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2017

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Recommended Citation

Sylvester, B. J.(2017). *Contesting The Generic Refugee: SIV Identity, Community, And Agency During Resettlement.* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/4101

CONTESTING THE GENERIC REFUGEE:
SIV IDENTITY, COMMUNITY, AND AGENCY DURING RESETTLEMENT

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts in

Geography

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2017

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DEDICATION

To Michelle and Russell, in heartfelt appreciation for your love and support,

without which this project could not have happened Je t'aime pour toujours.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Nagel for her guidance, assistance, time and patience-particularly in delving through multiple iterations of this thesis. Thanks also to Dr. Mills and Dr. Shah for both serving on the thesis committee and for continually challenging me to become a more critical scholar. I would like to thank the MEHGGS for their willingness to be sounding boards for both ideas and frustrations. And lastly, but certainly not least, I'd like to thank my wife Michelle for being a consistent source of support. I couldn't have done this without you. And I'd like to thank Russell, affectionately known as the little dictator, for always keeping things interesting and unpredictable.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the complexity of identity and community formation by Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders during resettlement in Columbia, South Carolina. It explores the ways in which identities coalesce around various themes, such as religion, gender, and military service, how these identities serve to create, expand, and claim membership in communities, and how SIVs exercise agency throughout these processes. Through semi-structured interviews with 9 SIVs in Columbia, SC, this qualitative study highlights the unique, highly individualized ways in which a select group of refugees experience resettlement, how they negotiate their placement within socio-economic hierarchies, and exercise agency to obtain access to employment, housing, vehicles, and information. This contests the form of the 'generic' refugee, adds to existing literatures that address the complexity of refugee resettlement, and suggests the need for a reorientation of resettlement policies.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DHS .... Department of Homeland Security

DSS .... Department of Social Services

ICE .... Immigration and Customs Enforcement

ISAF .... International Security Assistance Force

FOB .... Forward Operating Base

LFS .... Lutheran Family Services

NGO .... Non-Government Organization

ORR .... Office of Refugee Resettlement

RPP .... Refugee Resettlement Program

SIV .... Special Immigrant Visa

SNAP .... Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

SSP .... Scholastic Soccer Program

UNHCR .... United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

VA.. Veterans Administration

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On 19 September 2009 I first set foot on Forward Operating Base (FOB) Altimur, Logar Province, Afghanistan. In what would prove to be a formative year, I conducted over 120 combat logistics patrols through some of the most challenging, rugged and dangerous terrain (physical and human) in all of Afghanistan. During the course of those 12 months, I had access to, and used many times, nearly every tool in the military's arsenal: stealth bombers, fighter jets, Apache helicopters, 2,000-pound precision munitions, howitzers, and mortars, vehicles, small arms, machine guns, grenade launchers, and rockets. Despite this incredible firepower, the most valuable weapon I leveraged was my interpreter Gul. A thirty-ish year old, former English teacher from Kabul, Gul had been an interpreter for American forces for well over four years when I met him. And he continued to serve with our military for four more years after I left. He went on every patrol with my platoon, facing the same dangers without hesitation, always with his helmet askew and a Red Bull close at hand.

After 12 months of grueling missions and constant danger, we went home. Gul stayed. His family was threatened because of his job. When he would visit them, he had to leave the FOB under the cover of darkness, meet up with a friend or family member at a prearranged location, and cover his face until he was well out of Logar. Whenever he left the base, we never knew if he would make it back. A few of our interpreters never did. In his off time, Gul would hang out and relax with my soldiers. He loved hamburgers, cursing, and talking about the U.S. After a few weeks of missions together,

he approached me and asked if I could help him. He showed me a few letters of recommendation the previous two units had written for him, and said he had heard of a special program for interpreters to get visas for the U.S. Thus began nearly a year of policy research and complex, convoluted paperwork. The Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program existed, but applicants needed a multitude of documents, such as birth certificates and Afghani ID cards (which simply did not exist), as well as an endorsement by a high ranking military officer. The hurdles seemed too much, and despite months of petitioning, filing, and writing on Gul's behalf, I had to pass his packet off to our replacements in September 2010.

We stayed in touch, on and off, via Facebook for a couple years. He got married, moved back to Kabul, and started working with the Air Force at Kabul International Airport. He kept me up to date on his application's progress, but it never seemed to be moving forward. Then, in late 2012, communication stopped. I did not hear from Gul for over two years, until August 26, 2014 when he messaged me from San Antonio, Texas. He'd arrived in the U.S. three days prior, and was ecstatic to begin a new chapter. Gul is just one of the dozens of interpreters I have worked with during my tours of Afghanistan and Iraq. He is the only one I know to have successfully obtained an SIV, and it took him over four years to acquire it. My experience with Gul furthered my interest in refugee issues in general, and SIVs in particular, ultimately serving to inspire this thesis.

1.1 The Research

This research investigates agency exercised by resettled Afghan and Iraqi SIV refugees in Columbia, SC, specifically focusing on how this distinct population creates

and restructures their identities and communities within a resettlement context. Without presuming the existence of an a priori, cohesive Afghan or Iraqi identity or 'culture,' my research seeks to examine the different circumstances and constraints that drive identity formation and performance within this subset of the refugee population, and how these identities are positioned and leveraged in pursuit of desirable ends. The intent of this study is to illustrate the variability and complexity of a seemingly homogenous population, the 'generic' refugee; to deconstruct a pre-established conception of an 'ethnic' or 'culture' group; and to examine the continuous, fluid process of identity formation (Malkki, 1992).

As alluded to above, the SIV program is part of a much larger U.S. refugee resettlement program. The refugee resettlement program within the United States begins at the federal level, with the President and Congress annually establishing the total number of refugees to be resettled (U.S. Department of State: U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, n.d.). Refugees are generally referred for resettlement by either the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), by a U.S. embassy, or by a relative currently residing within the U.S. (U.S. Department of State: U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, n.d.). After security screenings by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (among other agencies), each refugee is referred to a non-profit voluntary resettlement agency, via the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) (U.S. Department of State: U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, n.d.). These agencies, overseen by regional and state ORR personnel, are contracted by individual states to execute state resettlement programs, and to provide federally mandated assistance and services (Idaho Office for

Refugees, n.d.). Refugees are thus placed, occasionally at random, in one of over 200 cities nationwide.

Afghan and Iraqi nationals who have been awarded an SIV constitute a distinct segment of the refugee population. The SIV program is comprised of three separate, but interconnected programs, all of which fall under the purview of the U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State: Special Immigrant Visas, n.d.). The first SIV program allocates 50 visas per year, and is available to both Iraqi and Afghani nationals who worked as translators or interpreters for the U.S. Armed Forces in Iraq or Afghanistan. This is a permanent program with a fixed allocation of annual visas (U.S. Department of State: Special Immigrant Visas, n.d.). The second program applies only to Iraqi nationals who were employed by US forces in any capacity (translator, security forces, contractor) for at least one year between 20 March 2003 and 30 September 2013 (U.S. Department of State: Special Immigrant Visas, n.d.). The Iraqi SIV program allowed for up to 5,000 visas to be awarded per year between 2008 and 2012. In 2013, the number of visas was fixed at 2,000 plus the unused visas from 2012. The Iraqi SIV program was extended once more in 2014, with an allocation of 2,500 visas. This was the last allocation, and the program will expire when the remaining 2,500 visas are issued (U.S. Department of State: Special Immigrant Visas, n.d.).

The third segment of the SIV program applies to Afghani nationals who were employed by either the U.S. government or International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) for between 1 and 2 years between 7 October 2001 and 31 December 2016, depending on time of application and type of employment (U.S. Department of State: Special Immigrant Visas, n.d.). This program allows for 4,000 visas per year, with an

additional 3,000 visas being made available (total of 7,000 visas) in 2016 (U.S.

Department of State: Special Immigrant Visas, n.d.). Unless extended, this program will

also cease when all 7,000 visas are awarded. The Iraqi and Afghani specific SIV

programs are temporary and subject to annual renewal, while the program accessible to

both Iraqi and Afghani translators is permanent. Additionally, the temporary programs

are available to a broader employment group, but in order to qualify the applicant is

required to provide evidence of a persistent, credible threat to themselves and their

families. Participants in this study fall under all three segments of the SIV program. Once

granted SIV status, regardless under which program, the individual falls under the U.S.

Refugee Admissions Program, as overseen by the Office of Refugee Resettlement

(Bruno, 2016).

My study focuses on this select group of refugees within Columbia, SC. Recently,

South Carolinians have been rather vocal in opposing refugee resettlement, particularly

the resettlement of Syrians and other Muslims within the state. Expressed anxiety over

national security, fueled by political discourse, continued violence in Syria, and recent

terrorist attacks in Europe, underpin this opposition. Public and political discourse tends

to homogenize refugees, even as it identifies Muslim refugees as particularly

problematic. Local discourse, which extends from individual commentary up through

proposed legislation debated in the South Carolina Statehouse (here in Columbia), has

contested the federal resettlement program and has sought to submit refugees to

surveillance and to hold refugees' sponsors liable for any violence or terrorist acts

committed by the refugee. While this legislation was defeated, its proposal and serious

debate illustrates just how definitively refugees are being construed as security risks.

My research examines how Afghan and Iraqi SIV refugees create identities and exercise agency within this resettlement context. Specifically, I examine how SIV refugees coalesce around identity-categories and community-building projects and how they leverage these identities and communities towards different goals. In examining particular resettlement experiences, I ask how SIVs position themselves vis-à-vis the general refugee population and how they negotiate place-based membership. My intent here is both to challenge the popular depiction of refugees, particularly Muslims, as homogenous and threatening, and to contribute to a critical critique of the helpless, uniformly destitute 'generic' refugee.

1.2 Organization of the Thesis

Chapter 2 establishes a conceptual framework for this study. It examines the shifting perceptions of refugees, from ambivalence to fear, in American history, discusses the racial hierarchies that accompany these trends, and illustrates the ways in which refugees are expected to conform to specific identity performances, situated within specific social hierarchies and specific space/place. This section explores the ways in which identities coalesce around different facets of refugee experiences, beliefs, and ascribed roles, highlighting the complex ways in which refugees create and perform identity. Ultimately, the background serves to highlight that refugees are not simply generic, idealized victims, but rather resourceful individuals who exercise agency in order to conceptualize and incorporate themselves into existing communities and society.

Chapter 3 covers the methodology of this study. Here I situate my methods within this established framework, and justify my use of qualitative methods and semi-structured

interviews for this study. Then I describe the data collection methods employed, the

process of selecting and accessing participants and the study site, as well as the specifics

behind the actual interviews. I conclude the chapter by describing how I consolidated and

analyzed my data.

Chapter 4 focuses on the ways SIVs understand, negotiate, and redefine identity

and community during resettlement. I focus here on specific coalescing themes around

which identity is formed or contested. I highlight the indeterminacy of identity formation

and how SIVs use identity and community to position themselves within existing socio-

economic and ethnic/racial hierarchies, claim access and belonging to various

communities, and access support networks both within Columbia and across the United

States.

Chapter 5 begins with a description of the resettlement process in Columbia,

implemented through Lutheran Family Services. I then show how Afghani and Iraqi SIVs

contest their physical placement and employment restrictions by using identity,

community and established support networks to circumvent their placement in certain

neighborhoods and jobs. I explore how SIVs are able to access mobility via employment

and housing to obtain vehicles, driver's licenses, and valuable information about

opportunities across the US. In this section I also briefly discuss how mobility serves to

connect SIVs to global networks (family), maintain ties to their 'culture' through

memory, and how it is used to make specific claims about American citizenship

Chapter 6 provides a succinct synopsis of my study and its purpose, and it

provides recommendations for expansion and continued exploration. I close with a few

comments on how this research can also serve to challenge conventional discourses about

refugees and immigration, thus serving a social as well as an academic purpose.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

My research centers on a small, select group of refugees, Afghan and Iraqi

Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) personnel who have been resettled in Columbia, SC. Both

Afghani and Iraqi SIV recipients experience a distinctive resettlement experience, one

that sets them apart within the general refugee population, and the still larger immigrant

population. I explore the ways in which SIVs negotiate resettlement, using their unique

backgrounds to reconfigure identity, redefine community, access social networks, make

specific claims of belonging, and situate themselves within the existing socio-economic

hierarchies of Columbia, South Carolina. While much has been written on refugee

identity formation, SIVs present an interesting case study due to their unique position as

prior partners with the U.S. in overseas conflicts. These prior, and enduring, relationships

with US soldiers and the American government, coupled with an intimate knowledge of

the English language, and strong familial ties to both Afghanistan/Iraq and to emigrated

extended family and friends, all shape identity and community formation among SIVs.

Studying SIV identity in Columbia, SC first requires a conceptual framework

within which to analyze key attributes and sources of identity formation and to assess the

purposes identity categories serve for refugees and the society-at-large. This background

provides a brief overview of American immigration and refugee policies, situated against

a shifting racial hierarchy, and discusses how refugee identity is affected by the political

processes of resettlement. I address contemporary conceptions of identity, highlighting

the theorization of identity as a constant, fluid process of negotiation that takes shape in

specific temporal and spatial contexts (Thrift, 2009; Massey, 2004). I incorporate a theoretic analysis of identity source(s), establishing that identities are derived from a combination of sedentarist logics, rhizomatic relationships, and human agency. Here I focus particular attention on the specific ways in which identity is formed and contested. An examination of the selective conveyance of identity through narrative, in turn, provides an understanding of the intention, or goals, of different identities. Lastly, I address how these theoretical insights inform my study of Afghan and Iraqi SIVs in Columbia, SC. Ultimately, this research seeks to further refugee literature by presenting a dynamic understanding of Iraqi and Afghani SIV identity negotiation and positioning within a Columbia, SC resettlement context. This advances current scholarly efforts to explore the agency refugees exercise in forming and expanding communities while negotiating membership within existing social hierarchies.

2.1 Immigrants, Refugees, and Shifting Racial Hierarchies

The history of immigration to the United States is older than the nation itself. Since its inception, America has been a nation of immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006). Nevertheless, immigration has, and continues to be, a highly contentious issue for the United States (Sassen, 1989). Controversies over immigration reflect numerous political, economic, and social anxieties (Sassen, 1989). Proponents of immigration point to the demand for low wage labor to fuel our economy, while appealing to the humanitarian need to assist those less fortunate. Meanwhile opponents highlight the threat posed to the native working class by immigrant newcomers, and preach about the burden borne by middle class taxpayers who are forced to pay for (supposedly)

increasing numbers of social welfare dependents. 'Ethnic' and 'racial' differences between immigrants and native populations fuel social debates over the value of multiculturalism versus the loss of national identity (Castles, De Hass, and Miller, 2013). Closely intertwined with these deliberations are fears of conflicting immigrant loyalties between the sending and receiving countries. Loyalty and nationalist concerns underpin discourses concerning legal status and the extension of rights and freedoms to non-citizens (Castles et al, 2013). Thus, immigration proves to be a pivotal issue that implicitly defines American values. Are we a country that fears the foreigner, that seeks to protect our values and treasure against the unruly mobs threatening to beat down our gates? Or are we a multicultural, liberal society that gains strength from multiplicity, that welcomes the immigrant as a valuable, essential source of labor and diversity?

Race provides a consistent, if implicit, facet of the immigration debate. Even a cursory glance at the history of immigration in the United States highlights the role of race and national origins in immigration policy. The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 provided broad reaching powers for restricting (and deporting) immigrants based upon country of origin, while more explicit laws like the Chinese Exclusion Acts of the 1880s targeted specific groups viewed as racially different from America's Anglo-Saxon core (Ngai, 2014). The recent executive orders of President Trump further underscore the persistence of racial and ethnic undertones in American immigration policy, with the 27 January 2017 order entitled "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States" specifically restricting flows of foreign-born, non-citizens from select Muslim majority, Middle East and African countries and halting all refugee resettlement, under the auspices of national security (Executive Order, 2017). Ironically, the text of this

order echoes strongly the verbiage from the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, underscoring just how pervasively and persistently race/ethnicity has driven American immigration policy.

Refugees are positioned within these immigration debates in specific ways. While the overall percentage of refugees, compared to the total number of immigrants and temporary workers, is relatively small, this population has a disproportionately large impact on immigration politics. Fleeing from religious, political, and racial/ethnic persecution, refugees have come from every corner of the globe and from every walk of life. Refugees are incredibly diverse, although at times they may be concentrated into specific racial/ethnic, linguistic, religious, or political flows due to geopolitical circumstances. The American public has displayed a rather ambivalent approach to refugees, with opinions fluctuating between welcome and hostility, from petitioning for refugee rights to openly questioning the validity of asylum claims. These positions on refugee issues are often tied to the racial composition of major refugee flows, the health of the national economy, and contemporary (as well as past) geopolitical circumstances (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006; Castles et al, 2013). Despite the diversity of refugee groups and their contexts of reception, refugee populations share a specific legal positionality. That is, being a refugee signifies a degree of compulsion. National and international institutions bestow (or impose) refugee status upon those whose migration is deemed to be involuntary rather than voluntary (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006). While this label brings with it potential social and political benefits, it also requires specific identity and performance expectations.

These expectations require refugees to display appropriate levels of loss, suffering and victimization (Flores-Borquez, 1995; Brown, 2011; Gabiam, 2012). As Gabiam (2012) posits, "in the current world order the refugee is primarily recognizable in terms of material and bodily distress" (102). These distresses require a "sense of victimhood" and a performance of "the suffering associated with this sense of victimhood" (Gabiam, 2012: 96). Failure to convey and perform an appropriate level of haplessness and loss threatens the ability of the refugee to retain their status, and to use this status to claim access to social and political support (Flores-Borquez, 1995). At the same time, refugees cannot abandon themselves to the whims of the state, as the state and host society are apt to impose a particularly undesirable socio-economic status, one that will eventually group refugees in with other marginalized populations that are not perceived to be deserving of assistance (Yeh and Lama, 2006; Brown, 2011). Thus, refugees are forced to perform a delicate balancing act through which they position themselves simultaneously as deserving victims and has distinct from socially undesirable populations (Yeh and Lama, 2006; Brown, 2011). The risks are great, if refugees display too much agency, they lose their 'most deserving' status as hapless victims (Gabiam, 2012). However, if refugees fail to execute agency in positioning themselves as distinct from other immigrants and minorities, they risk being associated with undesirable social elements, and thus lose their claims to support (Yeh and Lama, 2006; Brown, 2011).

Subject to geopolitical influences, political whims, and occupying a particularly precarious social position, refugees are directly impacted by social definitions of race and ethnicity, as well as perceptions of socioeconomic status (Besteman, 2012). Refugees, like all immigrants, are at risk as being viewed as low-wage labor competition, and thus

as a threat to native born populations. Refugees thus must rely upon humanitarian claims to 'deservedness' to distance themselves from economic migrants. This helpless victim identity requires specific narratives and performances, and is both promoted by the refugee and assigned by the state (Flores-Borques, 1995). Simultaneously, refugees are required to ascribe to a neoliberal economic identity of being independent and able to self-support (Trudeau, 2012). Here too, refugees are required to perform as impoverished victims, promoting a narrative of loss and suffering, while simultaneously proving themselves capable, productive (quasi)citizens, all while drawing discrete delineations between themselves and less desirable groups.

Refugees are, in short, forced to ascribe to a specific role of being the deserving social and economic victims, rather than capable, assertive and ambitious (Flores-Borques, 1995; Yeh and Lama, 2006). Resettlement organizations and government policies seek to define and shape specific identities for refugee populations (Trudeau, 2012). The spaces in which refugees are placed, employed, provided services, and educated reinforce these ascribed identities (Trudeau, 2012; Malkki, 1992). Political discourse and public perceptions demand the performance of these imposed roles. However, despite being placed in specific places, and assigned particular identities during the resettlement process, refugees exercise a great deal of agency. They use the spaces/places of resettlement, coupled with expectations of victimhood, and a surprisingly intricate understanding of ethnic/racial and economic hierarchies to negotiate their own sense of identity and community and to make specific claims of belonging and support. The monolithic image of the refugee as a helpless, damaged victim to whom we have a humanitarian obligation is thus contested. Refugees, specifically SIVs, while

certainly deserving of support, are not powerless or socio-economically destitute. Rather, they are capable of exercising agency, to include actively pursuing voluntary refugee status, to actively construct their resettlement experience.

Numerous academics have used identity and agency to explore the refugee experience, with explicit attempts to subvert the view of the refugee as passive and devoid of both identity and agency (Ramadan, 2006; Allen, 2010; Malkki, 1992; Gabiam, 2012). While the presence of identity and agency are established, the source of refugee identity is contested. Kibreab (1999) aligns identity with an individual's access to political, social and economic rights, stating "the identity people gain from their association with a particular place is an indispensable instrument to a socially and economically fulfilling life" (385). Here identity is conflated with the nation-state, that is, with the physical, territorial homeland assigned to a political entity. Malkki (1992) agrees that identity is critical to an individual's ability to claim political, social and economic rights, but disagrees with the physical bonding of identity to discrete, defined space/place. Instead, she highlights the power of refugees themselves to formulate identities and relationships to territory. Incarcerating identity within the confines of territory, "to plot only 'places of birth'… is to blind oneself to the multiplicity of attachments that people form to places through living in, remembering, and imagining" (Malkki, 1992: 38). Identity is mobile; as lived experience and memory, it is imbued within the person, not the land.

Thus, identity becomes a "creolized aggregate composed through bricolage" (Malkki, 1992: 37), a hybrid composition of lived experience and memory, adapted to fit within the current situated living experience of the refugee. In this theorization, identity is

not abandoned or lost through dislocation. Rather, it is adapted, and the experiences of dislocation and alienation, of confusion and loss, are incorporated into its fabric and explicitly used to reform and redefine. In short, Malkki (1992) proposes that identity can be dislocated without destruction, and relocated to a new cultural environment, where it retains characteristics of its past (through memory) while adapting to its present and situating itself for the future. This approach highlights the refugee's ability to exercise agency in forming and performing identities during resettlement. It contests the reproduction of the "generalized, even generic figure [of] the refugee" (Malkki, 1992: 33), while linking identity to the ability of the individual (or group) to make social, political and economic claims.

2.2 Coalescing Identity

Identity, as explored in the refugee and migration studies literature, is a continual, complex process of negotiating political, social, and economic interactions both within, and external to, the individual and the refugee community. Individuals and groups may possess, create, suppress, and perform multiple, seemingly contradictory identities in order to achieve a desired end state or goal (for instance, acceptance by dominant groups or particular material resources). Identity, in this sense, is not drawn from a pre-existing "culture," as parallel situations amongst seemingly similar people can result in different, multiple, or even fragmented identity formations (Nagel, 2009; Ramsden and Ridge, 2012). And similarly, different circumstances amongst vastly different individuals can result in the formation of a coherent, unifying identity. In short, identities are extremely

complex indeterminate processes, reflecting diverse temporal and spatial contexts (Nagel and Staeheli, 2008; Besteman, 2012; Brun, 2001; Brown, 2011).

This understanding of identity runs contrary to traditional, mainly psychological studies that approach identity in one of two ways. The first asserts that identity is a stage in an individual's development from infant to adult (Gonzales-Backen, 2013). The second, more contemporary approach, acknowledges that identity formation is a process, but that the process is contained within a specific step in the development of a healthy, psychologically mature individual (Gonzales-Backen, 2013). Both clinical approaches to identity relegate it to a stage, one that can be achieved through exploring and committing to a given identity, rather than acknowledging identity formation as a fragmented, fluid, and evolving process, occurring in adolescents and adults alike. The psychological approach to identity as a stage, rather than a continual process, also operates under the problematic assumption that individuals are considered to have fulfilled this level of development once they have "explored their identity and committed to an identity" (Gonzales-Backen, 2013: 94). This implies that an individual has but a single identity, and once acquired (or "achieved") this person is imbued with a static, unchanging identity.

Critical scholarship refutes this clinical approach to identity, instead claiming "identity is something we do and re-do in the actions and interactions of daily life" (Langellier, 2010: 71). This removes identity from a clinical diagnosis, and instead situates it within the political and social spaces of human interaction. By broadening the approach to identity studies, it becomes possible to examine identity (re)formation within the context of society, within specific spatial and temporal contexts. Thus, identity

becomes more than a singular achievement or stage of progression; it becomes a tool with which refugees can negotiate their existence within a resettlement context. Identity becomes a political mechanism for claiming rights, a social mechanism for achieving status, and an economic mechanism for accessing material aid. It becomes a means to preserve memories, to exercise agency, and to challenge disadvantageous socio-economic status. Identity does not originate solely within the individual, as social hierarchies and institutions serve important roles in defining, and limiting, the range of identities available to an individual (Trudeau, 2006). In short, identity becomes the medium through which individuals and groups negotiate goals, establish, maintain, and/or subvert social relationships, and ultimately access opportunities.

While identity formation processes are complex, varied and dynamic, they tend to consolidate around a central idea, characteristic or belief. Core practices and beliefs, such as religion, along with social constructions like race/ethnicity can be powerful centrifugal forces for identity and community formation. Similarly, language, gender, age, and common experiences may provide an impetus for creating or redefining identity and for claiming membership in different communities. In foreign contexts, an ascribed identity, like the mysticism associated with Buddhist Nepalese, may become central to forming, and performing identity (Yeh and Lama, 2006). Or an ascribed identity may be contested, and drive identity formation in opposition to an imposed status, as evidenced by Liberian refugees rejecting classification as African-Americans (Brown, 2011). The underlying point here is that while identities coalesce around consistent themes, these themes are not deterministic; they do not predict the ways in which refugees create, redefine, and leverage their identities during resettlement.

Identity can thus be described as an indeterminate process. Despite common coalescing themes, the resulting identities and community claims can vary drastically. This indeterminacy is particularly evident in refugee identity formation, as refugees have very strict regulations and controls imposed on them by the government and resettlement agencies. Compared to other immigrants, refugees are highly regulated in terms of the places they are settled, the programs they have access to, and even their ability to relocate. And yet, despite these restrictions that seek to create and impose uniformity across all refugee populations, their resulting identities and community claims are widely varied, highlighting just how indeterminate the identity formation process can be, especially within a tightly controlled resettlement framework.

The indeterminacy of identity problematizes theories concerning integration and assimilation. An inability to define a 'culture,' especially the dominant 'culture' of the host nation, raises the question of just what refugees are supposed to integrate into, and what identities are necessary for this integration to successfully occur (Nagel, 2009). With the restrictions imposed upon refugees during resettlement conveying a very specific idea of American identity, the resulting indeterminacy of identities that result from these policies underscores the impotence of reliance upon a 'generic' refugee treatment. The ability of refugees to exercise agency in negotiating resettlement contests the assumptions behind a linear assimilation process, and instead highlights the complex negotiations behind resettlement.

Religion, for example, influences refugee identity formation in the United States (Allen, 2010; Nagel and Staeheli, 2008; Langellier, 2010; Sorenson, 1990). Religion can be used by refugee populations to make claims for support and agency from host nations

(Yeh and Lama, 2006; Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont, 1988). In Colorado, Tibetan refugees rely upon their Buddhist religion to foster and perform a specific, ascribed mystic identity. They then leverage this identity to distinguish themselves from the larger, less deserving immigrant and minority community, in pursuit of a more desirable socio-economic status (Yeh and Lama, 2006). Refugees thus use religion to increase their perceived value to the host nation, by accentuating similar religious beliefs, emphasizing a desirable, unique difference, or abandoning their old religion in favor of a more socially acceptable one (Allen, 2010; Yeh and Lama, 2006). Refugee populations also use religion to reject host society's attempts to integrate them, instead using common beliefs to strengthen internal ties against outside intrusion, and to develop and maintain dense, homogenous support networks (Smith, 2013; Langellier, 2010). During resettlement, religious identity may increase in strength, taking on a centralized, centrifugal role, as formerly indifferent individuals and communities use it as a common foundation for building community (Allen, 2010). Or religious identity may be a non-entity, or even a centripetal force, depending on the particularities of the refugee, the host country, and the social and political environments of resettlement. Religious identity can fracture refugee populations from a similar ethnic and religious background, with some using it as a central, even overarching flocculent and others outright rejecting it; this division can occur along generational, gender or even socio-economic lines (Yeh and Lama, 2006; Allan, 2010). While the resulting identities (or lack thereof) created by religion varies greatly, the impact of religion on refugee population identity formation remains profound.

Ethnicity/race provides a second potential point of coalescence for refugee populations (Nagel, 2009; Besteman, 2012; Gonzales-Backen, 2013). Scholars typically view ethnicity as 'voluntary,' encompassing malleable attributes such as language, food and religion (Mavroudi and Nagel, 2016). Race, in contrast, is seen to stem from biological and physiognomic differences (manifested in skin color), and therefore it cannot be discarded as easily as ethnicity (Mavroudi and Nagel, 2016). Despite these conceptual differences, ethnicity and race are not analytically distinct categories. There are chosen and coerced elements of both, fueled by stereotyping based upon presumptions of homogeneity (Mavroudi and Nagel, 2016; Jacobson, 1998). The specific application of both terms differs between scholars and societies, and thus for the purposes of my research, to avoid undue confusion or contestation, I combine them into a single entity, ethnicity/race.

The boundaries of race/ethnicity are both internally constituted and/or externally imposed; race/ethnicity can be used to position oneself against an 'other' (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1993, 4). Ethnicity/race, particularly in the United States, has become a key determinant in socio-economic standing and is strikingly bifurcated along black/white lines (Jacobson, 1998). Recognizing the benefits of 'whiteness,' refugee communities may create and perform distinct identities to intentionally distance themselves from blacks and other perceived undesirable ethnicities (Nagel, 2009; Gonzales-Backen, 2013; Yeh and Lama, 2006; Brown, 2011). Liberian refugees, for example, emphasize their legal categorization and abilities to contribute to society, creating an identity intentionally separate from the stereotype of African American welfare recipients (Brown, 2011). Similarly, Nepalese refugees enforce strict social practices internally in order to preserve

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an aura of being deserving victims, simultaneously distancing themselves from other

Asian refugees (Cambodians, Laotians, etc.) and from black culture (Yeh and Lama,

2006). In both these instances, refugees "recognize that assimilation into black America

means both economic and social downward mobility" (Brown, 2011; 156), and therefore

use ethnicity/race to create a separate identity within the American socio-economic

hierarchy.

Language often serves as an identity flocculent for refugee populations. Nwagbo

(2015) states that "language is the strongest means of projecting ethnic identity" (107)

while Nagel and Staeheli (2008) note that, in the United Kingdom (UK), "Arab identity

has formed around Arabic-speaking social networks" (421). Faced with pressure to

conform to dominant social norms and behaviors, refugees often use their native

language to preserve, and even purify, their identities, and to convey these identities to

their children, who often have no other ties to their 'homeland' (Hopkins, 2010).

Language can similarly be used to reject a unified refugee identity, and instead create an

identity of rebellion or integration, as evidenced by Tibetan youth's embrace of Ebonics

and hip-hop language (Yeh and Lama, 2006). Similarly, language was used by youthful

Liberian refugees in Nigeria to create an assimilatory identity, to reject their status as

refugees and embrace their new country (Nwagbo, 2015). Language thus provides a

common ground upon which refugees can build, strengthen, or reject identity and

community belonging.

Gender provides another social formation around which identity can coalesce, and

"to ignore gender dimensions of experience and response to experience is to ignore the

ways in which flight, migration, resettlement and transnational connections produce,

reproduce, and alter gender… identities" (Hopkins, 2010: 524). Gender has been identified as a strong trait for establishing social support networks and identity amongst Somali and Eritrean women in Canada and the UK (Sorenson, 1990; Hopkins, 2010). These identities are enforced both internally, through pressure to present a cohesive, culturally pure identity in order to make claims for social and economic support, as well as externally through host nation agencies that re-enforce traditional gender roles through the application of welfare services (Nawyn, 2010; Hopkins, 2010; Sorenson, 1990; Langellier, 2010). Traditional gender identities can also be created and performed by refugees seeking the reestablishment of social support networks and those seeking to retain the 'right to return' (Smith, 2013; Sorenson, 1990). And lastly, gender identities are often contested and challenged by refugees who wish to create new identities within the host nation context (Sorenson, 1990; Hopkins, 2010). By either embracing or rejecting ascribed roles, gender is one of many factors around which identity centers, particularly in a resettlement environment.

Identity often fractures and forms along generational, or age, lines. Youth, adults, and the elderly develop, perform, and contest their identities in different and significant ways (Yeh and Lama, 2006; Liebkind, 1993; Nwagbo, 2015; Besteman, 2012). This divisiveness further challenges the predetermined categorization of distinct racial, ethnic, or cultural groups (Yeh and Lama, 2006). Amongst refugee groups, younger generations are especially apt to create and perform different identities, particularly when the generational gap is exacerbated with different lived experiences. Shared experiences of displacement and memories of racial subjugation serve to emphasize a common identity amongst Somali Bantu refugees in the United States, while their children, born after

resettlement, form their own unique identities based upon adult narratives and their own situated experiences, particularly in relation to American peers and interaction in public schools (Besteman, 2012). These identity formations are further complicated by education policies that force children to perform specific, acceptable identities, which leads to a questioning, and potentially rejection, of ascribed (internal and external) identities (Nwosu and Barnes, 2014; Yeh and Lama, 2006). Memories of homeland can fuel identity formations within elderly populations that directly compete with the economic and social need to assimilate amongst working adults, thereby creating internal strife amongst refugee populations, resulting in nearly diametrically opposed ethnic and linguistic identities (Nwagbo, 2015). Closely intertwined with shared experience, gender, and ethnicity, age serves to create different identities amongst similar populations, or similar identities amongst varied populations.

Shared experiences, particularly common experiences of deprivation, racial targeting, and dislocation can provide the catalyst for an overarching identity formation. A sense of loss and a desire to return to native soil may create an identity that supersedes tribal, political, and social differences (Coker, 2004; Ramadan, 2013). Collective experiences in camps and during resettlement attempts also drive identity formation amongst refugees, particularly those focused on retaining the right to return to their homelands (Ramadan, 2013; Feldman, 2015; Gabiam, 2012). In these instances, identity centers around mutual suffering and deprivation, and refugees are discouraged from obtaining desirable goals, such as self-sufficiency or permanent housing, on fears that these acquisitions would delegitimize claims for repatriation (Gabiam, 2012; Ramadan, 2103). Individuals who seek to better their circumstances and socio-economic standing

are thus forced to contest their ascribed refugee identity, risking both social stigmatization and loss of access to resources (Feldman, 2015). Similarly, shared experiences of racism and subjugation can serve to join dissimilar groups, entities without a common ancestry, language, or history, or even competing groups under a common ethnic identity (Hopkins, 2010; Sorenson, 1990; Besteman, 2012).

Identity is both created and conveyed through narrative (Panelli, 2004; Coker, 2004; Ramsden and Ridge, 2012; Gemignani, 2001; Langellier, 2010). Narrative is both verbal and non-verbal, including the conveyance of memories and the past through oral histories, as well as the manner of speech and the dress of the story teller (Ramsden and Ridge, 2002; Langellier, 2010; Hopkins, 2010). Narrative, particularly group narrative, provides agency to otherwise marginalized and silenced communities (Coker, 2004; Ramsden and Ridge, 2012). It is often used to make claims for support, painting specific refugees or communities as particularly deserving or desirable (Yeh and Lama, 2006; Ramadan, 2013; Brown, 2011). Narrative is used to develop and refine a collective memory and identity amongst displaced refugee populations, increasing agency through cohesion and focusing efforts on specific goals (Ramsden and Ridge, 2012; Coker, 2004; Hopkins, 2010). In cases of extended or even permanent displacement, narrative serves to convey memories of the homeland to individuals who have never seen it, re-enforcing an identity of victimization and loss, thereby rationalizing continued claims for the right to return and the continued provision of international aid (Ramadan, 2013; Feldman, 2015). Narratives can thus be used internally to create cohesive identities amongst a fractured and fragmented people. Or they can be projected to external actors and used to make

claims for political support or economic aid, based upon identities constructed on memories of persecution and victimization.

By selectively accentuating, rationalizing, or suppressing memories through narrative, refugees may create identities around past traumas or histories of oppression (Gemignani, 2001; Besteman, 2012). These narratives prove therapeutic, allowing the community to self-heal through the reinterpretation and relocation of past traumas (Gemignani, 2001; Chakrabarty, 1996). They also validate the pursuit and receipt of aid and community support. For example, embracing past wrongs and subjugation allow Nepalese refugees to create an identity centered on loss of freedom, thereby portraying themselves as noble victims, deserving of white, particularly American, sponsorship (Yeh and Lama, 2006). Similarly, Palestinian refugees embrace a narrative of dispossession, oppression, and dislocation, thereby obligating the international community both to provide services and to fight for their right to return (Ramadan, 2013; Feldman, 2015; Gabiam, 2012). Trauma narratives are expected of refugees, and failure to incorporate adequate abuse or deprivation into individual or collective narratives endangers aid and assistance (Flores-Borquez, 1995). Narratives can also reproduce and reinforce racial and gender subjugation in refugee populations (Nawyn, 2010). Thus, the narratives that are constructed and conveyed for the social, economic, and psychological benefit of the refugee and the community may also serve to marginalize the most vulnerable members of these populations.

These are the prominent factors around which identity may form, and they serve to inform my exploration of Afghan and Iraqi SIV identity formation. As evidenced in the literature, the presence or lack of any of these factors does not preclude the

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development of identity within a refugee population. Conversely, the presence of one or more of these factors does not guarantee the development of an identity, nor can it predict the resulting identity. Identity formation is a highly complex, indeterminate process situated in the intersection of space, place, and time and driven by social and political interactions. Identities are not mutually exclusive and multiple, conflicting identities may coexist simultaneously in the same person or community. Lastly, there are no pre-existing, cohesive and homogeneous identity categories, such as ethnicity or 'culture.' The purpose of this study highlights these assertions by exploring the ways in which Afghani and Iraqi SIVs develop, expand, convey and adapt identities and understandings of community membership during resettlement in Columbia, SC. This is not an attempt to understand how these individuals assimilate, but rather how they enmesh themselves within existing socio-economic hierarchies, how they navigate the resettlement process, and how they circumvent the restrictions imposed by rigid, inflexible policies (Nagel, 2009). This serves to further inform our understanding of refugees as dynamic individuals capable of exercising a great deal of agency, rather than a static, symbolic figure entirely reliant upon national and international actors for survival.

2.3 The Spatiality of Refugee Experience

Refugee experiences take place in, and produce, specific spatialities. That is, "refugees are not out of place, their place is defined by the particularity of their social interactions that intersect at the specific location where they are present" (Brun, 2001: 20). Palestinians, intent on maintaining the right to return, intentionally prevent camp development and improvement in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon (Feldman, 2015; Gabiam,

2012). They shape the camp into a place/space that accentuates suffering and displacement, in order to legitimize political and social claims. Refugees that 'self-settle' outside of official camps avoid specific places and are denied access to others, based upon their unofficial status (Brown, 2011; Coker, 2004; Malkki, 1992). During resettlement in the United States, government policies and resettlement agencies place refugees within specific space/place, thereby producing spatialities based upon a uniform, relatively rigid perception of the refugee. Refugees are thereby impelled to create and rely upon new forms of identity and community in order to subvert these restrictive placements.

There exists a distinction between space and place, with the former defined as "scientific, open, and detached" while the latter is "intimate, peopled, and emotive" (Anderson, 2010: 38). That is, space is conceptual and abstracted, while place is familiar and tangible (Thrift, 2009). While specific definitions and treatments of place and space vary greatly across geography, both place and space are viewed generally as co-products, and as a "process in process" (Thrift, 2009: 86). That is, space and place are affected by, and in turn exert influence on, the processes that occur within them. Place and space are thus directly implicated in the formation of identity; identity shapes place/space, and place/space shape identity. An analysis of the complex negotiations of identity formation must be grounded within a spatial context, one that embraces place(s) within space(s).

Identity, as one of these 'things' that is co-produced in space; is neither wholly rooted within a given territory nor the result of experience divorced from location (Malkki, 1992). Rather, identity is heavily influenced, and in turn exerts influence on, space (Panelli, 2004; Castles et al, 2013; Thrift, 2009). Identity formation and

performance are intrinsically spatial; they are dependent upon physical, social and discursive spaces (Panelli, 2004: 137). Physical space can be bounded or unbounded, and is created and conveyed through the use of barriers, ordering, or symbols (Thrift, 2009; Panelli, 2003). Social space is created via interactions between dominant/subordinate groups or individuals that occur within space/place (Cresswell, 1996; Panelli, 2003). Discursive space is conveyed through narrative, including written, spoken and enacted dialogues (Panelli, 2004). Since identity is negotiated and identified via social interactions and discursive positioning that occur within space and place, space/place defines and drives identity formation and performance (Panelli, 2004: 140). As Anderson (2010:41) succinctly states, "In short, our identity is defined by place."

Refugee resettlement is inherently spatialized, and consequently space/place has a direct and lasting impact on refugees during resettlement (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006). The presence of a similar ethnic/racial community allows refugees to access community networks for both moral and economic support and preserve select aspects of their traditional 'culture' (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006). Ethnic/racial concentrations are hinged upon, and negotiated within, the spaces/places in which refugees are placed. Similarly, access to a particular legal status, and its accompanying government support (social services, financial assistance) allows refugees to use resources unavailable to other immigrant populations (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006). Government policies are inherently space/place based, with different states and municipalities providing access to variable types and qualities of services. These services are simultaneously liberating and restricting, and they convey specific ideas about American identity and society, as well as the refugee's place within existing hierarchies. This 'official' spatiality places refugees

within both a restricted physical location and a discrete socio-economic status. Refugees who voluntarily relocate within restricted timeframes are ineligible for certain benefits, and initial resettlement is restricted to the municipality in which the refugee is placed. Thus the space/place of resettlement affects refugees by providing/restricting access to community networks, economic opportunity, public services, and resources (Baratta, 2016; Portes and Rumbaut, 2006).

2.4 Summary

Refugee policies continue to be particularly salient. Recent executive orders and subsequent protests and legal challenges highlight two contentious positions regarding refugees, resettlement, and American policy. On one hand, advocates for refugees highlight their deservingness by accentuating individual stories of separated families, traumatized children, and even SIVs stuck in a bureaucratic morass. On the opposing side, nationalist proponents emphasize recent terrorist attacks, both domestically and abroad, to ply on fear and national security. They paint refugees as potential radical Islamists intent on bringing death and destruction to a vulnerable America, rendered defenseless by blind adherence to liberal ideals. The debate from both sides obfuscates the complexities of the refugees themselves. They ignore refugee agency, instead painting them as either homogenous victims or terrorists. My study seeks to undue this perception of the 'generic' refugee (Malkki, 1992). Using the framework of identity and place/space allows for an examination of the resettlement process from the refugee perspective, showing that resettlement is more than simply receiving shelter and employment; it requires a great deal of agency. This removes the refugee from the

'generic,' and instead highlights the ways in which these immigrants negotiate complex

hierarchies, exercise agency and position themselves in ways that allow them to

incorporate into existing communities and society.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The overarching purpose of this research is to highlight the ways in which refugees and their resettlement experiences are both unique and highly variable. Resettlement for Afghani and Iraqi SIVs is a complex and indeterminate process, one in which the refugees themselves exercise agency in order to negotiate their placement within a specific resettlement context. Their experience is not generalizable, and it is unique to the specific combination of temporal, social and spatial interactions experienced by each individual (Arghode, 2012). Thus I employ a qualitative approach, one that uses the lived experiences of SIVs to understand the resettlement process in Columbia; how it is imposed, contested, and circumvented by both the refugees themselves and resettlement agency personnel. I use semi-structured interviews to explore my research focus, while allowing each individual's perceptions and experiences to guide the conversation (Cridland, Jones, Caputi, and Magee, 2015). These individual realities, while distinct, contain common (but indeterminate) identity coalescents, community constructions, and space/place negotiation, which inform my underlying research questions.

Thus, my overall research design centers on using an interpretivist paradigm to "understand and describe social phenomena from [the] perspectives of participants" (Glesne, 2011: 17). I use semi-structured interviews to obtain qualitative data that illuminates the complexity behind Afghani and Iraqi SIV identity formation and

performance. This data challenges the assumption of pre-established, discrete 'cultures' or ethnic/racial groups and contests the standardized approach to the refugee resettlement experience by examining the ways in which the SIVs position themselves within existing hierarchies, such as religion, gender, and race (Glesne, 2011). My methods align closely with my ontological and epistemological orientation, while being specifically tailored towards the intent of this research.

3.2 Site Selection

Initial academic studies focused on deconstructing the image of a homogenous 'refugee' focused on camps situated in other countries (Malkki, 1992). Subsequent studies built on Malkki's groundbreaking work, examining diverse groups such as Palestinians in Lebanon and Liberians in Nigeria (Ramadan, 2013; Nwagbo, 2015). In addition to examining refugees in relation to camps, scholars such as Yeh and Lama (2006) and Trudeau (2012) expanded refugee research to focus on resettlement in the United States. My study seeks to build on this latter shift, by examining a specific group of refugees and their resettlement in a small, southern American city.

Columbia provides a compelling site for examining refugees and their resettlement experience. Many of the attributes identified by Alysha Baratta (2016) in her thesis on refugee mobility in Columbia, SC align with my site selection. Columbia has limited resources available for refugees, including access to transportation and availability of social services. These social services are restricted in both supply and duration, and the state of South Carolina provides just the bare minimum of required federal assistance. The dearth of government support for refugees should, in turn,

accentuate competition amongst different groups vying for access to aid and drive the formation of identity based communities seeking to access economic opportunities. In other words, a failure of the state to provide ample assistance in Columbia should serve to intensify the very processes I am seeking to explore.

As a Southern city, Columbia has a lengthy history of racial segregation along a traditional black/white binary. All immigrants, to include refugees, are situated within a very rigid social hierarchy, and must negotiate their place between these two binaries, based upon the performance of specific labor and social identities (Winders, 2005). The bifurcated racial profile of Columbia, along with expectations of specific role performances from specific groups serves to accentuate the identity formations, claims and negotiations made by SIVs during resettlement. Here race/ethnicity serve as stark social and economic dividers, and refugees are forced to contest their placement within these restricted, imposed hierarchies.

Lastly, Columbia has both a (proportionately) high population of SIVs and is reliant upon a single resettlement agency. Columbia is located in close proximity to Fort Jackson, a large Army base. SIVs are drawn to resettle in specific areas in large part due to enduring ties with service members, many of whom are active duty and stationed at Fort Jackson. Those that are not active duty are Reserves or National Guard, and are likewise settled in the surrounding area due to the training resources and support provided by the installation. Thus, proximity to a major military complex creates a large pool of SIVs in Columbia. These SIVs are all resettled via LFS, the sole resettlement agency in Columbia. As all services and support stem from a single agency, I was able to access my desired population via a single source. This simplified an analysis of NGO

influence on resettlement by restricting the impact to a solitary organization (Trudeau, 2006).

3.3 Data Collection

This research was enabled by my relationships with local refugee organizations. I first approached Lutheran Family Services as a prospective volunteer in August 2016 by reaching out to their Refugee Services Coordinator. After being apprised of my research focus and goals, she put me in touch with the LFS employment readiness program director, whose job focused on preparing refugees to enter the US job market. After an initial meeting, I was given the task of teaching the weekly job skills training class. From August 2016 through December 2016, I fulfilled this and other ancillary volunteer roles for LFS. In all, I volunteered roughly 50 hours over 5 months. In addition to teaching job skills, I provided transportation to refugee clients, I delivered household essentials such as blankets and cookware, I connected them with language classes and provided driver education material. It was through these volunteer activities with LFS that I made my first contacts with Afghan and Iraqi SIVs.

In addition to volunteering with LFS, I also volunteered for three hours a week with the Scholastic Soccer Program (SSP). This program, spearheaded by Dr. Rajeev Bais, is aimed at reaching the children of refugees through soccer. Volunteers participate as coaches and mentors to refugee children ranging in age from 4 to 18. Through the venue of soccer, the program seeks to improve academic performance and social adjustment among refugee youth. As a coach, I interacted with mostly adolescent refugee children from October 2015-December 2015. While this pursuit did not provide any

participants for my study directly, it did familiarize me with the many challenges facing refugees in Columbia.

While only one of my volunteer efforts provided me access to my desired population of participants, both proved rich in increasing my background knowledge of the refugee resettlement process. Through both SSP and LFS, I was able to interact with resettlement agency personnel and volunteers as well as refugees from a variety of backgrounds. I was also able to collect documents and information about federal and state resettlement and assistance programs and see firsthand the ways in which these programs were administered/executed. Through these regular, interpersonal interactions and access to regulations and documentation, I was able to increase my wholesale understanding of these programs, their specific aims and intentions, and their sometimes unintended impacts on refugees. As I explain below, however, it was very difficult to find individuals who were willing to be interviewed for this project.

3.4 Participants

My selection of specific individuals for participation in my study was driven by Patton's (2002) homogeneous and snowball sampling strategies. I applied homogeneous sampling strategies to my refugee participants, in order to focus my study on a specific subgroup (Afghan and Iraqi SIVs), thereby allowing an in-depth study of their identity formation. Despite efforts on behalf of the LFS staff to locate possible participants, I had a great deal of difficulty establishing contact with my desired population. My first group of participants were accessed as a direct result of teaching the job training class. My initial contact was Iraqi, and he was a recent arrival to the United States named Sami.

When he participated in the job training class, I noticed he spoke nearly perfect English. At the end of class, I approached him and explained briefly the focus and intent of my study. He agreed to participate, and after two weeks, I was able to schedule an interview with him and his family. Sami's brother, Amir, worked as a contractor for the United States Embassy in Baghdad. He was responsible for vetting other Iraqi contractors hired to provide security and infrastructure support. As a result of this employment, Amir and his family were repeatedly threatened, and they applied for SIV status. While their application was being processed, Amir earned a scholarship through the Iraqi government to study computer science in the United States. In order to accept this scholarship opportunity, he had to drop his SIV application. His family's applications were converted to refugee petitions, and Amir and his wife, Sana arrived in the US in 2016. Shortly afterwards, his mother Khadijah and his brother Sami were granted refugee status and resettled with him in Columbia. In an ironic twist (and to further highlight the complexity of US refugee policy), Amir and Sana's application for asylum has recently been rejected, despite being based on the very same threats that afforded him access to SIV status (and subsequently validated his mother and brother's claims for refugee status).[1]

This first interview lead to a dead end, however. Sami's family was unable (or unwilling) to provide additional contacts within the SIV community. I turned to LFS for assistance, and the employment readiness program director set up an interview with Zorro, an Afghan SIV, in October, 2015. Zorro provided security services to the US Air Force in Afghanistan, overseeing 300 local national perimeter guards. He professed an

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[1] My nine participants include SIVs from all three sub-sections (the two temporary programs and the one permanent one), as well as those whose status subsequently changed after application.

inability to speak English, and our interview was facilitated by a translator over speaker-phone. Despite his feigned ignorance, Zorro frequently answered questions before they were translated, alternating between English and Dari. At the end of the interview, he was unwilling to facilitate access to the other Afghani SIVs in Columbia, claiming he did not know them despite frequently referencing his association with them during the interview. Thus, my second interview also failed to lead to additional participants.

LFS provided one final contact, Ahmed, an Afghani SIV who had worked briefly for the organization after his arrival. Despite numerous calls and emails, this contact proved evasive. Eventually, after three weeks of attempted contact, along with continued assurances from LFS that he was excited to participate in my study, Ahmed finally returned a text, requesting I leave him alone. I acquiesced to his request, and my study ground to a halt in mid-October. I knew there were four other Afghani SIVs in Columbia, as well as numerous Iraqi SIVs, however I was unable to access them. In early November, however, two Afghani refugees (not SIVs) arrived in my job class, accompanied by a young translator. This translator, while not an SIV himself, provided me contact information for all five Afghan SIVs in Columbia. I called and texted the three whom I had not yet contacted, and none responded. The following week, a new translator accompanied the two Afghani refugees. He was one of the SIVs who had not returned my phone call or text. I approached him, explained my study and (most importantly, I found out) the source of my interest in the Afghani community. Despite some initial hesitation over fear of being identified, Scarface agreed to both participate and encourage Khabir and Alex, the two remaining SIVs, to participate as well. He later acknowledged he only agreed to participate in my study because I had both served in

Afghanistan and helped an SIV in the past, thus he trusted me to protect his identity and not misrepresent his community.

Scarface, Khabir and Alex were all translators for various International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) units. Scarface and Alex worked with mission units; they were imbedded with mostly Special Forces and community engagement teams. They developed strong ties with these soldiers through shared danger and numerous missions in several different provinces. Khabir provided translation services, through a NATO contract, for ISAF Command in Kabul. He worked directly for high-ranking American officers (to include GEN Petraeus), translating classified documents into Pashto and Dari for Afghan forces. I completed their interviews during the last weeks of November and early December. Following up a lead provided by another employee of LFS, I was also able to establish contact with an Iraqi SIV during this time. Due to scheduling conflicts (he left to visit family in Iraq two days after I contacted him), I was unable to interview Zain face to face, but we corresponded via email and text, and he provided answers to my interview questions.

Thus, despite weeks of frustration and dead ends, I was able to ultimately interview 9 SIVs and their dependents by the end of 2016. All names have been changed to protect their privacy. Some participants selected their own pseudonyms based upon nicknames they acquired from American soldiers (Scarface, Alex and Zorro), while others allowed me to choose their aliases. All other personal information is kept intentionally vague, in order to limit the chance of my participants losing anonymity. This chance of public exposure initially limited my access to SIVs in Columbia, and thus

I take pains to protect my participants, even to the point of obscuring information that could prove useful to my study.

Seven interviews occurred in the individual's home. One interview occurred at the LFS offices in Columbia. The last interview occurred piecemeal over text and ultimately email, as the participant was out of the country visiting relatives in Baghdad. He was not returning until late January 2017, and thus we were unable to meet in person. I allowed all participants to select the setting of the interview, as well as the time and the date. In order to maximize participation, I emphasized my willingness to conform to their individual work and family schedules.

Four individuals were interviewed in a focus group setting, while four others conducted one-on-one interviews. Formal (audio recorded) interviews lasted from 37 minutes to 1 hour and 29 minutes of semi-structured conversation. The time spent at each participants' home, however, ranged from one hour to six hours. In addition to conducting the interview, participants graciously offered me tea, snacks, and even in one case, a full, multicourse meal. Before interviewing began, in all cases I attempted to build rapport by discussing non-study related material, including past military experience, exchanging family information, showing photos, and other social niceties.

Eight interviews were conducted in English, with the ninth involving a translator. The translator was contacted via the phone, but the participant and myself were physically located in the same space. Seven participants were male, and two were female. Ages ranged from the mid-20s to mid-50s. Six participants had direct work experience with US and coalition forces in their home country, three participants were the dependents. These three dependents participated in the focus group setting. For the

remaining interviews that occurred at participants' homes, while females and children were present, they did not participate. In two instances, I was not introduced to the participant's family, despite their presence in the house and continue references to them during the interview. In the other two cases, I was introduced initially but then the family members moved to another location within the apartment.

The interview was broken down into three relatively discrete parts. The first focus centered on understanding how the SIV experienced, and understood, the resettlement process. My first question was largely an attempt to build rapport. After introducing myself and the study, explaining the rights of the participant and my responsibilities as the researcher, and addressing any concerns or questions, I opened every interview with a very broad question: how was the SIV process for you and your family? I asked each participant to begin their answer at the point where they found out about the SIV program, and then describe their experience. Follow on questions revolved around the application process, the length of time before a visa was issued, and the actual travel from place of origin to Columbia, SC. I also explored their background of service with the United States military and/or government, the role(s) they played as translators, contractors or security personnel, how their American counterparts assisted them with the SIV application process, and whether or not they had stayed in contact with these Americans. The intent with this series of questions was to both make my participants comfortable and willing to share their experiences and to discover persistent networks between themselves and US service members. I tried to establish a common bond over past military experience in Iraq, learn about a significant period of time in their lives, and

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gather background information on family situation, length of service, and both local and international ties.

The next major focus for questions revolved around resettlement. I asked each participant why they settled in Columbia, SC. Using their responses, I explored the reasons behind their choice of relocation city (they all chose to be resettled here, none were randomly assigned) and why they choose to subsequently relocate to a specific neighborhood, separate from other refugees. I also inquired about ties to the community, asking whether they participated in any associations or clubs, whom they socialized with, and why they chose to socialize with these particular people. I asked about religious organizations, and the role these played in their resettlement, as well as how they viewed Lutheran Family Services and the services they provided. Here also I inquired about work opportunities, how they accessed and kept jobs, and whether or not they planned to stay in Columbia. I attempted to identify communities, how Afghani and Iraqi SIVs positioned themselves within the resettlement context and how they interacted with fellow SIVs, family members, other refugees, the local religious community, and the resettlement agency.

The last major vein of inquiry centered on identity, and how SIVs viewed themselves as part of, and yet still distinct from other refugee populations. These questions were a bit tricky, they were direct and occasionally made my participants uncomfortable. I always prefaced these delicate questions with a reminder that I was not intending to offend, and that the participant was not obligated to respond if s/he did not feel comfortable. Examples of these questions are: do you feel comfortable being a refugee? In what settings do you feel compelled to hide your status? Also, I asked

directly if they felt they had a greater claim to services over other refugees, since they had earned their visa by assisting the US military. In this last portion of the interview, I asked questions about maintaining ties to family members abroad, and whether the individual regretted moving to the United States. I asked about spaces that reminded them of home, and if there was a specific place that made them acutely aware of themselves (as refugees, Muslims, Afghans/Iraqis, etc.). The very last question I closed all interviews with centered on self-identity. I asked each participant "How do you view yourself? What makes you unique?" Thus, this last cluster of questions sought to highlight SIV identity formation during resettlement, how it was affected by community claims and family ties, and how it was amplified or subdued by specific places and spaces. Here I sought to extract the implicit ways that SIVs positioned community and support claims vis-à-vis other refugees, and how (if at all) they viewed themselves as deserving of social and financial assistance. Thus, while the interviews themselves were semi-structured and I adjusted them according to the flow of conversation, my interview questions focused on these central themes and followed a relatively uniform path.

With the exception of Zorro, all participants were able to communicate clearly in English. Occasionally, I would have to explain a question, but generally the participants understood my inquiry. Again, with the exception of Zorro, I felt all participants responded honestly and openly. Zorro appeared rather evasive in his answers, and I do not feel like he trusted me. This uncertainty is further evidenced by Zorro's selection of the LFS offices as the interview location, instead of inviting me to his home. I believe emphasizing my military background, my past experience in their respective countries, and my assistance to Gul in obtaining an SIV served to create a bond of trust and

understanding between myself and my other participants. This was rather counterintuitive, initially I did not mention my military experience when attempting to gain participants, fearing it would either discourage their participation or drastically affect their responses. However, after a tepid interview with Zorro, followed by Ahmed's rejection, in desperation I emphasized this link with Scarface, and it gained me access to the Afghani SIV community.

Thus, my positionality and subjectivity proved to be double edged swords. While my positionality as a white, male soldier with combat experience in Iraq and Afghanistan ultimately afforded me unique access to participants, it simultaneously limited my ability to access female participants. It may also have affected the refusal of SIVs (Ahmed for example) to participate in my study, particularly in light of the current political and social discourses concerning Islam, terrorism, Syria, and the like. I was also sensitive to performativity that catered to my positionality, and I attempted to assess participant responses from as neutral a standpoint as possible. This attempt at objectivity, while obviously futile, is necessary to minimize the impact of my subjectivity. My personal experiences living in a foreign culture, especially my experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, undoubtedly influenced the conduct of this study and my analysis of the data. Here my past experiences proved simultaneously advantageous and restricting. Due to past interactions with both interpreters and Iraqis and Afghanis, I was able to better phrase questions and interact with my participants without imparting unintended offense. I had to be particularly careful, however, to avoid projecting my lived experience onto theirs, and to avoid interpreting their responses through a lens colored by previous encounters and presumptions. By taking reflective notes during and after interviews,

identify and by paying particular attention to my positionality and subjecting, I believe I was able to obtain high quality, informative data.

These interviews occurred during a particularly turbulent time in American politics. Underscoring local and regional discourses concerning the presence of Islamic immigrants, refugees and citizens, my research was conducted during the final throes of the latest presidential election. National discourses supporting, and providing additional fuel to the controversy over Muslim immigrants and particularly, refugees were widely vocalized. My participants were made well aware of the controversy surrounding their presence in Columbia, SC and within the United States; during my interviews the conversation often strayed into discussions about contemporary politics, the presidential election, and later on, the potential impact of the President-Elect. Interestingly enough, the reactions of my participants varied, with some exhibiting fear over the future, while others were vocal in their support of the President-Elect. The point here is not to discuss the indeterminacy of political identity amongst SIVs, but rather to highlight that the political context in which my study occurred undoubtedly affected the ways in which my participants interacted with me during interviews, the course and content of our discussion, and the views they held about the society in which they were resettled.

The small number of participants (n=9) limits the generalizations I can draw from this study. That is, an attempt to apply my specific findings to another resettlement context is neither inappropriate nor my intent. The purpose of this study is not to provide a critical case study that can be applied to other small, Southern cities (Patton, 1990). Rather, my goal is to contribute to contemporary literatures that contest a homogenous approach to, and treatment of, refugees. By showing how Iraqi and Afghani SIVs

negotiate resettlement in Columbia, SC in very specific, intentional ways, this study

supports Malkki's (1992) dismissal of the 'generic' refugee. I thus assume a humanist

perspective, in that I seek to understand my participants as individual, human actors who

do not adhere to any specific, deterministic theory, model, or law (Castree, 2009).

3.5 Data Analysis

In order to capture my data, I used an app on my cell phone called 'SmartRecord'

to record each interview, with the expressed permission of my participants. These audio

files were then imported to, and transcribed with, an Olympus program, DSS Player.

While I intended to transcribe these interviews immediately, this proved impossible due

to a myriad of factors. I did, however, complete all transcriptions within two weeks of the

given interview. In addition to the transcription, I compiled a short list of notes

concerning observations and impressions immediately after each interview. I completed

all transcriptions myself, without any external aid or assistance, aside from a foot pedal

and the accompanying Olympus software. Due to the small number of interviews, and

seeking to remain as close to my data as possible, I did not use any software to code my

transcriptions. Instead, as I transcribed, I kept a handwritten list of prominent themes that

consistently appeared.

I began this study with expectations about identity, performance and claims for

deservedness. These expectations were a result of both my personal experience with

Afghani and Iraqi interpreters, and my engagement with refugee literature. While

interviewing and transcribing, however, I found that these expectations were generally

not met. Some anticipated themes, such as family ties and religious identity did appear.

However, the ways that family and religion were understood, redefined and applied was rather surprising. Additionally, unanticipated themes appeared. For example, consistent references to mobility, and understandings of citizenship linked to passport possession were unexpected, as was the existence of an expansive, nationwide network of SIVs employed by CarMax. Lastly, I was surprise when most of my participants failed to draw explicit distinctions of deservedness between themselves and other refugee populations.

While these themes provide the backbone of my findings, I also rely upon both the published documents obtained through my volunteer efforts at LFS and my participation in the refugee resettlement process. These documents provided insight into the formal goals and intentions of both the state and the non-profit organization, and the influence these factors have on identity formation amongst refugee populations. Augmenting these printed documents are my experiences as a volunteer, where I participated in conveying and emphasizing these specific goals on a weekly basis. Despite personal disagreements with the overt message of the employment program (or perhaps due to this disjoint), I became acutely aware of the impact, later supported through my qualitative data, that government and NGO agendas have on the negotiation of refugee identity.

In addition to my experience as an active participant in the refugee resettlement program, the observations I drew from teaching class and interacting with refugee youth during soccer practice helped drive my research focus. Specifically, I noticed both the adults and the children were exercising agency and actively co-constructing their resettlement experience. Far from being passive recipients, these individuals would ask questions, supply information, and request assistance in very intentional ways. For

instance, during job-training class, several women who wished to gain employment in the hospitality industry, instead of the other job opportunities offered to them by LFS, would frequently ask questions about hotel and hospital staff, request information about searching for jobs independent of their employment specialist, and would continually emphasize their past experiences as maids and domestic servants. In this small way, I noticed they were positioning themselves towards desirable employment, by performing specific identities and attempting to access information. Observations such as these helped focus my exploration of SIV identity, community, and agency, and provide a particularly useful context within which I was able to place, and better understand, the data distilled from my participants.

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CHAPTER 4: IDENTITY, COMMUNITY AND BELONGING

"We are all human, we all eager to have this feeling to belonging to something bigger than us. Some people choose religion, some people choose sport, some people choose nationality, some people choose army."

Amir, personal interview

Resettlement fundamentally disrupts refugee identity both by rupturing existing communities and repositioning the refugee within a new, externally imposed political, social and economic hierarchies (Flores-Borquez, 1995; Brown, 2011). Refugee status brings with it explicit expectations of submission, dependence, and helplessness, along with implicit expectations of assimilation (Flores-Borques, 1995). Refugees are forced to negotiate new identities and communities in this unfamiliar resettlement context (Brown, 2011; Besteman, 2012). Established identities take on new meanings; there's a striking difference between a male Muslim identity in Afghanistan and being a male Muslim in America, for instance. Established communities must likewise be redefined and understood, for example family takes on a whole new meaning during resettlement. The construction of identity and community thus become active processes during resettlement, as refugees struggle to make sense of themselves and their place within their new setting.

Identity formation is fundamental to understanding refugee resettlement. It highlights the (perceived) existence of social and ethnic/racial hierarchies in the host society and how refugees are intentionally placed within these hierarchies by existing political and social structures (Brown, 2011; Yeh and Lama, 2006; Besteman, 2012).

Focusing on identities illuminates the ways in which refugees contest (or accept) their ascribed roles, and how they attempt to position themselves within, or to re-work or subvert these social hierarchies. Identity thus highlights the agency exercised by refugees in forming new identities and communities, while showing how interactions with existing social structures and actors help shape refugee experiences during resettlement (Trudeau, 2012).

In this chapter, I demonstrate how study participants draw on family, religion, gender, national origin, ethnicity/race, and military experience to make sense of themselves and how they fit within an American society that views them with both sympathy and a great degree of suspicion. While these themes appear frequently in the refugee literature (Yeh and Lama, 2006; Besteman, 2012; Nagel and Staeheli, 2008; Langellier, 2010; Sorenson, 1990, Brown, 2011), the results of identity and community construction vary between individuals, groups and locations. While examining these coalescing themes, I want to emphasize the indeterminacy of these social categories. Religion, for example means different things to different people. For my participants, the same religion, Islam, results in drastically different identity performances and community claims. The salience of a specific identity, the way this identity is conveyed and used to negotiate membership in communities and society thus varies across individuals and groups. This indeterminacy of common, consistent coalescents provides an intriguing, insightful understanding of how refugees actively construct their resettlement.

While these six themes were most evident in the responses to my final line of questions, they were also woven into the narratives presented throughout the entire interview process. Single responses tended to combine references to family, religion and

national origin, for example, such that these social identifiers appeared to be intrinsically connected. And while the identity themes were relatively uniform, respondents imbued identities with different meanings and described their performances of these identities in different ways. This variety of resulting identities, reliant upon the same core coalescent, illustrates the complexity of identity negotiation and performance within the SIV community. Additionally, it underscores the dangers of approaching any group or individual with preconceptions pertaining to 'race' or 'ethnicity' (Nagel, 2009).

4.1 Family

Family served as both an identity and a community-based claim for my participants. Individual definitions and conceptualizations of family were incredibly diverse. Family was referred to abstractly and specifically; it was used to reference a single individual or an entire tribe. Family was also used to explain community membership, access to opportunities, conflict, and responsibility. Thus, a blanket approach to family as a coalescing factor—as the foundation of identity, community, and belonging— would prove just as problematic as a blanket approach to 'ethnicity/race' or 'culture' (Nagel, 2009; Ramsden and Ridge, 2012). This section explores and discusses the ways in which Afghan and Iraqi SIVs conceptualize family, and how family relationship mediates their experiences of settlement. The resettlement process involves profound changes to family structure and composition. These changes fundamentally alter the ways that SIVs understand themselves, their community, and their place in society. Here, family serves as a source of community, security and status, though in varying ways and to varying degrees.

Some of the men I interviewed derived a strong sense of self from their role as fathers and heads of household.   Perhaps Alex said it best, "here, I'm feeling a lot like a father. I mean, like because I'm supporting my sons, and my wife, and my daughter… I have a lot of responsibility down here" (personal interview).   In Afghanistan Alex's father was the patriarch, with Alex and his numerous brothers contributing to, but not being ultimately responsible for, the provision of food, shelter, and clothing to their families. In Afghanistan, the nuclear family was placed within a larger hierarchy that encompassed complex extended family relationships. These families were an important form of community; familial relationships dictated social ties and access to resources. Alex's identity was primarily influenced by his age, relationship with his father, and order of birth compared to his siblings, not by his role as a husband and father. In the US, by contrast, Alex is removed from his extended family and has become the sole provider for his family. His patriarchal role is shifting with the expansion of his responsibilities (and the shrinkage of the household unit). Removal from his extended family hierarchy requires the formation of a new community for social and financial security, achieved through a redefining of family.

Scarface echoes this sentiment, identifying himself as "the father of two kids and husband and trying to be a good provider for them" (personal interview). His statement, in conjunction with Alex's narrative, illustrate how Afghani and Iraqi SIVs, specifically the male participants, define themselves in relation to their role as providers for their nuclear family. This perception is compared against their previous roles within a community formed around extended family relationships. "Back in there [Afghanistan], no responsibility, no… I was just a father and husband… down here I have too much

responsibility, for my two sons, and for my daughter, and for my wife" (Alex, personal interview). The dissolution of a community premised upon blood and marriage thus requires a new understanding of paternal identity and its accompanying social and economic responsibilities. Divorced from their extended families, and the support that community provided, both Alex and Scarface are forced to both redefine their roles as fathers, and their definitions of family and community.

Family, both extended and nuclear, provides a valuable source of social networks and ties. The majority of my participants selected resettlement in Columbia, SC in part because of these extended family networks. Sami (personal interview) explained how he selected a sponsor and location, "so, like we have two choices. I choose my brother or my aunt in Chicago." These social networks, based on blood or marriage, in turn provide resources to build senses of community and belonging in the resettlement context, and to assist in the negotiation of new identities (Yeh and Lama, 2006; Allan, 2010). Sponsorship by relatives helps ease the isolation of resettlement, as discussed by Scarface (personal interview) "…yeah, but she came from big family. Like I have 12 brothers, 5 sister, two moms… we all live together [in Afghanistan]. Now, there's just two of us, we go outside and it's just her and these two kids. It's not easy…" He later on refers to resettlement as "jail, it's a kind of jail" (Scarface, personal interview). By choosing relatives as sponsors, SIVs attempt to leverage familial relationships, and create new communities, around a familiar core.

In resettlement contexts, however, communities formed around traditional family ties proved largely ineffective. Khabir provides an excellent example. He chose his aunt as the sponsor for him and his wife. Soon after arrival, however, he discovered a surprise.

"My aunt, I respect her… [but] she lived here for 30 years, so they adapted the culture of here" (Khabir, personal interview). Rather than provide a free place to reside, as Khabir anticipated due to social norms, she charged them rent. Khabir explains this abrogation of Afghan norms, "In our culture, they don't take rent, but my aunt in there they charge it. Back in my culture… if you come to my house, free, how long you live is free. And not only me, food and everything, even if they bring a family" (personal interview). For an Afghani, family membership allows claims to be made that provide access to significant advantages, particularly during resettlement. Violation of this expected norm requires a renegotiation and conceptualization of family as a community and an identity. This creates a division between those whom have been 'Americanized' and those who still hold true to 'cultural' norms. Despite having lived in the US for over three years, Khabir asserts he would never charge a relative rent, because "that's our culture" (personal interview).

In other instances, the size of the family proves ineffective for forming an effective community identity during resettlement. Both Alex and Scarface noted the size of their families back in Afghanistan. Similarly, Amir states he has "cousins, aunts, uncles, nephews…you know for the Iraqi usually they have a big family" (personal interview). These families provide a community of scale that allow individuals to access employment, economic support, and social status. In resettlement, SIVs can only bring their direct dependents, essentially a spouse and their children. This small, nuclear family is incapable of providing extensive social or financial benefits, and therefore, SIVs seek to redefine family, to renegotiate a community based upon family. Alex explains, "yeah, we're friends…we're a family relationship. I mean, we're not like families from the same

family…from same tribe. We're different tribes. But you know, because we're Afghans, we come to each other's houses" (personal interview). Here Alex shows how family ties are redefined to exceed blood and tribe relationships, and instead be based upon a common, national identity. This identity drives the creation of an 'ethnic' community, a family based upon Afghan origins, which SIVs can turn to for social and economic support, access to employment, and even simply friendship.

Even when SIVs have large numbers of relatives present in the United States, they are dispersed and not centrally located, and thus unable to provide the same economic and social benefits of family-based communities in Afghanistan and Iraq. "I have a lot of family members compared to other Afghans here…but I have my aunts, one in New York, I have two uncles in Atlanta, Georgia, I have one uncle and aunt in Pennsylvania, [and another] in Virginia" (Khabir, personal interview). When one of his uncles advocated for Khabir to move to Atlanta, Khabir refused due to his employment in Columbia. "My uncle was telling me, come to Atlanta. I say no, I work for CarMax, that's a good place… I'm making $22.50, so I'm happy" (Khabir, personal interview). Here Khabir notes that while his uncle wanted him to relocate to Atlanta in order to be closer to relatives, that this proximity did not provide the same economic security as his job in Columbia. Thus, the original function of family community is disrupted in resettlement, and new communities for securing economic and social security are formed.

The definition and role of family, and family based communities, changes drastically during resettlement. Traditional family structures and relationships are ruptured and renegotiated, ties that prove effective and beneficial in Afghanistan and Iraq are ineffective and weak in the United States. Thus, SIVs are inclined to redefine family

roles and community definitions, in order to access social and economic benefits. As traditional blood ties weaken through acculturation and spatial dilution, different concepts of family and community arise, uniting SIVs in new, yet equally powerful ways.

4.2 Religion

A second powerful, yet decidedly indeterminate, theme for coalescing identity is religion (Allen, 2010; Nagel and Staeheli, 2008; Langellier, 2010; Sorenson, 1990). Like family, religious identity and membership claims take on new roles during resettlement, serving to both unite and divide individuals and groups. For Afghani SIVs in Columbia, SC, religion proves to be a strong centrifugal force for self-identity, one that allows claims to membership in a larger Islamic community. In the absence of a traditional, family based community, Afghani SIVs are able to identify with, and claim membership in, the Pakistani and Indian Muslim community in Columbia. This Islamic community provides both a safe place of worship and valuable social support, and Afghani SIVs are able to leverage their common religious background (style of prayer, 'cultural' practices, and language) in order to tap into economic and social support networks. Their ability to use religious identity to claim membership in an expanded community highlights the agency exerted by SIVs during resettlement.

When asked about the role of religion in the Afghan SIV community, Khabir proved to be particularly insightful. He succinctly stated, "everyone is religious… we practice our religion frequently" (Khabir, personal interview). Adherence to a common religious identity provides a powerful cohesive force amongst the Afghani SIVs. It allows them to form and maintain a cohesive, group identity as practicing Muslims, similar to

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other refugee groups in resettlement contexts (Smith, 2013; Langellier, 2010). This adds additional commonality to strengthen a community based upon re-conceptualized family definitions. Additionally, it provides them access to other Muslim communities within Columbia. When asked about ties to local mosques and other Muslim groups, Khabir notes "our religion is the same, but our culture is different, but still, we can have a great bond with Pakistani people" (personal interview). When a local Afghan youth died tragically last year, this common religious identity allowed his mother to access social and financial support from Masjid Noor-Ul-Huda, a predominantly Pakistani mosque (Khabir, personal interview). Another local mosque, identified as mostly Arab, in contrast attempted to charge the grieving family for funeral services and a burial plot. A compatible religious identity thus enables Afghani SIVs to access Pakistani and Indian Muslims, creating a "community thing we do with Noor-Ul-Huda" (Khabir, personal interview). This religious identity fails, however, to overcome linguistic and ethnic/racial differences present in the other mosque. Thus, Afghani SIVs are restricted from claiming membership in all Muslim communities, but are still able to exercise agency by negotiating membership in Noor-Ul-Huda.

For Iraqi SIVs in Columbia, religion, or rather the rejection of religion, serves to both solidify a new identity, and fracture old connections. During resettlement, contestations over religion, and its prescribed social roles and practices, serves to erode old identities and form new ones. Amir, discussing fellow Iraqi students, highlights this discord. He states "some people here are religious…men hang out together, separate than women. It will not work for us" (personal interview). His wife, Sana, explains further, "I tried when we first moved. I tried to get along with his, you know, like two of the Iraqis

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from back home…But it just didn't work out. Because we are just different" (personal interview). Here, the difference is religious identity. Amir and Sana cannot find commonality with his religious friends in the US. This fracture overshadows the fact that they used to be friends back in Iraq. For these two participants, rejection of religious practice defines a new community identity that excludes former acquaintances. In Columbia, this family directs their religious identity towards an American one that accepts and celebrates religious plurality. By doing so, they reject the strict, traditional adherence to religion that fuels Iraq's social problems, and instead claim membership in an American community.

This refusal to adhere to religious practice and participate in the religious community serves to alienate Iraqi SIVs, separating them from former Iraqi (non-SIV) acquaintances. Iraqi participants used the rejection of religion, specifically religious practices requiring gender separation, to distinguish themselves from the larger Iraqi population in Columbia. Here my participants rejected being identified with a Muslim community, they intentionally distanced themselves from the larger Iraqi community, and instead laid claim to implicit membership in American society. Sami draws direct ties between religious tolerance and American society, saying Americans are "really nice people, because we [refugees] are different. Different religion, different countries, but still they smile and help you…if we have these nice people, in Iraq if we have 50% of the community, like you all are, then Iraq would be great" (personal interview). Religious plurality, coupled with a rejection of gender discrimination, allows Sami and his family to claim membership in a larger, American community.

Religious adherence and degrees of religiosity thus vary greatly between individual SIVs, illustrating the indeterminist nature of Islamic identity. Yet regardless of its acceptance, adherence, or rejection, Islam influenced identity negotiations and community formation for all of my participants. When asked to define their identity, all SIVs specifically referenced Islam. Afghani SIVs referred to themselves as devout Muslims, claiming membership to both a local Islamic community and a global Muslim brotherhood. Conversely, Iraqi SIVs referenced Islam in a decidedly negative light, emphasizing their rejection of religious practices during the course of their interviews and linking the Iraqi conflict with traditional forms of Islam. For Afghani participants, religion was the first identity mentioned, and it was tied into a larger 'human' identity. The placement of religion as the first mentioned identifier underscores its importance as a coalescing theme for both self- and community identity; their religious identity was their foundational identity. As Alex states, "First of all, we're all Muslims… the Muslim, like we're brothers" (personal interview). Scarface links religion to his very existence, "being a Muslim and person is a, you know you have, a feeling every day, every time" (personal interview). This emphasis on religious identity supports previous research that finds religion to be a particularly strong facet of identity formation (Allen, 2010; Nagel and Staeheli, 2008; Langellier, 2010; Sorenson, 1990).

The role of religion in my study highlights the complexity of SIV resettlement and the indeterminacy of this coalescing theme. Yeah and Lama (2006) note Nepalese refugees use religion to claim preferential treatment over other refugees; Afghani and Iraqi SIVs fail to make this claim. When asked about the differences between other refugees and SIVs, and whether SIVs should get preferential treatment, Zorro stated "the

only difference is that the people have different religions and, yeah, different perspectives" (personal interview). Amir echoed this sentiment, stating "we are all human. Of course. Helping the less fortunate should be the higher priority" (personal interview). Instead of claiming a relationally higher social standing or a more 'deserving' status, both Afghani and Iraqi participants use religion to make and solidify community membership claims. Afghani SIVs used religion to strengthen inter-community ties and access membership in a larger Muslim community. Iraqi SIVs rejected membership in an Iraqi religious community and position themselves as members within American society. The variety of ways in which the common theme of religion is understood and used underscores the dynamic and complex ways in which refugees negotiate, contest and position themselves in a resettlement context.

4.3 Gender

Gender roles and identity, like family and religion, are redefined during resettlement. For refugees, resettlement brings significant personal and social change. Traditional communities are dissolved, and refugees are forced to negotiate and form new communities based upon altered identities in foreign societies. Untethered from familiar support structures, and positioned within specific (and restricted) hierarchies, refugees rely on their available resources to redefine and negotiate a sense of self, community and belonging (Allen, 2010; Besteman, 2012; Hopkins, 2010; Nagel, 2009). Gender proves to be a powerful, if implicit, tool for creating a sense of normalcy in an uncertain resettlement context. While not explicitly discussed or explored by my participants, gender proved to exert a significant implicit influence on identity, community and

belonging. Similar to religion, gender can be either reinforced along traditional lines, with a strict separation and domination of male gender, or rejected as undesirable in a modern, American society (Hopkins, 2010; Langellier, 2010; Sorenson, 1990). In some respects, due to overwhelming gendered participation, where seven of my nine participants were male (and in the focus group with the two females, unless directly prompted neither spoke out), gender roles and their utility is inferred based upon observation and participant actions. For example, in three out of four interviews with Afghan SIVs, I was not introduced to the participant's spouse. This gendered separation prevented me from observing the division of gender identity, however it allows me to make key assumptions about gender practices within the Afghan SIV community, particularly in conjunction with literature that discusses the role of gender amongst female refugee populations (Hopkins, 2010; Sorenson, 1990).

The division between reinforcement of traditional gendered identities and the rejection of these identities again cleaved generally along Afghan and Iraqi SIV lines. Afghani participants were far more likely to ascribe gendered roles to themselves and their families, while my Iraqi participants were relatively vocal about dismissing traditional separation and stratification. Scarface positioned his gendered identity in line with his role as a provider, staying "first thing is I am a human, Muslim, Afghan…the father of two kids and husband trying to be a good provider." Here he links religious, national origin and his humanity to a natural role as a male provider. This identity is carried forward into the resettlement context, as Khabir notes "you know, our wives, they cannot live alone… so I explain to my manager, I cannot leave my wife here." As the provider for his family, Khabir, much like Scarface, assumes the role of caretaker. His

wife, he claims, cannot survive without him. Thus he positions his gendered identity as being essential to the very survival of his family, without a strong male presence, his wife would be unable to live.

These gender roles are then reinforced through social support networks established by Afghan SIVs and their dependents in the resettlement context. Here they provide a degree of comfort and certainty, by aligning with old, familiar social relations preset back in Afghanistan, and strengthen a sense of community, a community coalescing around an expanded definition of family. For Afghan SIVs in Columbia, the males associate with the males while the females likewise socialize along gender lines. "We [men] drive, we carpool every day. And also our wives, you know, that like when I go to work, my wife comes to their house, their wives come to our house…" (Khabir, personal interview). These networks extend beyond work, they include sharing information about hostile places and even leisure activities like playing cards and drinking chi. Thus, traditional gender norms are reinforced in the resettlement context for Afghani SIVs and their families. They facilitate the consolidation of information, reification of personal identity, and fuel the formation of a community based upon a common 'culture.' This aligns closely with the findings of Hopkins (2010) and Sorenson (1990), that gender amongst refugee populations provides a strong cohesive for establishing identity.

Yet rejection, or contestation of traditional gender identity also features in refugee identity (Sorenson, 1990; Hopkins, 2010). For Iraqi SIVs, this proves especially true. Amir ties traditional gender identity back to religion when discussing differences between other Iraqi students and himself. He rejects a "traditional way of living" that

segregates men from women, and thus performs a new identity based upon the degradation of a gendered social division. He positions himself and his family as modern and progressive, above the old gender identities that are foundational to the "reason why the Iraq situation is so bad. Because there's a lot of problems. Social problems" (Amir, personal interview). These problems, to include gender divisions, follow SIVs and other refugees, "even if you move outside of Iraq, still a lot of these problems exist" (Amir, personal interview). The acknowledgement of the detrimental role traditional gender identity plays on social problems necessitates the abandonment of his oldest, closest friends in Columbia who are unwilling to adapt to their new setting. "The two Iraqis who are here they are my friend since college. Since 2004. We've been friends for more like 12 years. But their wives different. Different interests. They more like into kids and traditional role of women" (Amir, personal interview). For these Iraqi SIVs, gender serves to develop new identities, ones that expand beyond traditional, religious, and national origins. Social ties are built upon common interests, such as academic studies and work, as Sana states, "I bring friends to our place… but not Iraqis" (personal interview). Here, gender identity allows Amir and his wife to make a specific status claim for acceptance into American society. By rejecting a traditional, rigid Iraqi identity of gender separation, they instead embrace a modern approach to gender equality, allowing them to claim membership in a broader community of likeminded individuals.

Gender proves to be a strong foundation for identity formation. For all my participants, gender served to create and/or strengthen unique identities in the resettlement context. As Hopkins (2010) states "migration, resettlement and transnational connections produce, reproduce, and alter gender… identities" (524). This is certainly the

case with SIVs in Columbia, SC. While the specific ways in which the resettlement process affects gender identities differs between participants, and thus the resulting identities are varied, gender nonetheless proves to be a potent indeterminate entity for creating new senses of self and community.

4.4 'Culture'

My treatment of 'culture' differs from (and contests) a conventional understanding of culture as a pre-existing, homogeneous entity. As an a priori category, culture does not exist (Nagel, 2009; Ramsden and Ridge, 2012). Rather than constitute an established, uniform, and discrete attribute, to which an individual or group belongs, 'culture' in this sense is an understanding of similarity/difference. As a relational tool, 'culture' provides SIVs a way to make claims of sameness or difference, to coalesce identity or reject membership claims. 'Culture' is based upon a variety of commonalities or dissimilarities, such as country of origin or language, that can be leveraged to either form or contest group identities and to claim membership in different communities. Thus, 'culture' is used as a reference point for positioning identity claims that center on common practices or shared origins.

Language drives some surprising identity formations for SIVs. Scarface draws a distinction between SIVs, who speak both their native tongue and English, and other refugees: "Most of the other refugees, when they were in my class, they were… we were different. First thing, they don't know the language" (personal interview). Khabir concurs, saying "he don't know how to speak English. That's why we're not, too much connected with each other" (personal interview). Here, the shared ability to speak English

allows SIVs to identify as separate from the general pool of refugees, "because whomever comes through SIV is certain that they speak English" (Khabir, personal interview). The ability to speak English allows Iraqi and Afghani SIVs to create a distinctive identity, independent of other refugees, an identity that posits the SIV as more capable of functioning and thriving in American society.

Language serves a centrifugal function; it allows identity to coalesce around a common native tongue and reinforces a sense of community. Many SIV dependents are unable to understand English, and thus, as Scarface notes for his family, "it's kind of a jail for my wife. She does not know English, she got here and she doesn't know, she didn't know anyone" (personal interview). In order to socialize, Scarface's wife, and the wives of the other SIVs, seek out others who speak their language. This allows a community to form along common linguistic lines (Nagel and Staeheli, 2008). The resulting identity is not limited only to fellow Afghanis or Iraqis, but rather to those with whom the SIVs and their families are able to communicate. Thus, Khadijah befriended a Syrian family, while the Afghani SIV community interacts and worships with Pakistani Muslims. Khabir explains, "the Masjid al-Muslimiin are Arabs. We don't speak Arab. Arabic. But Masjid Noor Ul Huda is all from Pakistan…we can have a great[er] bond with Pakistani people than with the Arabs" (personal interview). Here language allows for the development of identities that expand beyond ethnicity or national origin. A common language allows the development of a social relationship between an Iraqi and Syrian family, while it also facilitates a common religious identity within Masjid Noor-Ul-Huda. Thus SIVs leverage linguistic skills during resettlement to create, strengthen, and expand community claims.

Both Afghani and Iraqi participants leveraged 'culture' as a way to identify themselves as separate from, or included in, a specific group. That is, 'culture' was used to define themselves, individually, as identifying with, and claiming membership in, a larger community. As Khalid illustrates, "in our culture, they don't take rent, but my aunt in [NY] charge it" (personal interview). Here Khalid identifies himself as adhering to traditional Afghan (and arguably larger Muslim) hospitality norms. He draws a clear distinction between himself, retaining his 'culture' and his aunt, who no longer performs that identity. Alex also equates 'culture' with hospitality, saying "you should still show the respect and the hospitality, to show the guy you're religious and to show the guy your culture" (personal interview). He ties 'culture' and religion together under the umbrella of Pashtu hospitality, where certain actions must be performed in order to provide verification of a 'cultural' identity. Amir takes a different approach to 'culture,' but like Alex and Khalid, he uses it to show affinity with a larger identity. "It will make sense to accept people like me who pass several security background check, prove their willingness to accept American culture, to participate in the community, be a productive citizen in the future" (Amir, personal interview). Thus, despite 'culture's' problematic use to obfuscate complex, evolving processes, here it serves as an effective point of reference for making identity and community membership claims.

Iraqi SIVs, contrary to Afghani SIVs, were the only participants to reference their national origin as a discrete nation-state identity. While Afghan SIVs referenced Afghanistan as a source of their common 'cultural' identity, Iraqis referred to Iraq as a political entity. Interestingly, they treated being Iraqi as undesirable, and defined themselves by rejecting this identity. Sami explains he's glad to have left Iraq, "because

like I hope to take a new identity. Like, 'Hi, I am Sami, I am an American.' Because Iraqi

didn't give me anything. All they give me, the sadness, the tired…they treat you like shit.

Like, why am I proud to be from Iraq?" (personal interview). He rejects an Iraqi identity

and hopes to assume a new, American one. This rejection positions Sami as eligible for a

new national identity. Rather than provide a rooted, immobile identity, Sami's country of

origin instead serves to define what he rejects and what he aspires towards. Amir

elaborates on Sami's statement, saying "once you lose this feeling of belonging to

something bigger than yourself, like community or society, a country, a citizenship, you

end up in Sami's situation" (personal interview). National identity, for these two Iraqis,

is used to both define who they are not and lay claim towards what they seek to become.

4.5 Ethnicity/Race

Closely tied to 'culture,' ethnicity/race is another problematic identity

categorization (Nagel and Staeheli, 2008; Besteman, 2012). Ethnicity typically is

described as voluntary and 'cultural,' while race is more phenotypical, and is often

ascribed based upon physical characteristics (Mavroudi and Nagel, 2016). The distinction

between race and ethnicity is blurred, and likewise the separation between racial and

ethnic groups is far from distinct. As socially constructed processes, the definitions and

meanings of race/ethnicity are continually changing, and thus they are subject to temporal

and spatial influences (Nagel and Staeheli, 2008; Brun, 2001; Brown, 2011). Despite the

relational nature of race/ethnicity, American society is bifurcated along a black/white

division; the bifurcation exists independent of shifting definitions of 'white' vs. 'black'

(Jacobson, 1998). In the resettlement context, this black/white distinction is both

understood and leveraged by refugees (Jacobson, 1998, Besteman, 2012; Yeh and Lama, 2006). Afghani and Iraqi SIVs illustrate a strong grasp of ethnic/racial social hierarchies in Columbia, and consistently position their identities towards 'whiteness' in pursuit of a more desirable status.

To position themselves towards a favorable racial/ethnic identity, first the SIV must grasp the black/white bifurcation of American society (Yeh and Lama, 2006). My participants, while not directly questioned on racial or ethnic identities, were acutely aware of the black/white divide. When asked about citizenship, and whether he would consider himself an American once he gained U.S. citizenship, Alex delved into race/ethnicity, discussing how he fills out official government forms. While he considers himself Afghan-American, he notes the primary distinction in the US is color-based, not defined by national origin. "If you go somewhere, like the hospital, the form they give you, [it says] like Caucasian, or white or black" (personal interview). Regardless of how he self-identifies, American society (in this case the hospital) officially recognizes black or white race/ethnicity. Thus, Alex is faced with one of two unfamiliar choices, and he chooses to position himself favorably. "I haven't heard like, oh he's a German-American, you know. They just say African-American, so… I just write down 'white'" (personal interview). Faced with the black/white choice, coupled with even the faintest understanding of the racial hierarchy in the US, Alex chooses to identify as white, showing at least a rudimentary understanding of desirable ethnic/racial status.

Scarface, another Afghan SIV, encounters racial/ethnic categories in a more explicit and direct way. He works as a valet at the local Veterans Administration (VA) hospital, a job he secured through his continued connection with an American military

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officer. This job, coupled with his darker complexion and black hair, often leads to presumptive behaviors from clients. Speaking of these clients, he notes "if they didn't talk to me, if I don't introduce where I am from and my background, when they see me, I don't know why, they are thinking I am Spanish" (personal interview). When these individuals start speaking Spanish to him, Scarface replies that he is from Afghanistan and does not understand Spanish. Most are chagrined, or as he explains it, "like if you put someone in the wrong, you know, set, if you don't know I am Afghan and you say I am Spanish… you are kind of, I am sorry and something like that" (personal interview). While Scarface professes ignorance when it comes to American racial/ethnic categories, he nonetheless recognizes the necessity of defining his position within this hierarchy by explaining he is not Latino.

Scarface transgresses upon racial/ethnic norms by failing to fulfill a stereotypical job/ethnicity match. He notes this transgression, and the resulting embarrassment of his clients with humor and confusion, but later in our interview he shows an implicit understanding of American racial bifurcation by linking Latino and black ethnicities/races together. Recounting a difficult experience, Scarface draws a direct link between a racist client and his supervisor being African-American. "An old dude, I told him to move here, and he said 'This is America' or something, he thinks I am Spanish. I think he doesn't like them…My supervisor came and he stopped him… cause this guy had problems with my supervisor before. My supervisor black" (personal interview). These recounts shows an understanding of the racial/ethnic grouping of Latinos and African Americans as 'black.' Scarface unconsciously links the client's negative perceptions of Latinos to his past issues with the African American supervisor. Coupled

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with Scarface's humorous recounting of chagrin and acceptance after he identifies as Afghan (and not Latino), where "people like that, and they welcome me. And they are happy and they are wishing me good future" (personal interview), an implicit understanding of racial/ethnic identity is evident. Scarface acknowledges his understanding of racial bifurcated hierarchies by linking negative opinions of Latinos and African Americans, and offsetting these against positive reactions experienced when he repositioned himself away from a Latino identity.

Race/ethnicity directly influences the ways SIVs situate their identities and communities within Columbia. Other participants, Iraqi and Afghani alike, described their fellow refugees as 'black' or 'African' when drawing distinctions between themselves and the greater refugee population. When asked if he socialized with any other refugees, outside SIVs, Khabir acknowledged interacting with them at LFS, but "those people from, I don't know…the African countries…[they]don't know how to speak English. That's why we are not…too much, connected" (personal interview). Here he links race/ethnicity with an inability to understand English, and thereby rejects association with these refugees. Thus my participants demonstrated both an understanding of the ethnic and racial hierarchies within the United States, and an ability to position their identity towards the more desirable, 'white' race/ethnicity. This closely aligns with other literatures that explore refugee racial/ethnic understanding and positioning (Brown, 2011; Yeh and Lama, 2006; Nagel, 2009; Besteman, 2012).

4.6 Military Experience

Combat experience in Afghanistan and Iraq serves as a particularly strong coalescing theme for SIVs. This military identity, one that centers on shared risk, interdependence, and experience, levels differences between interpreters and soldiers overseas. Interpreters, contractors, and soldiers alike are formed into a cohesive community with common goals, focused on security, safety, and applied violence. In the resettlement context, military identity and the communities it provides access to changes. While the identity shifts, the impact of shared combat experience prevails, allowing SIVs to claim belonging and membership in a widespread community of combat veterans.

In order to access my desired participants, I found I had to rely upon this common military identity. Rather than avoid mentioning my association with the Army and past deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, I instead emphasized this common bond. As a result, most participants drew direct comparisons between their experiences with soldiers and my experiences in their countries of origin. Rather than fully explain themselves, participants frequently said things such as "you can feel it too, because you were there" (Khabir, personal interview) or "that's why, you know, they give me all the protection… it's war" (Alex, personal interview). Often I had to draw a distinction here between my experience and theirs, in order to elicit a full, rich response. I would emphasize a difference in location (I was in Logar, he was in Mazar-i-Sharif, for example) or a difference in time (I was only there a year, he was an interpreter for 7). The frequent reference to a common frame of understanding, a shared identity of combat, was prevalent throughout my interviews, and was most likely the only reason why I was able to gain access to this relatively insular group of refugees.

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Before resettlement, SIVs developed military identities that allowed them to claim equal membership to the deployed military community. "The interpreter… we have a same kind of thing, like the soldier…We were going on a mission, the Captain didn't think that he's a terp [interpreter], or he's a linguist. He didn't think that. We were sent out there as a team" (Alex, personal interview). Shared missions, equal exposure to danger, and a team mentality served to forge a common bond between soldiers and their interpreters. From personal experience, the same proves true of all individuals who regularly went on patrol. I had a mutual respect for, and reliance on, local national truck drivers, interpreters, and Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers who chose to align themselves with ISAF. In combat, no distinction is made between black/white, cook or mechanic, Afghan or American. Rather, a very clear, stark difference evolved. The overshadowing identity was simply those shooting with me, versus those shooting at me. As Alex succinctly explains, "we [interpreters] may get shot, we may save your life. That's why I say, I was down there as a soldier… I didn't think, I'm an interpreter. I was thinking I'm a soldier, and I'm serving for my country" (personal interview).

As American military units deploy and redeploy, Afghani and Iraqi SIVs maintained contact with individual soldiers and officers. These ties, maintained over time and across increasing, and ever changing, space influenced many resettlement decisions. Scarface chose to be resettled in Columbia due to a strong relationship with an old commander, Richard. Alex wanted to be resettled in Charleston, to be close to members of a unit he served with, but settled for Columbia as it was the closest place with a resettlement program. Zorro, Ahmed, and Zain all chose Columbia due to different connections with soldiers on Fort Jackson. Only two SIVs chose to resettle in Columbia

without a direct link to military ties. An employment opportunity drew Khabir to Columbia, provided through a fellow SIV. This SIV, Muhammed, however resettled in Columbia because of a connection with a local National Guard unit.

In a resettlement context, SIV military identity and the communities they access via this identity, change. Combat experience with American soldiers served to connect SIVs to other veteran populations and to validate their presence in Columbia. Scarface explains the expansion of the military community. "When I was working in the Army, the only thing we were dealing with is soldiers… [but] here we see old soldiers, new soldiers" (Scarface, personal interview). He uses his experience as an interpreter to explain why he is in the United States, "I never hide my identity, everybody asks me where I'm from and I say I am from Afghanistan…most people like it and they welcome me. They are happy and they are wishing me good future" (personal interview). Scarface uses his past experience serving as an interpreter with US forces to validate his presence at both the VA hospital, and in America. He draws on this identity to claim belonging in a larger veteran, and ultimately American, community. Thus, a military identity, initially tied directly to the individual soldiers he served alongside, expands during resettlement to incorporate veterans, and morphs into a general American identity, one based on service to the nation.

Alex also redefines the scope and purpose of military identity during resettlement. Rather than use his experience to claim membership in American society, he claims his service does not warrant access to US citizenship and refutes his ability to lay claim to belonging in the way Scarface does. "The thing is, back in the country [Afghanistan] I was working for Army, for Special Forces… But I wasn't working for free. They were

paying me. And also, I was helping my own country. I was helping my own people" (Alex, personal interview). While he acknowledges his experience as an interpreter allowed him to claim equal footing, to develop a shared identity with other soldiers in Afghanistan, he believes the only way to expand this identity and use it to validate any claims to American citizenship and belonging is to join the US Army. "My whole family wants to become as United States citizen…my plan, I may join the Army" (Alex, personal interview). While Alex states his service in Afghanistan does afford him the right to "come here [to the US] and live with my family in peace" (personal interview), he does not believe it allows him to identify with, and claim membership in, veteran communities or American society, because his motives in Afghanistan were self-serving and directed towards assisting Afghanistan, not America.

Amir draws a similar distinction to Alex, when asked if he believed his service warranted access to American society. He responded "I think it's not an obligation. It's still, I work for money. I was treated very well, I provided a service, [but] as the same time in exchange for money" (personal interview). When I pointed out that soldiers also are paid volunteers, he stated the difference between him and them was nationality. While he "appreciate[s] this current system, [that] this country will accept immigrant foreigner[s]" (personal interview), he does not believe his employment with the US government in Iraq allows him to lay claim to a common military identity with American soldiers and veterans.

Thus, military identity is created, reshaped, and reinterpreted in different ways, by different individuals, within the resettlement context. Some SIVs use it to lay claims to belonging and for access to an American identity, while others dismiss this application.

Some SIVs acknowledge the power of a military identity, and seek to secure it through enlistment in the Army, while others feel their past service allows them to resettle in the United States, but not to claim membership in American society. The ways in which military identity is developed and leveraged highlights the complexity of resettlement for SIVs, as well as the ability of refugees to leverage specific identities towards accessing specific communities and validating belonging.

4.7 Conclusion

Resettlement agencies and government policies work with a specific, narrowly defined perception of refugees and their place in society. Through this narrow framework, they impose upon refugees a limited identity, that of the 'generic' helpless victim, while simultaneously linking access to American society with self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency, in turn, is accessed along a standardized pathway. In order to become 'American' refugees must intently pursue and accept employment. Refugees are thus placed within definite places/spaces and jobs that restrict their access to (and exploration of) who they are, what 'America' is, how they fit within this new context and society. However, refugees are not completely bound to the identities imposed upon them. Instead, they negotiate their resettlement in a variety of ways, including reconstructing their identities and creating new communities.

SIVs actively construct identities during resettlement. While these identities coalesce around central themes, they are decidedly indeterminate. Common facets, such as religion, result in drastically different identity and community formations. These identities and communities are leveraged in a variety of ways, towards different aims.

Other coalescing facets, such as language, serve to tie SIVs into larger, local communities, and provide access to employment and social networks not readily accessible to the general refugee population. SIVs make sense of their placement using these various identities and community claims, they position themselves as simultaneously inclusive in, and exclusive of, the general refugee population. Through an analysis of six coalescent themes, I illustrate how SIVs create, negotiate, and redefine identity and community towards specific goals.

The ability to exercise agency during resettlement aligns with arguments that contest the perception and treatment of refugees as 'generic' and homogenous entities (Malkki, 1992; Besteman, 2012; Yeh and Lama, 2006). The examples explored above highlight how a small, narrowly defined group of individuals understand and negotiate resettlement in Columbia, SC. Their experience differs greatly from one individual to the next, and their collective experience is vastly different from other refugees settled in the same context. A standardized treatment of refugees, even a uniform understanding of a single facet of the resettlement experience, proves misleading. While state and resettlement agencies operate with a fixed definition of refugee, this relatively inflexible treatment, is actively negotiated, contested, and undermined by the refugee. Occasionally, the refugee may even adhere to the 'generic' categorization, when it best suits their needs. Thus, identity and community formations during resettlement are indeterminate and variable.

CHAPTER 5: IDENTITY, COMMUNITY NETWORKS, AND THE SPATIALITY OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

The previous chapter explored the ways in which refugees negotiate and formulate their identities within a complex set of opportunities and constraints experienced during resettlement. Refugees do not simply carry over identities intact from their places of origin. Instead, these identities are created and recreated based upon the shifting social, economic and spatial contexts of resettlement. These identities form the basis of, and claim access to, communities. A broad definition of community encompasses a "social network of interacting individuals, unusually concentrated in a defined area" (Johnston, 1994: 80 as cited in England, 2011: 95). These networks provide a myriad of social, emotional and economic resources that shape the material conditions of refugees in the society of settlement. In order to highlight the agency exhibited by SIVs in conforming to, contesting, subverting and bypassing the restrictions imposed by resettlement, I treat community as "a politically/economically/culturally motivated group that excludes those that do not have the same intended outcomes or goals" (England, 2011: 95). While the resettlement process creates some commonalities among all refugees, SIVs do not appear to engage in community building with other refugees. They instead draw upon internal ('cultural,' family) and external (military, religious) communities to access mobility assets, houses, employment and information.

The convoluted, complex entanglement of federal, state and non-government agencies responsible for carrying out refugee resettlement operate under shifting, vague

and often confusing guidelines. Each entity involved in resettlement has different

priorities and goals, which are often implicitly present in the support and services

provided or denied (Trudeau, 2008). A common undercurrent is present across all levels

and organizations involved in resettlement, however. This consistent theme is a treatment

of the refugee as a helpless, agentless victim. The implications of this treatment go

beyond expectations of specific identity performances (as discussed in the previous

chapter). Here, the concept of the 'generic' refugee results in unilateral decisions that

directly impact refugee housing, employment, and ultimately socio-economic mobility.

SIVs, in response, exercise agency in specific ways to circumvent these restrictions,

relying heavily upon access to housing and employment mobility.

Thus, settlement patterns for refugees in Columbia reflect an ascribed identity and

lack of agency. Employment opportunities do as well. The repercussions of these

placements continue to impact refugees and their families long after their association with

LFS ends. The 'official' placement and employment afforded to refugees limits their

access to education, transportation, and opportunities while promoting a specific idea of

American identity and the refugee's socio-economic role within society (Baratta, 2016).

Afghan and Iraqi SIVs provide a clear example of how refugees exercise agency during

resettlement by leveraging identity, social networks and community to elude being placed

(physically and economically) in an undesirable space/place.

5.1 Patterns of Refugee Resettlement in Columbia

Lutheran Family Services is the sole contract agency responsible for executing

refugee resettlement in Columbia, SC. They oversee the federally mandated, state

implemented 90-day Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP), which entails receiving refugees, placing them in housing, providing basic necessities such as bedding, furniture, food and utensils, and enrolling them in Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) (SCMAPP, n.d.). Additionally, LFS is responsible for dispersing cash assistance, providing employment services, such as job training, job searching, and language classes, and providing case management for refugees and their families (SCMAPP, n.d.). The overarching goal of RPP, to "enable refugees to become employed and economically self-sufficient as soon as possible," is explicitly noted on South Carolina's DSS website (SCMAPP, n.d.). The intent is not to ease the transition for refugees and their families, nor is it to assess the full human capital of each arrival. Rather, the RRP's goal is to reduce reliance on state assistance and social services as rapidly as possible.

This overt focus has several effects on refugees resettled in Columbia. First, it posits American identity firmly around self-sufficiency, labor and income. Other ideals are sidelined as refugees are repeatedly informed their duty is to become self-reliant. Before every job training class, I had to deliver a 10-minute spiel on class and resettlement agency expectations, which repeatedly emphasized the responsibility of refugees was to find, accept, and maintain employment as soon as possible. Alongside this emphasis on taking the first appropriate job were continual threats of losing all public assistance and support. To be good citizens, refugees are encouraged to take the first job offered, rather than train for one that afford upward mobility or the draws on their individual skills and abilities. The jobs accessible to refugees, facilitated through LFS

employment specialists, are low wage, low skill manual labor positions that pay minimum wage, require long hours, and are often located in inconvenient locations.

The second effect that RRP has on refugee resettlement is it imposes a highly-restricted timeline for obtaining self-sufficiency. The 90-day benefit clock starts the moment refugees arrive. This places both the refugee and the resettlement agency on a very tight timeline. As federal and state funding is tied directly to the 'success' of resettlement agencies in getting their clients to self-sufficiency within 3 months of arrival, LFS does not have the luxury of allowing refugees time to explore housing options (Baratta, 2016). Instead, apartments are selected, furnished and provisioned for each refugee and their family without input. Upon arrival, Scarface explains "for everyone else, like the new guys, they [LFS] pick the apartment for them…they are choosing the location…they pay the apartments" (personal interview). These apartments are, with few exceptions, located within a specific complex on the northwestern outskirts of Columbia. When I inquired as to the reasons for this consolidation, Scarface replied "I think they don't have restriction on having a job" (personal interview). LFS has a long-standing relationship with this particular complex, as Baratta (2016) highlights it has served as the refugee placement community since the 1980s. Thus, a number of factors combine to place refugees into a very specific physical space during resettlement. Rental requirements, constricted timelines, limited funds, and established relationship all serve to create an enclave of refugees in Columbia.

The housing of all refugees in a specific complex on the outskirts of Columbia has several implications for refugees. First, it prevents significant intermingling with local populations. Refugee mobility is restricted to public transportation routes (Baratta, 2016).

This placement also constricts economic opportunities, as refugees are limited to jobs they can access either on foot or by bus. These restrictions also include time, as bus routes do not always align with job shifts. Refugees are committed to leases (usually 6 months), which restricts their ability to relocate to a more desirable location. In order to maintain amicable ties to housing, LFS often subordinates the needs of refugees, as evidenced by Alex's experience after his lease expired. When I asked what he disliked about his resettlement experience, Alex explained how LFS set up an apartment for him. "But they screwed me up…I signed a six-month contract, but she didn't tell me…[to] take picture of the inside of the house…the carpet was so dirty, there was a hole in the kitchen…at the end of the contract, I was waiting for my deposit back, like $620. I wait for like a month, I get a mail from them [saying] I have to pay them $475 more" (personal interview). When Alex asked LFS to help him, he was rebuffed. He was told "we can't do nothing because that's between you and them" (personal interview).

Refugee resettlement in Columbia thus places refugees in specific places/spaces. As a result of restricted government programs, short timelines and scant resources, refugees are afforded no voice in their placement. They have no control over their housing, the resettlement agency selects the location, the apartment, the furnishings, and the length of contract. Employment 'choices' are likewise restricted to low wage, low income labor that fit a very specific spatial and temporal frame. Coupled with a persistent emphasis on self-sufficiency, refugees are thus physically located in a restricted space/place, and within a very specific socio-economic hierarchy. This placement imposes clear definitions of citizenship, identity, and integration, while simultaneously restricting agency and upward mobility.

Despite the imposed geographic and socio-economic status placed upon refugees by a combination of federal, state and local actors, refugees are still able to exercise limited agency in their resettlement. This refutes a linear assimilation model, where LFS promotes specific identities necessary for integration, and the refugee eventually becomes like the host nation (Nagel, 2009). SIVs in particular prove capable of mobilizing identities and community resources towards specific goals, namely avoiding the restricted location and status afforded them by LFS during resettlement. For Afghani and Iraqi SIVs, the communities created in the resettlement context become crucial sources of employment, mobility, social capital, and information. The value of these community resources is amplified by the ability to speak English fluently and by past and present relationships with American military personnel and other SIVs. SIVs, in short, produce, and are embedded in, multiscalar social networks that, as much as local agencies, shape their resettlement process.

5.2 Employment Opportunities

Employment training and options provided by LFS are limited. Job classes are conducted on a fixed six-week rotating schedule, and rely heavily upon a set of highly scripted, boilerplate presentations that do not address the specific needs or inquiries of refugees in Columbia. Rather, they inform refugees of the general American employment cycle of applying, interviewing, paperwork, paychecks, and taxes. While useful information, emphasis on local job markets, work 'culture' and training resources would be far more beneficial. Additionally, job openings and placements are accessed mostly through connections established with LFS employment specialists and specific

employers. Regardless of an individual's skill set, most refugees are placed in poultry or vegetable processing plants, or employed via USC's catering company, SODEX. The emphasis on self-sufficiency provides a forcing function to driving refugees into restrictive jobs.

Alternate employment opportunities and information, however, are accessed by Iraqi and Afghani SIVs in Columbia on several scales, and in several ways. The resettlement context creates new, different forms of community that can be leveraged for employment opportunities. During resettlement, an expanded understanding of family allows individuals who have no blood relation to claim membership in a common Afghan or Iraqi community. This membership affords the SIV direct access to employment through other members. Alex shows the tie between employment opportunities and membership in the Afghan SIV community. "I got my job pretty quick... I came here in October, [and] January I got my job" (personal interview). Alex obtained his job at CarMax through Khabir, another participant. He compares his experience and ability to gain employment with other refugees, saying Lutheran Family Services praised him, "you're doing pretty good. There are people that were waiting for like, years here. They didn't get a job" (personal interview). Alex's membership in the Afghan SIV community allowed him to circumvent LFS's controlled job skills cycle.

Scarface, while not employed at CarMax with other SIVs, asserts that he can leverage his community connection to get a job there. "If I want, I [am] able to find a job at CarMax with these guys, they have full time job" (personal interview). Like Alex, Scarface appreciates the connections he has with the Afghan community in Columbia, and how this membership affords him economic opportunities. He states "as an

Afghan…I kind of know how things work here, not 100% but maybe 50% because I heard stories from my friends… before I moved I got information from all of them…most of the [other] refugees, when they end up here, they just come" (personal interview). While he does not rely on the SIV community for access to a job, Scarface does use his connections for information about work practices, local 'culture', and American societal norms.

The ability to access employment via a shared Afghani SIV identity in Columbia, SC illustrates one way in which SIVs leverage identity and community. On a larger scale, these networks span the United States, and even the globe. For some SIVs, the local network is based upon an expanded definition of family, one based on a shared 'culture' instead of a common bloodline, while their larger networks center on more traditional family ties. Khabir's decision to settle in Columbia was the result of a job offer facilitated by his friend, Muhammed. Khabir and Muhammed met by chance, during their time as translators for NATO. Muhammed obtained his visa first, and was settled in Columbia, where he gained employment from the local CarMax. Muhammed thus facilitated employment for all subsequent SIVs, before relocating to Texas, and then California. Khabir retains contact with Muhammed, as well as with other SIVs who have since departed Columbia, thus keeping his employment options open. When I asked if he planned to stay in Columbia, Khabir responded "I'm not certain now. Because of the job, you know…if I see that two more, or three more families leave from here, then I will go. Probably to Atlanta or California" (personal interview). This decision on relocation is driven by connections, formed around a common 'cultural' identity, and depends on the availability of a specific job. "Because my position is not available in every store…if

Atlanta has a vacant position, I will transfer there, or California" (Khabir, personal interview). Khabir's ties to Atlanta are based on family ties—he has extended relatives there—while his link to California is through a fellow Afghan SIV. In both cases, Khabir illustrates how he is able to leverage identity based community membership in order to plan future economic decisions for himself and his family.

In Khabir's case, the SIV community is reified, or perhaps even replaced, by CarMax. His continued connection to Muhammed across both space and time, via a common employer, serves to foment a new community, one based upon vocational skills. Their connection was initially formed via commonality in 'culture,' experience, and employment in Afghanistan. Through resettlement and subsequent employment, however the centripetal force transitioned to CarMax, and the specific roles Khabir can play within the organization. Thus, future employment opportunities are decided not by a 'cultural' community, but by a vocational one. Khabir prefaces his ability to relocate upon the availability of a specific position within CarMax. Family and community ties continue to influence his preferred locations (Atlanta or California), but the catalyst for movement is no longer a simple family/friend connection. Rather, CarMax provides the impetus, or impediment, for Khabir's economic mobility.

For other SIVs, large scale networks for accessing economic opportunities are similarly based on identities centered on shared experience. Scarface has "a lot of friends in California, Texas, New York, Virginia" (personal interview). These friends are both Afghani SIVs and American service members with whom he worked in Afghanistan. Using a social network based upon shared experience, Scarface prepared for resettlement and finding a job in the US "before I moved. I got information from all of them, and

asked them, what are you doing for a job? And how's life, how's this and that?" (personal

interview). Scarface obtained his first job, as a valet, through a connection with a local

Army officer. Alex likewise maintains contact with soldiers, and uses these connections

to query about the job market in Charleston and other locations throughout South

Carolina: "My buddy, his name is SGT Smith, he's in Charleston… I'm like, dude,

what's up? He says, man I want to get a job somewhere but it's real hard" (personal

interview). When asked if he planned to stay in Columbia, Alex said he did, based upon

employment and cost of living information obtained through friends settled across the

US. "I'm pretty sure I'm going to stay 'cause it's cheaper. I talked to my friend in Texas,

and they're paying like…for two bedrooms, $900, $1000. I pay $540" (personal

interview).

SIVs are able to negotiate the resettlement process, avoid undesirable

employment options, and access valuable job and training resources by leveraging

community-based social networks. An expanded definition of family, the traditional

source of economic opportunity, allows Afghani SIVs to trade information and access job

openings both locally and nationally. Additionally, social networks linking SIVs to other

SIVs, American soldiers, and even national companies provide further agency for SIVs to

negotiate their placement during resettlement. These are opportunities, and communities,

created by SIVs' unique background and language skills. They are not available to

'regular' refugees, and thus the SIV resettlement experience most likely stands in stark

contrast to other LFS clients. SIVs are able to exert independence from LFS and other

government agencies; they are able to use these resources to overcome imposed

immobility. This allows them to increasingly identity as Americans capable of self-

reliance and (as a result) self-determination. As Scarface proudly states "I can move myself and my family. I am on my feet" (personal interview).

5.3 Driving

Resettlement policies and implementation directly constrict physical mobility for refugees. In Columbia, LFS locates refugees in specific apartments along bus routes. These apartments are located on the fringe of the city, where housing costs are low. While this placement provides access to public transportation, it simultaneously restricts free movement to available routes and times, as the apartment complex is relatively isolated from the larger urban area. SIVs, however, as a result of their connections and identity-based communities, occupy a relatively advantaged position. This position affords them greater physical mobility, which in turn increases their advantages during resettlement. Simultaneously, this access to (and resulting reliance on) mobility becomes imbedded in their identities, their community relationships, and their negotiations of American identity. Mobility, in short, serves as both a tool and a framework for negotiating resettlement.

SIVs use mobility--specifically the bureaucratic procedures linked to owning and operating a car--to create understandings of American society and identity. Sami compares the experience of registering his car in US with doing so in Iraq: "In Iraq, you don't have any rights. This simple thing [registering your car] destroys you…I buy a car so I pay $400 to someone, like to complete the process and register the car. It take, I don't know, like 4, like 3 months… [and then] I go by myself to deal with it. And this $400 is gone" (personal interview). By contrast, in the US "we go to the DMV

department here…they give you a number…they smile…it's happy when you go to these departments, they want to help you" (Sami, personal interview). Scarface draws a comparison between driving in Afghanistan and passing a licensing test in the states. "If you have a driving background back home, it's hard for you to drive here…we don't have the stop signs and nobody cares back home. We just drive" (personal interview). In this case, his previous driving experience hindered his ability to access vehicular mobility in the US, by instilling incompatible driving habits.

Mobility, for SIVs during resettlement, is quite complicated. Although I never directly addressed mobility and access to travel, all participants in my study mentioned owning a car, possessing a driver's license, and equated American citizenship with unrestricted travel. Two insisted I go outside and view their vehicles. Alex emphasized his ownership of two vehicles, a Lexus and a Toyota, despite being the only licensed driver in his family. Access to mobility underscores acceptance, or rejection, of traditional gender roles. Sana, an Iraqi SIV, was quite frank about possessing a license and chauffeuring her brother-in-law and mother-in-law to appointments, while without exception, only Afghani male SIVs had driver's licenses. Mobility, obtained through a driver's license and access to a vehicle, thus proves to be both freeing and limiting (Cresswell, 2006). Khabir equates his wife's total reliance on him to driving, "you know, our wives, they cannot live alone. Because my wife cannot drive" (personal interview). Thus, mobility provides a framework for either reinforcing or contesting gender roles for SIVs.

Mobility also facilitates the expansion of a sense of family-based community and belonging. Afghani SIVs, as discussed in Chapter 4, renegotiate their family-based

identities and communities to include 'cultural' relationships in lieu of blood and tribal

ties. Access to vehicles, and the pooling of resources for economic security and

employment, simultaneously facilitate and reinforce this reinvented community. As

Khabir notes, "we drive, we carpool every day" (personal interview). This allows recent

arrivals, like Alex, to access employment opportunities before they are able to acquire

transportation and a license. It also encourages another type of mobility, the consolidation

of SIVs into a single housing area.

5.4 Housing Mobility

As previous discussed, upon arrival to the United States, Lutheran Family

Services is responsible for obtaining and placing all refugees, including SIVs, in

apartments. The availability of housing for individuals without a steady source of income

is limited, so refugees tend to be placed within a specific complex on the outskirts of

Columbia. SIVs, contrary to other refugees, have existing resources they leverage within

the community, specifically other SIVs and soldiers, and are thus able to occasionally

negotiate and obtain better initial housing. The diversity of these networks, coupled with

the influence of LFS on housing decisions, however prevents SIVs from initially

consolidating in a specific location. Scarface explains "when I move here, Richard, my

friend got me an apartment downtown, close to his house. I was there for one year, that

was nice everything, nice new apartment, nice houses, expensive" (personal interview).

However, after his initial contract expired, Scarface choose to move "because I wanted to

stay close to these guys [the other Afghan SIVs], because when I go home, when I go to

work, my family, my wife, my kids…they are in the same apartments, same complex. So

they can visit. So they don't think we are far from Afghanistan" (personal interview).

Scarface is thus able to leverage two identity based communities for housing mobility.

The first, his ties to a former commander, allowed him to access desirable housing

downtown, close to his friend and to the work his friend provided. Subsequently, he

chose to relocate to an apartment complex that contained the other four SIV families, in

order to access a desirable community for himself and his family.

Afghani SIVs rely on mobility to access, and shape, their community, based upon

a common 'cultural' identity. The selection of their current complex was a process

implemented by Muhammed, an SIV that has since moved to California. Khabir

discusses how this concentration of Afghani SIVs occurred. When I asked if the five

families had intentionally congregated in one area, he responded, "Yes, we were not in

here [originally]. I was the first… no Muhammed was the first one in these apartments.

Then as soon as I came from NY, I came straight here. And then Muhammed went to

California. Ahmed was in [another complex] and then Alex and Zorro [came here] later.

So we were meeting and we were greeting, and then everyone came here. The reason is,

our family" (personal interview). This highlights a great deal of agency. SIVs are able to

exercise agency in negotiating initial placement (as evidenced by Scarface), and then

access mobility to selectively settle in a centralized location, one identified and accessed

independent of LFS. Leveraging social and economic networks, SIVs thus prove capable

of identifying, and obtaining, desirable housing, outside the constraints imposed on them

by the resettlement and government support systems.

5.5 Jobs and Cars

SIV employment specifically facilitates mobility and expands their lived spatiality in two ways. First, all Afghani SIVs are in some way employed in the transportation industry. Three of the four I interviewed, plus Ahmed, who I did not gain access to, all work for CarMax. This employer ties them directly to cars, they physically work on them, and thus embody mobility through their labor. Khabir is proud of his job as a car painter, and recognizes this skill will allow him access to jobs across the US. He recounted his work history, starting as a detailer for $10.50 an hour and concluding with his current role as a certified painter for luxury cars. "I paint…I'm a certified painter for Mercedes and BMW, Jaguar…I went to Virginia, had my certifications, and came back" (personal interview). When I noted the value, and transferability of his certification, he concurred, saying "absolutely, that was my plan you know…for anytime if I want to leave CarMax, or if they fire me…I have the greatest skill" (personal interview). Khabir's work on cars provides increased mobility; through certification and work experience he can access employment across the US, a benefit he readily acknowledges. His specialty also allows him to claim belonging in a CarMax community, one that affords him access to various locations, based upon his past loyalty and proven skills.

By working for a vehicle retailer, SIVs are afforded discounted access to mobility, through internal purchase programs. They are able to purchase a limited number of cars annually at wholesale, rather than retail, prices. SIVs thus are able to leverage identity based access to employment opportunities to both obtain access to vehicles quickly and cheaply, and to use this access for economic benefit. Alex inspects, purchases, details and sells cars to augment his CarMax income and to avoid using banks and accruing interest.

He buys cars outright as a means of investing, "I put my money in the cars, but the banks, no. The bank is charging too much" (Alex, personal interview). He then sells the cars he pays cash for, and uses this money to support his family back in Afghanistan. "I still send them [his parents] money…The money I make, you know, it's not enough. If I get some extra money, like I sell a car, I get a couple hundred dollars extra, I still help my mom and dad. I send them some money" (personal interview). Here, Alex uses his Afghani SIV status to access employment. Through this employment, Alex obtains vehicles at a discount, which he sells for a profit. He then takes the profit, and reinforces his traditional, family obligations by sending the money to his parents in Afghanistan.

In addition to leveraging mobility to obtain a tangible link (via remittances) to a traditional family identity, Alex ties it to nostalgia. I asked him directly about specific spaces/places in which he was aware of an Afghan identity, and his response centered on mobility, a car and a specific rest stop in Afghanistan. "There is a place between CarMax and St. Andrew…I go there, it remind[s] me of the place I was parking my car and washing my car, between Kabul and Jalalabad" (Alex, personal interview). He elaborates further, "when I'm going there, I'm thinking like...I'm back in Afghanistan…twice a week, I was going there… there was a small restaurant, you can go there and eat…and they wash your car for free" (Alex, personal interview). He then showed me a photo a friend took of this rest stop, and explained that the image made him miss Afghanistan and his extended family intensely. And so he drives a few times a week to a stretch of road between CarMax and St. Andrews, because "I love the place…you know it's not the same place but it looks like the same" (Alex, personal interview). Alex ties mobility to nostalgia, memory, and his identity as an Afghan. This identity is strengthened by

frequent visits to a space/place, accessed by driving, that reminds him of a similar space/place he used to frequent for meals and a car wash.

Scarface is the outlier amongst Afghani SIVs. He chooses not to seek employment with CarMax, because a full-time job will restrict his ability to transport his children to and from Islamic school. Instead, he holds two jobs, one as a valet and the second as an Uber driver. Both these jobs are directly linked to mobility, driving and vehicles. Rather than leverage a community identity to obtain employment, Scarface uses the freedom of mobility, accessed via ties to an American soldier, to facilitate his children's education. "Valet parking is a good job…money's good, but our time is not enough…the reason I keep it is my daughter, it's kind of good, flexible for me to drop her off at school and pick her up" (Scarface, personal interview). Interestingly, while mobility allows Scarface to choose a job that fits around his children's school schedule, the requirement to transport his kids to school is leading to a renegotiation of gender roles within the nuclear family. Because his employment options are limited, Scarface is trying to help his wife get a license, by teaching the test instead of focusing on English lessons. "I print like 20 pages of all the practice test, with the answers, and she's kind of learning those, instead of learning the book… I'm teaching her the question and the answer" (Scarface, personal interview). Through the application of identity and community ties, Scarface is simultaneously using mobility to facilitate his children's education, while mobility is serving to redefine gender roles within his family.

5.6 Passports and Citizenship

Lastly, SIVs draw direct correlations between American citizenship and access to mobility, specifically the ability to travel internationally. When asked what made being an American distinctive, Sami tied American identity to freedom of movement, respect and feeling more human. "The passport, it gives you freedom to travel…when you go to the checkpoint [at the] airport, when you give them the American passport, you feel like a human. They respect you" (personal interview). Alex echoes this sentiment, when asked why he wanted to be a US citizen, he replied being "an American citizen, it's a lot of benefit. I mean, you can travel to all those other countries…you don't have to go to the embassy and [get] a visa, no. Because you have an American passport…people they have too much respect towards Americans" (personal interview). For SIVs, American citizenship is tied directly to the passport, and the freedoms and respect it provides. Thus, they seek to leverage their status, as refugees, towards obtaining the freedom afforded by American mobility.

Khabir illustrates this pursuit of citizenship and the how SIV status brings special treatment. "As soon as I came here, we got our green cards… we are different than others, [they] get their green cards after a year, because they came from a refugee camp. We are not…we are SIV" (personal interview). He thus draws a distinction between refugees, who must wait one year from arrival for their green cards, and SIVs, who receive permanent residence status upon arrival. This gives SIVs a head start towards citizenship- they are eligible to apply in four years, rather than five. Khabir further explains he used family to gain information about citizenship "my aunt and uncles explained everything. They told me I have to go to the court…there is a hundred

questions…the judge will ask me questions, ask me to write something…and then give the citizenship" (personal interview). He then ties this earned citizenship to travel, saying that being an Afghan is "a national identity, but being an American, you have more values…if you're a US citizen, you can go there [Germany to visit his in-laws] without any problem. So I see those values… if I am a US citizen, I can have that life" (Khabir, personal interview). Thus Khabir highlights how SIV status, applied through government systems and using established community networks, can be leveraged to achieve citizenship, and ultimately unrestricted mobility.

5.7 Conclusion

SIVs are able to draw on community resources, networks and identities to reformulate the spaces/places of resettlement. Access to a small, but centralized 'cultural' community provides them the means to circumvent economic and spatial restrictions (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006). This community, coupled with established social networks that span both Columbia and the United States expands the spatiality of their resettlement. SIVs are not entirely constrained to specific apartments or controlled by inadequate bus routes; nor are they restricted to limited employment choices. Rather, advantageous legal status (refugee), coupled with extended communities and support networks, allow Afghani and Iraqi SIVs (likely in contrast to other, non-SIV refugees) to extend their resettlement space/place and access desirable employment opportunities, housing, and information.

The ability to create and restructure identity, use these identities to claim belonging in communities, and access these community networks towards specific goals

illustrates the true ability of SIVs to exercise agency in the resettlement process. SIVs access employment opportunities using a variety of networks to pass information, access jobs, and facilitate mobility. They use mobility assets to gain economic opportunity and solidify social support. They leverage numerous identities towards mobility goals, including citizenship, in pursuit of increased opportunities and freedoms. Simultaneously, mobility serves to both provide freedom and restrict opportunities, and it likewise both reinforces 'cultural' community identity while eroding traditional gender roles. Afghani and Iraqi SIVs leverage their identities and communities to contest the restrictions imposed by resettlement policy while using the very same regulations to advance their pursuit of citizenship. Thus, resettlement provides a complex setting in which refugees, specifically SIVs, use their available identity and community resources to pursue desirable outcomes. Contrary to popular conceptions of refugees as hapless victims, these individuals and groups are capable of exercising a surprising amount of strategic agency in negotiating the limiting spatiality of refugee resettlement.

CHAPTER 6: LOOKING FORWARD

This research provides a case study of the experiences of 9 individuals during resettlement in order to challenge the perception of refugees as homogenously 'displaced' and lacking in resources or agency. Restrictive government policies applied uniformly across populations serve to position refugees in specific, disadvantageous positions and discourses. My findings highlight that refugees, nevertheless, are capable of actively negotiating their placement, both physically and socially, in the resettlement context. SIVs are shown to renegotiate understandings of identity and community, while leveraging identities to access existing communities and social networks, in order to circumnavigate restrictive, inhibiting resettlement policies.

This research could be expanded and improved in several ways. Future studies could access larger populations of SIVs in different locations throughout the US. On a local scale, this study could be continued longitudinally, to examine how SIVs continue to negotiate their resettlement within Columbia, SC. Another possible focus is to examine how citizenship changes SIV identities and communities, how obtaining the oft-mentioned passport serves to provide new mobility access outside the United States. My study could be expanded to look at other refugee populations within Columbia, based on gender, race/ethnicity, national origin, or any other number of identities. This expanded study could then compare and contrast different resettlement experiences, based upon the unique agency implicit within these categories. While my study serves to augment existing understandings of refugees as complex individuals capable of exercising agency

within resettlement contexts, a comparative study could focus on differing levels of physical, social and economic mobility within the refugee population. Focusing on different forms of mobility can serve to inform resettlement policy by contesting 'generic' policies that, while perhaps well-intentioned, can severely limit opportunities for refugees. Addressing a uniform policy application redirects attention towards the core foundation of refugee resettlement, self-sufficiency. It could thus serve to redefine 'successful' refugee resettlement, refocus attention away from a singular focus on employment, and towards a more multifaceted approach to social, economic and physical incorporation. This reorientation would serve both refugees, and the larger immigrant population, by potentially facilitating the reallocation of social services towards a more mutually beneficial end.

In addition to supporting academic literature that seeks to illuminate the complexity of refugee resettlement, I hope this project adds to the ongoing conversation about refugee policy by highlighting a unique segment of the refugee population. This sub-set of refugees, Afghani and Iraqi SIVs, many of whom have risked their lives alongside American troops, provide an alternate view to prejudicial political and public discourses that leverage fear and security in pursuit of restrictive policies. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, a total of 4,283 Special Immigrant Visas were issued to principles, with an accompanying 10,100 dependent visas under the variable Afghan and Iraq specific programs, while a total of 223 visas (principle and dependent) were issued under the permanent program for translators (U.S. Department of State, Special Immigrant Visas, n.d.). To date, over 34,000 persons have been resettled in the United States under all three variations of the SIV program (Bruno, 2016). Anecdotal evidence puts the average wait

time between application and admission at several years (Bruno, 2016: 12). My participants supported this finding, with the shortest time being roughly three years, and the longest five. Recent political activity under the current Trump administration places the SIV program in jeopardy, by both temporarily suspending the issuance of visas, and by specifically restricting Iraqis from entering the United States.

The future of SIVs, and particularly their descendants, is far from certain. The 1.5 and 2nd generations face many challenges in the new country of settlement, including linguistic differences, racial/ethnic discrimination, and the absence of extended family support networks (Pieloch, McCullough, and Marks, 2016). This holds particularly true for the children of SIVs, who have additional challenges posed by current religious stigmatization and spatial separation from Columbia's larger refugee population. This spatial separation all but ensures SIV youth will attend schools without other refugee students. One of the main focuses of the SSP is to assist these refugee youth, including SIV offspring, with succeeding scholastically by building connections through sport and with community mentors. While education is a primary contributor to (and possible indicator of) future employment, income and mobility options, it is far from a single determinant (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006). Thus, additional programs should be created, possibly through LFS or through other community outreach organizations, to assist SIVs, and the larger refugee population, with transitioning into American 'culture.'

SIVs provide a particularly salient counterpoint to the projection of Middle East refugees as militarized Islamic security threats. These individuals, and their families, have served on the front lines against terrorists and Islamic militants, risking their lives alongside American troops. They also subvert the popular view of Muslims as incapable

of accepting and participating in American society. My research shows that SIVs are not only willing to enmesh themselves in American society, they are particularly adept at doing so. By exercising agency during resettlement, SIVs are circumventing a system that restricts their ability exercise individualism, entrepreneurialism, and mobility. Thus, in overcoming the constrictive policies aimed at assisting the 'generic' refugee, SIVs embody the very sort of immigrant the United States purportedly seeks-resourceful, hardworking and receptive to embracing American 'culture.'

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APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following list of questions were used to guide my interviews. As mentioned throughout this thesis, I did not strictly follow this list. Rather, I allowed the conversation to flow depending on the participant's responses. Thus, these questions served to structure, not constrict, my research.

1. How was the SIV/refugee/immigration process? With whom did you interact during the application? How did they treat you? What did you like/dislike about the SIV/refugee/immigration program?

2. Have you joined any clubs, associations, or congregations? Why or why not?

3. With whom do you socialize? How often? How do you build friendships? What common ground do you find with your friends?

4. Do you maintain ties with family members back in Afghanistan/Iraq? How and how often? Do you have family members here in the U.S.? Do you plan to stay in Columbia indefinitely? Do you plan on becoming a U.S. citizen?

5. What does it mean to be an American? How do you think Americans are different than Iraqis/Afghanis? How are they the same?

6. What is your opinion of the refugee resettlement program thus far? Are you satisfied with the support given by LSC? Do you feel it was a wise choice to move to the U.S.?

7. What was your role with the U.S. Government in Afghanistan/Iraq? Do you feel valued by the local population and/or LSC? Do you think your service is understood and/or appreciated? Do you maintain ties with the soldiers you worked with?

8. Have you made any social connections with other [Bhutanese, Congolese, Eritrean, Afghani/Iraqi, etc.] refugees? Do you have anything in common with them? Are you all treated equally or does someone get preferential treatment?

9. What is your job or what would you like to do for a job? How did you obtain employment or how do you plan on obtaining employment? Is this what you want to be doing? If not, what would you like to do?

10. In what settings do you feel comfortable being a refugee? In what settings do you wish to hide your refugee status/blend in? Does it matter if you are alone or with other refugees? Does it matter if you are with friends or with your family?

11. In what settings does it matter that you are Afghani/Iraqi? In what settings does your national identity not matter? What does it mean to be an Afghan/Iraqi here in Columbia?

12. How do you view yourself? What makes you unique?

13. How do you feel when you go to LFS? How do you feel in the job classes? At your work? How do you feel in public spaces?