take advantage” of the church’s generosity, and that this would put church members in an awkward situation. This worry, out of concern for the church, also relies on the belief that refugees should be treated with a degree of suspicion. Additionally, Asa and Rachel’s concerns hinge on the belief that “dependency” is conditioned. Acts of generosity, in this framework, encourage a pattern of “dependency” in which clients will “expect” continued financial support. Of course, it could be the case that some clients, because of a language barrier or miscommunication, might get the impression that the church would be able to offer sustained financial support over an extended period of time. I believe this is a valid perspective, and worth considering, particularly if Asa and Rachel wanted to make sure both JRS clients and church members were on the same page. However, the idea Asa expresses--that donations will encourage a pattern of “dependency”--is separate from this concern, and relies on the notion that “dependency” is undesirable, immoral and can be either encouraged or discouraged. Instead, I believe that it is valuable to reframe “dependency” as a legitimate desire that binds people

together in webs of connection and reciprocity, and, importantly, is often a reaction to tenuous circumstances (as are the circumstances of all JRS clients, and all refugees worldwide).

When I worked at JRS, the agency enacted policies that relied on the belief that performing services for clients, as well as providing cash donations, would increase their dependency. One of many instances where this tension was apparent was a particular interaction I witnessed between a JRS caseworker and a volunteer. JRS partners with volunteers, who frequently provide rides for clients in the Reception and Placement program who do not yet know how to navigate public transportation. Sometimes volunteers help set up apartments for new arrivals, and buy groceries to stock the fridges that will soon belong to refugees about to arrive in the city.

Jake is a soft-spoken young man who was working as a JRS caseworker during the summer months while completing graduate school classes, with plans of living in France when he graduated. He became good friends with Abdul, a JRS case aide, and the two often invited me to go to lunch with them. When they were in the office they loved to make fun of each other and laugh together. One summer afternoon while Jake and I were alone in the office filling out paperwork and looking through our emails, we heard a knock on the door. Clients often dropped by the office for meetings with their caseworkers or with Asa, the housing coordinator. I stood up to get the door, but Jake got there first. He welcomed inside a young woman waiting at the door. Jake briefly introduced us and explained that the woman was a volunteer with a local church. She had taken a family who had recently arrived in the city to the grocery store, and was stopping back at JRS to drop off paperwork with Jake. As the two chatted, she casually told Jake that she had bought the family their groceries with her own money. Jake was surprised. In a quiet tone so as not to make her feel bad, he told the young woman that that was against JRS protocol,

and that she should not buy them groceries in the future. JRS had provided the family with a voucher for groceries, he explained, and even though she was trying to do a nice thing, in the long term this would not help the family learn independence. Instead, Jake told the volunteer, the parents needed to get into the habit of doing things for themselves. The woman nodded, and the conversation moved away from grocery shopping.

If clients rely on others, it is seen as both immoral and a cause for suspicion (people must not want to work or be "independent," or they are trying to "take advantage" of JRS' access to resources). These ideologies underpin both Rachel's belief that refugees should have to work in order to get basic public benefits, and Jake's belief (and JRS policy) that volunteers should not buy refugees groceries. From JRS workers' perspective, cash assistance without "strings attached" will be free money, with no motivating factor forcing refugees to be contributing, moral citizens. Of course, as I write about in this chapter, clients often *do* want to rely on others for help, which is precisely why they make requests of the resettlement agency. Their very requests for aid are exhibitions of their agency.

Zelizer's history of social work and cash assistance further helps to contextualize Jake's reaction: As Zelizer explains, cash assistance as well as direct services (like buying groceries for clients) have been heavily contested in the realm of social work over the years. Zelizer describes the restrictions placed on charitable giving as "moral markers." I find this useful in analyzing Jake's response to the volunteer who bought the family's groceries. In his brief discussion with the volunteer, he invokes JRS policy, as well as the moral obligation of helping refugees "learn independence." The volunteer should not buy clients groceries, despite her good intentions, because she was unwittingly getting in the way of clients attaining the moral characteristic of being independent. Rather than thank volunteers for their generosity at buying groceries for a

new family in town, volunteers at JRS are reprimanded for "teaching" clients to be reliant on others' help. This operates on a couple assumptions: that moral people should *want* to be "independent" and "self-sufficient," relying on themselves rather than on others for help, and that dependency is a characteristic that is learned. As James Ferguson writes, however, "the poor are dependent." (Ferguson, 2013, 234). Dependency, according to Ferguson, is not created or reinforced by overindulgent patrons, it simply *is.* Ferguson further argues that rather than fret that "those with resources" should "extend patronage to those who lack them," the "greater danger may be that they will not." (Ferguson, 2013, 238). Ferguson's construction of dependency as a social fact rather than a moral failing is useful, and takes into account human interdependence and obligation to one another. Adopting this framework could radically transform policy at JRS: rather than treat clients with suspicion for being dependent, JRS workers could understand financial support and acts of service as moral acts of interdependence and obligation, rather than immoral indulgence of refugees' need. One JRS caseworker, Dan, does view his work through a lens of interdependence and obligation. In the next section I present his unique perspectives.

Dan

"There is a degree of guilt and shame in having been the person that made somebody else's home unlivable, too dangerous a place to be"

Dan is a very tall, large man with a warm smile and an easy laugh. He speaks slowly, and sits back in his swivel chair with his arms crossed when he is listening deeply. He is a resettlement caseworker at JRS, though he did not go to school to be a social worker. Dan wanted to be an art teacher but ended up in the military, after working as a handyman and

carpenter. Before coming to JRS Dan worked for the International Organization for Migration helping prepare refugees for their flights as they left a U.S. military base and made their way to their new homes. “I wish I found that instead of the military, because there is a similar way of living, and the same intensity without causing harm,” Dan told me.

While serving in the military, Dan was stationed on the U.S.-Mexico border. His assignment was to help construct a border wall. He described his work as ridiculous, and something he did not believe in. Every day he would drive to work and listen to Mexican radio stations. “I liked the music...I didn’t understand much of anything, but those DJs have a way better energy. They’re way more fun than American DJs.” At night, college students from Mexico would cut doors in the section of the wall Dan was building. He thought it was funny and appreciated the act of defiance. “People are just coming to do what the people we’re helping here are doing: They’re trying to find a better life.”

When I talked to Dan, he had a very different perspective than Rachel and Jake on dependency. Dan’s deep sense of guilt and shame about serving in Iraq frame his work. He told me that the reason he wanted to work at JRS was to do his part to heal the damage he felt he had been a part of creating. Sitting in a wide, cushioned swivel chair, Dan leaned back and thought about his experience in the military. He told me;

> Coming to [refugee resettlement work] after having taken part in--and very direct part in--the kinds of things that create refugees colors it a little differently for me, because there is a degree of guilt and shame in having been the person that made somebody else's home unlivable, too dangerous a place to be.

When I asked Dan about his clients asking for extra financial support, he told me that he feels the U.S. owes it to Afghan refugees in particular not only to allow people in and provide basic resettlement services, but to truly help them establish new lives. He emphasized that the United States' decision to pull troops from Afghanistan allowed for the Taliban to take over. Therefore, according to Dan, the U.S. is responsible for the influx of refugees. He suggested that true justice, perhaps, would look like the U.S. government paying for Afghan refugees' rent, or buying families houses. Dan framed justice through obligation--not obligation in terms of clients' obligations to get a job and attain self-sufficiency, but the United States' debt and obligation to Afghan refugees to truly make up for contributing to the violence that displaced them in the first place.

Dan's feelings of guilt and shame for his military service during the "war on terror" are representations of the responsibility the U.S. bears for millions of people displaced around the world since September 11, 2001. A 2021 study by Brown University's Watson Institute found that at least 38 million people and possibly up to 60 million people have become refugees or have been internally displaced due to violence that has resulted from U.S. wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, Libya and Syria (Vine et al., 2021). The United States has taken in hundreds of thousands of refugees since 9/11, but most displaced people have been resettled within the Middle East. According to Dan, the United States has not repaid its debt: Neither has the country resettled the number of refugees it has displaced, nor has the country provided sufficient support for refugees who have resettled here.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored tensions and anxieties that arise between staff and clients when ideas about "self-sufficiency" and "independence" clash. From workers' perspectives, "dependency" is a way of being that can be either encouraged or discouraged directly through policy. Workers, who understand "independence" as moral and necessary, enforce policy meant to instill self-reliance, while discouraging reliance on JRS. Workers view particular clients as "deserving" and others as "undeserving" of aid. Refugees deemed overly dependent and "without a good reason" for being needy, are considered undeserving, and often thought of as immoral. These clients are viewed, many times, as "taking advantage" of JRS, reinforcing workers' anxieties.

These tensions are not a result of ill-intentioned workers, but instead stem, in part, from a long history of social work policy rooted in suspicions about poor people. Of course, JRS also operates under a number of structural constraints: The agency depends, in large part, on funding from HIAS. Without additional funding, Charlie explained to me, JRS simply does not have enough money to support all clients for an extended period of time. Though JRS policy can only go so far without an increase in funding, I believe that it is valuable to propose alternative ideas about "dependency:" Rather than view reliance on others as immoral and suspicious, I believe we may choose to understand dependence as powerful, moral, and indicative of the ways in which, as human beings, we are all tied together in a web of interdependence. Like Dan, I believe that it is both most accurate and most just to frame U.S. aid to refugees as an obligation that the country has to the people that we, as a nation, have helped to displace.

Chapter III: Cultural Orientation or Cultural Imperialism?

One bright morning, as I sat down to answer emails in the office, Gloria approached me. She told me that she was going to be heading over to a family's home to teach a Cultural Orientation session and asked whether I was free to join. As a cultural anthropologist, I was intrigued by Cultural Orientation: What ideas would this new family have about the U.S.? How would Gloria teach them about U.S. culture? How would the family react to the information Gloria was going to share? Cultural Orientation, though taught throughout the United States from a set of required materials, allows room for resettlement workers to add in information they consider important. What would Gloria decide to teach refugees about "U.S. culture?"

In this chapter I write about Cultural Orientation sessions I attended while interning at JRS. I explore the purpose Cultural Orientation serves, from the ostensible goal of helping clients to navigate new systems, to the deep-rooted intent to, I argue, assimilate refugees into "U.S. culture." This chapter fills a gap in the literature of refugee acculturation and integration: There is very little scholarship on the Cultural Orientation sessions required of refugees in the Reception and Placement program, the 90-day nationwide program refugees are placed in upon arrival in the United States. This program is important in understanding the ways in which resettlement continues to function to assimilate people into "U.S. culture."

Cultural Orientation exists, according to government-sponsored materials, in order to teach refugees the skills they need to attain self-sufficiency and "success." Cultural Orientation materials should serve to "ensure refugees receive accurate, tailored information that supports their ability to achieve self-sufficiency in the U.S.," reads the official CO booklet.[6] Many Cultural Orientation modules offer refugees tools to understand and navigate new systems. I

[6] U.S. Refugee Admission Programs - Domestic Cultural Orientation Objectives and Indicators, from CORE Source Exchange

have chosen to write about Cultural Orientation as it is a pedagogical tool that resettlement workers use to enact their mission of helping clients attain the skills they need to achieve self-sufficiency. Though CO is thought by resettlement workers to be a helpful way for refugees to begin to adjust to a new culture (and is, many times), CO is simultaneously used as a vehicle to teach refugees to comport themselves in new ways in accordance with the desires of JRS workers and the U.S. government, rendering them governable subjects in the sense of Foucault's theory of the "conduct of conduct" (1982).

Acculturation Theory

In order to understand how Cultural Orientation (CO) at JRS is used as a tool to encourage refugees' assimilation into U.S. culture, it is important to understand the shifts in acculturation theory over the past century. Here I will provide an overview of the history of acculturation theory in order to position my own work in opposition to assimilation theory, to better illustrate the ways in which CO fits into a "unidirectional" model of acculturation theory, and to explain the lens of integration that I find useful in this chapter.

Over the course of the past century, acculturation theory has shifted from a focus on assimilation to a more holistic way of thinking about immigrants' and refugees' experiences in foreign countries. Park and Burgess' 1921 work (that set out to broadly define the field of sociology and its focuses), and Redfield, Linton and Herskovits' 1936 work (that defines "acculturation" anthropologically and outlines a basic framework for anthropologists to use in their own research), provide the basis for contemporary scholarship on "acculturation" (Ngo, 2019). This term describes the interaction between people of different cultures, and the effects of these interactions on both cultures. In his 2019 article, Hieu Van Ngo asserts that there have been

three major theoretical frameworks for acculturation theory in the past century. The first, termed "unidirectional acculturation" describes the "absorption of subordinate groups into the dominant culture" (Van Ngo, 2019) and emerges from Robert Park's theory that ethnic minority groups "apparently progressively and irreversibly experience contact, competition, accommodation and assimilation" (Park, 1950, 138). Park's student, Milton Gordon, built upon this framework and developed an "assimilation model" broken down into seven levels detailing various forms of assimilation, from integration into dominant institutions, marital assimilation, to "identificational assimilation" and ultimately "civic assimilation," which would signify an absence of conflicts over power. (Gordon, 1964, 1978). Assimilation and "loss of ethnic identity of minority groups" was necessary, Gordon held, to achieve national harmony. The "core culture" in the United States consisted of "middle-class cultural patterns of, largely, white Protestant, Anglo-Saxon origins." (Gordon, 1964, 72).

Gordon's ethnocentric and racist theory has been rightly and thoroughly critiqued by contemporary scholars. Portes and Zhou 1995, for example, argue the importance of socioeconomic status to acculturation, and have challenged the idea that immigrants assimilate into a homogenous U.S. culture. Instead, they offer a reworked framework in which immigrants may: 1. Acculturate into the white middle class 2. Assimilate into the lower class or 3. Maintain cultural identities and social ties through community networks.

There are major issues with this unidirectional acculturation framework: The assumption that there is one static, dominant culture that is superior to the cultures of ethnic minorities is ethnocentric and relies on the incorrect assumption that culture cannot change. In fact, culture is not static, and is constantly changing in a multitude of ways. A unidirectional framework for acculturation that seeks to justify the assimilation of ethnic minorities, Ngo argues, also "mirrors

the deliberate colonization of the so-called 'Third-World' nations and cultures by European imperialism over the course of hundreds of years" and "involves the social psychology of superiority and domination of Eurocentric ways of being, the assignment of inferiority and otherness to non-European people" (Ngo, 2019). This framework fails to question power structures within the dominant culture in a given society, as well as the role of the dominant culture and its institutions in marginalizing ethnoracial minorities. Through this negligence, unidirectional acculturation theory positions assimilation into dominant culture by immigrants as an exercise of their free will, rather than a result of subjugation and subjection to discriminatory and oppressive power structures. Immigrants' economic and social struggles, argues Ngo, are positioned as their own failure "to shed their cultural inferiority and to acquire the aspired-to Eurocentric, middle-class norms and standards." (Ngo, 2019). The "bootstraps myth" (disproven by Ngo 2007 and Watt and Roessingh, 2001) that holds that there is equal opportunity for all, and that through hard work immigrants can become successful, helps to disguise societal injustice and unequal access to resources, particularly for immigrants.

Pushing back on the unidirectional acculturation framework, psychologist John Berry developed a new framework termed "bidimensional acculturation" (Berry, 1974, 1980). In his theory, Berry claims that acculturation has four expressions: Assimilation (which occurs if immigrants do not wish to preserve their culture and do wish to be part of the host culture), separation (which occurs if immigrants want to maintain their culture and do not want to be involved in the host culture), marginalization (which occurs when immigrants do not maintain their own culture but neither do they get involved in the host culture), or integration (which occurs when immigrants maintain their own culture and also involve themselves in the host culture). Berry's framework strives to be apolitical, and focuses on immigrants' *choice* rather

than on the ways in which the dominant culture compounds power through institutions and excludes immigrants.

More recently, scholars have pushed back on bidimensional acculturation and have proposed that "integration" has to be understood within a context of global racial hierarchy and power dynamics (Cummins, 1994; Beiser, Noh, Hou, Kaspar and Rummens, 2001; Reitz and Banerjee, 2007). In this context, it is easier to understand that groups with less power will get subsumed into the dominant culture. Marginalized groups are not marginalized through *choice,* therefore, but through societal discrimination, systemic racism and exclusion.

Proposed by Bourhis et al. 1997, "interactive acculturation" responds to both unidirectional and bidirectional acculturation frameworks by emphasizing interaction between cultures rather than one-sided integration. In this framework, the dominant culture's orientation toward immigrant acculturation affects the outcome for immigrants. Both the dominant culture and the immigrant's culture are oriented toward either integration, assimilation, exclusion or individualism. When the immigrant and dominant cultures have the same approach to acculturation, Bourhis et al. deem this "consensual." When they clash in their approaches they are in "conflictual" interaction. Though this framework adds more nuance to acculturation theory, it does not question structural power differentials: The dominant culture is not subject to change, and it is immigrants who are expected to alter their cultures.

In this chapter, I apply Ngo's "critical anti-oppressive and social justice lens" to my analysis of Cultural Orientation, and join him in arguing that acculturation must be viewed in terms of cultural dominance and oppression rather than attempt to be apolitical. As Tew asserts in his work "Toward a Framework for Emancipatory Practice in Social Work," we must discard our ideas about "will" and "individualized power" (Tew, 2006). Instead, it is imperative to

understand that the dominant culture exercises authoritative power over subordinate ethnoracial groups and maintains the status quo through oppression and cultural erasure. (Dominelli, 2002, Tew, 2006, Freeman, 2006, Mullaly, 2002, Ngo 2019). Cultural Orientation is one method used to maintain this status quo.

Cultural Orientation: History and Curriculum

As part of my role as intern, I shadowed JRS caseworkers and aids on home visits. I attended a number of Cultural Orientation sessions, mostly given by Gloria, a current case aide and former JRS client. During my internship I was also tasked with contributing to Cultural Orientation materials. Given in the first 90 days of resettlement, while clients are in the Reception and Placement program, Cultural Orientation is a 15-module series of lessons provided to refugees to assist in navigating new cultural and legal systems. JRS' CO materials, as employees call them, are sourced from Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange's (CORE) book, "Cultural Orientation: A Guidebook for Refugees," and modules are created by the Center for Applied Linguistics.[7] Cultural Orientation was established in 1980--the same year as the Refugee Act--following the collapse of U.S.-supported governments in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and ensuing waves of refugees who arrived in the United States. According to the Cultural Orientation Resource Center website, refugees who arrived in 1975 (the "first wave" of refugees) "had been for the most part well-educated city dwellers: Most could read and write, at least their own language, and were familiar with life in a modern city."[8] However, "later arrivals were more likely to come from rural areas where their exposure to urban life and modern

[7] The Center for Applied Linguistics is a non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C. whose mission, as stated on their website, is to "promote language learning and cultural understanding by serving as a trusted source for research, resources, and policy analysis."
[8] "Cultural Orientation Resource Center Expanded History" 2023. http://www.culturalorientation.net/about/history/expanded-history.

technology was limited. Many had received no formal education and had no literacy skills in any language…In contrast to the first-wave refugees, second-wave arrivals brought with them little or no knowledge of Western life."[9] In response to a second wave of Southeast Asian refugees unaccustomed to life in the United States, in 1980 The Center for Applied Linguistics developed a Cultural Orientation curriculum for refugees to be taught during the resettlement process. The impetus for the creation of this program was the fear that refugees unaccustomed to "western" life would not be able to properly adapt to a drastically new lifestyle. According to the Cultural Orientation Resource Center, upon the arrival of second-wave refugees "alarming stories of cross-cultural mishaps circulated in the resettlement community and in the press. Refugees were jailed for hunting without licenses—a restriction unheard of in the home country. Parents were accused of child abuse when they left young children to supervise younger siblings—a common practice in many Asian countries. One refugee lost a hand to a garbage disposal he did not know how to use."[10] From this excerpt it is appears that the impetus for creating Cultural Orientation was to give refugees the tools they needed to navigate drastically different cultural and legal systems: People who hunt coming from places without hunting laws, for example, should know how U.S. hunting laws function in order to be able to navigate them and stay out of legal trouble. Those coming from places without appliances common in the U.S. (like garbage disposals) should similarly be given an overview of how these operate so as to stay safe and informed. Presented this way, Cultural Orientation seems to seek to give refugees the tools and cultural education necessary to make fully informed decisions and navigate a new reality.

This is not the whole picture, however. Cultural Orientation was not created merely to assist to teach refugees how to *navigate* new cultural and legal systems, but also how to *adopt*

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[9]Ibid
[10] "Cultural Orientation Resource Center Expanded History" 2023. http://www.culturalorientation.net/about/history/expanded-history.

U.S. cultural practices and beliefs. In fact, two years after creating Cultural Orientation, the Center of Applied Linguistics proclaimed that "the purpose of CO is to help refugees acquire the information and skills necessary to gradually adapt to a new society and culture. CO helps refugees incorporate elements of American culture into their own system of values and beliefs" (Center for Applied Linguistics, 1982). As presented by the Center for Applied Linguistics, Cultural Orientation serves to condition particular "values and beliefs" in refugees, rather than merely to teach "skills necessary to gradually adapt" to the United States. By seeking to alter refugees' very belief systems by making them more "American," Cultural Orientation serves as a mechanism of cultural imperialism, and opens up questions about what imaginings of being "American" CO entails.

It is helpful to understand this mechanism of control through Foucault's concept of "governmentality," which is widely referred to as the "conduct of conduct" (Foucault 1982, 220–221). Foucault holds that governmentality operates through power that is exerted on subjects either by discipline or by control. Mechanisms of control, which I find useful to think about here, operate to subtly and covertly encourage particular modes of conduct, while discouraging others. Mechanisms of control alter ways of thinking and knowing, influencing what subjects view as "true" and "right." I find it meaningful to examine the ways in which control operates through Cultural Orientation trainings.

CORE's Cultural Orientation for refugees is funded by the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration and also receives funding from the Department of Health and Human Services, the Administration for Children and Families and the Office of Refugee Resettlement. CORE's website explains that "refugees resettled in the United States receive Cultural Orientation to acquire vital knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to adapt to their new

lives and achieve self-sufficiency." Through conditioning particular "attitudes" in refugees, Cultural Orientation seeks to "conduct" not only refugees' actions, but also to alter deeply-held morals and beliefs.

CORE provides modules titled: 1. Budgeting and Personal Finance 2. Cultural Adjustment 3. Digital Technology and Literacy 4. Education 5. Employment 6. Health and Hygiene 7. Housing 8. Learning English 9. Newcomer Rights and Responsibilities 10. Public Assistance 11. Role of the Local Resettlement Agency 12. Safety 13. Transportation 14. U.S. Laws and 15. Your New Community. Each module in the resource book includes "objectives" and "indicators" that resettlement workers should use to guide their lessons. On the following page is an excerpt from the module on Employment:[11]

[11] U.S. Refugee Admission Programs - Domestic Cultural Orientation Objectives and Indicators, from CORE Source Exchange

Employment

OBJECTIVES	INDICATORS
Participants can explain that refugees play a central role in finding/obtaining employment in the U.S.	• Participants (if employable adults) can identify themselves as responsible for obtaining employment in the U.S. • Participants can list at least two ways the RA may assist them with finding employment services and developing job skills (e.g., classes and trainings, referrals to employment services) • Participants can list at least three ways in which they can search for employment (e.g., online, help wanted posters)
Participants can explain that a crucial way of finding better paying jobs is learning how to speak English	• Participants can list at least two ways English language acquisition is a key to a more desirable job (e.g., English is the most common language in the U.S., learning English is necessary to thrive and advance)
Participants can explain that early employment and job retention is essential to self-sufficiency in the U.S., and it must be the primary focus for all employable adults	• Participants can list at least one positive consequence of early employment (e.g., pay bills, expenses) and at least one negative consequence of delayed employment or lack of employment (e.g., unable to buy personal items, deny benefits) • Participants can list one reason that turning down any job could be used as a reason to deny benefits • Participants can demonstrate at least one good interview skill (e.g., firm handshake, eye contact) and list one negative action (e.g., not answering questions, a disinterested expression) • Participants can list at least two positive outcomes for retaining their job (e.g., keep public benefits, build job history)
Participants can explain that a person's initial job might not be in their chosen profession	• Participants can list at least two positive outcomes of accepting employment outside their chosen profession (e.g., gain experience, learn English) • Participants can identify at least two types of entry-level jobs they may hold in the U.S. during the initial resettlement period (e.g., customer service, food service) • Participants can identify that their first job might not be their last and that it is okay to change jobs or careers • Participants can explain that current job skills, professional development certificates, or education may not transfer immediately to their chosen profession • Participants can list at least two skills or factors that can help expand their employment opportunities (e.g., learning English, good job performance)

Figure 1: Employment module from official Cultural Orientation handbook (from CORE Source Exchange)

The Employment module directs resettlement workers to teach refugees not only *how* to find employment opportunities in the United States, but also *why* they must work, furthering the resettlement goal of self-sufficiency by responsibilizing refugees through language that positions employment as a moral necessity. Importantly, employment is positioned as attainable as long as refugees follow the module's teachings. This module uses the word "responsible:" The very first indicator states that "participants (if employable adults) can identify themselves as responsible for obtaining employment in the U.S." This will be possible, according to the module, as long as refugees dedicate themselves to learning English, learn interviewing skills, and accept that they will likely need to begin with an entry-level position.

The process through which resettlement workers funnel refugees into low-paying and unskilled jobs has been termed "administrative indentureship" by Jessica Darrow (2018). Though Darrow does not use the term to refer to Cultural Orientation, I believe "administrative indentureship" is also promoted through rhetorical devices used throughout CO modules: The employment module uses rosy language--refugees are to list why English language skills will allow them to find "desirable" jobs and "thrive and advance"--to push the idea that finding any job as quickly as possible will help them achieve "success." The module also uses negative language to underscore the consequences of shirking employment responsibilities: for example, refugees should be able to list "at least one negative consequence of delayed employment or lack of employment (e.g., unable to buy personal items, deny benefits"). Read together, the module's simplistic, moralized language combines to paint a positive and moral image of early, entry-level employment, and a negative and immoral image of what could happen if refugees do not become "responsible" by learning English and holding down an entry-level job: if this occurs and

refugees struggle, it is because they have not properly adopted necessary skills or taken on enough responsibility. This simplistic framing does not accurately reflect reality: As Darrow writes, most refugees who take entry-level jobs right away will not acquire the skills necessary to work higher-paying jobs. Similarly, full-time jobs often do not allow refugees the time needed to attend English classes (Darrow 2018; Benson and Panaggio 2019). Therefore, if refugees abide by Employment module teachings, their chances at economic mobility will in fact be limited.

Cultural Orientation in Practice

At the beginning of my internship, when I was just getting to know my co-workers, they often graciously invited me to shadow them as they went about their days. At Gloria's invitation, I decided to join her for a Cultural Orientation session she was going to teach. I didn't know what to expect, but I hopped in my car and followed her to her clients' apartment. We went into the building and down the winding steps to the family's basement unit. When we knocked on the door, a middle-aged woman opened the door and grinned at us, beckoning us in. "*Karibu*," she exclaimed, "*karibu!*" Gloria smiled at the woman and answered her in Swahili. She introduced me to Marie, who welcomed me with a "*jambo, karibu,"* and ushered me to a plush couch in her living room. From my seat I could see the wooden table that filled the small dining room adjacent to where we were sitting. A teenage boy was sitting at the table--Marie's middle son. Marie nudged him and he said hello to us before retreating to his bedroom down the hall. Marie walked Gloria to an armchair, and sat down on the couch. As Gloria chatted with Marie in Swahili and I listened, guessing they were making small talk, Marie's chubby, wide-eyed toddler got up from where he had been laying on the carpet and waddled up to her legs. Marie scooped him up and kissed him. Gloria and I, overcome by his cuteness, cooed at him. "His name is

Jean," Gloria translated to me. Jean squirmed out of his mother's arms and scooted across the couch, climbing over to me and batting his long eyelashes before looking away shyly. "He's such a flirt," Gloria joked. The chubby baby boy scampered around the carpet, entertaining himself and trying to figure out who the two strangers were. Gloria opened her binder to begin Cultural Orientation. "I usually do this in Swahili, but I'll translate for you so you can understand, too," she assured me. I thanked her, glad that I, too, would be able to understand the lesson. Just then a young woman walked in. Marie and the young woman greeted each other, and Gloria introduced me. Laura, Marie's daughter, lived down the street and would attend Cultural Orientation sessions with her mother, she explained. Laura asked me how I was doing, and explained that her mother couldn't yet speak English. I nodded, and Gloria began her lesson.

Alternating between Swahili and English, Gloria began by asking Laura and Marie what the hardest part of adjusting to U.S. culture had been like thus far. "Men here dress like women," Laura immediately replied, laughing. "On the bus I saw a man dressed like a woman--with makeup," she declared, clearly disconcerted. Speaking Swahili, Marie added that here it is possible for men and women to marry people of the same sex. "Yes, here people can change genders," Gloria answered. "Men can be women and women can be men. Don't worry, you will get used to it and it will be okay," she assured her clients. "Two people of the same gender can get married and you have to respect them," she added.

Gloria opened with a module on public transportation in the city. She explained how bus routes work, and how to get a bus pass. Then she acted out a skit. Standing up, she approached Marie. She sat down right next to her, pretending she was getting on the bus. Then she recoiled, a disgusted look on her face, scooting away from Marie. "Remember, these Americans like their distance," Gloria explained. Marie, Laura and I cracked up, amused. Gloria laughed too. She got

back up to reenact the skit. This time, she approached Marie and asked "is it okay if I sit next to you?" Again, Marie, Laura and Gloria cracked up. "In America you have to ask permission to get close to people," she explained. "Here people don't hug and kiss like we do back home."

Moving on to the "Safety" module, Gloria began to talk about child discipline. "Here you cannot hit your baby," Gloria said (she often referred to children as babies). "Americans take away electronics, they don't use physical discipline. You can give your baby a timeout, instead." Gloria explained that in the U.S. there are laws about child negligence and child abuse, and children can even report their parents if they hit them.

Though JRS CO sessions emphasize "no hitting" rules, official Cultural Orientation materials do not explicitly state this. Instead, one of the "Safety" module's "objectives" for parents requires that "participants can articulate there are legal rights and responsibilities related to family life in the U.S." The "indicators" that resettlement workers should look for are that "participants can list at least two basic laws regarding child supervision, neglect, and abuse (e.g., illegal to abuse a child, children can't be left unsupervised), including one acceptable method of disciplining a child (e.g., time outs, taking away toys). Participants can identify one or more ways in which approaches to childcare and discipline may conflict with U.S. laws."[12] Gloria's emphasis that parents may not hit children stems both from official materials and from Rachel's request that we emphasize this to clients. As Gloria taught the "Safety" module, Marie looked slightly startled, taken aback that her own children could report her to the police.

Gloria didn't seem to notice, and moved on. She had another skit up her sleeves: reading from her binder that "you should advocate for yourself," she peered down at the ground, pretending somebody had fallen over and she was walking by. "Can I help you?" she inquired.

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[12] U.S. Refugee Admission Programs - Domestic Cultural Orientation Objectives and Indicators, from CORE Source Exchange

"It's hard for us to be self-sufficient because in Africa we need everybody's help, but here, no. You have to take care of yourself," she stated bluntly. I was not entirely certain what she meant, but I assumed she was trying to communicate the country's emphasis on individualism, contrasted with the country that Marie and Laura are from, which presumably emphasizes community. "Here Americans are hard workers and your life is your job. And Americans are on time to work," she added, transitioning to the module on employment. She held out her wrist to show her watch. "You guys," she said, looking at me as an American representative, "if you plan a meeting with us for one hour, be prepared for an hour and a half. If you say 'bye' to me at the end of the scheduled time, then you break my heart because maybe I wanted to tell you about my Jean!" I appreciated her addition of Cultural Orientation materials for me, too, so that I could understand the norms she, Marie and Laura were used to. Then Gloria turned to Marie and Laura. "But here, if you take 15 minutes extra from me and I have something else scheduled after our meeting, then you're taking 15 minutes from the next person."

At job interviews, Gloria said, handshakes are just as important as time management. She got up, and walked over to Marie. "Hi, how are you?" she asked, extending her hand. Marie gently took it. "Shake with confidence!" Gloria encouraged, laughing. Then she jokingly cowered, leaning into the couch. "Don't act like this!" she exclaimed, "you have to be confident in interviews." A similarly important aspect of employment, according to Gloria, was eye contact: "In our culture," Gloria explained to me, keying me in so I could fully understand the importance of this module, "it's rude to stare at someone. Especially at a man. But here," she emphasized, looking at Marie and Laura, "you have to make eye contact." Gloria leaned forward in her chair, staring at me so hard I felt self-conscious. Marie and Laura laughed at the spectacle. "Remember to make eye contact and shake hands," Gloria summarized.

After sharing a good laugh about the ridiculous American practice of making intense eye-contact, Gloria moved on to discuss taxes, selective service, underage drinking, and important immigration forms. It is important to follow U.S. laws, she said, so as not to affect immigration status. In the United States, some of these important laws are about domestic violence. “In the U.S. it is not legal to fight in the home. Men and women have equal rights, so you cannot physically discipline your spouse. It doesn’t matter why you’re angry or what they did. All types of violence are illegal.” Marie and Laura listened, nodding along. “It’s illegal to touch, grope and make sexual comments to people. In this country you can report a man if he assaults you. Here you can’t kiss by force, either.” Marie said something to Gloria in a worried tone. “No, don’t worry, we are talking about adults,” Gloria laughed. She turned to me, “Marie says that Jean likes to kiss everyone!” Marie relaxed, but seemed worried, perhaps because of the quantity of information she was receiving. “And remember, how do you discipline your babies?” Gloria asked, reading from her binder. “It’s illegal to physically discipline your kids if you leave marks,” she answered herself. “And here,” she added, “your kids need to be supervised at all times. This is about safety, and making sure they have all of their needs met. We advise that you leave your kids with somebody if they are 12 years old or younger.” Marie, looking concerned, asked Gloria to clarify. “A couple hours is okay,” Gloria told her, “but not four or five hours. Your kids cannot be on their own.”

Marie called her older two sons into the room as Gloria began to talk about housing. Her sons sat on the couch next to their mother and listened patiently to what Gloria had to say. She explained that children are taught in school that they can call the police, and so all conflict has to be well managed so that children or neighbors do not get police involved. “If the landlord is called,” Gloria said with some foreboding, “you can get kicked out of the apartment, and then it

is really hard to find other housing." "If you two fight," she said, speaking directly to Marie's two older sons, "you have to work it out. Maybe one of you can be president and one of you can be vice president, and then maybe you do not have to fight," she said, and she and Marie laughed as though sharing an inside joke. Gloria told the family that neighbors can also report loud noise to the landlord, and so they should remember to stay quiet and to keep music down. Marie nodded to her sons and they retreated again to their rooms. At that moment Jean ran off to his room and grabbed a backpack almost double his size. He hauled it into the living room and proudly tried it on. It had been more than an hour, and Gloria had gotten through the material she had wanted to cover for the day. We stood up to go, and Jean ran over to us. We said goodbye to him, and then Laura and Marie thanked us. "*Asante sana,"* Marie said, smiling. She opened the door, and we walked back up the winding stairs together, and out into the sunny parking lot.

I enjoyed sitting in on Gloria's Cultural Orientation lesson. She had wonderful rapport with her clients, and was skilled at teaching engaging lessons full of charisma and laughter. Though I was simultaneously uncomfortable with her consistent referrals to threats such as law enforcement, surveillance by neighbors and the tenuous nature of immigration status, I admired her subversions of what I view to be U.S. cultural imperialism: Rather than *normalize* U.S. norms, as presented in Cultural Orientation modules (such as eye contact, handshakes, etc.), I witnessed Gloria openly *mock* "American culture" through hilarious skits that poked fun at the way U.S. citizens conduct themselves. Rather than merely uphold the idea that refugees should assimilate, Gloria explained why it is important to conduct the self in particular ways (in order to be a competitive candidate for jobs, for example, it may be beneficial to make eye contact), *while* laughing at the very practices she was encouraging, and rendering them "other." In these ways, Gloria's Cultural Orientation lessons undermined the very purpose of Cultural Orientation,

which, as I have shown, exists not only to teach particular "knowledge" and "skills," but to condition particular *"attitudes."* For Foucault (1975, 1980, 1982), and for Greta Uehling (2015), who applies Foucault's theory to her refugee resettlement research, "conduct of conduct" operates through its normalization and invisibilization. However, applying this theory to my own case study, I believe that Gloria subverts the power of cultural imperialism by exposing it and rendering it ridiculous.

Teaching Refugees How to Discipline Children

While the U.S. State Department funds a particular set of CO materials discussed earlier in this chapter, individual resettlement agencies are able to adapt and expand upon the modules. During my summer internship, JRS' Refugee Resettlement Director, Rachel, asked me to help develop new CO material. Over the summer she had voiced concern for what she saw as adult clients neglecting to properly supervise their children, and, one day in June, she asked me to develop a new module that would be given at CO sessions titled "Child Supervision." She had been talking about the need for better parental supervision after one afternoon when she saw a client's child playing in a dumpster in their apartment parking lot. She was frustrated that parents seemed to be shirking their responsibilities of watching their kids and she worried that their negligence was putting their children in harm's way. During my internship Rachel had told me about other incidents that had similarly upset her, but what had set her over the edge was when Asa reported seeing young children playing in a park near their house without parental supervision.

The day Asa witnessed this I happened to be in the office, at the long table we often used when we co-worked on projects. It was early afternoon when Asa came back from a home visit.

“Well that didn’t go as planned!” they joked to Dan as they walked in the door. They sat down at the table with me, and told me about what had happened. On the way to a home visit, they saw a JRS client’s children walking to the park. Eight-year-old children were pushing a stroller with a client’s baby down a sidewalk without adult supervision. Asa thought they looked like they were struggling. Shocked, Asa turned around and drove to the client’s apartment, where they told the children’s mother that her kids were walking to the park alone.

Curious to understand Asa’s perspective, I asked what they had been worried about. They told me that they were very caught off guard to see young children walking alone. Then they reconsidered; “I guess I was pretty young when I went to the park on my own.” They still seemed unsettled, and they asked what I thought about the matter. I told them I was unsure what JRS’ role was, but that it seemed like this was the parent’s choice, not JRS’. I had grown up with neighbors whose children had played at the park and walked around the neighborhood alone from a young age. Asa listened thoughtfully as I shared my perspective: that different cultures have very different conceptions of childhood and responsibilities that children should or shouldn’t be given, and that the accepted way of raising children in the United States is not inherently the “best” way. I told Asa that, generally speaking, I believed children should be allowed to play freely and explore, and that the freedom to walk around to friends’ houses or to the park might be something that is very positive for children.

Asa seemed interested in my opinions, and agreed with much of what I said. They also told me they thought it was important to keep in mind that “people here are nosy” and could call the police or even Child Protective Services. When neighbors saw one client’s child playing in a dumpster, Asa said, they filed a complaint. At the end of our conversation Asa suggested that perhaps rather than telling their client to supervise her children, instead JRS’ role was to fully

inform them of the potential consequences of their actions. “It’s beautiful the way you’re raising your kids, but also these things could happen if they’re unsupervised,” they said.

After our conversation, Rachel came out to the table where we were sitting and Asa updated her about the unsupervised children walking to the park alone. Rachel was upset and frustrated. Soon after this incident she assigned me the task, alongside Abdul and Emma, the other intern, of creating new Cultural Orientation materials for refugees to be “taught” while in the Reception and Placement program.

The questions that arose for me during my conversation with Asa are some of the same questions I use to analyze Cultural Orientation in this chapter: how do JRS workers understand their role in relation to clients' integration? Do workers consider it clients’ responsibility to conform to U.S. norms around surveillance and “nosy” neighbors? Do workers view their role in terms of *enforcing* U.S. norms, and if so, is this in order to protect clients from the risk of getting involved with the police or Child Protective Services? Could this in fact be enforcing clients’ assimilation and playing into the oppression of refugees? I would like to highlight that I admire Asa’s open-mindedness, vulnerability and self-reflection, and I empathize with both their and Rachel’s reactions to seeing young children pushing a stroller down a sidewalk without adult supervision. I do not believe that Asa meant to act as an enforcer of oppression and surveillance. I also do not know how the children’s mother reacted, or if she was glad to know that her children were walking to the park alone. Rather than criticize individuals at JRS who are trying their best under significant pressure, I wish to analyze the ways in which Cultural Orientation can serve to act as an enforcer of assimilation--regardless of whether or not JRS workers intend this.

In late June, Abdul, Emma and I sat down at the long table in the office to work on developing new Cultural Orientation materials on child discipline, at Rachel's request. Abdul--one of two JRS case aides and interpreters--had become a friend, and he often invited me to lunch at his favorite Chinese restaurant down the street. A refugee himself, he had been received by JRS a year earlier. When he told me he was only a few years older than me I didn't believe him. "Afghans look older than we are," he told me, "because of war." Emma, too, had become a friend. The other intern and a fellow senior in college, we often chatted about our experiences and our interests when we had downtime at work.

As the three of us sat down to tackle our assignment, I felt very uncomfortable, for various reasons: I did not want to enforce cultural norms on refugees, and as a 20-year old with no children of my own, I did not feel that I had the experience or knowledge to create a manual for parents on how to discipline their children. Rachel walked over to us and asked us to include videos on parenting courses letting clients know that "in the United States it's not okay to hit your children, and you can be reported." She explained to us that people who are used to hitting their kids to discipline them throw up their hands and think, "if I can't hit them then I can't discipline them," so she wanted us to "educate" parents on alternative forms of child discipline. "Here parents take away screen time if kids misbehave," she suggested that we add to the manual. She began talking about a refugee family that has six children. She said that she had told the dad that he could not hit his kids to discipline them. "He said, 'well, it's hard to discipline six kids. Two kids is easy but not six!'" Rachel rolled her eyes as she relayed her account, and exclaimed to us, "well, yeah, it's hard, think next time you think you want to have another kid!" Abdul laughingly agreed. I was very uncomfortable. I felt that she was insinuating that refugee parents are more likely to be irresponsible and less likely to be good parents, and I felt similarly

uncomfortable that Rachel seemed to generalize that many parents who choose to discipline their children by hitting them don't know other ways to enforce rules. "Educating" refugees that it is better to take away screen time than to hit kids struck me as Rachel's own opinion rather than based on U.S. law or objective fact.

Though uncomfortable with my assignment, I understood where Rachel was coming from: part of the reason that Rachel wanted us to develop these new materials came from concern that clients would get into trouble with law enforcement. In fact, during our meeting, Rachel told us about a family that had been living in an apartment at over capacity--there were eight family members in two bedrooms, which breaks the building's fire codes. The landlord was not aware that this was happening, and so their living situation was tenuous. The family took the guardrails off the balcony, Rachel told us. She didn't understand why. A nurse at a local health center saw the family's children playing on the balcony without the railings, and threatened to report them to their landlord. Rachel and Asa, who was listening to the account, began trying to figure out how to avoid the nurse reporting the family. They thought that if the family were reported they would probably get evicted. "This isn't the first time they are breaking the landlord's rules," Rachel said. She seemed exasperated about the situation, and particularly that the family had removed the guardrails on the balcony and allowed their children to play there anyway. I, too, was puzzled by the story. Rachel agreed with the nurse that this was a safety concern, but she was also concerned with making sure the family could stay in their apartment. I could empathize with her: Her exasperation, it seemed, came in part because she wished clients would make decisions that she considered to be what was best for them--both because she cared about their wellbeing and wanted to make sure they had access to safe housing, and because it would make her own job easier. She was clearly fed up that the family had made a decision that

put them at risk, but that wasn't going to stop her from trying to get them out of a tricky situation. I appreciated that.

Working on developing materials on parenting, Abdul took our task seriously. As Rachel requested, our agenda included writing guides on how parents should accompany their kids to the park and should not allow them to go alone, and that they should not let their kids play in dumpsters or climb trees. I felt complicit in encouraging refugees to assimilate to U.S. norms. I did not think it was our place to tell parents how to raise their children, or how to supervise (or not supervise) their kids. While I thought about how to proceed, Abdul and Emma began talking about how to phrase the tree climbing material, and how high kids should be allowed to climb. I interjected that "when I was little my parents let me go to the park on my own and I could climb trees, too." Abdul disagreed with my sentiment, pointing to a scar on his chin. He described a time when he was little that he climbed a tall tree and fell out, gashing his face. Emma contributed to the debate by adding that when she was little she was only allowed to climb trees when her parents were around.

"To me," I responded, "this shows that there is no law about climbing trees, and that there isn't even a particular norm. I don't think it's our place to instruct parents on this at all. I feel that we're interfering with people's lives on an inappropriate level." "Well," Abdul answered, "if it's interfering then why did Rachel tell us to include it?" I was unsure whether he meant to imply that Rachel wouldn't dictate unethical policies, or whether Rachel's decisions inherently set the norm for what would qualify as "interfering" rather than appropriate policies.

To better understand where Abdul was coming from, I asked him about how it was for him to receive CO when he was a client, and Gloria had been responsible for instructing his Cultural Orientation lessons. He said he had not enjoyed it, and that it had been "weird" that she

had told him about showering, shaving and brushing his teeth, as if that were something that would be foreign to him. I was interested that he did stress that there are clients who need to be taught about these things. I was also struck by how condescending it would feel if a social service agency tried to "educate" *me* on brushing my teeth and showering. I wondered if there are people who benefit from these particular CO sessions. If there are, I wondered, is there a way to make sure they have access to information they will find helpful while not requiring all refugees to go through these sessions?

Abdul, Emma and I compromised by writing a legal guide on child supervision and discipline. Rather than instruct parents not to allow their children to climb trees unsupervised or not to allow children to walk to the park alone, we introduced U.S. laws about child supervision, negligence and abuse as well as cultural norms so that parents could make informed decisions about how to supervise their children in a new country:

1. In the U.S., many parents take their children to places in the neighborhood like the park. It's normal for parents to take young kids, or to send them with an older sibling (around 11 years old). It's not very common for young children to go by themselves.
    a. Even though it's not against the law to let your kids play alone in the neighborhood, many people are not used to seeing babies and toddlers without parents supervising, and could be concerned. If neighbors are very worried about your children's safety they might call the police. In cases of serious child abuse or negligence, you could be fined, have changes to your immigration status, or have your children removed from the household.

This guide, which also included similar notes on norms and rules in apartment buildings, noise ordinances and even on the right of women to use birth control and how to access this, was incorporated into Cultural Orientation, and is still used in Cultural Orientation sessions with new arrivals. Though I was relieved that we were not telling parents *how* to raise their children, I believe that Cultural Orientation could be entirely reworked to focus on giving refugees tools to make decisions for themselves.

Conclusion

I believe that applying an anti oppressive lens to my conversation with Rachel and my meeting with Abdul and Emma is helpful in envisioning a social work practice based on solidarity with clients *and* concern for their wellbeing, which Rachel and Asa expressed to me. Rather than attempt to "educate" refugees on how to better conform to U.S. norms, an anti oppressive framework would have resettlement workers interrogate our own morals around parenting and our ideas of how to raise and discipline children. Rather than enforce particular ideologies (such as that it is morally wrong to allow children to walk to the park on their own or spank kids when they misbehave) as a unidirectional framework would call for, an anti oppressive framework would have us ask clients how best to support their own visions for their families. Rather than tell parents *how* to raise their children (which is based on resettlement workers' morals and beliefs), using this framework, resettlement workers could provide resources to refugees on U.S. laws and norms as a source of information, while also working in the local community to fight stigma around alternative forms of child rearing.

A common theme among JRS workers is that they all express care and concern for clients' "success" and wellbeing. However, Cultural Orientation conditions refugees to attain "success" and "self-sufficiency" by conducting themselves in accordance with U.S. norms, and adopting particular "attitudes" and behaviors deemed acceptable and desirable. An anti oppressive approach prioritizes refugees' wellbeing through different means: rather than encourage refugees to assimilate because that is a "realistic" way for clients to be successful, this framework encourages workers to address structural forms of oppression that make assimilation appear to be the only option. JRS workers' concern for children's safety, for their clients' access to housing and for their own jobs to go smoothly is understandable. However, these concerns can

still be addressed without encouraging clients to adopt forms of child rearing palatable and familiar to JRS workers and other local residents. Additionally, if there are factors that interfere with clients' ability to care for their children (long work hours, lack of access to child care, etc.) resettlement policy should be aimed at addressing these.

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to convey the ways in which U.S. refugee resettlement functions to responsibilize refugees by enacting policy that "teaches" independence and self sufficiency (often to refugees' detriment, such as when they are funneled into low-paying jobs with poor working conditions), while demonizing dependency. This functions to absolve both the United States, more broadly, and JRS, specifically, of responsibility toward refugees, upholding ideas that call for poor and oppressed people to better care for themselves and "pull themselves up by their bootstraps." However, refugees often *want* to be dependent on JRS for additional aid, and make claims on the resettlement agency. caseworkers often respond with suspicion, operating under the assumption that desiring dependency signifies a character flaw. This creates tensions and anxieties both for caseworkers, who, oftentimes, are truly trying their best, and for clients, who often do not have access to adequate resources to live safe and fulfilling lives in a new country. In order to address certain tensions, and to help clients navigate new systems, caseworkers teach Cultural Orientation modules to clients. However, these lessons often function to assimilate refugees into U.S. culture and inculcate particular "American" values such as "independence" and "self-sufficiency."

By applying an anti oppressive lens to my case study at JRS, I have sought to render visible the ways in which U.S. resettlement is structured to produce governable, responsible citizens while evading its responsibilities to properly care for people who, through heavy involvement in global conflict, the U.S. has had a major hand in displacing. Using an anti-oppressive framework I have argued the importance of interrogating structural systems of oppression and inequality in solidarity with clients, rather than accepting them (as JRS staff accept them when they adopt a "get real approach"), and working as agents of oppression by

forcing clients to remain in difficult situations. Instead, I believe that by putting anti-oppressive theory in conversation with discourse on the power and morality of dependency, it is possible to envision a resettlement system rooted in social justice, cultural diversity and solidarity between resettlement workers and clients.

Through my research I have also sought to illustrate the ways in which JRS staff members work within particular structural constraints, and lack the necessary funding and resources to properly support all clients. Workers have responded to this challenge by "cherry-picking" clients who are "deserving" of support. The "deserving/undeserving" paradigm further serves to excuse lack of sustained support for many clients by portraying "undeserving" clients as "taking advantage." Reframing these ideas at JRS is not sufficient: In order to properly enact anti oppressive policy, refugee resettlement agencies such as Jewish Refugee Services require increased funding, so that caseworkers do not need to engage in methods of "cherry-picking" clients who "deserve" aid.

Refugees are not "dehumanized" through acknowledgement of their neediness, I have argued, but, rather, through denial of the requests for support that they make on the resettlement agency. Refugee resettlement policy should make explicit the ways in which refugees *are* subject to oppression (through minimum wage jobs, poor working conditions, lack of financial support and discrimination) rather than proclaim them responsible for their situation. This, of course, would be the first step in a larger overhaul of the resettlement system. A restructured resettlement system would also require a major increase in funding to provide adequate support to refugees for a period longer than the first 90 days they are in the country. This could mean extending the "Reception and Placement" period, increasing funding to support expansion of casework staff--thereby increasing time and attention staff can give to individual

clients--prioritizing cultural training for staff, English learning over job acquisition for clients (to increase refugees' odds at socio-economic mobility), and increased prioritization of education and professional training for those who are interested.

Through increased financial support for agencies, the United States will better be able to fulfill the obligation it has to refugees--many of whom the nation has displaced through its "war on terror." Rather than construct neediness as dehumanizing and immoral, it is necessary to recognize the ways in which our own nation has engaged in violence that has had deep effects on the lives of millions of people, forcing them to leave their homes, and rendering them "dependent" on resettlement agencies. Rather than condition refugees to adopt "American" values and attitudes, from an orientation toward "independence" and "self-sufficiency" to particular methods of child-rearing, true justice means recognizing our interdependence as humans, our obligation to provide support as a nation, and refugees' full humanity, neediness and all.

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