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ABANDONED ALLIES: A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF THE SPECIAL IMMIGRANT
VISA PROGRAM

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

CRIMINOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
August 2021

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ABSTRACT

ABANDONED ALLIES: A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF THE SPECIAL IMMIGRANT VISA PROGRAM

Sarah Pedigo Kulzer
Old Dominion University, 2021
Director: Dr. Vanessa Panfil

Employing a qualitative case study approach, the current study aims to critically analyze the U.S.'s use of the Special Immigrant Visa program in Iraq and Afghanistan by examining the individuals it serves, the agencies through which services are rendered, and the state's vested geopolitical interests in the program. Engaging in active participation, I observed and interacted with those who work within, assist, or utilize the services of Commonwealth Catholic Charities' refugee resettlement program, including case workers, service providers, and resettlement clients themselves. Examined through the lens of neoliberal harm, the theoretical frameworks of realpolitik and Simmel's (1950) concept of the stranger were used to highlight the major themes that emerged from the fieldwork. These themes include the existence of bureaucratic hurdles throughout the resettlement process, the placement of SIVs and refugees into the least desirable positions within society, and the state's use of calculated kindness, a term coined by Loescher and Scanlan (1998) referring to America's calculated response to refugee crises to advance foreign policy objectives. Under the SIV program, the U.S. entered into a predatory and parasitic relationship with Iraqi and Afghan nationals, relying upon them to fill vital positions to fuel the American war machine. Despite the invaluable role SIVs played in U.S. campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is abundantly clear that the U.S. did not hold up their end of the bargain. The message is loud and clear: you were "worthy" enough to die for us, but not to live with us.

This dissertation is dedicated to the refugees, SIVs, and resettlement agency employees who welcomed me with open arms, despite the often-hostile reception they themselves received. Your courage, resilience, and kindness in the face of adversity inspire me everyday. I can only hope that sharing their stories illuminates the humanity that refugees and SIVs are so often denied.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I reflect on my academic journey and dissertation work in the Criminology and Criminal Justice Program for the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice at Old Dominion University, I am often reminded of the nagging feeling that I did not belong. That one day someone would realize that I didn't have what it took to be there. To the contrary, the support and encouragement I received along the way inspired me to achieve more than I could have ever imagined.

The decision to transfer to Old Dominion University created a chance encounter, which, unbeknownst to me at the time, would ultimately lay the foundation of my academic and personal transformation. Dr. Dawn Rothe, thank you for lighting a fire in me. You believed in me when I didn't believe in myself and inspired me to call out the system for what it is. Before we met, I had a goal, but no passion. After working with you for just a few short months, I realized that I was not only capable of being here, but that I *needed* to be here. I would not be here if it were not for you, and I hope I can inspire the same passion in my students that you have in me.

Old Dominion University also led me to my committee chair, Dr. Vanessa Panfil. There were many days when I felt like the odds were not in my favor, but you always found a way to turn every barrier into an opportunity. Thank you for encouraging me through the ups and the downs, for being the backbone of this project, and for representing a critical voice within the department. I cannot adequately put into words my gratitude for your dedication to this project and to my own academic journey. My hope is that this project has brought you as much joy as it has brought me.

This project would also not have been possible without the remainder of my committee, Dr. Jennifer Fish and Dr. Jeehye Kang. Dr. Fish, you truly inspired my passion for fieldwork. Before working with you, my desire to work alongside refugees seemed like an impossible pipedream. Thank you for introducing me to the SIV program and the CCC. Your compassion and guidance in the field has inspired me not only to be a better researcher, but also an engaged global citizen. Dr. Kang, thank you for being such a positive ray of light and for conducting the research that you do. Your research represents such an underrepresented field in criminology and has inspired and impacted my own academic trajectory.

To the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, thank you for welcoming me and becoming my home. To Dr. Danner, Dr. Triplett, and Dr. Gainey, your counsel and encouragement throughout my tenure at Old Dominion University reinforced in me my passion and value and reminded me that even on my worst days, I belong here. To my colleagues that have become lifelong friends, Dr. Frank Wood, future Dr. Phillip Austin, Dr. Asha Ralph, and countless others, thank you for taking this journey with me. I can honestly say I could not have done it without your camaraderie and support. BAL 6015 was my safe space, my home away from home, and at times, my go-to therapy spot. Each of you have become my family and I am so proud of the individuals you have become. You continue to inspire me everyday. Dr. Wood, I am so grateful that we were able to complete this journey together. Thank you for being my person, I can't wait to hear about your continuing success for years to come.

Finally, I give thanks to my family. To my parents, thank you for your never ending love and support. To my father, thank you for the way you love mom, for working shift work; grueling nights, weekends, and holidays to provide for us. For the hours spent studying, quizzing, and re-quizzing on the living room floor. Thank you for skipping sleep to attend my

defense, and for always believing in me, even if I was the smallest on the field. The field may be different now, but I take that with me always. To my mother, thank you for being the person I turn to when everything falls apart, and being the one who always knows how to put it back together. Thank you for encouraging me to try again, for reminding me to take things “one at a time,” and not letting me be too serious. Thank you for teaching me to “look them in the eyes” when I was looked over and for encouraging me to believe in my own strength. To my husband, thank you for always being my biggest cheerleader, my shoulder to lean on, and my best friend. Thank you for being my practice audience and for always encouraging me to be authentically myself. Your willingness and enthusiasm to support me no matter where this journey takes us still baffles me, but I couldn’t imagine taking this ride without you. Lastly, to my son, you will always be the reason behind everything that I do. I hope to inspire in you an open mind, a forgiving heart, and welcoming arms. Through you, the world can become a better place.

I am proud to be the granddaughter of an immigrant, of my Appalachian roots, of being a first-generation college student, of having my son by my side, and to join the society of scholars. Fight the system, never give up hope, and use your platform for justice.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

How do you say thank you? This was one of the first questions I asked when beginning my fieldwork. Such a simple task can become quite arduous if one does not know the language to formulate the question. I later found that there was no need to worry; I was surrounded by people who so generously offered their time and skills to teach me. Yet, despite my newly acquired linguistic abilities, the question still remains. How does one say thank you for sacrificing your safety, your family, your home, your identity, and even your life? In all honesty, I am not sure the words exist to adequately address the gravity of the situation. However, I am certain of one thing, we must try.

The U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, and subsequently Afghanistan, resulted in immense loss of life and the creation of a whole new refugee crisis within the Middle East. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that the 2003 invasion of Iraq displaced as many as 1 in 25 Iraqis from their homes, resulting in the overall displacement of more than 4 million Iraqis. Similarly, by the end of 2015, Human Rights Watch reported as many as 3.9 million Afghans have been displaced from their homes (Watson Institute for International & Public Affairs, 2016). During this campaign, the U.S. relied upon Iraqi and Afghan nationals to fill vital positions necessary to fuel the American war machine. Often branded as traitors to their home country or “American slaves,” these individuals, as well as their families, faced harassment, threats, and incredulous acts of violence at the hands of fellow countrymen as well as various Islamic extremist groups.

The U.S. created the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program in an attempt to remedy the often-dire situations faced by our essential allies within the region. Specially created for Iraqi and Afghan nationals who provided mission-critical assistance to the U.S., the program provides eligible applicants with prioritized U.S. admission, resettlement services, and legal permanent residency (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2021). Given the privatization of the region's oil supplies and the creation of a World Trade Organization (WTO) friendly economic system in Iraq to name a few, the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan served to further its own geopolitical interests in the region. However, these benefits came at a great personal cost to the Iraqi and Afghan nationals who assisted the U.S. in achieving these goals. While the benefit to the U.S. is undeniable, the question remains as to the benefits received (if any) by our Iraqi and Afghan allies.

Given its relatively short lifespan, the SIV program has yet to be extensively examined by social science research. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the current study aims to critically analyze the state's use of the SIV program in Iraq and Afghanistan by examining the individuals it serves, the agencies through which services are rendered, and the state's vested geopolitical interests in the program. More specifically, the current research focuses on the resettlement aspect of the SIV program and aims to shed light on its predatory, and often parasitic nature, by exposing the harm and social inequality it works to perpetuate. In doing so, the research utilized herein will expose the inherent disposability of Iraqi and Afghan refugees by highlighting the U.S.'s prioritization of realpolitik and neoliberal agendas over the human life which serves to realize them.

The current study utilizes a criminology of crimes of states; as noted by Kulzer and Friedrichs (2019, p. 157), "harm that is a collateral consequence of state policies and actions, or

even the failure of state to act, can be addressed as part of the mission of a criminology of crimes of states.” Expanding beyond the legalistic framework, this research adopts a social harm, or zemiological approach. As noted by Raymen (2019, p. 1), “some of the most significant problems facing contemporary society not only lie beyond the scope of legal prohibition, but are thoroughly normalized and integral to the functioning of liberal-capitalist political economy.”

Further, the participant observation approach is utilized as part of a broader case study regarding the SIV program. Engaging in active participation, I observed and interacted with those who work within, assist, or utilize the services of Commonwealth Catholic Charities’ refugee resettlement program, including case workers, service providers, and resettlement clients themselves. The theoretical frameworks of *realpolitik* and Simmel’s (1950) concept of the stranger were used to highlight the major themes that emerged from the fieldwork.

The following chapters are included herein: review of the literature, theory, methods, three data analysis chapters, theoretical discussion, and conclusion. The review of the literature includes a comprehensive overview of the evolution of the SIV program as well as the role of volunteer agencies in the resettlement process. The theory chapter examines the U.S.’s use of *realpolitik* within the international arena and the condition of the socially dead stranger which serves to legitimize the state’s exercise of biopower. The data chapters utilize a constructivist approach which “leans toward a story” and “may contain characters and plots, although they reflect reality rather than dramatize it” (Charmaz, 2001, p. 690). These chapters demonstrate the existence of bureaucratic hurdles throughout the resettlement process, the placement of SIVs and refugees into the least desirable positions within society, and the state’s use of calculated kindness, a term coined by Loescher and Scanlan (1998) referring to America’s calculated response to refugee crises to advance foreign policy objectives. The theoretical discussion

section discusses the role of realpolitik in the creation and utilization of the SIV program, the evolution of the SIV from ally to stranger, and the hegemonic discourse that works to legitimize the harm and inequality perpetuated by the state's use of the SIV program. The conclusion section highlights the stories of resiliency encountered throughout the study, discusses the voices and perspectives missing from the current research, and provides a methods reflection.

Research findings highlight the state's predatory and parasitic relationship with refugee and SIV populations. The stories utilized herein illustrate the harms and inequalities perpetuated by the SIV program, yet these stories often become lost before we even know they existed at all. The U.S. relied upon SIVs to fill vital positions to fuel the American war machine. The same machine which leveled their country, destroyed many of their homes, and stripped them of their identities. One thing is abundantly clear: the U.S. did not hold up their end of the bargain. The message is loud and clear: you were "worthy" enough to die for us, but not to live with us.

The following chapters will provide a broad overview of the history of the SIV program and the theoretical and methods frameworks utilized herein, followed by the presentation and analysis of ethnographic data, theoretical discussion, and concluding with policy recommendations and a methods reflection.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

Throughout its history, the U.S. immigration system has been plagued with hidden agendas and overarching geopolitical goals. This phenomenon is frequently exemplified by the U.S. use of the Special Immigrant category as it prioritizes immigrants who have provided a service to the United States and its allies. Given the current political climate, the Special Immigrant category is particularly relevant regarding nationals of Iraq and Afghanistan. The following chapter provides a historical overview of the Special Immigrant category as well as its application to Iraqi and Afghan nationals. Further, the resettlement options made available to Iraqi and Afghan nationals, including a referral by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Priority 2 Direct Access Processing, and the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program are outlined. Finally, the process of resettlement for SIVs who arrive in the U.S. is detailed.

SPECIAL IMMIGRANTS

The term “special immigrant” is defined in Section 101(a) (27) of the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) and largely encapsulates a category of permanent employment-based admissions that are subject to annual numerical limitations. Additionally, the INA included a category of immigrants who could be admitted into the U.S. without being subjected to numerical limitations, known as non-quota immigrants. Among other groups, this category included returning lawful permanent residents (LPR), ministers of religion, natives of Western

Hemisphere countries, and employees of the U.S. government who served abroad. The special immigrant category was officially added to the INA by the 1965 amendments, also known as the Hart-Cellar Act, which re-designated non-quota immigrants as special immigrants (Bruno, 2014). The Immigration Act of 1990 further amended the original special immigrant category by imposing an annual numerical limitation of 10,000, with exemptions for certain classifications. It also created additional special immigrant classifications and placed numerical limitations on religious workers other than ministers. The 1991 immigration act further revised the overall limit of special immigrants from 10,000 to 7.1% of the global level of employment-based immigration and added yet another group of additional special immigrant classifications. This cap was enacted to ensure that one or just a few countries did not monopolize permanent immigration flows (Kandel, 2018).

Over time, the classifications listed under the special immigrant category have become increasingly broad, covering a wide array of individual cases. Despite this, these classifications often exhibit a humanitarian commonality such as religious workers, public servants, and medical doctors (Immigration & Nationality Act, 1952). Further, the classification of the special immigrant category plays a pivotal geopolitical role within the international arena in that the definition often aligns itself with the way in which immigrants in question ally themselves with the U.S. or other powerful Western nations. For instance, many of the special immigrant classifications are directed at individuals who have worked for the U.S. government. These include classifications for former 15-year employees of the U.S. abroad, former employees of the U.S. government in the Panama Canal Zone, and individuals whose personal safety has been compromised due to their work (Congressional Research Service, 2019). The latter of these is

particularly relevant regarding classifications for nationals of Iraq and Afghanistan who have worked in conjunction with the U.S. government.

Given the current political relevance of the special immigrant category, particularly regarding nationals of Iraq and Afghanistan, there has been increasing debate regarding the distinction, or lack thereof, between special immigrants and refugees. Currently, there are three options available to qualifying Iraqi and Afghan nationals for resettlement in a third country which outline this distinction. These include: a resettlement referral from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a Priority 2 (P2) Direct Access petition for resettlement via the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), and a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV). One key distinction between these categories is the necessity to prove one's status as a refugee. The P2 Direct Access Petition and the UNHCR resettlement referral require the applicant to prove their refugee status. Conversely, the SIV is designed specifically to resettle qualifying Iraqi and Afghan nationals who, due to their service to the U.S. government, face imminent danger in their native country, thus thwarting any requirement for refugee status (Rigby, 2010).

OPTION ONE: REFUGEES AND THE UNHCR

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, international legal obligation to assist refugees is rooted in the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (CRSR) and its 1967 Protocol and is often reinforced by domestic laws. Every member nation of the United Nations is obligated to adhere to these laws, regardless of their status regarding the CRSR or its 1976 Protocol (Rigby, 2010). The CRSR defines a refugee as someone who,

Owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return (United Nations Treaty Series, 1951, p. 14).

The operationalization of this definition, often referred to as the “protected characteristic,” is a critical aspect in reifying and ensuring that the basic human right to life is upheld for those who are forced to flee their country of nationality (Rigby, 2010). It is also important to note that this operationalization does not include gender or gender identity/expression and uses language referring exclusively to men. Men as the default is highly relevant to issues and assumptions within the SIV program and refugee resettlement, as will be discussed throughout.

Further, these conventions require the UNHCR to render solutions to the refugee crisis. To date, the UNHCR has provided three possible solutions. The first, and preferred, solution is voluntary repatriation, in which refugees return home once the conflict has ceased or a reasonable amount of stability has returned. The second solution requires the UNHCR to assist refugees in integrating into the host countries (commonly referred to as the country of refuge) in which they reside as non-permanent refugees. However, few host countries allow for this temporary arrangement (Government Accountability Office, 2010). While the U.S. does not directly oppose local integration within its own borders, the extent of its contribution to this effort is largely limited to the funding of programs which enhance refugee self-reliance in other countries. These countries include Burma, Nepal, Syria, and Cote d’Ivoire (Bureau of Population, Refugees, & Migration, 2017). The third (and last resort) solution is the permanent resettlement of refugees in third countries. According to the UNHCR (2004, p. 11), resettlement is reserved for “refugees under the office’s mandate whose life, liberty, safety, health or fundamental human rights are at risk in the country where they sought refuge.” Only a small

number of nations participate in UNHCR resettlement programs, and those that do enforce strict annual quotas. Currently, less than 1 percent of the world's registered refugees are resettled in third countries (Government Accountability Office, 2010).

There are seven distinctive characteristics that qualify a refugee for resettlement through the UNHCR. They are listed in the UNHCR (2004, p. 243) Resettlement Handbook as: “legal and/or physical protection needs, survivors of violence and/or torture, medical needs, women and girls at risk, family reunification, children and adolescents at risk, and a lack of foreseeable alternative durable solutions.” Legal and/or physical protection needs most notably references instances of refoulement, which is the “expulsion of persons who have the right to be recognized as refugees,” and the inability of a refuge country to ensure the human rights of the refugee are protected (UNESCO, 2017, p. 1). Survivors of violence and/or torture as well as those with medical needs primarily references resettlement into a country which can provide more adequate medical and psychological treatment that would otherwise be unavailable in the country of refuge. Women and girls at risk addresses the unique challenges facing female refugees, namely referencing sexual violence and exploitation, particularly when the woman or girl lives alone.

Further, the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights posits that the family unit is “entitled to protection by society and the state,” and the violation of this sanctity represents a violation of basic human rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1966, p. 1). Accordingly, the UNHCR characterizes family reunification as a qualifying characteristic of resettlement. Regarding children and adolescents at risk, the UNHCR's Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a minor as anyone under the age of 18 (United Nations Treaty Collection, 1989). Further, those who are orphaned, unaccompanied, or separated are given special consideration. Lastly, the lack of foreseeable alternative durable solutions criteria is the

least utilized category. The UNHCR (2004, p. 111) Resettlement Handbook defines refugees within this category as those lacking “an opportunity to establish themselves in their country of refuge in a manner appropriate to their cultural, social, religious, or educational backgrounds.” Given that this definition is true for most refugees, it is rare that a refugee qualifies for resettlement based on this criterion alone (Rigby, 2010). In order to narrow this widely encompassing definition, the UNHCR requires that a refugee hoping to qualify for resettlement based on this criterion demonstrate that they are “at best only tolerated, and possibly considered ‘illegal immigrants’; the protection regime in place in their host country is discriminatory in nature;” and that “voluntary repatriation is not an option and will not likely be for the foreseeable future” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2011, p. 290).

THE REFUGEE CRISIS IN IRAQ ACT

The Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act, often referred to as the Kennedy Act, was spearheaded by Senator Edward Kennedy and signed into law as a part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008. The Kennedy Act outlined U.S. moral obligations to Iraqi refugees. The Act paid particular attention to Iraqis who aided the United States and highlighted the grave consequences that befell them for their support. Consequently, it states, the U.S. has a “fundamental obligation to help the vast number of Iraqis displaced in Iraq and throughout the region by the war and the associated chaos, especially those who have supported America’s efforts in Iraq” (P.L. 110-181, §2). In a cabled message to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Ryan Crocker (2007, p. 1), the American ambassador to Iraq, echoed these sentiments, urging the U.S. to “reward Iraqis working for the United States for their sacrifice, loyalty, and dedication.” To emphasize the morality of the issue, Senator Kennedy (2007, p. 2) urged, “we

have a special obligation to keep faith with the Iraqis who have bravely worked for us...by providing them with safe refuge in the [United States].” This call to support Iraqi allies garnered bipartisan support, with 5 of the 14 co-sponsors of the bill coming from the Republican party. With this established united front, the Kennedy Act made two fundamental changes to U.S. immigration policy. First, it designated certain classes of Iraqis as eligible for Priority 2 processing (described below). Second, it created a new class of Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) for Iraqis who rendered services to the U.S. government (Rigby, 2010). By reconstructing immigration policy on the basis of service to the U.S. government, the military in particular, the Kennedy Act also represents an official militarization of the refugee program. Enloe (2000, p. 3) defines militarization as a “step-by-step process by which a person or thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military or comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas.”

OPTION TWO: PRIORITY 2 DIRECT ACCESS PROCESSING

The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is responsible for the admittance of refugees into the United States. The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) assigns one of three possible processing priorities to each refugee that is referred to USRAP. These processing priorities are used to determine which refugees are of “special humanitarian concern” to the U.S. (USCIS, 2019, p. 1). Priority 1 cases are designated for those who have been referred from the UNHCR, designated Non-Governmental Organizations, or a U.S. Embassy. Priority 2 cases are reserved for those groups which are determined to be of special humanitarian concern by USRAP. Priority 3 cases are designated specifically for family reunification (USCIS, 2019). Under the Kennedy Act, certain Iraqis qualify for P2 processing as refugees of special humanitarian concern by USRAP. These include:

Iraqis who were employed by, or worked for or directly with the United States Government, in Iraq; Iraqis who were employed in Iraq by a media or nongovernmental organization based in the United States; or an organization or entity that has received a grant from, or entered into a cooperative agreement or contract with the United States Government; spouses, children, sons, daughters, siblings, and parents of the primary applicant; and Iraqis who are members of a religious or minority community and have close family members...in the United States (P.L. 110-181, §2).

The addition of these qualifications allowed for as many as 140,000 Iraqi refugees to qualify for P2 processing (Human Rights First, 2009). This is a significant feat given that the P2 process allows a qualifying applicant to file for resettlement directly with the U.S., rather than waiting on subsequent referrals from qualifying agencies (Rigby, 2010). Ironically, P2 processing lists the spouses and children of principal applicants as being of special humanitarian concern, yet these groups are ultimately not valued despite their “special” status. As noted by Thompson (2006, p. 348) “conflict analysts often ‘locate’ women primarily in roles defined by humanitarian relief terms” rather than as actors in the political economy of war. The subsequent invisibility of the role of women in the political economy allows for the amalgamation of women and children into “faceless victims of war,” a concept Enloe coined ‘womenandchildren’ (Thompson, 2006, p. 348).

In order to initiate the process, the applicant must make contact with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) of the state department. Given that the P2 applicant is applying directly to USRAP, they must first demonstrate that they qualify for refugee status. After refugee status is sufficiently established, the principal applicant (PA) must e-mail his or her employment verification to the IOM and OPE. After which, the IOM will conduct a preliminary interview with the applicant and begin the process of obtaining security clearance. Once the applicant is vetted through security, the IOM conducts a final interview with the PA and his or her family (Rigby, 2010). If sufficient

evidence regarding the applicant's eligibility is found, fingerprints are taken, and final medical and security clearances are given. This process can take upwards of two years to complete, particularly if the applicant is processed in Iraq (Human Rights First, 2009).

While the additional qualifications allow for more Iraqis to qualify for P2 processing, very few who qualify actually reach the U.S. For instance, Human Rights First (2009) reported that a total of 15,627 Iraqis have been granted P2 access to the U.S. refugee admission program. This access implies that their affiliation with the U.S. has been confirmed and their applications are ready for processing. However, only 1,398 Iraqis (<9%) whose eligibility has been verified have resettled in the U.S. via P2 access to the refugee admissions program (2009). As of 2018, there remains upwards of 100,000 Iraqis waiting to be processed through the P2 Program (Human Rights First, 2018).

OPTION THREE: THE SPECIAL IMMIGRANT VISA PROGRAM

The third option afforded to certain groups of Iraqi and Afghan nationals for resettlement in the United States is the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program. Unlike the UNHCR resettlement referral or the P2 Direct Access program, applicants of the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program are not required to demonstrate refugee status (Rigby, 2010). Rather, applicants of the SIV program are required to prove that they were employed by, or on behalf of, the U.S. Government in Iraq. There are three SIV programs available to qualifying Iraqi and Afghan nationals. The first is a permanent program created specifically for those who worked under the U.S. as interpreters or translators. The remaining two are temporary programs designated for those who have worked for, or on behalf of, the U.S. government in a general manner. One is designated for Iraqi nationals while the other is a parallel program reserved for Afghan nationals.

In order to submit a petition for any of the SIV programs, the PA must also meet the admissibility criteria outlined by the Immigration and Nationality Act. These include standards regarding health and security, as well as a public charge, or indigence, standard. However, unlike refugees, Special Immigrant Visa holders are exempt from the public charge ground and are, therefore, not required to prove economic self-sufficiency (Congressional Research Service, 2019).

Section 1059: Program for Translators and Interpreters

In January of 2006, approximately three years after the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, Congress enacted the first of many legislative actions which would make certain Iraqi and Afghan nationals eligible for lawful permanent residency (LPR) in the United States based on their service to the U.S. government (Congressional Research Service, 2019). Section 1059 of the FY2006 National Defense Authorization Act authorized special immigrant status for certain Iraqi and Afghan nationals, as well as their spouses and children, who worked directly under U.S. Armed Forces as translators or interpreters for at least one year (Twu, 2010). Here again, the role of spouses, who are almost always female, is located in the realm of humanitarian relief, despite the often critical role they play in the political economy of war.

In describing the work of Riley (2008), Dowler (2012, p. 494) argued that, “women’s bodies are militarized in that they are rendered visible, invisible or hyper-visible depending on the needs of the sovereign.” As suggested by Enloe (2000, p. 44) the military needs women “to boost morale, to provide comfort during and after wars, to reproduce the next generation of soldiers, to serve as symbols of the homeland worth risking one’s life for, [and] to replace men when the pool of suitable male recruits runs low.” In this sense, women are both depended upon and relegated to invisible roles in order to accomplish state interests. This gendering of social

life, “such as the daily and intimate interactions within families, is key to the presentation of militarized logics” (Dowler, 2012, p. 490).

Congress deemed that the intent of the program was to “reward and protect those men and women who put themselves and their families at great personal risk by assisting the U.S. government in Iraq and Afghanistan as interpreters and translators” (Twu, 2010, p. 738). This provision was given a numerical limitation of 50 principal applicants (PA) per year, a number which would count against the overall special immigrant cap (Congressional Research Service, 2019). Solomon (2008, p. 16) argues that,

The very subtleties of militarization permeate the daily lives of individuals, making them more accepting of, and reliant upon, ‘militaristic ideals,’ including the importance of military endeavors, the patriotic superiority of those enlisted and their families, and the military’s status as representative of the broader state.

By “rewarding” interpreters and translators, and later all those who worked on behalf of the U.S. government, the SIV program represents what Enloe (2000) describes as the “maneuvering” of Iraqi and Afghan nationals into positions which support military ideals. Solomon (2008, p. 17) describes maneuvering as “the means through which militarization happens and involves the manipulation and exertion of (political) control, over those populations not traditionally associated with soldiering.” In 2007, Section 1059 was amended to include certain Iraqi and Afghan nationals who worked directly under the Chief of Mission as translators or interpreters for at least one year. This amendment also included a requirement for the PA to obtain a favorable letter of recommendation from the Chief of Mission or flag officer of their assigned unit, as well as a temporary increase on the annual limit to 500 PAs for fiscal years 2007 and 2008, a number that would be exempted from the overall special immigrant cap (Bruno, 2014). Further, Public Law 110-181 (2008) amended Section 1059 to allow for the carrying over of any remaining visas to the next fiscal year.

Section 1244: Program for U.S. Employed Iraqis and Afghans

Spearheaded by Senator Edward Kennedy and the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act, a second SIV program was created in Section 1244 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008. This provision authorized 5,000 SIVs to Iraqi nationals who:

Worked with or on behalf of the U.S. government for a period of at least twelve months on or after March 20, 2003; provided faithful and valuable service to the U.S. government documented by a positive recommendation from the employee's senior supervisor; clear a background check and screening as determined by the Secretary of Homeland Security; have experienced or are experiencing an ongoing serious threat as a result of U.S. government employment; obtain COM approval; and are otherwise eligible to receive an immigrant visa and admission to the United States for permanent residence, except that the grounds for inadmissibility relating to "public charge" shall not apply (Twu, 2010, p. 744).

These 5,000 SIVs were originally given a five-year cap with a provision to carry forward any unused visas from one fiscal year to the next up until fiscal year 2013 (Congressional Research Service, 2019). Subsequently, the program expired at the end of FY2013; however, a short-term extension was approved for FY2014. Public Law 113-42 allowed for the continued processing of all cases which were pending at the time of the original expiration date, as well as the addition of 2,000 new cases given that the PA completed one year of employment on or before September 30, 2013 and filed an application by the end of the calendar year (P.L. 113-42). The final amendment to the Iraqi program, enumerated in the NDAA for FY2014 allowed for the issuance of no more than 2,500 SIVs to principal applicants after January 1, 2014 and limited the application deadline to the end of September (Congressional Research Service, 2019).

It wasn't until 2015 that Afghan nationals were included into the Section 1244 program. This was done via Title VI of the Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009 which allowed for an additional 1,500 SIVs to be allotted for nationals of Afghanistan annually through FY 2013 (Congressional Research Service, 2019). Any unused numbers were to be carried over to the next

fiscal year up until 2014. Given the ongoing security threat faced by formally U.S. employed Afghan nationals, an additional 1,000 SIVs were made available through the end of the year via the Emergency Afghan Allies Extension Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-160, §1 IN CRS). A further 4,000 PA applications were allotted by the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2015 with an expiration date of March 31, 2017.

Given the pending expiration date, the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2016 acknowledged the continuously deteriorating security conditions faced by formerly U.S. employed Afghan nationals and included a provision which stated,

It is the sense of Congress that the necessity of providing special immigrant status under this subsection should be assessed at regular intervals...taking into account the scope of the current and planned presence of United States troops in Afghanistan, the current and prospective numbers of citizens and nationals of Afghanistan employed...and the security climate in Afghanistan (Congressional Research Service, 2019, p. 6).

In this spirit, the Afghan SIV program was further amended by increasing the number of available SIVs from 4,000 to 7,000 and expanding the application deadline from December of 2014 to December of 2016 (P.L. 114-92, §1216). Despite this, employment qualifications were made to be increasingly restrictive, requiring two years of employment rather than the original single year requisite. The National Defense Authorization Act for FY2017 further complicated SIV qualifications, allowing only those Afghans who worked as interpreters and/or translators or those who have performed “sensitive activities” for the U.S. government in Afghanistan for SIV eligibility (P.L. 114-328 §1214). This increasingly restrictive rhetoric illustrates the inherent disposability of Iraqi and Afghan lives. While the U.S. may differentiate between those who completed “sensitive activities” and those who engaged in day-to-day work, these distinctions did nothing to protect those whose lives were at stake due to their cooperation with the U.S. government.

Despite the mounting restrictions, the same legislation allowed for an additional 1,500 SIVs to be made available and extended the employment and application deadlines to December 31, 2020 (Congressional Research Service, 2019). Finally, the Consolidated Appropriations Act for fiscal years 2017 and 2019 allotted a combined 6,500 additional SIVs for a grand total of 18,500 visas available for issuance after December 19, 2014. The funding for these additional SIVs were contingent upon the Secretary of State's completion of all required reports regarding processing prioritization (P.L. 115-232, Div. A, §1222).

Application Process

The application process for the Iraqi or Afghan special immigrant program contains multiple steps which often prove to be lengthy and cumbersome. The process varies slightly for applications under Section 1059 and Section 1244, as well as for those applying from abroad or within the U.S. While the majority of applicants apply from constituencies outside the United States, there are contingencies available for those applying from within the country (Bruno, 2014).

For those applying under Section 1244, the first step is to apply for Chief of Mission approval. To do so, the principal applicant must submit to the Department of State a letter of employment verification, a letter of recommendation from a direct U.S. citizen supervisor, and a statement describing the threats the applicant has received as a direct result of their employment with the U.S. government (Bruno, 2014). The requirement for eligible applicants of Section 1244 to prove the existence of an "ongoing serious threat" has been frequently cited as a limitation of the program. This often requires applicants to submit further documentation from their employers or community leaders outlining the threat, which places an additional burden of proof on the applicant. Further, Twu (2010, p. 746) argues, if the adjudication officers do not have

“clear standards to determine what constitute a ‘serious threat,’ when is ‘ongoing,’ or at what time it becomes ‘serious,’ there is too much room for arbitrariness or non-issuance of the visas.” If the applicant’s claims are, in fact, determined to be sufficient, an approval letter from the Chief of Mission is received. This requirement yet again outlines the inherent disposability of Iraqi and Afghan lives in the eyes of the U.S., and the lengths taken to avoid issuing SIVs. Rather than rewarding Iraqi and Afghan nationals for the great personal risks taken while serving under the U.S. government, the U.S. is able to skirt the possibility of approving SIVs by ranking levels of threat relative to Iraqi and Afghan lives. Isn’t it enough to have risk their lives upon being hired? Further, the requirement for an ongoing serious threat essentially places SIVs back into the category of refugees, which requires a well-founded fear of persecution. Consequently, the U.S. is, again, able to thwart the responsibility of granting SIV status by placing would-be applicants back into the larger pool of refugees.

Once an approval letter has been received, the applicant must file a petition with the Department of Homeland Security’s U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS). This is also the first step of the application process for applicant under Section 1059. For applicants under the translator/interpreter program, the required supporting documentation includes proof of employment as translators/interpreters, a letter of recommendation from the Chief of Mission or a qualifying general or flag officer from the military unit from which they were assigned, as well as a recent background check and security screening conducted by the Chief of Mission or the U.S. military (Congressional Research Service, 2019). For applicants of Section 1244, required supporting documents include the aforementioned Chief of Mission approval letter, as well as the applicant’s letter of recommendation from a direct U.S. citizen supervisor.

Once the petition for classification as an Iraqi or Afghan special immigrant is approved by USCIS, it is forwarded to the Department of State's National Visa Center, who then requires additional documentation from the applicant. First, the applicant must submit a copy of the biodata page from each applicant's passport, including all qualifying family members. For Iraqi applicants, this requirement has proven to be particularly detrimental (Rigby, 2010). In January of 2007, the U.S. announced that it would only recognize G-series Iraqi passports and that all other passports issued would face immediate invalidation (Stockman, 2007). Many Iraqis who fled the country found themselves stranded without valid travel documentation. To further complicate the matter, the majority of the G-series passports could only be issued from Baghdad, requiring applicants to make the expensive, and often dangerous, journey to Baghdad in order to obtain a valid passport (Twu, 2010). The process was extremely slow and cumbersome, as applicants were also required to produce official documentation that, due to the war, was often inaccessible, incomplete, or even destroyed (Constantine, 2008).

The National Visa Center also requires birth certificates from the principal applicant, as well as all qualifying family members, and police certifications from applicants who are nationals of Iraq or any applicants over the age of 16 who have lived outside of Iraq or Afghanistan for more than one year (Congressional Research Service, 2019). This requirement is also particularly onerous. As noted by Rigby (2010), SIV processing only takes place in Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt. However, not all of the issuing countries offer police certificates to a person who is living outside the country. Yet again, applicants seeking the required documentation are forced to travel to locations which present a considerable financial and security threat. Even if the trip is made, government officials are often unwilling to issue a certificate. This is particularly true of Jordan, which requires an official declaration of Jordanian residency to be

filed (Rigby, 2010). Due to circumstances largely outside the control of the applicant, much of the required documentation is extremely difficult to obtain. Finally, the PA must also submit a refugee benefits election form indicating whether the individual would like to participate in the Department of State's Reception and Placement (R&P) program if granted special immigrant status.

If the applicant was, in fact, able to secure all of the required documentation, the National Visa Center schedules an in-person interview for the principal applicant, as well as the family, which is to be held at a U.S. embassy or a consulate abroad (Bruno, 2014). During the interview, the applicant's fingerprints are taken and the applicant, as well as any qualifying family members, are required to obtain a medical examination at their own cost. This is particularly difficult for those applying in Iraq. Due to the significant security breakdown in Iraq and the subsequent deterioration of the country's field of medicine, these medical examinations are conducted at the U.S. Army Combat Surgical Hospital in the International Zone, causing significant delays in the application process (United States Department of State & the Broadcasting Board of Governors Office of Inspector General, 2008).

If the adjudicating officer is satisfied with the applicant's interview and all medical screenings have been completed, the applicant is informed of any missing documents which may prevent the issuance of the visa. More often than not, cases require additional administrative processing before the application packet can be approved (Congressional Research Service, 2019). While the USCIS does not provide any official statistics regarding the amount of time this process takes, those who have worked with the applicants have reported that it takes at least a year to complete (Human Rights First, 2009).

For those who opted to participate in the R&P program, once the process is completed and the visa has been issued, travel to the U.S. is arranged by the International Organization for Migration. Those who opted out of the program are responsible for arranging their own transportation. Once in the U.S., the applicants are granted legal permanent resident (LPR) status (Congressional Research Service, 2019).

THE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS

The Role of Volunteer Agencies (Volags)

After applicants are officially granted LPR status, the process of resettlement in the U.S. begins. The existing resettlement system in the U.S. has become wholly dependent on non-profit volunteer agencies, commonly referred to as volags. Beginning with the Corporate Affidavit Program of 1946 and the promise of financial support, volags guaranteed support for displaced persons so they would not become a public charge (Zucker, 1982). Further, the Truman Directive, as well as its 1950 amendments, placed the responsibility of resettling refugees to volags and state commissions. It wasn't until the influx of Cuban refugees in the 1960s that the federal government assumed significant financial responsibility for refugee resettlement. The Cuban Refugee Emergency Center was founded in 1960 by President Eisenhower. Subsequently, four volags received federal funds to provide refugee resettlement assistance: The National Catholic Welfare Conference, Church World Service, the International Rescue Committee, and the United HIAS Service (Zucker, 1982).

After the hasty evacuation of Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) and the subsequent Indochinese refugee crisis, the U.S. passed the "Soviet and Other" refugee program. In doing so, the relationship between the federal government and non-profit volunteer agencies evolved into a

fifty-fifty matching scheme. Within this system, volag settlement expenditures were reimbursed via federal contributions at the rate of one dollar for every two spent (Congressional Research Service, 1980). This system between public and private entities on both the federal and state level proved to be cumbersome and expensive. In an effort to consolidate the refugee resettlement process, President Carter established the Office of the Coordinator of Refugee Affairs as a part of the Department of State (Zucker, 1982). Soon thereafter, the 1980 Refugee Act was signed into law. Under this law, the Office of Refugee Resettlement was established with the task of developing a comprehensive refugee resettlement program in the United States. Currently, the Office of Refugee Resettlement examines the role of volags in refugee resettlement, in an attempt to “define more clearly the complex and often chaotic relationships among the volags and the federal, state, and local governments” (1982, p. 158).

Once the Department of Homeland Security accepts a refugee resettlement package, the State Department is responsible for ensuring that all resettlement services are met. Rather than relying on government offices to provide these services, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), the policy making body within the State Department who determines refugee services, contracts resettlement responsibilities out to refugee resettlement agencies. These resettlement agencies are non-profit, non-governmental organizations that are tasked with refugee resettlement using federal funding. For their services, ranging from adjustment and acculturation to psychological and material assistance, to the naturalization process, the agencies receive “public monies under sundry contractual arrangements...according to various formulas determined by time, need, and circumstance” (Zucker, 2982, p. 158).

Commonwealth Catholic Charities and the Resettlement Process

Currently, there are nine national resettlement agencies (volags) operating within the U.S.: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Church World Services, World Relief, the Episcopal Migration Ministries, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, the Ethiopian Community Development Council, the International Rescue Committee, and the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. The largest of the resettlement agencies is the USCCB, which provides services for approximately 30% of all refugees resettled in the United States (USCCB, 2019). The USCCB is made up of a multitude of dioceses who oversee the refugee resettlement program within their given parish. Included in this hierarchy is Commonwealth Catholic Charities of Hampton Roads, which falls under the tutelage of the Catholic Diocese of Richmond.

Within the *Refugee-Community Partnership Manual*, the Catholic Diocese of Richmond outlines “The Refugee’s Road: From Home to the U.S.” First, a well-founded fear of persecution results in the fleeing of one’s country of origin. The UNHCR then determines one of three possible solutions for resettlement: repatriation, asylum, or resettlement. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service then determines whether the family will enter the U.S. resettlement program. Once this determination is made, the family is allocated to a domestic resettlement agency. This decision is typically based on the capacity of the agency, the needs of the case, as well as the presence of family living in the area (commonly referred to as U.S. Ties) (Eby, Iverson, Smyers, & Kekic, 2011). If allocated to the USCCB, the family is assigned to one of approximately 100 Catholic Dioceses in the U.S. with a refugee resettlement program. If allocated to the Diocese of Richmond Regional Office, the family is assigned to one of three regional offices of Refugee and Immigration Services of the Catholic Diocese of Richmond:

Richmond, Roanoke, or Hampton Roads. Finally, the family arrives at their designated resettlement agency (Catholic Diocese of Richmond, 2019).

Commonwealth Catholic Charities, a sub-organization of the USCCB, provides four integral services: case management, employment, English as a Second Language services, and immigration services. The case manager coordinates the services that are received within the first 90 days of arrival. These include but are not limited to: the securitization of housing, furnishings, clothing, groceries, household supplies, transportation and interpretation services, as well as “health checkups and treatment, immunizations, social adjustment counseling, problem solving, cultural and social orientation, crisis intervention, and school consultations” (Catholic Diocese of Richmond, 2019, p. 11). Employment coordinators are responsible for recruiting employers, assisting with the creation of resumes and completion of job applications, and assisting with the adjustment to the U.S. job market and any job specific duties. ESL coordinators are tasked with the recruitment and training of volunteer English tutors as well as conducting English level assessments. While ESL services are listed within the USCCB manual as a provided service, budget restraints have resulted in the cessation of the ESL program at the Hampton Roads office. Lastly, the USCCB provides access to certified immigration representatives to assist with Immigration and Naturalization Services at low-cost to the client.

This initial phase of resettlement is funded through the Reception and Placement (R&P) Program. The R&P Contract requires volags to provide specific services at each step of the resettlement process. This is done to ensure that refugees are provided with the same basic services throughout the United States. At the pre-arrival stage, agencies are required to meet clients at the airport, provide them with transportation and a furnished place to live, weather-appropriate clothing, and a culturally appropriate meal when they arrive. At the post-arrival

stage, volags under the R&P Contract must assist with the social security application, arrange medical health screenings, child school enrollment, apply for benefits, and assist with all other necessary services including ESL and employment services. The R&P Program provides volags with \$2,075 per refugee. “Of this total, \$1,125 must be used for direct support of refugees and \$950 is available for the local affiliate to spend on its staff and infrastructure” (Bruno, 2017, p. 4). R&P funding is designated for a 90-day period, after which the refugee is expected to be gainfully employed and largely self-sufficient. Although the R&P Program plays a vital role in funding the resettlement process, it does little to specifically address the needs of women whose roles often remain invisible even throughout the resettlement process, despite the reality that, from an aid perspective, conflict affects women differently from men (El Bushra & Piza-Lopez, 1984).

Within the following chapter, the theoretical frameworks of *realpolitik* and the stranger condition will be discussed. These frameworks will be used as a guide to explore the state’s use of the SIV program by examining the state’s vested interest in the program, the individuals it serves, and the agencies through which services are rendered.

CHAPTER III

THEORY

FRAMEWORK

The current research utilizes a criminology of crimes of states; as noted by Kulzer and Friedrichs (2019, p. 157), “harm that is a collateral consequence of state policies and actions, or even the failure of states to act, can be addressed as part of the mission of a criminology of crimes of states.” Expanding beyond the legalistic framework, a social harm, or zemiological approach, is employed herein. As noted by Raymen (2019, p. 1), “some of the most significant problems facing contemporary society not only lie beyond the scope of legal prohibition but are thoroughly normalized and integral to the functioning of liberal-capitalist political economy.”

REALPOLITIK

Traditionally, the actions of states, including criminality and oppression, have been understood by analyzing the political economy and the international political economy. More recently, however, state actions have been analyzed through the lenses of geopolitical interests, or realpolitik (Collins & Rothe, 2014). Rothe and Friedrichs (2015, p. 76) define realpolitik as “a political ideology that prioritizes the economic, military, and political interests of states above moral and ethical obligations.” While the ideal modern *civitas maxima* (a concept which reflects the existence of a higher body politic and the collective belief that this intangible whole is greater than its parts) operates to create a collective moral framework, the disjunctive and contradictory forces that exist within international intercourse make it impossible that states would accept any

binding rules that are capable of limiting unilateral quests for power (Bassiouni, 2006). The theoretical framework of *realpolitik* works to explain this complex relationship.

Originating in the 19th century, the *realpolitik* theoretical framework is situated within the school of realism as a “political theory of power and neo-realism as an interest-based theory” (Rothe, 2010a, p. 113). Traditional economy-based perspectives have been instrumental in understanding a state’s economically driven policies; however, they overlook the geopolitical interests involved in state decision making. These include “ideological and religious interests, as well as issues of power beyond those tied to the economic system – namely, social-political capital and the preservation of legitimacy” (Collins & Rothe, 2014, p. 6). While the modern *civitas maxima* requires a collective sense of morality and responsibility for the benefit of all, states often forgo moral and ethical obligations in the name of self-interests and political expediency (Bassiouni, 2006). Subsequently, Schabas (2006) notes, if justice is at odds with the political or economic goals of the state or the international community, accountability is often met with lethargy and pushback. Given this, states that operate under the discourse of *realpolitik* forgo the morality and idealism associated with the *civitas maxima* model and make decisions based on bounded rational self-interests (Anderson, 2010; Bassiouni, 2006; Rothe, 2010b; Rothe & Collins, 2014; Rothe & Steinmetz, 2013).

The *realpolitik* theoretical framework has been used to explain various forms of state criminality and when combined with the concept of the stranger, is useful for understanding the U.S. use of the Special Visa Program, especially given its long and controversial relationship with Iraq and Afghanistan.

THE STRANGER

One way in which U.S. treatment of refugees and SIVs can be examined is through the ontological lens of the stranger. Simmel (1950, p. 1) asserts that the stranger represents a fixed position in society, explaining,

As a group member, rather, he is near and far at the same time, as is characteristic of relations founded only on generally human commonness. But between nearness and distance, there arises a specific tension when the consciousness that only the quite general is common, stresses that which is not common.

The stranger is ontologized as being uncommon, a position where the human condition alone isn't sufficient to relate him to the social group. Further, Ahmed (2000, p. 3 emphasis in the original) describes the stranger as, "not just someone whom we don't know, but the one whom we *know* to be a stranger," providing support to Simmel's (1950, p. 3) assertion that the position "has no positive meaning; the relation to him is a non-relation." It is through this lens that Collins and Rothe (2020) situate refugees, immigrants, and the homeless into broader society, noting that these groups are "disallowed the general attributes of being purely human, and their position in society is one of a non-relation to the rest of the societal group" (p. 58).

Within the American system, commonality is understood through the participation in neoliberal capitalist society. Kotsko (2018) describes neoliberalism as a "totalizing world order" (p. 95) which legitimizes itself using "deeply individualistic terms that render market competition the highest actualization of human liberty" (p. 10). Consequently, within this system, one's value and belonging are equated to economic participation and potential for capital accumulation. As Cacho (2012, p. 161) notes

In other words, as deciphered and interpreted through American neoliberalism, human value registers as human capital, and social worth is evaluated from the perspective of "real" and "speculative" markets. We can attribute value by recounting a person's useful and unique assets, talents, skills, and investments, and we can speculate about a person's future value: What can we expect this person to contribute to U.S. society in the future?

Utilizing a Foucauldian (1980) perspective, this uniquely American form of neoliberalism, in which capitalist logic has permeated the social and political spheres, requires an “economic analysis of the non-economic” (p. 243). It is in this sense that Collins and Rothe (2020, p. 58) argue “being a refugee, immigrant or homeless is not common in relation to the ‘normality’ of participating in the neoliberal capitalistic society,” thus relegating these groups to the condition of the stranger.

Assigning Value

Through this uncommonness, the state exercises the power to decide who is valuable or “worthy” of political relevance (Cacho, 2012). As noted by Agamben (1998, p. 142) the state holds “the power to decide the point at which life ceases to be politically relevant...in modern biopolitics, sovereign is he who decides on the value or the nonvalue of life as such.” This differentiation between the “worthy” and “unworthy” is achieved through the state’s use of biopower. Biopower can be understood as,

A social field of power and struggle, in which the vital aspects of human life are intervened upon for the purpose of rationalizing regimes of authority of knowledge, the generation of truth discourses about life, and the modes through which individuals construct and interpellate subjectivities between a sense of self and the collective (Anthrobiopolitics, 2013, p. 1).

More simply, biopower includes the management of bodies through the division of those who should live (worthy) and those who should die (unworthy). From a Foucauldian perspective, “the sovereign right to kill (*droit de glaive*) and the mechanisms of biopower are inscribed in the way all states function and are constitutive elements of modern state power” (Collins & Rothe, 2020, p. 58). The subsequent penetration of state power into the natural life turns mere politics into biopolitics. Agreeing with Foucault’s definition of biopolitics as being the convergence of natural life and state power, Agamben (1995, p. 5) added “the inclusion of bare life (man’s biological

being or zoe) in the political realm constitutes the original – if concealed – nucleus of sovereign power...the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power.” Subsequently, one’s biological existence is subject to the politics of the state. In so doing, modern politics have politicized bare life (Agamben, 2005).

One of the major components of biopower and the condition of the stranger is the concept of racism. Drawing from the work of Foucault and Agamben, Mbembe’s (2003, p. 27) conception of necropower, ‘the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not,’ incorporates the importance of race in the state’s differentiation between the worthy and unworthy. Mbembe (2003) asserts that the power to divide people into who must live and who must die operates through a biological field separating the living from the dead. This control “presupposes the distribution of human species into groups, the subdivision of the population into subgroups, and the establishment of a biological caesura between the ones and the others” (2003, p. 17). This differentiation is what Foucault (1997) defines as racism and is argued to be the key mechanism to perpetuate the exercise of biopower. According to Mbembe (2003, p. 17), “the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the murderous functions of the state.” It is, he says, “the condition for the acceptability of putting to death.” Adding to the analysis, Gilmore (2004, p. 16) conceptualizes racism as a killing abstraction, noting that

Racism is a practice of abstraction, a death-dealing displacement of difference into hierarchies that organize relations within and between the plant’s sovereign political territories...indeed, the process of abstraction that signifies racism produces effects at the most intimately ‘sovereign’ scale, insofar as particular kinds of bodies, one by one, are materially (if not always visibly) configured by racism into a hierarchy of human and inhuman persons that in sum form the category of ‘human being.’

Utilizing differentiation through racism, necropower produces what Debord (1988, p. 40) characterizes as “new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are

subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of the living dead.” When examining the condition of the living dead, Mbembe (2003) asserts that one must address the historical account of slavery given that it is one of the first examples of biopolitical experimentation resulting in social death. Here, the slave condition resulted from “a triple loss: loss of a home, loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status,” a condition that is identical to “absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death (expulsion from humanity all together)” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 21). Those deemed to be socially dead are denied what Arendt (1973, p. 296) denotes as the “right to have rights.” Once this occurs, the stranger, those deemed to be socially dead, are effectively barred from personhood and subsequently the ability to participate in rights-based politics. As noted by Cacho (2012, p. 7)

Engendered by corporate capital and the neoliberal state, ineligibility to personhood refers to the state of being legally recognized as rightless, located in the spaces of social death where demands for humanity are ultimately disempowering because they can be interpreted only as asking to be given something sacred in return for nothing at all.

Through this discourse, personhood is framed as an unrequited gift which must be given freely by the privileged population which requires the ceding of power and privilege for “nothing” in return (Patterson, 1982).

The carceral state’s differentiation between the worthy and unworthy is often accomplished without question from its constituents who have been indoctrinated through the hegemonic discourses surrounding neoliberalism, a system which “serves to let us know about our world and how it should be, and we, the believers, accept this a true, obvious and without question” (Collins & Rothe, 2020, p. 1). From a Foucauldian (1980) perspective, this ‘truth’ regarding these populations of the stranger becomes the dominant discourse, effectively barring any alternate ways of thinking while at the same time preserving the integrity of the state. Collins and Rothe (2020, p. 59) assert

The truth and discourse react to the social consequences or behavioral manifestations without acknowledging the nature or social roots much less the tie to neoliberalism. Yet, the state's truth, or hegemonic discourse, operates within neoliberalism and in accordance with the interests of those who most benefit from it. Instead, this truth and hegemonic discourse dissolve the homeless, immigrants and refugees into behavioral fragments rather than unitary human lives.

The figure of the stranger is often transparently recognized in that its nature is assumed, and, as Ahmed (2000, p. 6) argues, takes on “a life of its own only insofar as it is cut off from its histories of its determination.” This transparent recognition often results in an obfuscation of reality, allowing for the totality of one's experience to be boiled down to individual character flaws. Cacho (2012, p. 9) argues, “when transparently recognized, such figures are abstracted from the social relationships that affect them, assumed to represent ways of being in the world, defined only by people's claims and conclusions about their nature.” For Collins and Rothe (2020, p. 58) this process is essential to the state's demarcation between the worthy and unworthy as it allows for the reduction of “the multitude of intersecting social conditions that can cause people to become homeless, refugees and immigrants to a set of individual character flaws, someone else's problem and the unwanted: socially dead.”

The following chapter will examine the methods used in the current study which aims to critically analyze the state's use of the SIV program in Iraq and Afghanistan by examining the individuals it serves, the agencies through which services are rendered, and the state's vested interest in the program.

CHAPTER IV

METHODS

INTRODUCTION

Given its relatively short lifespan, the Special Immigrant Visa program has yet to be extensively examined by social science research. While many of the bureaucratic intricacies of the program have been explored in chapter 2, the effectiveness of the program as well as its overall impact on those it was created to serve is still widely unexplored. This overall gap in the literature inspired the current study, which aims to critically analyze the state's use of the SIV program in Iraq and Afghanistan by examining the individuals it serves, the agencies through which services are rendered, and the state's vested interests in the program. By employing a criminology of crimes of states and a social harm, or zemiological approach, the current research utilizes a criminological lens to address the harms emanating out of U.S. policy in the Middle East, particularly in relation to the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program.

When I first became interested in the SIV program, I had a number of questions regarding the program's reach, process, and how SIV holders are treated. These were some of the overarching questions I had:

- Question 1: What role do SIVs play in the realization of U.S. geopolitical goals within Iraq and Afghanistan?
- Question 2: How are SIV applicants treated during the process of receiving a visa? Are they afforded any protection?
- Question 3: Once in the U.S., do the services rendered by resettlement agencies meet the standards of living which were outlined by the SIV program?

- Question 4: Is the U.S. upholding their promise to Iraqi and Afghan foreign nationals who qualify for the SIV program?
- Question 5: Does the implementation, or lack thereof, of the SIV program by the U.S. government constitute a state crime?

In designing the data collection phase of the study, I moved from these primarily yes/no questions to a more inductive approach, studying the SIV program and refugee resettlement more generally. While I am still able to address these questions in my research, this approach also allows me to present a more holistic picture regarding the SIV program. The overarching purpose of this research is to examine the inherent disposability of SIVs and refugees by highlighting the U.S. prioritization of realpolitik and neoliberal agendas over human life that serves to realize them. This is done by examining the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program utilizing a qualitative participant observation approach as a part of a broader case study design.

RESEARCH DESIGN: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

This research aims to critically analyze the state's use of the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Program in Iraq and Afghanistan by utilizing the qualitative case study approach. Simons (2009, p. 21) defined the case study as an "in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program, or system in real life." Likewise, Mesec (1998, p. 45) defined the case study as a "comprehensive description of an individual case and its analysis, i.e., the characterization of the case and the events, as well as a description of the discovery process of these features." The case study approach allows for an in-depth analysis of a specific phenomenon drawing from a single case. As such, "the idea of representative sampling and statistical generalizations to a wider population should be rejected,

and analytical induction should be chosen instead” (Starman, 2013, p. 34). Further, Mesec (1998) suggests that researchers should select a case for a research unit where a problem or phenomenon that one is interested in exists. Given that the focus of the current study is directed towards the Iraqi and Afghan SIV program and aims to understand how the state’s use of the program, driven by realpolitik and neoliberal agendas, has resulted in the inherent disposability of Iraqi and Afghan refugees, the Iraqi and Afghan SIV program, with a particular focus on resettlement, was selected as the unit of analysis.

George and Bennett (2005, p. 19) identified four advantages of qualitative case studies compared to quantitative methods: Their potential to achieve high conceptual validity, strong procedures for fostering new hypotheses, usefulness for closely examining the hypothesized role of causal mechanisms in the context of individual cases, and their capacity for addressing causal complexity. In terms of validity, which examines the accuracy of the research measures, rather than lumping together cases that are dissimilar in order to obtain a larger sample size as done in quantitative work, the qualitative case study approach allows for “conceptual refinements with a higher validity level over fewer number of cases” (2005:19). It also takes into account the contextual factors other than those that are codified that quantitative research tends to omit. For instance, concepts such as democracy and state power are difficult to measure using quantitative methods. However, case study methods allow the researcher to more accurately measure these concepts using contextualized comparisons. In doing so, the researcher “self-consciously seeks to address the issue of equivalence by searching for analytically equivalent phenomena – even if expressed in substantively different terms – across different contexts” (Locke & Thelen, 1998, p. 11).

Further, the participant observation approach is utilized as part of a broader case study regarding the SIV program. Schensul and colleagues (1999, p. 179) define participant observation as “the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the research setting.” Spradley (1980) identified four levels of participant observation, including passive participation, moderate participation, active participation, and complete participation. I utilized the active participation method of participant observation within the current research. This method occurs when the researcher seeks to “participate in many activities of those [they] observe, doing what others do, to learn the cultural rules and values” (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011, p. 182). I actively participated by observing and interacting with those who work within, assist, or utilize the services of Commonwealth Catholic Charities’ (CCC) refugee resettlement program, including case workers, service providers, and refugee clients themselves. This approach allows for a systematic and holistic understanding of the interworkings of the resettlement program, as well as the SIV program itself, and thus works to best address the research questions at hand.

DATA COLLECTION

In order to best understand the SIV program, as well as the people who are impacted by it, I have engaged in various volunteer opportunities, centering around Commonwealth Catholic Charities (CCC). This organization acts as the primary refugee resettlement provider in the greater Hampton Roads Area of Virginia. To gain a systematic portrait of how refugee resettlement occurs in this program, I began acting as a permanent volunteer, spending 12 hours or more at the organization per week. This took place within a six-month time period beginning in March of 2019 and ending in September of 2019. This included a brief intermission between

August 8th and August 21st. Each permanent volunteer is required to have a supervising employee. Given my interests in the SIV program and learning more about SIVs in general, I was assigned to the resettlement case worker. The case worker is responsible for the client's intake as well as their first 90 days in the United States. This includes, but is not limited to, picking up clients from the airport after they have arrived in the U.S., securing housing and ensuring the availability of basic necessities, ensuring the completion of all required paperwork, scheduling and transporting clients to routine health screenings, assisting clients with assimilation and adjusting to life in America, and any other basic necessities they may require. As a volunteer case worker, I am also tasked with fulfilling and completing these duties.

Further, my research is enabled by my relationship with the CCC. As a volunteer, I have been introduced to both the bureaucratic and field work aspects of the Special Immigrant Visa program. One of my primary tasks is the completion of client administrative paperwork, such as client biodata, I-94 (proof of legal entry), notice of I-797 (notice of application approval by the USCIS), employment verification cards, applications for social services (Medicaid/SNAP/TANF), and all other documents they encounter throughout their first 90 days in the United States. Other critical tasks include acting as a liaison for clients as they traverse the Social Security Administration (SSA), various social services appointments, health screening appointments, as well as smaller tasks such as opening bank accounts and signing lease agreements. My role and duty in these interactions is to provide transportation, assist in the language barrier between the client and service providers, assist with the completion of forms and documents by explaining in greater detail what the document entails, act as the liaison between the CCC and service providers, and to ensure that the overall well-being of the client is being met.

My volunteering has provided me with a robust understanding of how refugee resettlement works, as connected to the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program. Each day I volunteered with the CCC, I recorded clear and detailed field notes using the voice to text feature on my password protected cellular phone. Each field note was labeled with the date and time. Further, in order to obtain a more holistic understanding, many field notes included notes on individuals, but also activities, and the physical environment itself. My 12 hours per week schedule also provided several hours of observations of, and direct interactions with, individuals who work within, assist, or utilize the services of CCC's refugee resettlement program. However, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the SIV program itself, my fieldwork moves beyond how the resettlement process works to include narratives of refugees themselves that may not directly pertain to the resettlement program, including their experiences in their home country that led them to pursue an SIV or more general information about their status as a refugee. In doing so, it is possible to illustrate the challenges faced, as well as the successes achieved, of individuals served by the overarching refugee resettlement program and the SIV program specifically. It is important to note that my experience with the CCC, including the types of clients I interacted with, was partly determined by the travel ban and, subsequently, who was permitted to enter the U.S. Further, my experiences at the agency were also impacted by these restrictionist immigration policies as fewer clients resulted in budget cuts, employment layoffs, and increasingly negative public attitudes towards refugees and SIVs. The travel ban was signed by then-President Trump in January 2017 and was revised three months later. The executive order completely suspended the refugee resettlement program for 120 days and specifically inhibited the entrance of refugees from Syria, Iran, Sudan, Libya, Somalia, and Yemen (International Rescue Committee, 2021).

Finally, given that the “sample size” is wholly dependent on the number of individuals who work with, assist, or utilize the services offered by the CCC, the true sample size of all those whom I came into contact with during data collection is unknown, and its total cannot be discerned using statistical methods. As mentioned, qualitative methods are intended to explore processes, such as how and why, instead of how many. That said, I regularly interacted with 10 key staff members at or affiliated with the CCC, 41 clients (and dozens of their family members) with whom I had repeated and detailed encounters over a period of time, and innumerable others in various agencies and in the general public during the course of our interactions. Thus, my project had 51 primary informants in terms of key workers and clients, and an estimated nearly 100 secondary informants that made up others who play a direct role in SIV resettlement, such as family members and agency workers. This speaks to Small’s (2009, p. 24) assertion that in-depth qualitative studies “may be conceived as not small-sample studies but multiple-case studies.”

HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECTS PROTECTION

This research was approved by Old Dominion University’s College of Arts and Letters Institutional Review Board as exempt, given that I provide each client with a brief introduction and request that serves as a consent script, and to remove identifiers and keep all the collected data in a secure area.

These requirements are representative of a broader conversation regarding research ethics with marginalized people. When working with refugee populations in particular, there have been numerous inquiries regarding the impact of the research process itself on already vulnerable populations (Allotey & Manderson, 2003; Jacobson & Landau, 2003; Ellis et al., 2007; Mackenzie et al., 2007; Limbu, 2009; Hugman, Bartolomei, & Pittaway, 2011). Two of the main

concerns regarding research ethics and refugee populations are a lack of informed consent and the possibility of a breach in security (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003; Hughman, Bartolomei, & Pittaway, 2011; Hughman, Pittaway, & Bartolomei, 2011). While informed consent is often touted as a one-and-done event, Hughman, Bartolomei, and Pittaway (2011, p. 663) argue that informed consent should be an “ongoing relational process, rather than a one-off event.” In this way, researchers are held to higher standards of accountability.

To address the first requirement set forth by the IRB, the following introduction is used for each client: “As you know, I am a student at the university. I want to learn more about the special visa program. Is it okay with you if I take notes when we speak so I can remember? Your stories would be very helpful for my research.” For many of the clients, English is their third or fourth language. This was kept in mind when scripting the wording of the introduction, which has been phrased in a direct and simple way to ensure the most complete comprehension. To reinforce this knowledge and utilize an ongoing relational process, all employees at the CCC, including the case worker and resettlement supervisor, were aware of my status as a researcher, and it often came up in conversations with clients.

Further, to address the second concern regarding participant confidentiality, all field notes are kept in a locked office or on a password protected device and do not contain any identifying information of refugees, ensuring that their identities cannot be readily ascertained. While working in the field, I learn a great deal about each client, who often divulge highly identifiable information in casual conversations. Some of these conversations included participation in well-known military conflicts as well as direct contact with violent extremists. Many of these individuals still have family within the region. In order to protect the confidentiality of the client, no names have been used while transcribing these conversations

within my field notes. Further, in the case of well-known events, all references to the name, date, and place of the event are omitted in an effort to ensure that the client cannot be singled out.

Admittedly, this means that some insights will not be as clear or visible as they would be if this detail was included, but this choice is made to reduce any further harm to participants. (As I argue throughout, they have already been subjected to enough harm from their engagement with American institutions.) These precautions also work to address concerns regarding refugee research as a whole. As suggested by Jacobsen & Landau (2003, p. 187),

The political and legal marginality of refugees and IDPs [Internationally Displaced Persons: those who are displaced within their country of origin] means that they have few rights and are vulnerable to arbitrary action on the part of state authorities, and sometimes even the international relief community...few authorities are willing to protect refugees from those who may do them harm, including researchers' whose actions may have less than ideal outcomes. One largely unacknowledged problem is the issue of security breaches arising from researchers' confidentiality lapses.

The stories and data utilized herein quite literally speak to life and death matters for refugees, SIVs, and their families and friends who may have been left behind. The current research was conducted with this understanding at the forefront of the fieldwork, ensuring that every precaution was taken to protect the confidentiality of all participants involved.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Even before becoming a permanent volunteer with the CCC, I was exposed to the local refugee community via the Refugee Studies Research course offered at Old Dominion University. It was through this course, and a subsequent Independent Study course, that I was introduced to the CCC and became familiarized with the refugee resettlement process.

Throughout the longevity of the course, each student was paired with a CCC employee whose job description fit their particular research interest, which is how I became familiar with the case

worker. We were also introduced to various SIV families who utilized the services of the CCC. Through casual conversation, often facilitated by the instructor (Dr. Jennifer Fish), we learned a great deal about their back stories and experiences with the SIV application process.

While participating in the Refugee Studies course, as well as the subsequent Independent Study course, I also participated in an at-home language program facilitated by students from Old Dominion University. While the CCC did provide ESL classes at that time, the at-home language class allowed for mothers with young children to participate without requiring childcare. These classes met every Friday for a span of two semesters. The majority of the participants were SIVs whose husbands had worked for the U.S. government in Iraq or Afghanistan. There were also some participants from Syrian and Pakistan. Often during the course of the class, the women would speak about their past struggles at home, as well as their current struggles in the United States.

Lastly, there have been a small number of SIV “success” stories made available by various news outlets and non-profit organizations. These narratives are primarily retrieved from No One Left Behind, a non-profit organization whose mission is to ensure that America keeps its promise to its wartime allies from Iraq and Afghanistan. The relationships and narratives depicted within the section where these “success stories” are discussed are used for the purpose of providing additional background and contextual information to guide the analysis.

THE RESEARCH SETTING: THE CCC AND OTHER SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES

Throughout my 1.5-year tenure with the CCC, the physical environment changed quite drastically. When I was first introduced to the CCC in 2017, it was housed in two adjoining buildings. The first building contained the caseworkers, the health liaison, and the job

coordinator, as well as other administrative staff, while the second building was devoted to ESL courses and child school enrollment. There were varying levels of English courses which were offered ranging from introductory to advanced. Each classroom was equipped with a row of banquet tables with chairs facing a chalk board. The walls were sparsely decorated with laminated educational posters, much like those one would find in an elementary school. The primary building was separated into three major sections: the waiting room, the common work area, which contained the supervisor's private office, and the back cubicles, which housed the remaining employees. In the last year, the CCC has gone through a multitude of physical and staffing changes given the reduced federal budget allocated towards refugee resettlement. Currently, the entire organization has been consolidated into one building and the ESL program has been eliminated entirely. For a short period, the ESL classes were moved into a small conference room located in the primary building; however, it was subsequently dissolved in the following months. The adjoining building now serves as a high-end hair salon.

Along with the ESL staff, the budget cuts also affected the case workers as well as the interpreter services specialist. In 2017, the Hampton office was staffed with two case workers who shared the case load between themselves and their volunteers. Today, there is one case worker who is responsible for every case that is allocated to the Hampton office. As a result, the caseworker must rely heavily on volunteer support in order to meet client demands. Further, after the original employee moved out of state, the interpreter services specialist position, which was tasked with coordinating interpreters for important client appointments, was dissolved.

While the office itself is located in an affluent part of Newport News, the areas where the clients are housed, and where the majority of the support services are rendered, are in less desirable neighborhoods. Even though clients are housed within a ten-mile radius of the office,

the condition of the neighborhood visibly declines as you drive down the main road. Specialty stores aimed at affluent college students are gradually replaced by corner stores and ethnic food markets and multi-million-dollar condos give way to overcrowded, run-down housing complexes. A large majority of the support services, including the Social Security Administration (SSA), the Social Service building and the Health Department, are all located within the same general area. The SSA building is particularly representative of the overarching physical environment which is traversed by CCC clientele. Unlike neighboring SSA offices, the particular office utilized by clients of the CCC is fully staffed with armed security guards and employs a full-size metal detector, similar to what you would find at an airport.

A WEEK IN THE LIFE

While any given week at the CCC can be described as busy, some of the most eventful weeks are those which include the arrival of a new client. During these weeks, employees and volunteers play a balancing act between existing cases and the new arrivals. Given the aforementioned staffing shortage at the CCC, many of the routine tasks are completed by volunteers. All client related tasks are broken down into two parts, the pre-arrival and the post-arrival. Each department has their own unique set of tasks and given my position as a volunteer case worker; my tasks were oriented as follows:

Pre-arrival tasks (to be completed the week of arrival):

- Coordinate with the U.S. Tie (if any)
- Identify and secure appropriate housing
- Secure and coordinate furniture donations
- Purchase any home goods not secured via donations
- Set up the furniture in the secured housing
- Shop for, and stock groceries in the secured housing
- Set up utilities for the secured housing
- Collect weather-appropriate clothing donations

- Determine any immediate health requirements of the clients (if any)
- Create Reception and Placement program (R&P) documentation for each person within the case
- Organize transportation to and from the airport

Post-arrival tasks:

- Pick up the clients from the airport
- Conduct a home orientation
- Conduct a cultural orientation
- Apply for a social security card
- Apply for benefits (SNAP, TANF, Medicaid)
- Coordinate medical screenings
- Apply for a mailbox key
- Conduct home visits (24 hour, 30 days, 60 days)
- Assist with opening bank accounts
- Assist with all other general needs of the client

The majority of these tasks must be completed within the first week of arrival. Given the nature of each task, they often require a great deal of time and effort. For instance, one particularly busy week during my time at the CCC occurred when an exceptionally large family arrived from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Given the size of the family, it took a full day to set up their apartment, which involved assembling multiple sets of bunk beds for the children and stocking the home with groceries. Once they arrived, two large vehicles had to be coordinated to pick them up from the airport. Given their extended time in refugee camps, they were largely unfamiliar with common household items used in the United States. Subsequently, an agency employee and I stayed for hours explaining how to operate each household item. Some of which included: water faucets, door locks, the oven and stove, the sliding back door, shower curtains, fire alarms, and thermostats. Despite our best efforts, throughout their first week we had to make emergency stops at their home to free them from their locked bedrooms.

After setting the family up in their apartment, they must apply for their social security cards. Given the size of the family, two trips to the social security office had to be made. These

trips constitute my most time-consuming task. Often, trips the SSA take upwards of three hours to complete. With this family in particular, we spent a combined total of six hours at the SSA. After the six-hour trip, the principal applicant (PA) informed me that the family was in need of additional groceries. Given the family's unfamiliarity with U.S. shopping customs, we are often encouraged by the agency to accompany them on their first trip to the grocery store. The client spoke fluent French and knew very little English. Given our language barrier, we walked around the store and used charade like gestures to communicate what it was he was looking for. Luckily, French and Spanish have just enough similarities that I was able to discern what he needed. Once we made it to the check-out line, we went step-by-step through the process of using an EBT card. By the time I brought the family back to their apartment and returned to the office, it was well past 6:00 p.m. Given the needs of the family, my typical 12-hour week was stretched to an almost 20-hour week. Each week is different and presents its own set unique challenges; however, these pre-and post-arrival tasks are completed for each client who arrives at the CCC.

THE SIV CLIENTS

Clients of the CCC come from a variety of different countries and cultures and each have their own unique histories and backgrounds. The largest majority of those who are admitted to the United States and served by the CCC are from Africa and East Asia. Those from the Near East, including Iraqis, Iranians, and Afghans, make up a smaller portion of agency clientele (Catholic Diocese of Richmond, 2019). While those from Africa and East Asia are classified as refugees, the majority of the clients from the Iraq and Afghanistan are admitted as SIVs. Each of which exhibit characteristics unique to their label.

The large majority of the clients I have worked with are refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). These clients primarily speak French, Swahili, and/or Kinyarwanda, and have very little exposure to the English language. They are also largely unfamiliar with U.S. culture including our basic hygiene, living, and employment standards. Despite this, the majority of these clients are flexible and largely willing to adapt in any way necessary. For instance, all of the clients I have spoken to from the DRC spent long periods of their lives living in refugee camps, many of whom were not afforded the opportunity to work or live in their own private quarters. By the time they arrive in the U.S., they eagerly accept any employment opportunity that is offered to them, which are often the positions and shifts that are deemed as being the least desirable by U.S. citizens. Likewise, when it comes to housing, many of the refugees from Africa and East Asia are accepting of any living situation arranged for them by the CCC. Despite the efforts of the agency, given their lack of employment and credit histories, refugees are often relegated to largely undesirable housing facilities.

Conversely, SIVs from Iraq and Afghanistan are much more familiar with U.S. culture given their frequent contact with U.S. citizens during their line of work. For instance, the majority of the men whom I have spoken with worked in close contact with the U.S. military, often living with them for months, or even years, at a time. This is made very apparent in some cases due to their adoption of common U.S. and military slang. However, SIVs also tend to be more aware of their elevated status as well. While in Iraq and Afghanistan, many of the SIVs filled vital roles for the U.S. government. Those whom I met were attached to U.S. Special Forces teams, the U.S. Embassy, and Joint Coalition Forces to name a few. While the nature of these positions placed them in grave danger, it also elevated them to positions of respect and importance among their Western employers.

As a result, SIVs have been dubbed by employees of the CCC as being much more “difficult” to work with. For instance, rather than blindly accepting the living arrangements coordinated by the CCC, many of the SIVs requested a certain housing complex. This particular complex holds a reputation among clients as being the cleanest and most updated of the housing facilities. Further, it also took much longer for SIVs to accept positions of employment. While they tended to be the easiest to arrange interviews for due to their familiarity with the English language and U.S. culture, they frequently turned down job offers that were not in their desired field. One SIV client whom I worked with spent nearly half a year on the job market and by the time my data collection ended had continued to reject job opportunities that are not within the medical field. While these tendencies often led many employees of the CCC to label SIVs as being “difficult,” in reality the desire for adequate housing and a well-paying job is a cornerstone of the American Dream and is sought by not only SIVs, but citizens of the U.S. as well.

Each of these groups presents their own set of challenges in the field. First, there were obvious cultural differences between myself and the clients, which often made communication difficult. For instance, given my gender identification as a female, some of the male clients were hesitant to speak with me or utilize me as a source of information. Most of them preferred to speak with the case worker who is a male with a similar background to their own. However, after prolonged contact with each client, this hesitancy began to diminish. Further, many of the female clients assume very traditional and subservient roles to their husbands. Often, the husband and I would engage in conversation, after which he would choose whether or not to relay the information to his wife and/or children.

As previously mentioned, there are also definite language barriers between myself and the clients. While many of the male SIVs spoke fluent English, many of their wives and children

were not exposed to English at all. Even with the male SIVs, some words and phrases would become lost in translation. Despite these small discrepancies, the language barrier was easily transcended with these clients. However, the language barrier is quite large with the refugee populations, many of which speak no English at all. In order to communicate with these clients, I relied heavily on agency employees who spoke fluent French. Often, we would communicate using exaggerated hand gestures or via the Google Translate function on our cellular phones. However, the latter option was limited as many clients were unable to read and write. Throughout the current research, to accurately capture the way in which the clients talk, direct quotes have been transcribed using the exact grammar from which they originated. This was done without judgement, but rather to preserve the authenticity of our conversations.

ANALYTIC PROCESS

In the earliest stages of the project, I recorded my field notes in a notebook which was kept in a secured office. However, this method proved to be inefficient. I then utilized the talk-to-text function on a secure mobile device in order to capture and record my data. This allowed me to capture more data in a shorter time frame. While I intended to record my field notes immediately, due to the fast-paced nature of the volunteer work, doing so was not a viable option many days. I did, however, take careful precaution to transcribe the events and conversations as soon as possible to preserve accuracy. Each field note is dated and time stamped.

The analysis utilized an inductive approach in which “data moves from the specific to the general, so that particular instances are observed and then combined into a larger whole or general statements” (Elo and Kyngas 2007, p. 109). Subsequently, themes are derived from the data. In order to stay as close to my data as possible, I did not utilize any software to code my

field notes. As I began to compile my field notes, I kept a running list of prominent themes that consistently emerged. These theoretical memos allowed me to critically analyze my data and return to the field with the intention to learn more about specific issues that arose. Once the field notes were completed, open coding was conducted to identify any additional themes. My running list of themes was subsequently compared to the preliminary themes until a final list of emergent themes was reached. Once solidified, the raw data was coded in a more focused way for each theme using color-coded indicators in Microsoft Word.

While these data provide the backbone of my analysis, I also utilize published documents obtained through my participation in the Refugee Resettlement course, as well as all previous field notes from my participation with the at home language class taught in conjunction with the CCC.

AVOIDING THE HIT-AND-RUN: THE ROLE OF POSITIONALITY AND ETHICS

It is also important to discuss the role of positionality and ethics that guided my approach within the field, as well as the subsequent analysis post-fieldwork. It is first necessary to address the dilemma of power in feminist fieldwork. As noted by (Wolf, 1996, p. 2) “the most central dilemma for contemporary feminists in fieldwork, from which other contradictions are derived, is power and the unequal hierarchies or levels of control that are often maintained, perpetuated, created, and re-created during and after field research.” This power is concentrated into three categories:

- (1) power difference stemming from different positionalities of the researcher and the researched (race, class, nationality, life changes, urban-rural backgrounds);
- (2) power exerted during the research process, such as defining the research relationship, unequal exchange, and exploitation; and
- (3) power exerted during the post-fieldwork period – writing and representing (Wolf, 1996, p. 2).

My intersecting roles as a student, a university lecturer, and a white U.S. citizen afford me with privilege while working with refugees and SIV populations in the field. The privilege remains despite my identifying as a woman. As suggested by Warren (1988, p. 26), “although white females may have secondary status because of gender, they acquire authority and privilege through race, class, and Western culture.”

It would be naïve of me to believe that these privileges would not impact my interactions with clients and service providers within the field, as well my interpretations of these interactions in the post-fieldwork analysis. In turn, my positionality within the field impacts the accuracy of the current study. Accuracy refers to the way in which researchers “describe how they interpret the events they participate in, so the only question is not whether we should, but how accurately we do it” (Becker, 1996, p. 4) To improve the accuracy of the current research, it is imperative to acknowledge the role of positionality in shaping of the research process (Fish & Rothchild, 2020). Despite my use of the active participation method of participant observation, my position of privilege inhibits me from truly experiencing or understanding the lived realities of clients. Simply recognizing the role of positionality in the current research will not inherently improve its accuracy. However, the acknowledgement of the unequal levels of power and control between myself and clients guided my approach within the field. In doing so, Wolf (1996, p. 3) suggests “confronting and understanding the multiple and often irreconcilable contradictions therein constitutes an important step in approaching projects with a political awareness and consciousness that will be devastated when such dilemmas arise.”

The dilemma of power also impacts the ethics of the research process. Becker (1996) suggests that situations and actions are altered when researchers are present, thus impacting the precision of the research. Wolf (1996, p. 18) echoes these concerns, noting “subjects are likely to

discuss only certain subjects with individual researchers, depending upon the researcher's positionality." While my positionality within the field undoubtedly impacted my interaction with clients, the use of participant observation in which there is an emphasis on the mundane banalities of everyday life acts to improve upon the precision of the current research. As noted by Becker (1996, p. 8) "rather than making inferences from a more remote indicator such as the answers to a question given in the privacy of a conversation with a stranger...they are seeing the 'real world' of everyday life, not some version of it created at their urging and for their benefit." Also present during the research process is the reality of unequal exchange and exploitation. As presented by Wolf (1996, p. 3), "academic feminists have tended to maintain control over research projects and 'knowledge creation'...by maintaining this control and distance, most feminist scholars end up benefiting the researcher more than those studied and furthering the gap between the researcher and the researched."

From the beginning, I wanted to avoid what Kumar (1992, p. 1) describes as the "hit-and-run" aspect of fieldwork in which the researcher comes in, takes what they need, and leaves. Engaging in the active participation method of participant observation allowed me to give my time and resources as volunteer to those who I encountered in the field. While this reciprocity works to alleviate the often-predatory nature of fieldwork, it does little to produce "any kind of equality between middle-class Westerners and their poorer subjects" (Wolf, 1996, p. 24). To help remedy this reality, the current research utilizes Benmayor's (1991, p. 172) suggestion to "privilege the dynamics of reciprocity" not only during my fieldwork through my actions, but by acknowledging this reality and to center research on the voices and perspectives of those who are researched.

Further, this exploitation is often seen at the post-fieldwork stage. As noted by Wolf (1996, p. 19), “as long as the researcher makes the decisions about the topic of research and how to conduct it and write it up, she holds the power.” While I entered the field with the intention of centering the research on the voices and experiences of refugees and SIVs, my positionality within the field inexorably impacted my understanding and interpretation of these interactions. To minimize this shortcoming, the current research aimed to include as much context and dialogue as possible, what Becker (1996) refers to as breadth. Becker (1996, p. 9) argues “epistemologically...the observation which requires less inference and fewer assumptions is more likely to be accurate.” While the current research aims to provide as much breadth as possible, I as the researcher am cognizant that “the idea that any ethnographic subjects are free to present their own meaning in any radical sense neglects the ways in which the dominant culture provides hegemonic meanings” (Alldred, 1998, p. 154).

To preserve the integrity of the discourse utilized herein, the current research aims to use what Fish & Rothchild (2020) refer to as scholar-activism. Specifically, the commitment to maintain relationships post-research and return the manuscript to the community from which it originated. As noted by Fish & Rothchild (2020, p. 274) “returning with the interview manuscripts and eventual book publications proved to be one of the most effective measures to work in solidarity with local populations...in these ways, we continually reframe our longitudinal research in efforts to respond to what local populations identify as most meaningful.” While Patai (1991, p. 139) suggests that it is not possible “to write about the oppressed without becoming one of the oppressors...when routine research practices are embedded in a situation of material inequality,” the current research aims to improve upon accuracy and precision by acknowledging the role of positionality, including as much breadth as

possible, and engaging in reciprocal acts of scholar-activism. With these considerations in mind, I now turn to my ethnographic findings.

CHAPTER V

BUREAUCRATIC HURDLES

During my time in the field, one of the most prevalent challenges that I observed was the existence of bureaucratic hurdles at every stage of the immigration and resettlement process. These challenges seemed to build off of one another and, rather than becoming less cumbersome as the process unfolded, they only seemed to become more complex and all-consuming. This reality appeared frequently in conversations at the CCC, where employees and volunteers would express concerns about the impossible feats that they, and their clients, were expected to achieve. During one of our lunch conversations, a colleague, who also arrived in the U.S. on an SIV, asked, “why is it in the United States you can’t just go and fix a problem? You have to talk to this person, who has to talk to this person, who then maybe will tell you what you need to do. In Afghanistan, if you have a question you just walk to the government building and ask who is in charge.”

His question immediately spoke to Merton’s (1968) classical works regarding the “dark side” of rational bureaucracies. I replied, “it’s kind of like the irrationality of rationality, right? This idea that we have made the process more ‘efficient’ by delegating tasks and requiring uniformed documentation at each stage of the service process, that it has become impossible to actually get something accomplished.” This complex web of bureaucratic hurdles, this irrationality of rationality, emerged in virtually every aspect of my fieldwork, during every stage of the immigration and resettlement process, and impacting all the actors involved.

PRE-ARRIVAL

While I did not have first-hand experience with the pre-arrival stages of the immigration and resettlement process, CCC clients often shared the trials and tribulations they experienced during this time. Despite the categorical differences between SIV and refugee clients, and even the individual differences within each group, everyone seemed to agree on one thing: getting to America is the most difficult, and dangerous, step of the entire process, particularly for SIV clients.

During my first week as a volunteer at the CCC, I was tasked with taking Mr. Abdul to apply for a social security card. When I arrived at the apartment complex, Mr. Abdul was readying his eldest sons for the trip while his wife was in the back room tending to the baby. Mr. Abdul was a fluent English speaker and was happy to engage in small talk while we waited for his wife. A few minutes later, she emerged from the back room, wrapping the swaddled baby in what looked to be a strand of Christmas garland. Smiling, Mr. Abdul looked at me and said, “I bet you don’t see a baby wrapped up like this in America.” Looking over towards his wife, I laughed jokingly and said, “like a little baby burrito?” Even though she didn’t speak any English, his wife was able to read our expressions and began to smile.

After strapping everyone into their seats, Mr. Abdul climbed into the passenger seat of the van. Noticing the Hummer stopped next to us at the traffic light, he looked over and asked, “why in the United States you drive cars for war on the road?” indicating his familiarity with American vehicles of war. After pondering the question, I shrugged and said, “it does seem strange, doesn’t it?” He went on to tell me that in Afghanistan, they mainly drive “Teeyotahs.” Given that I had only been volunteering at the CCC for a few days, I was not attuned to the slight variation in emphasis used by many non-native speakers. “Don’t you have Teeyotahs here?” My

face must have given away my confusion as he added, “you know, the little cars?” “Oh, TOYotas,” I said, apparently very enthusiastically. He laughed and said, “Ahh, toy like for children. I haven’t had to use English for a long time, I need to practice.” After which I assured him that his English was excellent, and it was my ear which needed the practice. He went on to explain that he took English in high school as an elective. Given the continued U.S. presence in the region, he thought it would come in handy. Curious, I asked him what he did after school. “I was a terp with the Navy Seals. That means interpreter, the guys called us terps,” he went on to clarify. Not wanting to pry, I let him steer the conversation. He went on to detail some of the missions he was a part of during his time with the Seals. “We went on missions every night. It was a lot, every day. We would ride horses and the motorcycles with four wheels up into the mountains and we would sleep outside. The guys would grow their hair and beard to look like the bad guys.” “Oh, the bad guys are the Taliban,” he clarified, “but everyone would know they [the Seals] were American because they had the blue eyes and the hair was light colored.” He stopped and looked out the window. “You might know one mission,” he said, adding the battle’s code name. “Have you ever heard of it?” Shocked, I look at him and nodded, “yes, I have heard of that one. A lot of people here know about that one.” “Yeah, I heard it is famous now” he said nonchalantly, turning back towards the window. “We took three casualties,” he said, in a matter of fact way. Not sure how to respond, I let out a long sigh, “I’m sorry, that must have been hard.” He nodded in acknowledgement, “they were good guys.”

On the way back from the social security office, he continued to talk about his life in Afghanistan. After doing some research on Special Immigrant Visas, I was interested to know how long it took him to get to the United States. “A very long time,” he said. “Most of my ‘friends’ left. They told me to email them if I needed help, but they went home and forgot about

me.” As he was talking, his wife began shushing the baby who was beginning to stir in the back seat. “I sent them emails for help when things got really bad for me and my family.” He glanced over at his wife in the back seat and rubbed his eyebrows with his hand, “they never responded.” I felt ashamed, like I was somehow representing the “friends” who left him stranded. This presented a crucial blow to his chances of receiving an SIV. In order for an Afghan national to be eligible for SIV classification, they must obtain documentation of “faithful and valuable service” from a senior U.S. supervisor (Bruno, 2014). Without the help of his American “friends,” Mr. Abdul wasn’t able to satisfy this requirement, ultimately forcing him into hiding and placing the wellbeing of his entire family at the mercy of the Seals who were at home, safe and sound.

When we pulled up to the apartment complex, I got out of the van and helped the children out of their seat belts. I asked Mr. Abdul if he would tell his wife that it was nice to meet her. She smiled shyly and reached out her hand as he was relaying the message. When I got back to the office, I turned the car off and sat in the parking lot reflecting on what Mr. Abdul had told me. Still feeling the pangs of guilt, I was having a difficult time coming to terms with the fact that I had been speaking to someone who had taken part in some of the most well-known battles of my lifetime. Battles which sparked a wave of patriotism throughout the county, inspiring box office hits and CrossFit workouts. Battles whose participants were touted as national heroes, except for this one. This one was left out of the history books and seemingly forgotten by the same heroes he helped to make. I got out of the car and walked back to my desk. It took him 10 years to get to the United States. Numb, I entered my case notes for the day and rather than engaging in the usual office chatter, I shut off the computer and went home.

The longer I volunteered at the CCC, it became evident that Mr. Abdul’s story wasn’t unique, as much as I wished otherwise. Each SIV client that I encountered spent a matter of

years waiting for their SIV status to be conferred. Mr. Khan, was one of the first clients my classmates and I met while participating in the Refugee Studies course. During one of our home visits, Mr. Khan shared a glimpse of his story with us. In Afghanistan, Mr. Khan worked as a cook on a U.S. military base, a job which he secured through the help of a friend. Due to the nature of the position, he was required to live on base, three hours away from his home and family. He was permitted to return home every two weeks, a trip which he made every two weeks for 10 years. Soon after he was hired, Daesh (ISIS) learned the nature of his employment and, more specifically, of his employer. By working for the United States military, Mr. Khan, as well as his family were branded as “traitors” and “American slaves,” and by default, became enemies of the terrorist organization. To avoid detection, Mr. Khan’s family was forced into hiding and his bi-weekly trips home had to be made under the cover of darkness. It was during this time when Mr. Khan realized that if his family was ever to regain a sense of normalcy, he had to get them out of Afghanistan. Unlike Mr. Abdul whose employers left before he could secure documentation of “faithful and valuable service,” Mr. Khan’s supervisor made sure his service was recognized.

He spoke very highly of his employers, often smiling while recounting the memories. Standing up to grab his backpack, he rummaged intently through various folders. He pulled out a stack of disheveled papers, holding them up proudly for us to see. The first was his military identification card, the top of which read, “U.S. SUPPORT PERSONEL” in large bold letters, followed by a homemade certificate which read, “Employee of the Year.” “Oh, that is wonderful!” I heard the instructor proclaim. Nodding in agreement, I asked Mr. Khan if the soldiers he worked with treated him well. “Oh, yes,” he replied with a smile. Despite the support he received from his employers, it would be years before Mr. Khan would arrive safely on U.S.

soil. Even with the support of U.S. supervisors, it takes meticulous planning, saving, and, arguably, a great deal of luck to satisfy all the screening requirements. As another SIV client noted, “there are so many interrogations, for you and everyone in your family, even the little children. They ask you about every little thing, and every little thing could mean you are a terrorist. What if your kid says the wrong thing? And you have to go to the Embassy, if you are hiding, that’s not too easy, and it is very expensive. Then you have to pay for everyone to get a medical screening and they take your fingerprints so many times. They probably have hundreds of fingerprints of my family. What are they doing with them? I don’t know.”

After years of meticulous planning and stringent saving, as well as numerous undercover trips to and from the base, home, and the Embassy, Mr. Khan secured SIV status for himself and his family. Recounting the memory, he explained that once he received his papers to come to the United States, his employers threw him a going away party. He pulled out a 4x6 photograph from his backpack and passed it around. In the picture, he and his supervisor were shaking hands, standing in what looked to be a mess tent. A small sparsely decorated table displaying a white sheet cake was strategically placed in the foreground. Assuming Mr. Khan’s friend, another Afghan national who introduced him to the job, would be in a similar situation, I asked him if he too received an SIV for his service. He looked down at the floor and started to speak. Fumbling to articulate his thoughts in English, he shook his head, raising his finger and tracing it along his neck. “No, no...Daesh,” was all he was able to communicate before his voice started trailing. Unable to come up with a response, I put my hand on my heart and bowed my head. As if he knew the words I was failing to express, he looked at me with kind eyes and nodded his head.

While these narratives were heartbreaking, they were not uncommon. It seemed as if every SIV I had spoken to knew someone who had been killed for their cooperation with U.S. forces. Despite this, there seemed to be no urgency on the behalf of the United States to get them stateside. It only took a five-minute Google search to see that the system was failing those it promised to protect. While the stories of SIVs are not plentiful, non-profit organizations such as No One Left Behind, the International Refugee Assistance Program, and The List Project all provide “success stories” of clients who have been resettled in the United States, none of which boasted wait times of less than two years. One prospective Iraqi SIV whose story was featured in the *New Yorker* stated, “sometimes, I feel like we’re standing in line for a ticket, waiting to die” (Packer, 2007, p. 4). In a similar vein, many of the refugee clients I encountered while volunteering at the agency faced equal, if not longer, waiting periods. Most of whom were diverted to refugee camps in neighboring countries before arriving in the United States. For instance, one Congolese client spent 10 years in a makeshift refugee camp in Tanzania. Similarly, most of the children from a Congolese family of 10, who ranged in age from three to early adulthood, spent their entire lives in a Ugandan refugee camp before reaching the U.S.

Further, even when applicants are granted refugee or SIV status, not everyone in the family may qualify. This proves to be particularly arduous for SIV clients as these limitations are often not discussed before the applicant takes the job. After the picture had made its way around the group, Mr. Khan carefully put it back into his black backpack. As if on cue, his wife emerged from the kitchen and took a seat next to me on the floor, proudly displaying her family to whom she was speaking with over FaceTime. She smiled and turned the phone towards me, pointing to a man who was standing in the doorway. “This is your son?” I asked. She nodded her head excitedly. The man on the screen waved to me and, by habit, I replied, “hello, how are you?” To

my surprise, he answered back, “I am doing very well, thank you.” He was standing in a dimly lit room with clay tiled floors. If not for a small wooden table and two chairs perched in the corner, the room would be completely empty. A woman in a long black hijab was sitting in one of the wooden chairs. Mrs. Khan’s son turned the camera towards her and said, “my wife.” Upon seeing her on the screen, Mrs. Khan turned to me and pointed towards her belly, signaling that her daughter-in-law was pregnant. Handing the phone to her eldest daughter who was sitting to my right, Mrs. Khan disappeared back into the kitchen. Once she had gone, Mr. Khan explained that due to age restrictions, he was forced to leave his two eldest sons in Afghanistan. After he and the rest of the family left for the United States, his eldest sons fled to Kabul. He explained that Kabul not only provided the men with more opportunities, but it also served a protective purpose as extremist forces held more power in the rural provinces. After making a case for his sons to the American Embassy in Kabul, Mr. Khan was told that *if* his sons were to receive a standard issue visa, it would take a matter of years. Glancing back towards the kitchen he sighed, “what do I do? It is safe here for my children,” gesturing towards the other children in the room, “but I think of them, every night.”

Beyond the policies and practices of exclusion, SIVs and refugees are subjected to the state-initiated stripping of their identities. This process often begins at the adjudication stage. Throughout my time at the agency, I frequently encountered clients with the same birthdate: January 1st. What I first thought to be an odd coincidence, turned out to be a systematic catch all for everyone who had fallen through the cracks during the resettlement process. During our conversation, one SIV stated, “tomorrow is my *real* birthday.” Confused by his statement, I asked him to elaborate. He explained that he, like many other SIVs, was given the fictitious birthday of January 1st at some point during the adjudication process. Naively, I asked, “Don’t

you know your birthday? Couldn't you just tell them?" He laughed and shook his head, "I did tell them, and it is right here on my Afghan passport. I don't know why they did not look at this, but now I cannot change it until I can get citizenship." "Also," he retorted, "my name is not Mohammad. I don't know why they put our name as this." He went on to explain that in Afghanistan, Mohammad is often used as a formal greeting or suffix for men. Apparently confused by this, or more likely just an unwillingness to engage in cultural education, adjudicators frequently use Mohammad in the place of a man's first name and assign his given first name to his last name. Trying to make light of the situation, I asked, "so if you were walking down the street with a group of SIVs, what would happen if I yelled 'Hi, Mohammad!'" He laughed and stated matter-of-factly, "we would all turn around probably."

It is not just the men who are subjected to this practice of identity stripping; women are particularly vulnerable. The longer I volunteered with the agency, the more I encountered women with the first name "FNU." Given its frequency, I began to think that this was a common Afghan name for women until I was informed that rather than a name, it is an abbreviation for "Family Name Unknown." "Most women in our country [Afghanistan] do not have a last name like in America," one SIV explained. "Women sometimes will take the last name of her husband or father, but this is usually just the name of the tribe he belongs to. Mostly, they do not have last names." Rather than accounting for this cultural difference, Afghan women are stripped of their names which are then supplanted by a crude abbreviation. As with the men, their given names are then used as a last name. While this practice fits neatly into U.S. cultural practices, it actively works to strip SIVs of the very essence of their identities. Even further, once the resettlement process has been completed and state-sponsored identification is issued containing these haphazardly applied names and birth dates, these identifying documents are often flagged as

fraudulent and rejected by state-regulated agencies that act as gatekeepers to the vital goods and services needed for survival

POST-ARRIVAL: PAPERWORK AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Even after the applicant is admitted into the U.S., these hardships continue. An SIV or refugee's first week in the U.S. is filled with long, and often unpleasant, appointments and paperwork the likes of which would exhaust even the most enthusiastic "Type A" personality. Within the first few days of arrival, clients must be taken to the Social Security Administration (SSA) to apply for social security numbers. This is a crucial step in the resettlement process as virtually all services and benefits stem from one's ability to obtain a social security number. As a volunteer, this task is often delegated to me. The caseworker is undoubtedly busy with other, more complex tasks, but it is also safe to say that sitting at the SSA is one of the least desirable assignments which is, in some part, why it is so frequently passed off. Before heading to the building, an application form must be completed for each client. This is usually done using their biodata; however, there are some questions which require more in-depth information directly from the clients themselves. This includes information such as their place of birth, as well as the first and last names of their birth parents. Given the amount of time spent waiting to be served, I usually have the clients fill these sections out while we wait. While these questions present themselves as being commonplace, they often present major challenges to both SIV and refugee clients.

During my first few months volunteering with the CCC I worked closely with a group of brothers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); each possessing varying levels of literacy and command of the English language. I filled out their social security applications

before picking them up and planned to work with them to complete the remaining questions while we waited in line. I asked the eldest brother, who knew the most English, to explain to the other that they needed to print the names of their birth parents on the form. After relaying the information to his brother in French, they both began filling in the blanks. Due to a lack of familiarity with refugee identification, SSA employees often consulted with each other while inputting their application information into the system. After consulting with a colleague, the employee assisting the brothers noticed that they had spelled their mother's name differently on their applications.

After a lengthy argument in French, each brother insisted that their mother's name was spelled in vastly different ways. In an attempt to remedy the situation, the employee asked the eldest brother to sound out his mother's name so she could attempt to spell it out. The younger brother interjected fervently, replacing the "IE" sound with an "OU." Working hard to appease both brothers, the employee spelled out the name to the best of her ability. She then asked the pair if the spelling looked correct, to which the eldest brother replied, "NO, no, no, OOUH, not EYE, OOUH." Responding to his brother, the other objected intently, becoming increasingly louder with each attempt. After a few rounds of writing, re-writing, objecting, and lengthy back-and-forth banter in French, the brothers finally "agreed" on a spelling. This agreement took the form of the younger brother swatting a hand and walking away in frustration. Ironically, the actual spelling of their mother's name would have been of little significance if the employee never realized that it was spelled differently to begin with. Nevertheless, this seemingly simple requirement resulted in an hour of strain and frustration for the Congolese brothers.

There is also a dissonance between refugee applicants and questions regarding their place of birth. Much of the confusion is due to the fact that the application asks for both the city and

the country in which the applicant was born. While the majority of applicants know their country of birth, many are unable to identify the specific city. Given the often-transient nature of their living arrangements, expecting clients to know the exact location of their birth, or that of their children, is impractical. Some employees are understanding and only require the country of birth to be completed before accepting the application. However, while assisting a Congolese family (who spent time in multiple different refugee camps) with the application process, one employee insisted that the city of birth was a non-negotiable requirement. When I arrived at the family's home to pick them up, they were eating lunch. Given the size of the family, I had to divide them up into two trips. The first trip consisted of the father and all children over the age of 12. Afterwards, the father would accompany the mother, who knew no English, while the older children cared for their younger siblings.

The first trip was fairly routine, barring the number of customers due to the recent holiday closure. It was the second trip that presented challenges. When we arrived at the SSA, we were vetted through security and instructed to take a seat until their number was called. As we were escorted through the metal detector, one of the security guards looked at me and jokingly said, "you again? Hey, I appreciate what you're doing with these people." Given the number of customers in the building, there were very few empty chairs available, so we split up between the open seats. After being called up to check in, we returned to the waiting area and sat in the first available seats. Unbeknownst to us, the seat I chose had been taken by a man who was in the restroom. When he returned, he announced that I had stolen his chair and that he was going to "punch my fucking teeth in." I calmly insisted that he could have his chair back and that I would move to a different row. An older gentleman who was sitting beside the Congolese couple stood up and proclaimed that I did not need to give up my seat. In response, the angry

customer stood up and shouted, “like hell she does...fuck you...mind your fucking business.” At this point, security stepped in and escorted the disgruntled man, who was still muttering something about someone’s mother, out of the building. The clients I had been accompanying were visibly shaken so I smiled and made the universal “I don’t know, that was weird” gesture with my hands. Despite my best efforts, it was clear that they felt uncomfortable. After a grueling two hour wait, their number was called.

After receiving their applications, the man helping them insisted that their city of birth be listed. He first explained this to the husband who turned to me, shaking his head. It was clear that he did not understand what was being asked of him. He then grabbed a pen from the desk and began writing his birth year on his hand, looking over to me for approval. Noticing this, the employee looked to me and said, “we have to have something from them.” I turned to the husband and nodded in approval pointing to his hand, and then said “city,” to which he replied by shaking his head. I tried again, this time saying “kijiji” (village in Swahili). Unable to come up with a response, he looked at the employee pleadingly and began reciting his refugee camp number and plot designation. Confused, and somewhat agitated, the employee looked to me and said, “look, we need some sort of viable answer from him.” Seeing the employee shaking his head, the husband became increasingly frantic and repeated his camp and plot designation. Obviously disgruntled, the employee looked at me and snapped, “tell him it’s OK, we can’t use any of that,” to which I turned to the father and said “nzuri, nzuri” (good, good). Obviously sensing that he was not going to obtain an answer from the applicant, the employee made a phone call to his supervisor. After two phone calls and 45 minutes, the employee settled on picking a Congolese city at random from Google Maps. Once again, the information which was

so fervently insisted upon was virtually irrelevant to the overall success of the application. That day, we were the last customers to leave the building, 3 hours after we arrived.

After obtaining a social security card, refugees and SIVs become eligible to secure vital resources and additional documentation that is needed to sustain themselves and, eventually, obtain a job. Upon arrival, each client is enrolled in the state services for which they are eligible. These services typically include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Medicaid. As a condition of the TANF program, qualifying applicants are required to participate in the Virginia Initiative for Employment and Work (VIEW) program, which aims to provide parents with the systems of support and resources needed to obtain employment (Department of Social Services, 2020). While the program itself has the potential to be of benefit, the application process presents a whole new set of challenges.

Within a week of receiving his social security number, I picked up the eldest of the Congolese brothers to take him to meet his VIEW case worker. A few days before his appointment, he received an application packet in the mail which he was to fill out beforehand. Before leaving the apartment, I read through a checklist of documents that were required for the appointment: identification, lease agreement, TANF approval letter, social security card, and the completed application packet. He took out a plastic bag of folders from his black backpack and laid them out neatly on the couch. After confirming that he had required paperwork, he placed the remaining papers onto a small folding table and stuffed the needed documents back into his backpack. On the way to the meeting, he revealed that he did not complete his application packet as he was unable to adequately translate the questions. Thinking that it would be, at most, 2-3 pages long, I assured him that it wouldn't be an issue and that we would fill it out together while

we waited. When we arrived at the building, we walked in the main entrance and were immediately confronted by security. Once we stated our business, we were instructed to take the elevator to the third floor and take an immediate left. Due to construction, this route was blocked off. We were already running a few minutes behind and were struggling to find the waiting area. Luckily, a staff member walked by and, begrudgingly, pointed us in the right direction.

When we arrived in the waiting area, we were told that the case worker was running behind. After finding our seats, the client pulled out his application which, to my surprise, was eight pages long. We filled out questions pertaining to his previous jobs, the duties he performed, and “what makes him a valuable employee?” With each question, he became increasingly agitated. It seemed silly, almost degrading, for me to ask him to essentially describe his worth. “Why, why they would ask this,” he asked, when he was prompted to describe how he imagined his life in five years, “what do I even know for tomorrow?” But there we were, in the middle of the waiting room playing an elaborate game of charades in a desperate effort to satisfy the application requirements which must be met for him to continue receiving TANF support.

After an hour, and about half-way through the packet, a well-dressed man walked up to the counter and demanded to speak to one of the case workers. We continued our game of charades until the man began raising his voice, insisting that while his wife was in the restroom, a case worker had managed to squeeze their child tight enough to leave bruises on his face. “He did not have those marks when she went in,” he insisted. “I had to use my lunch break to get down here, she needs to know. Someone needs to answer for this.” After a heated back and forth, an armed officer was called into the room. The man then began explaining to the officer that the case worker was a “coward” who needed to “pay” for her transgressions. After slamming his hand on the desk, the officer forcibly removed the man from the reception area. Unsure how to

proceed, we stopped working on the application packet and prepared to flee. During the commotion, the caseworker called me and the Congolese client back to an adjacent office. He panicked and pointed to his unfinished application. I shrugged my shoulders and urged him to follow the caseworker who ushered us into her office. The client immediately flashed his unfinished application packet. She looked at me and said, “why didn’t he complete this?” I explained that he was experiencing difficulties translating the document and we attempted to complete it together in the waiting area. She turned to him and said, “this needs to be done *before* you speak with me.” The client shifted his gaze to the ground and smiled sheepishly. In a scolding manner, she insisted that he look her in the eyes while she was speaking, turned to me and asked if I would be joining them for the interview. I politely declined and signaled to the client that I would be in the waiting room. As I was exiting the room, I heard her say, “y’all got to be getting this done. I guess we need to get a translator on the phone to get some of these answers.” Realizing that we had just spent an hour frantically digging for answers to complete this “essential” application packet which could have been substituted by a 3-minute phone call, I felt my face start to flush. I forced out a smile and quietly shut the door. His case was approved, despite his half-completed application packet.

While the VIEW program provides invaluable resources to help those enrolled navigate the job market, refugee clients are not able to legally secure employment until they receive an employment authorization card (called an I-797) from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This is often to the dismay of the client. After the initial excitement of arriving in the U.S. and moving into a home, the next inquiry is always job related. While I was transporting a client and his family to their new home, he leaned over the console and asked, “what now is the process for a job?” During the waiting period between arrival and

securing an employment card, we typically have frequent contact with clients to ensure that they are adjusting and that all administrative tasks are completed. There have been multiple clients who have expressed their unrest during this period. For instance, many clients have stated that all they can do is sleep: “I sleep and sleep for two weeks, it is no good.” Even when other administrative tasks are being completed, they often connect it back to their desire to work. While taking a client to receive their mailbox key, he hurriedly ran over to the mailbox and said, “now here I can get my papers for job.”

Typically, the employment card is received within a 3-week window. This works well with the agency’s general timeline as the first two weeks are often filled with appointments, paperwork, and general acclimation to life in the United States. However, obtaining the employment card was not an easy feat. To ensure that all required documents and services are being rendered, all client related documents, including employment cards, are forwarded to the office’s address until a change of address is submitted. These are typically submitted within the first 15 days, after which all mail that is addressed to the applicant is sent to their home address.

The oldest and the youngest of the Congolese brothers arrived in the U.S. two weeks before the remaining two brothers. As cases went, they settled in relatively seamlessly. Their required documentation was approved and arrived in a timely manner, which allowed them to obtain employment within the first two months of arrival. By the time the remaining brothers arrived, they were in the process of accepting employment with a local landscaping company. The day after their arrival, the remaining brothers were taken to the SSA to apply for a social security card. Since their transition was progressing smoothly, the employment coordinator already had employment lined up for each of the brothers, who were excited at the prospect of starting a job. All of this was put on hold when, after three weeks, their employment cards had

yet to arrive. Both brothers made a point to inquire about the delay each time we spoke. During the interim, the employment coordinator worked tirelessly with the employer who agreed to hire the brothers, ensuring that they would be ready to work as soon as they received their authorization cards.

After a month, one of the missing employment cards arrived at the office. The employment coordinator promptly informed the awaiting employer that one of the brothers would be able to report to work immediately. After making a photocopy to place in his records, I drove to the apartment complex to deliver the long-awaited document. I knocked on the door and waited for a while before knocking again. After a few insistent knocks, the younger of the brothers opened the door, squinting tiredly. It was evident that he had been sleeping. When he came to, his face lit up and he said excitedly, “oh, Sarah, come, come!” ushering me inside. I inquired about the second brother, and he shook his head signaling that he wasn’t home. I pulled out an envelope from my bag and showed him the employment card which had his name printed at the top. He grabbed the card excitedly and said, “for me?” After confirming that it was his, he grabbed me into a hug and twirled around in a circle. I laughed and stepped aside so he could finish his celebratory dance. Stopping abruptly, he inquired about his brother. I shook my head, indicating that his card hadn’t come yet, but assured him that we would continue to look for it. As excited as he was to receive his own employment card, he was equally as disappointed for his brother.

After months of inquiries, phone calls, and passing through the hands of multiple actors, the missing employment card was finally located... in Cleveland, Ohio. The case worker received a call from an affiliated agency informing him that they had received the employment card months ago but did not know who it belonged to. After almost five months, the final brother

received his employment card. The job which had been lined up for him months before was unable to hold his position.

Clients recognize that obtaining a job is vital to assimilation into the culture and community. The client whose employment card was lost made it clear that sitting at home was detrimental to his ability to learn English and U.S. cultural norms. During our conversation he explained, “when I get a job I hear over and over and learn what this is and this is... When I sit at home, I don’t learn, I must go to bibliotheca [library] to learn English.”

After his card was found, agency policies regarding employment verification cards were changed in an attempt to avoid similar situations. Rather than being delivered to the office, they are now mailed directly to the clients. While on the surface this seemed to be a convenient switch, it proved to be rather cumbersome, particularly regarding USPS policy. Within the first few weeks of arrival, all clients are taken to the post office to submit an official change of address application and apply for a mailbox key. Once the key is received, we provide them with a brief orientation on navigating the postal system and show them where their mailbox is located. One apartment complex in particular is especially difficult to manage. Throughout the complex there are 5 designated mail areas, each of which contain 4 separate structures housing 10-15 locked doors. Each door corresponds with the key designated by the USPS. At this apartment complex, both the structures and the doors are sporadically labeled. For instance, many of the mail structures have been etched with multiple different letters and numbers, while only some of the doors are labeled at all. The first time I “taught” a client to use their mailbox, I ended up having to ask a group of teenagers playing basketball across the street if they knew how the labeling system worked. Laughing, one of them walked over to the structure with me and said,

“alright, bet, I gotchu.” Given the lack of consistent labels, we resorted to putting the key in every door to see which one it opened.

Once the employment cards started being sent directly to the clients’ addresses, this overall lack of labeling resulted in a surge of undelivered mail. After multiple clients complained about missing employment cards, I started to investigate using the USCIS tracking feature. Oddly, the documents were all listed as “mailed.” The case worker contacted the local Post Office to inquire about lost mail. During this conversation, he was informed that the mail was not lost, but rather, it had not been delivered at all. He went on to explain that mail carriers are prohibited by law to deliver mail containing official state documents to mailboxes that are not labeled with the addressee’s name. To remedy the situation, the case worker informed the leasing manager of this requirement and made certain to emphasize the importance of the documents being delivered: for the livelihoods of the clients living at their apartment complex. Months later, the mailboxes remained unchanged.

Even when all the required documentation is properly completed and presented, SIVs and refugees still face rejection by those who are charged with interpreting them. While SIVs typically possess passports, refugees often arrive with less traditional forms of identification. This identification consists of a single piece of paper containing the photographs and identifying information of all family members involved in the case. This document is made official by a stamp that is initialed and dated by State Department adjudicators. While it does contain an official seal in the form of the stamp, many individuals are unfamiliar with this type of identification and, subsequently, refuse to accept it as an official document. This occurs quite frequently when clients attempt to open bank accounts.

Within the first few weeks of arrival, each adult client is taken to the bank to open an account. This represents a crucial step in their journey to self-sufficiency as their government assistance money, as well as their future paychecks, are deposited into these accounts. The first time I assisted a Congolese client in opening a bank account and depositing their first government assistance check, the case worker instructed me to go to a specific branch of a specific institution because they “didn’t give them that much trouble.” A volunteer who had been working at the agency for quite some time chimed in and said, “make sure you take them to a credit union and not a bank, they charge them for everything, they don’t even know it’s happening.” Taking note of this, I went through and made a checklist of all the documents that would be needed to open an account and deposit the check (photo ID, social security card, lease agreement, and the signed check) before picking up the client. When I arrived at the client’s home he was sitting on a small bed in the living room with a backpack’s worth of documents strewn around the floor. After sorting through the paperwork together, he placed the applicable documents back into his backpack and headed towards the car.

When we arrived at the suggested credit union, we were called back by the Member Service Representative (MSR) who immediately asked if I would be serving as the translator. After explaining that the client spoke sufficient English to understand, she still insisted on addressing me while she spoke. She requested two forms of identification as well as a proof of residency in order to begin the processes of opening an account. The client pulled out a folder from his backpack and looked towards me for reassurance. After I nodded, he slid the folder across the desk towards the MSR. While inspecting the documents, she looked up and said, “we need an official form of identification.” I explained that, as a refugee, the paper that she was holding in her hand was his only official form of photo identification. All “aliens” (per U.S.

Customs and Border Patrol) who are admitted into the U.S. are required to obtain an I-94 Arrival Record from the State Department. This form is required for an individual to apply for a social security card or any other form of state identification or benefits. Before I could finish, she asked for a passport. Again, I explained that as a refugee, he was not issued a passport, and that the I-94 containing the State Department's stamp was his state sanctioned form of identification. She examined the paper again, turning it over in her hand, although I'm not sure what she was expecting to find. "Does he not have a driver's license or a state ID?" I reiterated, again, that he is a refugee and the only form of identification he had was in her hand. She looked at the client, who was staring intently at the document in her hand and stated that she needed to make a phone call to the compliance department. While on the phone she stated, "it's like some computer paper with his picture on it. There's a stamp like on the visas. I can send you a copy, maybe you know what this is." She then made several photocopies and sent them off to the compliance department. After a lengthy wait, the phone rang, and she excused herself from the office. During this time, the client and I continued a previous discussion we were having about soccer on the car ride in. When we first met, we learned that each of our favorite soccer teams play in the English Premier League. Ever since, we engage in friendly rivalry banter when we are together.

After a thirty-minute hiatus, the MSR returned stating that she had reached a deal with the compliance manager. They would accept his identification to open an account; however, the account would be subject to a mandatory two-week hold on all funds going into, or being withdrawn from, the account. While it seemed like a small victory to have the account opened, the two-week hold would present devastating consequences to the client's livelihood. Most clients, refugees and SIVs alike, arrive in the United States with little (if any) wealth or assets.

This particular client, as with many others, arrived in the U.S. with \$0 to his name. Subsequently, the Match Grant check we brought with us represented his only means of income until he could secure a job. I thanked the MSR for her willingness to assist us and asked if there was any other way we could deposit his check. I made certain to emphasize the importance of these funds on the client's livelihood, arguing that the funds would not bounce given that it was a government issued check. After consideration, the MSR excused herself and walked the check over to the head teller. Once she returned, she made us a "final offer:" we could take the check to the issuing bank to cash it, or we could deposit the check with her institution on the condition that there would be a two day hold on the funds. After breaking this down with the client, he was concerned about the hold, explaining that his pre-existing medical condition required medical supplies, that, without the check, he would not be able to afford. Understanding the seriousness of his situation, I suggested that we take the check to the issuing bank to cash it there. Before we left, I made sure to grab a business card from the MSR who assisted us as I knew I would be bringing in more clients in the near future.

We arrived at the issuing bank and took our place in the teller line. When we were called, the client presented his check and stated that he would like to cash it. Without looking up, the teller said, "ID?" The client placed his backpack on the ground and began rummaging through a folder until he found his I-94. He slipped in under the Plexiglas wall that separated the teller from the rest of the lobby. She took a quick glance at the sheet of paper and said, "no, we don't take this." The client looked at me and his shoulders began to drop, taking on a posture which symbolized defeat. Again, I explained that he is a refugee, and that the I-94 was his only form of identification. Without looking, and intermittently pausing to smack her gum, the teller said, "we don't cash checks unless you got a valid form of ID." Understanding that we would not be given

an audience with the manager, the client stuffed his ID back into his backpack and started walking towards the door. Once we made it to the car he said, “thank you Madame Sarah, today is being long.” I replied with my best attempt at “you’re welcome” in French and told him I enjoyed our time together. He laughed, and said, “ah, almost better!” Despite my atrocious pronunciation, I could tell he was thrilled that I was putting the French lesson he gave me days earlier to use.

We made our way back to the credit union where the MSR spotted us walking in the door. We let her know that the issuing bank would not accept the client’s ID and that we would, therefore, be depositing the check with her. She flashed us an uncomfortable smile which hinted at feelings of resignation and walked the check up to the head teller. After a few minutes, she returned holding \$20 and a receipt. The client folded the \$20 bill neatly in his pocket and handed me the receipt. The remaining funds had been placed in his checking account and, the bottom of the receipt read, “mandatory hold.”

That same day, I arrived with two Kenyan brothers, both of which were eager to deposit their assistance checks. While in route to the bank, they spoke openly about their desire to use their funds to enroll in college and casually reminisced about their favorite subjects: English, geography, and business. When we arrived at the credit union, I asked to be seen by the MSR who had assisted me earlier that day. When our number was called, the brothers eagerly followed her into the office. One brother, whose English abilities were noticeably stronger, acted as the liaison between the MSR and his younger sibling. She went through the motions, calling the compliance department and sending photocopies of the two Kenyan brothers’ identifications, which were conveniently situated on the same piece of paper.

Due to their family being accepted by the USCIS as a single case, they were only given one identification form that contained the pictures and identifying information of each member of the family. This presented a new set of challenges for the MSR, who, despite her best efforts, was unable to convince the compliance manager that there were no separate forms of identification. She, again, excused herself from the office to speak with the branch manager directly. During this time, the brothers inquired about setting up direct deposits once they obtained a job, and asked how to apply for a credit card, hoping to apply for school this way. The MSR returned and let me know that she was able to negotiate a similar deal for the brothers, smiling confidently. Once the accounts were opened, she took each of the checks to the teller line, returning with a \$20 bill and a receipt for each brother. Their remaining funds would be available to them in two days. Before we left, she explained to me that given the brothers' ages, and their lack of familiarity with U.S. banking systems, the branch manager would not allow them to obtain a debit card until they were gainfully employed and set up a direct deposit system. It was obviously, in her mind, a minor inconvenience that could easily be resolved. She explained this to the brothers who nodded their heads silently.

Despite her confidence, the brothers were well aware of the ensuing hassle created by this "minor" inconvenience. While on the way to the credit union, the eldest brother asked why we had passed so many financial institutions, arguing that it would be easier to open an account at an institution that was close to home. I had to explain that many institutions would not accept their identification. In response he furrowed his brow and retrieved the I-94 from the folder which had been entrusted to him by his father. "This is very important" I heard his father say as the boys climbed into the van. "Najua!" (I know), he replied, rolling his eyes. Sitting in the passenger seat he scanned over the document and pointed to the stamp. I shook my head in acknowledgement

and said, “they just don’t know, so we go to this bank,” pointing in the direction I was driving. The credit union was a fifteen-minute drive from their apartment complex, without traffic. While there was a bus stop in the vicinity, the route was not a straight-shot from their home, requiring a connection mid-way through. subsequently, for something as simple as obtaining access to *their own* money, without a vehicle, the brothers were required to make the trek, either on foot or via a lengthy bus ride, to withdraw funds in person until they were permitted the “luxury” of a debit card.

UNREASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

Another bureaucratic hoop that both SIVs and refugees are expected to jump through involves the unrealistic expectations that they must attain in order to obtain access to, and continue funding for, vital resources. Moving beyond the issues regarding documentation and paperwork, which is often unreasonable in and of itself, these expectations provide significant, and often unrelenting, challenges to both clients and the agency itself.

After scoping out the area, the case worker asked me to take a new client to a different financial institution and open a bank account. While this institution was not previously known for accepting clients, new management yielded a promising opportunity. The client was an older woman from Afghanistan who, the caseworker warned, did not speak nor understand any English. While this is never the ideal situation, hand gestures and smiles were usually enough to get the job done. Due to the client’s age and limited mobility, we decided to roll the dice on this financial institution given its proximity to her home. When I arrived at the apartment complex, she greeted me with the customary, “As-salamu alaykum” and kissed my cheeks, to which I returned the greeting. We gathered the necessary paperwork from a UNICEF tote bag under the

trundle bed in the living room and walked outside. After locking the door, she turned and handed me the tote bag and showed me a small orange slip of paper. Before I could read the contents, she turned around and started off across the street. Confused, I stood by the door holding, essentially, her entire life in this tote bag, thinking she would turn around once she realized I wasn't following her. On the contrary, she continued across the apartment complex and disappeared into another apartment building. Not sure what to do, I pulled out my phone and called the case worker. "What do you mean she left?" he laughed. "I don't know, she just gave me her documents, showed me an orange piece of paper and took off across the street. Are you sure you told her what we were doing today?" After sharing a good laugh, he told me that she must be arranging for someone to pick her daughter up from the bus stop. I went to the van and put her tote bag in the passenger seat, hoping she would return soon. Five minutes later I saw her hustling across the street heading towards the car.

When we arrived at the bank, we were helped by a friendly young woman who, after seeing my volunteer staff ID, visibly became more comfortable. Similar to the previous institution, after presenting the client's I-94, the MSR made numerous phone calls to verify its authenticity. After speaking with the branch manager, as well as the fraud department, she was given the green light to open the account. However, in order to open the account, the institution required that the client understand the "foundations" of the banking process. After explaining that the client speaks little English and that this process would be explained to her by trained employees at the resettlement agency, the MSR insisted that the client give a verbal and written acknowledgement of understanding. We were then taken to the assistant manager's office so that a translator (belonging to an affiliated company) could speak with the client via teleconference.

The room was dimly lit and was stiflingly hot. The MSR acknowledged this and apologized for the heat, stating that the air conditioning vent in the room was not functioning properly. We took our seats across from the desk, and then MSR asked the client what language she spoke. Confused, she turned to me and shook her head. Trying to recall the language listed on her client biodata, I looked at her questioningly and said, “Farsi?” “Dari?” “Pashto?” Although I recalled her biodata stating that she spoke Dari, she indicated that she spoke Farsi. This did not seem out of the ordinary, given that the languages listed on a client’s biodata are often incorrect. For instance, while creating a Reception and Placement (R&P) document for a family of 7, I noticed that all but one of the family members were listed as speaking the same language. One child, the oldest son, was listed as speaking a completely different language from the rest of the family. Comically, the language that the rest of the family was said to have spoken was not listed as a language that this child understood, despite them living together for 15 years. These discrepancies are common and are usually sorted out once the client arrives at the resettlement agency.

After signaling that she at least recognized the word “Farsi,” the MSR relayed the information to the interpreter service. Within minutes, a Farsi interpreter was on the line. When the interpreter started speaking, the client looked very puzzled. She stood up to get closer to the phone and responded in a pleading tone. The interpreter stopped her mid-sentence and said, “I’m sorry, but this person speaks Dari.” After a brief hold, a Dari interpreter was on the line. Before the interpreter could finish their mandatory spiel about being recorded for quality assurance, the client began speaking. The interpreter, obviously thrown off by this, indicated that the client was saying that she was uneducated and did not know what they wanted from her. The MSR then recited a script to the interpreter, stating that in order to open an account, the client must

understand that there is a certain amount of money that must remain in the account. If the account falls below this amount, the client would be charged a monthly fee that would re-occur until the account balance is restored. As the interpreter was translating this information, I could see that the client was becoming visibly distressed. She repeated her concerns to the interpreter, stating that she was poor and uneducated and that she did not understand what this meant.

Looking to the MSR, I repeated that this information would be relayed to her by the staff at the agency who would explain how the banking system worked. At this point, the client began speaking frantically to the interpreter, who was obviously unprepared for the inundation of information she was relaying to him. The client then sat down and it was apparent that this was taking a toll on both her physical and mental energy. The interpreter stated that the client told him that she was confused, and that she repeatedly emphasized that fact that she was uneducated and did not understand these matters. She also mentioned that she was worried about her financial well-being and that she needed this money (referring to her benefit check) to buy food for her and her daughter. The MSR looked at the client and then turned towards the phone and said, “we need her to confirm that she understands these terms before we open the account or process her check.” Relaying the information to the client, she looked up and shrugged, it was visibly obvious that she felt defeated. The MSR told the interpreter to ask her again, if she agreed to, and understood the terms, to which the client shook her head no, but the interpreter indicated that she said, “fine.”

She was then instructed to sign her name on the electronic signature pad. The interpreter relayed the instructions as the MSR pointed towards the machine. Standing up, the client took the pen and searched around for the paper she was to sign. Understanding her confusion, I used hand gestures to indicate the act of signing and pointed at the electronic pad. She shrugged and

wrote a tiny “x” on the screen. The MSR began to ask the interpreter to ask the client to sign her legal name, to which I interjected, “she doesn’t know how to read or write” in a tone indicating that she should drop it. We had now been at the bank for upwards of two hours. Despite the time and effort on behalf of all parties, the MSR explained that she would open the account, but that the check would not be cashed or deposited until the client was able to comprehend the terms and agreements regarding the minimum balance requirements and the fee structure. With that, I turned to the client and smiled, indicating that she had done well. After two hours, we left without receiving any of her government assistance check. The next day, we closed the account and cashed the check at the “usual” spot, “conveniently” located two bus lines, or a 45-minute bike ride, away.

WHAT ABOUT THE WOMEN?

These hurdles are especially prevalent for the wives of Special Immigrant Visa holders. While there are female principal applicants (PAs), the vast majority of PAs are male. During my tenure at the CCC, I heard of only one female PA. Due to their close contact with U.S. citizens, the PAs are often fluent in English, and are aware of basic culturally specific customs and curtsies. However, this same closeness with U.S. citizens also requires them to live away from home. Consequently, their wives and children are not privy to this same level of exposure. Once they arrive in the United States, they are often left unable to communicate with anyone other than their husbands, or other SIVs in the area, often presenting several challenges resulting in the “failure” to meet developmental resettlement expectations.

Usually, when I take the wives of SIVs to appointments, their husbands always accompany us, acting as translators and virtual sounding boards who deflect and interpret

cultural conflicts in real time. On this this particular day, the client's husband was busy with the employment coordinator and could not accompany his wife and two youngest children to their WIC appointment. The case worker, who also speaks Dari, contacted the PA to inform him about the documents his wife would need for the appointment. When I arrived at the townhome, she was waiting at the door cradling the baby. The toddler was standing behind her, wrapping herself in her mother's skirt peeking shyly at me and smiling. After verifying that she had the required documents, we walked over to the van which I had equipped with car seats to accommodate each child. The toddler climbed excitedly into the van, taking a seat in the back row. Her mother followed, sitting in the middle row still cradling the baby. Realizing that they were not aware of the car seat requirements, I pointed at the baby and then towards the car seat. Hesitantly, the mother placed the baby in the seat, also instructing the toddler to sit in the adjacent car seat.

After buckling the toddler, I walked to the other side of the van to secure the baby. As I was buckling the straps, the baby began to cry. The mother reached over to pick the baby up. I made a driving motion with my hands and shook my head no, indicating that the baby had to stay in the seat in order to me to drive. The baby continued to cry throughout the entirety of the car ride to the doctor's office. We were less than a minute away when I saw the mother unfasten her seatbelt and remove the baby from the car seat. Seconds later, the toddler had managed to unstrap herself and was standing up in the back row. Admittedly, I should have pulled over and strapped everyone back into their seats. However, it was apparent that this would be a losing battle. After indicating to the mother that she should place the baby back into the car seat, she replied in Dari, swatting her hand indicating that I should leave her be. At this point, we were one stop light away from the office, I told myself to be as cautious as possible and prayed that there wouldn't be any police officers around to notice my unbuckled passengers.

When we arrived at the appointment, the receptionist immediately asked for the required documents. Once the documents had been verified, we were told to take a seat in the waiting room and wait to be called. After a brief wait, the receptionist called out a name which sounded like it could be Arab in origin but did not sound at all similar to the client's name. When nobody came forward, I had a hunch that it may be that she was referring to. After inquiring further, it turned out my hunch was right. Given the client's lack of English, if I had not been with her it is highly unlikely that she would have known that this name was supposed to be hers, and at this particular WIC office, they are not known for being especially forgiving.

We were escorted to the back office so that the client could be processed into the system. The client sat in a chair adjacent to the secretary's desk while I sat across the way. The client was cradling the sleeping infant while the toddler was busy exploring a bookshelf on the far side of the room. Using the documents brought by the client, the secretary began entering the client's information into the computer system. Looking up from her computer, she asked the client if she breast fed, assumably to refer her to the correct resources. The client responded by raising her free hand up in the "I don't know" gesture. Realizing that the client did not speak any English, the secretary pointed at the baby and repeated the question, this time much slower. I'm not sure if she thought that the client would miraculously understand her question now that her dialect was slowed, but nevertheless, the question yielded the same result. The secretary stated that she could not move forward with the paperwork until the question was answered. Doing my best to relay the question using hand gestures, I pointed towards the baby, made a motion like I was eating, and pointed to her chest. As if a lightbulb went off, the client immediately began to smile and shake her head. She then proceeded to remove her breast from her shawl and show the secretary, who immediately scolded her saying, "I don't need all that, just answer the question."

Realizing that her remaining questions would not be answered without an interpreter, the secretary let out an exaggerated breath and began dialing the interpreter service, asking the client what language she spoke. When the client replied with a confused look, the secretary rolled her eyes and turned to me. Admittedly, I had forgotten to check the client's biodata before leaving and couldn't remember which dialect she spoke. I sent a text to the medical liaison, hoping that he would be able to recall this information. While awaiting a response, I began listing out the common dialects to see if any piqued the client's interest. When the client heard Farsi, she began nodding her head. It wasn't until the secretary had a Farsi interpreter on the line that I received a response from the medical liaison informing me that the family spoke Dari. Sucking in her breath and making an "mmcht" sound through her teeth, the secretary abruptly hung up on the Farsi translator and re-dialed the service number.

Once the appropriate translator was on the line, she began asking the client questions regarding the infant's date of birth and birth weight. The client responded and the translator stated, "she said it was hot outside and the baby was small." The secretary replied sarcastically, "you don't know when your baby was born? Well then, we can't provide services. If we don't know the age of the child, we don't know if you are eligible." The translator was silent. Unbeknownst to the secretary, in many rural provinces of Afghanistan, it is not customary to receive an official birth certificate when a child is born. One agency employee who also arrived in the U.S. as an SIV explained, "we never had birth certificates, my father would just write our birth dates in the family Quran." Others, he explained, may not even go to that extent. "When it became time to enroll in school, you would bring the child and they would ask, 'how old is he?' They say, 'I don't know, he looks like he is five, yes?' and then they would be enrolled in

school.” It wasn’t until then that the child would receive any type of document recording their date of birth, and even then, it was, at best, an educated guess.

Breaking the silence, the interpreter reiterated that the client said it was very hot at the time. Cutting him off mid-sentence, the secretary state bluntly that she needed an exact date. Realizing that the secretary had the child’s Visa in front of her, I suggested that she use it to ascertain the child’s date of birth. “There, it wasn’t that hard now was it?” she said.

By this point, the toddler was getting tired of standing in the office. She began tugging on her mother’s skirts and whimpering. I pulled out a receipt and a pen from my purse in an attempt to keep the child entertained. In order to soothe the baby, who was beginning to cry, the client pulled out a bottle from her bag. Noticing its contents, the secretary snatched the bottle from the corner of her desk and said, “uh-uh you can’t be doing this, that’s cereal in there. Tell her she can’t do this,” she directed at the interpreter. Looking at the client, she pointed at the bottle and said loudly, “this a NO-NO.” Alarmed, the client began speaking frantically. Trying to keep up, the translator stated that the client was feeling anxiety about feeding her family and that she didn’t know if they will have any food. “Tell her we don’t do all that,” said the secretary, “we just focusing on her and the baby.” Clearly distressed, the client reiterated her concerns to the interpreter. “Tell her we got the information we need and that we going to take her to watch a video before they see the doctor,” the secretary said. “What language is the video going to be in?” asked the interpreter. The secretary replied, “we just do English.” The interpreter paused, listening to the client, and said, “she asks why she has to watch this video because she doesn’t understand English.” To which the secretary replied, “Maybe she’ll understand the pictures or something.”

While the client was being escorted to the viewing room, I asked the secretary about the contents of the video. She explained that the video provided an overview of the WIC program as well as information regarding child safety, proper eating and lifestyle habits for mother and baby, as well as a list of food items that participants can buy with their WIC card. This video is an essential component of the WIC program as it provides the participant with the necessary information needed to navigate the system. While the client may be able to piece together some of the information by “understanding the pictures or something,” this vital information is essentially being talked at her, rather than explained to her in a way that she can comprehend. After watching the video, the client is expected to have a strong enough understanding of the program to be able to abide by, and navigate, the rules and regulations that, if broken, could result in expulsion. Before leaving the office, as I had another appointment to attend, I took a peek into the viewing room. The toddler was playing happily with the toys which had been laid out on a carpet in the corner. Her mother was sitting in an adjacent corner leaned up against the wall with one arm cradling the baby, and the other propped up on the arm rest. She was covering her eyes with her hand. The video continued to play, despite the uncomprehending audience.

INTER-AGENCY EXPECTATIONS

These expectations are not limited to outside services. Given the CCC’s reliance on state funding, they are also expected to hold clients accountable for, and meet, often unattainable goals. Non-profit resettlement agencies, including the Refugee and Immigrations Services (RIS) of the Catholic Diocese of Richmond, are reliant upon state sponsored funding to provide the services necessary to achieve the overall goal of “*early and durable self-sufficiency* for refugees” (Catholic Diocese of Richmond, 2002, p. 11). By accepting a Reception & Placement (R&P)

Grant, resettlement agencies enter into a cooperative agreement with the Department of State. Within this agreement, resettlement agencies receiving state funding are required to follow specific guidelines regarding the quality and quantity of the comprehensive resettlement services offered to each client. These services include case management and orientation, employment placement assistance, school liaison services, ESL instruction, and prevention services for refugees and families (Catholic Diocese of Richmond, 2002). Due to the nature of the funding, clients are given limited access to each service. For instance, as per R&P guidelines, each client is allocated 90 days of case management, five years of employment placement assistance, three years of school liaison services, 30 days of ESL and cultural orientation, and one year of prevention services.

One of, if not the most, important of these services is the ESL and cultural orientation program. Without this program, obtaining and maintaining sufficient employment is virtually impossible. As noted in the Refugee Handbook for Service Providers, “finding a job and learning English are the two most important steps toward economic self-sufficiency” (Catholic Diocese of Richmond, 2002, p. 5). Despite its immense importance, the ESL program is only offered for 30 days. When I was first introduced to the CCC via the refugee studies course, much of our focus was spent on the ESL aspect of the resettlement process.

During my first orientation, we were taken to the ESL building and observed the beginner level English class. There were letters and numbers hung up around the room, much like one would expect in a preschool classroom. Despite its size, the classroom was occupied by four students. One elderly woman who was sitting alone smiling happily in the corner, a young mother who was leaning against the wall with a toddler pulling at her shawl, and two women who appeared to be sisters sitting in the front row. When we arrived, the instructor was halfway

through the alphabet. First sounding out the letter, and then pointing to his students to echo it back. The sisters recited each letter enthusiastically, the young mother who was lacking confidence repeated the sounds quietly to herself, while the elderly woman, saying nothing, continued to smile in the back corner. Pausing from his lesson, the instructor asked his students to introduce themselves using their name and home country. After a brief silence, he pointed to them and said, “name...country.” One of the eager sisters pointed to herself and recited her name and said, “Congo.” The other followed. However, the remaining students remained silent. The young mother shifted her gaze towards the ground while the elderly woman in the back continued to smile. The instructor explained that each of the students, barring the two sisters, spoke a different language and that he, a volunteer himself, didn’t speak any of them. As a result, he had to give them instruction using a language they did not understand. “It can be hard,” he said, “but we do the best that we can. Hand signals help a lot.” Using my own, albeit flawed, judgement, I assumed, given the focus on the alphabet and the overall lack of comprehension, that this must be their first week in the course. However, when asked by our instructor, the ESL volunteer informed us that this was, to my surprise, their last week of the allotted 30-day instruction.

Before our tour of the ESL building, we were given a brief introduction to the agency and its overall goal of promoting “early and durable self-sufficiency” for refugees. A representative from each branch of the resettlement program introduced themselves and gave a brief overview of the services they provide, as well as the length of time their services are available to resettlement clients. The ESL coordinator was not able to attend, as ESL classes were in session at the time of the orientation. The employment coordinator acted in her absence and explained the ESL process, memorably noting, “ESL is a really important part of the resettlement process.

Imagine moving to a new country and not knowing how to communicate. It makes everything really hard for them. We offer ESL classes to the clients for 30 days, if you think about it, that's not a lot. That's where you [volunteers] come in because we don't get a lot of time with clients for them to learn English, and a lot of them have a hard time coming to class."

After learning that this was the last week of instruction for the class of four, her words struck a chord. Per R&P guidelines, which the CCC must abide by in order to stretch funding, clients are expected to be gainfully employed and self-sufficient by the end of a 90-day period. However, on my first day, it was already apparent that this goal was not only unrealistic for the clients, but also virtually impossible for the resettlement agency. I immediately thought back to my own language courses throughout my academic career. I was enrolled in Spanish classes from the time I was in 7th grade up until my junior year of college. Despite the fact that I received eight years of instruction, that my Spanish teachers could all relay information to me in a language I understood, that I had family members who spoke fluent Spanish, and that I had the luxury of dedicated instructional time with minimal distractions, I am *still* unable to claim that I speak Spanish fluently, or even decently for that matter. The fact that refugees and SIVs who are also balancing past traumas, the shock of arriving in a completely foreign country, finding a source of income and childcare, facing endless amounts of paperwork, and a host of other obstacles, are expected to obtain enough English to become self-sufficient in a matter of 30 days is not only unreasonable, but laughable.

Adding to the impossibility of the situation, for a significant period, the ESL program was not offered as all due to restrictionist immigration policies implemented by the nationalist federal administration at the time. Given the reduction in overall immigration numbers, R&P funding, which is contingent upon incoming clients, was slashed significantly. To accommodate

this loss of funding, the CCC was forced to downsize and, eventually, place entire programs, including ESL, on hold. In an effort to remedy the situation, agency employees worked tirelessly to find alternatives for their clients, relying heavily on church programs within the community.

Frustrated, one client asked, “why the CCC not teaching English to me?” and going on to explain that other countries offer English courses to refugees. Unsure how to proceed, I explained that federal budget cuts resulted in the CCC losing funding for refugee services. “Ah,” he said, “they are not liking us, eh?” While a local church, which worked in close contact with the agency, offered a free ESL class during this interim, given the time and location of the class, it was difficult for clients to attend. Speaking to this, one client explained, “they [my brothers] go to learn at their church, but they are working manual labor. They are tired and all they can do is sleep. It is not good to be going to class.” Even with this lapse of essential services, both agency employees and clients were still expected to achieve the same levels of “success” despite the fact that they were operating in a limited capacity.

These struggles continue during the orientation phase. Within the first week of arrival, each adult client is required to take a cultural orientation pre-test. This test, which is written in English, asks questions regarding demographics (name and address), general laws, the scope and limitations of the agency, and emergency contact information. In a typical case, male SIVs do fairly well. Female SIVs and refugees on the other hand, often do not answer any questions at all. After their baseline scores are recorded, the caseworker must go over a pre-generated list of general orientation items created by the Refugee and Immigrations Services (RIS) branch of the Catholic Diocese of Richmond. The contents of this list are relatively streamlined among all volags. The checklist is broken into four sections: basic survival, legal issues, money and budgeting, and employment. These sections cover information such as general health and safety

protocols, the use of basic household items, a broad overview of U.S. laws and etiquette, and basic expectations within western economic systems.

When I began volunteering with the CCC, these orientations were frequently conducted in English via PowerPoint presentation. Subsequently, if the client did not speak English, they were essentially expected to obtain a workable knowledge of basic U.S. financial, legal, and occupational systems through hand gestures and pictures alone. This was not done intentionally, but rather, due to a lack of available resources and access to appropriate translators. While the delivery system has been improved upon due to an increase in language diversity among agency employees, there are still language barriers that essentially prohibit clients from obtaining information which, quite literally, could mean the difference between success and failure for resettlement clients.

Despite its good intentions, this orientation is often treated as a formality rather than an effective means of conveying practical information, as many of the topics on the list are wholly unrealistic and, frankly, unattainable. For instance, some of the more outlandish items listed on the official orientation checklist located in the *RIS Refugee-Community Partnership Manual* include: the neighborhood watch system, buying automobiles and automobile insurance, and acquiring hunting and fishing licenses (Catholic Diocese of Richmond, 2002). Most of the clients arrive in the United States with, quite literally, the clothes on their backs and a few pieces of luggage. While the overall goal may be to eventually achieve self-sufficiency, including a reliable means of transportation, it seems absurd to go through the process of buying and insuring an automobile when most can't even afford a bus ticket. In a similar vein, explaining the neighborhood watch system, which is wholly reliant on community cohesion (implying that community members are able to communicate with one other in a mutually understood

language), seems futile. I originally felt that this futility also applied to the hunting and fishing license requirement, until my trip with the Congolese brothers to their scheduled post-arrival physical.

While on the way to the health department, the brothers, who were sitting in the back seat, were engrossed in a heated conversation in French. As we were passing a particularly busy intersection, one of the brothers abruptly looked up from his conversation and shouted, “Madam Sarah!” Instinctively, I pressed my foot on the brake pedal thinking that he must have seen an impending hazard. After I realized that there were no immediate obstacles in our way, I eased off the break and asked him what was wrong. “There!” he pointed, “You cannot just be leaving it!” Looking in the direction of his finger, I saw a deer on the side of the road that looked as if it had been dragged to its current position after being hit by oncoming traffic. “We must be stopping for it,” he continued, his brothers nodding in agreement. Unsure what he meant, I laughed and said, “we can’t stop or we will be late.” Concerned, his brother, who was sitting in the back row, chimed in, “it is good for eating, how can you just be leaving it?” Not knowing how to proceed, I explained that, in the United States, you are not supposed to eat animals which are on the side of the road. Confused, the oldest brother said, “it is good, swear! Why we cannot be eating it? It is a waste” “I don’t really know,” I confessed, “you can only eat animals from the grocery store, or from hunting.” By this point, all three of the brothers were expressing their concern about wasting perfectly good food. “It is a waste, isn’t it? We waste a lot here,” I reflected. Nodding in agreement, the brothers went back to their conversation. Looking in the rear-view mirror, I saw one of them looking out the window. “America,” he sighed, shaking his head.

CHAPTER VI

UNDESIRABLE PLACEMENT

Many refugees who were clients of the CCC held pivotal positions in their countries of origin. During our car rides to and from various appointments, I always enjoyed talking with, and getting to know, the clients who I worked with. This sentiment seems to be shared by the clients as well, even those who do not speak the same language. One topic that frequently comes up during my conversation with clients is their occupation, or what they aspired to do back home. Often, clients asked me about my status as a student which sparked conversations about their interest in school or certain subjects that pertain to their past careers.

After ensuring that he had all the required documents to apply for SSA, the client smiled gingerly and sighed, “ah, we can be going,” gesturing towards the door. His apartment was small and cramped. He had a twin mattress set up on a metal box spring in the living room directly adjacent to a secondhand (or thirdhand, or fourth-hand) armchair which acted as the only chair in the living area. There was a small bathroom to the left, which struggled to obtain hot water. The kitchen was located in the back of the apartment and was similar to that of a door room. The refrigerator was small and looked more like a beverage cooler than a functional food storage appliance. There was a small sink sitting atop a hollow counter space, under which hung a small piece of fabric over a curtain rod. This is where he kept his non-perishable goods. “Sounds good,” I said as I got up from the small armchair, which was cracking significantly on its front leg and was missing quite a bit of padding on the right side. Carefully taking out his key from his pants pocket, the client meticulously checked that the bolt on the front door had been latched as the door had a history of jamming. After making it into the car, the client smiled sheepishly and

said, “How about Tottenham, eh?” referring to my favorite soccer team. “Ugh” I replied with a groan. “Handball [penalty] in two minutes! What are they doing? I cried after that” I said, rubbing my forehead in agony. “No!...Swear?” he laughed, “They still are not finding me a TV so I watch it at a friend’s house. Why he would do that? It is crazy! When I was watching it, I was thinking you were mad Sarah, swear!”

After meeting one another, we discovered that we were both fans of Barclays Premier League (BPL) Soccer, albeit our favorite teams were archrivals. “This was our year” I exclaimed. He laughed, “ah, Arsenal can be winning now, eh?” He looked out the window as we passed a local university located by the CCC office. “You are a student?” he asked, gesturing towards the window. “I am! At a university in Norfolk.” “What are your studies?” he asked curiously. “Criminology” I replied. He looked at me blankly. Realizing that he was unfamiliar with the subject, I explained further, “I study laws.” “Ah!” he proclaimed, “you study laws for refugees!” “Yes, that’s it!” I smiled, “What about you? What did you study in the Congo?” “French” he replied, “I was a teacher at the university.” “You were a professor?” I asked excitedly, “I teach at the university too. Did you like it?” “Oh, I love it.” As he was speaking, his face began to light up. “I love to teach my students.” He turned back towards the window looking longingly at the university buildings across the street. “Are you going to try and teach at a university in the U.S.?” This question, which I now realize, was incredibly naive to ask. “Oh,” his face dropping. “I cannot. In United States, they don’t allow this.” “I am sorry” I said, almost instinctively. “Madam Sarah,” he said tiredly, “I will be taking a job. Any job. They are not giving me a choice.”

This particular client created a buzz in the office before he even arrived. Given his advanced age and considerable health restrictions, the task of finding him an employer who

could accommodate his needs was going to be particularly arduous for the employment coordinator, despite his considerable educational background and command of the English language. When I returned to the office, I was curious to see if there had been any job prospects lined up for the client. After speaking with the employment coordinator, I learned that he had recently accepted a position at a local meat packing plant. “I told him it would be hard work,” the coordinator noted, “but pay there is the best of the jobs we have.” One thing that immediately struck me about this arrangement was the fact that the client was a devout Muslim who strictly observes Islamic dietary laws (Halal). I remembered completing his pre-arrival grocery shopping and having to follow very specific guidelines to accommodate these restrictions. These laws forbid the handling of pork, which, at this particular meat packing plant, could not possibly be avoided.

This unavoidable contradiction became commonplace for many of the clients I encountered at the CCC. In the Congo, he was renowned as a college educated scholar and dedicated professor with years of experience. In the United States, he now spends his days working shift work in a pork processing plant. His story, like that of so many others, tells the tale of unfathomable compromise, undesirable placement, and the sheer will to survive by any means necessary.

SIVs ON THE JOB MARKET

The issue of prior work and educational history not transferring over into the U.S. market presented a problem for many of the clients at the CCC, particularly the SIVs. While volunteering with the agency, I spent a considerable amount of time with the employees, often sharing lunches and eventually becoming friends. Many of them were eager to share their own

stories with me, knowing that my research interests often meshed with their own life experiences. On one such occasion, an employee spoke to me about his career in Afghanistan. He worked as a surgeon during the Afghan Civil War. He detailed the grueling hours he and his colleagues had to endure during that time. “Sometimes I stayed awake for 36 hours at a time doing surgeries,” he said. “We were a small team and would have to be working on 40 to 60 casualties a day. My family had to move to another province because our house became the front line.” As we were finishing up lunch, he pulled out an old picture and said, “Can you guess who is me?” It depicted a small group of men posing in what looked to be a makeshift hospital lobby area. They were all smiling, but you could see the fatigue on their faces. I laughed and said, “it must be this one,” pointing to a younger man with a beard standing on the far side of the photo. “How did you know?” he asked, laughing. “They [extremist forces] made me wear a beard,” his smile fading.

After years of working as a surgeon on the front lines, he was unable to practice any type of medicine when he arrived in the United States. Acknowledging this reality, he explained, “that is why some of the Afghan clients call me doctor, because I was a doctor in Afghanistan.” After he pointed this out, I recalled that many clients did refer to him affectionately as “doctor.” Even some of the other Afghan employees referred to him this way, and it was always said with an air of respect. “I tell them in the orientation that they don’t have to call me doctor because here I am not.”

This was a common reality for many Afghan SIVs. One of the first cases I ever worked with was a female SIV from Afghanistan. She was the first, and only, female SIV I encountered. She too worked as a doctor in her home country and was eager to continue her work in the U.S. When I arrived at their friend’s house (commonly referred to as a tie) to pick them up, they were

all waiting by the door. The tie gave me an agitated glance and started shuffling the children out into the front yard. Once we were on our way to the SSA office, I nervously tried my hand at starting up a conversation with the husband, who was sitting in the passenger seat. “So, what did you do in Afghanistan,” I asked, hoping I wasn’t being too forward. Seeming pleased to talk about his interests he replied, “I worked for the government doing taxes. I was...you call it...an accountant.” “Ah, you must be good at math,” I exclaimed, laughing and explaining that math was not one of my strong suits. He smiled and replied that he enjoyed studying it in school. “I also worked for an organization for empowering women in my country.” “That is amazing, we are lucky to have you,” I replied.

Based on my own ignorance, I assumed that his wife did not speak English, as this was usually the case, so I asked him what she liked to do back home. Looking up from her seat she replied in a matter-of-fact tone, “I am a doctor.” I apologized for assuming that she didn’t speak English, to which she smiled and said, “this is OK.” She went on to explain that she worked as a doctor in Afghanistan, but in the U.S. her credentials were not transferred. “I would like to go to school for the x-rays,” she said, “this way I can work in medicine.” “My husband went through a radiology program in the area,” I replied. “He liked it very much.” She made intense eye contact with me through the rear-view mirror, “I would like to know where I can apply to start this program, I would like to start right away.” I gave her the name of the school and let her know that I was not aware of the specific details regarding registration requirements, all the while she was furiously typing notes onto her phone. In the following months, she inquired about attending school numerous times, only to realize that her ambitions of becoming *at least* a radiologist were well out of her financial reach.

After much negotiating, the closest job the employment coordinator could secure for her was an entry level medical billing position which required minimum knowledge about the medical field and boasted little pay. The client subsequently rejected the offer, noting that her talent and skill could be better utilized elsewhere. During my tenure at the CCC, she rejected every offer presented to her, which became increasingly unskilled as the search went on. Subsequently, many of the employees at the agency became irritated with her. One, who also arrived in the U.S. on an SIV, noted, “SIVs are difficult to work with. They had good jobs at home and want jobs in their field when they arrive in United States. They won’t take any job that is offered to them, they will wait until what they want happens. But refugees are very easy going. They will take any job and they are easy to work with.” Despite the doctor’s (rightful) insistence that she deserved a position worthy of her skillset, her refusal to accept positions that did not fit her criteria placed a strain on her family, and subsequently their tie, as they were only allocated 90 days of state funded assistance. To keep the family afloat, her husband, who had also rejected prior job offers, took a part-time job selling t-shirts at a kiosk in the mall.

Another employee who I frequently spoke with would often share his life stories with me as we worked. He would share his accounts of growing up in Afghanistan and his experiences as an SIV. In Afghanistan, he was trained as an IT specialist and worked with the French forces as an interpreter. His work with the French brought him in close contact with U.S. forces, eventually securing him the ability to apply for a U.S. based SIV. “We would share the barracks,” he recounted. “The Americans weren’t allowed to have liquor, but the French were. So, the Americans would come to our tents. The generals had the good stuff.” He never went into much detail regarding the missions he was made to complete but hinted several times that they were quite dangerous for him and the other Afghan interpreters. “But I loved listening to the

French girls over the radio. The accent was romantic, much more attractive than the Americans,” he would throw in with a smile.

When he arrived in the United States, he took the first job that was offered to him. Despite his educational background in IT and his considerable skill with the English language, the only position he was offered was that of an entry level housekeeper at a local resort hotel. “It was terrible. People would vomit on the floor or in the bed and you have to clean it up. They wouldn’t care, they would just leave trash and mess everywhere and we would have to clean it.” “What about your education with IT?” I asked. “Didn’t they try to get you something where you could use that?” He explained that he obtained his education and training for IT while he was in high school, and briefly once he graduated, “but when the war started, I had to work as an interpreter to make money and technology changes very fast.” Eventually, he obtained a managerial position at the hotel. However, the conditions and pay were not much different. After learning about an opening at the CCC, he applied and obtained the position. His ability to speak multiple languages and his experience with the resettlement process worked to his advantage here, whereas in the previous market these skills were discounted or ignored altogether.

However, given that the CCC is a non-profit organization, his salary was not sufficient to support his family. In order to keep his family afloat, he had to take a part time job as a convenience store clerk. “It’s a dangerous job because the area is bad. People who come in at night are crazy,” he would often explain. Many times, I would arrive at the office in the morning and he would be sitting at his desk struggling to keep his eyes open. “Long day?” I would ask. “Oh, yea my bad. I had to work my other job last night. I didn’t get home until 2 in the morning.” With this routine, he would work from 8-5 at the CCC and then work the red eye shift at the convenience store. Adding to his hectic schedule, when there were new arrivals on the

calendar, it was his responsibility to pick them up from the airport. More often than not, flights are delayed resulting in clients arriving at the airport as late as 11 o'clock at night.

Another SIV who worked as an interpreter during one of the most well-known battles of the War on Terror also met a similar fate when he arrived in the United States. Given that he worked closely with U.S. forces for many years, he had a strong command of the English language and was accustomed to American culture. This was something that the employment coordinator was excited about given that these attributes increased his marketability. She was able to secure him an interview for the second shift at a warehouse facility almost immediately. "He did such a good job at his interview," she boasted when I arrived at the office the following morning. "He didn't need my help at all." The client was very happy to accept the position and begin working. He immediately asked the case worker for help in attaining the required pants and steel toed boots his boss requested. However, once he began to work and obtained his first paycheck, he became much more disenfranchised with the U.S. employment system. Soon thereafter, he began making frequent trips to the office to discuss further employment options that would provide him with a livable wage and hold hours which would be more accommodating of his family life. Eventually, he was told by an employee, who was also an SIV, that he essentially had to "pay his dues" and *maybe* he could find something better in a few years.

After a few months, he came into the office hoping to talk to the employment coordinator. I was sitting in an adjacent office working on some paperwork for an incoming case when he walked by the door. "Ah Sarah, how are you? It has been a long time," he said, flashing a strained smile. "Yes, too long. I am doing well, how are you?" As I asked, I noticed that he looked tired and was standing with a bit of a hunch in his back. "Things are not very good; I

need to talk to [the employment coordinator].” He continued walking and took a seat in the employment office. After he left, the employment coordinator stopped in and spoke with the case manager and me. The client had gotten injured on the job lifting a package that was too heavy for one person and was struggling to keep up with the demands of his supervisor. “He is going to need to apply for workmen’s comp,” she noted. This not only impacted his means of making a living, but it also seemed to take a heavy toll on his mental well-being. He arrived in the U.S. proud and excited for what the future held, but the man at the office that day presented himself as hopeless, broken, and exhausted, an unwitting casualty of the neoliberal capitalist system.

One SIV perfectly summed up this experience, stating, “you are broken up inside, but you can’t sit and wait. All the status you have, your job, your education, it’s all gone. You have to start over. You [Sarah] are only three years behind me, but really you are ahead of me. I had to start over.”

THE BOTTOM OF THE BARREL: OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFUGEES

This refusal to acknowledge skills resulting in undesirable placement also extended to refugee clients. Further, as one employee alluded, many of the refugee clients take the first job that is offered to them, no matter how harsh or demeaning the conditions. However, despite much of the derogatory rhetoric about refugee populations alluding to their (un)worthiness, a large majority of the refugees with whom I worked were highly skilled and trained in many fields that were of value to the community. Despite this, they were most often relegated to the most menial tasks situated within the harshest working conditions as their qualifications did not translate to the U.S. market. One family arrived from Kenya right as the school year was winding down. It was a large family, but as a group they were very soft spoken. The father, in particular,

had a quiet dignity about him that immediately commanded respect. After the family was settled into their apartment, the first order of business was to apply for their social security cards. That particular day, one of the two agency vehicles was in use so rather than driving the client to the SSA myself, we were dropped off by two other agency employees. Unfortunately for us, the vehicle we were left with was not equipped with a functioning A/C system, and it was particularly warm that day.

When we arrived at the client's apartment, he was waiting for us outside, sitting on a lawn chair which looked as if it might give way at any moment. He was dressed in a long sleeve button down shirt which he had meticulously tucked into a pair of Dickies work pants, a pair of steel toed work boots, and a matching ball cap. "Sorry it is so hot in here," one of the employees said as he climbed into the back of the car, "the air conditioning is broken." As I watched him fumbling with his seat belt, I thought he must be dying in what he was wearing as I was wearing a sun dress and still felt stifled. "It is no problem," he said, "I am not hot. It is very hot back home." He knew multiple languages but spoke primarily in French. Given that each of the agency employees were fluent French speakers, they had no problem sharing conversation. However, he was also proficient in English and could speak some Arabic and Farsi. One of the agency employees asked me how my Farsi was coming along, as he knew I had been practicing. "I can say some things, but it's still not great," I said, unconfidently. "Let's hear it then" he laughed. Knowing that I couldn't back out, I recited a few common greetings that I had been working on. Once I finished, all three of them shared a laugh. The client noted, "ah, you are trying, that is good!" The employee who was driving, with whom I developed a sibling-like relationship with, laughed heartily and said, "where did you even learn that? You sound like an Iranian."

Once we arrived at the SSA, the line was already wrapped around the outside of the building. Groaning, I looked over at the employee driving and said, “see you in a few hours then.” The client and I gladly exited the hot car and made our way to the line. While in line, we began talking about our careers and hobbies. The client shared that he worked for the United Nations while he was in Kenya. “I was in charge of refugees who arrived in Kenya,” he said proudly. “Oh, so you did what [the caseworker] does at the CCC?” I asked. “Yes,” he said excitedly. “Just like that. I would pick them [refugees] up from the border when they arrived and bring them to the camp. We would make sure they were safe and had food and shelter.” “That’s an important job,” I replied. “I would like to do social work in the United States,” he added. “Aren’t they paying for that if you are getting good grades?” “Oh, like a scholarship you mean?” As soon as I said it, I felt a pang of guilt in my stomach knowing that he very likely would not be able to attend school as he was the sole provider for his family. “Yes, a scholarship,” he said, checking to see if the line at the door was moving. “I will look at that, a scholarship.” Despite his direct experience in social work while working for the United Nations and his desire to continue work in this field, he was unable to secure anything more than a second shift position at the pork processing plant located almost an hour away from his apartment.

His two adult sons also accompanied him to the United States. One was in his twenties while the other had just reached the age of legal adulthood. Given their status as adults, they had to be processed separately from their remaining family members. As such, they were responsible for their own travel loans and housing arrangements. While the International Organization for Migration (IOM) provides monetary assistance, funded by the Bureau for Population, Migration, and Refugees, to refugees and SIVs traveling to the U.S., this assistance is given in the form of an interest-free loan that is expected to be paid-upon after the first six months of arrival. Anyone

over the age of 18 must sign a promissory note confirming their “agreement to make regular monthly payments to the sponsoring agency...these payments are used to reimburse the U.S. government for the funds it provided to ION for refugee transportation” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2021, P. 1).

Soon after their arrival, I was tasked with driving them to the office to get their Match Grant paperwork signed and completed. When I arrived at their apartment, the front door was propped open by a bike, but there was no sign of the boys. After calling their names a few times, the eldest of the brothers came slowly down the stairs wearing what looked like sleep clothes. “Are you and [your brother] ready to go?” I asked, obviously knowing the answer, but hoping that the question would prompt him to speed up the process. “We were sleeping,” he stated. “It is hard when we are not working to be staying awake.” I acknowledged him and let him know that we needed to head to the office as quickly as possible. He ran upstairs to wake his brother and they both returned downstairs dressed and ready to go about 15 minutes later.

Once in the car, I attempted to find some common ground that we could talk about. Luckily, they were both soccer fans and were eager to talk about the current season. “Who are your favorite teams?” I asked, “let me guess, Barcelona.” They both looked at one another and began to laugh. “That is my favorite team,” the eldest brother said. “Messi is my favorite player.” “Nah, but I am liking Chelsea, and Neymar is the best” his brother chimed in. After making a sour face at the mention of Chelsea (another rival of Tottenham) the brothers started to warm up to the idea of talking with me. “We want to play football [soccer] here, but all the teams are no good,” said the youngest, shaking his head. “I am a striker and he is a defender,” pointing to his brother. Given that my husband and I play soccer in pick up leagues around the area, I began to brainstorm a list of local teams. I quickly realized that the registration fees would be impossible

for the brothers to manage at that time, so I surpassed the urge to bring them up in conversation. “Some of the neighbors [other agency clients] play football in the field here,” I noted. Laughing, the youngest brother replied, “Yea we have been seeing them. They are no good.”

After reminiscing about the current soccer season, I asked the brothers what they wanted to do in the U.S. Both replied that they would like to go to school. The youngest brother recounted his disappointment when he was told that he just missed the age cutoff to continue public schooling. “What were your favorite subjects to learn?” I asked. Both brothers chimed in and agreed that their favorite subject was English. However, the eldest brother was interested in business while the younger enjoyed geography. After recounting some fond memories from their schooling in Kenya, the oldest brother turned to me with a look of discouragement on his face. “We are wanting to go to college, but it is too hard for people from other countries,” he said. Admittedly, I knew he was right. No matter how badly the brothers wanted to attend college, they had no way to afford it. Their academic transcripts did not transfer to the U.S. so they would not qualify for any academic scholarships or qualify for anything except for a GED program for that matter.

Further, since they were too old to attend public school and to be listed as dependents of their father, they both had to obtain jobs just to keep their heads above water. “Maybe if we are joining the military, we can go to school,” the youngest brother said excitedly, “how can we join the military?” My heart sank as he waited eagerly for a response. “Well, that is true. If you join the military, you would be able to go to school. But you need to be a U.S. citizen to join.” “That is no problem,” the eldest brother exclaimed. “When can we be doing that?” Trying to sound as cheerful as possible, I said “not too long, once you are in the United States for 5 years you can apply.” The air in the van immediately became heavy, like a balloon had been deflated and the

hot air stuck like tar in your nose and throat. Both brothers glanced at one another and sat back in their seats, looking loathingly down at the ground. For the remainder of the trip, we rode in silence. After working with the employment coordinator for a few weeks, the brothers also reluctantly accepted positions at the meat processing plant alongside their father. However, given their relatively young ages, they were relegated to the night shift. Soon thereafter, I didn't see much of the brothers. When I would see them in passing, they were no longer smiling and joking as I had remembered but looked tired and significantly older. To this day, I still keep my ear out for soccer teams in the area that could use a striker and a defender.

For most of the CCC's refugee population, manual labor in the form of the local pork processing plant and various landscaping companies act as the main source of employment opportunities. These positions require hard physical labor, grueling hours, and less than desirable shifts. This pace, which is difficult for many of the clients to maintain, particularly the older clients, often presents scheduling conflicts which subsequently keep clients in relative positions of poverty. For instance, the ability to successfully complete ESL training significantly increases a client's likelihood of moving up in the labor force. However, many of the shifts which refugee clients are subjected to make it impossible for them to attend these pivotal classes as most are held during normal business hours. After dropping off some paperwork to a refugee family living in one of the main apartment complexes, I noticed one of the brothers from the DRC sitting out by his front door. After spotting me, he shouted his usual greeting from across the street, "Ah, Madam Sarah, the most beautiful girl at the CCC." I laughed awkwardly and said hello. At that time, his brothers had all received their employment cards and were working at a local landscaping company. He, on the other hand, was stuck in limbo until his employment card could be retrieved. He had been in the United States for six weeks now, but his employment card

was nowhere to be found. Consequently, he spent most of his days sitting outside the apartment or napping in an attempt to pass the time. Despite his relative despair over his missing employment card, he was eager to attend ESL classes, which, at the time, were suspended due to federal budget cuts. “The CCC offering English soon?” he asked. “I hope so, maybe soon,” I replied. “[My brothers] are taking the English classes at the church,” he noted. “That is great! How is it going?” I asked. “No good. They are doing the manual labor” he said, looking frustrated. “[My brother] comes home and he is saying his back is hurting. They are getting home so late they are missing the class. They are getting home and sleeping. That’s it, they can’t be doing anymore!” After running into the brothers a few weeks later, I learned that the pair had given up trying to attend the ESL class.

THE HOUSING HIERARCHY

The housing market, or lack thereof, also presented considerable challenges for agency clients. Throughout my time at the CCC, clients were placed into four main housing complexes that existed on somewhat of a continuum. The complex in which the majority of the refugee clients were placed had a reputation for being the least desirable. It was certainly the oldest, or so it appeared, and was located in one of the worst areas. On the other hand, the complex in which many of the Afghan SIVs were housed was often the most sought after by clients. Especially those whose ties were aware of the available options. On many occasions, incoming SIVs would request to be placed in that particular housing complex. However, general availability and the size of the family often dictated the outcome of these requests. It was not that agency employees wanted to pigeonhole clients into these four options, but it was incredibly difficult for them to find leasing managers who would accept refugee and SIV clients. Given that their academic and

employment backgrounds often did not transfer into the U.S. market, all clients were viewed as a liability by rental companies as they did not have any type of work or credit history.

The complexes who did accept agency clients were located in some of the least desirable neighborhoods in the area. The agency itself is located in an affluent neighborhood, situated across from the 2019 Princeton Review's 17th ranked most beautiful campus in the United States. As such, it is housed around many high-end grocery stores, coffee shops, and modern apartment complexes that cater to the affluent student population. Each of the four apartment complexes are located within a 15-minute drive from the agency, as most clients do not have their own means of transportation and often rely on the agency during their first few years of residency. Despite the proximity, the environment varied drastically. During one of my first trips to visit a client at their home, this contrast was easily recognizable.

Once I started to get closer to the client's neighborhood, which was considered to be one of the "nicer" options, the high-end grocery stores and sparkingly new apartment buildings were quickly replaced by Dollar Generals and ethnic food markets. Bus stops became more frequent and were often overcrowded. At one of the more popular stops, one woman was using an overturned Save-A-Lot shopping cart as a makeshift bench while another soothed a crying baby sitting impatiently on her hip. The surrounding neighborhoods frequently came up in conversation between employees and volunteers at the agency, particularly when new housing options needed to be located. One volunteer, who had been volunteering at the agency for a number of years, frequently brought up the possibility of expanding the search into Hampton, which was always met with fierce resistance by the case worker. "Why don't we look in Hampton? That would give us a lot more options" she asked. "Look," he replied, "we placed clients in Hampton before and it was a terrible thing. One of the clients got shot outside his

apartment. There were little children there.” “But that was years ago,” she retorted. “No, I cannot risk the safety of the clients” the case worker insisted, instantly stopping the conversation from continuing any further. While agency employees do their best to secure housing that is both safe and comfortable, they often voiced their fear that clients’ children would be subjected to a “life of crime” and become “introduced to gang activity” as a result of the less than desirable housing options they were able to procure.

Before I began my hands-on work with the agency, I often shadowed one of the previous case workers who handled the securing of housing. During one of my scheduled days, the caseworker had convinced a nearby apartment complex to allow us to tour one of their units in the hope that a family who was arriving within the next week would be able to fill their vacancy. “We used them before,” she mentioned as we drove to the appointment, “but we had some issues with them in the past. They have new management now, so we wanted to try again since most places don’t give us a chance.” As we neared the complex, she pointed out a nearby bus stop, noting that it would be convenient for the clients. The complex itself was situated between a motel and a convenience store, both of which looked like a CPTED nightmare. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a target hardening strategy involving the design of the physical environment in such a way that reduces the incidences and fear of crime (National Crime Prevention Council, 2003).

As we pulled into the parking lot, I noticed that there was trash scattered alongside the sidewalks and up against the dumpster, which looked as if it had not been emptied in weeks. When we walked into the leasing office, we were immediately greeted by the smell of cigarette smoke and moth balls. A stout woman immediately jumped up from behind her desk and greeted us. “You must be the folks with the refugees,” she stated plainly. “I just had a family move out. I

can show you that apartment. We aren't done with it and it needs some work," she warned, "but you'll get the gist." We walked outside and around the back of the building where there was a dimly lit entrance to a stairway. As we walked up the stairs, she began to talk about the previous tenants who had been a large immigrant family of color. "They just don't understand how to keep things clean," she complained. "We had to replace the whole vanity because they would lay their cigarettes down on the counter. They would just leave their trash everywhere. I just can't understand why they would live like that." Both the caseworker and I continued on silently, as her tone became increasingly hostile as she continued talking about *those* people.

When we finally arrived at the unit, she unlocked the door and forcefully pushed it open. It was obvious that either the door did not align with the frame, or that the foundation was off kilter. The apartment itself was small. Once you opened the door you immediately stepped into the living and dining area. To the right was a small kitchen with a dorm-sized refrigerator and an old oven which looked as if it had not been cleaned in a number of years. The vinyl flooring was bubbling and was coming up at the junction between the kitchen and the living room. "This one has two rooms and one bathroom, you can walk through it if you want," she said. The first bedroom, which was designated as the master, had two large stains on the carpet and the wallpaper was peeling considerably. The second room was roughly half the size of the master and had burn marks along with windowsill. "We usually change the carpet out if there is significant damage, but this one seems to be holding up ok," she said. I looked at her surprised and replied, "I see." "There were only supposed to be up to five people living in here. That's what the fire code says. But they just kept having babies. What was I supposed to do? One of the kids and the baby slept in the living room," she noted with an air of disgust on her face. "How big is this family you have coming?" she asked the case worker. At the caseworker's response of

five, she replied promptly, “we can work with that.” She ended by asking, “y’all would be the ones paying us, right?” The caseworker nodded without saying a word. “Good, I hate evicting people, but you gotta do what you got to do, especially when they live like this” the leasing manager replied, spreading her arms as if to show us the apartment again.

Despite our tour and the leasing manager’s delight that she would be receiving a rent check from the agency for the first three months of the family’s stay, our request for housing was subsequently denied by the apartment complex who ultimately cited a concern about “financial stability.” Even though this particular complex refused to rent to us, the general condition of the apartment was indicative of most of the complexes who accepted agency clients. Before a client moves into their new apartment, the case manager must complete a home inspection. I would often accompany him during these walkthroughs, as it was beneficial to have an extra set of eyes.

The complex at which I completed the most walk-throughs was the complex that housed most of the refugee clients. The complex itself is located just off the main road, adjacent to a used tire dealer. There is no sign that indicates the name of the complex. There is only a rusted metal pole with a wooden sign that had fallen into the grass well before I began visiting the grounds. It must have been there for a considerable amount of time as it was already covered by vegetation. The buildings themselves were old and looked very similar to that of public schools which were built in the 1970s, with cinder block exteriors, flat rooftops, and a plastic type covering under each of the windows. Almost every apartment building had some sort of chair perched outside the door, as many of the residents spent their time sitting outside rather than in the buildings themselves. Each entryway contained a designated space for foliage outlined by cinder blocks; however, the majority of these spaces were overgrown with weeds intermingled with bits of trash and cigarette butts. At the end of the cul-de-sac, there was a small basketball

hoop that had been without a net for months. At any given time, you could usually find a handful of neighborhood children congregating around it. As we passed through the neighborhood, I noticed that one of the apartment buildings had a large blue tarp draped over what looked to be a gaping hole in the corner of the building. “What happened there?” I asked the case worker. “A car drove through it,” he replied casually. Rather than fixing the exposed building, the tarp remained draped haphazardly over the opening for the remainder of my time with the CCC.

When we arrived at the designated apartment, the door was already opened, presumably by the office manager or maintenance. As we walked up to the doorway, I noticed a roach scurry across the doorframe. Given the size of the family, we were inspecting a two-bedroom apartment. The living and dining areas were situated right inside the front door. The floors were laminated with a linoleum slab that was supposed to mimic hardwood. It was bubbling in many places and looked as if it had not been replaced in quite some time. On the main wall which separated the kitchen from the living area there was a large brown water stain that ran the length of its face. As we walked into the kitchen, a large roach crawled across the top of the doorframe. Instinctually, I jumped back and yelled to the case manager. “They will have to call the exterminator before the family arrives,” he noted, unfazed. We made our way through the kitchen where we noticed a large grease build-up on and around the kitchen stove. It looked as if this had also caused some damage to the surrounding wall as well.

Turning the corner, we headed up the stairs which were lined by a wrought iron hand railing. The railing itself swayed precariously as I grabbed hold of it. When we reached the bedrooms, the caseworker discussed his proposed layout with me as we inspected each room. In the master bedroom, we would set up three mattresses for the Principal Applicant (PA) and his two children. The second bedroom would be reserved for the PA’s brother who arrived as a

single. As we made our way back downstairs, I saw another roach crawl across the wall out of the corner of my eye. When we completed the inspection, we walked over to the leasing office to discuss the issues that we saw. Namely, the roach infestation and the grease buildup in the kitchen. While she entertained our concerns, she continued about her business without looking up or acknowledging either of us. “Well, the exterminator already sprayed, but I guess I’ll call him again if you still think it’s a problem,” she spat. “Just let me know when they are going to get here so they can sign the contract.”

The lease agreement process in and of itself was often an ordeal as it is typically the first time the client gets a glimpse of their new home. More often than not, particularly regarding SIV clients, there is a great deal of disappointment and frustration involved. For a period of about a month, the only caseworker took leave to visit his family back in Afghanistan. Given the recent budget cuts and staff shortages, I was essentially the only acting caseworker at the time. While many of the other employees were able to assist with the hands-on tasks, most did not have any working knowledge of the paperwork aspect of the job duties. As such, I was tasked with making sure all the required paperwork was completed for each of the new incoming cases.

During this time, an SIV family arrived from Afghanistan. The caseworker had secured housing for them before he departed; however, it was up to me to make sure the leasing paperwork was signed and in order. I picked up the family from their tie’s home, which was situated in a traditional middle-class neighborhood. They were excited to be seeing their new home; his wife and young son were particularly eager to have their own space. The PA was eager to speak with me; however, his wife was quiet and seemed to be quite shy. After I addressed her with the customary “As-Salaam-Alaikum,” she seemed to warm up to me, smiling and bowing her head in response. She pointed to a young boy who was crawling near her feet. “Your son?” I

asked, with a smile. She smiled back and scooped the boy up into her arms. He giggled as I waved in his direction. As we drove, the PA told me that he was a former employee of the United Nations and he had also worked for UNICEF. He was quite happy to be in the United States and was eager to begin building a new life for his family. As we spoke, his wife sat quietly in the back seat, fiddling with her son in the car seat. It was obvious that she did not like the separation that this caused; however, her husband explained that it was necessary in order for me to drive safely.

When we arrived at the apartment complex, I could tell that the PA was not thrilled about the location as it was a far cry from his tie's quiet suburban neighborhood. The street was plagued by traffic and the frequent passing of 18-wheelers made it quite loud. The leasing office was situated on the outskirts of the complex. We passed what used to be the community pool on our way in. The area itself was surrounded by a chain linked fence which had been cut by wire cutters on the middle frame. The water was a murky green and the concrete supporting the left side of the pool had caved in. Rather than fixing the issue, it looked as if the area had been converted into a makeshift storage area with various tarps and boxes scattered throughout the space. As we all shuffled into the office, we were immediately hit by a strong smell of cigarettes and stale food. In response, his wife pulled her hijab up over her nose. The room itself was small and dark. There was an old couch and an armchair which was missing quite a bit of its original fluff situated on the far-right side of the room. Behind these were stacks of reused paper boxes which gave off a strong odor of aged paper and must. On the other side of the room was a small desk which was littered with paper and food wrappers, flanked by two glass ashtrays.

The leasing manager, who was a cheery older woman whose voice indicated that she had been lifelong smoker, immediately stood up and asked me where the family was from. When I

told her the family was from Afghanistan she said excitedly, “oh, great! I’ve got [refugees] from all around them,” almost as if she was showing off her collection. She proceeded to list off the nationalities of their surrounding neighbors: “Afghan, Afghan, Pakistani, Afghan,” she noted proudly. The PA shot me a nervous glance and I smiled reassuringly. She then proceeded to ask me what the PA did while he was in Afghanistan, obviously assuming that he was not able to understand her questions himself. I looked over at him and smiled as he explained to her that he worked for the United Nations and proceeded to show her his business card. Glancing at his card, she turned to me and stated, “it’s a shame we get so many educated people from these countries and when they come to the United States they don’t get anything,” spreading her arms out as if to indicate the apartment complex itself.

After going through the contract, she let the PA know that she was not happy with his apartment in its current state: “the previous tenants did a number on it. We are going to put a tub and shower over the original bathtub.” The PA looked at her wearily and she assured him that it would be “acceptable” by the time they were done. Before we left, she looked at both the PA and his wife and stated in a firm tone “do NOT pick up any furniture that is by the dumpster. As tempting as it may look you have to leave it because it is most likely infested with bedbugs.” That was it, that was their parting words regarding their new home. As we left the apartment complex, it was obvious that the couple was feeling uneasy about their new living arrangements. As I dropped them off at their tie’s apartment, the wife grabbed my hand and smiled, squeezing it gently. “My wife hopes to have lunch when we move into our own home,” the PA said with a tired smile. I smiled at her and nodded my head, “hopefully soon.”

THE BEST OF THE BEST

These inadequacies were not reserved for the “least desirable” of the available housing complexes. Although one of the options was known by agency clients as being the “best” of the four choices, it too fell victim to both structural and environmental pitfalls. Before I began officially volunteering with the CCC, I would often visit this apartment complex with the ODU Refugee Studies course, as we would hold at-home ESL classes for the women who lived there. Each of the women who attended these classes were wives of SIVs. Subsequently, many of them spoke little to no English and had not been exposed to U.S. culture, as most of their husbands were required to live away from their families during their service. The previous management allowed us to use the model apartment as a makeshift classroom, as they were aware that many of the female clients were unable to attend classes at the agency given their various responsibilities at home, particularly regarding childcare. However, once management shifted, this was no longer provided to us as an option and the at-home ESL classes were cancelled indefinitely.

During one of our classes, the focus of the day was “the home,” in which we would describe common household objects and rooms within the house. After the main instructors finished with their initial lesson, we were broken into small groups in which four to five women were grouped with two ODU students. They were then instructed to describe each room of their house to their groups while we were there to assist if help was needed. It was heartbreaking to hear the women speak about their homes, as many of them were clearly dissatisfied and, frankly, appalled by their living conditions. Of the five women, the most advanced English speaker in the group started us off. “What rooms are in your house?” I prompted. “Mmm...living room, kitchen, bedroom for...” pointing to herself, “bedroom for...” holding her hand slightly above the

floor indicating her children. “Is it big or small?” the other ODU student asked. The woman smiled shyly and let out a sigh, “no...mmm very small. No room for the children. They are sleeping like...” she said, stacking one hand over the other. After she finished, another one of the women chimed in. “Kitchen is” holding up her fingers indicating that it was small. “Too dirty...bugs,” she finished with a disgusted look on her face. Their sentiments seemed to be the general consensus. Most of the women described their homes as being too small for their families, with many having to sleep in their living rooms. They also frequently mentioned the less-than-ideal sanitary conditions. Many concurred that they frequently dealt with “bugs” and rodents. The conditions in which the women were describing were easy to see, even without entering into an apartment.

When I would visit clients at this apartment complex, the hallways and stairwells were often indicative of the living spaces themselves. More often than not, these areas were littered with various food wrappers, empty drink containers, and even soiled diapers at times. Many of the lights were inoperable and, at one point, the glass fixture covering the fluorescent light located directly above a client’s front door had fallen onto the ground and shattered. I visited that client a number of times that week, the shards of broken glass were still sitting outside of their door when I arrived days later, and the fixture was never replaced. This apartment complex with its littered and neglected common areas, whose units were infested by bugs and vermin, which often required cots to be set up in living areas to accommodate children and grandparents, was the most requested by clients. This apartment complex was known widely as the “best” that we could offer. It is important to note, however, that this was not from lack of trying on the behalf of the CCC. Employees did everything in their power to secure safe, functional, and affordable

housing to each and every client. Despite their best efforts, most landlords were just simply not willing to extend their properties to agency clients.

THE DESIRE TO GO HOME

After the reality of life in America set in, a life dominated by night shifts, grueling working conditions, and deteriorating housing conditions, many SIV clients voiced their desire to return home. A week after signing their lease, the SIV family of three moved into their newly “updated” apartment. As described by the leasing manager, these updates included a cover which had been placed haphazardly over the existing shower and tub, as well as a deep cleaning of the carpets, which, at move-in day, still contained evidence of stain residue. A week after they had been moved into their new apartment, I took the PA to the post office to change his address and apply for his mailbox key. I walked up the narrow stairway to their front door and used the small knocker which hung crookedly under the peep hole. The PA answered the door hurriedly and ushered me inside where I was greeted by his wife and young son. She waived excitedly and gestured for me to sit down. Using my best rendition of Farsi, I asked, “chetori?” (how are you?). She giggled and nodded her head, as if encouraging a young child who had just done something well. She pointed at me and after an awkward pause I replied, “khubam” (everything is fine). Afterwards, we sat in relative silence, but she seemed happy to be sitting together. After a few minutes, her husband appeared out of the bedroom wearing a long-sleeved collared shirt tucked into a pair of pleated dress pants. Each time we went to any appointments, he made a point to wear his most professional attire. His wife stood up and scooped the baby into her arms as we departed, watching nervously as we shut the door behind us.

As we got into the car, the PA turned to me and said, “I am worried about my wife. She is very sad here and wants to go home.” Not sure how to respond, I asked if she had gotten a chance to meet any of the other Afghan women in the neighborhood. “The neighbor is very nice, and she talks to his wife,” he replied, “but this wife also tells her how bad it is here.” “I hope it will get better for her soon,” I said, trying to hide the worry on my face. “She gets headaches,” he continued. “She would sometimes have...” pausing to recount the word, “...seizures in Afghanistan. But here they are getting much worse. And she is pregnant,” he ended, looking out the passenger window. “Congratulations!” I said, trying my best to be as cheery as possible. “Thank you,” he grinned. “She does not want to raise a baby here. This is not a good place for a baby,” indicating he concurred with her assessment. After a brief pause, he said, “what about you, do you have a family?” “I am getting married in a few weeks,” I replied. He smiled and said, “I am glad you are getting married; you must put your happiness first and start a proper family.” I was touched by his concern for my happiness, despite the turmoil going on in his life. Then, he said nonchalantly, “we will come to the wedding.”

In order to prepare for the wedding as well as take care of various other tasks, I took a two-week break from my volunteer duties. Upon my return, I was asked to pick up the family and bring them to the office, as there was paperwork waiting for them to sign. When I arrived at the apartment complex, they were already waiting outside. After loading everyone into the van, the PA, who was sitting in the front seat, turned to me and said, “my wife asks about you. She doesn’t like some of the other members [referring to CCC employees], she always asks when we will see you.” Feeling a pang of guilt for my extended absence, I let him know that I was glad that she felt comfortable with me. “We decided that we are going to return home,” he said. “My wife does not feel safe here and she is not happy. We cannot raise a baby here and she will not be

happy until we are back home.” Stunned by this revelation, I asked, almost stupidly, “will it be safe for you back home?” He looked at me with tired eyes and said, “it will be better than this.”

After they signed all of their paperwork stating that they willingly decided to return to Afghanistan, despite vehement protests from the case worker, I drove them back to their apartment. When we arrived, his wife took my hand and gestured for me to come with her. “She would like you to have lunch with us,” the PA said. Despite the long list of tasks I needed to complete, I couldn’t bring myself to refuse her offer knowing that she had asked for me so many times previously. I couldn’t help but think, maybe if I had been around more that she would have fared better during her time in the United States; maybe she would have stayed. I knew this was irrational thinking, as there was nothing I could have done to solve the mountain of issues that caused them to want to leave the U.S.: the less than desirable job opportunities being presented to her husband, the cramped apartment complex with the uneven shower and stained floors, and the isolation that came along with it all. After climbing up the narrow stairwell, the PA pulled out his housekey and pushed his shoulder forcefully into the door. We took our seats on the living room floor where his wife had laid a sheet carefully over the stains of the carpet. She looked the happiest as I had ever seen her as she was buzzing around the kitchen getting lunch ready, knowing that she would be returning home soon. During lunch, she made a point to sit next to me on the living room floor. This was the last time I saw them.

Another SIV family shared a similar experience, although they did not end up returning to Afghanistan. They arrived a few months after the previous family had departed. He worked as a translator in Afghanistan and was able to secure an SIV for he and his wife. At the time of their arrival, the usual housing complexes did not have any vacancies, so the case manager had to get creative when securing a place for them to live. After several phone conversations, which often

became heated, and multiple visits to the building, the caseworker was able to secure the family a one-bedroom apartment situated in what looked to be a converted duplex building. While a bit farther out of the way, the building itself was located within the general vicinity of the other four housing options. It was situated behind a convenience store directly off the main road. They were given the ground floor apartment, which the PA was none too happy about. The area itself was similar to that of four apartment complexes. There were multiple ethnic food markets and discount merchandise stores scattered throughout the main drag, accompanied by overcrowded bus stops and various cash advance establishments. When I first met the family, I tried to spark up a conversation with the PA using of my usual questions, “how are you liking your house so far?” Most clients responded positively, saying it was nice, or at least OK. To my surprise he said, “we need to talk to [the case worker] it is not safe here for my wife.” Not sure how to respond, I said, “I am sorry to hear that, I am sure the case worker will be able to help you.”

Curious to learn more about the couple, I spoke with the employment coordinator the following day. I learned that the PA had refused every job offer that she had lined up for him, including an offer from the meat packing plant. “He has to take something,” she said exasperatedly. Weeks went by and the client continued to refuse each offer that was presented to him. “Something must be going on,” the employment coordinator noted. “He’s got to understand that he has to have a job. We can’t keep paying his rent, plus his wife is pregnant.” “Stop helping him,” the caseworker chimed in. “If he doesn’t want to take any jobs, don’t waste your time on it,” he continued, turning back to his computer. Being an SIV himself, he was insistent that clients needed to work their way up from the bottom, clearly internalizing the idealism of the “American Dream” despite his own personal struggles.

The following week I arrived at the office and was immediately greeted by the case manager and the employment coordinator, both of which looked highly agitated. “What’s going on?” I asked, knowing that something was bothering them. The case worker laughed and dropped a piece of paper onto my desk. “Take a look at this,” he said. The paper contained an email that had been sent to the case worker by the PA detailing the reasons as to why he felt the CCC had not done enough for him, why he had denied all the job opportunities that had been presented to him, as well as listing out his general grievances about the United States. He noted that he did not feel safe leaving his pregnant wife to go to work, as his neighborhood was not safe. He emphasized that this was especially pertinent if he was made to work the night shift. In his email he noted, “I would rather die in my own country than be killed by thugs and drug dealers in the United States. My wife used to be so happy to come to the U.S., now she cries every day and just wants to go home. If you can’t help me move, then help me go back.”

On the one hand, I understood why this email was sent. He expressed from day one that he did not feel safe in his neighborhood, despite evidence gathered by the case worker that he had “nothing” to be afraid of. I also empathized with his grievances. He expected to feel as if his wife was going to be safer in the U.S. than she was in Afghanistan. After all, that was the whole reason for applying for an SIV in the first place. However, I also understood the frustration of the agency employees who worked tirelessly to secure housing and employment opportunities for this family with their very best interests in mind, despite the numerous structural barriers placed in their way. While the couple did not end up returning to Afghanistan, they eventually moved to Northern Virginia with the help of other SIVs whom he knew from home.

This desire to go home not only impacted the adults, but also the children. While I was not with the agency at the time of this incident, the staff had recounted the story as we were

working in the office. An SIV family with a teenage son requested to meet with the case worker to discuss their son's desire to return to Afghanistan. They pleaded with the case worker to meet with their son and talk him out of making this desire a reality. "He hated it here," the case worker recounted. "He wanted to go back to Afghanistan and join the army. He wanted to fight for the country he felt was his." A volunteer, who was there at the time, chimed in and said, "he didn't fit in at school well and he had a hard time learning English. He also hated where he lived." The boy's parents were terrified of the son returning to Afghanistan as it meant certain death for him. Despite this reality, the boy was convinced that certain death at home was better than the life he was living in the United States. The family finally gave in, realizing that, despite their efforts, the boy would return to Afghanistan as soon as he turned 18. After several meetings with the family, the case worker even went as far as to pick out a plane ticket. However, at the last minute, the boy changed his mind. "I'm not sure why," one of the volunteers admitted. "He hated it here. He must have agreed to stay for his parents." The case worker shook his head in agreement.

TIED HANDS

No matter their previous work or academic backgrounds, clients of the CCC are relegated to the very worst working and living conditions. Conditions that, given their lack of leverage in the form of prior work and credit histories, they are forced to accept. Once again, it is important to note that this is not the fault of agency employees. In each of these cases, they worked tirelessly to ensure that each client is relatively safe, and that their basic needs are being met to the best of their abilities. However, as these accounts illustrate, the system in which they are forced to operate, in which funding is contingent upon case numbers which have effectively been reduced to near nothing, make these goals virtually impossible to achieve.

While concern for funding has always been a mainstay in the minds of refugee resettlement agencies, the Trump-era travel ban and refugee resettlement restrictions reduced an already tight budget to virtually nothing. The travel ban was signed by then-President Trump in January 2017 and was revised three months later. The executive order completely suspended the refugee resettlement program for 120 days and specifically inhibited the entrance of refugees from Syria, Iran, Sudan, Libya, Somalia, and Yemen (International Rescue Committee, 2021). By fiscal year 2020, only 11,814 refugees were resettled in the U.S., the lowest level in the program's history (Bureau of Population, Refugees, & Migration Refugee Processing Center, 2020). These restrictionist policies had dire and long-lasting effects on refugee resettlement programs throughout the country, including the CCC. As Mathema and Carratala (2020, p. 1) assert, "low admission levels translate to reduced funding available for the operation of the program, starting a domino effect on the entire system – from decimating the local infrastructure, which supports newly arrived refugees, to affecting those overseas who are waiting to be resettled." Agency employees, as well as their clients, were forced to operate in a rapidly deteriorating system which not only lacked federal support, but often, public support too.

CHAPTER VII

CALCULATED KINDNESS

Throughout my time at the CCC, it became abundantly clear that any “kindness” the U.S. showed towards SIVs was meticulously calculated. Originally coined by Loescher and Scanlan (1998), calculated kindness refers to America’s often “calculated” responses to refugee crises. These responses have been consistently aligned with, and impacted by, its own foreign policy objectives. This concept posits that “foreign policy considerations have been the principal animating force behind United States foreign policy since World War II” (Heloton, 1987, p. 857). While this is certainly evident regarding refugee populations, it is particularly applicable to SIV holders in that the need for the SIV program itself only came about in response to the United States’ prioritization of its own geopolitical interests in the region. All the SIVs with whom I encountered had been directly impacted by the consequences of foreign interventionist policies in their countries, particularly regarding the United States’ storied relationship with Iraq and Afghanistan. They were also keenly aware of the geopolitical interests that have defined this relationship.

During my time with the agency, I had many candid conversations with employees and clients who were eager to share their experiences regarding the program itself, as well as their overall experiences with the United States and other interventionist countries. Throughout these conversations, they detailed the impact of foreign intervention on their lives, the price they had to pay to get to the United States, as well as the treatment they received once they arrived.

IMMINENT DANGER: FOREIGN INTERVENTION AND LIFE IN AFGHANISTAN

When working with and learning about refugees and SIVs, it is impossible to understand their experiences with the immigration system without first learning about their life stories, as these identities are not mutually exclusive. I often ate lunch with two employees who arrived in the U.S. on an SIV. During these lunch breaks, they would reminisce about their lives in Afghanistan and bring up their families in the U.S. and back home. “My kids are keeping me up at night,” said the younger of the employees, rubbing his temples with his hands. “I have to work here and then I go to school. When I go home, I am tired, and they want to play. Look, I’m telling you don’t have any kids” he said exasperatingly, glancing in my direction. This became a popular topic of discussion given my upcoming wedding date. “Are you planning on having children?” the older employee asked. “I think so, we both want kids,” I replied, somewhat standoffish, as this had not been the first time I had been told by the pair not to have children. Sensing the tension, the older employee replied, “it is because of how we grew up that we say this,” looking over at his colleague.

They both grew up in Afghanistan during the Afghan Civil War, a conflict which was heavily influenced by foreign intervention. While this conflict took place well before the U.S. led War on Terror, and subsequently the creation of the SIV program, it marked the beginning of their experiences with interventionist policies, eventually resulting in their becoming SIVs. Describing his experiences, he recounted, “we were trapped in the basement of our home for a week. There was nine children and we did not have any food or water. My mother was sick during this time and she died in the basement with us. We couldn’t move her until there was a ceasefire. I was not big enough to carry her body, but my younger brother was stronger than me.” Once there was a lull in the fighting, his younger brother had to carry their mother on his back

for two miles until they were able to load her body onto a flatbed truck. While the older employee was recounting this story, his colleague was shaking his head in agreement. “We were also trapped with no food or water. We lived very close to each other,” he noted, looking over at the older employee. “My father had to go outside into the war zone to find food for us. The only food he could find was rotting carrots. We survived by eating these carrots for a week.” The combatants agreed to a three-hour cease fire to allow the remaining citizens to evacuate. The younger employee recounted running from his house to the river which separated the two warring sides: “when we were running, we saw heads that were detached and arms and legs all over the ground. We ran as fast as we could.” After their experiences, both men were very skeptical about having children, despite having children themselves. “The world is cruel, and you never know what is going to happen,” the younger employee said. After a long pause, his colleague turned to me and asked, “what if one day your son leaves the house and comes back as a dead body? That is why we say not to have kids.”

Many of the SIVs I encountered shared similar stories of grief and hardship, often as a result of foreign intervention within the country. On my first assignment, I was tasked with taking an SIV family to the SSA to apply for their social security cards. They were a family of four from Afghanistan, including the primary applicant (PA), her husband, and their young children, a son and a daughter. Their son was elementary school aged while their daughter was still too young to attend school. When we arrived at the SSA, there was already a line formed outside of the building, so I knew we were going to be waiting for quite some time. Luckily, the children were more than happy to play games on the parents’ cell phones. Since the office was so busy, we were not able to find a row with enough chairs to accommodate us all. To remedy the situation, I took a seat in the row directly in front of the family. After we had been sitting in the

waiting room for well over an hour, the children began to get antsy. The daughter was especially eager to get out of her chair. While at first her parents protested, they eventually allowed her to stand in the aisle to keep her from crying. After a few minutes, she stood shyly behind my chair. Noticing her curiosity, I turned around slowly and jumped, acting like I hadn't realized she was there. She giggled excitedly and quickly moved to my other side. We continued this game until she eventually tired out. Noticing the bored expression on the boy's face, I asked if he liked to play soccer.

Although I had not been at the agency long at that point, I realized that most of the clients were avid soccer players, or at least soccer fans, and it usually worked as a good conversation starter. At my question, the boy looked at me with a puzzled expression, shook his head and quickly returned to the game on his phone. Noticing his confusion at my question, his mother explained that the children were never able to learn how to play. "It was too dangerous in my country for my son to even go outside to get to school," she said. "They had to stay home and they could only play games inside, that is why they both play like this," pointing to the phones in each of the children's hands. "That must have been hard for everyone," I responded. "Yes," she shook her head, "but it [the war] was too dangerous, it is what we had to do."

Foreign presence in the country was a common thread throughout many of the conversations I had with SIVs regarding life in Afghanistan, particularly regarding the United States. During our shared lunch breaks at the office, I would often ask for their insight on the presence of Russians and Americans in Afghanistan. "Some people might call it an invasion, but not everyone felt this way," explained the older employee. "Some people thought that Afghanistan had nothing to be invaded for, so the Russians might be trying to help us. The same thing is said about the Americans when they invaded Afghanistan." I was honestly surprised by

his answer given the historical tendency for these interactions to begin with, or result in, armed conflict. “Some people like the Taliban saw it as an invasion,” he continued, “but some Afghans saw it as maybe an opportunity for change.” While he spoke, his colleague looked at me to show his disagreement with the statement. “Well,” he broke in, “we need to get a motel room for the new single.” I wanted to learn more, but duty called. Making a mental note, I would be able to pick the conversation back up later. Given the incoming client’s health concerns, his flight had been significantly delayed from the original arrival date. Without a definitive arrival date after the original cancellation, the agency was unable to secure housing that would be ready in time for his rescheduled flight. Given that the client did not have any viable U.S. ties (friends or relatives living in the U.S.) the agency had to book a motel room to house him while his living arrangements were being finalized. Since the day was otherwise slow, we all took the trip over to the motel. This was beneficial for me as I needed the experience. The case worker was going on vacation in the coming months, leaving me as the only viable backup at the agency.

When we arrived at the motel, we were the only patrons in the lobby. It was a small chain that looked to have been built sometime in the 1960s. The floor tile supported various cracks and the wall paint showed obvious signs of nicotine damage. The front desk, which consisted of a large triangular cutout from a built-in wall, was unmanned. We rang a small bell which had been placed atop a pile of yellow post-it notes. Stepping to the side of the room, the older employee looked at me inquisitively and asked, “why are you interested in SIVs?” To be honest, it was a question that I had not been expecting and was unsure how candid I should be with my answer. Glancing over at the front desk, which was still vacant, I responded, “because they deserve more. They risked everything, and got this in return,” raising my arms up. “It’s criminal what the U.S. is doing. We can’t expect people to risk their lives and then tell them to wait for years before

holding up our end of the deal.” By this point, the front desk attendant was peering through the cutout in the wall. “Ah, the usual?” he asked, gesturing to the case worker. “Yeah, we have a single arriving tonight.” As the caseworker finished up the paperwork for the motel room, his colleague and I walked out to the van since it was unusually warm in the lobby and the motel either wasn’t using, or did not have, air conditioning. “So, what crimes did the U.S. commit in Iraq and Afghanistan?” his colleague asked, leaning up against the van. “Where do I begin?” I laughed. “First, we did not receive authorization from the United Nations Security Council, making the invasion an illegal act of aggression. Second, there were no weapons of mass destruction so claims to legal self-defense were invalid. Third, we failed to protect civilians, we illegally transformed the economy, and engaged in torture and abuse.” About halfway through my summarized list, the caseworker joined us in the parking lot and listened intently, shaking his head periodically in agreement.

“Of course,” I noted, “these are not things that I experienced. Since you both lived there and experienced these things, you are the experts.” At this, they both noticeably lifted their shoulders and held their heads a bit higher. Despite their overall respect for women and their professional contributions, we often walked a delicate tightrope in which I learned to balance my own research and knowledge with nods to their expertise in the field. This tightrope was one way in which I attempted to ensure that their own experiences were not being minimized, but it also helped me navigate cultural differences regarding professional dynamics between men and women.

A few minutes later, the older colleague asked, “The [SIV] decision making process makes sense, no?” He continued, “It should be like a pyramid. If you helped the U.S., then you and your families should come first. They don’t have the space to accept everyone, no?” I

nodded in acknowledgement, waiting for him to continue. “I think that diplomats would come first, it makes sense” he continued, alluding to their elevated status. Before he could finish his thought, the caseworker interjected, “but you are not getting it, that this is the problem. It is a problem because it is only favoring people who have helped the United States. That is what she is saying, that because it is only helping Afghans that help the U.S. Why are they the only ones who they are helping?” “It is helpful because it helps refugees skip the refugee process, so the waiting is shorter,” the older colleague retorted.

Interested to hear his response, I pointed out that the U.S. waited until 2006 to create the SIV program, even when there were documented cases of Iraqis and Afghans in grave danger due to their service to the U.S. years earlier. “Yes! It is not a good system” the caseworker noted, while the older colleague brushed off my comments asking, “what else can they do? They can’t evacuate all of us.” Digging deeper into his reply, I asked, “I see where you are coming from, but you don’t think there is any better way to do this?” At this, the caseworker, who had previously been casually leaning against the van, stood up and added, “and think of this. The work that the U.S. is giving us is divided up by contracts. They are dangerous jobs that they [the Americans] don’t want to do, so they give it to us. I had to take the jobs because I needed the money.” Many of these jobs involved work with security forces, cultural advisors, and embassy officials; all of which involved direct engagement with the community and, often, the enemy.

While seemingly insignificant, his statement directly refers to the structural conditions Afghans were left to deal with as a result of the War on Terror. Given the coalition’s use of infrastructural warfare, the U.S.-led War on Terror in Iraq and, subsequently, Afghanistan, left both countries in a state of disrepair. Vital systems such as water, sewage, transportation, and healthcare, to name a few, were severely damaged during the invasion, not only rendering social

services unattainable, but also crippling the Afghan economy. Adding to his point, I suggested that these contracts were also problematic. “The U.S. is aware of this and can exploit it to their benefit. They know that you need jobs, and they also don’t want to risk American lives to complete these tasks. They know that people who need money to feed their families will be willing to do dangerous jobs with little protection if they are promised good pay in return.” Both men glanced at one another, nodding their heads in agreement. Returning to his lunch conversation, the older employee said, “the invasion of Afghanistan by the U.S. could be argued to be legitimate or illegitimate, depending on what side you are on.” Pausing, he narrowed his eyes and added, “but we all know it was illegitimate.” “Besides,” he said, “it’s easy to understand the politics [of the invasion] if you understand where the money is coming from, no?” referring to Afghanistan’s oil reserves. “You see the same thing with Iraq, the U.S. says there are these weapons of mass destruction but there was never any evidence. But you understand if you know where the money is coming from.” Feeling the weight of the conversation, as well as my own guilt for my (willing or unwilling) role in the U.S.’s actions, I sighed heavily and replied somewhat under my breath, “there’s always a string attached, even when human lives are involved.”

After spending two days at the motel, the incoming single was settled into his new apartment. Since the caseworker had already taken him to apply for a social security card, I was tasked with completing his agency intake paperwork. This paperwork usually took up the majority of my day, but it gave me the opportunity to hang around the office and catch up with agency employees. During this time, the caseworker, whose desk was located parallel to my own, reflected on our previous conversation at the motel, speaking candidly about his experiences with the SIV system. “It was a very dangerous job,” he reflected, describing the

route he would take to get to work. “You had to take a different route to the American zone every day so nobody could follow you.” Unlike some of the other SIVs who worked on American military bases, Afghan nationals were not permitted to live on this particular U.S. installation. “I lived on the outskirts of Kabul. I had to take five buses to get to work. This way it would throw them [extremists and disgruntled Afghan nationals] off if they were tracking me.” Elaborating on the subject, he noted that many Afghans were not fond of their fellow countrymen who worked for the Americans given the devastation they had caused: “they would call us American slaves. You had to be very careful when you went to work to make sure nobody recognized you.” “What happened if they did?” I asked, fairly certain of the answer.

He went on to explain that if you were recognized by someone, they would often resort to acts of violence against you and your family, ultimately forcing everyone into hiding until the threats subsided, which was not likely to happen. “I can’t even imagine,” I replied, “did anyone [from the U.S. installation] ever escort you out, or at least check to make sure you made it home?” Chuckling at my question, he responded, “what? no, why would they?” leaning back in his chair and placing both hands behind his head. This lack of protection was the norm even in emergency situations. With a family member in dire physical need, one SIV was forced to take a three hour long cab ride in a hostile environment when he was denied assistance by his U.S. employers. “I told the driver, do not stop. Not for the police, not for the military, for no one. It is not safe, you have to keep going no matter what.” Despite his efforts, he did not make it home to his family in time.

After a few moments he turned his chair towards me. Sensing that he wanted to say something, I stopped working on the intake paperwork and swiveled my chair to face him. He looked at me and sighed, “when you are working for foreign countries, it’s like being stuck on a

machine that makes sweets. There's two stones that churn wheat into flour. One stone is the foreign country which is dangerous for you, and the other stone is your own country who hates you for working for the infidels. Either way, you get churned to flour." After finishing his statement, he turned back to his desk and started working on his own paperwork. Stunned by the weight of words, I turned back to my own desk and stared blankly at the computer screen. Despite its simplicity, his metaphor perfectly illustrated the SIV experience. On the one hand, the foreign country offers an opportunity for "change" and the irresistible possibility of a livable wage, often exploiting economic desperation in exchange for dangerous contracts and offering virtually zero protective measures in return. On the other hand, you are labeled as American slaves by your own country and ostracized for helping the invaders, placing yourself and your family at risk of violent retaliation. Either way, you get churned to flour.

WHAT DID THEY DO FOR US? LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES

Common to all of the SIVs I encountered during my time with the CCC, the assumption was that life was going to be better once they arrived in the United States. However, they quickly began to realize that rather than escaping danger, the threat had just evolved. As one SIV noted, "when I applied for an SIV, I thought things would be better. I thought I wouldn't have to worry about my life or my family's safety. But now in the United States we are just labeled as terrorists instead of American Slaves like we were in Afghanistan." Rather than being recognized and threatened by disgruntled countrymen in Afghanistan, many SIVs described a new threat when they arrived in the United States: the criminal justice system, starting at the point of arrival. "When I arrived in United States, security pulled me out of the line and held me in the back room for four hours. You know what they said? They told me that they couldn't locate my fingerprints

on record.” “What did you do?” I asked. “You know that is a lie. To even get this far they [adjudicators] took my, and my family’s, fingerprints multiple times.” “Didn’t you have to get your fingerprints taken in Afghanistan beforehand?” I asked. “Yes!” he said emphatically. “They probably have now hundreds of my family’s fingerprints and now they are saying they have none?” After being detained for four hours, his fingerprints were miraculously “found” and he and his family were permitted to enter into the U.S. where he immediately began the search for a job.

“My first job was in Williamsburg,” he went on to explain. He worked as a housekeeper at a resort hotel. “One day I was walking outside near where I worked, and the police drove by. They stopped me and put me in handcuffs.” “What, why?” I asked, “did they tell you anything?” “No,” he responded. “I felt so ashamed because people were walking by and staring at me and were probably thinking ‘good job you caught a terrorist.’ I asked the officer if I could at least turn around so they couldn’t look at me.” The officer eventually allowed him to turn around, but he continued to feel the gaze of curious onlookers. After some time, his friends and coworkers noticed his absence and hurried across the street to vouch for him. “They came and told the officer that they knew me and that I worked with them across the street. That is why I was here, because I work across the street.” “That had to be infuriating,” I said, “to know you’ve done nothing wrong and for people to look at you like you are a criminal.” “Yes!” he replied, visibly edgy. After his friends and co-workers vouched for him and corroborated his story, the officer turned to him and asked mockingly, “well, aren't you famous?” Calmly, he retorted, “no, these are just my co-workers and friends.” After being detained for over half an hour, he was released by the officer, but the damage had already been done. By simply existing in this space, he was

singled out by this police officer and subsequently subjected to public humiliation on the grounds of nonexistent “suspicious behavior”—in actuality, his ethnicity.

Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident as many of the SIVs who I spoke with reported similar experiences. One client sent an email outlining his grievances with the agency, as well as his overall experience in the U.S., which contained similar experiences with agents of the criminal justice system. He noted that soon after his arrival to the U.S., he had been stopped and searched by the police not far from his house. Obviously distressed, he wrote, “I was stopped and searched by the police outside my own home. I was never searched in my own country.” At the end of his email he pleaded, “my wife was so happy to come to the U.S., now she cries every day and just wants to go home. If you can’t help me move, then help me go back [to Afghanistan].”

Those who obtained their driver’s license also reported being pulled over at an unusually high rate. When I first began working with the agency, I often rode with some of the employees while they completed routine tasks with clients to get a feel for how things were done. The recent arrival of a refugee family required a trip to the health department for their health-intake screening. Since I had never made the appointment before, the caseworker suggested that I ride along. As we were getting into the van to leave, a police officer was climbing into his patrol car which was situated in the adjacent parking lot. The officer shot us a wary glance and hastily pulled out of the parking spot. After the exchange, we began talking about traffic tickets. “Have you ever gotten a ticket?” the employee asked. “I got one before, but it turned out my speedometer was broken. I had to get it calibrated and take the proof into court,” I replied. “What about you?” I asked, almost instinctively. “I have been pulled over a lot,” he replied. Laughing, I replied, “well you do brag about how fast you can get to work in the mornings.” He smiled and

said jokingly, “well, yeah.” Not thinking anything of it, I looked out the window at the passing college students. “It is different for us,” he stated. “When the police see me, they think ‘oh, he is a terrorist probably.’ Because of how I look like they think I am suspicious, and they pull me over for nothing.” I looked over at him and shook my head, “it’s such bullshit,” I replied. “Yes it is!” he exclaimed, opening his eyes a bit wider and shaking his head vigorously. “It is different for us,” he reiterated, staring intently at the road.

A few weeks later, I was in the office assisting another volunteer with intake paperwork. As we were doing this, a few of the other agency employees were also in the office talking about the new incoming case. In order to enter a case into the SAM system (the case-tracking system utilized by the USCCB), you must enter each individual’s race and ethnicity in order to proceed to the next step. Although the volunteer had been at the CCC for quite some time, she rarely completed the paperwork aspect of the position. When she arrived at the race and ethnicity questions, she looked over at me hesitantly. “Oh,” I started, noticing her hesitation at the option boxes, “you have to click on ‘White/Middle Eastern.’” Hearing my response, the other employees in the room stopped their conversation. “Isn’t that crazy?” one of the employees asked, “they tell us that we are white, but look at this,” he exclaimed, holding his arm up to mine. “They tell us that we are the same, but we are not the same!” he finished, laughingly. It brought me back to our previous conversations, even though we are required to classify SIVs as being “white” on all of their intake and federal paperwork, within our society they are singled out and treated as terrorists and outsiders, pulled over and handcuffed in front of their own homes and places of employment on the grounds of “suspicious activity.” For them, the threat never went away, they still live it every day. Instead of being branded as “American slaves” as they were in Afghanistan, SIVs must now grapple with the reality of being labeled as “terrorists” by the very

people with whom they served alongside and protected in a literal war against “terrorism,” in the place that promised them respite, but after all, as one SIV explained, “it is different for us.”

This general lack of trust and understanding towards SIVs was also exhibited by the general public. When I first began working with the CCC, the offices were much more expansive. The administrative side of the agency, consisting of the resettlement coordinator, the case workers, the medical liaison, the employment coordinators, and the interpreter services coordinator were all located in their own separate office space. Directly connected to these offices was another separate rental space that housed the education and ESL coordinators, along with multiple classrooms. After refugee resettlement quotas were slashed by the federal government, the agency’s budget took a major hit, resulting in the closing of the separate educational building. Soon thereafter, a high-end hair salon took its place. One particularly slow afternoon, I was sitting in the office chatting with the administrative assistant, the employment coordinator, and another volunteer who had been with the agency for several years.

During our conversation, the topic of disgruntled citizens was brought up by the volunteer who had just experienced a particularly rude encounter at the SSA where a patron made an Islamophobic remark to a client. “Oh, that happens more than you’d think,” the administrative assistant commented, “people call in talking about some crazy things.” Elaborating on the subject, she continued, “one woman who had to be in her 80s stopped by the office one day. She said that she walked by our door when she got her hair done and, since she was Catholic, she was curious about what the office was, so she figured she would stop in and ask. I told her about the CCC, and that this particular office was used as a refugee resettlement agency.”

Realizing my own naivete thinking back on the conversation, I was excited listening to her story, thinking that the woman would be enthusiastic about the program, particularly given her religious affiliation. “You know what she said?” the administrative assistant asked in a sarcastic tone, “that woman asked me, ‘why are we helping Muslims? How can we help *these* people when there are people in the U.S. who need help? Shame on the Pope.” Taken aback by her story, it took me a minute to respond. “What did you do?” I asked. “I just told her to have a good day, that’s all you can do,” she replied. “Oh yeah, that is the worst kind of people,” the employment coordinator chimed in. “I had one guy call me to ask about getting employment assistance,” she continued. “I told him that we didn’t do that, that we only provided services to clients.” The man went on to inquire about becoming a client, to which the coordinator explained that this office only focuses on refugee resettlement cases. “He got real mad,” she said, cocking her head to the side and shifting in her chair, “going on about you help *these* people but you won’t help someone that served our country.” “Oh, jeez” I said, rolling my eyes. “If only he knew how much of a debt *these* people paid for this country. What did you say?” “Yes!” she exclaimed, “I told him look sir, there are plenty of organizations out there for veterans, this one is for refugees.” “Hmm, I take it he didn’t take that very well,” I responded. “Oh no, he hung up on me. That’s OK though, we don’t need that energy,” she finished, crossing her arms defiantly.

This seemed to be the general attitude surrounding agency clients; the idea that there were U.S. citizens who were more deserving of assistance, so how could we be helping *these* people? Little did they know, all of the SIVs who arrived in the U.S. were here because of the sacrifices they made in service of the United States, as if that service is supposed to make a difference in whether or not they should be viewed as “worthy” of U.S. assistance. While SIVs were afforded minimal protections during their tenure with the U.S. government in Afghanistan,

their employment, by contrast, eventually acted as “proof” of their worthiness of eventual humanitarian assistance. Given that they have provided a service to the U.S., attitudes towards them have been slightly more welcoming than those who are “just” refugees. This was not only illustrated by curious onlookers, but also by fellow volunteer organizations who wanted to offer conditional assistance.

Towards the end of the spring, the agency was busy with the number of new cases that had been assigned to their jurisdiction. Given the recent layoffs as a result of federal budget cuts, it left only one caseworker to juggle each new case. During this time, the caseworker had two assigned volunteers, myself and a middle-aged woman who had been with the agency for a number of years. She was charged with working with one of the larger refugee families who was expecting a baby girl in the coming weeks. Due to the upcoming birth, the mother required weekly assistance, which proved to be a time-consuming assignment. During this time, I was assigned to mostly SIV cases, completing their intake paperwork and handling their in-person obligations. At one point, we had so many cases that it was difficult to juggle each of the requirements between the three of us.

“We have a new arrival coming this week,” the caseworker noted as I walked into the office. “How big?” I asked, taking a seat at my desk. “It’s a family of three, and the wife is pregnant,” he replied, running his hand through his hair. “How are we going to pick them up from the airport?” I asked, reminding him that we already had two prior obligations during their scheduled arrival time. “Oh, I forgot to mention to you that they have a sponsor. She is going to pick them up and take them to dinner.” “A sponsor?” I asked, slightly confused. At this, the other volunteer chimed in from across the room, “Yeah, some woman called from the Mormon church. Apparently, they have an initiative at the church and want to ‘help,’” she said sarcastically. I

looked over to the caseworker who was laughing under his breath. “Look, I don’t like it either, but we need all the help we can get,” he said, “but yeah, she said she will only sponsor SIV families.” Noticing the confusion on my face, the volunteer jumped in and explained, “she told us that they were only interested in helping SIVs since it would be easier to justify to the congregation, you know, since they have actually done something for the U.S.” “Wow,” I responded, “so they aren’t interested in helping any refugees at all?” “Apparently not,” she replied rolling her eyes, “I guess they can’t be justified to the congregation.” “Look,” the caseworker butted in, “they are providing them with the furniture and everything. We can’t be picky.” For the next few months, the Mormon church assisted with multiple SIV cases, picking them up from the airport, taking them to dinner, and contributing to their apartment set-up. During this time, they never once accepted any refugee cases. After all, how could they “justify” this type of assistance to people who haven’t even provided a service to the U.S. in return? While their assistance was appreciated, particularly during such a time of uncertainty regarding funding, the message read loud and clear: “we will help you, only if you helped us first.”

COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES: SIV LIVES AND INHERENT DISPOSABILITY

Throughout their time in the U.S., and even before arrival, many of the SIVs with whom I worked were keenly aware of the repressive nature of U.S. society as well as the place they occupied within this system. The day after a highly publicized police shooting, I was having lunch with two employees in the breakroom. They usually took lunch together, laying out everything they had brought with them on the table to share. After my first few weeks at the agency, I was included in their lunch ritual. They would often utilize this time to ask me about a variety of topics that they did not feel comfortable discussing with “random” U.S. citizens.

During these conversations, they would frequently reference crimes of the powerful without even realizing it. “You know,” one of the men started, taking a spoonful of rice from the bowl in front of him, “here it is like the laws are created for one group of people. If you are too powerful, you don’t have to follow these laws, no?” “You aren’t wrong,” I replied, placing my lunch in the microwave. “But if you are less powerful,” he continued, “then they are forced on you very strictly,” referencing the recent police shooting. “It is like in Afghanistan,” the other employee chimed in. “It is like we have a saying, an eye for an eye. But it is usually the women [paralleling minority groups in the U.S.] who are the most affected by these laws, even if they did not even commit a crime.”

This was not the only occasion where SIVs had compared the U.S. to Afghanistan. One of my scheduled days at the office happened to fall directly after the news broke that the United States was considering bargaining with the Taliban for peace. This, combined with the ongoing travel ban news, became the hot topics of the week. Given these developments, incoming cases slowed down considerably, resulting in more time spent in the office. On this particular day, a client who had surpassed his allotted 90 days with the agency stopped by to get some advice regarding relocation procedures. Typically, when this happened, other employees would gather in the office to catch up. During these gatherings I typically continued to work on my daily tasks, as much of the conversations were spoken in their native language. Every so often, they would switch over to English to get my opinion on the day’s topic of conversation. As we all sat in the office, the news regarding U.S. talks with the Taliban was brought up. “Really, the United States isn’t any better than Afghanistan,” one of the SIVs mentioned, looking in my direction. Intrigued by his assertion, I prodded him to continue, “how so?” “The United States now is very much like Afghanistan, where it started off with very small oppressive groups that were able to gain power

and then they eventually took over the president,” notably comparing the oppressive regimes of Afghanistan to the then-current Trump Administration and its blatant disregard for marginalized groups. “And to think, we are supposed to be the ‘policemen’ of the world,” I replied sarcastically. At this, they all turned towards each other and shared a laugh. Responding to my comment and referencing U.S. assumptions that all Afghans are somehow on board with the oppressive ideologies of the Taliban, he continued, “and in Afghanistan, most of the Afghans are not even a part of the fight [referencing both conflicts with the U.S. and the Taliban], they are just stuck in the middle.”

The common theme running throughout these conversations was the awareness of the repressive nature of U.S. society, notably regarding the unequal distribution of power and the treatment of disadvantaged groups. While this awareness extended beyond their own lived realities, they were also cognizant of the blatant disregard shown towards their own lives. “People in the U.S. see news stories all the time of hundreds of Afghans being killed, women and children and everything. But they act like they don’t matter. Their lives don’t even matter to them,” professed one SIV.

Moreover, for many of the SIVs I worked with, the Trump Administration’s willingness to make a peace deal with the Taliban solidified these feelings of disposability. “How can the United States even consider bargaining with these people [the Taliban]?” one SIV asked, pushing his chair away from the table where he was seated. “We can’t make peace with these people after they killed and hurt so many,” he continued. “If we agree to peace and then everyone pulls out of Afghanistan it will just get worse,” this time standing up from his chair in frustration. Being cognizant not to infringe upon his space, I stayed silent and listened intently. “The Taliban pushed us back thousands of years to where Afghans walked barefoot through the desert and the

women did nothing but stay home and tend to the camels. Now the men have to grow beards and wear turbans like animals.” Sensing his growing frustration, I turned my chair to face him and said softly, “I can only imagine what you are feeling.” In effect, bargaining with the Taliban would, on the one hand, create a sense of “peace” for the U.S., while on the other it would result in more loss and destruction for the citizens of Afghanistan. Even further, by considering a bargain with the terrorist organization, the U.S. government is essentially acknowledging that the suffering that SIVs had to endure at the hands of the Taliban, often on our behalf, was nothing more than collateral damage that does not require the same atonement as does American lives.

Eight months after the initial negotiations were discussed, an official peace agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban was signed. While this agreement allowed the U.S. to begin the process of withdrawing troops, it did nothing to resolve any intra-Afghan conflicts between the Afghan government and the terrorist organization, leaving Afghan citizens “stuck in the middle” yet again. The following day, the lighthearted jokes that typically filled the office were notably absent. After signing in on the volunteer log, I took my seat at my makeshift workspace which was butted up against the employment coordinator’s desk. As a result of the continued budget hits the agency had been taking, the office space had been re-configured to house as many employees in one area as possible. The case worker was sitting at his desk, but did not greet me with the usual, “good morning, Sarah! How are you?” that I had gotten so accustomed to.

His elbows were sunken heavily on his desk and he was resting his chin on his interlaced fingers. Sensing his discontent, I glanced over in his direction and gave him a half-hearted smile, acknowledging that I had a feeling why he was upset. “I cannot even believe this,” he said exasperatedly. Noticing my arrival, another of the Afghan employees came into the office and took a seat across from the case worker. “How can they make a deal when it was our blood that

was being spilled?” the case worker continued, as his colleague nodded in agreement. “We were used like a bitch again,” he said, referring to their previous treatment at the hands of the Russians, “only to be thrown away like a used condom.” Looking at me he sighed and said, “I am sorry for my language, I am just very angry.” “You don’t need to apologize at all,” I replied, “you have every right to be angry.” Running his finger through his hair, he wordlessly returned to the paperwork which had been sitting at his desk. After a few silent moments, his colleague sighed, stood up and returned to his desk.

CALCULATED KINDNESS: THE SIV EXPERIENCE

Even before the War on Terror and the SIV program itself, the SIVs I spoke with have long since felt the impacts of foreign intervention in their country, which often resulted in loss and devastation and creating an environment that allowed for the SIV system to thrive. This, of course, is not meant in the traditional sense. However, the environment created by the War on Terror facilitated the supply and demand needed for a system like the SIV program to prosper; one in which the targeted population was deprived and manipulated into cooperation, eventually amassing a large number of “qualified” participants. Throughout each stage of the SIV experience, from life in Afghanistan to resettlement in the U.S., the impact of the U.S.’s prioritization of its own geopolitical interests is abundantly clear. After all, the SIV program itself was created in direct response to U.S. interests in the region, interests that required the cooperation of Afghan nationals to be realized. Working with the U.S. offered the hope for change and the irresistible possibility of a livable wage, while at the same time exploiting the economic desperation that the U.S. worked to create in exchange for dangerous contracts which offered virtually zero protective measures in return.

On the contrary, this service resulted in increased danger and, ultimately, the need to relocate for fear of death. Despite their invaluable service, once in the U.S., the slurs of “American Slaves,” were simply replaced by the label of “terrorist” and U.S. citizens and the criminal justice system took the place of extremist forces and disgruntled Afghan nationals. Yet, their service to the U.S. designated them as being more “worthy” of humanitarian assistance in the eyes of the American people, with the general consensus being, “we will help you, only since you helped us.” Despite this “elevated” status, the SIVs who I encountered are acutely aware of the place they occupy in U.S. society and that, ultimately, their lives are viewed as being disposable, a collateral consequence of American policy objectives.

CHAPTER VIII

THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

THE SIV PROGRAM: THE ULTIMATE EXERCISE OF REALPOLITIK

The U.S.'s role in the ever-growing refugee crisis is etched by the prioritization of realpolitik and neoliberal agendas, each of which emphasize capital accumulation over moral and ethical obligations. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2018), one third of the global refugee population is hosted by the 'Least Developed' countries. The U.S., by contrast, has decreased its refugee admission programs dramatically, specifically regarding those from the Middle East. For instance, the Pew Research Center reported that, "in 2018, nearly half (47%) of the world's resettled refugees were from Middle Eastern countries...by contrast, fewer than 1% of refugees resettled in the U.S. in 2018 were from the Middle East" (Radford & Conner, 2019, p. 1). While the U.S. has effectively shut the door on refugee admission from the Middle East, its interventionist policies have acted as an external catalyst, catapulting the numbers of displaced persons in the region, and contributing to the growing refugee crisis. Collins and Rothe (2020, p. 60) highlight the irony of the situation, noting that "the number of Afghanistan refugees is part of 17 years of United States' carceral military actions and war against the Taliban, then ISIS, in Afghanistan."

This exercise of realpolitik is particularly poignant regarding the Special Immigrant Visa Program which was created in direct response to the danger faced by Iraqi and Afghan nationals given their work for the United States (International Refugee Assistance Project, 2021). The U.S. relied on these individuals to fill vital positions to fuel the American war machine, the same machine which leveled their country, destroyed many of their homes, and stripped them of

security. Speaking to the vital role of Afghan nationals, Human Rights First (2018, p.1) asserted that, “we cannot complete our mission there without the Afghan translators, engineers, security guards, embassy clerks, logisticians, cultural advisors, and soldiers who stand by us.”

Despite the vital role Afghan nationals played in the American war effort, the current research suggests that the SIV system itself is inherently predatory, creating what can best be described as a parasitic relationship between the U.S. and the Afghan nationals needed to realize their goals. The U.S. led War on Terror utilized infrastructural warfare ultimately resulting in the crippling of the Afghan economy as well as the country’s basic infrastructure, security, and social welfare programs (Crawford, Fiederlein, & Rzegocki, 2021). Capitalizing on the precariousness of the situation, the U.S. intentionally contracted out the least desirable, and often most dangerous, assignments to Afghan nationals. These positions were inherently dangerous, afforded little protection, and as one SIV pointed out, “the work that the U.S. is giving us...are dangerous jobs that they [Americans] don’t want to do, so they give it to us. I had to take the job because I needed the money.” This parasitic relationship allowed the U.S. to create the conditions necessary to attach itself onto its “host” and utilize the host’s body to accomplish its own geopolitical goals, driven by realpolitik and undergirded by neoliberal agendas.

The SIV program is also inherently hierarchical. This system ultimately allows the state to assign value to one’s life based on the labor that has been rendered in its service. The SIV program protects and prioritizes American lives which occupy the top of the hierarchy. Those who risk their lives, and by default the lives of their families, to provide services to the U.S. government are then elevated up from the bottom of the hierarchical ladder occupied by “mere” refugees (those who have not provided assistance to the U.S. though their lives were still dramatically affected by its actions). Surprisingly, this hierarchy has been rationalized as a

necessary evil by many of those it is intended to control. As one SIV rationalized, “the [SIV] decision making process makes sense, no? It should be like a pyramid. If you helped the U.S., then you and your families should come first. They don’t have the space to accept everyone, no?” However, these rationalizations do not erase the blatant exercise of biopower in which human life is commodified, assigned value, and essentially the ability to continue living, based on their “worth” to the state. In fact, these rationalizations legitimize the state’s use of biopower to define who should live, and who should die.

However, the most heinous display of realpolitik is evidenced by the system’s facade of reciprocity. The system itself is built upon the understanding that we will “help” you *only* if you help us first, essentially representing an official accord that Afghan lives are only of value if they are working in conjunction with U.S. objectives. This understanding allows the U.S. to avoid any responsibility for the violence and harm it has perpetuated under the guise of the War on Terror, while at the same time assuming a humanitarian position within the international arena for the “assistance” it has provided to the Afghan nationals it has employed. Thus, the state is able to preserve its legitimacy while simultaneously prioritizing its own geopolitical interests. Further, despite their vital role and the obvious and immediate danger faced by nationals employed by the U.S., the program itself was not created until years after services were rendered, leaving formerly employed nationals and their families at the mercy of extremist groups. For instance, U.S. engagement in Afghanistan began in October 2001, yet the cursory SIV program for Afghan nationals was not enacted until 2006, five years after initial contact. This lack of haste on behalf of the United States was, and continues to be, extremely costly. By 2014, the International Refugee Assistance Project estimated that every 36 hours an Afghan interpreter is killed (Frail, 2016).

Despite the reciprocity stipulated by the SIV program, the “assistance” provided by the U.S. amounted to little more than the biopolitical management of bodies deemed to be “worthy” enough by the very people who fanned the flames of conflict in Afghanistan and created the need for an expedited means of escape. Collins and Rothe (2020, p. 69) allude to this contradiction noting, “the structural forces that lead to the massive and varying forms of inequality are initiated, and often forcefully perpetrated, by external interventionist policies that create the fragility of life that the carceral policies of state are instituted to address.” These policies, which prioritize U.S. geopolitical interests above the lives that are needed to realize them, are met with little resistance as those who are impacted are branded as the socially dead stranger.

FROM “ALLY” TO OUTSIDER

Throughout my experience with SIVs, it became evident that their position in society was that of a non-relation. Despite their former position as an ally, SIVs were continually met with exclusionary logic, effectively relegating them to the condition of the stranger. This discourse is often hidden in plain sight. Language utilized by adjudicators and government agencies freely refer to SIVs and refugees as “aliens.” This terminology automatically labels migrants as outsiders; “not just someone whom we don’t know, but the one whom we *know* to be a stranger” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 3). Exclusion through bureaucratic hurdles, undesirable placement often resulting in further victimization, and, ultimately, the expulsion from humanity all together have earmarked SIVs as the socially dead stranger who walks among us.

The SIV program itself is deeply entrenched within the system of neoliberalism in which one’s worth is determined by the value, or potential value, of the services they provide. However, despite the promises of the SIV program, these services are often not enough to ensure

resettlement in the U.S. While the U.S. has created and maintains the SIV program, very few of those who qualify for the visa are actually resettled. Further, for those who I encountered that did make it to the U.S., resettlement often occurred years after the initial threats had been received. This research suggests that this discrepancy is by design. The bureaucratic hurdles that are put in place by the state intentionally tightens the borders, ensuring that the “unwanted” are unlikely to physically transgress the border and actively works to deter potential applicants from applying. Further, SIVs rely on the American citizens they worked for to validate their service, and thus, their eligibility for the program.

Despite the vital contributions Afghan nationals make to the American war effort, most who I encountered were abandoned by the “friends” they served alongside before their eligibility could be confirmed. Not only does this ensure the “security” of the border, this requirement also reinforces the hierarchical nature of the SIV program as Afghan lives are only deemed to be valuable if vouched for by an American citizen. Even if this requirement is met, SIVs are expected to obtain documents that are virtually impossible or inherently dangerous to acquire. This includes police records and medical evaluations that prospective applicants are required to pay for on their own accord. These policies of exclusion illustrate the state’s use of biopower to ensure that SIVs are unlikely to breach the borders of the U.S., while at the same time reinforcing the notion that SIVs are “not just someone whom we don’t know, but the one whom we *know* to be a stranger” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 3).

While service to the U.S. allows SIVs to inch themselves above refugees on the hierarchical ladder of “worth,” any status that one had achieved before arriving in the U.S. becomes null and void once resettlement occurs. Despite the overwhelming arsenal of talent and experience SIVs bring to the table, their qualifications rarely transfer to American economic

systems. Subsequently, I encountered doctors, surgeons, embassy advisors, and a host of other high-status occupancies working in unskilled labor positions. Rather than utilizing the invaluable skills they brought to the table, the SIVs who I spoke with were relegated to the least desirable positions within our society, further cementing their status as the stranger. As noted by Cacho (2012), commonness is interpreted through a uniquely American form of neoliberalism in which participation in real and speculative markets determines one's worth. By stripping SIVs of their credentials, and thus the ability to effectively engage in the labor force, the state has removed the ability of SIVs to participate in the neoliberal capitalist society and, thus, the capacity to achieve commonhood. This biopolitical management allows the state to ensure the continuation of the stranger condition and, through this uncommonness, exercise the power to decide who is worthy of political relevance (Cacho, 2012).

ERASED IDENTITIES: THE LIVING DEAD

When combined with uncommonness, racism acts as a killing abstraction, allowing for “a death-dealing displacement of difference into... a hierarchy of human and inhuman persons that in sum form the category of human being” (Gilmore, 2004, p. 16). Throughout my time in the field, it was evident that carceral discourse surrounding SIVs portrayed them as terroristic threats to national security. Despite being classified as “white” on their federal paperwork, a position of privilege which often insulates one from coming into contact with the criminal justice system, SIVs commonly reported disproportionate police contact on the grounds of “suspicious activity.” While many of the SIVs who I encountered assumed their quality of life would improve once they arrived in the U.S., the threat they faced never went away, but rather it evolved. Rather than being branded as “American Slaves” as they were in Afghanistan, they are now singled out and

labeled as terrorists for simply existing in the space that promised them respite given their service to U.S. interests. They are treated as dangerous outsiders, frequently reporting being pulled over and handcuffed in front of their own homes and places of employment. As one SIV explained, “it’s different for us. When the police see me, they think oh, he is a terrorist probably. Because of how I look they think I am suspicious, and they pull me over for nothing.” This discourse, as Mbembe (2003, p. 17) asserts, is essential in the state’s exercise of necropower in that it represents “the condition for the acceptability of putting to death.” This necropolitical differentiation through racism allows the state to not only ensure that the SIV remains the stranger, but to also confer upon them the status of the living dead (Debord, 1988).

This status is easily discernible when one examines the living conditions SIVs are subjected to. These conditions have been frequently recorded when speaking about refugee populations, as Collins and Rothe (2020, p. 62) note,

Across the world, refugees have endured war, corruption and social oppression, however, refugee camps provide little safety or sanctuary. Not only are large numbers of people excluded from neoliberal society, they are tightly packed into makeshift shelters where they are subject to further harm and violence.

As the data in the current research presents, SIV resettlement in the U.S., which is offered as a *reward* for valuable service, is little better than the makeshift shelters of refugee camps. Despite the “worth” associated with their invaluable service and the expectation of relative safety in return for this service, SIVs often find themselves situated within areas subject to similar violence and harm as one would expect to experience in a refugee camp. It is important to point out that the resettlement agency does not intentionally place SIVs in these areas. On the contrary, employees worked tirelessly to acquire safe and reliable housing that would fit into their ever-dwindling state-allotted budget. Due to these budgetary constraints, as well as landlords’ unwillingness to rent to migrants in general, the SIVs who I encountered found themselves

packed into apartment complexes that were riddled with health and structural hazards, prone to violence, and ill prepared to handle the case loads. Subsequently, SIVs were commonly exposed to structural damage, lead paint and asbestos residue, bed bugs, roach and vermin infestations, and a host of other harms. These areas are also prone to increased police presence, consequently exacerbating the disproportionate police contact faced by SIV populations. This increased contact often perpetuated further victimization and harm at the hands of the criminal justice system.

Beyond the policies and practices of exclusion, arguably the most poignant illustration of the relegation of the SIV to the socially dead stranger is the state-initiated stripping of their identities. This is accomplished by the use of fictitious names, Mohammad for males and FNU (Family Name Unknown) for females, and birthdates (January 1st). Further, SIVs and refugees are stripped of their credentials, and essentially their livelihoods, once they arrive in the U.S. For instance, I have encountered medical doctors, professors, embassy advisors, and UN officials who are now relegated to the least desirable and lowest skilled positions society has to offer.

These practices highlight what Debord (1988, p. 40) characterizes as “new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of the living dead.” Throughout the SIV process, from the application stage, to adjudication, to resettlement, SIVs are continually barred from personhood, mirroring the slave condition. This condition, Mbembe (2003, p. 21) asserts, results from “a triple loss: loss of a home, loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status.” Stemming from their service to the U.S., SIVs become amalgamated into a disenfranchised mass which is suspended between two countries, an experience that, as one SIV eloquently explained, always results in getting “churned to flour.” The result is an entire population of people who have lost their

homes, their citizenship status, their sense of security, their occupational prestige, their birth dates, and even their names. When examining the evidence, it becomes apparent that the biopolitical and necropolitical management of SIVs at the hands of the state has resulted in immense losses comparable to “absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 21).

HEGEMONIC TRUTHS: THE “GIFT” OF PERSONHOOD

Despite the blaring injustices of the SIV system, a disconnect exists between discourse, policy, and the reality of being an SIV which often results in the reinforcement of the status of the socially dead stranger. Given the neoliberal discourse surrounding the differentiation of the worthy and the unworthy, the carceral state’s treatment of SIVs is often accomplished without question from its constituents. As Cacho (2012, p. 7) explains,

Engendered by corporate capital and the neoliberal state, ineligibility to personhood refers to the state of being legally recognized as rightless, located in the spaces of social death where demands for humanity are ultimately disempowering because they can be interpreted only as asking to be given something sacred in return for nothing at all.

From a Foucauldian (1980) perspective, the “truth” regarding populations of the stranger (as outlined by the hegemonic discourses surrounding neoliberalism) becomes the dominant ideology. Through this lens, SIVs are labeled as a threat as they are unable to participate in the neoliberal capitalist system, thus representing a “burden” to the privileged population given their “inability” to achieve commonhood. In turn, U.S. citizens see no return on their “investment.” As argued by Collins and Rothe (2020, p. 59) “the state’s truth, or hegemonic discourse, operates within neoliberalism and in accordance with the interests of those who most benefit from it.” Compounding the situation, carceral rhetoric surrounding SIVs effectively acts as a killing abstraction in which Muslim male bodies are differentiated through racism and labeled as a

threat under the hegemonic discourse of national security. Consequently, the reality of the SIV experience is transparently recognized, obfuscated, and failures are boiled down to individual character flaws, effectively preserving the integrity of the state.

These stories highlight the state's predatory and parasitic relationship with SIV populations. Yet, these stories, their stories, become lost before we even know they existed at all, and, quite frankly, this is by design. If, and only if, Afghan nationals risk their lives and the lives of their families enough, they might become "worthy" of a moment of our attention before being swallowed by a bureaucratic black hole and earmarked as society's unwanted burden after being systematically locked out of the neoliberal capitalist system. By controlling the discourse surrounding the SIV program, the state can continue to profit from the labor, and ultimately the lives, of SIVs with minimal pushback from its citizenry. Through the promotion of fear of the stranger, and, ultimately, those deemed unworthy of personhood, "these policies and hegemonic discourses continue the cycle of oppression and inequality" (Collins & Rothe, 2020, p. 62).

Further, by controlling the discourse surrounding SIVs, and socially dead populations in general, failure to thrive as a result of continued oppression is written off as a side-effect of individual failure rather than a result of the state's interventionist policies that have created the "problem" the SIV program was created to address in the first place. Through this lens, it become clear that the "kindness" shown to SIVs is a calculated endeavor which allows the state to legitimize itself in the eyes of its citizenry and, thus, continue the realization of its own geopolitical goals despite the harm caused to those needed to achieve these goals. This is not a new strategy; it has also been utilized with other populations deemed to be socially dead including refugees, the homeless, and immigrants:

The neoliberal project eradicates all aspects of humanity from those it targets, reducing them to the status of the socially dead stranger. Through populist rhetoric, the language of

hate, fear and othering, the most vulnerable in society become disenfranchised, afforded lesser rights and are targeted for violence...with little concern for their well-being beyond the capitalist value assigned by corporations who seek to make profit from their plight. While sections of state populations look on, or even speak up against the formalization of policies that normalize and legalize such carceral practices...There still remains a significant number of the citizenry who see nothing wrong with denying society's unwanted their basic human rights. They are seemingly comfortable with such suffering, elucidated as a failure of individual responsibility as opposed to broader structural forces, ones they blindly rationalize could not possibly touch them. (Collins & Rothe, 2020, p. 68)

These blind rationalizations were seen frequently throughout the current research where U.S. citizens frequently questioned the agencies focus on "these people" rather than those they deemed more worthy of its time. Little do they know, SIVs played a vital role in protecting and preserving U.S. lives (those deemed to be "worthy") in Iraq and Afghanistan.

WHAT ABOUT THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS?

The current research sought to address five key research questions. First, what roles do SIVs play in the realization of U.S. geopolitical goals within Iraq and Afghanistan? It is evident that SIVs played a pivotal role in the realization of U.S. geopolitical goals within Iraq and Afghanistan. Frequently filling the role of interpreter, cultural liaison, embassy advisor, security forces, and other mission critical actors, SIVs acted as the literal backbone to the U.S.-led War on "Terror," often fighting side by side with American and Coalition forces in the region.

Despite the critical role SIVs played in fueling the American war effort, SIVs were provided little protection for their services, and were ultimately abandoned by the "friends" they risked their lives, and those of their family, to support. Even further, when the application process began, applicants were made to perform dangerous, if not wholly impossible, tasks in order to meet the requirements. This speaks to the second research question: how are SIV applicants treated during the process of receiving a visa? Are they afforded any protection?

The third question asked: Once in the U.S., do the services rendered by resettlement agencies meet the standards of living which were outlined by the SIV program? For those who did make it to the U.S., the services they received as a reward for their service amounted to little more than one could expect in a refugee camp. Further, many were forced to leave family members behind due to arbitrary age restrictions, most of which were not discussed before they agreed to work with the U.S. government. Given that their previous work and educational experience did not transfer to U.S. markets, they were often relegated to the least desirable positions and locations within society.

Speaking to the fourth question, it is clear that the U.S. is not upholding their promise to Iraqi and Afghan foreign nationals who qualify for the SIV program. After all, the SIV program itself was not created until years after initial threats were made. Further, the bureaucratic hurdles faced by SIVs at every stage of the resettlement process are by design. The system was never intended to function in a way that would allow for the resettlement of those deemed to be the socially dead stranger. Consequently, the result is an entire population of people who have been stripped of their homes, their citizenship status, their sense of security, their occupational prestige, and thus their livelihood, their birth dates, and even their names.

Through policies of exclusion and hegemonic discourse, the state utilized biopower to ensure that SIVs are unlikely to breach its borders, thus the reality of the SIV experience is transparently recognized, obfuscated, and failures are boiled down to individual character flaws, effectively preserving the integrity of the state. Speaking to the fifth question—does the implementation, or lack thereof, of the SIV program by the U.S. government constitute a state crime?—the U.S. invasion, and subsequent occupation, of Iraq and Afghanistan constitutes one of the most egregious state crimes in modern history (Doig, 2014; Greider, 2003; Kramer &

Michalowski, 2005; Kramer, Michalowski, & Rothe, 2005; Roberts, 2003; Schmitt, 2004; Whyte, 2007). Subsequently, the violence and harm of the SIV program arose as a direct consequence of U.S. crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, and thus its problematic implementation falls within the realm of state crime. As noted by Kulzer and Friedrichs (2019, p. 157), “harm that is a collateral consequence of state policies and actions, or even the failure of state to act, can be addressed as part of the mission of a criminology of crimes of states.” Through its parasitic and hierarchical relationship with SIVs, the U.S. has perpetuated violence, harm, and inequality on an unprecedented scale.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

The goal of this research was to examine the inherent disposability of SIVs and refugees by highlighting the U.S. prioritization of realpolitik and neoliberal agendas over the human life that served to realize them. While the research utilized herein sheds light on the inequalities and harms faced by SIVs and refugees, it also illustrates stories of hope and resiliency. The following sections will discuss stories of resiliency, the voices and perspectives missing from the current study, as well as a reflection on the methods.

UNWAVERING HOPE: STORIES OF RESILIENCY

While the SIV and refugee experience enumerates immense hardship and loss, it is also important to highlight the instances of strength, perseverance, and resiliency that radiate through each of these stories, despite near impossible odds. Throughout my time in the field, I witnessed countless hardships faced by agency clients, but I was also privileged to stories of hope, daily acts of kindness, and wishes for a brighter tomorrow.

One of the most concrete ways in which this resiliency was evidenced was through clients' ability to remain afloat, despite the lack of access to vital resources. During my first few weeks at the agency, I overheard a conversation taking place between various agency employees and another volunteer who had been working closely with a Congolese family. The family had timed-out of their agency allotted funding, but still kept in close contact with employees as many clients did. The husband was employed as a meat packer and his wife stayed home with their eight children, with the ninth on the way. After providing the mother with transportation to her

prenatal appointment, the volunteer expressed concerns to agency employees about the precariousness of the family's financial situation. In response, the employment coordinator said, "I've seen a lot of homeless in the United States, but I've never seen any homeless refugees. I don't know how they do it, but they always find ways to stay on their feet." This conversation stuck with me throughout my time at the agency, and it always held true. Within my time at the CCC, never once was there an instance of a client being evicted or defaulting on payments, despite the critical lack of resources they faced. This is not to say that they always had the money to keep themselves afloat, but they always found ways to make things work. This often involved helping each other when times got tough. This practice was especially common among SIV clients who would frequently lend money to other SIVs who were in need. They created their own system of borrowing and repayment, and I never encountered any situation in which a repayment was not made. Similarly, refugees would often share food and material goods amongst themselves, ensuring that everyone was fed, clothed, and cared for.

This ability to remain afloat also extended beyond financial means. Both refugees and SIVs alike possessed a remarkable ability to operate in a society that was completely foreign to them, barring those SIVs who were exposed to U.S. language and culture during the course of their job. They worked tirelessly to learn English, despite the lack of available ESL courses. Many taught themselves multiple languages throughout their resettlement journeys. For instance, while sitting in the car waiting for her parents as they shopped for groceries, one teenaged SIV explained nonchalantly, "I love K-Pop, so I am teaching myself Korean." "That is really impressive," I responded. She smiled and said, "I taught myself English too." Similarly, a Congolese client recounted the way in which he learned English, explaining that he took a 20-day English course offered at a refugee camp in Tanzania. "You learned all your English in 20

days?" I asked, astonished. "Yes," he replied smiling shyly, "I will continue to be teaching myself." Further, when ESL classes were temporarily suspended at the CCC, there were multiple clients who would walk to various classes held by local church groups, often after long hours of working manual labor. This unyielding determination always seemed to keep them from succumbing to desolation, no matter what hardships they faced.

Throughout my time in the field, I was also privileged to clients' stories and visions of hope. These visions were a constant, despite the hardships, and often trauma, they endured. First and foremost, they always remained hopeful for their families who were not able to accompany them, no matter how impossible the situation seemed. For instance, one SIV family was forced to leave their two eldest sons in Afghanistan. The two men aged out of the system and were no longer eligible for a visa under their father's case. Subsequently, they did not qualify for SIV status. When faced with the impossible decision to separate his family the father explained, "what do I do? It is safe here for my children. Every night I think of them" [the children he had to leave behind]. After making numerous pleas to the American Embassy, he was informed that, given his sons' ineligibility for the SIV program, obtaining a visa with refugee status would take years. Despite this harsh reality, he continues to advocate tirelessly on the behalf of his sons, never giving up hope that his family will one day be reunited.

This infallible hope was also demonstrated by a group of brothers from the Congo. Their father, who was a prominent politician in the Congo, was assassinated by opposition forces. The family then fled to Rwanda where they were separated and placed into various refugee camps. Eventually, the situation in Rwanda deteriorated, situating them in yet another violent conflict. After spending years in separate refugee camps, the four brothers, as well as their children, were accepted for resettlement in the U.S. They arrived in pairs, two brothers and their children at a

time. When the second pair arrived, the four brothers were reunited for the first time in over a decade. After long embraces and plenty of tears, one of the first questions they asked the case worker was, “what now is the process to bring our wives here?” When the case worker informed them that the process would take years, without hesitation one of the brothers replied, “then we will begin now.”

The refugee and SIV clients who I encountered also had hope for their own futures. As an icebreaker, I would often ask clients what they wanted to do in America. Some of them dreamed about becoming professional soccer players, some wanted to become doctors, some wanted to become social workers, but their responses always had one thing in common: they wanted to go to school. Each client who I spoke with had a passion to continue their education, no matter how much or how little formal education they had. Many clients asked me how to apply for college and financial aid, how to research scholarships, and some even asked for help writing application essays. Despite the past traumas they had suffered, the instability they faced after arriving in the U.S., and the barriers to success that were placed at every turn, they were all determined to go to school. Further, contrary to the hegemonic discourse which depicts immigrants as a burden to the neoliberal capitalist system, every client I spoke with was eager to obtain a job and integrate themselves into American society.

Not only were clients determined to continue their education and obtain a job, they often spoke of their desire to use the skills they would acquire to help others. The last, and arguably most incredible, feat of resiliency that I encountered during my time in the field was the ability to remain kind. Many of the clients I spoke with had a desire to help those who had been cast aside. One Kenyan refugee detailed his work with the United Nations explaining, “I was in charge of refugees who arrived in Kenya. I would pick them [refugees] up from the border when they

arrived and bring them to the camp. We would make sure they were safe and had food and shelter.” After detailing his work in Kenya, he smiled and added, “I would like to do social work in the United States.” A Congolese refugee also expressed his desire to become a social worker in the U.S. “I was a teacher in Tanzania,” he explained proudly. “I would like to go to school in America for social work. I want to continue to help the children.” Similarly, one SIV client who had worked to promote women’s rights in Afghanistan expressed his interest in continuing this work in the U.S.

This kindness and the desire to help others was also evidenced by their unbounded generosity, despite the immense losses they had suffered. Every time I visited a client at their home, I was always offered food and drink, no matter how little they had for themselves. This was not done as a formality like we often see in the U.S., but rather it clearly brought joy to the clients to be able to share what they had with others. Clients were often eager to share lunch or tea with me after we had completed our various tasks for the day. They would go to great lengths when preparing these meals, laying out blankets on the floor and even taking the time to provide me with traditional American utensils. As one SIV explained, “in Afghanistan we will scoop our food with bread, but I know in America you do not do this.” As a student in the Refugee Studies course, the class frequently visited an Afghan SIV family who knew Dr. Fish.

During each visit, they made a point to invite us all for tea and lunch. Given the size of the class, as well as the size of the family, this was not an easy task. Despite this, they insisted on sharing what they had with all of us. This was a trait common to every client I encountered. No matter how much or how little they had, they always offered to share. Their generosity astounded me. Not only did they give everything they had, including their home, security, and even their identity when they worked for the U.S. government, they continued to give what little they

received when they were resettled. Not just to each other, but to me, a citizen of the country which cost them everything. Maybe this thought didn't cross their minds, but I tried to remain cognizant of this fact and make a conscious effort not to reject their generosity. When I began my fieldwork with Dr. Fish, I quickly learned never to say no to tea. Tea not only represented a way to build relationships with clients, but it also acted as a system of reciprocity. Admittedly, they gave much more than I could ever repay.

This generosity was not limited to material goods. Clients were also incredibly generous with their time and talents. During my time in the field, I made a point to learn as much about clients' language and culture as possible. I would take to YouTube to teach myself common phrases and responses. While these translations did not always work quite as I planned, it always made clients smile to hear my feeble attempts to communicate with them in their own languages. So much so that they would offer to teach me during our time together. We would often practice common words and phrases during car rides or while waiting for services. They were always patient with me, helping to correct my inflections and tense. With every subsequent visit I would make a point to use the words we had practiced, to which many would respond excitedly, "Ah Sarah, you are getting better!" They were also always willing to share and discuss their cultural traditions with me. There was never a time that I felt left-out or unwelcome when I was with them, despite the alienation they were so often subjected to by U.S. citizens. The more time I spent with clients, the more I realized that they taught me more than I could ever imagine teaching them.

WHO'S MISSING?

While the current study highlights the experiences of SIVs, there are notable voices missing from the overall story. While the stories and experiences listed herein allow for a detailed and nuanced analysis of the SIV program, the inclusion of more SIV voices, SIVs from Iraq, and women would allow for a more holistic understanding of the SIV experience.

Where are the SIVs?

Throughout my time in the field, I encountered clients from a broad array of countries. The majority of which were Congolese, Kenyan, and Afghan. While I was able to work multiple cases involving Afghan SIVs, the vast majority of the clients I encountered were refugees. This was especially the case after the 2017 executive order which banned travel to the U.S. for 90 days from the predominantly Muslim countries of Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. These restrictions were later expanded to include Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sudan, and Tanzania (Immigration and Ethnic History Society, 2019). The U.S. also placed a simultaneous hold on the processing of any new or in-progress SIV applications, resulting in a dramatic decline in SIV admissions. For instance, Gibian (2019, p. 1) notes, "State Department data shows that 1,649 Afghan SIVs were issued in 2018, a 60% decrease from the 4,120 visas issued in 2017." While immigration admissions as whole declined dramatically, there was still a steady trickle of clients who arrived from Kenya and the DRC, resulting in a disproportionate number of refugee to SIV clients. Despite this discrepancy, the refugee experience provided important perspective regarding the U.S. immigration system as a whole. It also proved to be an invaluable resource in analyzing the hierarchical nature of the SIV program, as well as the structural deficiencies of the resettlement process. However, the current research would benefit from the inclusion of more SIV voices.

More specifically, there is a noticeable lack of voices from Iraqi SIVs. During my time at the agency, I did not encounter a single SIV case from Iraq. This is not to say that they do not exist; however, due to structural restrictions their numbers have been severely reduced. Since 2014, there has been no additional funding allotted for the Iraqi SIV program. Further, the security situation within the country has deteriorated to the point that those applicants who were remaining were no longer able to be processed. Zeller and Staffieri (2021, p. 5) suggest, “the situation in Iraq is so insecure that our embassy in Baghdad cannot open for processing the few remaining SIV cases.” Subsequently, as of June 2020, the State Department has only issued 2,114 of its available 2,500 SIVs for Iraq (Zeller & Staffieri, 2021). The cessation of the Iraqi SIV program, along with the declining security situation within the country, have resulted in a drastic decline in SIV cases from Iraq. Future research would benefit from the inclusion of those Iraqi SIVs who have been resettled in the U.S.

Deafening Silence: What about the Female Perspective?

One of the most blaring deficiencies is the noticeable lack of female voices and experiences throughout this research, as well as research regarding SIVs as a whole. While frustrating, this omission is not necessarily surprising as women’s experiences and feminist analysis of international politics are often dismissed in both the political and academic arenas. As noted by Enloe (1990, p. 4), “Women’s experiences – of war, marriage, trade, travel, factory work – are relegated to the ‘human interest’ column. Women’s roles in creating and sustaining international politics have been treated as if they were ‘natural’ and thus not worthy of investigation.” Despite this lack of attention, women play vital roles in the realization of foreign policy goals, yet are assumed to fall outside the realm of international politics. To fully grasp the

role women play in the SIV process requires the understanding that the “international is personal.” As explained by Enloe (1990, p. 196),

The international is personal implies that governments depend upon certain kinds of allegedly private relationships in order to conduct their foreign affairs. Governments need more than secrecy and intelligence agencies; they need wives who are willing to provide their diplomatic husbands with unpaid services so those men can develop trusting relationships with other diplomatic husbands...To operate in the international arena, governments seek other governments' recognition of their sovereignty; but they also depend on ideas about masculinized dignity and feminized sacrifice to sustain that sense of autonomous nationhood.

Throughout the SIV processes, women are expected to sacrifice for the greater good of their families, their futures, and the future of their country. Their husbands are often required to stay away from the home once they begin work with the U.S. government, leaving the women behind to take care of the family and the home. Their husband's work also places women and their families in danger, requiring them to keep their husband's status a secret. Further, once the family has been approved for SIV status, they must pick up and leave without question in order to protect themselves. Despite the rose-colored glasses that obscures the reality of the SIV program, the program itself does little to relieve the burdens faced by the women who are intrinsically caught up in the system as a result of their husband's job. As Enloe (1990, p. 2) suggests, “a poor woman who has been deprived of literacy (especially in the language of the ruling group), bank credit or arable land is likely to find that the intrusion of foreign governments and companies in her daily life exacerbate, not relieve, those burdens.”

This reality became increasingly evident throughout my time in the field. While many of the men were fluent in English and were well-adjusted to U.S. culture given their close proximity to Americans during the course of their jobs, the vast majority of women who I encountered did not speak any English and knew little about U.S. culture. This made adjustment to life in the U.S. incredibly difficult and, in many cases, resulted in isolation, depression, and a desire to return to

Afghanistan. During my time with the agency, I had to rely on the men in order to communicate with the women. Consequently, the men controlled the flow of information that was relayed to and from their wives. This, in turn, acted to reproduce the system of inequality between male and female clients. Many times, I would direct a conversation towards a woman in the hopes that her husband would translate for us. In some instances, a brief conversation would be facilitated by the husband, but more often than not the husband would relay a short phrase to his wife and the conversation would stop there.

Despite this language barrier, we found ways to communicate with one other. This was usually accomplished through the use of hand gestures and facial expressions. While this method did not allow for in-depth conversations, it did allow us to cultivate relationships. There were many times where, after our daily tasks had been completed, the women would ask their husbands to ask me to stay for lunch or tea. During these visits, the males would frequently retreat into adjacent rooms once lunch was over. Even with our obvious language barrier, the women would sit happily with me, often encouraging me to hold their children and pointing out pieces of jewelry or clothing that they liked. I would always make attempts to speak to them in what little of their language I knew, which always seemed to brighten their mood. In one instance, I asked one of the female clients how she was doing. In response she gasped and grabbed my hand smiling widely. Her response was well above my ability to comprehend, but the effort seemed to make a lasting impact.

Contrary to popular nationalist rhetoric, U.S. intervention in the lives of Afghan women has only exacerbated the hardships they face as a result of their husband's employment. Throughout the resettlement process, women routinely face each of the hardships mentioned in Enloe's (1990) analysis of foreign intervention. Female clients regularly experienced the

isolation associated with the deprivation of literacy. This was compounded by the lack of available ESL courses as well as the burden of childcare which often prevented women from attending those classes that were available. Female clients were systematically barred from the banking system due to their lack of knowledge regarding money management, fee schedules, and lending, coupled with a lack of recognized paperwork. Those financial institutions who did allow clients to open an account were situated in inconvenient locations, requiring a means of transportation to access their money. This need for transportation, in turn, required the ability to read bus routes and purchase bus tickets. Further, arable land (in the form of safe housing, instead of land to grow crops as arable technically refers to) was difficult to obtain as most landlords would not rent to agency clients, often citing a lack of credit history as a reason to deny their application. The bureaucratic hurdles presented by the resettlement process represent yet another burden women must face as a result of their inadvertent role in the U.S. war machine.

Despite these efforts, female voices remain largely omitted from the current research. When examining the SIV program, as well as foreign policy as a whole, it is important to take into account the female perspective which is so often left out. As noted by Enloe (1990, p. 13) “women do not benefit automatically every time the international system is re-oriented by a successful nationalist movement.” Although U.S. rhetoric surrounding the “rebuilding” of Afghanistan depicts the forced transformation of the Afghan political and economic systems as a beneficial change for all, the voices and experiences of women are largely left unconsidered. The omission of these perspectives in this research, and beyond, works to reproduce the overwhelming inequality faced by women in the international arena.

METHODS REFLECTION

Conducting research with real people does not occur in a vacuum, and entails micro interactions that require emotional labor, role negotiation, and, ultimately role strain, which can also involve secondary stress and the delicate give and take associated with the negotiation of the role of power within the field. Below, I reflect on the process of conducting this project, which was informed by a feminist research ethic.

Emotional Labor and Role Strain

Throughout my time in the field, I had the privilege of meeting, working alongside, and forging relationships with incredible people. Every day in the field offered something new and I genuinely looked forward to each day I was scheduled to volunteer at the agency. With this being said, the fieldwork conducted herein required a tremendous amount of emotional labor, which, at times, I felt ill equipped to handle. Emotional labor refers to “the process by which workers summon certain feelings (and not others) in themselves, their colleagues, and their clients” (McQueeney & Lavelle, 2017, p. 85). Further, Hochschild (1983) argues that “display rules” dictate how these feeling should be expressed.

Emotional labor is particularly challenging in ethnographic fieldwork. As noted by Blee (1998, p. 383), it is “more difficult in fieldwork than in more routinized sites of daily life interaction to apply established ‘feeling rules’ to guide the emotional dynamics between researcher and respondent.” Given the unpredictable nature of fieldwork, emotional dynamics “often require continual negotiation and renegotiation” (Blee, 1998, p. 398). Emotional labor within the current research was exacerbated by the requirement to perform multiple roles at once. These roles often conflicted with one another, resulting in significant role strain (Hoffmann, 2007). For instance, during my time in the field I acted as a volunteer, a staff member, an

advocate, a translator, a support person, a student, and, at times, an “expert” in the form of a university educator.

As a volunteer, my role was somewhat transient. I was given tasks and responsibilities, but they were relatively low stakes as my volunteer status allowed me the opportunity to walk away at any given time. Further, when things went awry in the field (as they often did) I had the ability to default to the case worker. However, the longer I was in the field and the more budget cuts the agency took, my role became more of that of a staff member. At one point during my time at the agency, I was the only acting case worker. Despite my volunteer status, I was the only person at the agency who knew how to complete client intake forms, as well as the forms required for agency audits. Without these forms, both the clients as well as the agency would not be able to obtain proper funding.

These roles often competed with one another as I was technically only a volunteer, but I was also heavily relied upon to keep the system running. There were many instances in the field where I stayed much longer than my allotted volunteer hours. While, as a volunteer, I had the option to walk away, I did not want to abandon clients in the middle of a task. On one occasion, I took a Congolese couple to the SSA to apply for their social security cards. After this, they asked if I would take them to the grocery store. The trip to the SSA took much longer than expected and by the time we made it to the grocery store it was 45 minutes past the end of my scheduled volunteer hours. I called the medical liaison (the case worker was out of the country) to let him know that I would not be able to accompany the couple to the store as I had prior commitments that evening. “That is ok, just tell them that you will drop them off and then they have to take the bus home,” he replied and hastily hung up the phone as he was with another client. While the solution seemed easy, the Congolese couple spoke very little English, nor could they read from a

translation app. Using hand gestures and what little English they knew, I made it clear that I could not accompany them to the store. At which point, the female client began crying as her husband pleaded with me to stay. “Please, please help,” he repeated. Despite my prior obligations, I couldn’t bring myself to leave them in the parking lot crying and pleading for help. To navigate these services would require a working knowledge of English, U.S. currency systems, and a sense of locational awareness. The sheer panic they expressed at the notion of navigating these systems alone resulted in my not wanting to inflict any additional confusion and trauma on the clients. It had already been a particularly arduous day. Consequently, I did not get home until late in the evening, roughly three hours over my designated stopping time.

I also played the role of advocate, support person, and translator, despite my lack of fluency in any of the languages the clients spoke. These roles proved to be the most challenging. As a white (and therefore assumed to be American) companion in the field, service providers always addressed me before addressing the client. They typically assumed that I was there to act as a translator. For the clients who could speak English, I would swiftly assert that I was only there for transportation and that the client could speak on their own behalf. Despite my advocating on their behalf (which is degrading to the client in and of itself—but often necessary considering the circumstances), some service providers would still insist that I be present while they spoke with clients. For instance, while accompanying an SIV family to the leasing office to sign the lease on their apartment, the leasing manager insisted I sit with the clients as she explained the details of the contract. She protested, “They always say ‘oh I speak English, I speak English,’ but then they don’t *really* understand what I am saying to them and this is legally binding.” She said this right in front of the client.

Despite his fluent English, the client turned to me to remedy the situation. I quickly assured her that he was more than capable of reviewing the contract without my help. This deflection to me in a tense or uncomfortable situation was not uncommon, even for those who spoke English fluently. For instance, when an SIV client's identification was questioned by a staff member at the SSA, he turned to me and said, "please tell them, this is my only ID." I explained that the ID the client produced was the document issued to him by the State Department. Despite explaining the same information as the client, the employee begrudgingly accepted the document after it came from me. Clients were keenly aware when service providers defaulted to me during interactions. Subsequently, clients' deflection to me during these situations is more adequately representative of an act of deference in the hopes that the service provider would complete the transaction. While this was sometimes necessary in order to navigate the bureaucratic hurdles put in place, it also reinforces the construction of the SIV as the socially dead stranger. This system directly contradicts the overarching concern about self-sufficiency. Even when clients are largely self-sufficient, they must perform deference in order to get anything accomplished. This not only positions SIVs and refugees as reliant upon others for assistance, but it also negatively impacts their own self-perception. The latter is particularly true of male clients.

These experiences were typically more acute with refugee clients as they usually knew little, if any, English. During our outings we had to rely on hand gestures and what little language we understood between us. One example of this is the Congolese clients who I accompanied to the SSA. On that particular day, the employee required the client's city of birth in order to process his application for a social security card. This was not always the case, as many employees would process the application without this information. Despite his lack of

English, the client sensed that the social security agent was displeased with his application. When I asked the client if he knew what city he was born in, he began to frantically recite his plot designation assigned to him at the refugee camp. Throughout this process, the social security agent became increasingly frustrated, at one point he raised his voice above the client and told me, “look, tell him we can’t use any of that!” At the same time, the client sensed the agent’s frustration and became panicked. In this situation I had to reassure the client that he was doing a good job and that everything was ok (even when it seemed like it wouldn’t be), while simultaneously taking the brunt of the agent’s frustration that he could not obtain the information he wanted. These types of situations happened frequently, yet the “display rules” (Hochschild, 1983) of emotional labor required me to remain calm and even keeled while absorbing the emotions of both clients and service providers and navigating my own distress about the devolving situation.

There were also rare occasions in which service providers acknowledged that the treatment SIVs received from them was inadequate and they were deserving of more. For instance, a leasing manager at one of the housing complexes used by the agency briefly alluded to the fact that her housing complex was inadequate. After learning of the client’s previous work with the United Nations, she looked at me and stated, “it’s a shame we get so many educated people from these countries and when they come to the United States they don’t get anything,” spreading her arms out as if to indicate the apartment complex itself. But just as quickly as the topic arose, it was immediately squelched by her desire to get the vacant apartment filled. These instances also required me to default to the display rules of emotional labor. Internally I was furious. If you feel like your apartment complex is not meeting acceptable living standards, then why are you renting it out to people who you literally just admitted are being taken advantage

of? Of course, this is a rhetorical question as the neoliberal capitalist system is built upon foundations of inequality. For there to be winners, there also must be losers.

I also struggled with the concept of success. There was always an emphasis on client success. The concept of success was bureaucratically watered-down and was ultimately defined by a checklist. Did the client secure housing? Did they secure employment? Do they know their address and who to contact in an emergency? Did they improve from their cultural orientation pre-test? Do they know any English at all? Each of these boxes dictated a client's "success." But we have to ask ourselves, what is success? Can we really call it success when a college-educated client is working in a dead-end job just to make enough money to pay rent for an apartment that presents structural, health, and safety hazards? Can we really call it success if a client completes their allotted 30 days of ESL classes and can barely recite the alphabet? Even if they check off all the boxes, is this actually success? *Is this the life that we promised them in exchange for their sacrifice?* I struggled with these questions every day I was in the field, but I again defaulted to the display rules of emotional labor. Despite my disillusionment with the system, I couldn't make these blaring inadequacies known to the clients. After all, what does one say? In reality, I didn't have to say anything. Within the first few days in the U.S. the excitement almost always wore off and they became acutely aware that future they were promised looked much different from the watered-down checklist that defined their "success."

Boundary Work

It is also necessary to address the role of power when engaging in fieldwork. My intersecting roles as a student, a university lecturer, and a white U.S. citizen afforded me extensive privilege while working with refugee and SIV populations in the field. These intersecting privileged identities are similar to those experienced by Fish & Rothchild (2010, p.

267) who note, “negotiating the boundaries between power and disadvantage on a daily basis, we felt, at times, very connected to participants within our research communities, and, at other times, substantially distanced from the daily challenges central to the lives of the women we studied.” Throughout my time in the field, I toed a very distinct line between working with disadvantaged populations while still being afforded the privilege of control over my space, my time, and my body. These privileges were not always afforded to clients. As noted by Fish & Rothchild (2020, p. 271) this control “immediately positioned us as ‘Western’ and, thereby, separate from the communities we studied.” These privileges inexorably impacted my interactions with clients, with services providers, and, ultimately, my understanding and interpretations of these experiences.

The current research sought to shed light on the inequalities and harms faced by SIVs and it was this intention that guided my actions in the field. However, it would be naive of me to believe that my interpretations are not framed by Western hegemonic discourse, which inevitably legitimizes the status of SIVs as the stranger. Alldred (1998, p. 154) speaks to this contradiction, noting,

Recognizing the fact that in providing a research voice for a particular group we may simultaneously reinforce their construction as Other and concurrently our own perspective or the dominant cultural perspective as central...Ethical research is simply not possible in an unjust world, since researchers replicate structures of privilege through the institution of knowledge.

There were a few instances where I “tipped my hand” while in the field. These discussions typically revolved around U.S. intervention in Afghanistan and the way that the U.S. handled SIVs. On numerous occasions, agency employees, who were also SIVs, wanted to discuss the SIV program, the crimes committed by the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan, and U.S. negotiations with the Taliban. During these conversations I didn’t hold back my frustrations with the way the

U.S. handles all these topics. In most cases, they tended to agree, or at least not disagree, with my analysis and it seemed to strengthen my credibility as a competent researcher. This increased confidence in my relative knowledge about U.S. interaction with Iraq and Afghanistan resulted in more in-depth conversations about their lives and experiences with the U.S. government as well as the SIV program. I was also outwardly critical of the treatment of minorities and disadvantaged populations within our society. On many occasions, employees would discuss police interactions with communities of color. At the beginning of my time at the agency, I was reserved about sharing my opinions on the matter as I did not want to tip my hand before adequately reading the room.

Luckily, clients and agency employees seemed to be acutely aware of the systematic injustices present in the U.S. and were generally the first to bring these issues up in conversation. These conversations generally did not arise until they felt comfortable with me. I could usually gauge their comfort level based upon their openness (without provocation) and their propensity to joke with me. The longer I was at the agency, and the more comfortable employees and clients became with me, the more openly critical of the carceral system I became. Eventually, we discussed the ties between the modern police force and slave patrols as well as Alexander's (2012) assessment of the criminal justice system as representing an extension of slavery and Jim Crow laws. My relative understanding of the systemic racism, classism, sexism, and xenophobia within U.S. society seemed to give both clients and agency employees an outlet to discuss their frustration and their own experiences with these structural issues. However, given my position of privilege within society, my understanding was inherently limited. This was something I would openly admit, which seemed to foster a system of trust and reciprocity between myself and those I interacted with in the field.

However, there were times where my ideals about social justice and equality were challenged in the field and this proved to be difficult to navigate. Despite my privileged position within U.S. society as an educated, white, American woman, I still had to walk a fine line when working with male colleagues and clients in the field as gender roles were often dictated by religious and cultural norms. For instance, when discussing the inadequacies of the SIV program with my male colleagues, I always made a point to downplay my own knowledge and refer to them as the experts on the topic as they had experienced the system first-hand. Their status as experts on the topic was absolutely true; however, by affirming this status it acted to relieve the strain on our conflicting gender roles presented by my status as an educated woman. These religious and cultural norms also guided the relationship between male and female clients, in which women almost always occupied subservient roles.

During these interactions, I had to stifle my own ideals about female empowerment, as they are undoubtedly shaped by my own privileged position. Subsequently, the language inequality that existed between male and female clients dictated whose perspective I heard. It was almost always male. Consequently, despite my intentions, I am inexorably complicit in the reproduction of social inequality. In describing this dilemma in feminist fieldwork, Fish & Rothchild (2020, p. 272) note,

Our research continually reminded us that we needed to observe, and sometimes take part in, spaces that embodied sharply asymmetrical intersections of social power in order to write analytically about them. In this sense, our academic voices emerged from participation in systems of social inequality, thereby reinforcing broader power differentials on the basis of gender, race, class, and geographic location.

There were also many references to my marriage status and plans for children. One Congolese client in particular always referred to me as “the prettiest girl at the CCC.” During one home visit to discuss his employment card, he had a few friends over at his apartment. In the

course of the conversation, the client let his friends know that I was not married. “Ah, it is a shame,” his friend replied. I laughed off the comment and proceeded to inquire about the employment card. The client then asked if I had any children. “Not yet,” I replied. “I’ve got to finish school first!” I said jokingly. He smiled and said, “Madam Sarah, I can help you with that.” Despite feeling deeply uncomfortable, I did my best to laugh off his advances and complete the task at hand.

When clients would bring up my personal relationships and/or sexual history, which happened more frequently than I would have liked, I had to engage in what Hochschild (1983) defined as surface acting. McQueeney & Lavelle (2017, p. 87) state that surface acting “involves manipulating one’s outward display of emotion, but not one’s inner feelings.” I also had to engage in surface acting when my colleagues inquired about my upcoming marriage and my desire to have children. I was frequently told that I would become unhappy as soon as I got married as I would have to take care of my husband. Given my profession and continuing education, it was assumed that once I got married, I would have to give up these freedoms to work in the home. Similarly, I was also advised not have children. Children were often referred to as a source of strain. Their explanations were not limited to the economic costs of having children, but also the emotional costs as many refugees and SIVs experienced past traumas which influenced their opinion on bringing new life into the world. While I did my best to remain even keeled during these conversations, it was difficult to continually be told what I should and shouldn’t do with my body.

Leaving the Field

While my initial research called for a period of six months in the field with a minimum of 12 hours per week (to be consistent with an ethnographic approach of immersion over a period of

time), I enjoyed working with clients and employees so much that I had no intentions on ceasing my time in the field once my scheduled data collection period was complete. I began my fieldwork in March of 2019 and officially left the field in March of 2020. While I was in the field for a year, data collection was limited to the first six months. However, leaving the field was not done by choice. Given the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the agency had to be reduced to “bare bones” staffing. With these changes, only a certain number of people were allowed in the building at one time. As a result, employees had to alternate shifts working from home and in the office.

In order to comply with social distancing and building occupancy limitations, volunteers were no longer permitted at the agency. While leaving the field was ultimately not my choice, it allowed me the time to reflect upon and interpret the data I had accumulated. As noted by Weis (1985, p. 173), “while data analysis is an ongoing process in participant observation research, it is during the post-fieldwork stage that the researcher engages in the systematic construction of themes and the analysis and interpretation of data.” When the “doors” reopen and volunteers are once again permitted in refugee resettlement agencies, I fully intend on re-entering the field, though not necessarily as a researcher, but still as an advocate and scholar.

STATING THE OBVIOUS: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the lack of action regarding calls for policy reform, particularly regarding the international arena, for the current research to omit such formalities would, quite literally, disregard the human lives at stake. It is also important to acknowledge that there is no magic solution to address the sheer magnitude of the violence, harm, and loss experienced by refugees and SIVs throughout the world, often at the hands of the state. However, by acknowledging this,

my hope is that we, as a global collective, can take steps to prevent further harms and injustices from occurring.

First and foremost, we must put an end to the interventionist policies utilized by the Global North, and the U.S. in particular. In utilizing these policies, the U.S. plays a direct role in the creation and perpetuation of the global refugee crisis, particularly after the events of September 11, 2001. Vine and colleagues (2020, p. 1) report conservative estimates that “at least 37 million people have fled their homes in the eight most violent wars the U.S. military has launched or participated in since 2001.” The impact of U.S. intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan are staggering, with estimates of 14.5 million displaced persons in the post-9/11 era (Vine et al., 2020). Not only do these interventions act as an external catalyst for the global refugee crisis, they also represent gross violations of domestic and international laws and result in astronomical human, economic, and social costs. For instance, criminological literature regarding the U.S.-led War in Iraq cited multiple criminal violations against the U.S., including the assertion that engagement constitutes an illegal act of aggression (Kramer & Michalowski, 2005; Kramer, Michalowski, & Rothe, 2005; Roberts, 2003; Schmitt, 2004), that the restructuring of the Iraqi political and economic systems was illegal (Greider, 2003; Kramer, Michalowski, & Rothe, 2005; Schmitt, 2004; Whyte, 2007), and that there was insufficient evidence to support the necessity of “humanitarian” intervention (in the form of removing Saddam Hussein) by the U.S. and its allies (Doig, 2014; Kramer, Michalowski, & Rothe, 2005).

U.S. actions in both Iraq and Afghanistan have resulted in arguably one of the most significant human rights crises in modern history. The Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs (2021, p. 1) concludes, “prior wars and civil conflict in the country have made Afghan society extremely vulnerable to the indirect effects of the current war... Nearly every

factor associated with premature death – poverty, malnutrition, poor sanitation, lack of access to health care, environmental degradation – is exacerbated by the current war. In order to curb the current refugee crisis, the U.S. must put an end to its neoliberal conquest of the Middle East, which often results in near-genocidal outcomes.

Further, the livelihood and wellbeing of the occupied population must be prioritized when decisions regarding withdrawal and peace deals are made by foreign occupiers. The U.S. occupation and subsequent withdrawal from Iraq ultimately resulted in the creation of a dangerous power vacuum facilitating state-sponsored corruption, crime, and failed economic policies, and opened the door to extremist groups vying for power (Kulzer & Friedrichs, 2019; Cordesman, 2020). In 2019, the Institute for Economics and Peace (2020) ranked Afghanistan as the least peaceful country in the world. Despite this reality, President Biden recently called for the withdrawal of all remaining troops from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021. This announcement has been met with swift criticism, citing the fragility of the Afghan democratic state, the likelihood of civil war, and the potential resurgence of extremist groups (Kirisci & Memisoglu, 2021). By withdrawing from Afghanistan, the U.S. would, undoubtedly, relieve itself of the little responsibility it had taken in the “rebuilding” of Afghanistan. While this would result in immediate gratification for the U.S., it would have immediate, devastating, and far-reaching consequences for the citizens of Afghanistan. In a similar vein, the U.S. should prioritize the well-being of Afghans when making peace treaties within the region. While bargaining with the Taliban creates a sense of “peace” for the U.S., it opens the door for sectarian violence and further harm for the citizens of Afghanistan. As one SIV fervently argued, “if we agree to peace and then everyone pulls out of Afghanistan, it will just get worse.”

At the very least, open-door immigration policies must be implemented. It is abhorrent that U.S.-led conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have resulted in the displacement of upwards of 14 million people, yet “fewer than 1% of refugees resettled in the U.S. in 2018 were from Middle Eastern countries” (Radford & Connor, 2019, p. 1). Even more abhorrent is the expectation of aid and reciprocity from Afghan and Iraqi nationals, while simultaneously denying the same courtesy in return. U.S. troops and employers are able to return to their homes, while the interpreters, cultural translators, cooks, embassy advisors, and security forces which provided them with life-saving support are left hiding and often fleeing for their lives as they “stand in line for a ticket, waiting to die” (Packer, 2007, p. 4). Going further, no human being, regardless of SIV status, should be relegated to a life of hiding or the confines of a refugee camp for years on end waiting for a broken system to deem them “worthy” of life in a country outlined by fictitious man-made borders. Freedom of movement is a fundamental human right which should not be reserved for the lucky few who manage to navigate the bureaucratic dregs of neoliberal capitalist “efficiency.”

Even further, these freedoms should be extended to the family unit. At no point should the family be forcibly separated during the migration or resettlement process. As noted by Nicholson (2018, p. 3),

A right to family unity is inherent in the universal recognition of the family as the fundamental group unit of society, which is entitled to protection and assistance. This right is entrenched in universal and regional human rights instruments and international humanitarian law, and it applies to all human beings, regardless of their status. It therefore also applies in the refugee context.

Separation of the family not only perpetuates trauma, but it also removes feelings of safety and security that one may have while entering into an unknown environment. Further, family

separation actively works to prevent assimilation, an underlying requirement of the refugee resettlement program and key component for “success” in the U.S.

Lastly, conditions must be set which allow people to do more than just survive once they are resettled in the U.S. For refugees, SIVs, and all populations relegated to the condition of the socially dead stranger, life revolves around survival. While this allows for one’s biological being to continue, it is virtually impossible to move beyond the level of self-preservation into what Agamben (1995, p. 1) coins, “a qualified life.” Realizing this, the international arena has recognized the “right to development as an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to and enjoy economic, social, cultural, and political development” (Stewart, 1989, p. 349). While rhetoric surrounding the American Dream ideology does its best to discount these realities, U.S. standards of living lag behind most of its wealthy developed counterparts, scoring abysmally on scales relating to poverty, access to affordable housing, access to quality basic education, and access to basic healthcare (Merelli, 2017; Pesce, 2020). Subsequently, there remains a large portion of the U.S. population, often including refugees and SIVs, who are locked out of the right to development, who must focus solely on the fulfilment of basic needs in order to survive. The right to an adequate standard of living, including access to livable wages, affordable healthcare, affordable housing, and quality basic education should not only be available to refugees and SIVs, but to Americans as a whole.

Additionally, in order for refugees and SIVs to achieve the right to development, access to consistent and quality ESL services are of paramount importance. As noted in the Refugee Handbook for Service Providers, “finding a job and learning English are the two most important steps toward economic self-sufficiency” (Catholic Diocese of Richmond, 2002, p. 5). Despite the

immense importance of the ESL program, it is only offered by resettlement agencies for 30 days, and, for a time, was not offered at all due to budget restrictions. Funding should not only be provided for consistent and quality ESL courses taught by certified professionals but should also be invested in childcare during these classes. Many of the refugees and SIVs who I encountered adopted traditional gender roles in which the males worked outside the home and the females stayed home with the children. Consequently, many female clients were unable to attend ESL classes as they were the only source of childcare for their children. Those who chose to bring their children to class were unable to effectively devote their time to the learning environment. Providing childcare during ESL classes will, theoretically, help alleviate the achievement gap between male and female clients.

SNAKE OIL SALESMEN: CONCLUDING REMARKS

Throughout my time in the field, I encountered truly incredible people and was privileged to their stories of hardship, perseverance, and resiliency. Their stories highlight the state's predatory and parasitic relationship with refugee and SIV populations. Yet, these stories often become lost before we even know they existed at all. Quite frankly, this is by design. If, and only if, they risked their lives, and the lives of their families in support of U.S. policy objectives, they might become "worthy" of our attention before being swallowed by a bureaucratic black hole, spit out, and touted as a "success" story. We must reconsider what we define as success, and whether we are indeed setting people up to succeed. What we facilitate for them cannot be defined as success, can it? The U.S. relied upon SIVs to fill vital positions to fuel the American war machine. The same machine which leveled their country, destroyed many of their homes, and stripped them of their identities. One thing is abundantly clear: the U.S. did not hold up their

end of the bargain. The future that was promised to SIVs as a “reward” for their sacrifices resulted in little more than a bureaucratically watered-down checklist of formalities that, if completed, resulted in “success.” However, if these boxes were left unchecked, the failure of the U.S. to uphold its promise to SIVs is boiled down to individual character flaws. Thus, a perfect storm is created, effectively preserving the integrity of the state while sweeping its victims under the proverbial rug. The message is loud and clear: you were “worthy” enough to die for us, but not to live with us.

The clients I worked with in the field welcomed me with open arms, despite the often hostile reception they themselves received. Their grace and kindness in the face of adversity and their desire to create a better life for not only themselves, but for all those who are struggling, moved me to my core and is something we could all learn from. Throughout my time in the field it became evident that they could teach me more than I could ever imagine teaching them. I can only hope that sharing their stories illuminates the humanity that SIVs and refugees are so often stripped of. We have a moral obligation, not just as U.S. citizens, but as fellow human beings to treat them with the respect and dignity they deserve. And, if we are lucky, we will change our own thinking and welcome our own re-education, one in which the dominant hegemonic discourse represents refugees and SIVs as the valuable members of society that they are.

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APPENDIX

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BPL	Barclay's Premier League
CCC	Commonwealth Catholic Charities
COM	Chief of Mission
CPTED	Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design
CRSR	Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ESL	English as a Second Language
INA	Immigration and Nationality Act
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LPR	Legal Permanent Resident
MSR	Member Service Representative
OPE	Overseas Processing Entity
P2	Priority 2 Direct Access Petition
PA	Principal Applicant
PRM	Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
R&P	Reception and Placement
RIS	Refugee Immigration Services
SIV	Special Immigrant Visa
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
SSA	Social Security Administration
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
USCCB	United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
USCIS	United States Citizenship and Immigration Services
USRAP	United States Refugee Admissions Program
VIEW	Virginia Initiative for Employment and Work
VOLAG	Voluntary Agency
WIC	Women, Infants, and Children
WTO	World Trade Organization

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