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"Our situation is 180 degrees different": Resettled Refugees' Understanding of Citizenship, Formal Schooling, and Agency

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Abstract

This study problematizes the conceptualization of refugees as passive victims of structural violence by recentering the voices of resettled refugees and their articulations of agency. Using semi-structured interviews with resettled Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Philadelphia and employees at a Philadelphia nonprofit that provides social services for immigrants and refugees, I examine how resettled refugees understand structures of formal schooling and citizenship as well as their articulations of agency. Through these interviews I found that resettled Syrian and Iraqi refugees rejected structures of citizenship and formal schooling and did not feel agency in participation within these structures. Instead, participants articulated agency primarily through their personal identities. This agency was articulated as the power from within, consciousness within constraints, or agency within structures. This work points to the need for further research that recenters the particularities of the resettled refugee identity, underscoring the ways in which the refugee identity is configured in complex, particular, and individualized ways across contexts.

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Lastly, thank you to my family. Thank you for all the sacrifices you have made in this country so that I could have the immense privilege of learning, thinking, and understanding more about the world.

[1] All the names of people and places have been changed in this study.

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Acronyms

CPM: Center for Philadelphia Migrants

INA: Immigration and Nationality Act

LPR: Legal permanent resident

NGO: non-governmental organization

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

UNRWA: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

USCIS: United States Citizenship and Immigration Services

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2018, I interned at a nonprofit where I helped resettled refugees with the first part of their citizenship journey: applying for legal permanent residence (LPR status), also known as the "green card" application. I collected all the documents required for the application, and met with resettled refugees one-on-one to record their case histories. Throughout the internship I was struck by the difficulties I faced contacting institutions of the state. Simple tasks such as getting in touch with the welfare office or setting up appointments for resettled refugees to receive biometric examinations became incredibly frustrating due to inept bureaucrats, language barriers, and refugees' experiences of discrimination. In contrast to the frustration I faced daily in this role, when I interacted with resettled refugees to request that they once again return to the office or once again re-submit their applications, they demonstrated incredible patience, resilience, and cooperation. In my one-on-one meetings with resettled refugees, I was struck by the hopes and values they placed in the green card and citizenship process. This work led me to questions regarding how refugees perceived and defined citizenship. Did they view citizenship as something that gives them more opportunities or security? Was citizenship something that could engender feelings of belonging in American society? Did resettled refugees feel that they have a voice or ability to be agentic in the face of the challenges of resettlement?

In order to answer these questions, I explored literature in refugee studies. I became interested in refugees as a particular migrant group, with a set of needs and perspectives that were not necessarily reflected in other migrant groups. With this lens in mind, I looked at citizenship as a way of understanding the refugee identity and experience in the international

system. Next, I read literature in refugee education, and found that in this literature resettled refugees had high educational aspirations and generally felt that schooling would provide them access to further opportunities and equal rights. At the same time, I discovered that much of the existing scholarship on refugee education was focused on the emergency context, particularly in refugee camps. There were few studies on resettled refugees and the dilemmas they faced. I found that this disparity contributed to the view of refugees as passive victims, because it reinforced the notion that refugees were bound to be caught up in complex structures of state violence, changing national immigration policies, and disempowering and xenophobic rhetorics. Thus, I began the project wondering if resettled refugees felt empowered by their experiences in structures of formal schools and citizenship.

While I originally expected to discuss the relationship between citizenship, schooling, and perceptions of agency, what I found was that resettled refugees were not necessarily drawing explicit connections between these topics nor did they necessarily experience agency in interaction with these institutions. The resettled refugees I interviewed primarily expressed agency in terms of their cultural and religious identities, which allowed them to experience agency in private spaces, outside of the structures of the state. However, participants' cultural and religious identities also intersected with structural forces that often disempowered them. This privately constructed, cultural and religious conceptualization of agency is intimately connected with how participants understood their structurally given identities as resettled refugees, future citizens, or students within formal school systems. Participants were conscious of the ways in which they lacked agency within these systems and they chose to reject and re-interpret their relationships with these structures.

I describe this conceptualization of agency as individual consciousness, consciousness within constraints, or the power from within. This conceptualization of agency means possibility and survival within disempowering structures, rather than the more dominant conceptualization of agency as social action or social transformation. As one of my interview participants, Habib, claimed,

> We have a different situation [than other migrants]. Our situation is 180 degrees different. First of all, we came as refugees. We didn't come out of love to America. America was imposed on us, to come here. We have no other choice. Okay we came here, but there's nothing to make it easier. Me personally, I don't write or speak in English. And here one of the conditions to get the citizenship is to take a test and I don't know what. So how am I supposed to take the citizenship? This is an important point, and a complicated one. (Habib, November 16, 2018)

In this brief statement, Habib responds to my queries on his experiences with structures of formal schooling and citizenship, reframing my questions through his own understanding of his position in American society. This study aims to highlight the voices of resettled refugees like Habib, as they describe the challenges and hopes for their life in the United States. I hope that this study brings attention to the ways in which resettled refugees can and do demonstrate agency, even if this agency is not through their participation within structures or through social transformation of structures. These resettled refugees articulated their own novel understandings of agency, as consciousness within constraints, as the possibility of survival within disempowering structural environments.

Statement of research questions, overview of chapters

The central questions that guide this study are: How do resettled refugees engage with structures and institutions of the state, in particular formal schooling and citizenship? Do their

interactions with these structures foster agency? In what ways do resettled refugees demonstrate their own agency?

To answer these questions, in the next chapter I review relevant literature in the fields of education, refugee studies, and political science. In chapter three, I discuss the methods used in this study, describing the process of using semi-structured qualitative interviews with resettled refugees and employees at the Center for Philadelphia Migrant (CPM)[2], a Philadelphia nonprofit that provides social services for refugees and immigrants. In chapter four, I discuss the findings from my interviews with resettled refugees and employees at CPM. I review individual profiles for each resettled refugee and examine four themes that emerged from the data: the prospect of citizenship could serve as a source of security, participants found formal schools in the US disempowering, participants were empowered by their cultural and religious identities, and that participants performed agency within structural constraints. Lastly, in chapter five, I connect my findings to the literature. I argue that resettled refugees actively rejected structures of citizenship and formal schooling and did not feel agency in participation within these structures. Instead, participants articulated agency primarily through their personal identities. This agency was articulated as the power from within, consciousness within constraints, or agency within structures.

[2] All the names of people and places have been changed in this study.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining refugee

In this study, I chose to focus on refugees because of the multiple dimensions of the refugee identity which necessitate further study of refugees as a particular migrant group. The dimensions of the refugee identity that I consider in this study are political, legal, and individual. I classify these identities in two ways: structural and personal (See Figure 1). I consider the political and legal aspects of refugees' identities as structural identities, or identities that are developed in direct relation to the nation-state or the international system. For example, legal aspects of the refugee identity could include the right of non-refoulement or the need to attain legal status to secure one's political rights. In contrast, the personal dimensions of refugee identity are dependent on the refugees' individual contexts and their personal values and/or beliefs. While these categories are not mutually exclusive, I do make distinctions among them in order to make an argument about refugee agency. I argue throughout that while structural aspects of the refugee identity often paint refugees as passive victims of structural violence, an understanding of the personal dimensions of refugee identity indicates how refugees continue to demonstrate agency within the structures that disempower them.

Figure 1. Dimensions of refugee identity

Dimension of refugee identity	Structural or Personal?	Examples
Political	Structural	State interaction with refugee populations, national immigration policy, global rhetoric on refugees
Legal	Structural	Definitions of refugee from

		1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, legal principles that protect refugees such as non-refoulement
Individual	Personal	Cultural identity, religious identity

The political and legal aspects of the refugee identity are commonly understood in relation to the nation-state. Refugees have a particular relationship to nation-states and the international system. The particularity of this identity stands apart from other migrants, as refugees have no choice in their own displacement, are left without a state-identity, and must use this status to claim refugee status while also actively seeking statehood membership in order to access equal rights (Haddad 2008, p. 27). As Haddad (2008) argues,

> Refugees are not the consequence of a breakdown in the system of separate states, rather they are an inevitable if unanticipated part of international society… The refugee's identity is forged precisely by her lack of belonging, her status as an outsider and her position between, rather than within, sovereign states. (Haddad 2008, p. 7)

Refugees statelessness is what defines and determines their access to the legal protections afforded to "refugees" but also leaves them in a position where their position in relation to the state is always one of an outsider. Within this political identity, trauma and loss configure prominently. The impact of trauma is often discussed along with refugees' statelessness, their position in the international system as an outsider, and the political ramifications of a lack of access to rights as granted by a state (Edge, Newbold, and McKeary 2014; Bonet 2018). Later in this study, I will explore how these legal and political identities factor into resettled refugees' understandings of their own agency.

Along with identifying the legal and political particularities of the refugee identity, this study seeks to understand refugees as their own particular migrant group. Some scholars choose to categorize refugees within a larger group of migrants. For example, Abu El-Haj and Skilton (2017) use the term "im/migrant" to denote the diversity of people included in the category of migrant which include immigrants, transnational migrants, and refugees (p.77). The authors argue that there is a need for education to push back against the "colonial present," which is the idea that contemporary discourses on migrants put forth an imagined pathway toward immigration that ignores the continued impact of imperial power relations on migratory patterns (Abu El-Haj and Skilton, 2017, p. 70-1). In this context, the term im/migrant connects various migrant groups to make an overarching claim about the need to decenter the nation-state and recognize imperial power structures. While such perspectives are valuable, in this study, I move away from broad categories to underscore factors that make refugees a unique population with particular needs. I argue that studying refugees also means paying attention to the continued salience of states in an increasingly globalized international system, a challenge that affects migrants at large, but affects refugees in particular given the structural aspects of their identities.

Outside of the particular reasons to focus on refugees, it is important to remember that the term "refugee" is context-specific and it aims to represent diverse histories and identities (Haddad 2008). While the category of "refugee" is not necessarily a contested concept, there is contestation over who can, should, and does count as a refugee, as evidenced by scholarship that seeks to contest and expand definitions of refugeehood (Shacknove 1985; Zetter 1991; Betts 2013). In this study, I follow the definition of a refugee provided by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, (explained in the section below) while recognizing that many

scholars argue that the definition is too narrow (Maley 2016; Haddad 2018; Betts 2013). Furthermore, I use the term "resettled refugee" throughout to indicate that I am speaking about a particular group of refugees within this larger subset, the one percent of refugees who are resettled, and from those, Syrian and Iraqi refugees residing in Philadelphia, PA.

Global politics of refugeehood

Legal history

While "refugees" as a category of displaced people existed prior to the 1951 Refugee Convention, World War II and the resulting population of displaced peoples in Europe served as the impetus for the institutionalization of an international legal framework for refugee protection (Betts et al 2012; Betts 2017; Maley 2016). According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is defined as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR 1951 Convention). Several years later the 1967 Protocol was passed, removing the geographic limitations on European refugees, but the 1951 definition of refugee remains fairly narrow (Maley 2016; Betts et al 2012; Ferris 2013). In addition to defining who qualifies as a refugee, the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol outlined the core principles and rights of individuals designated as refugees, such as burden sharing and non-refoulement. Burden sharing is the idea that solutions to refugeehood are best resolved in the international sphere. Because the burden of hosting refugees primarily falls on neighboring countries, the management of refugees should be primarily dealt with in the international sphere to "share" this burden (1951 Convention; Maley,

2016, p. 135-140). Non-refoulement is the idea that refugees should not be forcibly repatriated to their country of origin (Betts et al 2012; Ferris, 2013, p. 22). Both burden-sharing and non-refoulement are key to understanding the structural dimensions of the refugee identity, as they indicate the ways in which states are responsible for recognizing and resolving the "problem" of refugeehood— or the status of refugees.

UNHCR, internationalization

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the international body tasked with protecting refugees. It serves as the "guardian" of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol (Betts et al 2012). The UNHCR's mandate is twofold: provide protection and find durable solutions for refugees (Betts et al 2012). Protection activities may range from food assistance to political coordination. The three durable solutions identified by UNHCR are resettlement, voluntary repatriation, and integration (UNHCR 2019, "Solutions"). According to UNHCR, there are approximately 25.4 million refugees globally, fleeing primarily from Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan (UNHCR 2018). About 86 percent of refugees flee to neighboring host countries and only *one percent* are eventually resettled into high income developed countries (UNHCR 2018). The top refugee-hosting countries (in order of most hosted) are Turkey, Uganda, Pakistan, Lebanon, and the Islamic Republic of Iran (UNHCR 2018). Despite the principle of burden-sharing, the integration of refugees in neighboring host states is politically contentious, given that many countries of first asylum are developing countries, with few resources and little political commitment towards refugee populations. Additionally, voluntary repatriation in an era of protracted conflict is further unlikely. Given the difficulty of "durable solutions" in the 21st century, refugees are "almost always without any possible

pathway to citizenship in neighboring host countries" which means that they are unable to access the legal, political and economic rights that come with statehood membership (Dryden-Peterson 2016, p.474). Therefore, despite its international response to refugees, UNHCR relies heavily on state cooperation and buy-in to maintain their protection activities.

The establishment of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol occurred at a time when related international developments around human rights and protection were occuring. The 1951 Convention was followed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention of the Child, which "conceptualized rules for normative behavior and enshrined education as a human right" (Dryden-Peterson 2016, p. 475). Following these two acts, the "education for all" framework emerged at the Jomtien conference in Thailand in 1990, and the Dakar conference in 2000. "Education for all" was a call for a more centralized and international system of humanitarian action for education in times of crisis, including refugee crises (Retamal and Adeo-Richmond 1998). In addition to the education for all framework, there was a proliferation of international institutions involved in refugee policy (and educational policy), including the USAID, UNESCO, and UNICEF, along with the previously involved UNHCR and UNRWA (Retamal and Adeo-Richmond 1998, p.8). These treaties, along with the end of the Cold War, solidified the permanent designation of refugee policy (educational and otherwise) to the domain of international institutions, leaving states to implement refugee policy as a part of a complex system of norms and international treaties (Maley 2016).

A renewed focus on states

While international institutions protect refugee rights under international law, the same institutions have paradoxically contributed to the lack of inclusion of refugees as full citizens by

characterizing refugee policy as relevant only to the humanitarian domain. Most refugee policy relies on an intervention framework that leads to short-term policy solutions at the state level in countries of first asylum. In the last twenty years most refugees have experienced increasingly long periods of exile, limiting their ability to participate as full citizens in *any* nation state. As long as humanitarian crises prolong in length, and as long as host countries refuse to give a path to citizenship for refugees, the provisionary resources limited to the "emergency situation," often provided through NGOs and international agencies, only serve refugees in the short-term. This means, for example, that although international institutions provide opportunities to educate refugees, such opportunities do not lead to increased economic security or social inclusion. International institutions largely facilitate emergency education, based on intervention and short-term assistance, instead of education that would help refugees attain various social, political, and economic rights. The provision of emergency education in humanitarian contexts is just one example of the disconnect between the resources provided by international institutions and state responsibility and action for protecting refugee populations. In order for refugees to gain access to political, social, and economic rights (including education) in countries of first asylum, states must adjust resources and local perceptions to include refugees as part of their citizenry.

Thus, despite the institutionalization of refugee policy in the international realm, a renewed focus on states hosting refugees is imperative. This renewed focus on states also reflects the structural dimensions of the refugee identity. The Foucauldian concept of bio-power emphasizes the ways in which refugees lack agency through the structural dimensions of their identity which interact with the state.

The concept of bio-power was originally defined by Foucault as the state's management and control of human of human life (Zembylas 2010, p. 35). This is a specific form of "governmental power which addresses the administration, control and regulation of human beings as members of populations" (Christie and Sidhu 2006, p. 450). Foucault's claims on governmental power have been disputed on two grounds by Giorgio Agamben, a philosopher who further advanced the concept of bare life.[3] Agamben alters the premise of Foucault's claims by claiming that biopower is not a only a modern phenomenon, and instead has its origins in ancient Roman law (Agamben 1998; Zembylas 2010, p. 35). Furthermore, he claims that bio-power is rooted in a state of exception[4] where sovereign power can designate individuals as bare life, those who are subjected to violence and even death by the sovereign power (Agamben 1998; Zembylas 2010, p. 36-7). Agamben argues that the prime example of bare life is refugees. State control over human life is not simply a modern phenomena that can be erased in the age of globalization, where national political and economic differences (as well as borders) continue to have salience.

The problem with Foucauldian explanations of the state power is that they do not account for the possibility of agency. Presenting the differential citizenship afforded to refugees (both in flight and once they are resettled) in a historical continuum of fixed oppressive state power implies that such power relations are fixed. A focus on state power, while pragmatic, also yields

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[3] Bare life (or homo sacer) is defined as an individual who can be killed by the anyone (and the perpetrator will not be held accountable) but cannot be sacrificed in a religious ritual. Agamben's paradigmatic example of bare life is Auschwitz, "in which human bodies had been declared merely to be biological, hence allowing their erasure without any consequences for the perpetrators" (Zembylas 2010, p. 36). This work considers states of exception and/or emergency where the state can violate the rule of law in the name of the public good. This act is theorized to paradoxically reaffirm the sovereign's power.

[4] The "state of exception" refers to Agamben's claim that refugees are the exception and the rule that reifies the sovereign's power. The state of exception can also refer to the nature of the individual designated as homo sacer: someone who can be killed with impunity but cannot be sacrificed, a body completely in the hands of state power.

certain self-fulfilling conclusions on the perceptions and expectations of resettled refugees. Such conclusions primarily reference the structural dimension of the resettled refugee identity, which articulate the ways in which state structures continue to disempower refugees. While this study relies on theoretical frameworks that articulate the power states have in determining refugees' access to equal rights, it also seeks to center the notion of agency, articulated in private spaces outside of the state's power.

The US context

Refugee policy varies according to different state contexts that change over time with global and domestic politics (Maley 2016; Betts et al 2012). This study has a small stake in this vast field— the one percent of resettled refugees in total, and of that one percent, resettled Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Philadelphia. The United States signed onto the 1951 Convention in 1968, and formalized its refugee policy in the Refugee Act of 1980 (American Immigration Council 2018). The 1980 Refugee Act was an amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) and resulted in the US Refugee Admissions Program (Felter and McBride 2018). While refugees were admitted in the United States prior to 1980, these admissions were on an ad hoc basis. The Refugee Act of 1980 formalized the vetting and admissions process for refugees, formally integrated the definitions of refugees in the INA, and granted the executive branch the authority to set annual limits on numbers of refugees admitted per year (Felter and McBride 2018).

In general, the number of refugees admitted per year to the US has declined over time from 200,000 in 1980 to 22,500 in 2018 (Felter and McBride 2018; American Immigration Council 2018). The variation in refugee admissions is a reflection of global politics (e.g. crises in Middle East) as well as domestic politics (e.g. party affiliations or political values of the current

US President). Most recently, President Donald Trump suspended the refugee resettlement program for 120 days in January 2017, only to resume the program with a dramatically reduced ceiling for refugee admissions (Felter and McBride 2018; American Immigration Council 2018). Under the Trump Administration the ceiling for refugee admittances was set at a historic low of 45,000 for the fiscal year 2018 and 35,000 for the 2019 fiscal year (Rush 2018).

In the United States, various actors and institutions are involved in refugee integration at the national and state levels. These actors vary from state to non-state groups. State actors include schools, welfare offices, and government offices such as the USCIS and the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Non-state groups include civil society groups, faith groups, diaspora networks, NGOs and nonprofits. Originally, this study intended to focus on the structures of formal schooling in the United States and the process of citizenship (in conversation with national institutions such as the USCIS) as pathways to empowerment. However, after collecting data, I also became interested in how resettled refugees articulated agency outside of these structures, in private environments, given that participants did not feel agentic in their interactions with these state structures.

In addition to the particular landscape for refugee resettlement in the US, it is also important to note the individual backgrounds of participants in this study. All participants in this study were Syrian and Iraqi refugees who were resettled in the United States in the past one to three years. The Syrian refugees involved in the project cited the Syrian Civil War as the central reason for their displacement. The Syrian Civil War began in 2011 and has since resulted in over 5.6 million refugees, in addition to more than half of the population that has been internally displaced (USA for UNHCR 2018). The majority of Syrian refugees are located in countries of

first asylum which include Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan (USA for UNHCR 2018). Under the Obama Administration, the US hosted 18,007 Syrian refugees, while also raising the ceiling for refugee admittance from 70,000 to 85,000 in 2016 (Zong and Batalova 2017). In contrast, under the Trump administration's historically low refugee ceiling, only 3,024 Syrian refugees were admitted in 2017 (Swaine 2018). The number of Syrian refugees admitted into the US, compared to the need they present globally as a refugee group, is alarming.

The Iraqi refugees involved in the study cited a multitude of reasons for their displacement, most often a threat to their physical safety in Iraq. Many of these refugees worked for US military forces in Iraq (Hanna 2011). The US responsibility in the creation of these particular migrant groups should be a particular cause for concern. The US has been admitting increasing numbers of Iraqi immigrants since 2000, with 38% of admittances being refugees or asylees in 2007 (Terrazas 2009). However, since 2018, there has been a sharp decline in Iraqi refugees admitted to the United States, particularly those refugees who worked for US military forces in Iraq (Torbati 2018).

Given changes to the US resettlement program, both Syrian and Iraqi refugees are being admitted in increasingly lower numbers. In addition to these reductions in admittances, the US has substantially decreased their leadership role in the international refugee regime under the Trump Administration. While US refugee admittances have generally declined since 1980, the US's devaluation of the program under the Trump administration is cause for concern (Kerwin 2018; Barnett 2018; American Immigration Council 2018).

Citizenship

Definitions and approaches

This study engages with three different conceptualizations of citizenship: political, transnational, and cultural. In this section, I will define each type (See Figure 2), provide a brief example of the type in the context of citizenship in the United States, and explain the role of agency in the type. While the "types" of citizenship identified in this study are drawn from a wide range of scholarship, from political theory to citizenship education studies, they are by no means all inclusive or mutually exclusive. Instead, they represent a continuum of ways to conceptualize citizenship; individuals may experience multiple forms of citizenship. Lastly, I have interpreted this range of citizenship types with a particular group of people in mind: Iraqi and Syrian resettled refugees in the United States. For example, aspects of cultural identity and cultural citizenship may be different in the the United States as compared to a country of first asylum such as Turkey or Lebanon. This is because notions of citizenship are closely tied to the particular contexts in which they are presented.

Figure 2. Definitions of citizenship types.

Citizenship Type	**Definition**	**Role/Notion of Agency**	**Examples**
Political	State centered, individual's legal status in the eyes of the state. Appeals to notions of a cohesive national imaginary, (Anderson 2006; Castles 2017).	"Choice" to become a citizen or legal permanent resident. Individuals must fit into dominant conceptual understanding of "citizen."	"Becoming American"

Transnational	Citizenship as a lived experience that includes negotiation across various national borders. This might also include deterritorialization or disagreggation of citizenship from the borders of the nation-state. (Abu El-Haj 2015; Bashir 2017; Callan 2004)	Validating how individuals construct different contexts, places, and experiences together.	Belonging to Multiple Places "Iraqi-American artist"
Cultural	Different groups define their identity and view their role as a citizen of the state uniquely, and that each of these unique configurations should be validated (Rosaldo 1994).	Interactions with dominant conceptualizations of political citizenship and the national imaginary, re-affirming these interactions as valid.	"Belonging in the United States" "My identity" Notions of security, stability, safety, home, freedom

Political citizenship

Traditional notions of citizenship are state-centered and generally referred to as "political citizenship." This is the "traditional" conceptualization of citizenship because it is one rooted in an individual's relationship to the state alone, and it is limited to a legal designation determined by the state of residence. In this conceptualization of citizenship, only the state determines citizenship. For example, in the United States, political citizenship for a resettled refugee would be determined by their status with USCIS as a refugee, legal permanent resident, or citizen (USCIS 2018). Political understandings of citizenship tend to carry particular understandings of the ideal citizen, or a set of particular cultural and/or social expectations from citizens. There is

little room for the notion of agency in this designation as it is determined entirely by one's status within the system.

In most settings in which political citizenship is invoked, it is with the purpose of establishing a homogenous national identity where all citizens are included in the commitment to a "national imaginary" (Anderson 2006; Abu El-Haj 2015). For example, in US schools, practices of political citizenship abound, from the pledge of allegiance at the start of each school day to evaluating students' "civic-mindedness" on report cards (Figueroa 2011; Levinson 2005). Scholars such as Abu El-Haj (2015) describe the effect of these dominant conceptualizations of citizenship as both assimilative and individualist, presupposing that minoritized students in schools will "eventually adopt 'American' norms and values" (Abu El-Haj, 2015, p. 219). Due to the constraints that political citizenship places on minoritized communities in the United States, such as resettled refugees, I also refer to such conceptualizations with the notion of citizenship equating "becoming American," which I include in a question about citizenship posed to my interviewees.

Traditional notions of citizenship have become increasingly complicated by migration in an age of globalization (Castles, 2017, p. 3). As states decide on policies that affect both migrants and citizens, they also explicitly contend with the ways in which their populations as a whole are shifting. How should states react to changing populations? Scholars observe three trends within states: recognizing and assessing public policy to adapt to changing populations, acknowledging changes alone, and ignoring changes (Castles 2017; Akar 2017). The new questions emerging in national discourses on inclusion and belonging are intimately connected with the choice between adoption, recognition, and ignorance. As Callan (2004) argues, changes

in global migration have created "new sites for civic engagement… [where] the model of citizenship as a shared national identity has become 'obsolescent'" (Callan, 2004, p. 78). Thus, there is a need to expand or move beyond notions of citizenship as solely political or state-based. It may be that there are more productive or innovative ways to conceptualize citizenship in a world that is increasingly mobile and diverse. Furthermore, if migrants are to be added into the "national imaginary" of states and reap the benefits of such belonging, conceptualization of citizenship needs to move beyond traditional notions of political citizenship (Abu El-Haj 2015).

Beyond states, transnational citizenship

Scholars look towards both the challenges and opportunities that globalization presents for changing notions of citizenship. For example, Bashir (2017) argues that "the structural disaggregation of citizenship redefines its inclusionary potential beyond sovereign state boundaries" (p. 24). This leads to a "deterritorialized" or disaggregated notion of citizenship that allows for more expansive notions of citizenship in states experiencing protracted conflict or extreme cultural cleavages. Bashir (2017) offers a new way to view political citizenship, outside of the constraints of traditional state-centered conceptualizations. This understanding results in "multi-layered and complex notions that partly transcend territorial and political boundaries" (p. 35). Thus, one of the ways in which political citizenship can be reconfigured is through disaggregation or deterritorialization of citizenship, where there can be competing notions of citizenship within a single state, across states, and beyond states.

Disaggregating political citizenship is not the only way to move beyond a state-centered conceptualization of citizenship. Abu El-Haj (2015) advocates for a more expansive notion of citizenship, completely divorced from a one-state centered model, which she calls "transnational

citizenship." Transnational citizenship is the "complex, fluid ways that many young people today construct belonging and citizenship across national borders," as a challenge to nationalist and exclusionary discourses (Abu El-Haj, 2015, p. 213). Abu El-Haj (2015) claims that transnational citizenship pushes back against political conceptualizations of citizenship that can be assimilative, as well as some cultural conceptualizations of citizenship that "do little to challenge the institutional structure of exclusion and oppression" (p. 220-1).

Agency plays a larger role in transnational citizenship than it does in political citizenship. This is largely because transnational citizenship is conceived as a set of lived experiences and interactions with various institutions. However, a major critique of the transnational conceptualization is that while it claims to decenter the nation state it nevertheless must engage with multiple political conceptualizations of citizenship, thus providing the possibility of agency within particular national constraints (Abu El-Haj, 2015, p. 221). For example, in the context of formal schooling, the push for educators and students to focus on transnational citizenship may be transformative within specific schools and classroom contexts, but may not translate to contexts beyond schools, where migrant students are faced with the political constraints of citizenship in other structures of the state.

Lastly, in terms of the US context, transnational citizenship may have more relevance for certain minoritized groups over others. Resettled refugees in the United States may have a unique perspective on affiliation to any nation state, either their home state or the one in which they have been resettled, especially if they have experienced periods of protracted conflict, or decades living in a refugee camp. Therefore, transnational citizenship may strike a strange

balance for resettled refugees who do not identify within the nation they currently reside in, and are no longer able to access political citizenship in their country of origin.

Cultural citizenship

Cultural citizenship is the idea that members of different groups define their identity and view their roles as citizens of the state uniquely, and that each of these unique configurations should be validated. As Rosaldo (1994) argues, "Cultural citizenship refers to the right to be different and to belong in a participatory democratic sense" (p. 402). Cultural conceptualizations of citizenship are especially important in increasingly diverse societies because individuals often experience citizenship not as an "either/or matter, but along a continuum from full citizenship to second-class citizenship" (Rosaldo, 1994, p. 402). These cultural notions of citizenship are often produced by "vernacular ideas about first-class citizenship," where although two individuals may share the same legal status, their social and cultural identities make it so that they cannot access the same rights or feelings of belonging as other citizens. (Rosaldo, 1994, p. 402). This means that citizens will often self identify along a continuum of full or second-class citizenship according to their day-to-day material conditions as well as notions of belonging (Rosaldo, 1994, p. 402). In the context of resettled refugees in the United States, these vernacular ideas about first-class citizenship could be represented in multiple ways, from ideas about what it means to "be American" to ideas about how their position in American society relates to other minoritized groups. Cultural notions of citizenship allow for a reconfiguration of one's relationship with the state, and can potentially allow for multiple understandings of what it means to be a citizen and belong in the nation-state. Similar to understandings of transnational citizenship, cultural citizenship also allows individuals to belong to multiple states and multiple communities.

Formal schooling and refugees

In addition to resettled refugees' understanding of the structure of citizenship, this study looks at resettled refugees' understanding and experiences with formal schooling in the United States. A majority of the literature written on refugee education is centered on emergency education such as education in refugee camps (Retamal and Aedo-Richmond 1997; Chopra and Adelman 2017; Cooper 2005; Fincham 2012; Waters and LeBlanc 2005). Other studies focus on education of refugees in countries of first asylum such as Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, or Turkey (Culbertson and Constant 2017). Additionally, there is a body of literature that explores refugees experiences in higher education (Gately 2015; Morrice 2013; Rasheed and Muñoz 2016; Zeus 2011). Lastly, there is a small set of literature on refugee experiences in countries of resettlement such as the United States or United Kingdom (Taylor and Sidhu 2012). My project is situated within this latter area of research.

Although only one percent of refugees are resettled in developed countries such as the United States (Shapiro 2018), I see three reasons to focus on this group in this study. First, in many of the current works on migrant education, the experiences of refugees are dissolved into a larger discussion of other migrant groups (Rios-Rojas 2014; Abu El-Haj and Skilton 2017; Bukus 2018). The conflation of refugees with other migrant groups may be misleading given that refugee groups may have different needs than other migrant groups, such as extra counseling due to trauma and significant gaps in formal schooling. Second, the existing literature on resettled refugees focuses primarily on instructional needs or language needs, and there is little written about how resettled refugees' structural and personal identities explicitly affect their classroom experiences and vice versa. Third, a common theme in refugee emergency education literature is

that refugees demonstrate a high need and high aspirations for formal education (Waters and LeBlanc 2017; Chopra and Adelman 2017; Dryden-Peterson 2016). Some of their goals for their education include: education for eventual inclusion into host societies, education to learn new skills to bring back to their home countries, and education to gain employment. However, very little is written about if such wants and perceptions of schooling change or adapt in resettlement contexts.

While my findings do not explicitly highlight the connections between schooling and citizenship, there is some literature on how refugees' experiences with citizenship and schooling are connected. For example, Bonet (2018) explores the intersections of resettled Iraqi refugees experiences in Philadelphia public schools and their understandings of citizenship. She argues that the United States needs to re-invest in public education while understanding the particular needs of refugee youth in order for refugees to attain full access to United States citizenship. The study outlines the particular needs and challenges that refugee youth face such as interrupted schooling, "aging out" of public schooling, and poor ESL classes (p. 58-61). She calls for revival of public education, "one of the last vestiges of the public goods owed to American citizens," a public good that has particular importance for resettled refugee youth (Bonet 2018, p. 65). What makes Bonet's study informative is how she links perceptions of schooling to refugees voicing a lack of rights, which she connects to citizenship. While my study looks at how resettled refugees perceive and value formal schooling and citizenship, it does not connect the two topics explicitly. Instead, I look at formal schooling as an example of a structure with which resettled refugees engage.

Defining agency

In *Supporting and Educating Young Muslim Women,* Amanda Keddie (2018) explores how young Muslim women experience agency and empowerment in Western schools. In her interviews with resettled refugee girls from Afghanistan she finds that from the girls' perspectives, schools offered spaces to express agency and empowerment through supportive spaces, cultural affiliation with other Muslim girls, and opportunities for a better future (p. 75). However, the educators working with the girls perceived the girls' religious and gender identities as possible detractors from their empowerment (Keddie, 2018, p. 75). Keddie's analysis is an important starting point to understanding how agency is highly contextual and relational.

In this study, I place a similar emphasis on agency. On the one hand, agency can mean the ability to have a voice, and to perceive a sense of control over the physical and psychological self. On the other hand, agency can mean the ability to act or engage in forms of personal or social transformation. In this study, I discuss the former meaning of agency, with attention to the personal and individual contexts of each resettled refugee. I argue that resettled refugees articulate agency within structural constraints, as consciousness within constraints, or the power from within (Luttrell 2009; Keddie 2017). This understanding of agency is highly contextualized, individualized, and dependent on the particular circumstances that resettled refugees' face.

Literature review conclusion

When I began reading literature on refugees in political science and educational studies, I noticed the ways in which both citizenship and formal schooling figured prominently in the literature. Additionally, I noted the many ways in which state power and state violence continued

to configure in refugees' lives despite the institutionalization of refugee policy in the international realm. Furthermore, I noticed a lack of literature that centered refugee experiences in particular, and I often read about migrants experiences with citizenship and formal schools in general. I noticed that studies on citizenship ranged from delineating refugees' complicated relationship to states and the international system to how citizenship affected refugees' access to rights or feelings of belonging (Haddad 2008; Abu El-Haj 2015). Studies on formal schooling generally highlighted refugees' high educational aspirations and the promises of schooling, despite negative experiences in schools or lack of access to formal schooling in camp contexts (Chopra and Adelman 2017; Waters and LeBlanc 2017). My original expectation was to compare resettled refugees' interaction with the structures of formal schooling and citizenship. However, as I began preparing and conducting interviews with refugees, the role of the refugee identity in particular and articulations of agency started to become more relevant. It is these two dimensions of the work that figure prominently in my analysis of how resettled refugees' interact with structures of formal schooling and agency.

Chapter 3: METHODS

Introduction to methodology

The central concern of this study is how resettled refugees in the United States perceive their agency in relation to the potential promises or opportunities that citizenship and schooling hold. Before I conducted any interviews, I chose to complete a literature review in refugee studies and refugee education. I found that this literature was plentiful in the field of emergency education, or refugee studies in contexts of emergency, but there was little on resettlement

(Retamal and Aedo-Richmond 1997; Chopra and Adelman 2017; Cooper 2005; Fincham 2012; Waters and LeBlanc 2005). Furthermore, while several of these studies feature qualitative data, the voices of the refugees themselves are absent in these works (for an example of a work incorporating qualitative data from interviews see Water and LeBlanc 2005). Therefore, one of core intentions of the project was to re-center the voices of resettled refugees. I believe that the best way to highlight these voices was through semi-structured qualitative interviews.

Methodology

Interviews can provide information that is qualitatively different from surveys or other forms of data collection. Interviews "provide tangible, 'work-withable' data in a field of endeavour that often times feels abstract, [and] difficult to pin down" (Forsey 2012, p. 364). For this reason, interviews provided the best form of data collection when working with broad and multifaceted topics such as schooling and citizenship. There are a range of interview styles; some are positivist, and generally more structured, while others are more open and unstructured (Forsey 2012, p. 366-8; Merriam 2009, p. 89). I chose to conduct interviews on the latter side of the spectrum, and took on a researcher's position that Forsey (2012) compares to an "intrepid traveller… seeking a depth of engagement which allows fellow travellers to tell their own stories" (p. 366). My interview questions guided the general structure of the conversation, with consistent opening and closing questions throughout, but with conversation that could move in the direction chosen by the interviewee (p. 372). This format allowed me to "respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam 2009, p. 90).

I also chose to conduct semi-structured interviews because of the need to consider the diverse effects interviews can have on the participants: "At one extreme interviews allegedly empower, generate self-awareness, or offer a kind of therapeutic release for interviewees; at the other, they draw reproach for feigning intimacy with, and then abandoning the people they engage" (Sinding and Aronson 2003, p. 95). Given that I was working with resettled refugees, a vulnerable population who has experienced trauma, and I was asking individuals to reflect on their daily challenges that necessarily interact with this trauma, I needed to consider how my questions could potentially re-traumatize the participants. In order to prepare for this possibility, I chose a semi-structured interview style that allowed me to respond to individual experiences on a case by case basis. Furthermore, I worked to make the interviews as comfortable and responsive as possible while also allowing myself room to respond and engage with unexpected topics or reactions that came up in the interview. The flexibility of the interview style allowed for participants to engage with concepts in their own manner, increasing the potential for the interview to serve cathartic or therapeutic process (Forsey 2012, p. 367). I hope that my interviews served this role for the participants involved. After thanking one of my interviewees for his time at the end of the interview, he stated, "Thank you. We're not losing anything, and maybe someone will hear our voice" (Habib, November 16, 2018).

Scope of the study, sourcing of data

The data for this project came through two particular connections. First, I had familiarity with a non-profit that resettles refugees in the Philadelphia area, Center for Philadelphia Migrants (CPM). I had previously interned at CPM and was familiar with several of the employees there. My original intention was to first interview these employees, and then

interview the refugees they worked with at the institution. However, I had difficulty identifying refugee families through CPM employees due to capacity, time, and cooperation constraints.

Given my difficulty finding resettled refugees to interview at CPM, I reached out to a Swarthmore College employee, Hannah, working on a community project with resettled refugees in Philadelphia. I became familiar with Hannah through an on campus job, and had a long-standing relationship with her. Hannah's community project had substantial institutional support both by organizations in Philadelphia and by Swarthmore College. The program's aim was to engender empathy and a sense of belonging for Syrian and Iraqi refugee communities in Philadelphia.

With Hannah's help I contacted three refugee families who agreed to be interviewed. My fourth interview was with Omar, a resettled refugee who also served as a translator for the interviews. Omar served as an integral connection to participants, given that he had served as a translator for several of the interviewees before. Participants greeted him with warmth, and often had their own conversations with him before the interviewees began. As evidenced by Omar's role in the project, the resettled refugees sourced through Hannah's community project are a select group. These interviewees had a history of participating in a community projects and a familiarity with "researchers." This institutional relationship may have made the participants more likely to agree to the interview given their comfort with interacting with college students and employees. It may have also made these participants more reflective than other resettled refugees due to their previous experiences with Hannah's community project, which asked them to reflect on their experiences as resettled refugees. On the other hand, it is possible that this prior connection allowed the participants to be comfortable with being interviewed and open to

sharing their stories with me. This comfort and familiarity was integral to open conversation. The process of selection and the participants' prior connection to the institution did not appear to impact their perspectives and personal experiences with citizenship, schooling, and feelings of agency as they described them in the interviews. In summary, what made this group of interviewees particular was their relationship and comfort to research which may have actually increased their openness to the interviews.

Data collection overview

For this study I collected the following data: three semi-structured interviews from employees at CPM (see Appendix B), and four semi-structured interviews with resettled Syrian and Iraqi refugees residing in Philadelphia (see Appendix A).

Interviews with CPM employees

I interviewed three employees at the Center for Philadelphia Migrants (CPM), a non-profit in Philadelphia that provides social services for refugees and immigrants (See Figure 4). These employees were selected by a contact at the institution, who identified them as individuals who worked one-on-one with resettled refugee clients on a daily basis, in a variety of avenues, from school enrollment to citizenship applications. In these interviews, I asked how the employees viewed the role of citizenship and education in refugee resettlement, drawing on their interactions and experiences with resettled refugees at CPM. I also asked them about their personal opinions on the role that schooling and citizenship have in refugee resettlement.

These interviewees generally reflected the challenges that resettled refugees identified in their interviews. Central topics that emerged in the interviews were: the anxieties behind the

citizenship process, challenges in formal schooling environments, and challenges with English language acquisition. While these interviews were valuable in getting an understanding of the nature of the issues that resettled refugees face, I will place greater emphasis on the interviews with the resettled refugees themselves in order to accentuate their voices, especially given that many of the discussions I had with CPM employees reflected the topics and challenges discussed by the resettled refugees.

Figure 3. Profiles of CPM Employees

Interviewee	**Employee Overview**
Emily	Emily is a female employee in her 30s who has worked at CPM for several years. She is a licensed social worker. Her daily work at CPM consists of case management for newly resettled refugees.
Olanna	Olanna is a female employee in her 30s who has worked at CPM for several years. Olanna provides case management and translation support for refugees and immigrants at CPM.
Jade	Jade is a female employee in her late 20s/early 30s and has worked at CPM for several years. She is a licensed social worker. In her work at CPM she aims to look at each individual holistically and to meet their various needs. She works with particularly vulnerable refugees who have been victims of torture.

Interviews with resettled refugees

In this study, I will emphasize my data from the semi-structured interviews with the four resettled refugees. In these interviews, which were each between 40 minutes and 1 hour, I first asked about the interviewees' origins, and how they came to be in the United States (such an

approach is recommended by scholars such as Forsey, 2012, p. 371). I then asked participants questions about citizenship, schooling, and the relationship between the two (see Appendix A). While these questions were prepared before the interview, they were worded and discussed differently according to the participants' backgrounds, engagement with the questions, and the identities of the participants in the interview.

I had a total of four interviews (Figure 3). Three of these interviews were with individuals, and one was with a family of four (which I will consider as "one" interview). In my findings, I often draw on the family of four, the Haddad family, more often given that both children and parents were present in the interview. In other interviews, parents spoke on behalf of their children. The three individual participants were Iraqi refugees, and the family members interviewed were Syrian refugees. The participants ranged in age, from around 10 years old to around 60 years old. Three out of four interviewees were green card holders, and one had recently acquired US citizenship. Most interviewees had some formal schooling in their country of origin (often only elementary school, with the exception of Omar), and half had formal schooling experiences in the United States. Two of the interviews occurred in participants' homes, and the other two in local coffee shops. For these interviews I used an Arabic translator, Omar (described above), who translated my questions and relayed the participants answers back to me in real time. I transcribed Omar's English translations, but had a second translator, a student at Swarthmore College, also translate the participants' responses into English. While both translators generally had similar interpretations of words used by interviewees, I have used the diction directly translated from the student at Swarthmore College more consistently throughout the study, given that her translations were more detailed and specific than Omar's

real time interpretations. Omar also served as the second to last interviewee for the study; while this could have impacted the responses he gave given his familiarity with the questions and general structure of the interviews I found him engaged and open in his interview.

Figure 4. Profiles of resettled refugees

Interviewee	**Profile/Interview Summary**	**Interview context**	**Country of Origin**	**Citizenship Status**	**Age**
Hussein	Hussein is a resettled refugee in his 60s from Iraq. He is married and has five children. Hussein left Iraq due to a threat to his personal safety. In the United States, he has re-ignited his passion for art by painting images of Iraq.	Coffee Shop	Iraq	Green Card Holder	~60
Haddad Family (Habib, Amina, Daoud, Farid)	The Haddad family left Syria due to the Syrian Civil War. Their children both attend formal schools in the United States, and spoke of the many challenges they faced integrating in schools as resettled refugees.	Family home	Syria	Green Card Holder	Parents in late 40s/ early 50s. Two children ages ~7, ~18

Omar	Omar is a middle aged male who left Iraq originally to attend university, but when he returned was forced to leave the country due to persecution. Omar values the mobility an American passport would provide him and he hopes to travel to every continent one day.	Coffee Shop	Iraq	Green Card Holder	~40
Mohammed	Mohammed is an elderly male who left Iraq due to political strife. He has two older children, one in high school and one in their late 20s. His work and daily life are guided by his religious convictions.	Family home	Iraq	Citizen	~60

Data analysis

I transcribed my data from interviews with CPM employees, as well as Omar's English translations from the resettled refugee interviews. As mentioned above, I had a student at Swarthmore College translate the Arabic responses from the resettled refugee interviewees. In my data analysis, I looked at transcriptions by group, separating responses from resettled refugees and CPM employees. In general, I looked for what patterns could be explained by my data, and what questions emerged from the data. Following a constant comparative method of data analysis, I split my data into units, and compared these units to each other to see if different units fit with each other in a novel way (Merriam 2009, p. 177). Then, I separated the data into

categories which can be also be called "a theme, a pattern, a finding, or an answer to a research question" (Merriam 2009, p. 178). This process of "category construction" began by coding each interview transcription and notating comments and questions next to the relevant and interesting units of data (Merriam 2009, p.178). Next, I compared codes to each other and began to name and combine categories (Merriam 2009, p.180-7). After formally constructing my categories, I revisited the literature to re-name and consolidate the categories I found and also to find connections to my categories and those found in my literature review. Lastly, I engaged in the process of theorizing about the data by thinking about the relationship between themes from my literature review and categories constructed from my interviews (Merriam 2009, p. 192).

Positionality statement

My own positionality may have impacted the nature of the interviews, primarily in terms of my own research experiences and perhaps the experiences and perceptions of the interviewees. However, it is less likely that my positionality impacted the data or results of the study. Following discussions in feminist methodologies in qualitative research, I argue that the researcher's power and identity are complex and challenging barriers to overcome in qualitative research (Wolf 1996; Henry 2003). In particular, it has been important to me to reflect on my own positionality and representation of self in this research. I am an Iranian-American who comes from a family of immigrants, and issues of migration, human rights, and belonging have always been of interest to me. In addition to my experiences working with resettled refugees at a Philadelphia nonprofit, the questions and motivations behind this research are partially drawn from my family's experiences with integration and belonging.

I believe that my Middle-Eastern identity provided me certain advantages and a sense of familiarity with interviewees. I also believe that it gave me a familiarity with the religious and cultural identities of my participants. For example, I knew to greet the participants with the common greeting of "As-Salaam-Alaikum," or to take off my shoes upon entering their homes. However, at the same time, my positionality also possibly disadvantaged me. Often, one of the first things participants wanted to know was if I was Muslim or if I spoke Arabic and/or identified as Arab. I found myself reverting to "stock" answers to such questions, in order to reveal parts my identity to my interviewees but still allow for further questions around my identity (Henry 2003). Such questions made it difficult to know how my own identity potentially impacted the interviewees. These questions marked me as an individual with some cultural knowledge, but perhaps not a member of the in-group. Nevertheless, despite some of these potential disadvantages of my identity, I believe that it ultimately allowed me to be nimble in the interview environment.

Methods conclusion

While my interviewing methodology was intentional in structure, the circumstances that surrounded my interviews may have impacted the nature of the interviews. These circumstances included the role of the interview environment and interpretation. Interviewees may have experienced various levels of comfort given the location of the interview. When I was in interviewees' homes I noticed a level of comfort and security that perhaps could have been indicative of the environment of the interview. Similarly, the vulnerability of the population played a role in interpretation. It is possible that details may have been lost in translation due to the extent of the translator's familiarity with the participants through Hannah's project, but it is

just as likely that participants' and translators' mutual familiarity led to increased openness and understanding in interviews. While these circumstance may have served as both strengths and weaknesses in the interviews, the general strength of my methodology is the format of the interviews themselves and the insights they engendered. The semi-structured qualitative interview format allowed for the interview questions to change depending on context and the nature of the participants responses, allowing for more opportunities for the interviewee to guide the direction of the interview. This structure helped alleviate concerns regarding working with a vulnerable population.

Chapter 4: FINDINGS

In this section, I will discuss my findings from interviews with resettled refugees, and employees at the Center for Philadelphia Migrants (CPM). This analysis considers the central questions of my study; How do resettled refugees engage with structures and institutions of the state, in particular formal schooling and citizenship? How do their interactions with these structures shape their agency? In what ways do resettled refugees demonstrate and articulate their own agency?

I argue that the perceptions of citizenship, schooling, and agency that participants engage with do not occur in an analytical vacuum and are instead influenced by each individual's lived experiences. Therefore, I will first present individual profiles of the resettled refugees and their families in order to highlight the factors that influence each participants understandings of citizenship, schooling, and agency. Second, I will argue that four distinct but related themes emerged from the data. The first theme is that the prospect of gaining United States citizenship is

seen to provide physical and emotional security, and generally engenders feelings of empowerment. The second theme is that respondents generally felt disempowered by formal schooling in the United States. The third theme is that participants' cultural and religious beliefs served as a source of empowerment when navigating challenges in schools, with the citizenship process, and in daily life in the United States. However, at the same time, these identities could also lead to disempowerment due to the challenges in the current political climate. Lastly, the fourth theme articulates how resettled refugees demonstrated agency within structural constraints.

Individual profiles of resettled refugees

Hussein

My first interview was with Hussein, a resettled refugee in his 60s from Iraq. Hussein is a green card holder who has been in the United States for several years. He is married, and has five children, who are all also resettled refugees. He identifies as Muslim. He left Iraq because of political instability and a lack of physical security for him and his family. During his time in the United States, he has reignited his passion for art, and has started a series of paintings that capture the essence of his hometown in Iraq.

After a week of snow storms, the local library we planned to meet at had lost power, so Omar, the translator, and I met Hussein in a Dunkin Donuts in North Philadelphia. On the phone with Omar, Hussein insisted on meeting at a particular Dunkin, adjacent to the library, noting that it was more secluded and that he frequented the establishment. Before the interview started Hussein asked me questions in English about where I was from and what languages I spoke.

Throughout the interview Hussein was intentional about the answers he gave, often asking for clarification and rephrasing his responses several times.

Hussein spoke about citizenship as an identity that includes the history and culture of the nation state in which he resides. He viewed his Iraqi citizenship as representative of the challenges and struggles his people go through, while his US citizenship represents security for him and his family. He hopes that once his US citizenship is finalized he can finally feel a sense of relief, especially given that there is no way to go back to Iraq for him and his family. After he gets his citizenship, he hopes he will safe in the United States given the rights that US citizenship would afford him. He states, "It [citizenship] makes me equal to all the people here… We're considered legal residents [now], but we're denied many of the rights of the American citizens" (Hussein, November 16, 2018). In addition to providing equal rights, Hussein notes that citizenship will also help secure his safety in the country because "legal residents are subjected to any change or mood, [and] maybe one day they'll tell us the green card is expired" (Hussein, November 16, 2018).

Hussein spoke about his age as an impediment to pursuing further schooling in the US. He described wanting to attend an art class in the United States and fearing he would be the oldest in the class. With laughter, he mentioned that there were others who came with canes and walkers to the class who were much older than him. If the opportunity to take art classes is afforded to him, he will pursue them, noting that, "If Allah gave me time, my name might be known in this field. Perhaps, with Allah's help" (Hussein, November 16, 2018).

Hussein places significant value in education, and noted that it is one's personal responsibility to take advantage of any and all educational opportunities offered to him and his

family. He currently has children in high school and middle school. When speaking about his children's experiences in United States schools, he stated, "[Schools] give opportunities, but eventually it depends on the personal effort of the student" (Hussein, November 16, 2018).

Hussein's understandings of personal responsibility shape his agency. Even in the most difficult circumstances, Hussein described his ability to prepare and plan for his future, because he felt that he was individually responsible for his family's safety and security. He tries to transmit this perspective on individual responsibility to his five children, who he hopes can further their family's economic success in the United States. When he looks at other immigrant and refugee communities in the United States, he finds strength in their ability to overcome their circumstances. He stated,

> What made things easier on me, is that I found people from all over the world here. From Africa, East Asia, Arab countries, and almost all of them came with similar circumstances, and their lives are going on normally. And it made me think, are they better than me? If they can do it, I can can do it. (Hussein, November 16, 2018)

Hussein compares himself to other migrants in order to affirm his own ability to thrive in the United States. He also outlines the choices he made during his journey in the United States, and the choices he continues to make every day. Hussein states that he "chose this path" when describing his life in the United States and how citizenship might change his daily life (Hussein, November 16, 2018). He finds comfort in the notion that rules and laws in the United States seem comparatively clear for him when compared to those in Iraq. He states, "Things are clear [here], not complicated. You know what's yours and what you have to do." (Hussein, November 16, 2018).

Haddad family (Habib, Amina, Daoud, Farid)

My second interview was with the Haddad family. The Haddad family are resettled refugees from Syria, who left Syria for their family's physical safety due to conditions of the Syrian Civil War. In the United States, their transition has been difficult. As Habib, the father, stated, "We escaped from injustice and came to hard life and injustice" (Habib, November 16, 2018). They have faced a host of challenges including financial insecurity, unemployment, discrimination, and trauma from their journeys to the United States. Habib used to be a carpenter in Syria. He now works as a packer in a grocery store. Amina, the mother, was a seamstress who worked from home in Syria. She is now unemployed. They have two sons. Daoud is graduating high school this year and planning on attending community college in the fall. Farid, their younger son, is about seven years old. Farid is bold and energetic, and says he is eager to leave the United States as soon as possible. The Haddad family identifies as Muslim. The family has green cards, and they are currently applying for citizenship. Habib has limited English skills, while Amina has moderate, conversational English skills. Their sons are both fluent in English but have started to lose some of their fluency in Arabic.

Omar and I were invited to interview the Haddad family in their home in North Philadelphia. As soon as I stepped into their home, Habib started discussing some of the difficulties he was having with the citizenship process with Omar. At the same time, Amina offered us fruit and tea. Habib spoke for most of the interview. When the topic of schooling came up, Farid was eager to tell me about his experiences and jumped up to talk into the microphone. Habib's responses were often filled with great emotion. At times he had a lot of enthusiasm and during others he was almost in tears. Amina often stopped him to apologize to

me about the tone of his responses. I responded by encouraging them to participate in the way that was most comfortable to them. The interview was filled with all kinds of emotion, from deep sadness, to anger, to laughter.

When prompted to speak about their journey to the United States, both Habib and Amina spoke about their many disappointments when they first arrived in the United States, particularly about how their living conditions were poor. Amina stated, "We couldn't sit on them [the furniture] for not one week. The house was full of roaches. Beds were tied in a metal wire. We threw it all out within a week. We had nothing. And until this year, we managed to get a few things" (Amina, November 16, 2018).

Habib spoke about citizenship as safety and security for their family. This meant safety and security psychologically as well as physically given the current political climate. Habib described citizenship as life itself, and that without it, it is like he is without food or water. Amina spoke about citizenship more in terms of mobility, and how she hoped it would allow her to visit family or go back to Syria one day. Daoud spoke about citizenship as part of his transition to the United States, and as key for his future success in the country because he did not see himself ever going back to Syria.

A major discussion point was the issue of language ability, both for citizenship and schooling. Amina said that language skills had become an issue for their family on multiple levels. Habib has had difficulty learning English which has affected his job prospects and his ability to provide for the family. Amina stated, "I want him to learn [English] because he's the main support for the house. But they didn't give time for people to learn. Immediately [they must go] to work" (Amina, November 16, 2018). Habib stated that if he attended schooling things

would get worse for the family because he wouldn't be able to be responsible for the family's expenses (Habib, November 16, 2018). While learning English was a challenge for Amina and Habib, their children had more positive experiences given their ability to learn English in schools. However, Amina was concerned about that the children losing their Arabic language skills given the pressure to learn English. She noted how these differences also contributed to generational anxiety between the children and their parents, as parents worried about their children losing aspects of their cultural identities. Additionally, Amina also noted how their financial status impacted the family's experiences with schools. Amina can not afford to take community college classes. She explains,

> Last year, I was really thinking about it, and I applied to community college, and I passed the tests. But then I calculated the expenses of transportation back and forth, and other expenses, and he [Habib] can't provide that for me, and I don't have enough money. I called welfare to ask about these things, but no one was able to help me at all. So this would need a budget of at least $300 a month, and he can't provide that. So, how am I supposed to study? (Amina, November 16, 2018)

Financial challenges only compounded the cultural and emotional challenges the family had with schooling and language.

Daoud and Farid also spoke about their experiences with bullying, xenophobia, and belonging in US schools. Farid gave several examples of times he felt unsafe in US schools and how he cared little about feeling American or being accepted by his peers. He instead wanted to use schooling to leave America. Farid stated, "I don't want to be American, I just want to learn American. I just want to learn English and then get out of the country" (Farid, November 16, 2018). Both Daoud and Farid said they felt unsafe in school. Farid was perplexed by the police presence in schools and wondered why the police failed to protect him when other students started fights with him.

The family's sense of their own agency was marked by their experiences with trauma, loss, and by the different expectations for each family member's futures. While Habib pointed to the impossibility of ever going home, Amina and her younger son centered their hopes for the future on the possibility of one day going back to Syria. Daoud, like Habib, noted that going back to Syria is not an option in his future. Within the family, each individual had their own perception of what citizenship and schooling could do for their mobility and their individual happiness. However, they each grounded this perception through the same two issues: whether they could one day return to Syria and what this might mean for them personally, and how they viewed the languages they have lost and gained.

Omar

My third interview was with Omar, who also served as a translator for the project. While I was originally not intending to interview Omar, during a timing mix up with the last participant, Mohammed, we found ourselves waiting in a Dunkin Donuts for a few hours and Omar offered to be interviewed. Omar is a resettled refugee from Iraq who is in his mid 40s. He is unmarried, does not have any children, and identifies as Muslim. Omar is well educated and has several degrees in design and art, and he is currently pursuing another art degree in the United States. He identifies as an Iraqi-American artist.

Omar views his Iraqi citizenship as the history and cultural pride of Iraq, which he carries with him in his everyday life. He views American citizenship with a different lens, with American citizenship meaning stability and mobility. By stability he means "not in between," a feeling that evokes a sort of security and clarity in one's physical and emotional safety (Omar, November 17, 2018). In terms of mobility, Omar values travel. He wants to experience new

cultures and meet new people, which he believes are integral to his growth as an artist and as an individual. To exemplify his use of the two terms, he spoke of an incident he had while traveling to Cambodia, where he was racially profiled and extensively screened before his flight. He explains,

> I am going to a history site, with a group of people, and I am interested in art and history, and this was the only thing in my mind. But unfortunately, when I reached the Cambodia airport, I am the only one in the whole airplane that they stop me, because I have Iraqi passport. You know? This is the feeling that, why? I am an artist. How do you know whole plane is good and I am not good? Why you stop me, only one person of 200? That's why I think if I have citizenship I will be more stable, and I can have more flexibility and more freedom to do what I want, visit art historic sites, other countries, places I dream to visit. (Omar, November 17, 2018)

Omar hopes that with an American passport, he would no longer be questioned in the same way he had been with an Iraqi passport, and that his US citizenship could provide him with a new sense of mobility and psychological stability. In addition to this stability and mobility, Omar views citizenship as an identity that comes with particular duties and responsibilities. These duties include "to be good, to contribute, [and] to be [a] good example for other people" (Omar, November 17, 2018).

Omar values education and has had varied schooling experiences. He views schooling as a process through which to build skills that will lead to work opportunities. Additionally, he wants to know how academic communities work, and has done his best to understand how higher education functions in the United States. He hopes this knowledge of higher education, along with his American degree, will allow him to influence more communities through socially engaged art.

Omar described having an American degree and American citizenship as the "perfect combination" (Omar, November 17, 2018). His perception of agency was rooted in this idea of

forming a "perfect record," something that he believed he was already doing, even without citizenship. This notion of a perfect record was also influenced by his will and duty to help, to engage with the immigrant Iraqi community in the US and beyond. He wants to be someone that others are inspired by, and roots his identity and actions in this need to help others along with his cultural identity as an Iraqi.

Mohammed

My fourth interview was with Mohammed, a resettled refugee from Iraq. Mohammed has one child in high school, and an older child in their late 20s. He is married, and he identifies as Muslim. Omar and I met Mohammed in his home in Philadelphia. Before we began the interview, Omar and Mohammed had a lengthy discussion about their current art projects. Mohammed showed me the current project he was working on, a replica of an ancient structure in Iraq where the call to prayer was announced. There was intricate Arabic calligraphy inscribed on the replica. Before we began the interview, Mohammed introduced me to his wife, who offered Omar and I tea and Iraqi pastries. She did not participate in the interview, but sat across the room and listened to the conversation. During the interview there was a constant faint sound of clinking beads. Mohammed was counting tasbih through the use of a misbahah. This is a tool that Muslims use to perform dhikir, which are short remembrances one recites to glorify God or count prayers.

When I spoke with Mohammed he had just received his citizenship and had recently attended his citizenship ceremony. He felt great joy from sharing his new citizenship status on Facebook, and had received many congratulatory messages from friends and family. This praise meant a lot to him, as "any immigrant wishes to get [to] this stage" (Mohammed, November 17,

2018). He said that citizenship gave him inner peace and stability. He thinks very highly of American citizenship and believes that it is the dream of any immigrant (Mohammed, November 17, 2018). Furthermore, gaining US citizenship instilled a sense of confidence in himself. As he states, "If I weren't good enough in the eyes of the American government to get the citizenship, I wouldn't have. This increased my confidence in myself and my life" (Mohammed, November 17, 2018). Even without citizenship, Mohammed felt that he could secure and guarantee his freedom, but with citizenship he has an extra level of inner peace and stability. This freedom has its limits, and he believes that not all freedom is good, particularly some of the freedoms that are promoted by US cultural norms.

Mohammed believes that formal schooling in the United States can provide his children with exposure to new cultures which have their own potential value. He believes that his children have had an easier time adapting to American culture because of their interactions with other American youth in schools. At the same time, he cautions that this might lead to intergenerational strain between parents and children, and he worries that his children might lose their cultural and religious roots over time. He states,

> I think that the new generation, no matter how much they're involved in the new society, they have to have roots in their original society. They shouldn't leave their cultures and they must maintain a connection to their home country… We want this culture to be a means for them to control themselves and maintain their morality. In our religion and culture this is the most important thing. (Mohammed, November 17, 2018)

Thus, Mohammed emphasized the ways in which school environments can lead to challenging situations for his family in terms of their cultural and religious identity.

Mohammed draws on his cultural and religious identity to maintain his agency. He believes that he can secure his freedom through his citizenship, but still continued to maintain his

identity as an Iraqi Muslim even when he did not have citizenship. He noted the strength he sees in other refugees and immigrants who also come from his background, and he finds community with these other individuals. Mohammed is confident of his ability to secure his freedom and also maintain his identity in the United States.

Themes

These snapshots of each resettled refugee I interviewed reveal the individual contexts and factors that influenced their understandings of citizenship, formal schools, and their own agency. In the following sections I will articulate the four themes that emerged from the data using interview data from both resettled refugee interviews and interviews with employees at the Center for Philadelphia Migrants (CPM). As noted below, there are several places where these themes overlap, such as in discussions of language ability, and the impact of the current political climate in the United States. The first theme is that the prospect of citizenship generally leads to feelings of security and empowerment. The second theme is that formal schools are generally disempowering for participants, particularly because of their experiences with language acquisition and unsafe school environments. The third theme is that participants' cultural and religious identities were sources of empowerment in private spaces, but could present challenges when interacting with structures of formal schooling and citizenship. Lastly, the fourth theme is that participants expressed agency within structural constraints through their cultural and religious identities and their understandings of their individual responsibility to take care of themselves and their families even when they have little choice.

Theme 1: Prospect of citizenship can lead to security and empowerment

The first theme is that the prospect of citizenship can lead to security and empowerment for resettled refugees. In my interviews, I asked participants a variety of questions regarding citizenship (See Appendix A). These questions included how participants felt about the prospect of gaining US citizenship, their relationship to citizenship in their country of origin, and how citizenship might affect, if at all, their daily life in the United States. Furthermore, I asked participants where they looked to for support in the process of gaining citizenship. In this section, I will first discuss how resettled refugees articulated the notion of security when speaking about United States citizenship and focused on history or culture, when talking about citizenship status in their country of origin.

Many respondents talked about US citizenship in terms of "safety," "stability," and "security." These were the terms most often used to describe perceptions of US citizenship. These terms can have particular meanings in academic discourse, but here I will use them as my participants did. Participants used the terms "safety" and "security" interchangeably to describe their physical safety and emotional stability. For example, this may have been referring to their experiences leaving their country of origin or how the current political climate in the US makes them feel. Participants used the term "stability" mostly to denote their current citizenship status, and how citizenship could help them feel "less in between," as one participant described (Omar, November 17, 2018). The terms "stability," "safety," and "security" were used interchangeably throughout, and definitions of these terms differed for individual participants.

Most participants described citizenship as a necessary condition for security in the United States. One reason why participants felt empowered by citizenship was because it could

engender their physical safety. Here, safety was defined in terms of physical safety and emotional well-being. Physical safety generally meant safety from deportation or deprivation of one's political status, while safety in terms of emotional well-being was a reflection of one's political status, political climate, or identity as a refugee. As one of the interviewees explained,

> In the bare minimum, in the worst case, you'd feel safe. There's no president to kick you out, there's no government to take you and bring you. There's no organization to play with you. At least you'll feel safe. That now you feel strong. No one can play with you. Now the president in America [President Donald Trump], every minute he's coming up with new laws, and new regulations. We feel like we're hanging. You can't guarantee yourself unless you take the citizenship. When you take the citizenship, you won't care about these laws, and them changing. (Habib, November 16, 2018)

Habib talks about security and physical safety in terms of "guaranteeing yourself." With the stability or security of US citizenship, also came discussions of how such citizenship can only secure safety to some extent, as shown above by Habib's explanation of the current political climate in the United States and how it affects his safety. Resettled refugees' notions of safety were complicated by what citizenship might guarantee for different people. An employee at CPM gave an example of a resettled refugee who felt that citizenship would potentially fail to secure one's safety. She explains, "Her main priority wasn't the green card. It was making sure that her son was kept in the same school and was kept safe" (Jade, September 7, 2018). While Jade's example differs from how Habib envisioned safety, it does demonstrate how citizenship is only one step in "guaranteeing yourself" and how one's identity or perceptions of what it means to be American, such as feeling safe in school, might impact notions of safety as well.

Conversations on safety and security provided by citizenship were also intertwined with talk of mobility, freedom, and the prospect of returning back to one's country of origin. While discussions of mobility often happen around discussions of citizenship, mobility's relationship to

security or safety varied by individual context. Interviewees noted how citizenship would allow them to travel to visit family and provide them with flexibility to leave the United States. As one interviewee noted,

> That's why I think if I have citizenship, I will be more stable. I can have more flexibility to do what I want, visit art historic sites, other countries, places I dream to visit. To check out the cultures in the world. By stable, I mean the life will be more stable. Like not in between. Right now it is in between. I am not Iraqi, not American. If I get citizenship, I will be more stable, emotionally. (Omar, November 17, 2018)

In this quote, Omar's understanding of mobility is more closely related to freedom and stability rather than security or safety. Still, others talked about the mobility that results from citizenship in terms of the possibility of going back to their country of origin, and what this might mean for their identity.

> For me, the thought I have is that if I get the citizenship the first thing I'll do is leave America. That's what I have in mind. My mind is telling me that for now I'm only waiting for the citizenship. But I don't know about later. My kids future is here. Because even if I think of going back after I get the citizenship, it's not the same for my kids. Because they will be lost again in our country, and they will be lost between the two places. (Amina, November 16, 2018)

Claims about citizenship's promise of security were complicated by notions of home, where home may be, and what freedom means for each participant. While most participants spoke about their homes as an impossible place to return to, they also implicitly noted the losses that came with their new citizenship status. Although citizenship provides the freedom or mobility to travel, Amina still felt restricted by the current climate in her home country and the prospect of her children's futures as "in between" two places. Even if she becomes a citizen she will not feel fully "stable" given that she has lost part of her identity and home in Syria, her country of origin. While Amina was reluctant to claim that she would really have more freedom with citizenship, others like Omar root the value of citizenship in the mobility it could provide them, even if it is

not a panacea for their freedom. Ultimately, participants viewed US citizenship as a positive addition to their freedom, security, and stability in the United States. However, participants also had different experiences with their countries of origins and conceived of their identities in the United States according to such experiences, which impacted their thoughts on the role of US citizenship in their daily lives.

When United States citizenship and their country of origin citizenship were compared, interviewees often stated that their citizenship from their country of origin signified their history, culture, or their identity. While US citizenship ensured stability, it was only referred to as a potential identity to be embraced by one respondent who stated,

> The citizenship, for me and my family also because I'm getting old, ever since I left Iraq, this way I consider myself without an identity. Because first of all I cannot go back, and here I have no identity. Even though I am a legal resident, but I have no identity until I get the citizenship. So my aspiration is to get this new citizenship. (Hussein. November 16, 2018)

Most participants described United States citizenship as a source of safety, something that would add to their identities but not entirely replace them. Despite the many positive feelings towards citizenship, it was clear that the process of getting citizenship and the effects it could have on interviewees' daily lives were not innocuous.

Theme 2: Formal schooling as disempowering

In my interviews I asked participants about their experiences with formal schooling, and the value they placed in formal schooling (See Appendix A). Experiences with formal schooling often challenged resettled refugees' sense of their own agency. These challenges included language ability, negative school environments, and financial barriers. CPM employees echoed

the disempowering conditions that resettled refugees experienced in formal schooling, but they were more likely to speak about formal schooling in a positive light.

Only two participants (Hussein and Omar) described formal schooling as potentially empowering. Hussein noted how the opportunity to attend more schooling would be welcome but difficult due to his age. He explains,

> But honestly I regret that I didn't take this step [pursue education] when I first got here. Now I regret it… Yes. Because now I saw an experience that I still have. I saw that the students with me some of them are really old with canes, to them I'm a young man. While before I got to class I thought I'd be the old man among young people. So maybe if my health and circumstances help, I might continue my studies in the same artistic field. (Hussein, November 16, 2018)

Hussein views formal schooling as imperative to his children's' futures in the United States. He said that "there's no comparison" to the quality or status of schools in the United States (Hussein, November 16, 2018). Omar had similar feelings about the quality and perceptions of formal schools in the United States, stating that,

> Now when I involve in American college, I have American citizenship, it means I spent years here, in college and outside college. It means I am in this college for a few years, I share some celebration with people, some events, some seminars. That will help me to widen my vision of achievement, and I believe many countries think the same way, even when they want to hire someone. They look where he graduated from. You know? It's not that big issue, but the decision maker will have points, when he saw that he graduated from US, from this college. (Omar, November 17, 2018).

Omar and Hussein's conceptualizations of formal schooling could have differed from other participants given that both had received higher education in their countries of origin, and saw schooling as connected to accessing more opportunities. Others, like the Haddad family, struggled to see schooling as a resource to access more opportunities because of the disempowering environments their children faced in US schools.

Discussions of formal schooling in the US centered on language ability and experiences with English as a second language. Language could serve as a source of cultural anxiety, and as a marker of the generational divide among families. One participant spoke about the flaws in language education,

> For me, I was hoping there would be school who are specifically for people who speak English as a second language to have a connection between their language and English. But now, they're learning English and forgetting Arabic. This is a problem if we go back home. In this society they have to lose things. If we ever go back for our own sake, our kids won't be able to fit in. Because our kids had to lose something, to gain something. (Amina, November 16, 2018)

In this response, language served to further the losses that the family has faced, even as it potentially provided the children with access to new opportunities in the United States. Language could also lead to discord among families. As an employee at CPM stated,

> I was more emphasizing the fact that parents doesn't speak the language its a big barrier. And it's another big barrier when they have to use interpretation through their family members because I feel like when it is family members they don't really interpret or relay the message appropriately as the truth because they are just going to assume, probably, that they [the parents] know. And maybe the Mom or the Dad can feel ashamed because they are not comfortable enough to share since another family member is there. (Olanna, September 6, 2018)

Here, the CPM employee relays a range of intergenerational challenges related to language ability that resettled refugee families must address. While learning a new language was often a challenge by itself, these additional social dimensions around language acquisition further complicated participants relationships with their own family members and with formal schools.

Other respondents did not view language as an impediment, and instead pointed towards the personal responsibility their children have to take advantage of formal schooling in the United States. As one participant stated,

> Through the way they [the schools] follow up on their students, and their attendance, and their academic standing. There's clarity and care with students. Then it's up to the student

> himself. The school is providing everything. If there's anything missing it's the student's responsibility. (Hussein, November 16, 2018)

As a parent, Hussein feels that his children's success in schooling is not as dependent on the particular programming provided, but instead on the personal responsibility children take on to succeed academically in school. Thus, Hussein understood his and his family's agency as the power from within, where one articulates agency and choice within structures.

In addition to challenges with language ability in schools, participants felt disempowered by their schooling environments, where they experienced bullying and xenophobia. As Daoud and Farid explained,

> Daoud: For me, I just leave everything behind me and work. I just don't want to get in trouble. There is a lot of racists in the school with me and a lot of people try to fight with me. And I say no, I don't want to fight, I don't want to get in trouble with you. Go away. Farid: Sometimes me too, people try to fight me. Interviewer: Would you say that you feel safe in school? Farid/Daoud: No. (Farid and Daoud, November 16, 2018)

Brothers Daoud and Farid explained several circumstances in which their safety was compromised in schools, and how their teachers and peers exacerbated these situations. Even so, they still spoke about how formal schools could help them "learn" what it means to be American (Farid), or how schools would eventually help them gain employment (Daoud). An employee at CPM also described the negative school environments faced by their resettled refugee clients. She states, "Our clients' children are being severely bullied and often times it is around them being different, being immigrants or refugees, of different socioeconomic statuses, and xenophobia" (Jade, September 7, 2018).

In addition to negative school environments, participants highlighted the financial difficulties that surrounded schooling, and how such challenges made schooling less valuable. As one participant stated,

> There wasn't an emphasis on education back home [in Syria] like here. And here there's a wrong point, in other countries when they have new immigrants, they make schools for them to force them to study at first. But he [Habib] has to look for a job to afford the necessities of our house. And me, I can go out with the kids like twice a week, to/in churches [for English classes], and I have to pay for everything. Nothing is for free. So I'm trying as much as I can to work on myself. But I want him [Habib] to learn [English or study something)] because he's the main support for the house. But they didn't give time for people to learn. Immediately to work. (Amina, November 16, 2018)

These financial difficulties precluded participants from furthering their formal education given the need to enter the workforce immediately. When I asked Habib what would change if he were to attend formal schooling, he responded, "Things will get worse. Because if I go to school, I can't work. Who's going to be responsible for our expenses?" (Habib, November 16, 2018).

In summary, participants generally felt disempowered by formal schools given a variety of challenges such as language acquisition and unsafe school environments. Discussions of formal schools and language instruction were centered on the limitations of participants' identities as refugees, a part of their structural identities. Their identities as resettled refugees impacted their understandings on the value, purpose, and potential of formal schooling.

Theme 3: Cultural and religious identities: Sources of empowerment and discord

During interviews, participants centered their religious and cultural identities, from invoking God in their speech to speaking explicitly about the role that their cultural and religious practices play in their daily life. Participants spoke of their backgrounds as sources of empowerment and agency, even as they described how their identities were challenging to maintain in America, particularly in the current political climate. The political climate was referenced to in discussion with the discriminatory rhetoric from US President Donald Trump, anti-refugee sentiment, and islamophobia. Participants often attributed feelings of fear,

uncertainty, and a lack of safety to the current political climate. In this section, I will discuss how participants' cultural and religious identities challenged notions of belonging in the United States. These identities were often sources of empowerment, even when they presented challenges in the context of the current political climate. I will discuss how participants resisted encroachments on their identities, and complicated what it means to be American by rooting their agency in their cultural and religious identities.

Many participants spoke about their cultural and religious identities as sources of empowerment. As one interviewee explains,

> We do not deny that we're Iraqis whatsoever. And this is an honor to us. But belonging to a great country that welcomed you during a crisis and a very hard time, this is something we're grateful about. (Mohammed, November 17 2018))

Although Mohammed felt it was challenging to maintain his cultural and religious identity in the United States, he felt confident in his ability to overcome these challenges, even before he received his citizenship. He believed that his United States citizenship secured his freedom to continue to maintain his cultural and religious identities in the US.

The ways in which participants centered their cultural and religious identities intersected with their feelings of belonging or understandings of what it means to be American. As one respondent stated,

> In the school they always talk about the melting pot. They always say like the melting pot is everyone goes and jumps in the melting pot to be American. Like, no. I don't want to *be* American. I just want to *learn* American. I just want to learn English and then get out of the country. To get two languages. (Farid, November 16, 2018)

In this quote, Farid battles with what it means to be American and also ties the notion of mobility and freedom to his identity. In the same interview, his mother, Amina, spoke about the challenging cultural and social elements of schools, saying,

> We fear for our children, to be honest. Schools have abnormal things. As for Daoud's high school, it has a lot of problems that are unethical, and alcohol, and drugs. How can we guarantee our son's safety, that no one will give him any of those things? There are a lot of things that are offensive to morality and good manner [in his school]. (Amina, November 16, 2018)

Both son and mother agreed that schooling challenged their identities and their family's ability to maintain their values. However, they articulated this challenge through different aspects of their personal identities, with Farid pointing to challenges to his cultural identity while Amina pointed to challenges to their son's religious identity.

Interviewees viewed "being American" in many different ways. Some rejected the notion of being American because of their strong affiliation with their country of origin and their cultural roots. Ideas on what it meant to be American were also related to each individual's relationship to their cultural and religious roots. One participant said,

> When children are raised in a new society, they don't behave like older people, they dive into the new culture and society more than the grownups. I think that the new generation, no matter how much they're involved in the new society, they have to have roots in their original society. They shouldn't leave their cultures and they must maintain a connection to their home country. No matter how much culture they gain here, we don't want them to reach a decay. We want this new culture to be a means for them to control themselves and maintain their morality. In our religion and culture this is the most important thing. To be a good person who respects everyone and everyone respects him. (Mohammed, November 17 2018)

At the same time that Mohammed is happy about his children's ability to be involved in society, he is also concerned that they may lose parts of their identities, either in schools or over time through interaction with other Americans. Part of this concern is also reflected in the particular challenges of what it means to be a resettled refugee in the United States today. As one participant noted,

> So it's better for me if I get the citizenship right now… Because of Trump and all the things that are happening. When you hear him [Trump] talk about refugees, you are scared he will kick us out and something like that. But when you get citizenship, nothing

> like that is happening to you. So that's why we want to get the citizenship right away. (Daoud, November 16, 2018)

This respondent was acutely aware of how the political climate affected his future in the United States. Employees at CPM echoed this concern. One employee stated, "The topic of citizenship comes up for all of our clients and especially with the current political climate. Clients are approaching us before its even time for them to start thinking about adjusting their status" (Emily, September 5, 2018).

In summary, while many participants relied on their cultural and religious identities as sources of empowerment, these identities can be challenging to maintain in the United States. The ways in which participants' cultural and religious identities intersected with language ability, the current political climate, and generational differences were examples of these challenges. Nevertheless, most participants pointed to their cultural and religious identities as sources of strength, resilience, and empowerment in their daily lives.

Theme 4: Agency within structural constraints

In this section, I will discuss what agency looks like for resettled refugees and their families, and how these feelings of empowerment intersect with perceptions of formal schooling and citizenship. I note three ways that resettled refugees expressed agency: articulating the notion of individual responsibility and choice, noting feelings of clarity in rules and regulations in the United States, and rooting one's agency in cultural and/or religious identities. I argue that all three of these expressions of agency can be described as consciousness within constraints, or the "power within" because participants exclusively expressed agency through their means to survive within structures rather than through transforming or acting to change such structures.

One common way participants expressed agency was through their ability to control their circumstances, and the individual responsibility they had over their own choices. For example, one interviewee stated,

> But while being here I started to *understand* what it's like to live in America. If you don't [give a] personal effort you can't proceed… to try to understand how the life looks like here and how *he can help himself.* (Hussein, November 16, 2018, emphasis added)

In this quote, Hussein views individual responsibility as "giving a personal effort" and "helping yourself," rather than relying on others. Omar had a similar view of personal responsibility. When I asked him what people, places, or resources he relied on to complete his citizenship papers, he replied, "I don't want to rely on someone, on individual people. Because anyone have his experience, maybe [they have a] special case" (Omar, November 17, 2018). An employee at CPM also described how resettled refugees value individual responsibility. She states,

> For me, opportunities is really broad. In America there are a lot of things that some take for granted and others appreciate it more. So it all depends, if you [in reference to resettled refugees] take it for granted it may be because you have seen better than that and if you appreciate it it's because you have seen the worse. So knowing when is the opportunity and what is the time to grab it and use it it's really like another way of developing yourself as a person. (Olanna, September 6, 2018)

These responses demonstrate how resettled refugees viewed their own agency as the power within to have individual responsibility over one's decisions.

In addition to individual responsibility, participants spoke of their own agency in terms of their ability to make choices and plan for the future even when choice was limited. As Hussein explained,

> The family decided [to come to the US] because of the danger. Anyone who leaves their country to a strange country, with a strange culture, language, and people, they'd be surely worried at first. They face difficulties. As a head of a family, I planned everything in my head. And I was comfortable because the immigration organization was going to help, and they did help. So we passed the first phase which is the toughest. (Hussein, November 16, 2018)

Even in a situation where there is little choice, Hussein points to his ability to plan and decide next steps for his family. In these situations, interviewees also pointed to the people and places they relied on for help. Here, Hussein points to an immigration organization, and others pointed to nonprofits, like the Center for Philadelphia Migrants (CPM). The ability to make choices and plan stood out in the diction interviewees used. Such responses showed that they felt most empowered by their ability to act within (rather than against) the structures that disempowered them.

In addition to choice and individual responsibility, participants expressed agency by noting that they felt they could easily understand the rules and regulations in the United States, a situation which gave them more confidence in their daily lives. They had a particular viewpoint of the state and institutions that centered their own responsibility to act as a moral and law-abiding future citizens. For example, in the same interview, Hussein states,

> Me and my family, even when we were back home, we won't disturb anyone or the American government. And there's an important point, things here are clear. Not complicated. You know what's yours, and what you have to do. This is important. (Hussein, November 16, 2018)

In addition to the clarity noted by Hussein noted above, others pointed to the confidence they had in United States institutions as compared to those in their country of origin.

> It [gaining citizenship] gave me more confidence. If I weren't good enough in the eyes of the American government to get the citizenship, I wouldn't have. This increased my confidence in myself and my life… I think when people come here and take the citizenship I think they earned it after hard work. Like I said, if the American government didn't think I was qualified to take the citizenship they wouldn't have given it to me. (Mohammed, November 16, 2018)

These comments were expressed in particular by Hussein and Mohammed, while others like the Haddad Family had more distrust with institutions like schools.

As discussed in theme three, participants' cultural and religious identities were most commonly sources of empowerment. Participants discussed how they drew strength from these identities, even in circumstances where these same identities were challenged by structures of the state. For example, Mohammed spoke about his ability to maintain his religious practices as Muslim and how this was integral to maintain his identity in the United States. He said,

> I'm already doing it [having freedom and maintaining my traditions]. For me and my family. For example, I go to *Jummah* [Friday prayer for Muslims] wearing my *dishdashe* [traditional clothing in Arab states], and I see people looking at me, and I say hi to them. To show them the true image of my personality and my religion, also to gain their love. (Mohammed, November 17, 2018)

In this quote, we see Mohammed speak about how his religious identity as a Muslim is intertwined with his cultural identity as an Iraqi man. He looks to both of these identities to root himself in the United States. Another example comes from Omar, who spoke about how he leverages his cultural identity and background as an Iraqi in his art. When I asked Omar if he thinks he might lose something when he becomes a US citizen he replied,

> I am not losing anything because I will be involving the Iraqi study in my art work, and in my work. That will be my style. So I will have two countries. I will be American artist, concerned with Iraqi history in my artwork… [an] American-Iraqi artist. (Omar, November 17, 2018)

The expression of one's personal and cultural identity allowed participants to articulate agency in private spaces, within their own terms, outside of their structural identities. Articulations of agency were most prominent in the expressions of participants personal identities (cultural and religious identities) rather than their structural identities (understandings of the state and state structures).

Findings conclusion

In this section, I discuss the four thematic findings from my interviews with resettled refugees and employees at CPM. I also point to the ways in which each individual participants' understanding of citizenship, formal schools, and their own agency was unique to their individual contexts and personal identities. Participants generally rejected structures of formal schooling and citizenship and did not feel agency through participation within these structures. Instead, participants articulated agency through their cultural and religious identities, which was often through the notion of their own agency as the power from within, as consciousness within constraints, or as agency within structure.

Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

Discussion introduction

In this study, I originally set out to explore how resettled refugees' perceptions of citizenship and schooling were related, as both structures figure prominently in literature on refugee well being (for example, see Bonet 2018; Gerrard 2017; Abu El-Haj and Skilton 2017; Callan 2004; Zembylas 2010). I expected to examine the relationship between refugees' experiences around citizenship and schooling, and their sense of agency that I assumed would or would not result from participation in these institutions. However, what I found was that participants did not necessarily connect citizenship and schooling in this way. Nor did they experience much agency within or in response to these institutions. Instead, resettled refugees

challenged some of my expectations, drawn from prior literature, on the role of citizenship and formal schooling in their lives.

A central way in which they challenged these expectations was through a particular understanding of agency that was rooted in their cultural and religious identities. Participants used their cultural and religious identities as sources of agency, demonstrating how these identities provided empowerment in private spaces, but also how in interaction with public institutions, these identities could become sources of tension or disempowerment. At the same time, these cultural and religious identities intersected with other aspects of resettled refugees' identities that were more structurally informed, such as their understanding of themselves as a particular migrant group, and their engagement with structures of citizenship and formal schooling. While the later understanding of their identities often lead to feelings of disempowerment, the former allowed resettled refugees to continue to feel agentic.

Participants' understanding of agency as rooted in their cultural and religious identities provides an alternative conceptualization of agency, which runs alongside the structures that disempower them. While participants were conscious of the ways in which these structures affected their agency, rather than demonstrating agency through directly engaging with institutions of the state, participants affirmed their own agency in private spaces, through an articulation of their complex identities as resettled refugees, Syrian or Iraqi nationals, fathers/mothers/children, Muslims, and future citizens of the United States. This is an articulation of agency as individual consciousness (Luttrell et al 2009; Keddie 2017). My research emphasizes the importance of understanding agency in these terms, as consciousness within constraint, as possibility and survival within disempowering structures. Below, I will

discuss how my findings engage with the literature in terms of resettled refugees' understanding of their agency in relationship to structures of citizenship and schooling.

Citizenship: Resettled refugees' understanding of citizenship

Citizenship is a central topic of research in refugee studies (Costello 2017; Betts 2012; Maley 2016; Bonet 2018; Gerrard 2017; Castles 2017; Abu El-Haj et al 2011; Fincham 2012; Way 2015). The topic figures prominently due to the ways in which refugehood is configured legally, as most refugees spend extended periods without legal rights. Scholars in refugee studies look to citizenship as one dimension of the experiences of refugees, as citizenship highlights refugees' acquisition of rights and their well being (Costello 2017). However, more research is needed to explore the ways in which refugees experience citizenship in resettlement contexts, especially over the long-term. How do refugees who are eventually able to access citizenship in resettlement contexts think about this prospective legal status? How does citizenship figure in their daily life? This study starts to answer these questions. As explained in chapter two, I view definitions of citizenship on a continuum that includes political citizenship, transnational citizenship, and cultural citizenship (Figueroa 2011; Levinson 2005; Abu El-Haj 2015; Bashir 2017; Rosaldo 1994).

Participants in this study identified United States citizenship as a source of security. Conversations with participants around the notion of security were closely intertwined with other terms such as "stability" and "safety." Stability referred to one's position in relation to the state, such as being granted citizenship status after being forcibly removed from one's country of origin. However, stability could also refer to one's emotional stability and/or psychological well being. In a similar manner, safety could mean physical protection from bodily harm, emotional

and psychological well being, or even feelings of belonging. Furthermore, participants' use of the terms security, stability, and safety were intertwined with other complex understandings of home, mobility, freedom, and the prospect of returning to one's country of origin. In addition to their multiple meanings across contexts, it is important to note that these terms emerged via translation. Both translators had different translations for the term "security" with security appearing to be synonymous with other related terms (e.g., stability, safety) used by the participants. I therefore use the term security to describe participants' understandings of multiple related terms such as safety, mobility, stability, and freedom as well as their personal and socio-emotional security (Stewart and Mulvey 2013; Korntheuer et al 2018, p. 200-1). Lastly, how participants personally defined security is connected to their understanding of their own identity and their agency. For example, Habib articulated his own security in terms of his physical safety and emotional stability rather than his position in larger structures, where he felt that he would always be structurally disadvantaged as a resettled refugee (Habib, November 16, 2018).

Participants in this study thought about citizenship in connection with their cultural, religious, and refugee identities, a finding that reflects cultural and transnational understandings of citizenship in the literature (Rosaldo 1994; Abu El-Haj 2015). For example, Omar identified politically and culturally with multiple states, calling himself an Iraqi-American artist. Omar invoked the cultural histories of both states to explain his understandings of citizenship. Omar's understanding of citizenship could also be conceptualized as a transnational understanding of citizenship, where citizenship is conceptualized in fluid ways, across national borders, as a challenge to nationalist and exclusionary discourses (Abu El-Haj 2015). Other participants

discussed how their cultural and religious identities interacted with their legal status. Most participants felt empowered by these identities but also felt that they could at times be at odds with the cultural expectations required to gain US citizenship. For example, Daoud discussed how his US citizenship could help grant him further security in the United States, but that citizenship in the United States also meant embracing English, which has weakened his relationship with Arabic and his cultural roots (Daoud, November 16, 2018). The tension that participants felt by the expectations and qualifications required for US citizenship can be supported by the idea of cultural citizenship as opposed to legal or political citizenship. Cultural citizenship "refers to the right to be different and to belong in a participatory democratic sense… even when such differences as race, religion, class, gender, or sexual orientation potentially could be used to make certain people less equal or inferior to others" (Rosaldo 1994, p. 402). Participants voiced how United States citizenship did not engender feelings of belonging, but could provide personal security. Thus, participants wanted space to affirm their own cultural and national identities within political, state-based understandings of political citizenship.

While participant responses reflected aspects of cultural and transational citizenships, some of their other responses were not as well represented in the literature. In addition, some participants' understandings of citizenship reflect multiple points of the citizenship continuum. For example, the Haddad family rejected the notion that citizenship could ever engender feelings of belonging given their experiences as refugees. Instead they viewed citizenship as a measure towards the family's emotional and physical security. For some members of the family, citizenship was a tool that would allow them to eventually return to their country of origin. They invoked transnational, political, and cultural definitions of citizenship as they spoke about their

identities and their understandings of citizenship. This was the case for the Haddad family as well as other participants like Mohammed, who valued the multiple dimensions of his identity, and also noted that United States citizenship provided him the security to continue to inhabit his cultural and religious identities in his daily life, making sure that he does not "reach a point of degeneration," or become too American (Mohammed, November 17, 2018). Additionally, in many cases, participants experienced the effects of dis-citizenship, a term that highlights the exclusionary function of citizenship which serves to reproduce inequalities and hierarchies within the nation-state (Ricento 2013). This was the case for several participants who voiced how structures of the state, such as formal schools, actively participated in their exclusion. In addition to experiencing the effects of dis-citizenship, participants also engaged in disaggregating citizenship, or the idea that citizenship could possibly be deterritorialized to transcend political boundaries (Bashir 2017). Participants disaggregated citizenship by applying complex understandings of security and mobility to their citizenship statuses, such as when Amina claimed that one of the central reasons she wants US citizenship is to one day be able to leave the US permanently and return back to Syria (Amina, November 16, 2018).

Thus, while participants viewed citizenship as a source of security they simultaneously rejected some of the ways in which the value of citizenship is traditionally configured for refugees. These challenges originated from participants' complex identities (personal and structural), which in turn impacted their conceptualizations of citizenship. Even as participants voiced how citizenship could provide them with security, they also rejected the notion that citizenship would serve as a panacea for their daily struggles. Instead, they often emphasized

other aspects of their day to day lives, namely their cultural and religious identities, as sources of empowerment.

Formal schooling: A source of disempowerment, role of language acquisition

In research on refugees and schooling, schooling is discussed as a key factor for refugee well being and access to equal opportunities. Many works in refugee education highlight the high aspirations that refugee youth have for education, calling for increased support for refugee education in emergency and humanitarian contexts (Waters and LeBlanc 2017; Chopra and Adelman 2017; Dryden-Peterson 2016). In these studies, formal schooling is framed as key to providing equal rights, opportunities, and better livelihoods for refugees. While these studies highlight the important ways in which education configures in the lives of refugees, most of these studies do not cover education in resettlement contexts. Literature on refugee education that is focused on resettlement contexts describe schools as socializing institutions, schools as pathways to opportunities that advance refugee livelihoods, and schools as disempowering places where youth experience discrimination and a lack of equal access to educational opportunities (Taylor and Sidhu 2012; Collet 2010; Bonet 2018; Olsen 2008; Abu El-Haj 2015). A theme in this literature is the role of language acquisition in formal schools, where refugees experiences are often discussed alongside other migrants (Dahl, Krulatz, and Torgersen 2018; Akbari and McDonald 2014).

As mentioned above, the literature on refugee education is missing research on several aspects of refugee education in resettlement contexts. First, there are a lack of studies that focus on older adolescents and adults from refugee backgrounds (Bigelow 2018, p. 256-9). While the issues of child migrants are important, only focusing on children's experiences ignores issues

that extend beyond childhood (such as aging out of the formal schooling system) as well as issues that affect refugee families in general (Manning and Bridges 2018). Second, within this literature there is a lack of scholarship that critically centers resettled refugee identities in the resettlement context (Shapiro 2018, p. 3-5; for studies that analyze identity see Collet 2010; Fincham 2012; Berry 2012).

My findings revealed that participants did not demonstrate high aspirations for schooling, nor did they view formal schooling as contributing to their security, emotional health, or access to equal rights. As Bonet (2018) argues, the pre-migratory hopes refugees had for their schooling are interrupted by every day hardships, and such experiences prevent refugees from becoming full citizens in their new communities (p. 53-4, 64-5). Furthermore, these struggles teach refugee youth that they are still rightless even with a green card or citizenship status, as they continue to remain outside the bounds of the nation state, and are continually "othered" by their lack of access to equal rights (p. 65). When I asked participants about their hopes for the future, very few explicitly cited further schooling and education. In fact, one participant explicitly voiced how schooling would directly decrease the quality of his life, while stating that US citizenship was "life itself" (Habib, November 16, 2018). In contrast to their understandings of citizenship, participants in my study believed that formal schooling provided little for their livelihoods. Participants that did have positive experiences in US schools or found the find the prospect of formal schooling as potentially empowering had received some formal schooling in their country of origin and generally viewed schools as a mechanism in which to gain certification or legitimization of their skills for the workforce.

In addition to a lack of high educational aspirations and a view of schools as generally disempowering, participants discussed how their identities intersected (often negatively) with their schooling experiences (Collet 2010; Fincham 2012). In particular they discussed how their cultural and religious identities, which were generally sources of empowerment and strength, were sources of disempowerment in schools. These identities were not re-affirmed or reflected in the formal schooling environment. As Collet (2010) argues, religion plays a particular role in resettled refugees' identities, and thus, their integration experiences. He recommends that United States public schools should approach refugees and other migrants identities using a polyethnic group rights framework that defends the rights of refugees and affirms their identities in public institutions such as schools (Collet 2010, p. 195-205). This need for identities to be reaffirmed in formal schooling environments also closely relates to the notion of cultural citizenship discussed earlier. The ways in which resettled refugees expressed their relationships to both formal schooling and citizenship require an understanding of their particular religious and cultural identities, and the ways in which these identities challenge common understandings of refugees' relationships to institutions of the state.

The need to recognize, reaffirm, and respond to refugees' identities in schools intersects with their language needs. Language was a multifaceted issue for participants. For some, language served as a source of anxiety while others were empowered by the prospect of new language abilities. The difficulties and rewards that participants experienced around language ability were intimately connected to a broad range of factors including: how participants viewed their cultural and religious identities, their perspectives on formal schooling, the lack of

affirmation of their personal and cultural identities in formal schools, their prospects in the process of citizenship, and their perceptions of agency.

Some of the literature on refugee education and language acquisition can at times emphasize language at the expense of other relevant factors (Shapiro 2018, p. 6-8). Further study is needed to explore the relationship between refugees' identities and language acquisition (Dahl, Krulatz, and Torgersen 2018). The field of second language identity research begins to help us understand how language ability can be connected to other social factors. Ortega (2013) outlines two relevant concepts in this field: investment and imagined communities. Investment is the idea that learning a language also means investing in the "wider range of symbolic and material resources" that come with that language (Ortega 2013, p. 242). The extent of investment language learners have depends on the communities of practice that the language learner engages in, some of which are imagined communities. Imagined communities are "communities that exist at present only in the imagination, and which learners forge on the basis of their past membership and life history as well as on the projections they make for a better future" (Ortega 2013, p. 242).

The notion of investment and imagined communities relate closely to my finding that identity and individualized contexts are intimately connected to one's perceptions of and challenges with English language acquisition. Participants' language abilities were also connected to the other imagined communities, namely their communities in their countries of origin. These imagined communities also reflected how participants felt about English language acquisition and feelings of belonging in schools and other structures. For example, when participants spoke about English acquisition, they simultaneously mentioned the loss of Arabic

language skills. Thus, in order to analyze participants' experiences with English language acquisition, we must also look to how English language acquisition affects their other language skills, and how these other languages configure in their identities. The identities they hold impact not only their ability to acquire new languages, but also what it means to maintain the identity connected to their native languages. In addition to how their identities interfaced with language, participants discussed how language served as a source of anxiety in the workforce and in schooling. Participants not only looked at language in terms of imagined communities (originating from identities connected to their countries of origin or new identities as future citizens of the US), but also looked at language acquisition in terms of investments and material rewards, such as a higher paying jobs, successfully completing the US citizenship exam, or placement out of ESL classes.

In summary, my findings around schooling challenge refugee education literature that points towards refugees' high aspirations or hopes placed in schooling. It could be that this discrepancy points to the particularly disempowering conditions resettled refugees experience in public schools, among other challenges related to their personal identities or with language acquisition. The challenges my participants faced in formal US schools should be cause for concern for researchers, policy makers, and advocates, given that public schools in the United States serve important socializing and integrating functions for resettled refugees. It is imperative that formal schools recognize the particular needs of refugee students, in ways that affirm the multiple aspects of their personal and structural identities as resettled refugees. Formal schools can do this work in a variety of ways, from providing informed language instruction to respecting and re-affirming refugees' cultural and religious identities in the classroom and

beyond. These changes could potentially alter the disempowering conditions resettled refugees face in formal schools.

Agency within structural constraints: Cultural and religious identities, legacies of trauma and loss, the refugee identity

During the early stages of this project, I focused on understanding the various structures that affected the daily lives of refugees. These structures included: state power and violence, current global rhetoric on refugees, and global and state-level institutions charged with the care of refugee populations (Dryden-Peterson 2016; Chopra and Adelman 2017; Agamben 1998; Harrell-Bond 2002; Mainwaring 2016; Haddad 2008). However, as I began preparing for my interviews with resettled refugees, and after hearing their voices, I took a renewed interest in agency. I was interested in the ways in which my participants conceptualized their own ability to make change in the face of the structuctural constraints they had faced and continue to face. A focus on agency can reconfigure or challenge dominant narratives on refugees as passive victims.

This study views agency as highly contextualized, individualized, and dependent on the particular circumstances that each individual faces. While some scholarship separates understandings of agency and empowerment, in this study I used the terms agency and empowerment interchangeably. I view agency on a continuum from collective agency to consciousness, where agency can mean collaborative social action or self-awareness and understanding (Sewell 1990; Davies 2000; Luttrell et al. 2009; Keddie 2017). I draw on a poststructural approach towards agency in this study, and I characterize my participants' understanding of their own agency as individual consciousness, or the "power from within" to continue to make choices, feel individual responsibility, and act within structural constraints

(Luttrell et al 2009; Keddie 2017). In her study of young Muslim women in schools, Keddie (2017) defines agency in similar terms:

> Important here is understanding agency as enabling a sense of presence, voice and possibility but as historically and culturally specific and located and thus as impossible to fix in advance. Agency, therefore, will be differently understood and articulated by different individuals and groups, as it will be contingent upon context and time. (Keddie 2017, p. 26)

As Keddie (2017) argues in her study, this form of agency requires one to re-configure the dominant conceptualization of emancipation as dictated by Western and liberal conceptions of feminism. In a parallel vein, my understanding of agency in this study as consciousness within constraints, seeks to counter individualistic, Western, neoliberal understandings of agency as choice (Luttrell et al 2009, p. 2-4).

My participants' understanding of their own agency was particular to their individual circumstances, their values, and their beliefs. Particular topics mattered in distinct ways for each participant. For example, some participants felt a stronger connection to their country of origin, and completely rejected the notion that they could belong in the United States, while others felt that they could affirm their cultural and religious identities in the United States, and feel a sense of belonging, despite the structural constraints their identities presented for them. Despite these individual differences, there were several patterns in participants expressions of agency. These conceptualizations of agency were often more closely tied to the imperative for survival and stability in one's own life rather than evaluating one's position within societal structures or institutions.

This study demonstrates how refugees, in general, did not experience agency within or in regards to state institutions of schooling or citizenship. In contrast to much of the literature on

refugees' high aspirations towards education, and education as ultimately a source of empowerment, my participants almost exclusively felt disempowered by schools and their schooling environments. Notions of agency were slightly more salient in discussions of citizenship, where participants looked towards citizenship as something that could provide them multiple avenues to work around structural constraints, as well as feelings of safety and security that helped them in their daily lives. The most salient dimension to notions of agency came out in participants' discussions of their cultural and religious identities, and their articulation of their own needs as migrants who are refugees. For example, Mohammed's cultural identity as an Iraqi national and Muslim, gave him a sense of belonging, safety, and community even before he acquired his citizenship. He described his citizenship as a factor that could secure his ability to continue to affirm these identities. This understanding of agency was rooted in one's personal consciousness, or their power from within, to view their identity and their lived experiences through a particular lens which guaranteed their emotional well-being in a way that participation in structures of formal schooling and citizenship did not.

There are some works in refugee studies that explore how refugees cultural and religious identities impact their well being and livelihoods (Manning and Bridges 2018; Collet 2010; Frounfelker 2017; Ristic 2012; Crandall 2018; Berry 2012). However, my findings reveal that there needs to be more emphasis on understanding the ways in which cultural and religious identities provide alternative avenues for agency and empowerment, which are rooted in one's personal identity rather than their structural identities vis-a-vis structures of citizenship and formal schooling. While participants did express agency through their cultural and religious identities, these identities also directly contributed to ways in which they felt disempowered

when these identities were expressed within structures such as formal schooling. Participants were often conscious of this process. They discussed how their identities as resettled refugees made it difficult for them to access the equal rights and/or feelings of belonging that could come from receiving US citizenship and positive experiences in schools.

Thus far, I have discussed the personal dimensions of the refugee identity that engendered empowerment, namely one's cultural and religious identities. However, participants were also aware of the structural aspects of their identities that affected their agency, namely their experiences as refugees, a particular migrant group. This structural dimension of the refugee identity relates to how refugees are configured as a category of migrant in global politics and international law. While some scholars group refugees with other migrant groups, more attention is needed to how refugee identities legally and politically differ from other migrants (Abu El- Haj and Skilton 2017; Bukus 2018). In order to gain a fuller picture of refugees' agency we must also confront how refugees are constitutive to the structure of the international system and are also subject to an increasingly hostile and unwelcoming global political environment (Haddad 2008, Taylor and Sidhu 2017; Pucino 2018).

One particular dimension of this identity that was highlighted repeatedly was trauma and loss. The impact of trauma is a common topic of research in refugee studies, one that is often cross-classified in the fields of psychiatry and psychology (Montero 2018; Edge, Newbold, and McKeary 2014; Eide and Hjern 2013). My study underscores findings in this research but also points to the particular ways in which resettled refugees' identities and experiences with trauma inform their perceptions of citizenship and formal schooling. The impact of trauma in my study was revealed in two particular ways. First, participants spoke about trauma and loss when

discussing their journey to the United States or when comparing themselves to other migrants. Second, participants spoke about trauma and loss in conversation about topics relating to their individual context, such as experiences with language acquisition or discriminatory experiences in formal schooling environments.

In summary, my study outlines how refugees demonstrate agency in their everyday lived experiences, in their understandings of their ability to survive in hostile, unwelcoming, and unsafe environments. A central way in which participants demonstrated this form of agency was through expression of their personal cultural and religious identities. However, these understandings were not mutually exclusive from participants' awareness of the ways in which their identities as a particular migrant group structurally disadvantaged them, as evidenced by their understandings of the role that citizenship and formal schooling have in their lives. While survival is not enough to change the circumstances in which my participants live their everyday lives, it is important to understand how agency is continually being performed, even if if this agency is not directly in conversation with structures of citizenship and schooling.

Implications and future research

My findings illustrate three particular needs for future research on how resettled refugees express agency and interact with institutions of the state. First, more research is needed in understanding articulations of refugee agency that are rooted in notions of survival, "the power within," or the idea of individual consciousness and understandings (Luttrell et al 2009; Keddie 2017). Part of this work may include employing innovative or non-traditional research methods such as the use of narratives and storytelling (Manning and Bridges 2018, p. 71; Montero 2018, p. 92). The use of narratives may also help articulate the relationship between one's social

identity and its relationship to second language acquisition, as some scholars of language argue that "people cannot freely choose who they want to be but rather they must negotiate identity positions in the larger economic, historic, and sociopolitical structures that they inhabit and which inhabit them" (Ortega 2013, p. 242). Furthermore, more research is needed in understanding perceptions of resettled refugees' ideas of citizenship and schooling both over time and in an intergenerational manner. Methods that employ the use of narratives, storytelling, and voices across generations can produce scholarship that not only centers the voices of refugee-background individuals, but also demonstrates their own understandings of their agency, in their own words.

Second, part of understanding refugee agency within structural constraints may also require more research on how particular refugee groups conceptualize their personal cultural and religious identities. While identity is discussed in refugee studies, more work needs to be done on how refugee identities intersect or challenge traditional understandings of refugees' engagement with structures of schooling and citizenship. Additionally, further research could be conducted on how resettled refugees' cultural and religious identities impact their experiences and needs in schools. This work could also relate to understandings of cultural citizenship, and how resettled refugees use these identities as sources of empowerment even when such identities may cause resettled refugees to have disempowering experiences in schools and with other institutions of the state. Further study is needed on the explicit rejection of schooling institutions and processes, and what this might mean for resettled refugees' livelihoods and futures.

Third, a central theme in my research has been the particularities of the refugee identity as a legal, political, social, and cultural identity and/or category of migrant. Although less than

one percent of refugees are permanently resettled in developed countries, more research needs to be done on resettled refugees' experiences in order to better understand the particular needs of this migrant group (UNHCR 2018). The dearth of scholarship on resettlement contexts further engrains the notion that refugees are products of exceptional emergencies, rather than demonstrating how the production of refugees is constitutive of the structure of the international system of nation-states. Refugees and the challenges they face, are rooted in historical legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and state violence (Agamben 1998, Zembylas 2010; Haddad 2008; Castles 2017). While this study aims to underline how refugees express and experience agency, it is also important to note how the institutional and emotional needs of refugees are shaped by these histories. Additionally, it should be noted that many of my participants expressed agency in ways that also challenged the category of "resettled refugee." Some participants expressed the possibility of going back to their home country for an extended period of time, or after the crisis in their country of origin was over. I wonder if such claims are due to the particularities of this population of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, and the political and social conditions that guide their everyday challenges, such as rampant islamophobia and disempowering political and social environments. More research needs to be done to interrogate the "refugee category" and to understand the particularities of refugee populations across contexts.

Concluding reflections

My interest in the livelihoods of resettled refugees has been a personal, theoretical, and political project. Personally, I first became interested in refugees as a particular migrant group when I worked with refugee families at a Philadelphia nonprofit. I was struck by the dissonance between their individual resilience and the disempowering experiences they had faced in their

country of origin, countries of first asylum, and now in the United States. At the same time that I was struck by their particular struggles, the ways in which these refugees interacted with structures of the state reminded me of my own immigrant family's struggle with belonging, discrimination, and access to equal rights in United States. While I began to recognize the particularities of the refugee identity I also came to believe refugees' struggles were tied to complex histories of global migration and human rights. These personal motivations piqued my interest in understanding the particular dimensions of the refugee identity, and how resettled refugees in particular, experienced daily life in the United States.

Outside of my personal stake and interest in the population, I became fascinated by the ways in which refugees occupied a unique role in relation to individual states and the international system. This was my theoretical project. My original interest was in state dominance and state structures of violence, such as the notion of the refugee as the prime example of bare life (Agamben 1998). However, I soon found that this literature often reinforced the notion of refugees as passive victims. Instead, I started to look for ways in which to frame the refugee identity with more agency. This led to a deeper analysis of the various dimensions of the refugee identity and the ways in which my interview participants actively reconfigured traditional understandings of the "resettled refugee" category through their rejection of structures such as formal schooling and citizenship. My research contributes to the body of literature that aims to understand the particularities of the refugee identity by presenting refugee identities through multiple dimensions.

Lastly, I hope that this study also functions as a political project. My hope is that the work combats the passive victimizations of refugees by demonstrating the ways in which

resettled refugees continue to express agency within structural constraints, primarily through an articulation of their religious and cultural identities. This project has practical implications for US refugee policy and the international refugee regime. The protracted conflicts that have created refugee populations, the current global climate of xenophobia and discrimination towards refugees, increasingly restrictive national immigration policies, and the US's decline in refugee admissions as well as leadership in refugee policy, are just several of the salient factors that paint an alarming and insecure global environment for refugees. In order to solve the "refugee problem" policy makers must look past language that emphasizes exceptional crises and emergencies and instead pay attention to the ways in which refugee identities configure in complex, individualized, and particular ways across both asylum and resettlement contexts.

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Appendix A: Resettled Refugee Interview Questions

1) Introductions
    a) Can you tell me about your journey to the United States? How did you end up here?
        i) When did you arrive in the US?
        ii) How many children do you have? How old are they? Are they here with you?
        iii) What were you expecting when you came here? How have your expectations changed since arriving to the US?

I'm especially interested in how you think about citizenship, and about yourself as a citizen.

2) Are/were you a citizen of Syria/Iraq? What does being a citizen of Syria/Iraq mean to you? Has your thinking about Syrian/Iraqi citizenship changed since you left?
3) Are you citizens in the US (or legal permanent resident/green card holder)?
    a) What would it/does it mean to you to be a citizen of the United States? How do you think being/becoming a citizen might change your life in the United States?
    b) What do you think you might gain from US citizenship? What do you think you might lose after you become a citizen?
4) What does becoming a citizen of American mean to you? Is gaining citizenship the same as becoming/being American? Or does being American mean something else?
5) How do you think getting citizenship might change your day to day life in the United States?
    a) As a citizen, what responsibilities and rights do you think you have in the US?
    b) How you think getting citizenship will change your perception of yourself? Would you say citizenship makes you feel more American? What does being American mean to you?
    c) How do you think you will tell people who you are and where you are from if you had to introduce yourself?
    d) Some people say citizenship is a tool - it gets you other things. What do you think of that? What will getting citizenship get you/allow you to do that you wouldn't have been able to get/do before?
6) Who do you talk to when you have questions about citizenship? What people, places, or resources do you rely on?

Thank you for sharing your thoughts about citizenship. I now want to turn to a related topic, your/your family's experiences with schooling and education.

7) What are your experiences with formal education/schooling? Did you receive formal schooling in Syria/Iraq/elsewhere?
8) Have you attended school in the US? Do you expect to attend school in the United States? Why/why not?
9) What do you think the role of schools are/have been in helping you adjust to life in America?
10) How about your children? Did your children receive schooling in Syria?
11) Are they enrolled in schools in the US?
    a) How did you choose that/those schools? Did you have choice in the enrollment?
12) What hopes do you have about what school will provide for your children?
    a) What do you think the role of school is in helping your children adjust to life in America?
    b) Some people say that schools provide opportunities for resettled refugees like you and your children. What do you think about this?
    c) How have your children changed since starting school, if at all?
    d) Some people say that schools change your feelings about being American. What do you think about this?
    e) How do your children feel about the schools they attend? Are they happy with their schools? Why or why not?
    f) Do you think schools are a safe place for your children? Do they feel like they belong in school?
13) Who do you talk to when you have questions about schooling? What people, places, or resources do you rely on?
14) How do you feel about your ability to understand how schools work in the United States? Is it similar or different to your understanding of how other places work in the United States?
15) As a parent, what are your hopes for your children and your family in America?
16) Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Appendix B: Center for Philadelphia Migrants (CPM) Employee Interview Questions

1) Can you describe your work? What kinds of clients do you work with?
2) Why CPM? How long have you been a CPM caseworker? How did you get here?
    a) Why did you decide to work here? What were your previous work experience? Had you worked with refugees in other capacities?
3) What are the challenges and rewards with working with refugee populations in Philadelphia?
4) What challenges do your clients most generally face? How do you overcome or help them overcome these challenges?
5) How do you think the families you work with feel about citizenship?
    a) What do you think it means to them?
    b) Do they view citizenship as a tool, an opportunity, a procedural necessity, something of value, or something else altogether?
    c) Do they think citizenship is the same as being or becoming American?
    d) Do they identify any concerns about getting US citizenship?
    e) Do they voice benefits or potential gains?
6) What do you think is the value of citizenship?
    a) Some people say citizenship is a tool. What do you think of that?
    b) Others say citizenship means you belong in the United States. What do you think of that?
7) How do the families you work with feel about schooling in the United States? Is schooling something you assist them with as part of their transition?
    a) Do they voice concerns or hopes for schooling?
    b) What kind of schooling experiences do your clients share with you, if any?
    c) Do you think your clients see their legal status tied to their hopes for schooling?
    d) What do you think the relationship is between formal schooling and perceptions of citizenship?
        i) Do you think your clients would share that perspective?
        ii) What do you think your clients think about the relationship between schooling and citizenship?
8) What do you personally see as the goals and/or purposes of schooling in the US? Do you think they are similar to or different from other state institutions like the post office, Congress, or welfare offices? Do you think schools have the same goals or functions as these other places managed by the US government?
    a) How do you think your clients view these institutions /places as compared to schools?
9) Is there anything else you would like to share with me?