SHARING CULTURE:
VOLUNTEER CULTURAL MENTORSHIP OF REFUGEES

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of Colorado Colorado Springs
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Sociology
2019
This thesis for the Master of Arts degree by
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Date: 2 AUG 2019
ABSTRACT

Refugees resettled in the United States are entitled to services related to health, employment and education assistance organized at the federal level, and offered cultural mentorship from volunteers organized at the local level. Those volunteers, motivated by a variety of experiences, training and goals, impact the social and cultural integration of refugees in specific ways. This research explores the motivation and impact of individual volunteers involved in the cultural mentorship process with arriving refugees in a medium-sized city on the Rocky Mountain Front Range. Interviews, participant observations and content analysis of training materials were conducted to understand the process and how individuals interpret and adapt it. Cultural mentor volunteers are motivated by knowledge gained through personal experience and use their life experiences to inform their mentorship. Volunteers participate in a bi-directional social exchange that enhances community cohesion, enabling new refugee populations to integrate culturally and socially as they become citizens of a new nation-state.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the many refugees and volunteers who shared their stories and insights with me. I am grateful for the opportunity to know you!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With gratitude I would like to thank my family for creating the space for me to pursue this goal. Thank you for being a great team.

With appreciation, I would like to acknowledge the mentors who have shared their subject matter knowledge, their academic wisdom, and their encouragement at every stage. Thank you especially to my committee: Stephen, Frank and Emily.

Thank you to the Sociology Department at UCCS for wonderful classroom experiences in applying scientific and mathematical reason to the seemingly irrational; lively and thorough theory discussions; and especially for enabling my passion to teach social science.

“The social sciences do not have anything comparable to genes… to build upon… [rather,] the culture of a society is the cumulative aggregate of the surviving beliefs and institutions.”

(Douglass North, Understanding the Process of Economic Change, p. 83)
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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, violent conflicts in multiple regions have resulted in a record high number of displaced people seeking safe relocation outside of their countries of origin (UNHCR, 2018). At the same time need has risen, resettlement has come under scrutiny in many participating countries around the world reconsidering their position on bringing refugees into their communities (Nawyn 2014). Community volunteers who work with refugees utilize their first-hand knowledge to act as supportive integrators. Volunteer cultural mentors serve a bi-directional role as both champions of newly arriving refugees in the wider community and as personal mentors to refugees, sharing practical and cultural information. Both processes influence the rapport and community building needed for the functioning of the democratic nation state through shaping common understanding and experiences. When national communities perceive poor integration of newcomers, sentiments can turn against welcoming more, therefore, this type of volunteer plays an instrumental role in maintaining the flow of the refugee resettlement process. This study undertakes to learn more about the characteristics of volunteers, their backgrounds and motivation, how they operate within the resettlement system and what promotes or hinders their successes as key bi-directional community integrators, an essential role to the democratic nation-state’s continued support of new members. While integration is a process common to all newly arriving immigrants, this research focused on the
integration of refugees because they hold a specific international legal definition, maintain a sympathetic quality in public narrative, and undergo an integration process that is nationally organized and monitored according to international standards and adjusted by elected and un-elected public officials who represent the interests of the community: refugee resettlement provides a lens into the process of integration of immigrants into the receiving community that can be studied entirely in the open and without risk to participants, with a simultaneous open debate in the political arena through which to gauge public sentiment.

Refugee is a specific international legal designation representing those who flee their countries of origin because of persecution, war or violence (UNHCR USA 2011). To be granted this legal status, that persecution must stem from race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Myanmar, and Syria, among other locations, contributed to over 68 million displaced in 2017, of which 85 percent remain in developing countries, including 40 million who are internally displaced inside of their country of origin (UNHCR, 2018). Refugees, once so designated, are the subjects of international agreements that mandate how they are received and supported when they are taken into a new state (UNHCR USA 2011). Given this definition, 25.4 million people were recognized as refugees in 2018. Among them, approximately one fifth are Palestinians who also fall under the care of UNRWA (UNHCR, 2018). This large population is followed by other very common countries of origin, accounting for two thirds of the non-Palestinian refugees who are under the
responsibility of the UNHCR, including Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia. Additional small populations make up the remainder. Resettlement of these refugees is an international effort of tremendous proportions that is carried out in the most local of situations: specific communities in a variety of nations.

In 2017, around 100,000 people were resettled, 40 percent less than previous years due to reduced resettlement offers from receiving countries. The crisis in refugee resettlement stems in part from the challenges to state sovereignty by the international agreement, by legally mandating the acceptance of populations designated outside of the receiving country. In a nation-state system, members of one nation connect to each other through a sense of community, which entrusts the state to work on their behalf to pursue domestic and global interests. Immigration of all kinds is sometimes feared (perceived) to threaten the community’s sense of itself, making the case of refugees with their “inherent worthiness” a case study in mitigating the misalignment (Nawyn 2014). To increase alignment between community and state, either state policy must shift or community perspective must change. In the case of refugee resettlement, members of the existing community who

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3 For example, The President of the United States contributed to slowing the refugee pipeline when he suspended refugee admissions for 120 days in early 2017, and instituted a travel ban for seven Muslim majority countries: Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. He explained the action saying, “Until we figure out what … is going on, we have no choice.” (Trump, 2016) and in that statement, expressed a fear of the unknown that resonated with those who fear that refugees are not what they represent themselves to be, or will not become functional American citizens (Nawyn 2014). This is demonstrated in polling date, as seen here, for example: https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2018/05/24/fewer-americans-believe-united-states-should-accept-refugees/638663002/; https://www.politico.com/f/?id=0000015d-0ea5-d1e3-a97d-5ff5d4dc0001; https://www.politico.com/story/2017/04/20/poll-syrian-refugees-united-states-237406
Volunteer with refugees serve an instrumental role in shifting the perspective of the community.

Volunteers augment state-sponsored refugee resettlement agencies who are tasked to provide material support in the key areas of health, housing, medical care and employment and/or education. Alongside the material support of the agency, cultural mentor volunteers dedicate their energy to sharing the local culture and often want to learn about other cultures. They agree to walk alongside the refugee family throughout its initial integration period and offer local knowledge, logistical support, cultural information and friendship. Cultural mentors are given standardized training and offered support by the larger organizations and programs they affiliate with. However, most of the time these volunteers work in concrete individual-to-individual or family-to-family level contexts. This requires the volunteers to exert high levels of flexibility when explaining culture and lifestyle, sharing local knowledge and assisting refugees in setting up the flow of their new lives based on the mentors’ own socialized knowledge.

In this study, volunteer cultural mentors were interviewed about their motivations and affiliations, their training and how it interacts with their personal experiences, social bonding and shared experiences of culture with refugees they work with, and the barriers they and the refugee families they are paired with experience during integration and cultural mentorship. This research serves as a microcosm of how nation-states socially and politically integrate new or marginalized members, in the
current global system, with an eye to sustainability of that system through social connection and community building within nation-states as they process global migration.

The voluntary nature of cultural mentor and refugee relationships enables wider community building, while the proscriptive training and support systems routinizes and maximizes the impact of that community to influence larger narratives. This study seeks to understand how cultural mentor volunteers understand, participate in and experience the integration of refugees, as community bridges who bi-directionally facilitate the socialization of new members into the local community.
CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Refugee Resettlement

While human migration is integral to the history of humanity, each era experiences it differently. In the era of globalization, built on expanding the international legitimacy of the nation-state system, personal security is rooted in citizenship and individual rights flow from the right of a state to determine rights and responsibilities of its citizens (Dhanapala 2001). International agreements create minimum human rights requirements in the form of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and states that fail to meet that standard create populations who can call on international aid (UN 1948).

Global migration originates in economic, social, political or conflict-driven global disparities, which individuals hope to mitigate through relocation (Koser 2016: 44-45). Refugees and asylees occupy a distinct category within conflict-driven migration, legally recognized as people who are fleeing states that fail to protect and secure them, and therefore entitled to seek new citizenship on the basis of honoring human rights within the international nation-state system. As Ong states, “the role of modern state power in universalizing citizenship is paradoxically through a process of individuation, whereby people are constructed in definitive and specific ways as citizens” of one state or another (Ong 2003:80). By definition, refugees apply for new citizenship from a third location, while asylees apply to remain once they have
relocated themselves to a safer state. The international system of refugee resettlement has its official origin in the post-WWII, 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and Stateless People (UNHCR USA 2011), grappling with the need for individuals to identify as citizens somewhere in the international state system, although some states were defunct or had failed in their responsibilities to some citizens during the war. Here, refugee was defined and legal obligations from signatory states were incurred, as well as obligations of refugees to their host countries. The initial rights agreed upon include:

- The right to non-refoulement (Article 33);
- The right not to be expelled, except under certain, strictly defined conditions (Article 32);
- The right not to be punished for illegal entry into the territory of a contracting State (Article 31);
- The right to work (Articles 17 to 19);
- The right to housing (Article 21);
- The right to education (Article 22);
- The right to public relief and assistance (Article 23);
- The right to freedom of religion (Article 4);
- The right to access the courts (Article 16);
- The right to freedom of movement within the territory (Article 26); and
- The right to be issued identity and travel documents (Articles 27 and 28).
The 1967 Protocol expanded these rights and the status of refugee to include people displaced outside of the timeframe related to WWII but meeting the same criteria and introduced refugee obligations. Refugees are “required to abide by the laws and regulations of their country of asylum and respect measures taken for the maintenance of public order” (UNHCR USA 2011). This places responsibilities on refugees that require gradual mentorship into the local cultural context.

The history of immigration in the United States includes public rhetorical vacillation between a welcoming stance based on acknowledgement that most citizens today are descended from immigrants, and an othering posture fearing challenge to the local culture brought by new arrivals (Ong 2003). Refugee resettlement agencies originate in the welcoming stance. While founding the Rescue Committee (later to become the International Rescue Committee (‘IRC’), Albert Einstein represented the welcoming theme when he called for those in the free world to “assist [people] suffering from the policies of” nations at war (rescue.org). The mission of resettlement of refugees in the United States emerged from a historical narrative of immigration emphasizing America as a nation of immigrants. This poem by Emma Lazarus, herself a mentor to refugees, is engraved on the Statue of Liberty “Bring me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free, the wretched refuse of
your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp
beside the golden door.”²

The original, post-WWII 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and
Stateless People legally defines refugees as those who are “forced to flee” their
country “because of persecution, war, or violence” and a “well-founded fear of
persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality or political opinion” that hinders
their return (UNHCR, 2019). It is worth noting that the 1951 convention, though it
targeted a large wave of refugee movement, came after an initial wartime reaction
wherein refugees were turned away and consequently perished in the war³. After the
war, upon reflecting on that tragedy among others, the convention was designed to
avoid similar future occurrences, through organized international support for refugees
(UNHCR 2011).

Out of the population of legally designated refugees, the United Nations High
Commission for Refugees (‘UNHCR’) identifies only the most vulnerable of
displaced people to be considered for resettlement into new countries. Resettlement is

² Emma Lazarus was a Jewish poet who volunteered to work with integrating refugees from the
Russian Jewish pogroms in New York City in the late 1800s.
³ From the Smithsonian.com “World War II prompted the largest displacement of human beings the
world has ever seen—although today's refugee crisis is starting to approach its unprecedented scale.
But even with millions of European Jews displaced from their homes, the United States had a poor
track record offering asylum. Most notoriously, in June 1939, the German ocean liner St. Louis and its
937 passengers, almost all Jewish, were turned away from the port of Miami, forcing the ship to return
to Europe; more than a quarter died in the Holocaust.” Read more:
https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/us-government-turned-away-thousands-jewish-refugees-fearing-they-were-nazi-spies-180957324/#0ZsXmRBFoVwGasXU.99
based on categories including medical needs, survival of torture and violence, and at-risk populations like women and children.

During different periods, American refugee policies also vacillated, sometimes meeting the standards of the convention while also fulfilling foreign policy goals, such as creating categories for those (often white Europeans) fleeing communism during the Cold War. In the aftermath of the politically disputed war in Vietnam, welcoming Asian and Southeast Asian refugees served a purpose in assuaging American guilt (Jamieson 1993: 366-7; Ong 2003: 77-82) Later, persecuted Tibetans were granted a special visa to relocate to America as a token of support that also sent a message to the increasingly powerful Chinese government on the international political stage (Howe, 1991; Singer, 2007). (Also, See Figure 2)

Welcoming refugees from communist states served an evolving and politically potent role in the American orientation toward refugees. In the 1960s, during the height of the Red Scare, it was a source of national pride to absorb deserters of the enemy ideology, with over 90 per cent of refugees coming from communist countries (Ong 2003: 81). In the 1970s, as the ideological war grew colder, political focus shifted toward identifying domestic communist threats, and “the image of refugees as politically activist soldiers against global communism began to wear thin… more care was taken with controlling refugee influx, which came to represent danger more than opportunity” (Ong 2003: 81) As the fear of mixed loyalties grew in the era of anti-communist domestic political actions, recently arrived foreigners with communist
national origins became suspect. Perception of refugees’ status shifted from members of a class of people needing the protection of a state to individuals who may not reliably maintain loyalty to the new country. (Ong 2003: 82)

Throughout these domestic phases, the international numbers of displaced people remained relatively stable until 2014. What has changed in the recent migration crisis (including but not limited to those legally designated as refugees) is demonstrated here:

*Figure 1: The Refugee Crisis is at Historic Proportions 1955-2015 (UNHCR via Vox.com 2016)*

Inside of the United States this has not resulted in a proportionate change in the raw number of refugees admitted, which has fluctuated some but not risen to an extreme. What has changed noticeably is a shift in the most common countries of origin in response to evolving international pressures, and a resultant demographic
shift from a preponderance of city-dwellers to increasing numbers of rural, agriculturally-oriented populations becoming refugees, the impacts of which will be discussed in the findings section.

Figure 2: The Shifting Origins of Refugees to the U.S. Over Time 1975-2017 (Pew Research Center 2017)

Refugee Resettlement in the United States Today

The current process of refugee and asylum seeking is an amalgamation of the original framing of refugees as those without a state and in need of merciful state protection for safety (Darrow 2016), and the post 9/11 fear of the individual refugee as potentially “radicalized,” dangerous in and of themselves (Alvarez 2016). Rottman observes that the refugee and asylum-seeking system has become cumbersome as it
struggles to address both goals, the drive to implement updates and to “change appears to have overshadowed the US commitment to protect” (Rottman 2009: 7).

The UNHCR refers refugees to the United States for screening, including biometrics like iris scans, facial scans and fingerprints, and government screening including eight separate government agencies, multiple background checks and three in-person interviews (UNHCR 2018). Once approved, the refugee is assigned to one of nine non-governmental organizations who maintain a presence in one or more state. While all 48 states and the District of Colombia accept some refugees, each is structured a little differently depending on which agency operates there, and what the state funding structure is. Refugee placement is made at the national level, dependent on state agency capabilities in different locations. Determinants include available funding, support services in place, employment opportunities, and refugees’ own social and familial connections. The agencies are then responsible for helping each refugee “integrate and become economically self-sufficient” in their new U.S. community (UNHCR 2018).

State laws and funding streams impact the process of integrating refugees. This study takes place in Colorado, one of thirteen states to participate in the Wilson-Fish (‘WF’) program, an alternative resettlement program that provides financial and medical support as well as social services to refugees. WF programming ties refugee funding to early employment and self-sufficiency, effectively orienting all resettlement agencies in the state toward those goals. Resettlement includes a period
of financial support (generally six months to a year) and an initial cultural orientation into the local way of life. During the arrival period, refugees are paired with a local volunteer cultural mentorship team, made up of people who are fluent in the local context and are tasked with individualizing their integration support according to their own understanding and the refugee’s unique needs and goals (Agency Training, 2018).

*Integration into the Nation-State*

In an era of globalization where nations are reflecting on their participation in international systems, refugees highlight two places of disconnect between the nation and state in the nation-state system. The first is the creation of peoples who may be a part of a nation: that is, those who identify with each other on the basis of shared history and culture, but do not have a state to represent them in the international arena (Anderson 2006). Statelessness can occur when they are forced out of the state of residence or when the state is no longer viable. For an example of this we can look to the Kurds, who are an ethnic group but overlap with many states geographically and also cannot claim the rights to safety as a citizen in some of those states (McKiernan 2006, 90-92).

The second disconnect is when states are mandated by international agreement to absorb new members, if against the objections of existing members. Then, politically active members of the nation-state may engage in state-boundary policing, and in fact attempt to slow or halt the immigration process, out of a nation-preserving
instinct (Hansen 2014). This paper makes no statement about the validity of these arguments, but rather uses them to understand the current need to proffer integration into the functional forms of cultural life inside the geographical location of the state to new members in order to maintain the maximum integrity of the nation-state as a system. Particularly in liberal democracies, those who join the state must be incorporated into the national values that formed and continue to form the nation-state, through mutual adaptation that ensures citizens have a working knowledge of each other upon which to make civic and political decisions (Miller 2016).

The question emerges, how do refugees make the transition to citizens in their new nation-state? This process involves identifying with, sharing common cause with, established embers of the community through increasing familiarity and mutual investment in local community. Refugees exercise personal choice and agency in how they engage with the local community, while the staff and volunteers who work with them can enable maximum efficacy in their approach to local services such as children’s schools, medical clinics, police and public safety officers through sharing local norms (Bestemen 2016). How community mentors socialize new members into cultural norms has long-lasting impacts of both the mentee and the community.

Refugees move from their origin country through extended and often arduous journeys, sometimes living in camps or as displaced people without access to the resources to which they are accustomed. Their agentic strategies during these journeys are essential to their survival, gaining access to scarce resources and
devising strategies for continued movement through the legal pipeline that results in relocation under refugee status into a receiving country. While in camps or in the relocation pipeline, refugees adapt their physical presentation and the narratives they share to appeal to the decision-makers who will determine their futures. Interviewing Somali Bantu refugees in Lewiston, ME, Catherine Besteman (2016) found that many refugees had re-structured their narratives to meet the requirements of the selection criteria. Narratives themselves became an exercise of personal agency, that is, a choice made to effect an outcome. Besteman found that refugees sometimes restructured their families on paper, editing polygamous relationships or adding children who were not blood relatives but were adopted along their journey. Such changes to personal identity allowed individuals to enter and move through the pipeline, meeting the spirit of the resettlement process while adapting to the law. Self-definition became a method of personally influencing on their fate (Besteman 2016).

Where economic migrants exercise agency through extra-institutional or non-governmental paths, using informal and personal networks to secure housing, employment and sometimes suffering from a lack of legal rights, refugees differ, exercising agency inside of an institution, assigned legal status and rights, and institutionally compelled to gain employment or participate in the educational system. Cultural mentorship occupies a liminal space between institutional and extra-institutional support during a transition from foreigner to local citizen.
When refugees arrive to their host society, their socialization experiences vary from childhood lived in the total institution of a refugee camp to recent departure from an urban life, to violence and deprivation experienced in rural conflict. Prior socialization impacts their integration experiences. In all cases, refugees have to transition along a spectrum of institutional boundaries on their journey from origin to new community. Upon arrival, refugees’ agency is again expressed in how they engage with the receiving country’s functional culture.

A cultural mentorship relationship with local community members is one way that refugees can adapt to living in their new society, in addition to utilizing official refugee resettlement offerings like job search assistance, medical care, housing assistance, educational planning for children, and English classes for all ages.

Making this transition requires local knowledge, how to do the many tasks related to everyday survival that are new or differently executed in the new context. As Kim Taintor, the Colorado State Refugee Coordinator described, “The actual arrival to the US is just the beginning of a long journey towards integration for refugees, and it is the local community in which they resettle that offers them the environment to find that which they have been seeking: Safety, stability and opportunity” (Dodge, 2017, 209). While medical care, education and employment are organized and regulated by government policy, cultural or social mentorship is not publicly funded or managed, but emerges out of volunteer action in the receiving community.
The difference in the most commonly used terms defining the process of refugee resettlement theory, ‘integration’ and ‘assimilation,’ place social structures that immigrants encounter into two camps. Assimilation seeks conformity of the arriving population to the receiving population in language and custom, “to become similar” or in the instrumental sense “to make similar” (Brubaker 2001: 534). Assimilation is measured as “a matter of degree” where the onus is on the subject to make himself similar enough to function inside of the social structure (Brubaker 2001: 534). Integration, on the other hand, is supported by “differentialist policies” that support cultural differences in populations and local structures through careful negotiation of new mores (Brubaker 2001: 532). According to Ager and Strang, measurable integration is conceptually subdivided into de facto and de jure integration. De facto integration is characterized by informal and social networks, and is part of making immigrants feel ‘at home’ or ‘settled’ (Ager 2008; Hovil 2014; Smit 2015). Possession of social ties enable migrants to be more efficacious in their new surroundings (Garip 2008; Massey 1990; Tilley 2007). Conversely, de jure integration is legal and integrates a new national identity for the immigrant and offers lasting access to formally acquired resources- however de jure integration does not guarantee social acceptance (Hovil 2014). Refugees arriving in the United States have legal status and a resettlement path that is both state sponsored and accountable to federal standards, this ensures de jure integration takes place, or put differently, satisfies the needs of integration into the state. The civic side of integration is unofficial, and while it is conducted with some structure, it relies on unpaid caring
labor that varies based on personal interaction and creates personal bonds inside the new nation. This de facto integration makes it possible for refugees to engage in their new local community as members of it, not because of inherent similarity but because there is mutual understanding built on experiences in common (Ager 2008; Miller 2016).

Despite some push toward nationalism and assimilation, transnational ties and an increasingly interconnected world suggest that the most likely success is found in the integration-oriented approach (Brubaker 2001: 532). When citizenship rights are given by the state, there are both state and nation obligations incurred, from the perspective of other members of the nation state, both rights and responsibilities as members. While the state-obligations are automatically enforced (taxes) the nation-obligations of civic participation must be socialized by the other members (Miller 2016: 132)

Just as complications in “institutions and social mechanisms… transform people into refugees” there are also both institutional and social mechanisms “that assist refugees in returning to citizenship status in adopted countries” (Ong 2003: 79). Ong suggests that research is needed to “produce a detailed understanding of the kinds of mechanisms and practices” that produce citizens from refugees (2003: 79). This paper proposes that the intentional outreach of well-socialized local individuals to the refugee community who simultaneously use their status in the local community to increase empathy for the newly arriving refugees increases mutual understanding and
leads to a new, integrated community continually reshaping to include its actual and current members.

David Miller (2016), in his political philosophy of immigration proposes a further clarification of the de facto side of integration into three concepts: social, civic, and cultural integration. Social integration draws on the idea that spatial integration may not be meaningful as a catalyst for social cohesion without a “pattern of behavior” that routinely includes comfortable interactions between groups. It is noteworthy that the presence of groups that consider themselves different is not an automatic hindrance to this process, as long as those groups can interact comfortably on a routine basis. This, he argues, is especially necessary to a democratic process wherein the majority will rule, but should be informed by awareness of all groups and members of society (Miller 2016: 132).

Civic integration, similarly, “does not involve people [sharing]… substantive goals…” across groups, but it does require that all groups come together “to share a set of principles and norms that guide their social and political life” and have a “shared understanding of how these goals are to be pursued and within what restraints” (Miller 2016:132). This is a process rather than an outcome. Newly arrived immigrants can engage in political and civic processes alongside native populations, through classical democratic systems and institutions, and find a voice for their needs. This may be an idealistic narrative of democracy, but to the extent that it is possible, it is aided by cultural mentors, with knowledge of current local context and the newly
arrived populations’ needs and aspirations, who act as go-betweens. In fact, the
double-consciousness of those cultural mentors could be instrumental to the
community’s equilibrium in a time of demographic change by making voices on all
sides relatable to others in the community.

Cultural integration, as Miller describes it, means some shared identity is held
by members of all groups: we are all members of the local town. This creates an
identity based on space and shared resources that encourages investment in the local,
as he says, “being an Oldhamer” is important to all residents of Oldham, even if they
continue to negotiate what that will mean. Joseph Carens (2013) argues that from an
ethical standpoint, some common norms, “so long as their adjustment does not
require them to violate any principled commitments of their own”, should be
implemented by refugees in their new life, so create common identity with the local
community (Carens 2013: 71-74).

While Miller goes on to advocate for policy changes that enforce integration
through top-down requirements (“on employers and public officials”) rather than
individuals, he insists that individual social integration is necessary, on the routine
social, civil and some shared cultural front, to build trust. He suggests that when
people from different groups “overlap in public space” they will encounter
“inevitably misunderstandings”, and when that happens “trusted intermediaries are
needed to resolve” the situation.
Some refugees echo this sentiment reflecting on their integration and community involvement. Quoted in a newspaper article by Pillitteri (2016), Syrian-European activist Bassam Al-Kuwatli describes the parallel desires of refugees and local communities to gain common interest in this way:

It is important that we learn to distinguish integration from assimilation. European societies are trying to assimilate migrants: They are expected to dress, talk and act as the locals do. We need to respect their identity. We need not to push them into becoming something they are not. By allowing migrants to be themselves and giving them opportunities rather than seeing them as victims, they will follow the integration path and they will be happy to contribute to the country that is hosting them. They take from society and when they can they will give back.

Al-Kuwatli’s emphasis demonstrates the importance of creating a new commonality. Social programs need to be attuned to refugees’ culture to maximize their success in integrating refugees, accomplished by providing refugees the relevant tools to secure life for themselves in a new context. Integration is supported by these “differentialist policies,” recognize historical differences in the functional culture of populations while still supporting local structures through the ongoing careful negotiation of new mores. (Brubaker, 2001, 534-7)
Cultural Integration

Societies continue to function through reproduction of members, who are then socialized into the appropriate ways of gaining access to social acceptance and cooperation, goods and services, participation in order and motivation. “Culture is socially transmitted behavior conceived as an abstraction” and “the structure of action … must be self-sufficient” to form a reproducing society (Aberle, 1950, 102). Refugees have adapted their functional culture to ahistorical and sometimes dysfunctional systems, often as dependents in refugee camps and displaced communities, creating additional barriers to ‘settling in’ culturally to their new home community. When refugees enter a new society (nation) they must gain enough knowledge to be a reproducing, or actively contributing, member to ensure that they can fully join the nation-state system.

Lawrence Bartlett, the Director for Refugee Admission for the United States, describes the challenge of this demographic shift in this way: “We’re taking refugees… [sometimes] not literate in their own language” and the longer they are outside of functional state systems the less developmentally appropriate opportunities they have had, like education. Dodge observes that “people from Syria and Iraq are highly literate, not always highly educated, while those from places like the Congo are not” (2017: 208). Cultural mentorship must be personalized and adaptable to meet the needs of individual transitioners.
The challenges of cultural integration are increased when accompanied by a rural-urban transition, or an agricultural-menial labor class transition, because the accompanying elements of culture are quite different. Volunteers working with refugees are tasked with sharing time management, personal style and hygiene standards for public workplaces like hotels and restaurants, interpersonal communication norms and linguistic expressions of respect and politeness that are different between the origin and receiving culture.

Based on research using the World Values Survey, Basanez identified three zones of culture: “In cultures of honor… people can live with more pride and sense of community, but usually material well-being is lacking for large sections of the population due to the complications and difficulties of economic life, and individuality may also be stifled. In cultures of achievement, on the other hand, people generally live with more material satisfaction, but there is less interest in honoring traditions and customs, families tend to be dispersed, and there is not much appreciation for community life. Cultures of joy would [be]… similar… depending on the side to which they tilt more strongly” (2016, 195).

Basanez argues that culture is not static, but “keep[s] slowly changing over time, adjusting to the variability of circumstances by generational replacement.” (2016: 157). This is borne out by research showing the second-generation, children of immigrants, are usually more culturally attuned than the first (Besteman 2016). During integration, gaining information about the cultural practices of the receiving
community is essential to the reception of the refugee. “Take punctuality, for example: neither cultures of honor nor cultures of joy particularly prize punctuality, and anyone living in such a culture will rarely arrive on time… but if that person visits a country with a culture of achievement, he or she will change his or her behavior to suit the host country’s standards [through the pressures of] peer pressure and enforcement” (Basanez 2016:183).

The UNHCR states that ‘the process of local integration is greatly facilitated by refugees becoming self-reliant, since they are better able to interact with the local population both economically and socially, and thereby contribute to local development as an asset rather than a “burden”’ (UNHCR USA, 2011). When mentorship relationships enable shared culture, increasing familiarity for all parties, they enable integration that is mutually beneficial. Director of Refugee Admission for the United States, Lawrence Bartlett, described the process of integrating with newly arriving refugees this way: “They’ve known hardship, but they’re resilient. Frankly, they become great Americans.” And for people who work with refugees, “I think it changes the lives of people who come into contact with them as much as it changes the refugees.” (quoted in Dodge 2017: 208)

Alastair Ager and Alison Strang developed an Integration Framework based on literature review and fieldwork in the United Kingdom (2008), including four of the elements on the Geneva Convention that they found to be essential to refugee integration: employment, housing, education and health care. Additionally, gaining
citizenship and social integration or “belonging” and enjoying social bonds with people of “like ethnic group” impact the perception of integration into the new community (Ager and Strang 2008).

Figure 3: A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration (Ager and Strang, 2008)

Following this model, de jure integration, or granting legal rights creates the foundation. Safety becomes the purview of the new state, stability ensured by the resettlement agencies. Language and cultural knowledge are offered through both official agency channels and cultural mentorship. But, the level of ‘Social Connection’ is the key bridge which cultural mentors build with the refugees by sharing their local socio-cultural capital. The quality of the outcome markers will depend on the quality of the base domains (Ager and Strang 2008).
For the receiving community, maximizing integration of refugees increases the utility and social cohesion of the whole community. Creating an atmosphere of inclusion and functional possibility can encourage migrants of all kinds to remain and invest in their new location (Brecher, 2000). “Transnational social fields are in part shaped by the migrants’ perceptions that they must keep their options open. In the globalized economy that has developed over the past several decades, there is a sense that no one place is truly secure, although people do have access to many places” (Glick Schiller, 2002). When migrants plant roots in a local community, the social and economic benefits are increased locally, encouraging cohesion in the integrated community as immigrants are not seen as temporary citizens.

Volunteers see refugees as worthy of inclusion in the local community, and see their own role as intermediaries to the community, as people who understand the whole situation. Refugees’ economic integration is approached through two pathways: humanitarian, which allows for individualization and the possibility of personal choices and continued exercise of agency (for example, a refugee turning down a job that doesn’t match their interests, waiting for a better opportunity) and bureaucratic, requiring the refugee to continually meet benchmarks to maintain their worthiness (Darrow 2016; Nawyn 2014).

This can create a tension between humanitarian goals of supporting the “blameless victim” and the need for that same person to become capable of performance in the local economy to remain worthy, or risk reclassification as
unworthy if they cannot become self-sufficient quickly (Darrow 2016). For those who volunteer to work with them, the task is framing refugees as inherently worthy of support and maintaining their sympathetic character through coaching into self-sufficient and worthy lifestyles, and to avoid the risks of lifestyles with negative or unworthy perceptions (Darrow 2016; Nawyn 2014). The volunteers who have stayed past their first refugee family matches see their role as maximizing the refugee’s ability to maintain worthiness in the society as they settle in, and avoid being pathologized alongside the American poor (Darrow 21016, Tang, 2015). Volunteers are sometimes critiqued for ‘whitewashing’ the new immigrants, providing a way of continually justifying their positionality and beliefs about the society they live in through mentoring others into it (Darrow 2016).

In this research, cultural mentors’ participation in the bi-directional process of integrating refugees into the local community, as a mechanism for maintaining the nation-state through an era of increasingly globalized migratory flows, is examined.

This research examines the relationship between volunteers’ life experiences and how they become interested in volunteering in a cultural mentorship role, interpret the standardized training in their cultural mentoring experience, and experience local community in light of their relationship with resettled refugees. This study expects to find that established members of the community who engage in
mentorship relationships with refugees will influence both the refugees through direct action, and the mentors’ existing community networks through the knowledge they gain of refugees. Bi-directional influence of this type would be beneficial to increasing community solidarity.
CHAPTER THREE:

METHODOLOGY

The primary research conducted was interviews with cultural mentors, with comparisons drawn by examining the official training materials of the resettlement agency and interviews with refugees. The emphasis of the cultural mentor interviews was on the life experiences of the mentor, their motivation for volunteering, how they understood their training and role, and what they emphasized in their mentorship relationships. Through contact with the local agency’s volunteer coordinator, observational research was conducted, including observation of the volunteer orientation training of those who were becoming cultural mentors and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) volunteers. Additional observations were conducted as a four-month employment intern and as an eleven-month (ongoing) instructor for the employment readiness class mandated for newly arriving refugees until they gain their first job.

Site

The site of this research is a Rocky Mountain Front Range city with a population of about 700,000 including the metro area around the city limits. There is a small downtown area with hotels and restaurants that are a frequent site of employment for refugees. The surrounding residential areas include a range from
extended stay apartments to multimillion-dollar homes, currently in a state of growth in employment and in the housing market. The city’s economy is supported by military installations, multiple industries, and tourism, with two universities and many community organizations. This city can be seen as a microcosm of the national divide over the incorporation of immigrants and refugees into a new nation-state, with a local history of division over accepting refugees with strong opinions on both sides fostering active and sometimes heated political debate.

The local refugee resettlement agency is part of a religion-based resettlement agency that operates in 23 states. The major metro center of this state provides support and training to the local agency but they do not maintain identical practices. The volunteer coordinator explained that some local services differ, as do the expectations attached to different volunteer roles. While all resettlement agencies seek to build self-sufficiency in the refugee population, they are given autonomy in deciding how to meet that standard in their local practice.

The local office had six staff at the beginning of the research period, which was from September of 2018 until May of 2019. In addition to the director, there is one position dedicated to medical services, one for employment, and one coordinates education, including cultural orientation. Two positions were cut during the research period, due to reduced funding, and the loss was felt throughout the organizations, as those duties now fell to others. The loss of their knowledge and experience was felt keenly throughout the office. Included in the duties that were reshuffled in that
Changes in the national resettlement program during the research period meant that arriving refugees’ numbers dropped from highs over 125 each month to sometimes under 30. As of the completion of the study period, the local agency is only receiving refugees with ties to people who have already settled here. This type of arrival is less complicated for integration: though medical, employment and English learning remain mostly the same, some of the logistical planning and cultural orientation are enabled by existing social ties.

Access to the site was granted through discussion of the project and interview process and goals with the director of the agency and the volunteer coordinator. The director is oriented like a parent, caring deeply for refugees as a group of people who are vulnerable in multiple ways, and wanting to know that any research will be productive for them. The volunteer coordinator wore many hats and was primarily concerned that the research process not interfere with the volunteer population, which is always fewer than the jobs that need filling. Rapport was built and maintained through undergoing the training process for volunteers and maintaining regular interaction through volunteer activities and community events with agency staff, volunteers and the local refugee community. These activities are ongoing and serve to knit the community together.
Volunteer participants were invited through email, but two respondents were additionally known to the researcher through shared volunteer activities. The researcher participated in volunteer activities including teaching a weekly employment readiness group class and individual job skills mentoring with refugees throughout the research process, and interacted with other volunteers occasionally.

**Interviews**

An email solicitation went out to all volunteers with the agency, from that, ten responded with interest. In the end eight cultural mentors were interviewed in the local area. Table 1 (p. 41) illustrates the demographics of the volunteers interviewed.

Interviews were in-depth, lasting between 40 minutes and 1.5 hours, and followed an interview guide (Appendix 3). Discussion included the volunteer’s experience in training, with the materials given and with their refugee integration and cultural mentorship process experience. Their interview transcripts are used to examine the links between life experiences and how they (1) become interested in volunteering in a cultural mentorship role, (2) interpret the standardized training in their cultural mentoring experience, and (3) experience local community in light of their relationship with resettled refugees. It was hypothesized that increased exposure to regions of the world creating refugees would contribute to increased interest in volunteering, would favor personal knowledge over agency training, and would increase interest in diverse local communities.
The interviews took place mostly in coffee shops chosen by the interviewees. During the interview, compensatory beverages were offered. There were no other incentives. The guided interviews covered six areas. Summarization of these areas and how these areas measure core concepts of research hypothesis are given below:

1. The demographics of the mentor, allowing for an estimate of their socio-economic index range, life experiences and personal motivation. (To evaluate personal experience and exposure to situations, ideas, and communities related to refugees prior to volunteering)

2. How they decided to volunteer, including their relationship to the organization and their fellow cultural mentor teammates. (To evaluate their personal relationships and original framing motivations and connections to this volunteer opportunity.)

3. How they understood their training, purpose and the influence of their past experiences on that understanding. (Their self-evaluation of 1&2)

4. What their experience as a cultural mentor has been like, including their evaluation of their expectations in retrospect, the demographics of the family they worked with and what they have shared with their refugee mentee family that has been particularly meaningful. (To evaluate what are they trying to accomplish, how they understand their role in integration as a bi-directional process in the local community. We also learn what the goal of their volunteering is and how they view refugees’ maximal integratory success.)
this portion of the interview, we also discuss their image of the ideal outcome for a refugee family that is fully integrated to assess their goals in volunteering.

5. Reflection on the ongoing support they receive as volunteers, the resources available to them, what could be done to improve the integration process, and how their own perspectives changed in the volunteering process and what advice they would give to new volunteers. (This evaluated their understanding of the local community, as well as their self-evaluation and local agency-evaluation, as the people engaged in community integration of new members.)

6. Finally, I asked them if there was anything else they would like to talk about related to the refugee integration process, encouraging the generation of themes the literature review didn’t address and placing the research in a grounded theory approach wherein themes emerge organically.

Of the eight cultural mentors interviewed, five were women. Mentor ages range from 23 to 65. They were all financially comfortable. The occupational distribution of mentors is: 3 retired persons, 2 teachers, 1 undergraduate student, 1 stay-at-home-mother, and 1 soldier. Six volunteers identify themselves as Christians and another two have no religious beliefs. Six are currently married and another two never married. Jointly considering their education, occupation and income, they are all middle-class people. Six are working with their first refugee family currently, and of the two remaining, one is working with her second family and only one has worked with many families: ten at this point.
Table 1: Cultural Mentor Volunteer Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor Nickname</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>M/F</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Volunteer Roles</th>
<th>How many families/How long volunteering</th>
<th>Social Class* (GSS Occ. Code)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Married, 2 Children (1 preschool, 1 elem)</td>
<td>Protestant Christian</td>
<td>Stay at Home Mother</td>
<td>Cultural Mentor Team, ESL tutor, Childcare support</td>
<td>2 families, Iraq and Congo.</td>
<td>Class I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Married, no kids, one cat</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Retired, Blogger, Volunteer</td>
<td>CM, Team Leader, ESL Tutor</td>
<td>10 Families, Nepali Bhutanese, Congo, Burundi,</td>
<td>Class II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Married, 1 High School-age Child</td>
<td>Christian, Muslim Husband</td>
<td>Active Duty Soldier, BA Pol, MBA</td>
<td>Cultural Mentor, ESL Tutor</td>
<td>1 family (Iraq)</td>
<td>Mil (9830) Approx. Class II (5830)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Not religious</td>
<td>Student (Politics, Community Development)</td>
<td>ESL Tutor</td>
<td>1 Family, (Congo)</td>
<td>Student Approx. Class II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M5</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Married, Old Kids</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Cultural Mentor</td>
<td>1 Family</td>
<td>Class II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Not religious</td>
<td>Teacher (Geology, Astronomy HS)</td>
<td>Cultural Mentor, ESL Tutor</td>
<td>1 Family, (Congo)</td>
<td>Teacher Approx. Class II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M7</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Married, Older Kids</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Cultural Mentor</td>
<td>1 Family, Congo</td>
<td>Class II (2330)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M8</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married, Older Kids</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Cultural Mentor</td>
<td>1 Family, (Congo)</td>
<td>Approx. Class II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area Averages</td>
<td>Median: 34.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>56% Married 47% w/kids &lt;18</td>
<td>34.6% Religious:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Overall avg. income: $37,204</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Occupation-derived class categories are taken from the General Social Survey Occupational Distribution for the 10-class Version of EGP. (For a detailed chart, see http://gss.norc.org/Documents/reports/methodological-reports/MR125.pdf.) More
The official training materials for the local agency were also examined for themes, as was the volunteer packet offered to cultural mentors. With the support of the agency director and both the volunteer coordinator and the person who inherited her tasks after the funding change, the researcher also participated in training and volunteered with the agency, gaining knowledge and experience through informal conversations and participant observation. Training materials were coded for themes which were then compared to interview results.

The researcher’s positionality can impact how interviewees respond (Holmes, 2014; Malterud, 2001), and how insider-outsider status can influence connection with the subjects of research (Herod 1999). In these interviews, significant commonalities were found between researcher and interviewee, in shared educational background, socioeconomic status, and often race and religion. Additionally, we shared a motivation to participate in the integration of refugees, which emerged in us and grew as we learned about the situations refugees face in their relocation process, creating an insider connection. These commonalities aided rapport but any presence of common social ties may also encourage socially acceptable responses to questions, creating the potential for biased responses.

Volunteer Training and Literature

Literature cultural mentors receive include a volunteer contract⁴, delineating the duties they are undertaking for the agency. In that contract, the agency agrees to be

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⁴ Full volunteer contract available in Appendix E
available to provide information and training, supervise the integration process, be 
open to feedback and treat the cultural mentor as a partner. In return, the cultural 
mentorship team’s representative agrees to assist with specific services, adhere to 
agency rules and procedures, maintain confidentiality, and keep in contact with the 
agency regarding the refugee family’s status.

Volunteers receive three primary documents. The first is a Fact Sheet, 
containing information about refugees worldwide, their legal designation, and the 
resettlement process. It also includes information about victims of human trafficking, 
who are entitled to similar services from the agency. In line with Ager and Strang’s 
integration markers (2008), refugees and asylees are entitled to de jure (by law) 
integration assistance: case management including health and educational support, 
that is children’s education and English as a second language (ESL) classes, and 
housing placement. They are also offered de facto (practical living) integration 
assistance, such as community programs and resources covering financial literacy, job 
clubs, sports programs for youth and seniors, after-school mentoring, and parenting 
support. Community development partnerships with local organizations and local 
ethnic community groups provide many de facto supports. Cultural mentors add to 
the latter form of integration assistance.

The second document is Cultural Mentor Visit Ideas, a four-page list of 
suggestions about spending time together with the refugee family. The list is divided 
into English practice ideas, navigating the city, needed householding skills, financial
management, fun local activities and cultural experiences, recreational activities, and more.

Following this is a document entitled “Tips for Mentors”, in which the first, and bolded, note is to “Stress the importance of self-sufficiency.” This is a recurring emphasis through in-person trainings and all printed materials. Self-sufficiency and economic independence in the first six months to a year is the goal of the resettlement program. Other tips include:

- Avoid using children to interpret sensitive information, as it upsets the power balance in the household.
- Refugees can act helpless and volunteers and staff can overreact or play into those worries.
- Refugees can be very resourceful and are intelligent in their own ways. Uneducated does not equal ignorance.
- Be an advocate for the agency, they need to have trust in our agency.
- Enjoy making friends, developing a relationship and sharing.

The final, and most dense, document outlines the entitlements and benefits refugees can receive. Depending on the situation, each person may have slightly different benefits on top of the resettlement entitlements. For mentors, being aware of

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5 Full list available in Appendix
the distinctions can help them to understand both the refugee family’s budget and the importance of employment and self-sufficiency once the entitlement period ends.

The tone of these documents is perceived by some volunteers as paternalistic, with an emphasis on agency expectations of refugees’ needs, rather than asking refugees what they need. One mentor pointed out that refugees may not know what they need, but they often know what they want- and that this can provide the volunteer enough information to outline the skills and information they should share with the individual they are mentoring.

Volunteer Demographics

The volunteer coordinator forms or authorizes teams. In this particular agency, cultural mentorship teams are made up of approximately 6 people, who know each other socially or are members of religious or civic groups from which a team is drawn. Many are drawn from a church, where a leadership team put out a call to all parishioners. Some are comprised of members of extended families, and others are friend groups. Some are students at the same college who joined a campus club with the stated intention of working with resettled refugees. In the case of solo or small groups of volunteers, sometimes strangers are grouped by the agency. One such volunteer said “There’s one member of the team I can contact, and I got their number from the family!” In a time of urgent need, he contacted the other team member and they rallied together, on the day they met, to solve a problem. Cultural mentorship
teams frequently become close-knit social circles through their volunteer activities, offering each other support and advice as well as the refugee mentees.

The team-arrangement used at this local agency is not universal, with other agencies around the country engaged in a variety of cultural mentorship formats including family-to-family pairings, individual pairings and situation-dependent pairings (i.e. mentors offering skillsets they have for citizenship or ESL tutoring, financial literacy or job readiness preparation).

In the team formation, the agency requires: that there is at least one male and one female member (no single-gender teams), that some members have significant time available for the first months to assist in transporting the refugees to their appointments, that all members make a six-month commitment, and that members record their hours online for the agency to track and receive a matching grant. Additionally, while many volunteers practice a religious tradition and may be motivated by it in their volunteer work, proselytizing or even inviting to religious events is strictly out-of-bounds.

Motivation to Volunteer

Six volunteers have no personal or family ties to immigration, and all are born citizens of the United States. One volunteer is married to a naturalized citizen and another had spent time closely affiliated with Somali refugee youth through a high school sports team. Many of the groups have members with significant international experience who are familiar with culture shock, others are motivated to demonstrate
welcome by a religious or moral imperative. Three volunteers had lived outside of the United States for three or more years, and two more had spent multiple months on international service trips.

For those who had lived abroad, it was a highly motivational factor for empathetic engagement in refugee resettlement. Most discovered a passion to get involved as they learned more about refugees. M2 said “I learned what it was like to be the stranger when living abroad for three years” and saw “how much immigrants need a bridge person, to help them understand the culture and language and how things work.” After that international experience, she volunteered on an English teaching church mission in Mongolia which sparked her to study ESL in-depth. When her church later partnered with a school district for ESL instruction, she volunteered in the classroom and began to meet the local refugee population. She found them “inspiring” and sought to learn all she could about refugees and local resettlement and has now been volunteering for over a decade.

M1 began working with refugees “to fill the time” when living in Egypt for her husband’s work, “I learned about the opportunity from friends who volunteered with their church” and was moved by the stories she heard while assisting with resettlement applications and “knew I wanted to be a cultural mentor as soon as we returned to the United States” to assist in “building a new life.” M3 heard a presentation about a church-refugee agency partnership while visiting her uncle’s church in another state and found the idea intriguing. When she relocated to this area
she looked into volunteering and offered the agency, “put me wherever I can help.”

M6 describes himself as not-religious, but is motivated by the “personal philosophy that is you are able to help someone, you have a moral obligation to do so.” All of these volunteers mention obligations they felt that they incurred as they became aware of refugees and the global systems that create them.
Issues:

Successful integration of immigrants can be an economic and social benefit to the receiving community. Discovering friction points can help pinpoint integration assistance to be maximally impactful. Refugees occupy an intersection between the impacts of personal psychological stress caused by trauma, cultural differences and the resulting culture shock, and variations in public policy regimes and governmental institutional support structures; this intersection influences their personal decision-making and exercise of agency. Volunteer cultural mentors occupy the friction points, representing the connection between two or more social structures and their integration into a new structure.

Essential to the process of cultural integration and an inclusive national identity, building familiarity and common culture is the role of cultural mentorship. Mentors bring their understanding of the society in which they live and attempt to share functional culture with new members; they also explain the new members to their existing social network, leveraging their social status to incorporate new people into the society. This is a building and bridging process, and is dependent on the mentors’ own histories, their beliefs about society, built on their life experiences, their socio-economic status, their beliefs about refugees and their motivation for engaging in volunteering.
While their training is in common, individual mentors receive the information differently and choose different parts to focus on, investing their mentorship relationship with what they believe to be most useful. The similarities and differences in mentorship approaches will here be analyzed in relation to the background of the mentor and in the context of integrating multiple backgrounds into a coherent and integrated community making up the nation portion of the nation-state, and reinforcing for members their sense of shared interests.

*Interpreting Training and the Volunteer Cultural Mentorship Experience*

How volunteers engage with their training, and whether they consider themselves to be arms of the agency or of the community, are impacted by their motivations and goals and, in turn, impacts what type of activities they share with their mentees.

Three volunteers expressed a version of ‘having lived life here, I am equipped to teach others to do so,’ and one particularly related it to raising children. This can be seen as a form of resocialization after the total institution of the refugee camp, however M4 found this attitude frustrating in the campus club because it was “paternalistic,” and he “broke away from [the school club] because their attitude was more of teaching them the way, like this is how you’re supposed to do things and not having much appreciation for that being a process, or something you work through over time.” His reaction is in line with the idea of building new ways of relating to people in different groups, and in doing so, to further civic unity. He emphasized
learning from refugees what they are interested in, and supporting them in working toward their own goals.

The role of a cultural mentor is presented clearly in training and volunteer materials, and modified some by individuals’ backgrounds and personal experience. The duty or role categories are here broken down by frequency of mention in the interviews, pulled from open-ended responses to three questions, spaced through the interview.

1. What does a Cultural Mentor do?
2. What sort of Culture have shared together?
3. What is the most important duty of a Cultural Mentor?

Table 2: Role of Cultural Mentor (Self-Perception)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socializing (sharing a meal)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to Refugee-Led Emotional/Social Support and Problem Solving.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering Volunteer-Led Advice or Navigating Systems (most commonly financial literacy, building credit)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistical Support (such as driving to appointments)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching English</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Skills (use of household appliances)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
English language capability was the most frequently mentioned barrier or enabler to integration by cultural mentor volunteers, with English competency also referenced as the most salient influencer of successful integration, as observed by the volunteers. In response to the question, “Who in the family do you most connect with?” all mentors described the person with the highest English capability level in their paired family, and described working most intensively with that person. One mentor shared the story of a team member’s previous family pairing where no one was comfortable speaking English, “They just weren’t able to help much.” In contrast, M2 said of the father/husband in her paired refugee family, that

He is so good. I think they have a better than average integration opportunity through him, he seems really comfortable … He had lived in the sticks, just like the women, but he has this confidence, his English skills are so high that he was just like, ‘let’s go’ and he just slotted into life really easily here.

M2, M3, M7 and M8 all mentioned education and English as enablers of success. As M8 described, “Having English skills, [especially] being able to read, will help to get the best situation here.”

English enables two particular forms of cultural adaptation. The first is a practical ability to read communicate in official interactions, easing the processes of banking, driving, school registration, medical care and anywhere else where interacting with the authorities is required. The second is in the depth of informal,
interpersonal relationships. Volunteers related how much they enjoyed getting to know refugees who shared their experiences, thoughts and future dreams with them, all built on a shared language. A few mentors speak one of the refugees’ languages, and one in particular uses that shared language to build rapport with her paired family. She practices both Arabic, for her sake, and English, for their sake, on her weekly visits. Laughing over their errors, sharing their thoughts and mutual appreciation for the difficulty of learning any new language have been foundational bonds in a close friendly relationship. The evidence is there that shared language itself is the important part, rather than English specifically, for the social bonding aspect of integration.

Parenting (4) and gender expectations (3) were the most frequently mentioned cultural differences. M4 describes the parenting differences as “more screen-time, more gendered role expectations… heteronormative cultural norms” that included regular questions to the cultural mentor about his marriage prospects.

As Basanez’s (2016) research suggests, differences in relating to authority and hierarchy can impact cross-cultural relationships, particularly relating to gender expectations. M1 observed that,

Everyone [on the cultural mentorship team] texts the husband to coordinate with the women. I mean, they’re in English classes, we should be able to send basic text messages to them but they’re also so, I think culturally they don’t want to make a misstep, so they don’t want to say any wrong word
in English to us. The educational system in Africa is very teacher on top, students stay quiet. So, they barely say anything to us. So, I think it’s gonna take at least 2 years for those women to really be settled in. But at least they’re in their 20s, so they’re going to be able to develop a real life here.

M4 and M6 both talk with the children who can speak the clearest English and relate to the rest of the family through them. M4 points out that the elementary age child he works with faces “expectations that he grow up quicker” at home, while at the same time he must meet the expectations of his school.

M2 mentioned that only when the husband and kids were out during a home visit would the female adult members of the household communicate their own concerns. At other times, they would “defer to the man.” All volunteers expressed that the men in the households they interact with do the majority of the communicating, for reasons including cultural norms and English fluency. M1, M2 and M7 speculated that more intensive English language instruction offered early in the resettlement period would enable all adult members of the household to have influence over how they engage in their new lives.

One way gendered expectation expresses itself is when only one adult is on the bank accounts or insurance, which makes sense to the family if only one member of the household is managing outside tasks, but poses a risk. M2 explains it this way to her paired families: “if they get hit by a bus tomorrow, their family will have a hard time getting access to those resources.”
While gender impacts who might engage most in employment and financial planning, the local experience also reflects the literature suggesting that rural-urban transitions are particularly complicated. Besteman’s (2016) study of Somali integration in Maine reflects similar themes to the local integration experience of those from the Democratic Republic of Congo, where limited English, limited literacy in the native tongue, lack of employment experience and the related lack of socialization into employee habits, and little prior experience in financial management play a large role in integration difficulties. The adjustment from rural life to city life is complicated and involves learning many new skills. Additionally, specific training and/or certification is required for most of the better paying jobs, and that training requires English proficiency. One refugee the researcher counselled for employment readiness has 17 years of plumbing experience in his native country, but lacks the language skills to pursue the necessary certification to work in plumbing here though he is both skilled and motivated. In the family M4 works with, one adult works in another state because the pay there, in a chicken factory, is better than he can earn here, while another adult is working toward certification to be a truck driver. The impact of life experiences includes, but is certainly not limited to, gender expectations.

Gender norms come up in formal and informal training, and were a repeated topic of concern for volunteers. In training, it is emphasized that men and women are equal here in America, and that volunteers should continue to emphasize that. One mentor in particular makes a point of sharing American norms of equality and in that
role has explained birth control to female refugees as a method of empowerment and enabling life choices. In another case, a volunteer asserted with her refugee family that the female children should be able to play outside with all of the other neighborhood children, rather than clean up the home, insisting that in America, the parents work hard to enable the kids to play more. One volunteer mentioned working with a family that included a teen daughter and worrying for her that the family might marry her to someone from their origin country because she was reconnecting with old friends through the internet. Her concern was that a lack of integration into the local high school community could cause the daughter to choose an adult life somewhere else because her social ties remained transnational.

Some cultural mentors mentioned in their interviews that gender norms were broken down early in the mentorship relationship. M2 expressed that many families initially talk about keeping her separate from the men in the family, never to be alone together. She continued to explain that in most cases, after only a few weeks, when families understood that she “wasn’t trying anything with their men” they stopped worrying about chaperoning her visits. However, when asked if her husband, also a member of the team, had ever been around the women without chaperoning, the answer was a clear no. In all interviews, the male volunteers mentioned worked with male refugees in logistical processes and socialized with them, but did not work with the female refugees. Female volunteers worked with everyone.
Three mentors specifically helped with money transfers to family still in refugee camps, and in those cases, it was a highly important matter to the refugee asking for help. They did research and in one case, the refugee mentor came to a different conclusion of the ‘best’ option to transfer funds than the refugee did through their research with local refugee acquaintances. M8 remembered this as a small conflict and did not remember how they resolved to go forward, just that they did establish a way to send remittances to the family members still abroad. He recommended routinely including that information in the training so that volunteers can offer effective guidance on the subject, where he felt concerned people could easily be taken advantage of.

Two families have asked their cultural mentors how the mother can get into childcare work, which the mentors explain is job that requires training and certification. The official barriers to pursuing jobs beyond the entry level in a bureaucratic society can be disheartening to refugees as they integrate. The refugee family M6 is paired with aspires “to be merchants, open a shop [or] engage in trade as business people” which is a common occupation in their origin country, D.R. Congo. M6 has discussed this with them, and is concerned that “they will never understand the complications of opening a business here enough to be successful.”

A key area of concern for refugees in this location is the ability to drive, they often seek out driving lessons and information about purchasing a car in their mentorship relationships. Four mentors discussed driving lessons, and M4 taught a
member of the family to drive. In this community a car is usually considered essential, especially as an agentic strategy. Those who rely only on bus transportation contend with complicated and infrequent routes, and weather complications in the winter that limit their employment and social options.

The guidelines for refugee employment are to have no more than one hour’s commute, each way, including bus, bike and walking. When refugees arrive they are mandated to accept the first job offered that meets the requirements; many have long and/or complex routes to work. M1 was asked for driving lessons by a stay-at-home mom whose husband did not want to teach her, and decided not to begin that instruction, for two reasons, an uncertainty about how that would challenge the family’s social norms and, more important to her, the risk to herself or her child who is usually with her for volunteer activities. Another volunteer did offer driving lessons to a married woman, though she found the experience intimidating and discontinued lessons after a few weeks. One volunteer suggested that driving lessons, and other specialized skills, are better left to the experts: when she is asked about driving, she refers refugees to a driving school. M2 and M8 both suggested that referrals to driving education could be offered more regularly through the resettlement agency because some members of the family may become interested in driving only after the official mentorship period has ended.

While frustrations with employment opportunities are frequently mentioned, there are also areas where success is often met. Two goals in particular came up in most interviews: children’s education and home ownership. Refugee families
immediately enroll their children in school and the children are then able to begin
adaptation to their new language and learning environment in an age appropriate way.
One school district in particular has specialized in English as a Second Language
instruction (ESL) and has ongoing refugee child integration activities and
programming. There are agency volunteers who work directly with kids in the
schools and some work with the children at home to catch up to their grade-level
expectations and help with their homework. One such volunteer said many interesting
conversations come up around homework assignments for the high schoolers he
volunteers with. He related that the most difficult situation he assisted with was a
high school writing assignment about race relations in the United States. It was
difficult to explain “power and privilege differences related to U.S. history” when he
felt the students didn’t know “how they were perceived” in their “day-to-day lives” in
America, and he wanted to neither perpetuate injustice nor deny it.

M2 spoke of assisting three families through the home-buying process, one
through a local agency that serves underprivileged populations, one through a regular
real estate agent, and one currently beginning the process. Most refugees ask about
driving and purchasing cars. Both of these goals include the hidden tasks of building
credit, a process that is often new to refugees. Three mentors wish that there was
training for volunteers and/or refugees about the credit system and other financial
literacy topics.
When the reduction in the flow of refugees impacts the families already here who look forward to family reunification, it can delay them in achieving family goals. For one Nepali-Bhutanese family M2 worked with 10 years ago, bringing over two additional family groups means they now live together in a large, suburban, multigenerational home, that they have purchased through the concerted effort of the whole family. In two other cases, single family units purchased homes after approximately ten years of working and saving money since arriving in the new location.

Community building and personal relationships were the most rewarding part of most volunteers’ experiences. One of the great joys mentioned by three volunteers was being around pregnant women and new babies, they all spoke of being honored to share in the experience because it made them feel like family. Another volunteer has been ‘honored’ to attend elementary school events designed for children to bring the significant adults in their lives. While this is usually for parents and grandparents, he enjoyed the opportunity to be the child’s special adult and share in the programming that day.

*Barriers Experienced by Cultural Mentors*

Of the impediments to volunteers’ mentoring activities, the most frequently mentioned was time, with six out of eight reporting that the logistical work of the first few months took more time than they expected and two volunteers explicitly stating that was a reason they might not continue to mentor another family after this one. One
team primarily utilizes a retired, married couple who are willing to heavily invest their time into the logistical support to save other members of the team for shorter, more targeted, meetings. The initial logistics include transportation to appointments with medical, governmental and financial offices.

Additional time is dedicated to organizing the home, setting up internet and television connections, learning the local public transportation system, navigating school requirements and addressing individualized needs and interests - for example, initiating and following through with prenatal care.

The mentorship relationships varied in quality and duration. Differences in culture and social norms sometimes cause discomfort in the relationship. Some volunteers encountered discomfort when the refugee family was not able to use the support as offered, either they did not connect at the times it was offered or they were asking for support that the volunteer did not feel comfortable giving. When social connection faded it was sometimes related to time sensitivity, where volunteers felt that their time was not “respected” through mentees engaging with them during visits, or not being in an agreed upon place and time. When these became a pattern, volunteers described evaluating whether it was the best use of their own time. This process was described by three respondents, and all finished the terms of their volunteer contract with the agency, but slowed and eventually stopped spending extra time on social and personal connections. This is a reflection of the maintenance of ‘worthiness’ in the eyes of the receiving community, through socially expected
behavior. Some of the more experienced mentors offer direct information, using statements like ‘Americans take appointments very seriously and it is rude to not be on time’ while others were less direct, but took it more personally.

Volunteers mentioned concerns about different parenting behaviors and home cleanliness practices that made two volunteers hesitant to have their children present at some activities with the refugee family. One volunteer invites the family out to activities in the local area to provide an opportunity for their children to play together in a controlled environment that also acclimates the refugee mothers to the local amenities for kids.

Another issue faced by volunteers, including M2, M3, and M4, is differences in food culture that can prevent planned meals together, as in the case of one volunteer who wants to invite the family she works with for a meal but they declined out of concern that the food would not be halal (prepared in accordance with Muslim food culture rules) and two other volunteers who shared similar stories. The two who regularly share food consider that to be one of the special experiences volunteering has brought them. One volunteer related that he enjoys staying for dinner with the family he mentors, and sharing appreciation for good food has brought them closer. Food is also a source of bonding, M2 describes taking families out for a day of tourism in the area, and then being welcomed into their home as they prepare and serve a meal to thank her and her husband. Another family purchased a coffee maker,
although they don’t drink coffee, just so they could offer it when hosting their paired mentors.

Finally, some refugee families integrate into a local co-ethnic community, faith community, or other social network and stop reaching out to their official cultural mentors. This was viewed as successful integration and “growth” by volunteers, who sometimes expressed sadness at the social distance even as they were happy for the success of the family they were paired with. Four mentors had learned new recipes or cooking techniques, and felt this was a long-term benefit in their lives. Some refugee families kept in touch with their mentors, but not all, and some mentors had multiple ongoing social relationships with families they had mentored when they first arrived in the area.

Local Community

Cultural mentors do not discuss politics with the refugee families they were paired with, however all of them spoke with knowledge and passion about the current political climate and policy changes around resettling refugees in the United States. This demonstrates the mutually integrative effects of volunteering to work with refugees. One mentioned that she had “learned so much about policies and the local political system” through advocacy work with refugees. Two cultural mentors directly expressed frustration that some members of the community reject refugees, both identifying that stance as unconscionable for anyone who understands the realities refugees fled.
Cultural mentors with significant social standing in their community as well as a deep empathy for refugees spoke of the challenge of acting as a go-between. M1 described a situation in which a retired man on her team accompanied a newly arrived refugee with reasonably good English skills on his initial official appointment schedule and leveraged his social status and knowledge of systems to expedite the refugee’s processes. In a similar circumstance, M2 accompanied a newly arrived refugee man to the bank to open an account with his first paycheck and was shocked that they told him he could not access the money for 2-3 weeks. She objected and they offered him the option to take out $100 in 3 days, but nothing else for 2-3 weeks. M2 and her mentee left, opening his account at another bank without those restrictions. To M2, the experience demonstrated discrimination, particularly because the bank responded (although not enough) to her objection.

This sort of extension of one’s personal social knowledge and social capital is routine for all of the cultural mentors interviewed. In some cases, cultural mentors lost friendships when they tried to exercise their social capital on behalf of a refugee, suggesting the strain between people inside of a community when the perception of shared interests are challenged. M2 describes growing frustration with her previous church community because while they highly value prenatal life and take action to protect it, they did not respond to her pleas to extend support to newly arriving refugees. She wonders how they could value life in one context while rejecting it (back to the danger of a conflict zone or camp) in another context, even after she explained the plight of refugees. She theorizes that while they can imagine a baby,
they cannot truly imagine the life of a refugee, and that lack of empathetic imagination leads them to feel separate. Miller supports this argument, “people in poorly integrated societies are less likely to understand, … and to trust one another” (Miller 2016, 134). Cultural mentorship integrates society by increasing common understanding and builds trust in the process.

Many cultural mentors felt that misunderstandings or lack of knowledge of the refugee population was the underlying reason for any lack of compassion for them. She felt confident that if people understood what the journey of a refugee was like they would feel compelled to help. Some volunteers specifically try to share news of the refugee community, policies that impact them, and their local experiences with their social networks, with mixed results. All of the cultural mentors expressed that the experience volunteering with refugees had made them feel more connected with the local community, through relationships with refugees, community organizations, and other volunteers.

*Cultural Mentors’ Suggestions*

Cultural mentor volunteers witness individual families navigating integration into their new community, this puts them in a uniquely valuable position to observe the process of integration. They witness what works well, adapt the official guidelines to meet individual needs and observe areas where change would be have the most meaningful impact. Multiple volunteers recommended longer and more intensive English classes, M1 suggested six months of intensive and one year or more of
continuing English classes as the best way to enable refugees to enter fully into life in their new community.

One volunteer suggested that having occasional food potlucks with a designation for particular diets (vegetarian, halal) to be included in the advertising, would be a way to bring the community together. Another volunteer suggested that community events that are open to the public could broaden area support for refugees. One possible community support structure would be to hold quarterly trainings for volunteers and monthly evening potlucks for cultural mentor teams and the families they are paired with. In those venues, experts from the community could be brought in to share particular relevant knowledge, for example about taxes or medical insurance, on or topics raised by volunteer mentors as needed by their paired families at that time. Many topics came up as areas volunteers wished they were more informed of refugee-specific information: the process of building credit, buying a car or home, learning to drive, applying to college. This would be another way of capitalizing on the social relationships of cultural mentors with both the receiving community and the refugee community and building shared understanding.

Personal experience drove cultural mentors to adapt their agency training to suit unique combinations of the information the mentor believed the refugee needed to become self-sufficient, the information requested by the refugee and the unique barriers and enablers in the individual relationships. Cultural mentors with overseas experience, either as the foreigner in need of cultural mentoring or as a volunteer in a
region that produces refugees, are compassionate to the situation of refugees. Most of them believe that others in the local community would feel similarly if they had more knowledge of the situation.

Common difficulties included struggling when there was no shared language, frustrations with employment options, gender norm and parenting differences, time-sense, and lack of knowledge among volunteers in a few key areas refugees commonly express interest in. Cultural mentors wish for clearer guidance about mentoring in the areas of driving, credit building, educational opportunities, and purchasing cars and homes. Mentors also recommend more community-wide events that encourage interaction between refugees and the larger community.
CHAPTER FIVE:  
DISCUSSION

Cultural mentors are well positioned to act as integrating mechanisms for arriving refugees. This research contributes to the discussion of refugee integration into new social-cultural contexts from the perspective of existing community members. Volunteers from the local community differentiate themselves through actions to create a new culture, a third culture, that maintains existing norms while including contributions of new members (Miller 2016). Those who voluntarily engage in integration efforts rather than solidifying difference or maintaining previous status have a variety of motivations and experiences for their engagement, but share a desire to create common cause with these new members for the benefit of all members, in a bridge-building process.

Refugees arrive in possession of de jure (legal) status in the community, though in need of services to actualize that status that are provided by the resettlement agencies. For successful integration, they also require de facto (informal, or ‘felt’) integration support (Ager and Strang 2008). Joining a community fully and engaging in a long-term commitment to remain in it requires local bonds that approximate the strength of the existing transnational social connections refugees already possess (Glick-Schiller 2002). Volunteers also seek to engage transnationally through local engagement, to ease their sense of collective responsibility for international systems and resulting situations through taking on local responsibility for some of the
outcomes (Ong 2003). One volunteer expressed it as “The old, ‘think globally, act locally’.” (M4)

Cultural mentors volunteer to share in two particular ways: practical skills and social interaction. Through those two methods, volunteers take on the role of a caring person who socializes new citizens, as reflected in the three interviews that mention mentoring refugees as similar to parenting. In the ongoing process of reproducing society, necessary functional skills are taught by parents and community leaders like school teachers to create functioning citizens (Aberle 1950). Individualized and caring skills instruction is part of effective socialization of refugees into a society (UNHCR 2009) and mitigates fears of the other, who may have divergent interests or be dangerous to the status quo (Miller 2016). The essential functional skills are outlined in agency literature and are an essential part of the cultural mentorship team’s objectives in their initial contract. The goal of self-sufficiency is paramount to this strain of sharing, with the agency encouraging volunteers to ‘wean’ refugees off of practical support in the first year.

The social interaction relationship develops over time, with the potential to strengthen over the course of time spent together. Initially, respondents reported inviting the refugee family to join them in planned activities or meals. Later, the relationship was recognized by volunteers to be moving to a new level when the refugee family returned the hospitality. For the longer-term relationships, practical skills came to take a backseat to the ongoing social relationship. These community
bonds began as formalized roles and evolved into a common social relationship, the foundation of community cohesion (Dodge 2017; Miller 2016). Those who share common local interests such as the school system, local institutions and politics, are bonded together and become a political entity engaged in local governance (Carens 2013; Miller 2016).

The continuation of the mentor-mentee relationship into an ongoing social relationship depends somewhat on the volunteer’s ability to continue recognizing the refugee as “worthy” (Darrow 2016). When refugees strive and achieve, mentors are proud of both the refugee and the role they, the mentor, have played. Some relationships deteriorate when the refugee is not positioned to reinforce the mentor’s perception of the integration process, and does not respond with worthy actions (i.e. being consistently late or not taking/keeping employment opportunities). When the position of the mentor is not reinforced, the relationship tends to end alongside the ending of the official contact.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is geographic. The refugees interviewed were in a separate location in a medium-sized east coast city and had worked with a different agency with its own mentorship process, and at a different time. Their perspective remains a valuable connection to local mentors because of the specific functional tasks and information relayed- in fact, the commonality of the themes referenced
hints at greater generalizability of the conclusions that could be explored through follow-up research in additional locations.

Another limitation is the timeframe of the research, acknowledging the impact of federal policy regimes on all institutional processes including refugee resettlement. This research was conducted during a time of slowed refugee admission, additionally limited by current restrictions on countries of origin (which relates also to the urban/rural demographics of the admitted refugees and the types of mentorship needed), and the raw numbers of and funding for admitted refugees. If this research were revisited in a time of greater refugee flow, it would theoretically include more topics of mentorship that are relevant to refugees from urban spaces who are recreating an urban life rather than adapting to one for the first time. Future areas of research could include additional resettlement sites and alternative mentor team structures to identify the most effective combinations for maximizing local community engagement with the refugee integration process.
CHAPTER SIX:

CONCLUSION

To refer back to U.S. Director of Refugee Admissions Lawrence Bartlett’s observation of refugee integration, “They’ve known hardship, but they’re resilient. Frankly, they become great Americans;” the truth in this is borne out in this research. Refugees are agentic in their journey to their new community and make contributions to the nation they join. Bartlett goes on to say, of people who work with refugees, “I think it changes the lives of people who come into contact with them as much as it changes the refugees.” (quoted in Dodge 2017: 208). The process of mutual adaptation is one of choice to engage and build community, in the process maintaining the cohesiveness Miller (2016) sees at the heart of democratic nation-state governance.

One of the real risks of a failure to effectively integrate newly arriving populations in a way that makes them understood by the majority of the local population as well as ensuring they understand the local, is that the space between the state and the nation widens and the tribal form of nationalism hardens in response to fears about boundaries, change and the balance of rights and responsibilities. Having a strong sense of a national character can be harnessed if that sense seeks to incorporate new members through socialization and mutual recognition of humanity, utilizing the recognition of commonality in immigrant origins rather than emphasizing difference. If the United States is to remain proud of her immigrant
history, more citizens should engage in socializing with newly arriving members and sharing in cultural exchange with them to achieve mutual understanding. Cultural mentors, as people with knowledge of both groups are well-situated to understand the needs of integration and suggest improvements to the process that maximize its benefit to all members of the whole community.

This paper examined the intentional outreach of well-socialized local individuals with the refugee community as a bi-directionally effective practice. Volunteers who simultaneously use their status in the local community to increase empathy for the newly arriving refugees increase mutual understanding and lead to an integrated community continually reshaping to include more of those who live inside its’ boundaries.
WORKS CITED


Nawyn, Stephanie. 2014. “‘I have so many successful stories’: Framing social citizenship for refugees” *Citizenship Studies*. 15(6-7):679-693.


APPENDICES

A. Federal Regulations Defining Refugee Resettlement Program……..72
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Title 45: Public Welfare, Subtitle B, Chapter IV, Part 400 KEY SECTIONS:

§400.1 Basis and purpose of the program.

(a) This part prescribes requirements concerning grants to States and other public and private non-profit agencies, wherever applicable under title IV of the Immigration and Nationality Act.

(b) It is the purpose of this program to provide for the effective resettlement of refugees and to assist them to achieve economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible.

(c) Under the authority in section 412(a)(6)(B) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, the Director has established the provision of employment services and English language training as a priority in accomplishing the purpose of this program.

[51 FR 3912, Jan. 30, 1986, as amended at 60 FR 33601, June 28, 1995]

§400.2 Definitions.

The following definitions are applicable for purposes of this part:

*AABD* means aid to the aged, blind, and disabled under title XVI of the Social Security Act.

*AB* means aid to the blind under title X of the Social Security Act.

*Act* means the Immigration and Nationality Act.

*APTD* means aid to the permanently and totally disabled under title XIV of the Social Security Act.
Case management services means the determination of which service(s) to refer a refugee to, referral to such service(s), and tracking of the refugee's participation in such service(s).

Cash assistance means financial assistance to refugees, including TANF, SSI, refugee cash assistance, and general assistance, as defined herein, under title IV of the Act.

Desigee, when referring to the State agency's designee, means an agency designated by the State agency for the purpose of carrying out the requirements of this part.

Director means the Director, Office of Refugee Resettlement.

Economic self-sufficiency means earning a total family income at a level that enables a family unit to support itself without receipt of a cash assistance grant.

Family unit means an individual adult, married individuals without children, or parents, or custodial relatives, with minor children who are not eligible for TANF, who live in the same household.

Federal Funding or ‘FF’ means Federal funding for a State's expenditures under the refugee resettlement program.

General assistance program means a financial and/or medical assistance program existing in a State or local jurisdiction which: (a) Is funded entirely by State and/or local funds; (b) is generally available to needy persons residing in the State or locality who meet specified income and resource requirements; and (c) consists of one-time emergency, or ongoing assistance intended to meet basic needs of recipients, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or other essentials of living.

HHS means the Department of Health and Human Services.

Local resettlement agency means a local affiliate or subcontractor of a national voluntary agency that has entered into a grant, contract, or cooperative agreement with the United States Department of State or other appropriate Federal agency to provide for the reception and initial placement of refugees in the United States.

Medical assistance means medical services to refugees, including Medicaid, refugee medical assistance, and general assistance, as defined herein, under title IV of the Act.
National voluntary agency means one of the national resettlement agencies or a State or local government that has entered into a grant, contract, or cooperative agreement with the United States Department of State or other appropriate Federal agency to provide for the reception and initial placement of refugees in the United States.

OAA means old age assistance under title I of the Social Security Act.

ORR means the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

Plan means a written description of the State's refugee resettlement program and a commitment by the State to administer or supervise the administration of the program in accordance with Federal requirements in this part.

RCA Plan means a written description of the public/private RCA program administered by local resettlement agencies under contract or grant with a State.

Refugee means an individual who meets the definitions of a refugee under section 101(a)(42) of the Act.

Refugee cash assistance (RCA) means cash assistance provided under section 412(e) of the Act to refugees who are ineligible for TANF, OAA, AB, APTD, AABD, or SSI.

Refugee medical assistance (RMA) means: (a) Medical assistance provided under section 412(e) of the Act to refugees who are ineligible for the Medicaid program; and (b) services provided in accordance with §§400.106 and 400.107 of this part.

Secretary means the Secretary of HHS.

Sponsor means an individual, church, civic organization, State or local government, or other group or organization which has agreed to help in the reception and initial placement of refugees in the United States and other public and private non-profit agencies, wherever.

SSI means supplemental security income under title XVI of the Social Security Act.

State means the 50 States, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, and the Trust Territories of the Pacific.
State agency means the agency (or agencies) designated by the Governor or the appropriate legislative authority of the State to develop and administer, or supervise the administration of, the plan and includes any local agencies administering the plan under supervision of the State agency.

State Coordinator means the individual designated by the Governor or the appropriate legislative authority of the State to be responsible for, and who is authorized to, ensure coordination of public and private resources in refugee resettlement.

Support services means services provided or contracted for by a State, which are designed to meet resettlement needs of refugees, for which funding is available under title IV of the Act.

TANF means temporary assistance for needy families under Title IV-A of the Social Security Act.

Time-eligibility means the period for which FF (Federal funding) is provided under §§400.203 and 400.204 of this part, after applying the limitation “[s]ubject to the availability of funds” in accordance with §400.202.

Title IV of the Act means title IV, Chapter 2, of the Immigration and Nationality Act.


400.4 Purpose of the plan.

(a) In order for a State to receive refugee resettlement assistance from funds appropriated under section 414 of the Act, it must submit to ORR a plan that meets the requirements of title IV of the Act and of this part and that is approved under §400.8 of this part.

(b) A State must certify no later than 30 days after the beginning of each Federal fiscal year that the approved State plan is current and continues in effect. If a State wishes to change its plan, a State must submit a proposed amendment to the plan. The proposed amendment will be reviewed and approved or disapproved in accordance with §400.8.

[51 FR 3912, Jan. 30, 1986, as amended at 60 FR 33602, June 28, 1995]
§400.5 Content of the plan.

The plan must:

(a) Provide for the designation of, and describe the organization and functions of, a State agency (or agencies) responsible for developing the plan and administering, or supervising the administration of, the plan;

(b) Describe how the State will coordinate cash and medical assistance with support services to ensure their successful use to encourage effective refugee resettlement and to promote employment and economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible.

(c) Describe how the State will ensure that language training and employment services are made available to refugees receiving cash assistance, and to other refugees, including State efforts to actively encourage refugee registration for employment services;

(d) Identify an individual designated by the Governor or the appropriate legislative authority of the State, with the title of State Coordinator, who is employed by the State and will have the responsibility and authority to ensure coordination of public and private resources in refugee resettlement in the State;

(e) Provide for, and describe the procedures established for, the care and supervision of, and legal responsibility (including legal custody and/or guardianship under State law, as appropriate) for, unaccompanied refugee children in the State;

(f) Provide for and describe (1) the procedures established to identify refugees who, at the time of resettlement in the State, are determined to have medical conditions requiring, or medical histories indicating a need for, treatment or observation, and (2) the procedures established to monitor any necessary treatment or observation;

(g) Provide that assistance and services funded under the plan will be provided to refugees without regard to race, religion, nationality, sex, or political opinion; and

(h) Provide that the State will, unless exempted from this requirement by the Director, assure that meetings are convened, not less often than quarterly, whereby representatives of local resettlement agencies, local community service agencies, and other agencies that serve refugees meet with representatives of State and local governments to plan and coordinate the appropriate placement of refugees in advance of the refugees' arrival. All existing exemptions to this requirement will expire 90 days after the effective date of this rule. Any State that wishes to be exempted from
the provisions regarding the holding and frequency of meetings may apply by submitting a written request to the Director. The request must set forth the reasons why the State considers these meetings unnecessary because of the absence of problems associated with the planning and coordination of refugee placement. An approved exemption will remain in effect for three years, at which time a State may reapply.

(i) Provide that the State will:

(1) Comply with the provisions of title IV, Chapter 2, of the Act and official issuances of the Director;

(2) Meet the requirements in this part;

(3) Comply with all other applicable Federal statutes and regulations in effect during the time that it is receiving grant funding; and

(4) Amend the plan as needed to comply with standards, goals, and priorities established by the Director.

(Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 0960-0418)


§400.6  [Reserved]

§400.7  Submittal of the State plan and plan amendments for Governor's review.

A plan or plan amendment under title IV of the Act must be submitted to the State Governor or his or her designee, for review, comment, and signature before the plan is submitted to ORR.

[51 FR 3913, Jan. 30, 1986]

400.155  Other services.
A State may provide the following other services—

(a) **Information and referral services.**

(b) **Outreach services,** including activities designed to familiarize refugees with available services, to explain the purpose of these services, and facilitate access to these services.

(c) **Social adjustment services,** including:

1. **Emergency services,** as follows: Assessment and short-term counseling to persons or families in a perceived crisis; referral to appropriate resources; and the making of arrangements for necessary services.

2. **Health-related services,** as follows: Information; referral to appropriate resources; assistance in scheduling appointments and obtaining services; and counseling to individuals or families to help them understand and identify their physical and mental health needs and maintain or improve their physical and mental health.

3. **Home management services,** as follows: Formal or informal instruction to individuals or families in management of household budgets, home maintenance, nutrition, housing standards, tenants' rights, and other consumer education services.

(d) **Day care for children,** when necessary for participation in a service other than an employability service.

(e) **Transportation,** when necessary for participation in a service other than an employability service.

(f) **Translation and interpreter services,** when necessary for a purpose other than in connection with employment or participation in an employability service.

(g) **Case management services,** when necessary for a purpose other than in connection with employment or participation in employability services.

(h) **Any additional service,** upon submission to and approval by the Director of ORR, aimed at strengthening and supporting the ability of a refugee individual, family, or refugee community to achieve and maintain economic self-sufficiency, family stability, or community integration which has been demonstrated as effective and is not available from any other funding source.
(i) Citizenship and naturalization preparation services, including English
language training and civics instruction to prepare refugees for citizenship,
application assistance for adjustment to legal permanent resident status and
citizenship status, assistance to disabled refugees in obtaining disability waivers from
English and civics requirements for naturalization, and the provision of interpreter
services for the citizenship interview.

[54 FR 5481, Feb. 3, 1989, as amended at 60 FR 33603, June 28, 1995; 65 FR
15449, Mar. 22, 2000]
B. Introduction Letter, Cultural Mentors

Good afternoon volunteers!

I am reaching out on behalf of a UCCS graduate student who is volunteering with LFS and working on a research project focused on the local refugee integration process. Participation in this project is solely on a voluntary basis and not a requirement of LFS. I have included additional details from the student below and you may contact her directly with any questions or if you wish to participate. As always, you may also contact me with any questions you may have.

Hello Volunteers,

My name is Stefanie Brady and I am also a volunteer with Lutheran Family Services. I am working on a research project at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs that aims to understand the refugee integration process locally.

I would appreciate the opportunity to interview you about your experience as a cultural mentor with refugees integrating. The questions are straightforward and seek to collect experiences, lessons learned and best practices from volunteers. There is no specific amount of time or experience you need to have, all voices contribute to the best understanding of this process.

If you would be willing to be interviewed for about one hour to share your experiences with me and help me on this project I would really appreciate it! I am seeking to meet with 10 or more local volunteers over the next few weeks, individually or in groups-whichever you prefer.

Please email me or give me a call and we’ll set up a time and location that is convenient for you.

I sincerely appreciate the work you do as well as your consideration of this request, because this project is very important to me.

Sincerely,

Stefanie Brady
C. Interview Guide, Cultural Mentors

Interview Guide

1. Introductory Information and Comprehension of Informed Consent
   a. I am conducting a study of how refugees integrate into their new community in the United States. In this interview, I would like to learn how you approached cultural mentorship with refugee families as they made decisions for themselves and their family, what resources were most helpful and what you found difficult. If you have any question or concerns at any point in this interview, please feel free to interrupt. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, you may withdraw at any time, and you may choose not to answer questions. The interview should last approximately one hour and I will take handwritten notes, working with you, to create the most accurate reflection of your experiences. Please feel free to correct me when I misunderstand, so that my notes reflect your experiences as well as possible. I will audiotape this interview only with your expressed consent.
   b. Please go over the consent form. Do you have any questions for me at this time?
May I audiotape this interview?
   c. There are five sections to this interview, first, may I take down some,

2. Demographic Information:
   a. First Name/Pseudonym
   b. Age
   c. Marital Status
   d. Family Demographics
   e. Are you connected to immigration personally, through yourself or someone you know?
   f. Are you a citizen, were you yourself naturalized?
   g. What do you do?
      i. Previous Occupations?
      ii. Education?
      iii. Spouse Occupation
   3. Decision to Volunteer:
      a. What led you to this volunteer opportunity?
      i. Do you volunteer with any other members of your family? (who was catalyst/how did they begin?)
   4. Training:
      a. What does a cultural mentor do?
      b. How were you trained?
      c. Which previous life experiences of yours have been the most helpful in preparation for this role?
      i. Have you ever experienced culture shock? Does that inform your mentorship?
      d. Is your volunteer position what you imagined it would be?
5. Experience:
   a. What is the family you work with like?
      i. How many members, ages, occupations, education levels,
   b. Have they faced any particular or unique barriers to integration?
      c. What do they aspire to do?
      i. Are there barriers to them in achieving that goal?
   ii. Do you see them overcoming those barriers?
   d. What elements of culture or social practice have you shared with the family you
      work with? How did you share it? (For example, work clothing shopping? Or playdates
      with kids getting together?)
      e. In the family/s you worked with, with whom did you most connect?
      i. What did they want to know from you?
   ii. (perhaps things that could be added to future training)
   f. What do you think are the biggest or most meaningful similarities and differences in
      culture?
      i. Are they what you expected?
   g. Given your understanding of our local social and economic context, what do you
      think the best possible outcome for a newly arriving refugee family would be?
   h. What do you think the life of the family you work with will look like in 5 years?
   i. What has been a proud moment or high point in your cultural mentorship
      experience? Where you felt you made a difference?
   j. Has there been a low point?
   i. Do you have any thoughts about what would have made that better?

6. Conclusion / Reflection
   a. What do you think the most important roles/duties of a cultural mentor volunteer
      are?
   b. What has been the most helpful organization or person when you need to do
      something or learn something about this location?
   c. What barriers have you encountered?
      i. Given your experience, what do you think could be done to improve integration for
         refugees?
   d. What advice would you give to people who organize helpful services for refugees?
   e. Will you continue volunteering with additional families in the future?
      i. What motivates you to continue volunteering? (Or what discourages you?)
   f. How has the environment for refugees changed in the time you have been working
      with them? Have you observed any change to integration practice in that time?
   g. Did your training or experience change your perspective on refugees or migration?

7. What else would you like to include? Is there anything I forgot to ask about that
   has influenced your integration experiences?
D. Resettlement Partner Agreement

Resettlement Partner Agreement

We, LCS Colorado Springs, agree to work together for the resettlement of

with [group name] ________________________________

beginning ______________________. We commit to the following:

1. To provide adequate information, training and assistance for the Cultural Mentors to be able to meet the responsibilities of helping settle a refugee/refugee family.
2. To ensure diligent supervisory aid to the partner during the resettlement period.
3. To be receptive to comments from the partner regarding ways in which we might mutually better accomplish our respective tasks.
4. To treat the Cultural Mentoring Team as an equal partner with agency staff, jointly responsible for completion of the agency.

II Representative of Cultural Mentoring Team:

We ________________________________, agree on behalf of the Cultural Mentoring Team to commit to the following:

1. To assist the refugee family with the services on the back of this page. We understand that this is a moral commitment only, and that LCS is ultimately responsible for the provision of these services.
2. To adhere to LFSRM rules and procedures (as explained on the volunteer application) including hours at myvolunteerpage.com in a timely manner, and maintaining the CONFIDENTIALITY of agency and client information.
3. To maintain open lines of communication with LFSRM of any concerns or changes in the status of the refugee’s well-being.

III Agreed to:

______________________________ __________________________
CMT Representative Date

______________________________ __________________________
LFSRM Representative Date
Volunteer Linkage Visit Checklist

PA Name: ___________________________ Volunteer Name: ___________________________

Date of Visit: ______________________

☐ Introductions: Names, how long in United States, kids’ ages

☐ Define the role of a cultural mentor
  □ Mentors are not case managers: they don’t know about you cash assistance, food stamps, etc.
  □ Mentors are not paid, they taking time from their busy lives to help – talk about volunteers’ schedule limitations (work, family, school, etc.)
  □ Mentors will be your friends, answer cultural questions, help navigate community

☐ Set boundaries, clarify expectations
  □ Mentors will not give money
  □ Mentors will not give medical advice
  □ Mentors are not to be alone with young children, a parent must be present
  □ Ask family about religious and cultural restrictions related to gender, diet, etc.
  □ Are there any times that mentors should not call or visit? Talk about family’s schedule (work, school, job class, etc.)
  □ Mentors want to help the family learn to be independent, they will assist regularly in the first few months and then less as time goes on (talk about time frame of family’s program)

☐ Talk about the family’s circumstances
  □ Is anyone working? Is anyone in school or daycare? Is anyone on a waitlist for school/daycare?
  □ Does the family have a car? Does anyone need help studying to take the permit test?
  □ What are the family’s immediate/future needs? Can the family think of any? Make suggestions: i.e. Transportation (medical appts., WIC appts., ESL enrollment, etc.), ESL, homework help, set up bank account, apply for state ID, switch utilities into family’s name, library card, practice bus, extra housing/cultural orientation, outdoor activities, shopping on a budget, etc.

☐ Make a plan
  □ How often will the volunteers visit? Can family call volunteers for rides to appointments?
  □ Encourage family to not feel shy about asking their volunteers for help, mentors WANT to help them and will be happy to know if the family needs something specific
  □ Exchange phone numbers and email addresses – make sure family has voicemail set up and know how to use it, show volunteers translation apps. as needed, is text messaging an option?
  □ Set a date/time for next visit
  □ Remind volunteers about documenting activities

Client Signature: ___________________________ Date: ____________

Volunteer Signature: ___________________________ Date: ____________

LFS Staff Signature: ___________________________ Date: ____________
E. Cultural Mentorship Theme Chart, attached as additional PDF document.