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The Politics of Refugee Resettlement

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Political Science

by

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September 2018

The dissertation of Shyam Krishnan Sriram is approved.

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September 2018

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## ABSTRACT

### The Politics of Refugee Resettlement

By

Shyam Krishnan Sriram

The United States has a long and varied history of accepting refugees though a national admissions and resettlement program was not codified until 1980, primarily in response to the refugee crisis generated by the Vietnam War. Since that time, over three million people have come to the United States bearing the official designation as refugees and have become part of the fabric of this country. Yet the refugee resettlement program has mostly existed out of the public eye and has developed into a complicated power-sharing system of public and private actors and institutions, layered on the existing system of American federalism. Lost in the development of the resettlement program was a focus on the quality of the integration outcomes demanded by the federal government.

The focus of this dissertation is a study on the politics of refugee resettlement through an analysis of policies and their implementation. In particular, I am interested in the differences between two very different states, Georgia and California, to understand how each carries out their respective resettlement programs. In order to achieve this goal, I have conducted extensive interviews with 18 policy implementers and 26 Bhutanese refugees in both states. While resettlement and integration have been studied before, this dissertation makes an important contribution in the field of American Politics by focusing on the *qualitative experiences of integration* through the lived experiences and opinions of those who implement policy, and those who are the recipients of it.

I have three sets of findings collapsed into two empirical chapters. First, while Georgia and California both oversee their respective resettlement programs, which is only a

feature of 28 of the 49 states that accept refugees, the frameworks are remarkably different. Resettlement is carried out mostly at the county level in California whereas the local affiliates of the national refugee resettlement organizations (RROs) do the heavy lifting in Georgia. An important and overlooked aspect of the frameworks is also the role of the state refugee coordinator (SRC). In California, it is a former refugee, whose leadership and expertise are appreciated by everyone who comes into contact with him. In Georgia, by contrast, it is someone who has little faith amongst other policy implementers and by his own account is not actually in charge of resettlement. The importance of the SRC becomes more pronounced when one considers the role of veto points or areas where policy disagreement can quickly give way to abrupt stoppages and even reformulation of existing statutory objectives. When the SRC can minimize veto points despite a more complicated resettlement structure, as in California, the program is implemented more effectively.

The second major finding is how implementers view resettlement. While disagreements amongst implementers should not be a surprise to anyone, it was unexpected to see just how little connection there was between the hierarchical integration that was so strong in California with the implementers' perspective in that state towards resettlement. The implementers in Georgia also had similarly desultory perspectives on integration. So should it be any surprise that refugees in both states had poor perceptions of the integration efforts and the resettlement process? Not at all, I argue. The program of subnational, sub-federal refugee resettlement is implemented with so little care to the actual benefit of refugees, and it shows. Refugees in both states suffered what I have termed "integration distress" due to a slipshod, haphazard, and poorly implemented resettlement paradigm.



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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### A. Two Crises Meet

The tussle between America and its immigrant past and identity have resulted in a contentious history, one that is forced to confront a series of inconvenient truths. Mortland (2001) highlights one in particular – the confusion over what exactly makes one American. This unspoken “model” of economic dependence, learning English, and adopting certain political opinions was understood by those already in America and silently agreed upon by successive waves, became the framework with which past immigrants-turned-Americans have judged future arrivals. Continued demands for immigrants precipitate a continued demand for integration (Alba and Foner 2015). In a very recent work, Fee (2018) remarked on the unique position of refugees as not only state-sponsored guests, but those who have agreed to a program of “state-facilitated integration” (2). As a consequence, Fee (2018) became the most recent of a recent line of scholarship that views integration as the overarching goal of the United States’ resettlement program (Bloemraad 2006, Jiménez 2011, Waters and Pineau 2015, Hooper et al. 2016).

The National Academies of Science convened a 2015 panel on immigrant integration and defined it as the long-term process where newly-arrived communities and their recipient host societies “come to resemble one another” (2). The panel recognized that integration was multi-dimensional, inter-generational, participation heavy, and predicated on institutional and individual acceptance that provided equitable opportunities to all involved. It is a two-way process whereby the new and old change. Accordingly, “Integration may make immigrant and their children better off and in a better position to fully contribute to their communities, which is no doubt a major objective to the immigrants themselves” (2).

Since the United States Department of State began officially keeping track of admissions in 1975, a little over 3.4 million refugees have been accepted into the United States. In that time, nine presidents have overseen the program, and instituted changes to the refugee limit or ceiling based on infrastructural demands, public opinion, nativism, and national and international tragedies.

If we understand refugee resettlement as a vehicle for the integration of a particular class of immigrants – refugees – then it is remarkable how little attention political scientists have paid to studying resettlement. It is an inherently political process involving many types of institutions and political behaviors. Refugee admissions and resettlement were two components of federal immigration policy that seemed, by all accounts, to fly under the radar and without any public interest or political scrutiny. But that cloak of invisibility vanished in 2015, almost overnight, after the 2015 Paris Attack and public perceptions that Syrians displaced during the civil war might be more likely to be terrorists than just individuals seeking humanitarian protections (Park 2015, Pearlman 2016, Adida et al. 2017). For the first time in the brief history of the European Union, the region was faced with a massive crisis of humanitarian relief from those “outside of the European region ... During the course of 2015, over a million asylum-seekers would come to Europe” (Betts and Collier 2017, 2).

The strange politics of the time created bad policies. But this wasn't just about the magnitude of the fast-moving river of asylum-seekers; it was the “muddled and incoherent” response from European policymakers from April 2015 on that stifled any semblance of welcome that the would-be refugees desired (2). What started as a problem in Europe, swiftly became global, and eventually a uniquely American problem. The United States, in just a few

short months, was faced with two crises: an institutional response to a massive number of Syrian refugees seeking asylum, and its own existing and problematic resettlement paradigm.

Refugee resettlement is a function of government that relies on an elaborate pastiche of power-sharing between the federal, state, and local governments. It has always been political, and historically the result of two competing sets of political interests: immigration restrictionism and immigration expansionism. President Trump has focused on refugees through a series of executive orders, speeches, and tweets. Three executive orders signed in January 2017 resulted in mass protests and litigation (Fullerton 2017). In the months since, refugee- and immigration-related policy announcements and enforcements have occurred at a steady rate including the September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017 decision to cap the Refugee Admissions Program in 2018 at 45,000<sup>1</sup>; the parent-child separation policy at the Southern border with Mexico (and its June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018 reversal<sup>2</sup>); and the Supreme Court's June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018 ruling in *Trump v. Hawaii*, vindicating the "Muslim ban" and offering judicial support for Trump's executive actions. The alarming anti-refugee tone of the last two years, particularly during the run-up to the 2016 presidential election, has now spilled over into official American policy, and generated a full-fledged immigration crisis and a deepening question over refugee admissions and resettlement.

In this new, Trump presidential era, what are the politics of refugee resettlement? How and in what ways does federal refugee policy influence state policy? The purpose of this dissertation is to outline the curious case of refugee resettlement politics in the United

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-taking-responsible-humanitarian-approach-refugees/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/affording-congress-opportunity-address-family-separation/>

States. I am keen to understand the role that the individual American, subnational state plays in the implementation of refugee resettlement policy, and how those policy implementers set the stage for a resettlement arena that could positively or negatively affect the experiences of the policy recipients – the refugees.

Immigrants migrate voluntarily and have a pre-planned destination in mind; refugees are forced to migrate and will make many stops on their way to eventually being resettled in a third or fourth country of residence or may live their lives in transition in camps (Rutledge 1985). A well-defined understanding of a refugee would not occur before the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees agreed upon a definition in 1951, which the U.S. would only formalize into American law with the Refugee Act of 1980 (Coulson 2017, 86). The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is the benchmark for international policy and case law. A refugee, according to Article 1 of the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, is a person who:

“owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (as quoted in Stepick 1984, 167).

A refugee is anyone who has been forced to flee his or her country due to a well-established threat, distinguishing them from the traditional understanding of an immigrant, and has been accepted for resettlement by a second or even third country. (Aleinikoff 1995, Bohmer and Shuman 2008). By the very designation of “refugee,” it also implies that the person has crossed an international border and is away from the country of nationality, is fleeing persecution (political, religious, racial), and cannot return home (Meilaender 2001, 175).

Stepick (1984) also notes that while Articles 31, 32, and 33 of the 1967 Protocol reference



state sovereignty, a feature less discussed is Article 33's reference to "non-refoulement" i.e. "No Contracting State shall expel or return ('refouler') a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion" (as quoted by Stepick 1984, 167).

While integration may be a broad, often confusing phrase that encapsulates different kinds of expectations about how immigrants will function in the United States, it takes on a specific tone when it becomes a part of government policy, and is covered by Title 45, Subtitle B, Chapter IV, Part 400 of the federal code. As Tyeklar (2016) noted, the public and private organizations that carry out refugee resettlement in the United States do so not just through the implementation of federal goals, but in a comprehensive, discursive effort; it is about making refugees understand who they are in the American context and crafting new identities (152).

An extensive literature abounds on the policy effects of integration in Australia (Matthews 2008, Colic-Peisker 2010, Fozdar and Hartley 2013), Europe (Korać 2003, Ager and Strang 2008, Valenta and Bunar 2010, Mulvey 2010), and Canada (Simich 2003, Yu et al. 2007, Hyndman 2011). Work on the subject in the United States has been on the rise over the last 15 years (Ong 2003, Bloemraad 2006<sup>3</sup>, Allerdice 2011<sup>2</sup>, Rumbaut 2014, Tyeklar 2016, Portes and Chambers 2017, Fee 2018). Besides Allerdice's (2011) recent dissertation on refugee resettlement and its effect on the transnationalism of Sudanese refugees in Australia and the United States, no other political scientist has examined refugee resettlement in the United States from an institutional, process-based perspective.

The goal of this dissertation is to help understand the politics and policies of refugee resettlement integration in the United States through a study of Bhutanese refugee resettlement as carried out by two states with distinctive resettlement policies, Georgia and California (Most Different Systems Design or MDSD). While I am only focusing on two states, I believe the results offer a glimpse of what could possibly be a broader pattern in the American context of federalism and generate intriguing possibilities for future research. Through twenty-eight interviews with Bhutanese refugees, I have characterized a pattern of resettlement that results in what I call “integration distress.” My Bhutanese participants exhibited a general willingness, and not resistance, to engage in the integration process and be willing to receive help with job placements, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and other kinds of help to get adjusted to life in the United States. But this has also come with a great cost: systematic gaps and a general unevenness in the kind of help that these refugees get from RROs has created a wave of distress that is acutely felt by some individuals and also affected the entire Bhutanese communities in Atlanta and Oakland (where I did my fieldwork).

Federalism offers a convenient angle for this topic for precisely the reason that Derthick (2001) has commented on the “compound republic.” The Framers did not create a “pure federation” nor a “pure unitary” government, but a system of government that needed states to survive. Federalism then becomes not a consequence of American political development, but a necessity brought on by the diverse sets of attitudes that different Americans had in different corners of the fledging nation. “Acknowledging as much,” writes Derthick, “Madison remarked on the floor of the Constitutional Convention that if the states did not exist they would have to be invented” (2001, 5).

## B. A Brief History of Refugee Resettlement

The trajectory of a refugee is never easy and usually involves a transition from an IDP to a refugee over many years, many of which are often spent in camps, occasionally in a third country (Bohmer and Shuman 2008, Capps et al. 2015, Feuerherm and Ramanathan 2016). Until 1980, the United States' policy was primarily to grant refugee status or asylum (to those already here) for people trying to escape Communism and Communist governments. However, with the passage of the Refugee Act in 1980, the U.S. officially changed its criteria to be more in line with the United Nations' definition (Rumbaut and Portes 2001, Lee 2006, Bomer and Shuman 2008).

The Electric Code of Federal Regulations is explicitly clear about resettlement, which is codified in the section on "Public Welfare." Title 45, §400.1 states the primary motivation behind the refugee resettlement program is "to achieve economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible" and "the provision of employment services and English language training as a priority in accomplishing the purpose of this program" (eCRF 2018). In order to achieve this result, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), an agency within the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration of Children and Families (ACF) collaborates with various state governments (Martin 2005, Vang 2008). These states subsequently partner with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other non-profits to help refugees in different states not only get resettled, but also to get help in adapting to all the changes with living, working and hopefully, thriving, in the United States. ORR allocates federal money to the states, which then goes directly to the refugee resettlement organizations, creating a "public- private partnership with nongovernmental organizations participating in every step of the process" (Vang 2008,

11).

The ORR expects refugee resettlement agencies to assist new arrivals for at least 135 days, or until the refugees can identify other sources of support beyond the ORR itself (Gold 1992, Andersen 2008, Darrow 2015a). These integrative services include free housing; monetary assistance; education about government benefits and registration assistance for programs like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Medicare, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF); English classes, social and medical help, immigration issues, and employment (Gold 1992, Canniff 2001, Ong 2003, Andersen 2008, Vang 2008).

Such an intricate and elaborate federal-state policy and relationship should be the subject of intense academic study, but sadly, refugee resettlement is one of the least understood domestic policies in the United States, despite the United States receiving 197,341 refugees in just the last three years (Zong and Batalova 2017), and 3,391,232 total from 1975 to September 2017 (Refugee Processing Center 2017). De jure, resettlement seems fairly straightforward, but in practice, the politics of refugee resettlement in the United States is best described as “tricky.” There are four primary reasons to account for that description.

First, the U.S. has a checkered history of immigrant policy due to oscillating levels of restrictionism and expansionism. As Bellah (1989, 88) put it, “All Americans except the Indians are immigrants or the descendents (sic) of immigrants, but not all immigrants have met the same reception.” Since the 1790 Naturalization Act and the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) to the Refugee Act of 1980 and 2017’s Executive Order 13769, policy towards immigrants and refugees has constantly shifted based on domestic and foreign policy

concerns, often the result of nativist movements (Handlin 1951, Takaki 2000, Pierce and Meissner 2017, Fullerton 2017). In a recent work, Park (2018) remarked how “Americans have *always* passed rules encouraging the arrival of some people while discouraging the arrival of others” (26).

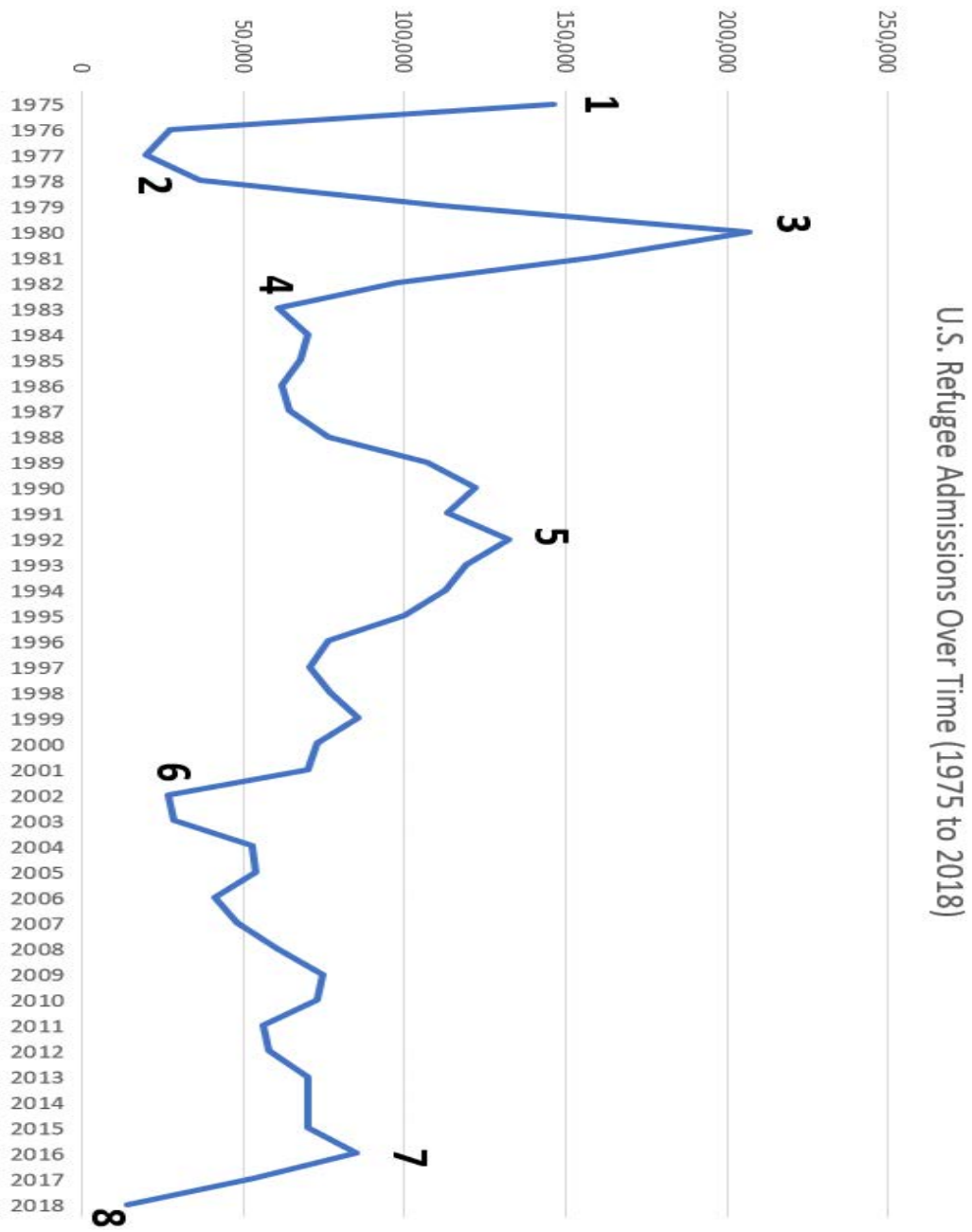
Second, this uneven policy development has directly led to resettlement patterns that have favored some refugee arrivals over others. Not all refugees arrive with identical professional experiences, levels of education, native- and host- language competencies. Those who arrive with more social capital and English skills are more likely to emigrate (Gold 1992), but refugees often arrive lacking literacy in their native languages (Capps et al. 2015). But of greater consequence is that the U.S. simply does not treat all refugees the same. This is more than just apocrypha; scholars have documented many instances in which groups that were perceived to have more resources, or political support, were given more government assistance (Gold 1992, Ong 2003, Heisler 2008, Allerdice 2011). Nowhere has this been revealed with so much disturbing clarity as the government’s treatment of refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. This is not just about issues with adjustment and integration; Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese refugees have received subpar housing, less monetary assistance, and disinterested caseworkers (Gold 1992, Ong 2003, Chan 2004, Hein 2006, Tang 2015).

Third, the politics of refugee resettlement can at least partly be explained by the reticence of the U.S. government to adopt the United Nations’ definition of a refugee until the 1980 Refugee Act., and finally bring their policy objectives with that of the global community. The United States has accepted refugees since 1939 – despite the lack of an official program at the time – and Congress has passed refugee-related legislation in 1948,

1953, 1975, and most recently, the Refugee Act of 1980 (Haines 2010). Until 1980, the United States' policy was primarily to grant refugee status or asylum (to those already here) for people trying to escape Communism and Communist governments. However, with the passage of the Refugee Act in 1980, the U.S. officially changed its criteria to be more in line with the United Nations' definition (Rumbaut and Portes 2001).

The refugee resettlement program as we know it has never been seen as problem and a *threat* to American life. Until now. **Figure 1** illustrates admissions from 1975 to 2018. Refugee admissions were exceptionally high around 1975 and the Fall of Saigon; in that fiscal year alone, the United States received 146,158 refugees. By 1977, the first year of the Carter presidency, only 19,946 refugees were admitted, primarily the result of public opposition to what was perceived as voluminous resettlement (Teitelbaum 1980, Engstrom 1997). With the passage of the 1980 Refugee Act by Carter, there was a ten-fold increase in the number of refugees accepted by the United States. The robust pace continued during the Reagan administration with a dip in the early '80s due to public perceptions of Cuban refugees (Stepick 1984, Waldinger 1984, Ong 2003). The rate increased again during the presidency of George H.W. Bush and by 1992 had reached 132,531 per year – the highest in over a decade. This pace maintained itself during the Clinton administration, but dropped substantially following 9/11, and would only reach pre-9/11 levels by the end of Obama's second term in 2016. But within two years, refugee admissions would drop from 84,994 in 2016 to 53,716 in 2017 and 14,331 as of June 2018 – an 83 percent decline. If Obama's admissions protocol was expansionist, Trump's has been one of restriction (Fee 2018).

**Figure 1: Refugee Admissions from 1975 to 2018**



### C. A Tale of Two States

Georgia and California are two of the 49 states that currently allow for the resettlement of refugees accepted by the United States government.<sup>3</sup> The United States has had an official refugee program in place since World War II, but only with international parity through the Refugee Act of 1980. Between 1975 and 2017, 3,391,323 refugees were accepted into the United States.<sup>4</sup> Georgia, which accounts for 3.2 percent of the total U.S. population, accepted 4 percent of refugees in 2017,<sup>5</sup> and has historically resettled about a tenth of California's total (Georgia Refugee Health Program 2015, 2002).<sup>6</sup> California, which accounts for 12 percent of the U.S. population, accounted for almost as much (10 percent) of all arrivals in 2017,<sup>7</sup> but has historically accepted more refugees,<sup>8</sup> than any other state (CDSS 2017).

Georgia is a bastion of Southern, conservative politics, and California, a Democrat-majority state that thrives on multiculturalism. While Georgia is home to an active bloc of minority legislators, it has, in recent years, become less known for its positive role in Black political identity, and more for its anti-immigrant tone. This manifested itself in the Illegal Immigration Reform and Enforcement Act (HB 87), a 2011 law that gave the police broader profiling powers and made it illegal to knowingly hire undocumented workers (Powell 2012,

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<sup>3</sup> Wyoming has no resettlement program.

<sup>4</sup> Refugee Processing Center (2017)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states#States>

<sup>6</sup> This number does not exactly match the California data for 1975 to 2017; rather, Georgia admissions are documented from 1981 to 2001 and 2004 to 2015.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states#States>

<sup>8</sup> 732,937



Redmon 2011). California, by contrast, is recognized as one of the friendliest states towards immigrants. Its policies have netted it the distinction of having pro-immigration policies at the state level that are often more generous than federal benefits (Ramakrishnan and Colbern 2015), and as the most pro-immigrant integrationist state in the union (Gulasekaram and Ramakrishnan 2015). In 2015, Governor Nathan Deal issued an executive order barring Syrian refugees from being resettled in Georgia (Deal 2015). California Governor Jerry Brown, meanwhile, announced that Syrian refugees would be welcome in California if they received an appropriate level of security vetting (White 2015).

Yet, Georgia and California, the former known for its sweet tea and the latter for its tamales, share one thing in common – both states oversee their respective refugee resettlement programs. As Figure 2 illustrates,<sup>9</sup> California and Georgia are two of 28 states where the refugee resettlement program is administered by the individual state often as traditional, bureaucratic departments including the Departments of Human Services, Social Services, Children and Families, and Workforce Development. In the rest of the country, refugee resettlement is administered as a public-private partnership; by private, religious-based agencies that coordinate directly with the federal government (with apparently no state-level oversight)<sup>10</sup>; or through Wilson-Fish agreements.<sup>11</sup> Currently, the only state that

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<sup>9</sup> The data in this map was drawn from two sources: the ORR, and the LGBT Freedom and Asylum Network: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/state-programs-annual-overview>

<http://lgbt-fan.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/rcusa-state-profiles-3-14-12.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Catholic Charities operates programs in Alabama, Alaska, Kentucky, Louisiana, Tennessee, West Virginia, Maine, Mississippi, and Nevada; International Rescue Committee in Montana; Lutheran Social Services in North and South Dakota; U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants in Vermont; and Jewish Family Services in Delaware and Illinois.

<sup>11</sup> These agreements arose out of the 1984 Wilson-Fish Amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act. Under this agreement, participating states do not provide cash assistance to refugees through Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Refugees are given other forms of government support “in a manner that

has no resettlement program is Wyoming, despite the *presence* of refugees (Frosch 2014, Zong and Batalova 2017). As a point of understanding, it is helpful to understand that the unit of implementation of resettlement policy is the *state*, which can decline to resettle refugees period; establish independent or unique agencies to handle resettlement; hand over all resettlement and readjustment programming to a private contractor and not even be involved in the process; or monitor and oversee refugee resettlement through traditional line-organizations and state bureaucracies, which can contract with private agencies to handle specific tasks.

This dissertation documents a comparative case study of the politics of refugee resettlement with a mixed-method approach including interviews, government documents, public laws, and historical data. Beyond the Republican partisanship associated with Georgia politics, and the Democratic affiliation in California politics, each state is ideal for comparison due to their different immigration-related policy positions. Georgia and California were chosen for this analysis primarily due to convenience. I taught at the Clarkston campus of Georgia Perimeter College from 2008 to 2014 and built up strong relationships with various refugee communities. Clarkston, nine miles east of Atlanta, is the resettlement point for *all refugees* arriving in the state, earning it the nickname the “Ellis Island of the South” (Long 2017). My doctoral work in California gave me the research base to build contacts in the Bhutanese refugee community, which has been established in Oakland. Through personal networks, I was able to establish connections and contacts with

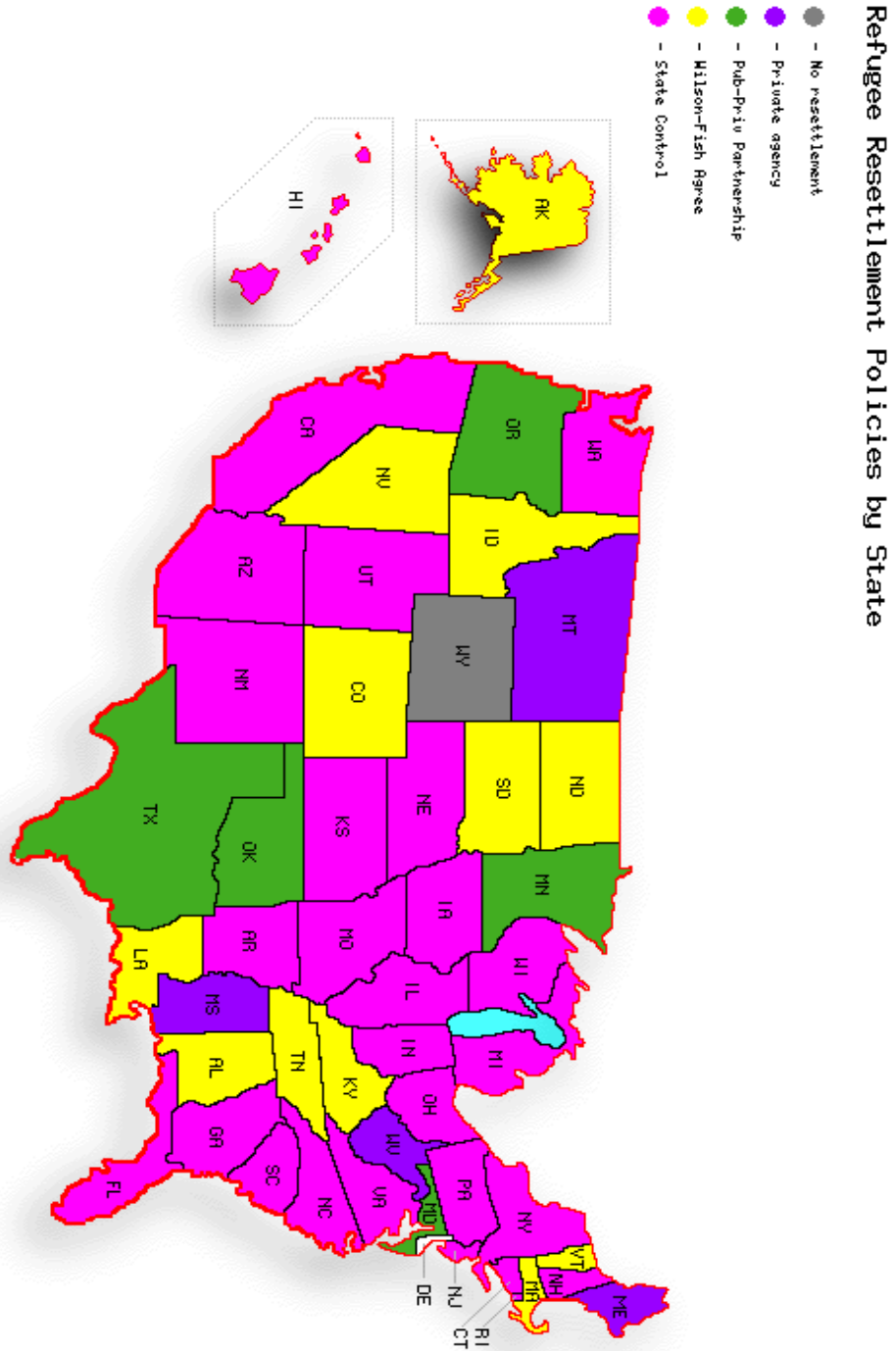
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fosters self-sufficiency, reduces the likelihood of welfare dependency, and fosters greater coordination among resettlement agencies and service providers in a community” (ORR 2010, 3).

Nepali interpreters in both states that made it convenient for me to focus my research on both states.

**Figure 2: State-by-State Overview of Resettlement Programs**

Source: djmagspwnk (c)



#### D. Of Refugees and Implementers

There is a cogent history of qualitative research in political science that aims to capture the complexity of the human experience through more than numerical trends and its analysis. Recent works have used archival research, public records, interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and ethnographies to capture the racial injustices of Latino chicken-plant workers in Mississippi (Stuesse 2016), the economic lives of slum residents in India (Boo 2012), voter mobilization after Hurricane Katrina (Han 2009), rural voters and decision-making in Wisconsin (Cramer 2016), and the political ambitions of World War II veterans (Mettler 2005), among others.

Building on the few qualitative accounts of refugee experiences in the United States (Ong 2003, Eggers 2006, Allerdice 2011, Tang 2015), my intention is to use this dissertation as a medium to offer rich data on the political attitudes and opinions of refugees themselves, and in their own words. As Fee (2018, 2) noted recently, “The migration literature oversimplifies the structure of the resettlement program and overstates the benefits that refugees enjoy.” Too often, the media paint a picture of refugees as the traumatized “other” who are somehow so unique that their past lives are obscured because of their sole goal of “becoming American” (Haines 2010, Martin 2005). This is a false narrative, primarily because it assumes that the prior lives of refugees do not matter.

Numbers matter, but so do voices. While the ORR and Urban Institute routinely track the short- and long-term success of refugees through the Annual Report to

Congress<sup>12</sup> and the Annual Refugee Survey<sup>13</sup>, respectively, they do little to capture the lived experiences of refugees. I am interested in the “qualitative integration” of refugees.

My dissertation is not a study of the making of refugee policy, but its implementation, or the post-enactment processes in individual states. In their seminal work, Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) tried to understand the implementation of federal policy in the United States as “a story of how actors with multiple, competing goals can delay, modify, scale down, otherwise change a law in ways its congressional authors might not have intended” (as quoted in Beland et al. 2016, 16). For Edwards and Sharkansky (1978), “what comes after a policy decision is just as important as the decision itself” (292). A focus on implementation, they believe, is about documenting each part of the institutional, bureaucratic, and yes, political process that accounts for how a policy, as a legislative directive, is actually carried out with agency discretion, under the guise of some kind of oversight, with goals as varied as “issuing directives, enforcing directives, disbursing funds, making loans, awarding grants, making contracts, collecting information, disseminating information, assigning personnel, hiring personnel, and creating organizational units” (293). Public policies are not self-enforcing; their implementation by human actors is a requirement.

Recent work has used comparative federal policy between the United States and Canada (Bloemraad 2006), the United States and Australia (Allerdice 2011), city-level organization (Chambers 2017), agency caseworkers (Gold 1992, Fee 2018) and resettlement agencies (Darrow 2015a, 2015b) as the units of analysis and observation. However, I have

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/annual-orr-reports-to-congress>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.openicpsr.org/openicpsr/project/104642/version/V2/view>

not found any work that used an individual state in America as the unit of analysis. and state and local employees as the units of observation. Apart from Allerdice (2011), the remaining scholarship on resettlement policy has a distinct apolitical tone and tends to divorce politics from policy. One of my original contributions in this dissertation is the formulation of the Hierarchical Integration Model of Resettlement Implementation, a qualitative model to predict the success of implementation in Georgia and California based on the leadership of the state refugee coordinators.

The Bhutanese are an ideal community of focus for this dissertation for several reasons. First, they have only been resettled in the United States since 2007-2008, allowing for a “fresh” and recent take on resettlement experiences (White House 2016). This community of refugees are actually of Nepali descent, and primarily speak Nepali and practice Hinduism (Kumar 2012). They were the target of a Bhutanese nationalism program that did not reach the level of ethnic cleansing but did put restrictions on any cultural activity not deemed to be Buddhist or in the national interest (Varenes 2008, Subedi et al. 2015). As of May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2018, a little over 96,000 Bhutanese have been resettled in the U.S, comprising over a quarter of all refugees in 2011 and 2012, and accounting for 15 percent of all refugees in the last decade<sup>14</sup> (Table 1).

Second, they represent one of the newest waves of Asian immigration to the United States; studying their resettlement and experiences could provide a valuable addition to Asian American immigration history as a point of continuation and comparison. Third, their relatively new status in the United States, as well as being non-controversial, has not lent itself to research, except in the case of their mental health

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<sup>14</sup> Refugee Processing Center (2018)

struggles, which have been well documented (Chase 2012, Ao et al. 2012, CDC 2013, Subedi et al. 2015). Finally, although their birthplace or country of origin is Bhutan, most of the younger generations have never lived there; rather, they grew up in refugee camps in Nepal (Mishra 2014). The Bhutanese refugees are ethnically Nepali and are referred to in Dzongkha as *Lhotshampa* or “People of the South” (MAR 2015, Ao et al. 2012, 2).

**Table 1: Bhutanese Refugees as Percentage of Total Admissions (2008 to 2018)**

	<b>Bhutan</b>	<b>All Refugees</b>	<b>%</b>		<b>Bhutan</b>	<b>All Refugees</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>FY 2008</b>	5,320	60,191	8.8%	<b>FY 2014</b>	8,434	69,987	12.05%
<b>FY 2009</b>	13,452	76,654	17.54%	<b>FY 2015</b>	5,775	69,933	8.2%
<b>FY 2010</b>	12,363	73,311	16.86%	<b>FY 2016</b>	5,817	84,994	6.84%
<b>FY 2011</b>	14,999	56,424	26.58%	<b>FY 2017</b>	3,550	53,716	6.6%
<b>FY 2012</b>	15,070	58,238	25.87%	<b>FY 2018</b>	2,109	14,331	14.71%
<b>FY 2013</b>	9,134	69,926	13.06%				
				<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>96,023</b>	<b>629,467</b>	<b>15.25%</b>

With the refugee interviews in place, I was then able to identify the second group of research subjects, who formed the basis of analysis for this project. By “policy implementers” I am referring to “the agents who implement these policies ... both professional service providers and volunteers” (Allerdice 2011, 7). I have expanded her definition to include federal, state, and local-level government officials involved in carrying out the refugee resettlement program, as well as nonprofit volunteers and staff with the

volunteer agencies or “refugee resettlement organizations” (RROs) that often form the lowest level of the hierarchy of refugee resettlement implementation.<sup>15</sup>

I interviewed 18 policy implementers, nine in each state, including both states’ refugee coordinators, and regional representatives for the Office of Refugee Resettlement, who act in an advisory role. Since Georgia’s program is administered out of one county, I focused on interviewing more of the staff with resettlement agencies. In California, I interviewed county-level coordinators and some resettlement staff.

By observing and understanding the behavior of individual policy implementers, who are *reacting* to the federal policy prescriptions they have been given and implementing those policies, my goal is to use this dissertation to start a conversation about why states need to be studied more – considering that a study of refugee resettlement is really a study of federalism. A skeptic might ask why study the role of states at all if refugee policy is a federal one? To her I would simply say that if the states don’t have a role, then why is there such variation in how states run their programs? If there is so much variation, what effect does that have not only on how policies are implemented, but on their recipients (refugees)?

#### E. Chapter Outline

In **Chapter 2**, I place refugee resettlement in historical context by examining United States immigration and refugee policy from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present, including expansionist and restrictionist policies related to Asian immigrants. **Chapter 3** is dedicated to theories of integration. I begin with a thorough discussion of the origins of these theories,

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<sup>15</sup> Unlike past research, I have avoided using the phrase “volag” for volunteer agency due to its similarity to the Russian phrase “gulag.” For this dissertation, I have adopted Darrow’s (2015a, b) term, “refugee resettlement organization.”



and go on to discuss “Americanization,” assimilation, incorporation, immigrant and refugee integration, and a study of resettlement as integration. My methodology is the focus of **Chapter 4** with a detailed discussion of case selection, fieldwork challenges, sampling, and my mixed-method approach including interviews, state laws, and immigration arrival data. **Chapter 5** is the first of two methodological chapters. It focuses on the Hierarchical Integration Model of Resettlement Implementation and the results of my comparative analysis of Georgia and California’s resettlement programs. My findings related to the “implementation gap” and “integration distress” are the feature of **Chapter 6**. My dissertation concludes in **Chapter 7** with an overview of my findings, a discussion of future projects, and a recommendation for refugee resettlement policy to be engineered as positive feedback design.

## CHAPTER II: A RACIAL HISTORY OF IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE POLICIES

### A. Early Challenges: American Attitudes towards Blacks and Native Americans

The history of American humanitarian policy towards refugees is rooted in American policies towards Native Americans, Blacks, and other communities that even pre-date independence from Great Britain. Schrag (2000, p.18) notes that from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the federal government had almost no role to play with immigration restriction. The fledgling republic needed workers, and the government was not about to limit its source of trade power. But where the federal government chose not to be involved, states stepped in, creating the byzantine and obfuscating framework of immigration-related federalism that lingers to this day. These laws, however contradictory, created layers of institutional racism and exclusion.

In this chapter, I draw on the rich history of racial and immigration scholars to tell a story about American immigration policy and construct an argument for the continued, and present, “racial othering” of refugees (Billington 1938, Handlin 1951, Loescher and Scanlan 1986, Higham 1993, Takaki 2000, Omi and Winant 2014). As Bellah (1989, 88) poignantly put it, “All Americans except the Indians are immigrants or the descendents (sic) of immigrants, but not all immigrants have met the same reception.”

American history from the Colonial Era has been an overwhelmingly deleterious epoch for non-White and non-Christian immigrants and people of color. As early as the 17th century, the beginnings of the Black/White racial binary had its origins in an even more destructive belief: “the commonest way to make the distinction between white and black was to speak of Christians and Negroes” (Bellah 1989, 87-88). It was unfathomable to early Americans, despite occurrences of religious conversion, that “black” could equal “Christian”; as a result, blacks were assumed to not be Christian and therefore, inadequate. The irreducible irony was not lost on Bellah (1989) either: religious hypocrisy has always existed, but America is exceptional in its longstanding use of fundamentally conflictual beliefs about the redemption of man, and who was worthy of salvation. This belief was the base layer for the view that many Americans hold to this day, and which is one feature of the recent antagonism towards Syrian refugees: is there only one American religion or many? (107). A theme that runs throughout this chapter, and dissertation, is the contradictory nature of American history towards inclusion and exclusion. For every attempt to incorporate a people there has also been some version of denial of rights, statehood, or equal protection. How else to explain the steady stream of religious minorities to the United States including Pilgrims, Acadians, Catholics, Scots, Sephardic Jews, Norwegian Quakers, and German Mennonites? (Schrag 2000, 17 – 18).

Not only were Indians denied their own elaborate myths of origin, but they became a pawn/ uncredited figure in the European settlers’ vision of what American could and should be. The inability to think of Indians as equal coupled with their rapid and vast degradation became what Bellah (1989) has referred to as “the primal crime on which American society is based” (37). The treatment of Indians, in addition to the continued denial of black rights,

was the extra prong in the assault on American multiculturalism or “the double crime” that was the whole beginning of the American story, and the history that America cannot excise or forget (37).

Before there was an anti-immigration movement, there was anti-foreign one, and before that it was the anti-Catholic or “No-Popery” movement (Billington 1938). These movements were European in origin like many other discriminatory social movements that flourished in the United States. Billington provides evidence for anti-Catholic and anti-foreign sentiment two centuries before the Mayflower, and a long, long history of “quasi-historical propaganda” that spread quickly with the advent of the printing press, and allowed fervent, fecund institutional discrimination (2). As early as 1536, Martin Luther’s anti-Catholic rhetoric fueled hysteria: “all who have the spirit of Christ know well they can bring no higher or more acceptable praise offering to God than all they can say or write against this [Catholicism] bloodthirsty, unclean, blasphemic whore of the devil” (2 – 3).

Bellah (1989) doesn’t go so far as blaming the Framers for the complicated mess that would ensue, but falls just short, saying instead that much of this country’s problems are the result of “utopian millennial expectations” (xvi). American exceptionalism is based on a hubris developed from a complicated and contradictory legend that has persisted since the Revolutionary War (Bellah 1989, Billington 1938). During that crisis, two ideologies began to fuse together, which would only unite by the Civil War – “Protestant covenant theology and republic liberty” (Bellah 1989, 52 – 53). That legend is the basis for much of the fallacy associated with the false promise of the American Dream – anyone can make it, despite their pre-American or pre-immigration history, if they are willing to put in the work. “America as

an asylum for the oppressed,” he writes, “is one of the oldest elements of the national myth, part of the millennial meaning of the American experiment” (88).

Takaki (2000) articulates a theory of “iron cages” to explain how 19<sup>th</sup>-century Americans created a self-enforced, Protestant work ethic (a la Weber) to explain the ideology of republicanism that flourished in America after independence and up to the Spanish-American War. These cages, “emerged in American society as the self was placed in confinement, its emotions controlled, and its spirit subdued” (ix). Republicanism, was uniquely American and divinely-ordained, and would only succeed with “rational, ascetic, and self-governing individuals” (ix). By placing themselves in “iron cages,” Americans were setting themselves up for a future predicated on economic self-interest first and foremost.

One possible challenge to Takaki’s (2000) understanding of “iron cages” is in his avoidance of the immigrants’ difficulty in getting used to a specific and highly individualistic American way of life. European immigration resulted in endogenous and exogenous shocks, and “took these people out of traditional, accustomed environments and replanted them in strange ground, among strangers, where strange manners prevailed. The customary modes of behavior were no longer adequate, for the problems of life were new and different” (5). If we could abridge Handlin (1951) and Takaki (2000), we might be able to say that the process of Americanization that would-be Americans had to undertake was not only one of defining who belonged and who did not, but also of giving up the communal ways of the Old World and abrogating them with the steel-eyed, humorless, and individualistic iron cage of the New World. Sooner than later, European immigrants, gave up fighting the pervasive loneliness to accept that it was part of being American: “all relationships became less binding, all behavior more dependent on individual whim” (Handlin 1951, 155). Becoming an American, noted

Higham (1993), was predicated on being able to face hardship with aplomb because everything was uncertain. Assimilation demanded “a dependence on the self and the immediate family more than the wider community; a high respect for personal achievement; [and] a tendency to conform to the values of peers and neighbors instead of holding stubbornly to ancestral ways” (5).

Besides foretelling Bellah’s (1989) notion of Americans wanting sin and virtue, heaven and hell, concurrently, Takaki’s (2000) theory of “iron cages” also sets the stage for thinking about race, welfare, and dependence, which also foretells later arguments about immigrants and welfare. Not only were non-Whites in colonial America presumed to be non-Christian, but they were also believed to be lacking in the self-control needed for republican virtues and living.

Since people of color lacked rationality, allegedly, they could not constrain their emotions, and were thus dependent on whites to rule them. Blacks and Indians, in particular, were often described as “child-like” or “savage,” and incapable of deciding their own fates because they lacked the clear, Christian, rational thinking of whites. Worse, argues Takaki, is that whites often assumed roles of brutality over non-whites because the iron cages facilitated an internal belief that violence was necessary and required, especially over subjects who could not control themselves (81). It would not be a stretch to surmise that the continued prevalence of iron cages in twenty-first century might account for recent executive language about immigrants from “shithole” countries wanting a place in America (Mascaro 2017) or the plan to expel 200,000 Salvadorans from the U.S. (Miroff and Nakamura 2017). Since “these people” cannot take care of themselves due to the lack of a republican authoritarian

will, they must be controlled by the United States government, whom in turn can dictate when immigrants meet certain criteria, and when those criteria can be rescinded.

Deloria (1998) also comments on this perplexingly naïve outlook of 18th and 19th century Americans who convinced themselves that the country, already inhabited, was Eden and theirs for the taking. Despite recognizing the fecundity of the land and the richness of native culture and customs, early Americans could and would not recognize Indians as capable of anything more than “noble savagery” (4). This resulted in a curious and devastating ideological binary for American Indians. Their “savage” ways made them the proper subjects of control by settlers and colonists, but their “nobility” was to be desired, copied, adopted, and then repackaged by whites in a way that was less savage because it had now been repurposed and cleaned as “American.” The Boy Scouts of America, Sons of Daniel Boone, New York Tammany Society, and the Gordian Knot were all established to achieve this goal by “playing Indian.” Actual Indians were then judged as not being “Indian enough” compared to what settlers perceived an Indian to be (Deloria 1998).

But here is where Bellah (1989) introduces two distinct points. First, the opposing force to the American belief in the limitless potential of an independent America was the expectation that “heaven” could co-exist with the desire for “hell.” While the Eden view existed, so too did the nightmare and that conflict is what set the myth of origin off to a rocky start. The dream of the lasciviousness of America where earthly delights could be had by anyone willing to work? In other words, God and Satan, or heaven and hell at once. That people arrived in America for a multitude of different reasons – for self-help or self-wealth – is beyond discussion, but what is less explained is how these reasons would create in their

own ways the insurmountable tension that would grip early America, and which exists in an even more virulent form now:

Second, Bellah breaks with Deloria (1998), by pushing the notion that America as “Eden” was generated by early Americans’ knowledge of the Bible. This emphasis on Scripture was a consequence of a lack of a national, American form of the arts; by not replying on European literature, Bellah (1989) says that early Americans had two primary sources of entertainment: “the sermon ... and the hymn” (53). This is primarily the reason for the success of two key pieces of early American “art” – “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” and President Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural. The reliance on Scripture as literary covenant, and presidential jeremiads as Scripture, would set the stage for two hundred years of American popular thought. Such a Christian and biblical awareness gave settlers an immense confidence that their new home was indeed divinely ordained, and “the pristine newness of the ‘new world’ seemed to be heavy with an even more radical newness; the coming of the millennium, the fullness of times, when God would create a new heaven and a new earth beginning right here in North America” (61). Billington (1938) also references the 19th-century Americans’ dependence on the Bible, but for a different reason: using it as a reference text gave nativists a tool to convince other “church-going Americans” that border control was a necessity (53).

#### B. Nativism, Immigration, and the Rise of Restrictionist Policy

Park (2018) remarked how “Americans have always passed rules encouraging the arrival of some people while discouraging the arrival of others” (26). The 1790 Naturalization Act, one of the first major pieces of legislation created by the tyro U.S.



Congress, which explicitly listed out the kind of person who could become an American – someone who believed first and foremost in the rule of law and the idea of a representative democracy. Takaki notes that with the passage of the 1790 Act, the fledgling U.S. Congress began a process, which continues to this day, that “explicitly linked race to republican nationality” (2000, 15).

Higham (1988, p. 97) described the President John Adams-signed 1798 Alien Acts as America’s “first restrictionist policy.” The law, whose creation was instigated by nativists, put limits on the political participation of naturalized citizens, who were seen by nativists – or natural-born citizens – as political threats. When laws such as the 1798 Act failed to control immigrants and immigration, then it became a question of restrictionism (Higham 1988).

Higham (1988, 4) saw nativism as a uniquely American phenomenon. It was generated by the hostility of white settlers on the East Coast to new arrivals and the fear they would be unable to assimilate to a “distinctively American way of life.” This in turn made white Americans presume that immigrants would be disloyal. It embraced different types of Americans who were attracted to the idea of a way of life where jingoism could also be understood as a kind of singular religious purity. In that way, a nativist could also be an evangelical, a Baptist, or even an atheist. Billington (1938) notes that anti-foreign and anti-Catholic sentiment preceded independence by two centuries and were essentially cultivated in and exported from Europe. These early forms of discrimination later became reactive in nature and allowed the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant majority in America to rely on this “Old World” way of thinking when it came to restricting emigration to the United States, while simultaneously pushing for a belief that a wholly “American” way of life was

endangered by constant immigration (Takaki 2000). In other words, nativism was founded on anti-foreign and anti-Catholic attitudes, and was also the basis for the rise and influence of the Know-Nothing Party, starting in the mid-1850s (Billington 1938).

Higham (1993, 1988) argues that it wasn't just about immigrant loyalty; nativists saw themselves as more than patriots, but the heralds of an ideological movement that collapsed nationalism on top of religious zealotry with a goal of maintaining a specific vision of what America should always be. "Patriots," he wrote, "rejoiced in the strength of a universal heritage expected their nation to perform a universal service ... the concept of a national mission fused Christian with democratic values in the heat of the American Revolution" (1988, 22). The best people to achieve this mission were those of British and Anglo-Canadian extraction, and the worst were Native Americans, Blacks, Asians, and those persons not considered white or European. These threats to the nativist mission were consequently the dependent, servile, weak, non-Christian, and unassimilable.

Emigrating from Europe had its own hurdles to overcome before one could achieve American authenticity. The first waves of American nativism in the 1830s and 1840s were a reaction to Eastern and Southeastern European immigrants, who were perceived as a "particularly insidious representative of the whole foreign menace" (Higham 1988, 87). Nativism became a major political movement with its united opposition to the arrival of large numbers of Chinese male laborers predominantly in the Pacific Northwest (Park 2018, Wong 2017, Motomura 2006, Zeidel 2004, Higham 1993). The Sinophobic hysteria triggered by their presence united Americans across the land as well as Democrats and Republicans in West Coast pogroms that included everything from boycotts to mob violence (like

lynchings). Wrote Wong (2017, 2), “In the era of Chinese exclusion, being American meant not being Chinese.”

American response to the Chinese marked a turning point in history. For the first time, questions of citizenship, immigration, race, citizenship, and politics were all debated simultaneously, this despite the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 and its inclusion of birthright citizenship (Bloemraad and Ueda 2006). With the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, American became a “gatekeeping nation” (Lee 2006). The government made claims, often unsubstantiated, about the virtues of immigrants (as a cover for racism) and used the legislative and judicial branches to enforce these beliefs. Higham (1993), however, remarks that while the primary purpose of the Act was to limit Chinese immigration based on racist fears, the law also levied a 50-cents per arrival fee and gave the federal government more of a say in denying entry to the United States for any reason, explicitly provide by statutory power or not (38).

From 1907 to 1911, the nine-member Dillingham Commission undertook a national and congressionally-funded study of immigration. Created by President Theodore Roosevelt, its impact would be felt for two decades passed its official end (Zeidel 2004). The commission came out of the Progressive Era and its proponents’ belief that any social issue could be tackled in a rational, scientific manner. So too immigration, which Progressives saw as causing deep economic and social crises in America, the host country, for these immigrants who were often from much poorer nations of origin. “Advocates for the working class who viewed new arrivals as a threat to high wages and ‘an American standard of living’ supported restriction as a means of protecting labor’s interests,” wrote Zeidel (2004, 10).

“Immigrants, they contended, in comparison to natives, would live under wretched conditions and work for pauper pay.”

Immigration became an issue primary of poverty alleviation, which the Commission decided to tackle, literally, at the source. If immigrants were overwhelmingly poor and continued to remain so once in America, then it was up to the government to restrict who was allowed to come, and under what conditions. Progressives, noted Bloemraad and Ueda (2006), believed that civic education, English classes, and political participation could make anyone “American”. These early ideas, they contend, form the basis for even current discussions over “good citizenship” (41). While many of the commission’s recommendations were never codified and/or fell out of favor with successive administrations, Zeidel (2004) notes that the long-term influence of the Dillingham Commission would only be felt during World War I and the Red Scare, when “those who did not fit traditional white, Anglo-Saxon American norms became the targets of mistrust, suspected malefactors whose potential for disruption had to be checked” (145). For Abrams (1984), the spike in nativism following the First World War led immediately to the passage of immigration quotas, seen as necessary “to preserve the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ nature of the country” (108). The rallying cry of the post-war period was “100-percent Americanism” (Higham 1993, 53).

The Commission coincided with the passage of another dubious piece of early twentieth century immigration protectionism – the 1907 Gentlemen’s Agreement between the United States and Japanese governments to maintain a diplomatic relationship between the two states (Abrams 1984). Martin and Houston (1984) mention that the Dillingham Commission and its antecedents – the 1921 Quota Law, 1924 Immigration Act Origins Law, 1952 Immigration and National Act – allowed for successive, preventive restrictionist

measures to limit entry. This was done in three steps, first by refusing to facilitate immigration, then by imposing qualitative restrictions on immigrants, and finally by limiting the number as well as the kind of immigrants accepted each year” (30).

Wong (2017) documents state and federal courts hearing 52 race-related immigration cases between 1878 and 1944. All dealt with the inclusivity versus exclusivity of American citizenship based on notions of whiteness, which was denied to Chinese [*In re Ah Up* (1878)]; Hawaiians [*In re Kanaka Nian*, 1889]; Burmese [*In re Po*, 1894]; Japanese [*In re Saito* (1894), *Bessho v. U.S.* (1910), *Ozawa v. U.S.* (1922)]; Koreans [*Petition of Easurk Emsen Charr* (1921)]; Afghanis [*In re Feroz Din* (1928)]; Arabs [*In re Ahmed Hassan* (1942), *Ex parte Mohriez* (1944)]; and Filipinos in five cases between 1916 and 1941 (Wong 2017, p. 25 – 26). Asian Indians and Syrians in separate cases were deemed to be White, and then different judges ruled they were not (p. 26). The desire to achieve the government’s classification of “free white persons” brought additional claims to the United States Board of Immigration Appeals and courts from plaintiffs of Hindu, Armenian, Parsi, Tatar, Turkish, Kalmyk, Hawaiian, Thai, Iraqi, and Palestinian descent, which Coulson (2017) has dubbed “racial eligibility cases” predicated on “racial eligibility discourse” (xi). These cases at both the federal and state levels laid the groundwork, according to Park (2018), for the current conflicts over immigration federalism, and were also complicated further at that time by *local* governments who used their jurisdiction to remove groups of people (26).

These citizenship-related cases and legislation were questions of participation because naturalization leads to membership in the polity. In his work on “precitizenship,” Motomura (2006, p. 8) remarked that every applicant for citizenship from 1795 to 1952 also had to submit a letter of intent to become a citizen. Immigration, he believed, was once seen

as a transitional period, and people in the country lawfully were perceived as transitioning towards full citizenship. That way of thinking is gone: “we Americans no longer view immigration as transition, not do we think of immigrants as Americans in waiting. In fact, the opposite is true; we treat new immigrants as outsiders until shown otherwise. They may later become citizens, but we no longer treat them as if they will” (Motomura 2006, 9). It might be important to note here that not all immigrants wanted to become citizens. In his classic work on Italian immigrants in Harlem, Orsi (1985) describes the Italian way of thinking about naturalization as “half-citizenship” by delaying the process as long as possible or only partly filling out paperwork with no intention of ever actually applying.

### C. The World Wars and the Era of the Refugee

In his 1951 classic, Oscar Handlin described the United States as “the land of separated men” (305). The very act of leaving their countries of origin with no immediate plans of return became the prototype for immigrants; it necessitated a government policy aimed at designating who was qualified to gain entry, and who could become American through a series of institutional hoops where more than just fealty and loyalty were tested. This utterly subjective way of thinking became the basis for immigration policy that changed rapidly at the whims of policymakers who could change their minds whenever they desired. But immigration to the United States would change forever with the rise of Nazism in Germany and the creation of a whole new class of people who would be officially recognized as refugees, whose need for shelter in America would not simply be due to seeking a better life, but out of desperation due to political persecution. While refugees or political immigrants had begun arriving in the United States as early as the late nineteenth century,

and specifically after the Russian Revolution of 1905, they would only become an official “statistic” for official American policy directives with the advent of World War II.

As early as 1917, the United States government recognized that not all seeking admittance to the United States did so voluntarily. Coulson (2017) notes that the Immigration Act of 1917 exempted one class of immigrants from the literacy test that was a feature of this legislation: victims of “religious persecution” (86). The 1917 Act was also known for a more dubious reason, which allows us to see the contradictory nature of American immigration policy early on: it also created the “Asiatic barred zone” to limit emigration from certain countries not seen as desirable “exporters” of future Americans (Ong 1998, Schrag 2000, Junn 2007). Despite a presidential veto from Woodrow Wilson, Congress was successfully in its override and passed the Act, which created a literacy test purposefully to limit immigrants without a basic knowledge of English; bar Asian immigrants from countries other than China or Japan; exclude people who had previously belonged to revolutionary organizations; and allow for the swift deportation of newly-arrived immigrants who fomented discussion of revolution (Higham 1993, 52).

World War II created a situation of desperation for the more than 8 million Europeans who needed immediate and permanent housing; this number included “survivors of extermination camps, prisoners of war, forced laborers from states conquered by Germany, and thousands who fled before the advance of the Russian Army” (Stepick 1984, 169). Yet despite the massive scale of displacement, discrimination would mar the earliest of the formal discussions on refugee admissions.

Religion had a role to play in the American refugee program, just as it did in early American debates and understandings over who belonged (as mentioned earlier). The public

image of Americans being open to *all* refugees is apocryphal at best; Haines (2010) and Dinnerstein (1982) note that even in 1945, there was less public support for accepting Jewish displaced persons versus Christians, and that this anti-Semitism manifested itself in hesitation to accept President Truman's directive in 1945 to accept refugees fleeing Europe. In his analysis of the history of political asylum in the U.S., Schrag (2000, 22) admits that while the United States accepted a quarter of million Jewish refugees between 1933 and 1944, much more could have been done. He notes that the rise of Hitler coincided with the aftermath of the Great Depression and "the American restrictionist machinery" (21).

Truman's directive would be followed by several acts of Congress like the 1948 Displaced Persons Act, the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act, 1953 Refugee Relief Act, and the 1975 Indochinese Migration and Refugee Assistance Act that were each passed in response to specific groups seeking resettlement in the United States (Haines 2010, Abrams 1984). Roger Waldinger (1984) determined that Jewish refugees (after the Second World War) were followed by Hungarians, then a million Cuban refugees in three waves, and then almost 400,000 "Indochinese" after 1975 (213). Following the 1953 Act, for example, the U.S. accepted 38,000 Hungarian refugees and initially housed them at Camp Kilmer in New Jersey (Haines 2010, 143). With the 1962 Migration and Refugee Assistance Act, the government also began to offer refugee aid, this time to Cuban refugees, which included "cash assistance, health care, education and training (including refresher courses for professionals)" (Haines 2010, 144). This aid, though, often came with a huge catch for states who did not receive the funds directly and had to ask for reimbursement. Chan (1991) describes another community-specific piece of legislation, the 1975 Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act, which allocated funding to volunteer agencies and states – the latter whom needed to ask for



compensation – until the federal funding abruptly ended at the end of 1975 and then reauthorized again in 1978, putting states in pecuniary jeopardy (128 – 129).

Until 1980, the United States' policy was primarily to grant refugee status or asylum (to those already here) for people trying to escape Communism and Communist governments. Stepick (1984) determined that just in two years, 1975 and 1976, the United States granted asylum to 5% of those fleeing rightist regimes and 95% of those fleeing Communist countries" (173). After the passage of the Refugee Act in 1980 by Congress and President Jimmy Carter, the U.S. officially changed its criteria to be more in line with the United Nations' definition (Rumbaut and Portes 2001, Lee 2006, Bomer and Shuman 2008, Tang 2015, Park 2018). The Refugee Act was the baby of Senator Edward Kennedy, and the consequence of decades of "legislative-executive tension" between branches of government over whom should be let in to the United States and who had the power to make those decisions (Schrag 2000, 25).

Yet, even in a new era of codified refugee policy, the U.S. government has historically not applied equal standards to all groups. Occasional foreign policy "thaws" have given certain previously disparaged and denied groups, brief moments of clarity, allowing them to remain including Ugandans in 1973, Nicaraguans between 1978 and 1979, and Iranians after the Revolution and until 1981 (Loescher and Scanlan 1986, 213). Refugee quotas also were not set equitably across the globe with Southeast Asians getting preference over Haitians and Central Americans. As Rep. Romano Mazzolli said during a 1986 committee hearing, "The Refugee Act of 1980 was intended to eliminate ideology and geography in our refugee admissions program. We seem not to have accomplished this most important objective" (216).

The first wave of refugees arrived without any government assistance; those who came just before World War II often did so with individual or private-sector support (Haines 2010). Even after the war, certain communities have received sponsorships not available equitably across the board; Loescher and Scanlan (1986, 213) mention the role of the American Israeli Political Action Committee (AIPAC) in securing assistance only for Jews from USSR and Amnesty International helping Chileans fleeing the rule of General Pinochet, respectively.

Historically, American immigration policy has created a ripple effect of expected and unexpected consequences. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act institutionalized racism and allowed the federal government to use legislation as a mask for pejorative views on racial differences (Lee 2006). Issues with Chinese immigration then became the basis for antagonism towards Eastern European immigrants. These policies affected the lack of support for early refugees/political immigrants. Differing attitudes towards which communities qualified as refugees resulted in differing policies over acceptance, and less support for Central American and Mexican refugees set the stage for current questions over illegal immigration (Lee 2006).

The Refugee Act of 1980 would codify American policies towards refugees and provide more institutional (see political) cover for policymakers after years of playing catch-up with international treaties and charters, as well as other countries' more progressive refugee-related policies. But the fact it has not been updated or abrogated by later comprehensive legislation indicates to some extent how slow the United States has been to revise policies and statutes in the face of newer phases of immigration. Thirty-eight years later, the Refugee Act stands as a time-bound and outdated law that could not have

anticipated the changing nature of immigration, the rising number of “irregular” and “undocumented” immigrants, the fundamental shift in who qualifies as a refugee, and the role of the United States as a destination for those seeking more than just political asylum.

Despite the obdurate pace of new refugee-related legislation, the 1980 Refugee Act remains the law of the land. In the next chapter, I will discuss the history of immigration theory, its role in American public policy, and its application through refugee resettlement.

### CHAPTER III: IMMIGRANT ASSIMILATION AND INTEGRATION

Bloemraad and Ueda (2006) defined American identity as a product of American attitudes toward immigration, as well as immigration patterns. “Understanding such choices, and their fluctuations over time, illuminates the dynamics of immigrant incorporation and American nation-building,” they wrote (2006, p. 36). One of the specific ways to understand or map these patterns in immigration is to study debates over integration of immigrants and refugees in the United States. Chapter 2 began this discussion with a history of immigration policy and its accordion-like movement from restrictionism to expansion. This chapter will focus on the origins of integration as a tool (or weapon) of political change. Drawing on Wieviroka (2008), Alarcón et al. (2016) conceive of debates over integration at three levels: integration in historic perspective; modelling integration; and turning integration into public policy (12). I will highlight all three levels in this chapter and examine integration outcomes and refugee resettlement at the end.

### A. Integration in Historic Perspective

The integration of new arrivals into a wholly American way of being has gripped the popular imagination as a point of debate and policy since the founding of this country. In his systematic takedown of the establishment of America [see the American Myth], Takaki (2000) reexamines the legacies of key figures in early American history. One of those was Benjamin Rush, the Father of American Medicine. Rush was terribly fearful about a multiracial society; he believed that there were only three paths of republican instruction for the public: “education, motherhood, and medicine” (21). The education of new immigrants as part of a process of “Americanization” was popular by the 18th century, but only achieved national recognition by the early 20th century.

Another American founder scrutinized by Takaki (2000) is Thomas Jefferson, who believed that the only way republicanism would survive and thrive in America would be through “republican machines” which would be responsible for inculcating American values into new arrivals. Jefferson was allegedly content with this formula if immigrants would be homogenized. Like Rush, Jefferson also believed in the value of education, but both men also had a very specific idea in mind when it came to who “looked” American. Jefferson also believed that blacks, through education, could become white, but only as far as habits, manner of dress, speaking, etc.

Opponents of assimilation (and subsequently incorporation or integration) represent two wildly-diverging perspectives: those who believe immigrants and the foreign-born simply can never become American, and those who believe it is just too difficult to integrate into an American way of life. The latter grouping tends to view assimilation as

unrealistic. Levitt (2007) notes that Americans presume newly-arrived immigrants will simply cut off all ties to countries of origin, driven by a zeal to want to become American immediately, and anticipate a relative “ease” with the transition.

Writing almost sixty years ago, Handlin (1959, 76) noted that “migration did not simply wipe away their [immigrants’] earlier experiences;” their pre-arrival lives had to be modified and transitioned into new American lives, not simply abandoned and born again. The former group of anti-integrationists often hold the view that immigrants cannot integrate because the American identity is something so remarkably different from anything else that new waves of communities hitherto unseen in the U.S. do not have the basic characteristics requisite for compatibility. By emphasizing their uniqueness as distinct from Europeans, early Americans were able to argue in turn for a distinct American character that would make the republic wholly different from anything seen until that point (Handlin 1959). Bellah (1989) notes that Benjamin Franklin, for all of his historic popularity, was enormously fearful of non-Anglo Saxon immigrants bespoiling his country because of their inability to integrate. Franklin was one of the earliest proponents of “Americanization.”

The 18<sup>th</sup>-century writings of Michel Guillaume St. Jean de Crèvecoeur are often cited by historians as inspiring much of the thinking of the time towards new immigrants (Billington 1938, Handlin 1951). In a famously-attributed statement, he said,

“The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas and form new opinion. From involved idleness, servile dependence, penury, and useless labor, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample substance – This is an American” (as quoted in Handlin 1959, 149)

Franklin and Crèvecoeur are held up as early proponents of Americanization precisely

because they represented the differing viewpoints; while both were early arguers for America as a “nation of immigrants,” Franklin saw immigration as a form of balkanization and loss of racial purity, while Crèvecoeur was optimistic as long as there was a commitment to assimilate into a new “race of man” (Lee et al. 2006, 1 – 2).

As early as 1820, Americans began to publicly voice their displeasure with the increasing number of immigrants, particularly from Ireland, who were coming into the United States (Billington 1938). While these new immigrants were seen as too poor, and too dependent on self-help agencies, the primary source of rancor was their Catholic faith, which resulted in the beginnings of the “No-Popery”, anti-Catholic movement. Billington (1938) notes that despite the U.S. benefitting from all this immigration, nativists found a convenient target to hate, and began to argue whether the national identity could be maintained with all this new blood.

As the United States slipped into the 20th century, the federal government took the lead in establishing more centralized standards for the kind of immigrant America wanted and the procedure by which those select immigrants could be converted into prototypical Americans. In 1906, Congress established the U.S. Bureau of Naturalization, sparked by the insistence of the immigration integration trailblazer Frances Kellor (Higham 1988, 241). By the beginnings of the twentieth century, nativism became mainstream and its influence seeped innocuously into many aspects of American government life. Nowhere was this seen more than the Americanization movement. While the nativists of the nineteenth century had been content to see immigration policy played in out as a series of expansionist and restrictionist waves, the growing mistrust of immigrants was predicated on the public opinion, widely held, that some immigrants did not want to or could not assimilate for a

variety of reasons. This jarred with the “confident faith in the natural, easy melting of many people into one” (Higham 1988, 234).

Bellah (1989) recounts a famous incident in the 1920s just outside Henry Ford’s factory in Dearborn, Michigan: “A giant pot was built outside the gates of his factory into which danced groups of gaily dressed immigrants singing their native songs. From the other side of the pot emerged a single stream of Americans clad in the contemporary standard dress and singing the national anthem” (94).

But a truly assimilationist curriculum for new immigrants would only be motivated by World War I, and the “sudden” realization that German Americans were still German, and what really separated “good” immigrants from “bad” ones was not just citizenship, but also learning English (Motomura 2006, Higham 1993, Higham 1988). Suddenly, the cultural heritage that so many Americans had maintained – speaking English and German, English and Greek, English and Italian – gave way to the cold reception towards all non-English tongues. To be American, you had to only speak English. The goal, after World War I, was “100-percent Americanism” (Higham 1993, 53). English fluency became the most visible (or audible) sign of national unity causing President Theodore Roosevelt to quip, “Hereafter we must see that the melting pot really does not melt. There should be but one language in this country – the English” (Motomura 2006, 170).

Looking at American history in the big picture, Bloemraad and Ueda (2006) contend that assimilation becomes the go-to theory whenever American identity is evaluated after a period of refocus and revision. Citizenship always matters, but during these episodes, it is naturalization that becomes a stand in for the process of becoming part of America, and the Chinese Exclusion Act thrust American identity to the center.

## B. Modelling Integration (and the Problem of Assimilation)

Every immigrant group that has arrived in America has not only lent their cultural practices to this nation's landscape, but they have also, in turn, been affected by the extant American traditions. This process of navigating the system – politically, geographically, culturally, and linguistically – and “becoming American” has been termed differently by competing theories and scholars and are constantly affected by native “resistance” to new Americans, despite many “natives” being one-time immigrants. American anxieties are of two types: “whether the newcomers will fit and fears that they will undermine the basic foundations of established ways of life” (Alba and Foner 2015, 2).

The dominant theory for the last 50 years, has been the theory of assimilation, and its salience can be felt in a thousand different policy considerations as “the” theory to explain immigration to the United States. Assimilationist theory formally owes its origins to the work of Gordon (1964), whose theories were based

“[on a] normative expectation that diverse immigrant groups from underprivileged backgrounds should eventually abandon their old ways of life and become completely ‘melted’ into the mainstream culture as indistinguishable nonethnics, or ‘Americans,’ through residential integration and occupational achievement in a sequence of succeeding generations” (Zhou 2001, 198).

Heisler (2008) also notes that Gordon's (1964) ideas were severely limited in that the main assumption that guided them was unrealistic: that American society would remain the same, even as immigrants changed.

The assimilationist framework is predicated on the notion of political incorporation and presumes that immigrants will experience greater ease over time “as they become an indistinguishable part of the host society” as their ethnic traits including identity and



language fade away (Zhou 2001, 203). This has also been titled acculturation as the native tongue and traditions are replaced with English and a new identity (Zhou 2001). For Waldinger (2001), the idea of assimilation “implies a convergence between immigrant and host country expectations: over time, immigrants, and certainly their children, are increasingly likely to aspire to the conditions enjoyed by the average resident of the United States” (12). “In abstract terms,” writes Minnite (2009, 53), “political incorporation is a classical liberal trope descended from the traditions of the French Revolution. To incorporate means to unite into one body, to mix thoroughly together.”

Olneck (2006) draws on Benedict Anderson’s theory of the “imagined community” to argue that the theory of assimilation owes its origins to the belief that a nation can be constructed if its citizens believe that there is something political, but almost primordial, that binds them together. There is, of course, theoretical support for the role of the state in manufacturing a “biopower” or “biopolitics” to establish which citizens should be denied the ability to assimilate, all the while encouraging (forcing) another set of citizens to not only join the civil body politick, but to respond to the nation’s call of duty by taking up arms and dying for a greater good (Foucault 1982, Agamben 1998, Ojakangas 2005, Sriram 2016). While Anderson (1991, 141) believed that nationalism, as played out across the world, was ultimately a story that “nations inspire love and often profoundly self-sacrificing love,” Olneck (2006) focuses the tale on the United States.

He hypothesizes that the assimilationist paradigm in the United States is not as clear cut as how Anderson (1991) might imagine it to be; rather, along the lines of Bloemraad and Ueda (2006), the definition of assimilation has changed over time as American political thought has ebbed and flowed on what the polity has come to believe

are the essential features of political knowledge that one must have to “be” American. As a consequence, immigrants have constantly struggled with a set of unrealistic expectations placed on them by “natives” who have demanded assimilation, but often without understanding what that entailed. Drawing on Lave and Wenger (1991), Reed-Danahay (2008) argues that while the nation might be “imagined,” real social change and even immigrant adjustment to their new life does not take place as easily at the national level, but more amongst immigrants at the one-on-one level. Integration, she suggests, happens through “social agency, social learning, and lived experience” (79).

While Olneck (2006) also points to Gordon (1964) as the first scholar to articulate what assimilation might look like for new American immigrants, Olneck (2006) revises past understandings of American assimilation by pushing for a new approach that emphasizes historicity. American nationalism *must* be considered in light that it is not based on a motherland or fatherland, but is actually new and recent, and continues to evolve. Like Smith and King’s (2005) theory of conflicting racial orders – American political development has been stymied due to the impasse between those who see race as intrinsic to policy versus those who see policy as color blind and devoid of race – others charge that the conflict between belief in the American Creed and this country’s checkered history of racial exclusion has created an untenable situation (Arieli 1961, Olneck 2006). In other words, how can everyone buy into the American Creed as the formula for success when not everyone is given an equal chance at attaining it? Haines (2006) has a similar point: the federal government ought not to “play” refugees like an accordion, constantly creating walls that limit who can come in, and then forcing them to assimilate through rushed resettlement.

The challenge to extant theories is that the traditional model of assimilation simply does not work for today's American immigrants, and perhaps, did not work for past immigrants either. Rather, scholars have suggested that the current generation of children of immigrants is undergoing "segmented assimilation" or "the differential pace of acculturation among parents and children including the development of language gaps, and its bearing, on normative integration and family cohesiveness" (Rumbaut and Portes 2001, 6). For King (2001), the current thinking about immigration "glides over a fundamental division between involuntary and voluntary immigration and constructs a narrative exclusively in terms of the latter category" (143).

Neither assimilation nor the melting pot allow for the realities of American policy, particularly from 1880 to 1929 when, according to King, "federal policy was designed to systematically select certain groups for 'melting' and to exclude others" (2001, 144). Even in Glazer and Moynihan's (1964) early study of New York, they contended that assimilation sounded good on paper, but had not proven itself in practice. While they saw American immigration policy as too welcoming, assimilation worked partially at best and that an older generation of Americans had the most success assimilating their "ethnic cousins" (20).

Massey and Sanchez (2010) provide a five-point takedown of Gordon's problematic assumptions. First, at the time of writing, Gordon (1964) did not recognize how much American immigrant society had changed and could not anticipate how drastically it would change very soon. Second, linear assimilation did not take into account non-European diversity. Third, while newer immigration communities and processes were different from that of previous European immigration, it was hard to challenge widespread

belief that Europeans had only succeeded through “dint of hard work” (3). Fourth, it was a false assumption that previous generations had come to America and simply sought a clean break with their countries of origin. Lastly, Massey and Sanchez (2010) state that Gordon (1964) and other assimilation theorists cannot account for African Americans. How could Blacks assimilate by marriage, by way of example, when there were expressively laws against interracial marriage?

Levitt (2007) contends that these myths of European immigrant integration have posed a formidable challenge for later immigrants to contend with and overcome. The problem of assimilation is primarily one of belief about the pre- and post; we “assume that what happens in America is made in America. We expect newcomers to assimilate, becoming part of ‘our’ community by severing their ties to their homelands” (11).

Waldinger (2015) concurs: immigrants are rarely seen as emigrants, denying them homeland attachments. A better theory to explain the political behavior of immigrants is transnationalism, which allows for “keeping up contacts and involvements with the people and places left behind” (37).

Like Levitt (2007) and Waldinger (2015), Motomura (2006) argues against assimilation because it does little to encompass the full range of immigrant experiences. Proponents of assimilation think of immigration as a contract; immigrants can either come to America or not, but if they do come they must buy into some sort of unspoken agreement. Alternatively, immigration might be thought of as “territorial personhood,” which implies rights on anyone in country, whether citizen or not, or “immigration as affiliation” that allows for homeland connections and filial bonds that are allowed to accompany the immigrations to the United States (10 – 11).

Gordon (1964) thought of assimilation in different ways including acculturation (“language and values”), structural assimilation (“personal networks and social organizations”), and marital assimilation (Massey and Sanchez 2010, 2). But this understanding leaves little room for different ways of thinking about how immigrants might engage with their host country, a theoretical crisis that demanded different theories about immigrant incorporation into American life. Perhaps the most important of these “new theories,” and a primary understanding of this dissertation, is the notion of integration.

By integration I am referring to what David Laitin and colleagues describe as “the degree to which immigrants have the knowledge and the capacity to achieve success in their host country” (Figueroa et al. 2016, 3). Entzinger (2014) adopts a similar definition, adding that it is “a process in which immigrants are integrated into a receiving society that in itself is already integrated according with its degrees of its own social cohesion” (693). Drawing on the theory of transnationalism, Waldinger (2015) regards integration in terms of “the everyday demands of fitting in,” (50), but more than just trying to mirror the practices of the host country because not being seen as wanting to fit in (or wanting that badly enough) can backfire against immigrants. Rather, “picking up the linguistic, cognitive, and interpersonal tools needed to get by and then get ahead in the new society proves far more rewarding” (50).

Integration has also been referenced as incorporation; Huddleston (2016) and Bloemraad (2006) both view incorporation as a form of “mainstreaming,” where immigrants adopt, engage, and meld with the political and social characteristics of the host society. Morales (2011) notes that with the exception of Bloemraad (2006), scholars can

find no obvious difference between integration and political incorporation. Bloemraad's misgivings stem from her theory that incorporation is a type of integration with the former focused on political participation at the group level (in contrast to assimilation, which she sees as individual-level activities).

Lee et al. (2006) describe political incorporation as “various processes that relate to how immigrants gain political voice in the United States or find their political opportunities constrained” (15). Using Smith (1997) and Jones-Correa (2002), scholars contend that “incorporation” is more suitable to describe the political adaptability of immigrants compared to “assimilation” to account for official and unofficial, formal and informal forms of participation (Pearson and Citrin 2006).

Billington (1938) and Glazer and Moynihan (1964) remarked that early parties and machines may have socialized/taught politics to immigrants, but only to use them for their causes. “Helping immigrants” became big business for politicians and other corrupted folks and was often done as a form of bonding between co-ethnic community members . But it's not difficult to see how this would not meet the current criteria of integration, civic or otherwise.

Political integration or incorporation can be thought of as “various processes that relate to how immigrants gain political voice in the United States or find their political opportunities constrained” (Lee et al. 2006, 15). Ramakrishnan (2013) firmly rejects any attempt to conflate assimilation with incorporation. He asserts that assimilation, or even the extremely narrow “immigrant political assimilation,” has the individual immigrant as its target, while incorporation references groups. He offers an even more fine-tuned demarcation later: if immigrant political assimilation can be regarded as the “convergence

or divergence in individual-level political behavior, political knowledge, and political attitudes involving immigrants and their descendants,” then immigrant political incorporation should be regarded as the “mobilization, political presence, and political weight of social groups and organizations in political institutions” (33).

Integration too has its own historical baggage with perspectives and definitions of integration caught up with American history. Many have stated that beginnings of current interest with integration really began in 1990s with scholars wondering for the first time if the “new” immigrants arriving post 1965 would integrate as well as their European counterparts who came during the first large wave (Lucassen et al. 2006). As this renewed attention was being paid to resettlement policies, American policy elites and the public began a debate about the integration or incorporation of refugees.

Another convenient starting point for a discussion of immigrant political participation is naturalization and citizenship. Citizenship acts like a glue, according to Bloemraad, that binds immigrants together more than just through certain legal protections because, “it is also an invitation to participate in a system of mutual governance, and it can be an identity that provides a sense of belonging” (2006, 1). In an eloquent twist, Aleinikoff (2001) has argued that states have two sets of boundaries – the legal and the physical – that are closely intertwined because whom states choose to admit as immigrants in part determines who shall be citizens” (267).

Bloemraad (2006) distinguishes between “participatory or substantive citizenship” (“engagement in the political system of the adopted country”) and “full citizenship,” which she believes includes the latter and naturalization (“acquisition of legal or formal citizenship”) (5). Alba and Foner (2015) think of “full citizenship” in terms of “full

membership,” which is an equity of opportunity for immigrants akin to those afforded to the native-born. “It also means,” they write, “having a sense of dignity and belonging that comes with acceptance and inclusion in a broad range of societal institutions” (1 – 2).

Immigrant incorporation has been an essential function of the American public-school system, says Reed-Danahay (2008), and the goal has always been citizenship. While I disagree with her assessment that schools “have intentionally been designed to create citizens,” I recognize that schools are public institutions with civic outcomes in mind (p. 80). Reed-Danahay (2008) makes her case by drawing on Rosaldo’s (2003) theory of vernacular citizenship, which posits that everyday interactions in the public and private spheres give immigrants the sense of whether they are first or second-class citizens.

What happens when immigrants don’t attain “full citizenship”? Bloemraad levels the blame on government and its belief in legitimacy, often derived from a false logic about equality for all, but not enforced in practice. She says “the story of citizenship is not just about the immigrants we receive, but also fundamentally about the reception we give them” (2006, 2).

### C. Turning Integration into Public Policy

The normative limitations of integration theory can be addressed through the construction of integration outcomes. If we accept the limited logic of assimilation as the de facto theory to understand immigrant behavior, then integration offers a clearer path to describing the ways in which immigrants adapt to life in a new, host country. Much of the work on this topic has been developed through the experiences of countries in the European Union, many of whom have established national standards for integration monitoring. The



EU's National Integration Evaluation Mechanism (NIEM)<sup>16</sup> has been set up to identify and measure integration outcomes for 15 EU nations in three broad areas – “Socio-Economic Integration<sup>17</sup>,” “Legal Integration<sup>18</sup>,” and “Socio-Cultural Integration<sup>19</sup>.” However, this is just the plan: the first reports are not due until later this year (2018), and then 2020. Eight EU members have had national monitoring in place since 2011: Sweden, Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, and Portugal (Huddleston 2016).<sup>20</sup>

According to Huddleston (2016), the Council of Europe agreed on nine integration indicators like employment (including rates of employment and unemployment); education (including percentage of dropouts, highest education attained, and percentage of 15-year old students designated as “low achieving” in reading and STEM); social inclusion (including income, poverty rate, and property ownership); and active citizenship. However, the core indicators of EU integration remain percentage of immigrants who become citizens versus long-term residents; percentage of elected officials; turnout among voting-eligible population (VEP); political trust; and sense of belong.<sup>21</sup>

What makes this debate mildly confusing, particularly in the European context, is

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.forintegration.eu/pl/about-the-project>

<sup>17</sup> “Housing,” “Employment,” “Vocational training and employment-related education,” Health,” Public relief and social security”

<sup>18</sup> “Residency,” “Family Unity and Reunification;” and “Access to affective nationality.”

<sup>19</sup> “Children’s Education,” “Language learning and social orientation,” and “Building bridges and fostering participation.”

<sup>20</sup> Despite having national standards, there is tremendous variation in how integration is measured. All the countries use survey instruments, but not the same questions. For example, Estonia’s survey includes 100 questions, while Germany’s includes 100 indicators across 14 areas. Conversely, Norway uses 36 indicators.

<sup>21</sup> Huddleston (2016, p. 194) notes that several of the integration outcomes are problematic and do not account for the pre-departure experiences of immigrants. For example, is it fair to measure employment in nations where native-born unemployment is higher than that of the foreign-born?

that NIEM appears to conflict with the integration measures, and political histories, of individual EU nations. Isaakyan (2016) references three distinct perspectives on integration that exist concurrently in Europe and which cannot help but be in conflict with each other. First, “Civic- Territorial Integration” doesn’t presume assimilation, but immigrant must have some civic and political values in common with host (e.g. France and the Netherlands). Second, “Assimilationist Integration” in Germany, for example, implies “immigrants develop a strong attachment to dominant national values of the host society, which should be viewed as universal and unquestionable” (172). And third, “Multiculturalism,” which is highlighted in Sweden, insists that immigrants be allowed to maintain ethnic ties, but labor-market integration will be key.

In both Greece and the Netherlands, language fluency is considered the primary indicator of integration, which was only one part of the NIEM rubric (van Meeteren et al. 2013, Griva and Panitsides 2013). The Netherlands’ 2006 Civic Integration Abroad Act created the need for a mandatory Dutch exam that new immigrant hopefuls had to pass *before* emigrating, and the 2007 Civic Integration Act applied to those already in country<sup>22</sup>. Not only were they required to take language classes on their own – with some of the cost paid for by the government – but having Dutch fluency is a prerequisite to naturalization (van Meeteren et al. 2013). While Greek language fluency and knowledge is considered a desired outcome in Greece, the nation has struggled to balance what they perceive as respect for minority language rights with belief that integration can only be achieved through knowledge of a country’s main or official language (Griva and

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<sup>22</sup> Exemptions apply only to citizens from other EU countries, Switzerland, Monaco, Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, the Vatican City, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

Panitsides 2013). Despite the Greek government setting up classes and special intercultural schools to introduce immigrant children to the Greek language, the government has not had much success in helping immigrants integrate into Greek society and learn the language versus their own mother tongues.

Huddleston (2016) and Bloemraad (2006) both view incorporation as a form of “mainstreaming,” where immigrants adopt, engage, and meld with the political and social characteristics of the host society. It might be helpful to think about integration for the moment as a multifaceted concept that measures “success” in many ways. In one of the rare examples of an integration survey conducted in the United States, Colorado’s Refugee Integration Survey and Evaluation (RISE) measured it across ten domains: “Economic,” “Civic Engagement,” “Safety and Stability,” “Education and Training,” “Language and Cultural Knowledge,” “Social Bonding,” “Social Bridging,” “Children’s Education,” “Health and Well-Being,” and “Housing” (Taintor and Lichtenstein 2016).

The United States government has two primary integration outcomes for immigrants – self-sufficiency and learning English. If English language acquisition is one of the primary markers of integration in the United States for refugees (and immigrants more broadly), then it shares a privileged position with obtaining self-sufficiency or economic integration. Both are oft-repeated expressions amongst the policymaking and implementing communities as the gold standards for integration. While the latter is easier enough to understand – though perhaps hard to assess – the former is a catchall phrase that includes different beliefs that add up to achieving self-sufficiency. Primary among these is economic dependence, often measured as employment.

Economic self-sufficiency, as a challenge and goal, has a long history as part of any discussion about immigrants in the United States, and American culture more broadly. Tocqueville (1835) remarked about Americans as “Always in motion, they could not relax, for they did not know for certain where they were and where they soon would be financially and socially” (as quoted in Takaki 2000, 73). Tocqueville also had an early observation that Americans found little enjoyment in their lives because they were just so busy working and defined themselves by the quality and quantity of work performed.

In two early works, Handlin (1951, 1959) remarked on the public perception of European immigrants as over-populating urban ghettos, over-dependent on handouts, and directly related to criminal deviance. Faced with limited public and private agencies, immigrants quickly formed community-specific self-help societies to share their knowledge and resources. According to Handlin, “in every sphere of life in which these problems appeared, there arose also organizations of newcomers to ease the difficulties” (1959, 76).

Waldinger (2015) understands emigration and immigration through five lenses: intersocietal convergence, place, space, nation, and state. Language has a powerful role in two of these lenses: space, and the nation. For the former, Waldinger (2015) says that language offers an overtly simplistic way of separating insiders from those seen on the outside, especially in terms of the theory of acculturation. Learning a new language with emphasis on the dominant language, he argues, becomes “both a symbol and a tool of membership, functioning simultaneously as the means of communication and as a meaning-laden indicator of group membership” (45). With regards to the nation as a lens for immigration, Waldinger (2015) remarks about the inadequacies of multiculturalism, which is often proffered as a salve on immigration debates. For one, he says, it is assymetric, forcing

immigrants to not only maintain an identity with their countries of origin, but also with that of the host. Learning the host country's language, therefore, becomes a kind of unofficial prerequisite to become a "native," which in turn helps the immigrant eventually claim a new patriotism.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that in the history of the debate over first assimilation and later incorporation and integration of immigrants, there was never a clear distinction over the integration outcomes specific to refugees and not immigrants more broadly. A lack of clear-cut definition over what we are trying to explain with the terminology has resulted in what Ramakrishnan (2013, 29) calls "conceptual stretching." While his argument is that scholars have carelessly used terminology like assimilation, integration, and incorporation without truly understanding what the terms mean and why they are different, I believe that the additional loss of "theoretical utility" has occurred due to a lack of demarcation between what these terms mean for immigrants versus refugees.

What I am trying to do in this chapter, as well as the dissertation, is to tell a story about the refugee experience in America from the perspective of integration, by way of three primary questions. What did, and how does, the U.S. government want refugees to accomplish in order to be considered integrated? Where does integration take place – federal, state, local – and who is responsible for the integration of refugees? And what are the refugees themselves learning (hearing) about integration?

#### D. Resettlement as Integration

In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) into law (Motomura 2006, Chen 2014, Tang

2015). The bill substantially reduced the benefits available from two federal programs, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and “food stamps” through Aid to Families with Dependent Children (which was replaced by Temporary Assistance to Needy Families). The legislation fulfilled a Clinton campaign promise to reform welfare, but its passage proved devastating for millions of immigrants, particularly refugees who are legally noncitizens before they “accomplish” naturalization.

The legislation’s preamble focused on the history of American immigration law and its focus on self-sufficiency. In his signing statement, President Clinton said, “when an immigrant comes to America ... they have to promise that they won’t try to get on welfare, and they won’t take public money.” Similar language was offered by the Senate: “immigrants make a promise to the American people that they will not become a financial burden” (Motomura 2006, p. 52).

Due to their unique status, refugees fall under the jurisdiction of immigration law, but also alienage law, “governing the lives of noncitizens inside the United States” (Motomura 2006, 46). While later amendments to PRWORA would eventually restore eligibility to refugees, other groups were not so lucky; the law “grandfathered in” newly-arrived immigrants at the time, and future immigrants, all of whom were denied food stamps and many SSI benefits (51).

In study after study, scholars and practitioners have identified one goal that has primacy over all others as far as the ORR is considered: getting employment in order to attain economic independence to be less dependent on the government (Haines 2010, Allerdice 2011, Capps et al. 2015, Sturm 2016). Congress even codified this belief in its 1982 amendment to the 1980 Refugee Act by stipulating, according to Allerdice, that

“refugee attainment of immediate employment was the key objective of refugee resettlement” (2011, 117). Employment is followed by linguistic integration via English competency in a close second.

It should be remembered that unlike most immigrants who choose to live with compatriots and in ethnic enclaves, most refugees do not get to choose where they want to live in the United States (Waldinger 2001).<sup>23</sup> While it seems logical that refugees should be resettled in cities with large existing refugee and immigrant populations, this procedure was only adopted in the last two decades. Prior to that, especially after the government was chastised for resettling most of the Cuban refugee Diaspora in Florida, many refugees, including large numbers of Vietnamese, were resettled in areas *without* large immigrant populations; the theory, at least initially, was that such a move would force refugees to integrate quicker (Zhou 2001). This policy applied to all three waves of initial Vietnamese resettlement in the United States (1975, 1975 – 1977, and 1978 – 1980) (Whorton 1997).

Feuerherm and Ramanathan (2016) are also explicit in their belief that the typically traumatic experiences of refugees necessitate a resettlement process that *should* be different than that offered to standard immigrants. Their unique legal allowances provide them special dispensations including more support to get jobs, training, and education, as well as the medical care needed for people who have not just experienced physical discomfort and ailments, but also mental pain. This is a valid claim because as Gold (1992) and others have noted, resettlement is messy; while the federal government may have certain meta-beliefs on how refugees *should* be handled, achieving the goals of

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<sup>23</sup> I am specifically referring to refugees and not political asylees; the latter are often reunited with their families after their asylum applications are accepted.

resettlement – financial independence, social assimilation – is often not easy for those assisting with the process.

Yet, there are critics of the current system because it is seen as *too generous* for some immigrants, and not others. In her models of immigrant political incorporation, Bloemraad (2006) points to the considerable assistance that refugees receive from governments, specifically Canada and the United States; as such, she focuses on “ordinary immigrants” and drops refugees from her discussion. Portes and Rumbaut (2014, 45) believe that refugees receive a resettlement package that can only be described as “generous,” particularly compared to non-refugee immigrants who are not eligible for the government benefits for which refugees are given access. Gold (1992, 143) has even argued no matter how much help is given to refugees to become economically independent, it is beyond the average resettlement worker or volunteer’s control; rather, it can only come from a personal interest and through individual experiences.

Lastly, it is vital to note that the resettlement process cannot apply to all refugees equally because there are gradations among refugees in terms of resources and social capital. Not all refugees arrive with the same professional experiences, levels of education, native- and host- language competencies, etc. Those who arrive with more social capital and English skills, for example, are more likely to integrate (Gold 1992), but refugees often arrive lacking literacy in their native languages (Capps et al. 2015). But a more serious consequence is that the U.S. government does not *treat* all refugees the same. This is more than just apocrypha; scholars have documented many instances in which groups that were perceived to have more resources, or political support, were given more resettlement assistance (Gold 1992, Ong 2008, Heisler 2008, Allerdice 2011).



Nowhere has this been revealed with so much disturbing clarity as the government's treatment of Southeast Asian refugees. This is not just about issues with adjustment and integration; Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese refugees have received subpar housing, less monetary assistance, and disinterested caseworkers (Gold 1992, Ong 2003, Chan 2004, Hein 2006, Tang 2015). According to Ong (2003), "Southeast Asian refugees are among the most invisible groups in the North American consciousness" (xvi). Worse, Southeast Asian refugees repeatedly decry their treatment by Americans in their countries of origin, and once they are resettled in the United States. A history of broken promises has created generational wounds that don't heal, but are passed on like heirlooms (Loescher and Scanlan 1986, Rumbaut 1996, Motomura 2006, Hein 2006). The Hmong's attitude towards the U.S., even after acceptance and resettlement, is due to what they call "the Promise" (Motomura 2006). First, the Americans promised to help the Hmong whom fought for them in Laos, but many were left behind. Second, the American government became selective over which Hmong it would take and left many behind, separating families. Third, many Hmong veterans never received equal benefits to other American veterans of the Vietnam War. And lastly, in 1996, President Clinton cut welfare benefits as to all refugees, including the Hmong, through changes in the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program (Motomura 2006).

While the Hmong are often referenced as the Asian refugee group with the least amount of integrative success compared to other Asian immigrants and refugees, such a description does nothing to explain the deep betrayal experienced by the Hmong due to U.S. foreign policy, let alone resettlement issues. Tang (2015, 5) argues that this "good refugee"/"bad refugee" dichotomy only serves the interests of this government, which decides who

will be the “bad refugee” (and not the other way around). While his work was on Cambodians who were forced into what he calls the New York City “hyperghetto,” Tang (2015) notes that many refugees from that geographical region came with no marketable skills, never given the training or education to succeed, became dependent on welfare, and were then *blamed* for it.

At the beginning of this dissertation, I mentioned the problematic nature of refugee integration in the United States and will end this chapter with a description of those problems. Fee (2018) notes that “a myth of compliance” surrounds the work of RRO caseworkers who must constantly adhere to “standardized benchmark assessments of paperwork” (2). This in turn creates an idea of integration solely derived from meeting certain objectives derived from the agreements signed between the federal government and refugee resettlement organizations. While I have referred to this idea in my dissertation as statutory integration, Fee’s (2018) work, solely focused on RRO caseworkers, utilizes her concept of paper integration. The overarching concept concurs: integration outcomes that do not keep the long-term successes of clients (refugees) in mind but focus on statutory ideas about how refugees should achieve self-sufficiency, to what extent they should learn English, and other vaguely-worded barometers of success in the new host country.

Studies about the problematic results of refugee integration are few, but powerful. A cross-national study from the Georgetown University Law Center investigated resettlement amongst Iraqi refugees in Jordan and the United States. The report begins somberly with an excerpt from an Iraqi widow who said, “I left Iraq to find security. But what kind of security is it to live in a homeless shelter?” (HRI 2009, 1). Through interviews in Washington, D.C., Detroit, and San Diego, the investigation reveals a widespread lack of faith in the

resettlement program's primary objective of economic independence. Refugees in all three cities expressed their happiness with the initial welfare benefits and assistance but bemoaned the lack of long-term care. One of the biggest issues, which indicates how complex resettlement can be, is that the UNHCR has designated eleven different criteria for Iraqi refugees, but the help provided in the United States often tended to obscure the specific needs of refugees in favor of broader, less-tailored and more general help. Other issues included underfunded employment services at the state or local level, and "anti-poverty" programs that did little to help refugees achieve long-term success.

In her work on refugee resettlement in Massachusetts, Tyeklar (2016) used the innovative technique of examining the websites of local RROs to understand their approach to integration outcomes. Self-sufficiency is repeatedly used by RROs, "but as a process and a goal is not explicitly defined on their websites" (164). The metrics these organizations used are unrealistic, especially when refugees' primary source of income is state and federal assistance, and also when accounting for the largely volunteer work base. With such an income stream, how can clients possibly meet "self-sufficiency," 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Level of state, or "durable self-sufficiency," exceeding 450 percent of the FPL? (165). Tyeklar also pointed out to the vague, almost fantastical language some RROs used. For example, Catholic Charities in Boston had the following statement on their website: "Along with this critical assistance, refugees receive compassion, understanding and positive reassurance from our staff to help in the attainment of independence and self-sufficiency" (165).

One of her findings echoes that of HRI (2009); resettlement often subsists as a one-size-fits-all way of thinking that barely takes into account the intra-community differences of

refugees let alone the massive differences that exists between different groups whom have arrived. This was particularly true, implied Tyeklar (2016), in the RRO offerings that failed to account for the trauma that often accompanies refugees; traumatic experiences did not occur in isolation and were often compounded by a lack of caseworker understanding and care.

Like Fee's (2018) assessment of caseworkers, Darrow (2015a, 2015b) has also probed resettlement through the experiences of individual policy implementers and determined that a rushed system of compliance creates varied outcomes for refugee clients. Her fieldwork in Illinois among five refugee resettlement organizations (RROs) illustrate a pattern of almost desperate insubordination and failure to meet performance standards. Despite the presence of specific guidelines, the agency workers Darrow (2015a) interviewed often took matters into their own hands and informally created on-the-spot decisions with little administrative oversight. Caseworkers were often forced to use "adaptive strategies" to help those clients they perceived as "most likely to succeed" (Darrow 2015a, 2).

The most serious of her findings was the almost self-resignation of the caseworkers (and some managers) that their assistance did not really qualify as helping the refugees achieve self-sufficiency. Finding employment for the clients, often of the sub-optimal variety, often put caseworkers in a moral bind; the very idea of a refugee resettlement organization (RRO) was conceived as a vehicle for refugees with English limitations to receive outside assistance to find work, but these RRO employees in Chicago knew they were hardly helping their clients to the extent the national contracts insisted they reach (Darrow 2015a, 28).

While not one of the two major markers of self-sufficiency, housing integration or security was also considered a priority of RRO caseworkers and staff. Yet here again, refugees often received less-than-desirable accommodations. The opaque wording of national contracts gave caseworkers tremendous discretion, but asks Darrow (2015b), to what end? RROs in Chicago often acted as intermediaries between refugee clients and landlords, but often did not do their due diligence to determine the livability of the future lodgings. The goal was to find housing for clients, quickly, and the quality often suffered. Like her work on employment outcomes (Darrow 2015a), financial constrictions also stymied the efforts of caseworkers, who had could not agree on what constituted “safe housing” and how anyone could find that with limited finances (Darrow 2015b, 106).

In their study of challenges to refugee integration in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Fennelly and Orfield (2008) remarked that one of the inherent frustrations was radically different understandings of what constituted “good” housing (similar to Darrow 2015b). For example, in almost any other setting, a permanent move to the suburbs should meet the criteria of “upward mobility,” but what of refugees who made such a move, but were still ostracized by their white neighbors? (201). These anti-immigrant attitudes were not the only barriers to housing integration; Fennelly and Orfield (2008) also mentioned the lack of school resources to provide curricula for non-native English speakers (NNES) and a general lack of targeted, housing-related assistance for these immigrant and refugee new homeowners.

Perhaps the most damning evidence of housing discrimination and its role in the integration failures of refugees is Eric Tang’s (2015) work on the plight of Cambodian refugees in New York. In his second chapter, “Housed in the Hyperghetto,” Tang (2015)

points immediately to the Cambodian refugees' lack of literacy and the position they were put in, signing a "Statement of Understanding" with the American Council of Voluntary Associations (ACVA) about their accommodations without truly understanding the agreement they were making (52). The ACVA contracted out with other organizations to secure housing, but no actual examination of housing to see if it was fit to live. In scenes reminiscent of *The Jungle*, refugees talked about squalid apartments with no air or heat, hot or running water, awful electric and wiring that would emit sparks. According to Ra, the primary interviewee, "Nobody helped us ... Once you moved in, you had to deal directly with the landlord and the super. You had to fight for yourself. The resettlement agency never said anything about our housing situation. The only thing they said to us was 'apply for welfare' and 'apply for a job'" (Tang 2015, 68).

Tang also comments on the Catch-22 that Ra and other Cambodian refugees found themselves in as confused new arrivals in New York. They were repeatedly told that it was their responsibility to find work, and the sooner they did, better housing would be available. But no one in the RROs talked about the recession or the reality that those jobs that were available to barely-literate refugees would not help anyone reach the self-sufficiency thresholds the RROs stubbornly clung to at the expense of the peace-of-mind of the refugees. Like Fee (2018), Tyeklar (2016), and Darrow (2015a), the New York caseworkers that Cambodian refugees came into contact with were overworked, under-paid, and frequently making spot decisions on who deserved the most help and how resettlement policy should be implemented. They knew, contends Tang (2015), that even with federal- and state-sponsored job-training programs, refugees would not be able to get the jobs needed to lift themselves out of poverty (68).

## CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY

### A. Case Selection

#### (i) The States

The preceding three chapters set the stage for my empirical analysis of refugee resettlement policy in the United States by articulating the problem (the misunderstood politics of refugee resettlement policy), placing it in historic perspective (as one facet of a long-standing and also confusing tradition of restrictionist versus expansionist American immigration policy), and lastly, making the case for resettlement as a vehicle for integration. This chapter lays out my methodology including challenges with sampling, recruitment, and bias. I begin with a discussion about case selection of the states I used in my sample.

The theoretical origins of the modern comparative politics question of case selection owe their origins to John Stuart Mills' 1843 work, *A System of Logic*. It was Mills who first articulated the "Method of Agreement" to understand why an explanatory variable (X) continued to have a relationship or covary with a variable of explanation or dependent variable (Y) despite changes in other variables. This "Method" would later form the basis of the Most Different Systems Design (Keman and Pennings 2017, 57).

In Chapter 1, I presented a map compiled from a state-by-state analysis of government websites to illustrate the diversity of resettlement programs in the United States. This ranged from no program (Wyoming) to private agency control of the whole program (Montana, Mississippi, and Maine) to state oversight of the resettlement program (28 states) in addition to states with public-private partnerships and Wilson-Fish agreements. Though Georgia and California are two of the majority where the individual state governments have

oversight over refugee resettlement, the “political opportunity structures” of each are so uniquely different that they should allow for a greater study of how each state implements resettlement (Kitschelt 1986).

As I mentioned in my opening chapter, the primary motivation behind choosing Georgia and California was personal and one of convenience due to established personal knowledge and connections through past work in higher education. But in order to provide a more theoretical justification for my choices, I have relied on a Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) for my case selection. MDSD allows for a small-n analysis of a social problem, often with better internal validity than other approaches. Since the cases are states, the logic is that by doing a small-n study, I am creating a framework of analysis with the same set of variables that should be applicable for a larger project of more or even all the states that engage in refugee resettlement (Seawright and Gerring 2008).

Unlike the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD), which is ideal for situations where most of the variables across all background conditions remain the same, but differ on a key variable and the outcome, MDSD is a better fit when there is an expectation of a similar outcome (Faure 1994, Landman 2002, Seawright and Gerring 2008, Keman and Pennings 2017). While the goals of refugee resettlement are related to self-sufficiency, and laid out in federal law, we cannot expect the states to implement them the same due to conflicting state interpretations. What is intriguing, as social science research, are the variables that differ between the two states. This is why a Most Different Systems Design is ideal for this project.

(ii) The Refugees



Bhutan is an isolated, mountainous, Buddhist kingdom in South Asia, sandwiched between India and China. The country is not a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and only established its first constitution in 2008 (Lee 2014, Varennes 2009, Saul 2000). Lee (2014) goes so far as to call Bhutan a Buddhist theocracy in the guise of an absolute monarchy; its king is recognized as both a religious and political leader. Though internationally recognized for its “Happiness Index,” its ethnic policies over the last three decades have generated a recent refugee crisis (Wood 2017, Mørch 2016). As Saul (2000) notes, Bhutan is a “troubled” place, “invisible” to the West (322).

The persecuted community are the *Lhotshampa* or “People of the South” – Bhutanese of Nepali descent.<sup>24</sup> The majority are Hindu, and they settled in the southern part of the country in the late nineteenth century due to a labor shortage, later becoming known for their agrarian successes (Giri 2004, Pattanaik 1998, Hutt 1996). In the modern era, the Bhutanese government’s policies can be split into two phases: “accommodation,” from 1958 to 1980, and “absorption,” from 1980 to the present (Pattanaik 1998, 638). Hutt (1996, 402) notes that in this first phase, the *Lotshampa* were given citizenship, and even cash incentives to intermarry with the Drupka majority.

In an attempt to create an identity under the banner of *driglamnamja* (Dzongkha for “one nation, one people”), the Bhutanese government began a process in the late 1980s of forced integration and assimilation of the Nepali people to meet the standards of the Drupka (Muni 1991). Citizenship, which had been granted so easily before to the *Lhotshampa*, was now restricted by the Citizenship Act of 1985 to those who had maintained residency, had a

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<sup>24</sup> Hutt (1996, 400) notes the politics of labelling with this community and the often-interchangeable use of “Lhotshampa,” “Nepali,” and “Bhutanese Nepali,” while his preference is “Nepali Bhutanese.” Benson et al. (2011) use “Lhotshampa” and “Hindu Lhotshampa.”

Bhutanese parent (as per the Census), could read and write Dzongkha, knew Bhutanese traditions and history, and had never been disloyal to the king (Saul 2000, 327). These assimilative policies or code of etiquette were known as *Driglam Namza*, aimed at creating a singular Bhutanese identity predicated on language, dress, marriage, citizenship, limited birthrate, and Buddhist “values” (Muni 1991, Hutt 1996, Pattanaik 1998, Saul 2000, Giri 2004, Lee 2014). Pattanaik (1998, 640) notes that an additional cause for concern for the Bhutanese government was the political instability across the southern border with India.

After years of local resistance, the Peoples’ Forum for Human Rights and Bhutan Peoples Party were organized in 1989 and 1990, respectively, to agitate for more rights for the *Lhotshampa*, who by now included not only Bhutanese of Nepali descent, but also Nepali nationals from India who sought better economic opportunities in Southern Bhutan (Hutt 1996, Muni 1991). This culminated in the September 1990 protests where approximately 40 to 50,000 Bhutanese of Nepali descent participated in non-violent and violent protests across the four districts of Southern Bhutan (Saul 2000, Muni 1991). In response, the national government called the protestors “anti-nationalists” and “terrorists” (Muni 1991, 150).

They began to expel the *Lhotshampa* in 1991 creating an international refugee crisis (Giri 2004, Banki 2008, Varennes 2008, Giri 2004, Kumar 2012). 75 percent of the people were given refugee status in Nepal, where they were resettled into several UNHCR-backed camps (Hutt 1996). This was not without controversy; while the vast majority of these refugees speak Nepali, practice Hinduism, and claim Nepali ancestral roots, they are not recognized as Nepali by the Government of Nepal, and often not considered Bhutanese by the Government of Bhutan, despite the refugees’ lack of interest in claiming anything but Bhutanese citizenship (Saul 2000, Hutt 1996). The other 25 percent of refugees sought

protection in India, despite not being officially recognized as refugees and becoming illegal immigrants (Giri 2004). Despite the formation of the Bhutan-Nepal Joint Ministerial Level Committee to determine who among the refugees had legitimate rights to return, an infinitesimal number of the displaced have been able to reclaim their land and possessions again in Southern Bhutan (Varenes 2008, Saul 2000). Part of the challenge in establishing a right of return is that many of the *Lhotshampa* did not even receive that recognition, being labelled instead as “illegal immigrants who have overstayed labor contracts” (Saul 2000, 326). Others were forced into signing documents claiming they were “voluntary emigrants” and not refugees, thus denying the ability to receive any kind of benefit from the state, and denying the possibility of return (Hutt 1996, 407).

Estimates vary, but between 1991 and 1995, approximately 88,000 Bhutanese refugees of Nepali descent made their way to camps in Nepal. This number swelled to 96,000 in 2000 and now includes multiple generations born in the camps (Saul 2000). Finally, after almost two decades of stalled negotiations between the governments of Bhutan and Nepal, the *Lhotshampa* began the process of third-country resettlement starting in 2006 (Subedi et al. 2015). The United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) resettled *Lhotshampa* around the world with the United States receiving the most (Benson et al. 2011). As noted in Chapter 1, 96,023 have been accepted by the United States between 2008 and the end of May 2018; that is over 15 percent of all refugees in the last decade (Refugee Processing Center 2018).

## B. Sample Selection

### (i) The Policy Implementers: Recruitment and Sampling

I conducted 18 detailed phone interviews with policy implementers in Georgia and California between July 2017 and January 2018. Initial contact was made with respondents via email using by using publicly-available information. Since each state has a different organizational structure for resettlement – in Georgia, all refugees first live in the City of Clarkston and are aided by the same five or six agencies, and in California, the state coordinator works with individual counties to handle resettlement – I targeted different “types” of potential interviewees depending on the state. The location of Bhutanese refugees also determined the final list of implementers particularly in California; since all my interviews were conducted in San Leandro, Oakland, and Hayward, I over-sampled policy implementers in Alameda County.

In her work on RROs in Chicago, Darrow (2015a) employed what she called an “organizational ethnography” that included interviews with caseworkers and management and non-participant observation. Generally, the indication one might get from reading her methodology was that RRO staff were supportive of her research agenda and agreeable to the idea of being observed during their daily interactions and meetings with other RRO staff and with refugee clients.

As I referenced in my first chapter, the current politics of refugee resettlement cannot be divorced from the current political climate, a function of partisanship and existing “policy legacies” (Béland et al. 2016). And Georgia, helmed by a Republican governor and

Republican control of both chambers of its General Assembly, has felt the political effects of the Trump era more so than California. That can be my only conclusion after the difficulty of finding interview subjects in that state. The nine Georgia policy implementers I interviewed over the phone were almost impossible to reach, and it took almost three months to schedule many of the interviews, only to be told that certain people would have to cancel. The following figure contains one of the email templates I used to reach implementers:

### **Figure 3: Sample Recruitment Email**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Shyam (pron. SHAAM) and I'm a doctoral student at the University of California at Santa Barbara. My dissertation focuses on refugee resettlement policy, a topic I have been interested and involved in for several years, and I am interviewing policy implementers in California and Georgia (where I used to live).

I recently interviewed \_\_\_\_\_, the state refugee coordinator for California, and am now interviewing county-level refugee coordinators across the state. Would you be available next week for a 30-minute phone interview? I can email you the questions ahead of time, and in the meantime, have attached an informed consent form for your records.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

One area of concern that could have stymied my recruitment efforts was the content of the actual interview questions. I have to accept a potential bias here in that everyone who agreed to be interviewed by me, first saw the questions I was going to ask. In some cases, I included the questions with my initial request for an interview, and in other cases, sent the questions in after being asked to see them. In one case, as an example, an interview request was turned down by a Southern California county official *after* seeing the list of potential

questions because, in her words, “I can’t answer these questions without getting them approved by our national office.” Conversely, I went through this vetting process to interview the Catholic Charities manager in Atlanta. At least three different people approved of my questions before I could interview the target implementer. The following figure contains said questions:

**Figure 4: Interview Questions for Implementers**

1. Please tell me about your professional and educational background.
2. How would you describe your role with regards to refugee resettlement?
3. What does integration mean to you? How would you or your agency measure “successful” integration?
4. What do you perceive of as potential challenges to refugee integration?
5. How would you define political integration?
6. Do you think about refugee resettlement in terms of a short-term solution or as a long-term plan for refugees?

Of the 21 people I initially emailed or called, I received positive responses from 12 (approximately 57 percent response rate). Some were eager to schedule a time to talk right away, while others required repeated emails and communication. Three people said they were not interested or did not have the time for an interview; two suggested I talk to other people in their organizations (which I did); and four never responded. Of that 12, I eventually would only speak to nine, but as I mentioned previously, some of these interviews were scheduled very soon after I first made contact, whereas others took months to plan. I was told that I could not interview the Georgia SRC without the ORR regional representative and state analyst on the call concurrently.

I was able to conduct the interviews by also leveraging certain interviewees against each other. So, by interviewing one RRO director and referencing her by name, I was able to get my foot in the door to interview someone else. In the end, my final sample of Georgia

interviewees included the SRC, two ORR staff members, the Mayor of Clarkston, two RRO managers, two RRO directors, and one resettlement specialist. Table 2 represents my nine interviewees and includes information about their official titles, agencies, type (public or private), office location, and jurisdiction.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Jurisdiction</b>
State Refugee Coordinator	Department of Family and Child Services	Public	Atlanta	State of Georgia
Regional Representative	Office of Refugee Resettlement	Public	Atlanta	AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, NC, SC, TN
State Analyst	Office of Refugee Resettlement	Public	Atlanta	State of Georgia
Program Manager	Lutheran Services	Private	Atlanta	Metro Atlanta
Mayor	N/A	Public	Clarkston	City of Clarkston
Senior Program Manager	Catholic Charities	Private	Atlanta	Metro Atlanta
Resettlement Specialist	World Relief	Private	Clarkston	Metro Atlanta
Deputy Director	International Rescue Committee	Private	Atlanta	Metro Atlanta
Director	Refugee Resettlement and Immigration Services of Atlanta (RRISA)	Private	Clarkston	Metro Atlanta

**Table 2: Final Sample of Georgia Interviewees**

My California sample was not as challenging to obtain. I had a lot of support for the project from the SRC and the county-level coordinators for Alameda, Stanislaus, Los Angeles, and San Diego. But here again, not all county coordinators saw the value or importance of my project and either declined the interview, never responded to repeated interview requests, or responded but never tried to help me move the conversation forward. A similar pattern would play out with RRO staff. Some were very enthusiastic and others not so much leading me to a similar strategy as I used in Georgia of leveraging certain interviews against others. My response rate was higher in California, 72 percent, but that only accounted

for 13 responses of the initial email “blast” to 18 implementers. Eventually, I would only interview nine.

Despite my challenges, I do believe that the case selection and interviews would have been even more difficult without my past, refugee-related experiences as a faculty member and community volunteer in Clarkston, Georgia. Like other resettlement researchers, I was able to earn trust from policy implementers in both states by speaking the language of refugee resettlement, which gave me access, even though that was also constrained by political pressures (Fee 2018, Darrow 2015a, Darrow 2015b, Allerdice 2011, Gold 1992).

But the presidential politics of the day were felt in a different way in California; cuts to refugee admissions nationally have a direct impact on regional cuts. Each refugee has a certain dollar sign attached to his or her head; that figure is the estimate of how much it will cost over 180 days (the average time of resettlement services) to provide for that refugee. When a national RRO signs a contract or letter of intent with the federal government, then the amount of money it will take to provide services to all refugees for a particular state are apportioned to the regional branch of the RRO. So, when admissions fall, so does the money per refugee. Eventually, if there are not enough refugees, regional RROs close shop. This was the situation in California between July 2017 and January 2018 when I was conducting interviews. Faced with cuts, RROs in California were scrambling to provide services to existing clients and were not so keen to be interviewed by me about the state of the resettlement program. Table 3 includes information on my nine California interviewees and includes information about their official titles, agencies, type (public or private), office location, and jurisdiction.



**Table 3: California Interviewees**


<b>Title</b>	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Jurisdiction</b>
State Refugee Coordinator	Department of Social Services	Public	Sacramento	State of California
Regional Representative	Office of Refugee Resettlement	Public	Sacramento	Arizona, Nevada, California, Hawaii
Refugee Coordinator	Department of Social Services	Public	Hayward	Alameda County
Manager	Department of Community Services	Public	Modesto	Stanislaus County
Refugee Coordinator	Department of Health and Human Services	Public	San Diego	San Diego County
Refugee Coordinator	CALWorks	Public	Los Angeles	Los Angeles County
Director	International Rescue Committee	Private	Oakland	Alameda County
Refugee Services Division Director	Catholic Charities	Private	Oakland	Alameda County
Immigration Outreach Coordinator	Alliance for Africa	Private	San Diego	San Diego County

(ii) The Refugees: Recruitment and Sampling

My teaching experiences in Clarkston, Georgia from 2008 to 2014 gave me the initial interest in the Bhutanese refugee community through my interactions with Nepali-speaking students. My South Asian background and Hindu name allowed me access to Bhutanese families, which only improved after I started learning Nepali in 2016. To recruit Bhutanese refugees in Georgia I asked three of my former students to introduce me to other community members who came to the United States as refugees and who would submit to an interview. I used a form of respondent-driven sampling to find “hidden populations” (Heckathorn 2002, Salganik and Heckathorn 2004). This sampling technique was pioneered in sociology and public health to recruit sensitive populations that are often invisible to the mainstream like drug seekers. But this technique is ideal in the context of refugees because they are a sensitive, “hidden population,” and also because a general distrust of government makes their recruitment difficult. Through a Critical Refugee Studies Collective grant, I was able to offer

\$25 gift cards as reimbursement for those who successfully completed an interview. I also realized earlier on that I could incentivize recruitment by also giving \$10 gift cards as a finder's fee for referrals. Figure 5 includes two recruitment flyers I used in Georgia:


**Figure 5: Sample Recruitment Flyers in Nepali and English**



### अनुसन्धान को लागि भुटानी मानिसहरुको आवश्यकता!

- हामी २० पुरुष तथा महिला को अन्तर्वार्ता गर्न चाहन्छौं जो [shyam@umail.ucsb.edu](mailto:shyam@umail.ucsb.edu) मा राज्य अमेरिकामा सरणार्थीको हेसियत मा प्रवेस गरेका हुन्।
- प्रत्येक अन्तर्वार्ता ४५ मिनेट को हुनेछ र अनुसन्धानकर्ता र नेपाली अनुवादकद्वारा तपाइको घरमे संचालन गरिनेछ। हामी तपाईं कहाँ आउँछौं।
- अन्तर्वार्ता सम्पन्न गर्ने सबैलाई \$45 को क्रोगेर (Kroger) या पटेल ब्रदर्स (Patel Brothers) गिफ्ट कार्ड उपलब्ध गरिनेछ।
- अन्तर्वार्ता को लागि अन्य उमेद्वार छनौट मा सहयोग गर्नुहुने सबैलाई \$10 को गिफ्ट कार्ड उपलब्ध गरिनेछ।
- अन्तर्वार्ताको मिति आउने जनवरी, २०१८ को ४, ६, ७, ९ र ११ तारिख तोकिएका छन्।

यदि तपाईं इच्छुक हुनुहुन्छ भने कृपया श्याम श्रीराम लाइ [shyam@umail.ucsb.edu](mailto:shyam@umail.ucsb.edu) मा इमेल गर्नुहोला।



### Bhutanese People Needed for Research Project!

- We want to interview 20 men and women who are at least 18-years old, and who came to the U.S. as refugees.
- Each interview will take 45 minutes and will be conducted by a researcher and a Nepali translator at your home. *We will come to you!*
- Each person who completes an interview will receive a \$25 gift card from Kroger or Patel Brothers.
- I also have \$10 gift cards for referrals to other refugees.
- Interviews are currently being scheduled for January 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

If you are interested in participating, please email Shyam Sriram at [shyam@umail.ucsb.edu](mailto:shyam@umail.ucsb.edu).

Respondent-driven, chain referral, and snowball sampling are widely used in social science research and comes with its own unique drawbacks. According to Biernacki and Waldorf (1981), it is not a “magical” or mystical process; the principal investigator must control the “sample’s initiation, progress, and termination” like any other method of recruitment (143). Penrod et al. (2003) note that chain referral sampling was conceived to minimize bias and increase anonymity, but brings specific issues too. Drawing on the work of Harry (1986) and his research on gay men, these authors describe “source-related problems and age-related problems” (Penrod et al. 2003, 102). Both resulted in biases I had

to contend with while recruiting refugees. The “source-related” bias is that my sample consists of refugees who wanted to participate, which indicates they had the personal interest and characteristics to be open enough to talk to a stranger (me) about something as intimate as resettlement and their first experiences in America. As far as the “age-related” bias, I had the opposite problem of Harry (1986). His sample was over-representative of gay men within a very specific age range. My sample contained seven refugees – three in California and four in Georgia – who came to the United States when they were under 18 or over 60. This was problematic because they could not take part in the orientation process that I use as a point of analysis in Chapter 6 and were either forced to attend school based on their caseworker’s “recommendation,” or were told they could not work because they were too old.

Another source of bias for the Bhutanese refugees in my sample was the issue of “respondent as research assistant” (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981, 154). All three of my Nepali interpreters were first interviewed by me as project participants, which led to a sort of symbiosis. By first participating in the interview process, all three men got a feel of my project, the scope of questions, and the kind of experiences I was trying to understand. I was also able to communicate in basic Nepali, which could have added an additional level of bias as they understood my project as possible more sincere than that of a researcher who had not learned the language. As “locators,” these interpreters fulfilled the symbiotic relationship because I could ascertain whether they understood what I was trying to do, and if they could be helpful in recruiting/referring more refugees from their community (Biernarcki and Waldorf 1981, 154).

But recruiting former refugees in Metro Atlanta did not go as easily as planned or as it had been in January 2015 when I interviewed several people from the same community for

a project I was doing on suicide amongst refugees. I can account for three possible reasons. First, there was a notable fear or concern this time around and I can hypothesize that it was related to a changed political climate in Georgia due to President Trump. Most of the former refugees I did eventually interview had become naturalized citizens, but were still distrustful towards me, as a researcher, and an antipathy about sharing candid perspectives on resettlement due to a fear, perhaps misplaced, of deportation or losing welfare eligibility. Due to these concerns, I have changed the names of all the interviewees and also limited the descriptive information about them because of their fear of government retribution.

Second, something I had not predicted and could not possibly know until I was actually doing the work, was that the level of education amongst Bhutanese refugees is very low.<sup>25</sup> Most former refugees lack primary language literacy let alone English literacy. So, I had spent two years developing my reading, writing, and speaking skills in Nepali only to find in Atlanta that most refugees could not read my flyers! And even if they could read the flyers, I also learned during my fieldwork that the Nepali I had been taught at Cornell University was the type spoken by the Bahun or Brahmins, the highest Hindu caste in Nepal and India. As such, former refugees who belonged to this caste were more likely to respond well to my questions (directly from me or via my translator), but my Brahmin Nepali also had the potential of alienating non-Brahmins. As a point of reference: Nepali spoken by Brahmins tends to contain a lot more Sanskrit words, which are not used by the rest of the population.

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<sup>25</sup> Despite my prior contact with members of this community, I was not aware of the degree to which literacy and education would be a barrier to my research. Since most of my contact had come through the college where I was employed, I admittedly had little interaction with non-college Bhutanese.

Third, despite speaking the language and having some contacts, some Bhutanese were skeptical of my interest because of long-standing tension with the Indian community. I heard stories from my former students that could be true or had become apocryphal, about Indian doctors in Atlanta defrauding Bhutanese refugees of their Medicare and Medicaid benefits. I could not verify if these were true, but it still made it difficult for some people to trust me. But after they got to know me, heard me speak faltering Nepali, and understood my project, people opened up their hearts and homes to my translator and I and gave us access to their resettlement stories.

Ultimately, I interviewed 14 men and women in Stone Mountain, Lilburn, and Clarkston, Georgia after meeting a former refugee, whom I refer to as Gyan, who heard about the project due to one of my Nepali flyers outside of a small grocery store. After interviewing him, he agreed to be my translator and also introduced me to many of his family and friends who wanted to participate. With his assistance, I interviewed 14 people total in Georgia from January 4<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

Recruiting interviewees in California paralleled some of the difficulties in Georgia, but not all. Language and literacy were also issues here, but my biggest difficulty was making the initial contact since I did not know anyone in the Bhutanese refugee community in the state. When I wrote my prospectus, I naively presumed that I could just email or call the dozen community organizations around California and people would be dying to talk to me. That did not happen at all. I barely received responses from any refugee organizations. My bigger problem was that due to their past statelessness, “Bhutanese refugees” is actually a misnomer. This community would be better referenced as Bhutanese of Nepali descent because actual Bhutanese community organizations in California did not consider this group

of refugees, *the Lhotshampa*, to be Bhutanese, and the Nepali immigrant community wanted nothing to do with the refugees because they weren't "real" Nepalis.

I knew from a few Internet searches that there were Bhutanese refugee communities in Los Angeles, Sacramento, Berkeley, and Oakland, so my initial program was to visit all of these cities and just post my recruitment flyers (similar to those used in Georgia on page 65). But, in a stroke of luck, I found a Bhutanese community organizer, whom I refer to as Bruce, whom I met in Oakland, and who enthusiastically bought into my research agenda. He also agreed to act as a translator and introduced me to 15 other community members including members of his family. This allowed me to finish my interviews over two weekends in January and February 2018, in Oakland, San Leandro, and Hayward, California.

These interviews were conducted in homes, coffee shops, and in more than one occasion, my car (as a quiet, distraction-free zone). I used the Voice Memos app on my iPhone to record all the interviews, replacing the traditional table mics and/or recorders. I transcribed the interviews later by listening and typing out each interview manually and did not use Dragon or any voice-recognition software.<sup>26</sup>

All my participants came to the United States as refugees, and some have now become citizens, while others continue to maintain their Green Card status. All are lawful residents of the United States, but they expressed some fears about being recorded and participating in this project. In order to protect their identities and add an additional level of security, I have chosen the unusual step of not identifying them even with fictional names.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> This is the same interview and transcription format I used for the policy implementers.

<sup>27</sup> The consent forms signed by the Bhutanese participants stated I would not use their names to protect their identities. I added the additional level of security after consulting with staff with the Human Subjects Committee, Office of Human Subjects, University of California at Santa Barbara.

Their stories are what matter to tell the tale of refugee resettlement. My refugee interview questions are included in the Figure 6:

**Figure 6: Interview Questions for Refugees**

1. What was your experience when you first arrived in America?
2. Did you feel welcome? Or did you experience any discrimination?
3. What was the resettlement process like?
4. What did you learn in orientation in Nepal and in U.S.? What did you learn? What skills were emphasized by the resettlement agency?
5. Did you receive government assistance? What was your experience with government welfare workers?
6. Who was your caseworker? What agency? How much contact did you have with them?
7. What skills did your resettlement workers emphasize? Were you encouraged to attend specific classes and/or acquire certain skills?
8. Did caseworkers talk about citizenship? Voting? Political participation?
9. Where did you learn most about politics? Citizenship? Who told you about it?
  
10. Here is a list of people or organizations. Can you please rank them in order of most to least important when it came to teaching you about politics:
  - Other Bhutanese refugees.
  - Other Americans (not Bhutanese).
  - Government officials.
  - Agency volunteers or caseworkers.
  - Classes/professors in school/ college
11. What does American citizenship mean to you?
12. Would you return to Bhutan/ Nepal?
13. Do you want to stay in the U.S.?

C. The Failed Survey

One of the unfortunate and desultory aspects of this project was my failed attempt at gauging responses from Bhutanese refugees to my Survey of American Refugee Integration (SARI). The original plan for the dissertation was to utilize a mixed-method approach with a quantitative, large-n survey of Bhutanese refugees in Georgia and California, followed by in-depth interviews with a stratified sample of respondents who had already participated in the

survey. Similar surveys of refugees have been conducted before including the Colorado Department of Human Services' 45-question Refugee Integration Survey and Evaluation (RISE), which tracked a single cohort of refugees from four countries – Bhutan, Burma, Iraq, and Somalia – over a four-year period (Taintor and Lichtenstein 2016). All the refugees in their sample were resettled in 2012 [Baseline (B)], and the research team employed a cross-sectional panel and attempted to re-survey all 467 original respondents in 2013 (B+1), 2014 (B+2), and 2015 (B+3).

Inspired by RISE, I developed SARI to specifically analyze the experiences of Bhutanese refugees. My original plan, as outlined in my prospectus, was to offer refugees the survey in Nepali or English and pilot it online. However, two former students had difficulty translating the survey. The challenge was not only linguistic, but conceptual and would portend later issues. I decided then to just use an English-only survey, despite the survey bias; by restricting the language, I would also limit who could participate. I received IRB approval to administer two, online versions of SARI through [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), and intended on using my personal connections and networks to get respondents, especially through refugee community and youth groups on Facebook. But between November and December 2017, I had a response rate of only 12 percent; of the 20 people who started it, only three finished. This was the same for the Georgia and California versions.

Alarmed at the lack of interest, I held a focus group with seven of my former Bhutanese students from Georgia Perimeter College when I was in Atlanta in January 2018, to specifically determine why no one was able to complete the survey. All seven students said the survey was unique and something they had never seen. However, they all thought the survey asked questions that most had never considered and had no idea how to answer.



Besides two students who had become Political Science majors, none of the other students had ever seen a Likert Scale before and did not understand the process or concept of ranking choices. So, a question like “What was your level of language fluency BEFORE coming to America?” became difficult to answer because no one could figure out the differences among the seven choices: “very poor,” “poor,” “fair,” “functional,” “good,” “very good,” and “native-like.” The focus group also let me know that while the survey was mobile-phone friendly, it was not easy to forward the link as I had already envisioned because other Bhutanese refugees, allegedly, thought they could just answer a few questions and did not have to answer every question.

Based on the feedback from the focus group, I decided to abandon the survey and focus only on interviewing refugees. The loss of the survey data was irreplaceable, but I have come to believe that integration, while quantifiable, loses its nuance when it is explained in terms of answers to surveys. Voices are lost and in the case of my project, two sets of voices were captured through interviews: the policy implementers and the policy recipients.

## CHAPTER V: THE HIERARCHICAL INTEGRATION MODEL OF RESETTLEMENT IMPLEMENTATION

### A. Introduction

One of the least understood elements of refugee resettlement in the United States is the manner in which states actually implement their policies. As I have contended throughout this dissertation, states, as sub-national governments in a federal structure, have discretion during the implementation process for much of the federal policies and programs administered from Washington, D.C. In the following section, I first begin with a detailed discussion of the policy implementation literature and pay special attention to some of the key variables discussed by other scholars. I then offer an original and creative approach to studying resettlement policy implementation using the Hierarchical Integration Model, which focuses on the concept of “hierarchical integration” that emphasizes minimizing veto or challenge points in the bureaucratic process. Drawing on interviews with policy implementers in Georgia and California, I argue that the leadership of the state refugee coordinator is the most important variable in a state meeting its resettlement goals and objectives (as outlined in its state plans to the ORR).

### B. Components of Policy Implementation

There is a rich literature, albeit a dated one, on policy implementation. Though this research agenda has fallen out of favor in the discipline, it has never been more relevant, aided primarily by recent work on the Affordable Care Act. While the phase of implementation-focused research has waned, the questions are even more relevant. “Even as the researchers seem not to have solved the implementation puzzle,” O’Toole wrote,

“practitioners continue to find themselves enmeshed in the vexing challenges of converting policy intent into efficacious action,” (265). One of the major conflicts amongst policy scholars that has also led to a demise of the topic is the sparring between those looking for large-n, variable-rich, longitudinal studies and others who insist on small-scale analysis or case studies (O’Toole 2000, DeLeon and DeLeon 2002).

By policy implementation, I am referring to Van Meter and Van Horn’s (1975) understanding that “encompasses those actions by public and private individuals (or groups) that are directed at the achievement of objectives set forth in prior policy decisions” (p. 447). Implementation begins once the short- or long-term policies have passed the proposal stage, been funded, and set to be in action. For Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983), the key focus is the relationship between the makers of policy and their influence on “street level bureaucrats” (Lipsky 1980) to achieve certain goals and provide services to specific groups. The authors identify three key sets of actors in the policy life cycle: “the center” (source of policy), “the periphery” (policy implementers), and “the target group” (Mazmanian and Sabatier 1983, 12). While each set has a different vantage point, “the center” and “the target” have the same question: “To what extent are the intended services actually delivered?” (p. 12). But the real focus for this chapter (and dissertation) is “the periphery,” and in that context, they define implementation as “the manner in which local implementing officials and institutions respond to the disruptions in their environment caused by the efforts of outside officials to achieve a new policy” (12).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The authors later refine this definition, introducing the concept of the “policy subsystem” to account for the iron triangle that makes sure policy implementation occurs as a result of a tightly-controlled interplay between “the relevant agencies, legislative committees, and interest groups (Mazmanian and Sabatier 1983, 20).

At the beginning of Pressman and Wildavsky's (1984) *Implementation*, the authors hook the reader with this cogent statement: "The separation of policy design from implementation is fatal" (xxv). Their intention was to use a specific case study, the Economic Development Administration (EDA) in Oakland, Calif., to provide an in-depth analysis of what happened when federal policy was so far removed from the specifics of implementation. The relevance of their project, over thirty years later, lies in its insights culled from detailed interviews with policy makers and implementers. The most important lesson, they argued, was that "implementation should not be divorced from policy. There is no point in having good ideas if they cannot be carried out" (143).

Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) note that policy implementation seems simple to understand, yet complex to measure. Its contradiction, they note, is that policy challenges are usually understood in the policy making and design phase and not conceptualized enough when it comes to putting the policy into the field. Further, they believe that defining the specific actors and variables has proven too difficult. It is for precisely this reason that implementation became a topic of study. The failure of the Great Society was a failure of implementation, and it spawned a wave of research (Bailey and Mosher 1968, Derthick 1970, Gross et al. 1971, Sabatier and Mazmanian 1981, Mazmanian and Sabatier 1983, Pressman and Wildavsky 1984). What the implementation literature got right, says DeLeon and DeLeon (2002), was its focus on individual government programs

In the case of the EDA, and its creation in the era of President Johnson's Great Society, the program's creation and its buy-in from officials in Oakland were of paramount importance. All else became "technical questions" to be resolved as issues of secondary concern. This, according to the authors, doomed the program. Pressman and Wildavsky

(1984) offered four strategies to enhance implementation: constructing policy with less veto points; an understanding of how policies will be implemented and by what agencies; agency oversight of policy implementers; and designing policies keeping in mind what didn't work in the past (143 – 145).

The need to reduce veto or clearance points to improve policy implementation is a key feature in the literature. For Pressman and Wildavsky (1984), “Since each required clearance point adds to the probability of stoppage or delay, the number of these points should be minimized wherever possible” (143). While not one of their primary conditions for effective policy implementation, Sabatier and Mazmanian (1979) also emphasize the need to reduce veto points to achieve stable implementation.

Despite my earlier statement about the datedness of the policy implementation literature, it has recently come into favor again through the burst of scholarship surrounding the Affordable Care Act (Starer et al. 2011, Haeder 2012, Haeder and Weimer 2013, Béland et al. 2016). The intricacies of this legislation, building upon rather than replacing previous laws, created an immediate need for detailed policy analysis of its design at the federal level and implementation among states. In their work on the implementation of the ACA, Béland et al. (2016) identify three characteristics to explain the variation in its success: policy legacies, institutional fragmentation, and public salience. Policy legacies “consist of preexisting institutions and intergovernmental relationships that predate the passage of the ACA” (9). States with tougher legacies make it far more difficult for opponents to try and challenge the new policies. The authors also comment on the legacy of popular policies and the statutory and local resistance to federal changes. The opposite is also true: “weak policy

legacies allow opponents of reform to leverage uncertainty about policy outcomes to sow doubt about embracing a new reform” (9).

Institutional fragmentation is, for Béland et al, “the extent to which a policy divides decision-making authority among multiple actors” (9). The theory here is like that of veto points: the more people involved in deciding how the ACA should be implemented, and the individual jurisdictions or policy subsystems those actors focus on, only increase the fragmentation of the policy’s implementation. States with higher institutional fragmentation are less likely to carry out smooth transitions over implementing the Affordable Care Act. Lastly, the authors highlight public sentiment towards three features of the ACA as their third key variable in its implementation. They look at the public’s knowledge and support towards insurance exchanges, Medicaid expansion, and regulatory reform. It might be helpful to consider the role of public sentiment in terms of Downs’ (1972) “Issue Attention Cycle.” The public is first awakened to a new problem when confronted with new information. Their interests reach the level of elites who also institute changes or posture as if they are making changes, before public opinion falls. But the attitudes and feelings of the public can rise again if triggered by a new crisis, which causes policy elites to pay attention again.

Béland et al (2016) emphasize that what makes the ACA such a dynamic topic of study is that its design *demanded* certain state responses and that its politics, as an Obama-related project, motivated some states to believe that if the right actors could set the agenda then the law’s implementation could be initiated or delayed. The question was on “the political legitimacy of the reform itself” (16). States, they argued, engaged in one of two ways to push back against the ACA. Some engaged in a “negotiation of consent,” where lobbyists and wonks tried to influence the policy from outside of government (16). But others

opted to push for change inside government, specifically state offices and agencies, which they dub the “construction of dissent” (17). Accordingly, “Both consent and dissent emerge out of strong incompatibility between federal and state policy preferences. Sharp disagreements between actors at the federal and state levels can permit political controversy to persist long past the point of enactment” (17).

Additionally, leadership in the policy implementation process is considered a key variable, but is seen as difficult to measure, yielding normative debates over its evaluation. What makes a good leader? What are leadership qualities that imperil or encourage policy implementation? One of the challenges, for Smith (1973), is differentiating between *political* leaders and *policy* leaders. In the context of the Developing World, Smith (1973) recounts the quotidian challenges faced by policy implementers who are affected by poor political leadership<sup>29</sup>. For successful policy implementation, however, Smith (1973) does account for the bureaucratic leadership, as well as the capacity of the implementing organization to meet the program needs it has been set out to accomplish, and the availability of strong institutional culture and personnel. For Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), leadership must be thought of in relation to personnel. Since the smallest unit of implementation is the individual bureaucrat, they believe leadership has a key role to play in not only motivating individual implementers to smoothly carry out a project, but that leadership, in conjunction a couple other characteristics, “can influence the individual’s identification with the organization’s goals and objectives, either facilitating or hindering effective implementation depending on the orientation of the implementing agency” (477).

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<sup>29</sup> In the original manuscript, the author uses the expression “the Third World”. I changed the language to be more in line with current acceptance.

In their classic framework, Sabatier and Mazmanian (1979) offer several “conditions” for the successful implementation of any policy. Condition #3 is on leadership and the dual traits of political and managerial skill required by all leaders to achieve the goals laid out in the original statutes. Where “political skill” is focused on keeping all actors and parties happy including those in the policy subsystem, interest groups, allies, and accounting for minority opposition, “managerial skill” covers more bureaucratic needs including keeping agency and staff morale high, preventive management concerns before they develop further, and implementing a system of due process and “managing internal dissent” (Sabatier and Mazmanian 1979, 495).

Where Smith (1973) demarcated between political and policy leaders, Sabatier and Mazmanian (1979) insist that it is political leadership that sets the tone for the lead policy implementer. This is especially true in appointments due to political favoritism. The authors also note that no amount of policy design heroics will aid the implementation like successful leadership can.

### C. Modelling Refugee Resettlement Implementation

Modelling implementation is difficult for precisely the reason set forth by Van Horn and Van Meter (1975) over forty years ago: how do you create parameters for implementation when so little conceptualization takes place over long-term policy application? In their survey of the topic, DeLeon and DeLeon (2002) write that part of the lack of sustained interest in the topic is due to the difficulties with its formal understanding; “it was too difficult to study ... or, conversely, too simple” (469).



One of the most challenging features of undertaking policy implementation is specifying the dependent variable. In classic understandings, like Easton's (1953) systems theory, analysts often looked for outcomes and reduced speculation to what inputs an institution received and how those were converted into specific "outputs." Hill and Lupe (2002) note that "outcomes may be influenced by factors that have nothing to do with the policy intervention" (145). Beyond the requirement for strong leadership and focused policy goals, unchanged policy/statutory objectives, and active support from key legislators and interest groups, Sabatier and Mazmanian (1979) emphasize that veto points, or their management, are a must.

I would like to offer a novel dependent variable that is usually used as an independent variable in past work on policy implementation – hierarchical integration. I argue that this DV is a function of four, key concepts from the literature: institutional fragmentation, leadership, oversight, and political controversy.<sup>30</sup>

$$\text{Hierarchical Integration} \\ = f \{\text{Fragmentation} + \text{Leadership} + \text{Oversight} + \text{Controversy}\}$$

In their explanation as to why certain policies fail, Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983, p. 20) posit seven reasons: "clear and consistent objectives," "incorporation of adequate causal theory," "initial allocation of financial resources," "hierarchical integration within and among implementing institutions," "decision rules of implementing agencies," "recruitment of implementing officials," and "formal access by outsiders." Hierarchical integration is appealing as a dependent variable because it is a composite measure that aggregates two

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<sup>30</sup> Hierarchical integration also becomes an endogenous variable, in the context of other implementation factors, when trying to explain the success or failure of the policy outputs, which in this case would be the services provided to refugees.

concepts. According to Sabatier and Mazmanian (1979),

“The degree of hierarchical integration among implementing agencies is determined by the number of veto/ clearance points involved in the attainment of statutory objectives and the extent to which supporters of statutory objectives are provided with inducements and sanctions sufficient to assure acquiescence among those with a potential veto” (491).

By utilizing hierarchical integration as the dependent variable in addition to the traditional outcome or output (Easton 1953), I can then offer additional (and original) theories and hypotheses to account for the second component of the aggregate measure (besides veto points). The key here is isolating variables that would offer “inducements” to *not* veto. I have four key independent variables. First, if veto/clearance points are those points when “an actor has the capacity ... to impede the achievement of statutory objectives,” then understanding what those clearance points are seems to be vital to understanding the likelihood of any state implementing federal resettlement policy (Sabatier and Mazmanian 1979, 491). Drawing on Béland et al. (2016), I argue that institutional fragmentation will depress the likelihood of achieving consensus over the state’s resettlement program.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** The lower the institutional fragmentation (the less veto points), the greater the hierarchical integration of the state’s resettlement program.

Second, the leadership of the state refugee coordinator (SRC) should have a huge influence on the pro-refugee consensus within a state. Because of the 1980 Refugee Act, Congress created the Office of Refugee Resettlement and tasked each state with creating the position of a state refugee coordinator. Under Title 45, Chapter IV of the Federal Record, each state *must* identify an SRC either by gubernatorial or legislative appointment or decree. The SRC must be an incumbent state employee, and “will have the responsibility and

authority to ensure coordination of public and private resources in refugee resettlement in the State.” The most recent list of all state refugee coordinators is maintained by the ORR and is publicly available.<sup>31</sup>

In a very early analysis of nine refugee programs, Kogan et al. (1982) noted that there was “wide variation in the responsibilities assumed by the SRC” (44). The SRC ranged from extremely involved in the day-to-day operations to barely available. This combined with other responsibilities led some states to have SRCs whose leadership, they argued, directly affected the ability of staff to carry out the goals of the program, oversee relationships with other agencies, and oversee the distribution of benefits to refugees. As such, it is vital that other policy implementers in each state – local and county-level bureaucrats and elected officials as well as staff with refugee resettlement organizations (RROs) – should support the leadership of the state refugee coordinator.

**H2:** The greater the level of support for the leadership of the state refugee coordinator, the greater the hierarchical integration of the state’s resettlement program.

One of the key components of resettlement policy that is poorly understood in the United States is the role of oversight. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) oversees the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), which in turn has oversight over 21 agencies including the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR).<sup>32</sup> It is tasked with overseeing the nation’s resettlement program and acting in an advisor role to state refugee coordinators and other support staff in public and private roles. To aid in this

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/orr-funded-programs-key-contacts>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/about/offices>

effort, ACF is divided into ten regions with regional offices and regional administrators who implement ACF's federal policies. Similarly, the ORR has ten regional representatives of their own to provide oversight to specific zones.<sup>33</sup> ORR oversight, as administered by the regional representative, is a key and missing part of the successful implementation of a state's resettlement program. Since this dissertation is focused only on California and Georgia, I hypothesize that the Region 9 representative (Arizona, California, Hawaii, and Nevada) and Region 4 representative (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee) must concur with and support the decisions of the respective state refugee coordinators in order to achieve a strong level of hierarchical integration.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** The greater the level of federal oversight of the state refugee coordinator, the greater the hierarchical integration of the state's resettlement program.

Nakamura and Smallwood (1980), Kitschelt (1986), and Béland et al. (2016) provide theoretical support for a fourth and final independent variable. The resettlement program is going through massive changes for the first time in its history, so the political controversy of refugee politics might affect the consensus in the state. In all three of these works, the authors point to the presence of unique structures - what Kitschelt (1986) calls "political opportunity structures" – that either establish stable baselines or engender further micro-structures or processes that allowed for greater policy implementation despite the presence of consensus-breaking. Since hierarchical integration is predicated on the successful management of veto points and achieving a certain level of bargaining to dissuade actors from not vetoing,

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<sup>33</sup> [https://archive.acf.hhs.gov/programs/oro/regions/acf\\_regions.html](https://archive.acf.hhs.gov/programs/oro/regions/acf_regions.html)

achieving a certain level of harmony over political controversy must be included in any model of refugee resettlement implementation.

**H4:** The weaker the level of political controversy in a state, the greater the hierarchical integration of the state's resettlement program.

#### D. Discussion

##### (i) *Program Structure*

My first hypothesis was related to the question of institutional fragmentation, which I conceptualized as the number of veto points in the resettlement process in each state. As I conducted the phone interviews, I was able to map out an organizational flowchart to highlight the fragmentation and possible veto points. First, the common perception is that resettlement is a kind of Venn Diagram where the efforts to help refugees are born primarily by the state with some assistance from the federal government and private resettlement agencies, but less so from the counties. But each state had remarkably different organizational structures, which leads me to believe that merely grouping them in the category of states that directly administer resettlement programs is a disservice.

Second, as a point of reference, I used the most recent Georgia<sup>34</sup> and California<sup>35</sup> state plans submitted to the ORR to see if there was some parity between the stated, organizational goals, and the evidence gleaned from the interviews. What I discovered was that the Georgia SRC has a minimal role. While he is the official coordinator and heads the partnership between the federal government and Georgia, his implementing role is limited,

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<sup>34</sup> <https://garefugees.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/state-plan-2011.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Refugee/StatePlans/CA\\_State\\_Plan\\_2017-18.pdf?ver=2018-02-14-104010-877](http://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Refugee/StatePlans/CA_State_Plan_2017-18.pdf?ver=2018-02-14-104010-877)

and he is very much a creature of the state agency to which he is formally employed (the Georgia Department of Family and Child Services). The real powerbrokers in Georgia are the regional offices of the national refugee resettlement organizations (RROs) whose service contracts are established by their national offices and formal agreements with the federal government's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (Department of State) and the ORR.

Resettlement in California is more layered. The State Refugee Coordinator actually manages the state program, but the key point of difference between California and Georgia is that in the former, the counties have far more responsibility to implement programs in their areas and can even subcontract out specific resettlement services to other private agencies. There are many more veto points and here again, my first hypothesis was not supported: a high level of institutional fragmentation in California did not lead to less consensus, but more. Despite California have a more complex resettlement program with many more potential points of policy confusion, challenge, or even dissension, the state's program has been engineered to limit conflict and minimize veto points. This was not the case in Georgia despite that state having a "simpler" framework for resettlement – no county influence at all, and most work carried out by the private RROs.

(ii) *Leadership*

It should come as no surprise that leadership was greatly affected by the unique structures within each state, and that in turn had a massive effect on perceptions of the leadership of the state refugee coordinator. The California SRC received tremendous support from the interviewees, who praised his past experiences as a Laotian refugee, as setting a

positive tone for the state. When interviewed, he said that his 30 years of state experience gave him the management and administrative tools, but it was his own life that truly gave him the knowledge to provide the appropriate services to the new refugees coming to California. According to the Stanislaus County refugee coordinator, “The state [coordinator] is very supportive, and has a really great story and he’s a personal friend of mine. He feels passionate about what he does because he understands the process.” Other interviewees praised the SRC and their relationship with him as “really good and active.” The Alameda County refugee coordinator, also a former refugee, remarked on her and the SRC’s experiences as what made their work, and implementation, so successful. For the director of the Oakland chapter of Catholic Charities, she felt acutely a statewide consensus in terms of political climate and a high level of collaboration between RROs and counties, but also with the SRC. “His level of partnership is incredible,” she said. “The fact that there so many organizations in California ... He and his team make time to be involved in every conversation we have. Throughout the state, organizations have really come together”

The Georgia State Refugee Coordinator, by contrast, received a dismal evaluation. Not a single policy implementer spoke well of his direction and leadership, and no one believed that the SRC had a common plan for the state. When I asked the Mayor of Clarkston, the only elected official in my respondent pool, if he saw a consensus in the state, he said, “Absolutely not. Governor said we won’t accept Syrian refugees. Politics, politics, politics. All the Republican governors are saying the same thing (they’re on the same listserv).”

Indeed, in a perplexing and unexpected interview I conducted with the Georgia SRC, he constantly reminded me that he didn’t oversee anything. In his words,

“The state does not actually resettle any refugees. They are resettled by the local voluntary agencies that have a direct contract with the Bureau of Refugees, Population, and Migration ... Our role at the state is to provide ongoing support, social services, refugee cash assistance to assist in taking care after they have been resettled ... We are trying to take the word “resettlement” out of my office’s names.”

This is made all the more shocking when the state plan for Georgia includes an organizational chart indicating that the state refugee coordinator *does* oversee the state resettlement program, and is supposed to synchronize the activities of numerous policy actors including “Refugee Program Contractors/ Service Providers,” the State Refugee Health Coordinator, the “Multi-County Supervisor,” and the Georgia Coalition of Refugee Stakeholders.<sup>36</sup>

As the senior program manager at Catholic Charities told me, “Wouldn’t it be great for the state refugee coordinator to be an advocate and he doesn’t see that as his role at all?” Another RRO official, the deputy director of the Atlanta office of the International Rescue Committee, mentioned that many of the 18 or so government offices and private agencies involved with resettlement had formed their own coalition to aid in the work precisely due to the lack of leadership from the state coordinator. A program manager at Lutheran Services of Georgia commented on this as well and called out the poor leadership and attitude of the SRC *and* governor. A former Rwandan refugee, this program manager said that while Atlanta and Clarkston were supportive of refugees, as well as employers and economic sectors, the governor’s lack of support for the state resettlement program was palpable. Worse, she said, was that the SRC had adopted Governor Nathan Deal’s approach as well; “they don’t really like refugees.” Based on these interview statements, I believe there is

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<sup>36</sup> <https://garefugees.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/state-plan-2011.pdf>



strong support for my second hypothesis: positive perceptions of leadership are directly proportional to hierarchical integration

*(iii) Oversight*

My third hypothesis focused on oversight. For the resettlement program, oversight is provided by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, a federal agency within the U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services, proved to be a key component in California. The regional ORR representative has a dual role as a program analyst and outreach coordinator, but our interview revealed much more detail in not only her responsibilities, but what she saw as her role. As a program analyst, she has oversight over all federal “formula grants” making her more like a grants officer; she was charged with implementing refugee cash assistance, Social Security, and other funds, and also compiling program reports and doing on-site monitoring. In her second role as outreach coordinator, the ORR representative was responsible for working with other federal agencies to ensure that all involved knew the needs of refugees in the ACF region (including California in this case).

But oversight in this case also involved monthly calls with the state refugee coordinator, bi-monthly meetings with county coordinators (mostly in the Bay Area and Northern California). The regional ORR representative also let me know that while she has oversight over California, the refugee resettlement program is in fact administered at the county level, making her responsibilities greater than simply acting as a liaison between the federal government and the state as a whole.

One of the key and immediate differences I realized through the interviews was that ACF had different expectations for oversight with refugee resettlement depending on the

region of the United States. Not all regions are created equal and it was not just about size, but expectations. Region 9 was four states compared to Region 4's eight states. Further, the Region 4 ORR representative carried on the roles of program analyst and outreach coordinator at the same time; this was divided between two people in Georgia. The ORR Region 4 analyst worked on data, compliance, forecasting refugee-related trends, budget issues, and some monitoring.

The actual Region 4 ORR regional representative said that her role was to “support the state ... provide technical assistance, help bridge the gap and break down barriers, and actually carrying out functions. Also, as a part of that, I am responsible for going out and networking and providing outreach. That’s kind of a general program.” It is hard to decipher exactly the obligations of her position compared to the description of the Region 9 representative who had oversight over California. But the revelatory part of our conversation was when she admitted how poorly the federal government conducted oversight in the region. Mid-size programs were visited only ever two years. Smaller programs rarely received site visits, and at best, desk monitoring. I got the impression that this just wasn’t about size, as number of states, but an institutional belief that each state should be left to implement their programs with minimal federal oversight. The statements from the federal ORR representatives for Georgia and California confirm my third hypothesis: more federal oversight leads to greater hierarchical integration, and the converse is also true.

(iv) *Political Controversy*

Finally, my interviews yielded a rich discussion with the implementers in both states about the nature of political controversy regarding the respective refugee resettlement programs, lending support to my fourth hypothesis. 15 of the 18 people I spoke to remarked

on the current political climate, but used that as a justification for discussing, again, the leadership of the SRCs<sup>37</sup>. The Immigration Outreach Coordinator for San Diego-based Alliance for Africa, for example, talked about the refugee-related polarization she had observed in San Diego County, but also felt that the area was home to such a continual flow of immigrants from Mexico that it gave the area an advantage in being on the frontlines of the immigration debate. When asked about potential challenges to refugee integration, she referenced “the anti-immigrant rhetoric from the Trump administration,” and a rise in violent incidents experienced by refugees and RRO staff. In a similar vein, the San Diego county refugee coordinator spoke about the rise of anti-refugee sentiment in the area, but also referenced a privately-funded report focusing on public attitudes in Southern California towards immigrants. The findings, she said, were heartening; despite the loud anti-refugee tone of those engaged in public protest, the majority of San Diego county residents were supportive of refugee resettlement. Both women spoke to the role of the SRC in setting the tone of the state’s response to President Trump’s perceived anti-refugee bias.

The current political climate was discussed by implementers outside of Southern California as well. The Los Angeles County refugee coordinator talked about the implicit need for solidarity amongst “implementers and allies” precisely due to the presidency of Donald Trump. In a moment of shared irony, she told me that it was baffling how federal refugee policy could also be directed by someone so anti-refugee; “like where is the sense in that,” she noted. Yet, she also noted how important the state refugee coordinator had become at the time we talked due to all the public pressure and scrutiny of her agency. “We need him

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<sup>37</sup> Unsurprising, the three federal ORR staff people had no expressed opinion on the question of political climate.

more than ever,” she opined, “to help put out state and regional fires that we can’t fight alone. And the best thing about him is that he doesn’t act like king. He is helping us because he was a refugee and he knows that he was appointed by the governor to do exactly this.”

The Georgia interviewees were conscious of the national political controversies surrounding the resettlement program but took on a completely different tone. I perceived much less hostility towards the Georgia state refugee coordinator, compared to the responses I received about his leadership style. For the director of Refugee Resettlement and Immigration Services of Atlanta (RRISA), it was all about “having to ride those waves.” The refugee program was not going anywhere, she said repeatedly, because there was a pro-refugee culture in the state despite its Republican governor. Like another implementer, she praised the Coalition of Refugee Service Agencies that came together several years ago. Its work had collectively prepared each RRO to talk to the public about why refugees mattered in Georgia, and it was those talking points that made the conversations easier to have in Georgia and less likely to devolve into character attacks on the SRC.

The IRC’s deputy director spoke about how much the resettlement program nationally, and in Georgia, had changed drastically in such a short period of time. A former Peace Corps volunteer, he referenced his time overseas to set the stage for a scattered interview where he gave answers to questions I asked ... and didn’t ask. Like the Los Angeles County coordinator in reference to the California SRC, he felt the Georgia SRC *had* to take on a greater leadership position to alleviate the feeling of malaise that seemed to permeate the meetings amongst refugee stakeholders at the local- and state-levels. Unlike the LA coordinator, the IRC director believed the political changes forced him to make unilateral

decisions about how his agency would have to pursue their own integration agendas.<sup>38</sup>

#### E. Conclusion: Making State Implementation a Federal Concern

When Pressman and Wildavsky concluded *Implementation* (1984), they articulated the challenge of policy implementation as a lack of intent and foresight by policymakers. “Means and ends,” they wrote, “can be brought in to somewhat closer correspondence only by making each partially dependent on the other” (143). The conundrum of policy design was engineering them not just with outputs in mind, but greater clairvoyance about *how* they would actually be executed. The Hierarchical Integration Model of Resettlement Implementation draws on the seminal work of Mazmanian and Sabatier to articulate a framework with which to evaluate the hierarchical integration of individual states’ resettlement procedures. I believe that this simple model accounts for four key factors that can explain how integrated a state’s program is when it comes to meeting certain goals of the federal resettlement program (that I refer to as *statutory integration* in the next chapter). These factors are institutional fragmentation (veto points), leadership of the state refugee coordinator, federal oversight, and political controversies.

Three of the four hypotheses were supported by the model’s results. The greater the support for the state refugee coordinator, the stronger the federal oversight, and the less chance of political controversy, the greater the level of hierarchical integration in both states (Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4). The real surprise was my first hypothesis about institutional fragmentation. All the literature points to the belief that fewer veto points the better, but this was not true in Georgia. The state has a much more streamlined process of resettlement, primarily because the state has such a small role compared to the RROs. But there was much

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<sup>38</sup> This is covered in much greater detail in the next chapter.

more dissension about the program. California, which has a more complex system of resettlement and more veto points, actually had a higher level of hierarchical integration or symmetry in its program.

I believe that these initial findings offer up some unexpected questions about the internal workings of state administration of a previously-hidden and quite completely misunderstood area of public policy. If this project established that differences do exist in the implementation of refugee resettlement policy, then the next chapter answers the question of why differences matter: their effect on the type of services provided to and received by the refugees.

The core concept of punctuated equilibrium, as laid out by Breunig and Koski (2012), is that policies are often designed to be “sticky” to have more policy friction/veto points, which creates policy stability. In the case of Georgia, more is not less, and less is not more; less is less. The state has fewer veto points and less institutional fragmentation, but to what end? Poor leadership from the state coordinator has created a culture of dissonance, not consensus. Refugee resettlement policy in Georgia is not just incremental but is “disjointed incrementalism” (Braybrooke and Lindblom 1963, 105). When the authors asked this question – “How can a coherent attack on a problem be mounted without a common plan?” – I could do nothing but mutter, “Indeed” (p. 106). It is disjointed in Georgia because there is a profound lack of coordination between the state and refugee resettlement organizations. Each non-profit agency, while committed to the task of resettlement in line with their national organization’s contract, is allowed to pursue implementation to the beat of their own drummer and with minimal oversight.

And what of California? My analysis paints a picture of a state that despite feeling the national and even international pressures is led by a former refugee turned state coordinator whose program is thriving. But why? I hypothesized that more veto points would result in greater institutional fragmentation, which would lead to less consensus. Healthcare policy research might again provide some answers. In their recent comparative analysis of the British and American health policy arenas, Sparer et al. (2011) suggest that a new understanding of vetoes might be in order. A veto, by its very name, usually implies something negative, but they insist that there are *two* types of policy “points.” Veto points are the most commonly referenced and are a consequence of federalism, which create legislative barriers or burdens that allow for checks on policy-making and implementing. Missing from the discussion are “opportunity points” that open up policy implementation to regulatory creativity. California’s excess veto points are not areas where policy can go wrong; instead, they are “opportunity points” for pro-refugee innovation. Just as Kogan et al. (1982) surmised three decades ago, leadership matters, and the leadership of the state refugee coordinators turned out to be the deciding variable of consequence in my analysis.

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## CHAPTER VI: COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN (IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME)

### A. Introduction: Of Gaps and Statutes

In the preceding chapter, I laid out a framework to explain the ways in which sub-national states might implement their refugee resettlement programs by virtue of what Sabatier and Mazmanian (1979) dubbed “hierarchical integration.” My model suggests that California achieves a higher level of hierarchical integration in its implementation compared to Georgia. Yet, the model only seeks to explain institutional behavior in terms of a framework, not outputs.

In this chapter, I make my second empirical contribution by sharing the voices of that American refugee policy implementers and Bhutanese refugees to try and formulate a theory about policy gaps. There are two places where expectations fail to meet reality with, I argue, possibly devastating outcomes for the refugee clients. The first gap is between the resettlement-related statutes and the actual attitudes of policy implementers. The second gap is between the implementers and the refugees. Taken together, both gaps create a domino effect where unclear policy statutes, as codified by law, are hastily or vaguely interpreted by policy implementers who in turn fail to meet the needs of their clients. The Bhutanese are but one of dozens of communities resettled every year in the United States as refugees, but their experiences are emblematic, I believe, of deeper issues within the resettlement paradigm.

As referenced in Chapter 1, the United States Refugee Resettlement Program was first codified under law with the 1980 Refugee Act,<sup>39</sup> though it was actually an amendment

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<sup>39</sup> <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-94/pdf/STATUTE-94-Pg102.pdf>



to the earlier 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act<sup>40</sup> and an update to the 1962 Migration and Refugee Assistance Act.<sup>41</sup> Subpart B of Title 45 of the Code of the Federal Record details the federal-state relationship for resettlement. Under “Grants to States for Refugee Resettlement,” the e-CFR states that any state that wishes to receive money from the federal government for refugee resettlement must submit a plan, yearly, to “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” (§400.5b). Other requirements of the plan include information on whom the governor has designated as the state coordinator; responsibilities concerning the welfare of refugee and unaccompanied children; management of refugees’ medical needs; anti-discriminatory language refugee recipients; and a plan for regular meetings between state leadership and all volunteers and resettlement representatives and advocates. The governor must approve the plan before it is submitted to the ORR.

The Federal Record also covers the process by which states can form partnerships with refugee resettlement organizations (RROs), though this acronym is *not* mentioned in the Record; rather, they are referenced as “local resettlement agencies.” Accordingly, states are allowed to form partnerships with multiple RROs and may also choose to designate one as a “lead resettlement agency” (§400.56).

But where the detail dwindles is in any kind of exact or precise language about measurable outcomes related to English knowledge and/or employment – the dual markers,

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<sup>40</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/ilink/docView/SLB/HTML/SLB/act.html>

<sup>41</sup> [https://www.law.cornell.edu/topn/migration\\_and\\_refugee\\_assistance\\_act\\_of\\_1962](https://www.law.cornell.edu/topn/migration_and_refugee_assistance_act_of_1962)

as stated in the Federal Record, of “economic self-sufficiency.” This is where the state plans could be an important source of information, but also do not provide the level of specificity we might presume would come with gubernatorially-curated state plans to the federal government to receive monies to implement such a complex, bureaucratic program.

The introduction to the Georgia Department of Human Services Refugee Resettlement Plan (last revised in 2011) states that its primary goal is “to encourage effective resettlement and economic self-sufficiency of refugees.” The document defines “effective resettlement” as a point where they are

“self-reliant in utilizing existing community resources to meet their basic needs related to English language training, skills training, employment, medical care, and social and cultural adjustment. Economic self-sufficiency is defined as providing for the basic economic needs of the individual and family, without reliance on public assistance, by gainful employment in nonsubsidized jobs paying more than minimum wage” (1).

But all of this appears rather vague as far as concrete goals and outcomes. What is “self-reliant”? What qualifies as “English language training” or “social and cultural adjustment”? What about “gainful employment”? Moving deeper into the document under the section titled “Assistance and Services,” there is more opaque language about “refugee employability skills” (3). While there is a little more information about the aforementioned English classes, this information references the CFR on English training, almost as if to acknowledge that the federal government insists there be periodic reports about basic language proficiency among refugees, but without again explicitly stating what the barometers will be surrounding English proficiency (5).

Perhaps the language of the Georgia State Plan that is the most concerning is about who qualifies for assistance. It is clearly stated that “The State will focus refugee support services on those most likely to result in the earliest possible movement of the refugee to

economic self-sufficiency” (3). How is this determination to be made? Does a caseworker have the ability to decide who is the most likely to succeed? Or is this up to the leadership of the refugee resettlement organization (RRO) that is taking care of its client?

The California Department of Social Services’ California State Plan for Refugee Assistance and Services (revised February 2018) is California’s state plan that is submitted every year to the ORR in conjunction with federal standards on funding. However, unlike the Georgia plan, California does not state the objectives of resettlement immediately; rather this state focuses first on organization and leadership and eventually gets to refugee-related goals in the section titled, “Assistance and Services.” Yet here too there is a difference in the organizational structure of the states (mentioned in Chapter 5): California has a specific Refugee Programs Bureau (RPB) that is administered by the SRC. This sub-agency was created to coordinate all resettlement efforts throughout the state (5). The California State Plan also references the role of counties and their responsibility to each submit a county refugee services plan (CRSP). While there is less vague language about economic self-sufficiency, the California plan also lacks specific integration outcomes. One exception is the FSSP requirement. A family self-sufficiency plan (FSSP) is required “for every employable member of the family” (5).

#### B. Integration from the Perspective of the Implementers

Drawing on the questions referenced in Chapter 4, I will analyze the responses from policy implementers to two topics: the meaning of integration, and if refugee resettlement is conceived of as a long- or short-term solution. I will look for patterns in responses across both sets of implementers to see if there are substantive state-based differences. The

hierarchical integration model of Chapter 5 painted a picture of California as a state with a better implemented refugee resettlement program compared to Georgia. But the previous section suggests that the California state refugee plan does not match the implementation framework. What will the actual implementers tell us from the interviews? Will they converge?

(i) *“What does integration mean to you?”*

Since the role of the state refugee coordinator has been such a dominant feature of the analysis, and this dissertation, so far, it seems like a good starting point here. The California SRC understood integration in terms of the future of the refugees as residents of his state; “English language comprehension and competence; and lastly, a general understanding of American culture and laws. Taken together, he said, would make a refugee “self-sufficient.”

The role of integration has played a major and pivotal role in this dissertation, and it is always seen as equivalent to attaining self-sufficiency. For the Alameda County Refugee Coordinator (CRC), employment was the primary marker of integration, followed by activity in the community. She used an interesting word here: “visibility.” This was a similar mindset with the Stanislaus County coordinator: employment and activity. For her, “I want to see a refugee family is residing next to a family of 20 years and they are commingling and have a good relationship and their families are both attending school.” The representative from the Alliance for Africa had a more scientific response to the question of integration, and referenced her RRO’s four-point matrix that helped her and the other staff rank the self-sufficiency of her clients. She did say that each refugee client had a different goal to reach.

So, clients with disabilities often became self-sufficient in her eyes when they were able to navigate the hospital admissions process on their own.

Employment was referenced again by another implementer in Stanislaus County who saw self-sufficiency only in terms of having a job, and “successful integration” as a full-time job. This implementer also proffered something no one else said in either state: that she saw some refugee communities as having a better chance at integrating simply due to numbers. “Typically,” she said, “Iranian refugees would integrate much quicker than others because they have huge communities who have been here for years and want to help. But I haven’t seen so much support for refugees from Burma or Somalia.”

The IRC director for Oakland was extremely candid when asked this question saying he had never been asked that question and had no clear definition because it was not measured by his agency. He referenced the cooperative agreement signed between the national office of IRC and the federal government and certain outcomes referenced in that document, which was primarily employment and “how quickly they [refugees] get a job.” But, he also admitted there is a holistic understanding that he and other caseworkers tended to embrace more: “Do they have a secure and safe home? Are their kids enrolled in school? Do they have access to medical care? Are they employed? Are they going into debt?”

The California policy implementers had a number of different responses for the question of integration. While some highlighted the importance of employment, others saw community participation and “visibility” as an even more vital skill. The point one implementer made about wanting to see former refugees maintain families and ties to the area of resettlement for 20 years is a good segue for the next question.

If integration meant many things in the California context, it did not in Georgia. The repeated phrases were “employment” and “self-sufficiency” by implementers in this state (with only one exception, which I will get to in the next paragraph). For one resettlement specialist with World Relief, integration was understood in terms of his RRO’s “cultural orientation competency” that emphasized applied skills. There were community employment, health, and budgeting. The Georgia state refugee coordinator (SRC) and both ORR representatives I interviewed all understood integration as immediate self-sufficiency usually from a full-time job with minimal travel for the primary caregiver in each family. The SRC defined self-sufficiency as “the ability to care for yourself or your family without needing aid or assistance from the government.” The ORR state analyst for Georgia said that besides getting and keeping a job, learning English was important, but she also understood that for almost all refugees, English classes suffered at the expense of finding work. Since a “host of classes [are] available,” she believed that refugees could advance if they “want to advance, want to improve.” A refugee-turned-Georgia implementer mentioned that while self-sufficiency was the most important marker of integration, she also knew from firsthand experience that integration was “being able to navigate all the systems that you live in – school, financial institutions, health institutions.”

The only Georgia policy implementer who did not see eye-to-eye was the Mayor of Clarkston, who was also the only elected official I interviewed in both states. He qualified as an implementer because Clarkston, as I have referenced several times in this dissertation, is the first resettlement point for all refugees when they first land in Atlanta. His answer to the question about integration could also double as his response to long-term versus short-term thinking. First, he said, “we should operate as if refugees are coming to America to become

Americans. We shouldn't assume they are temporary Americans. We should make a commitment to creating policies on integration, but the policies lay out a certain number of ground rules." Those rules, he explained, were a focus on understanding American property rules, the idea of personal space, throwing away trash, and recycling.

(ii) *Do you see refugee resettlement as a long-term or short-term solution?*

If there was some equivocation amongst the California implementers to the question of defining integration, there was almost consensus within the same group to the second question. Every implementer in my sample thought of resettlement as a long-term solution. The ORR representative for California declined to answer the question on integration, but when asked about a "solution," responded immediately that "there are only three durable solutions for the UNHCR. Return to home country, integration into the country of first resettlement, and the third being refugee resettlement." She saw resettlement in the U.S. as a long-term solution, despite "less than half of one percent of refugees resettled in third country."

One interesting difference was that implementers with private agencies had contrasting positions on long- versus short-term solutions in terms of the number of months they were funded to provide services. While all saw resettlement as a long-term plan, how do you define "long term?" The Los Angeles County coordinator said that short-term thinking was impossible because integration was a generational goal that could take as much as five to ten years. The director of the International Institute of Los Angeles defined "long-term" as 60 months or five years of immediate and follow-up services to refugee clients. The California SRC saw his role as fixing immediate and urgent problems, or at least overseeing a program

that handled individual clients, with an eye to the long-term success of clients. As a former refugee, he constantly referenced his own steep learning curve and what he wished he knew when was first resettled in the United States compared to what he would learn on his own later. The Alameda County coordinator had the most comprehensive answer to this question, which is also unsurprising because like the SRC, she was also a former refugee. In her opinion, “You have to look at RR as a long-term plan. These refugees come to our country and they are now part of us. They belong to our country. They are here, and they want to live here and be part of the United States.”

Despite the different organizational structure and framework of the resettlement process in Georgia, covered in detail in Chapter 5, Georgia implementers also favored refugee resettlement as a long-term solution, *and* understood “long term” as a varied number of months to provide services for refugee success. According to the World Relief implementer, the cooperative agreement specific 90 days as the service window, but he admitted that his RRO was known to provide services for some clients up to 180 days, and even longer than that due to dire situations such as loss of wages and arrest. A director at Catholic Charities also spoke in favor of any and all long-term strategies to improve the quality of life for these “New Americans,” as she called them, but admitted that most RROs saw their work as short-term only. Knowing that it is almost impossible to integrate in six months, she said that her agency had the same kind of holistic attitude that other implementers in Atlanta shared, namely that if the clients needed more time, her agency would help them.



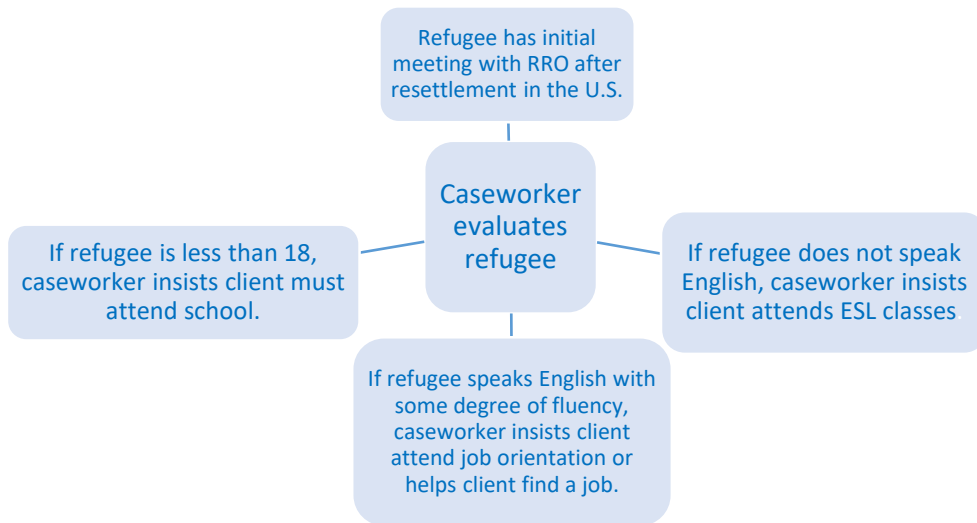
### C. Integration from the Perspective of the Refugees

In my introduction, I commented on the lack of political science research drawn from the individual stories of refugees and their role in the resettlement process. As I have navigated through this dissertation, I have attempted to tell a story about the politics of refugee resettlement by focusing on the institutional powers of states through the experiences of those implementing policy in Georgia and California. In this third and final “act,” following the suggestion of a framework to understand resettlement and then an analysis of the differences between implementers in their thoughts on integration, I present a set of findings from the lives of twenty-eight male and female Bhutanese refugees, ranging from 20 to 78-years old. Huddleston (2016) has noted that much of the policy research fails at predictivity because of a lack of consensus over “result indicators ... what the situation is of the people whose lives the policy actors aim to improve” (p. 197). This section is explicitly focused on correcting that situation by understanding if refugee resettlement policy works by reaching its clients.

Figure 7 represents a rough understanding of the first one or two interactions between the RRO, its caseworkers, and the clients after refugees first arrive in their destination cities (based on the interviews with participants). The caseworker, it should be noted, has an enormous amount of discretion to make an on-the-spot evaluation or judgment call about the prospective path each refugee can take. This could be due to specific RRO guidelines or the caseworker’s street-level decision-making (Lipsky 1980, Allerdice 2011, Darrow 2015a, Fee 2018). What is less known is how each caseworker decides who should go to high school; what constitutes an acceptable amount of English knowledge in lieu of attending ESL classes; and the appropriate level or quality of available jobs. Since I have documented some

of these challenges in Chapter 3, my focus here is again on the refugees and their experiences navigating this space.

**Figure 7: Caseworker Choices**



It is this simple flowchart that seems to be emblematic of the myriad of places where policy seems to go wrong and where simple, spur-of-the-moment decisions have enormous consequences for the long-term care of refugees. This does not represent all the potential challenges facing this unique set of clients but does account for several. I have sorted the refugees' experiences across both states into three, main challenges.

(i) Orientation Curricula and Exemptions

All asylum-seekers, whose applications for third-country resettlement are accepted, first go through an orientation in their refugee camps. According to my interviews, the first orientation could be carried out by the International Organization of Migration (IOM) or specific refugee resettlement organizations (RRO) that take on the resettlement from specific countries based on contracts signed with the United States government (for refugees coming

to the U.S.). Of the 28 participants in my study, 25 remember this camp orientation, but there is a range of memories associated with it.<sup>42</sup> The general perception is that this first orientation was an introduction to America and included tutorials on flying on an airplane for the first time; using a traffic light; shaking hands; maintaining eye contact; taking the bus; using a Western toilet; not drinking alcohol or chewing tobacco; getting along with neighbors; and other new skills.

Many of my interviewees talked about their wish that the camp orientation should have covered how difficult life was in America, how hard it was to get a job, and the problems they might face. Instead though, the content of the presentation did not back down from saying the refugees would have to work hard, but that life in America was so much better than the camps and that they would be able to own their own homes and cars. My translator in Georgia, a former student, also said that part of the orientation in Nepal was that each refugee had to sign a number of forms in Nepali that essentially indicated they had voluntarily attended the orientation and understood the context of life in America (despite most not actually knowing what they were saying). One of these forms, he alleges, was a registration for Selective Service that he says he would not have signed if he had really known what it was about. Another interviewee said that “the form becomes the orientation.” The agency that resettled him would later tell him that by signing these forms during the initial orientation, he had signed a sort of contract with the RRO that he would abide by the laws of the United States. He told me, “You signed the form without understanding. You did not really know what you signed and they presume you understood even when you clearly did not.”

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<sup>42</sup> Three were too young at the time and were not required to attend. Their elder siblings or parents often did.

The orientation in the United States, the “second orientation,” that is arguably the single most important initial experience for any refugee arriving in the United States. Building on the first training in the refugee camp, this second experience for the newly-settled refugee is intended to provide a foundation to encapsulate everything that refugees should expect to deal with wherever they are resettled. For refugees arriving in Georgia, that is life in and around Clarkston, which is part of Metro Atlanta. For those arriving in California, there are many possible sites of resettlement, but I have focused on Oakland for this dissertation.

So, who attends orientation? This was one of the most surprising findings during my research. Ostensibly, every household member over 18 was supposed to attend, but this rarely happened. Often, only one family member, usually the initial and sole provider, would attend. On top of that, and perhaps one of the contributing reasons to the integration distress I discuss soon, all of my interviewees who did not attend orientation had later problems with integration. This was complicated by two phenomena. First, elder Bhutanese who would have most benefited from the orientation, did not have to attend. Since they were already illiterate in Nepali and English, and most had a poor education, this put them at risk for feeling greater isolation. Second, the RROs often exempted refugees, most likely due to a lack of resources, but at what cost? Several interviewees mentioned saying how harrowing their first few months were, but the RRO broadly, and caseworker more specifically, decided that they [the refugee] did not need to attend orientation. In one case, the caseworker determined during intake that the refugee knew enough English to not need orientation. In another case, the client had family in Oakland and had come during reunification, so was told

that a caseworker was not available to help her get settled. This drove her to seek emergency care in a hospital for depression. She told me,

“They didn’t give me any volunteer, you can go back yourself since you know English, and the volunteer can go with someone else. So, I went to Social Security by myself and yeah I went there. I stood in the line, and got all the papers and then I had an interview. It was really difficult for me to understand their language and their accents. It was quite difficult for me to understand and I keep on asking them to repeat time and again.”

The lack of real-world knowledge information was also seen as a feature of the second orientation. When I asked a 30-year old female refugee in San Mateo, California about what she wish orientation had covered, she despondently responded by saying,

“About the reality of life here. How competitive and how hard it is to find a job ... I don’t think they talked about how hard it is to get a job. All I remember is them talking about how to stay in a plane seat, how to get feeded (sic), how to say hello ... Not practical, not about the education, not about the political system ... I think that was the most important thing I missed.”

(ii) What is Self-Sufficiency, Anyway?

In Chapters 1 and 3, I explained the twin goals of the resettlement program as employment and English that form a composite integration outcome simply referred to as “self-sufficiency.” But, over the course of this dissertation, I have explained how self-sufficiency has a tendency to be understood differently by those individuals actually implementing policy, and why that should affect how clients might perceive different expectations from the RRO staff they [refugees] come into contact with in daily interactions. Implementers’ attitudes towards self-sufficiency, particularly in terms of a short-term or long-term system of resettlement, should also have certain policy effects.

One of those effects, as experienced by my participants in Georgia and California, is an overwhelming belief that RRO staff, particularly caseworkers, cared little for the long-

term economic success of their clients. This was quite vividly described when refugees discussed their first jobs. After getting those jobs, assistance from caseworkers often vanished overnight, and worse, once the client started making some money, he or she was often ignominiously told that welfare benefits would be cut because they had “made it.”<sup>43</sup> According to one Georgia interviewee, he had to take whatever job the agency gave him, and was chastised when he complained:

“They emphasized me to work first. Because in America, they said, no work, then nothing. So they first told start working, and they put me in a job ... in a chicken plant ... I think I got Social Security after 22 days or one month ... [job was hard] I worked over there like two months and quit. It was hard ... very cold. I saw some people from our community who are vegetarian and had to work in the plants.”

For a 45-year old former refugee in Oakland, her first job in housekeeping became a nightmare when she alleges she was discriminated against by the other women, all African American. When I asked her why, she said that due to an illness, the manager of the housekeeping company arranged for her to have a helper to make sure medication was taken at the correct time. The other employees became jealous and became angry, saying that refugees received too many benefits from the government. When she decided to quit, staff with the RRO became upset and told her they would not help her find another job. To make it in America, she had to “be tough.” During a group interview in an Oakland church, a 31-year old woman talked about her initial joy in getting a job within two weeks of being in the United States, but the joy giving way to disbelief that she had to work in an industrial bakery. I initially thought her opposition was due to an internal conflict about caste; as a Brahmin,

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<sup>43</sup> It is important to note here that §400.77 of the federal code does allow for refugee cash assistance to be cut if a client terminates employment within 30 days of getting hired, and does not clarify about quality of life, quality of employment, potential hazards, or any other reason why the refugee may have left employment.

she may have found the work demeaning. But she said that the factory was too hot and “was very suffocating.” She vomited constantly during her first day and quit the next. But the International Rescue Committee either did not believe her reasons for quitting or were unhappy with her decision; she says they refused to help her find a new job, and even when she did on her own, she says the IRC then told her she would lose her food stamps, rent, and bus tokens because her new income made her ineligible for assistance.

Self-sufficiency is not just about getting a job. As the data visualization in the previous section illustrated, there is also a belief that getting an education matters. For Bhutanese refugees under the age of 18, attending high school often became the only option after initial resettlement and a meeting with the RRO and the designated caseworker. Several of my interviewees talked about being forced to attend high school in the United States even though they had already graduated from secondary school in Nepal, Bhutan, or India! Some had even attended a year or two of college but were forced to join a local high school. One 25-year old refugee laughed when he described his experience starting ninth grade at Druid Hill High School in Decatur, Georgia ... at the age of 18. He was 22 when he graduated, even though he was already a high school graduate from the refugee camp in Nepal.

In a similar vein, learning English is an important feature of self-sufficiency, but no one I interviewed knew exactly what the criteria were for attending English classes. Again, caseworkers, following their RRO guidelines, implemented unknown guidelines for deciding who should attend ESL classes and for how long. I did not meet a single refugee in either state who took an exit or final test in English to prove or establish a certain level of fluency. Rather, most of the Bhutanese talked about taking classes for anywhere from 30 days to a year, and deciding on their own when they wanted to stop taking classes. I met many

*Bhutaniharu* (Bhutanese people) who claimed they had taken English classes instead of working on the advice of their caseworkers and yet, could barely study for the citizenship test, hold a conversation in English, or do more than sign their own names. One refugee in Georgia who had a very low level of English literacy, and was also illiterate in Nepali, said that his caseworker refused to enroll him in ESL classes claiming that it was more important to find work. He mournfully told me during the interview that by never improving his English, he was destined to never work a good job in America.

When I first started the dissertation, my aim was to understand the political integration of refugees. But as I learned more about resettlement, I understood that while civic or political engagement is a vital and often misplaced experience, it is not a priority for policy implementers. In fact, almost all of the implementers I interviewed made it clear that political engagement was not part of the resettlement MoU, and more importantly, that RROs instructed their staff to avoid all political discussion. Yet, as I have described in detail in Chapter 3, civic integration is a vital part of integration-related programming around the world, even if it is not considered a priority, as compared to self-sufficiency, in the U.S.

Of the 28 refugees I interviewed, about half (13) claimed an interest in politics, but one that was not fostered by the RROs. Besides reminders to apply for Green Cards and take citizenship tests, the Bhutanese were usually not asked to participate in politics or political activities. There were some interesting exceptions. Two women in Oakland heard about a Laotian community organization that provided free ESL and citizenship test classes. Those classes allowed them to not only study for the test but gave them a basic primer on American civics. Another interviewee in San Leandro, California said that her experiences as the secretary of her refugee camp empowered her to get involved after she was resettled. She did



some Internet research and found a local chapter of the League of Women Voters and asked them to come to her house. They held a voter education drive in her home and turned it into a political Tupperware party.

A couple of refugees in Georgia also shared their political experiences with me. One knew nothing of American politics, until two people came to her apartment and asked if she knew about Ted Terry, the Mayor of Clarkston. One of the people spoke Nepali, and he explained to her that Terry, the incumbent, was very supportive of refugees and he was good for the Bhutanese community. With no other sources of political knowledge or mobilization, this woman registered to vote on the spot, and subsequently voted in her first election. That experience had stayed with her and during our interview, she gleefully told me that she had continued to vote in other elections. Lastly, a former student of mine who had become the family's patriarch before the age of 30, was not critical of the resettlement agency's lack of interest in mobilizing him but was critical of the larger Bhutanese community. He was frustrated at the lack of education and the apathy about the basics of the political process, so he taught his family about politics and then took his mother and grandparents to vote because it was important to him that the family participated.

(iii) Integration Distress

While many of these feelings could also be the result of the trauma of the refugee experience including living in camps, displacement, torture, imprisonment, and family separation, I argue that a mottled and pervious resettlement experience makes refugees feel like they have nowhere else to go (literally and figuratively). RRO directors, managers, caseworkers, and volunteers may express concerns about previous trauma, but trauma is not

in kept in mind as a consequence of the actual process. To put it succinctly, the refugee resettlement process creates new and additional traumas.

I have coined the expression “integration distress” to account for the trauma of resettlement experienced by Bhutanese refugees in my study, but likely become a part of life for other refugee communities in the United States as well. Integration distress, as I understand it, is a general malaise and loss of confidence in not only the U.S., but also in the resettlement process, individual RROs and their staff. Many of my interviewees felt frustration, sadness, depression, vulnerability, and lack of efficacy about their futures in this country. One interviewee in Oakland, a 40-year old woman, described it as “birano” or isolation (Nepali: बिरानो).

Integration distress was felt by most of the participants in my study but manifested itself in different ways. Older interviewees believed there was never an opportunity to learn English because their caseworkers insisted they first find jobs, even terrible ones, and it was more important to work than learn a new language. These interviewees seemed forlorn discussing the topic of English during our interviews and expressed the wish to go back in time and decide on learning English first. Since they could not, they were resigned to steady jobs that were not glamorous, but at least provided a steady source of income. Some of the older interviewees also talked about never getting a chance to attend the secondary, local orientations because the family caseworkers deciding the older family members could not work and were eligible for SSI that would preclude them from working.

Another form of integration distress was the fleeting relationships with caseworkers, many of whom were not fulltime RRO employees, but actually volunteers. Previous work has documented the frustrations felt by refugee resettlement workers who cannot control the

number of clients they receive, so services provided vary greatly (Darrow 2015a). The transient nature of caseworkers led many refugees to be confused about whom to talk to because they were so dependent on outside assistance. Very few of the agencies had designated Nepali speakers, and most of the caseworkers were not of Nepali or Bhutanese descent and could not speak the language of the clients. A former refugee in Snellville, Georgia, whose elderly parents were both confined to the house and had never worked, mentioned how confusing it was to come to the U.S. during the winter, not know anything, and then meet a wonderful caseworker who picked them up from the airport and took them everywhere. And then he was gone, quitting after just two months. Incidents like this often created a divide between the refugee family and their agency.

Perhaps the most profound thoughts on integration distress came from my California translator who was 23-years old when he first moved to Oakland in 2012. “I was excited to some degree, and to some degree I was depressed,” he said in our interview. “Because it wasn’t an option. We did choose to come here, but to some degree we didn’t choose.” This was not doublespeak. He was echoing what many in refugee policy have said over the years about the inevitability of global politics often creating a dependence on the United States for asylum and resettlement. When I pushed him on what had inspired him to become politically active and a local leader among the Bhutanese youth, he said, “People are still fighting for their survival. When you are in survival mode, you don’t talk about self-actualization.” His words made me reflect on the very nature of political integration. How can anyone care about when poverty is the dominant thought?

#### D. Discussion: The Implementation Gap

Despite California's strong hierarchical integration and focus on long-term resettlement efforts for their refugee clients, the state has failed to fully utilize the resettlement process as one of achieving integration, specifically in the case of Bhutanese refugees. With only a couple of exceptions, many of the interviewees expressed a moderate level of responsiveness to the RROs' resettlement services, but a deeply-held sense of distress or panic with the lack of integration. The same was true of Georgia, which did not have the benefit of either high hierarchical integration or policies that leaned closer to long-term solutions. Again, some refugees appreciated what the state and its officials and agencies had done for them [the refugees], but many also expressed their fears about the integration distress, and how they felt its effects were irreversible and deleterious.

While it is impossible to make judgments over the success of integration outcomes without using cross-sectional data or looking at long-term patterns amongst a cohort of refugees, I argue that it is possible to decipher and calculate a feeling of "integration responsiveness" amongst refugees. I hypothesize that a refugee community's responsiveness is directly proportional to the hierarchical integration of the state's resettlement program. In other words, states like California that have a high degree of hierarchical integration – fewer veto points, better federal oversight, better state leadership, and less institutional fragmentation – should be able to achieve a higher level of integration responsiveness amongst the refugees they purport to serve.

Surprisingly, this is not what I find. My twenty-eight detailed, individual and group interviews with Bhutanese refugees in both states lend strong support that there is a pervasive and persistent "implementation gap" that exists between the statutory integration goals of the

federal and state governments and the actual experiences of refugees. Refugees in California and Georgia pointed to hurried, poorly-implemented resettlement experiences that did little to integrate them socially into American life. Instead, some refugees were forced to attend school, even if they had already finished high school or attended college in Nepal, Bhutan, or India; and others to seek employment at subpar jobs. Worse, my findings in both states show a pattern of initial enthusiasm from an array of refugee resettlement organizations (RROs) that peter out quickly and do nothing to support the long-term success of refugees after an initial 90- to 180-day welcome period. Compounded by initial and overlooked experiences with trauma, the refugees I interviewed in both states were often faced with what I have called “integration distress”, or a kind of resettlement-related PTSD.

Drawing on previous work, I conclude that this dissertation research points to not only an implementation gap, but a failure of implementation of statutory integration outcomes in both states (Edwards and Sharkansky 1978, O’Toole 1986). All states are not the same, and neither are resettlement agencies. One finding of this dissertation is that not only do state and local policy implementers see their responsibilities very differently, but there exists a large amount of intra-state variance. If an agency emphasizes political integration – and makes it a part of their mission and programming – then this emphasis is passed on to their clients (refugees). This is a remarkable finding because political integration is not emphasized by the federal government and is often not even part of the discussion of self-sufficiency. But if a policy implementer at the state or county levels, or with an RRO decides that it is an integration agenda to be pursued, then it is.

My findings suggest that if an RRO decides that civic engagement is important for their clients then it either offers the programming itself or sub-contracts out to another group.

This was one of the features in California where the county refugee coordinators had a large degree of discretion. While their primary partners were the regional affiliates of the RROs, each county could also decide to sign a contract with an additional service provider, usually a non-profit organization. In San Diego County, two implementers, one with Alliance for Africa and one at the county level, let me know that they had mutually decided that newly-arrived refugees needed more focus on civic engagement and political knowledge than either the RRO or government could provide. So, the county subcontracted political integration programming to two other groups, Mid-City CAN and Pathways for New Americans (PANA). No other county in California offered so many additional opportunities.

The ramifications of this kind of unilateral decision-making and implementation are huge. While the Office of Refugee Resettlement may track integration patterns across the states, primarily through oversight, refugees may receive remarkably different levels of care simply depending on the state where they are resettled and perhaps, the county or city where the regional RRO is based. The question is not whether an implementation gap exists (because it does). The question is whether it is fair for a refugee, newly arrived in the United States, to receive support for certain integration outcomes and not others simply because policy implementers decide what is important and what is not. At its most basic level, this appears to be a failure of federalism, and a violation of equal protection.

CHAPTER VII:  
FROM REFUGEES TO NEW AMERICANS: POLICY PRESCRIPTIONS  
FOR A NEW RESETTLEMENT PARADIGM

A. My Findings

In *Still a House Divided*, political scientists Rogers Smith and Desmond King articulated a simple, but powerful formula to explain the almost invincible nature of racial politics in American life. America is constantly at war with itself due to two fundamentally distinct ways of seeing racial life that each seek to make and implement policy along their understanding of race. One group recognizes the primacy of race in every aspect of American political life and demand “race conscious” public policy, often pursued as multiculturalism. The other group recognizes the *past* primacy of race, but sees American political development as “post-racial,” which stipulates, in their minds, the need for “colorblind” public policy (King and Smith 2011).

If America’s deep and worsening racial divide is in fact due to the saprophytic nature of its competing “racial alliances” (King and Smith 2011), then perhaps this country’s inability to reach any kind of consensus on immigration policy is also due to a binary conflict of another kind: “diversity” versus “homogeneity” (Higham 1993, 4). The American public and elites are constantly torn about the need to present the United States as welcoming, but also insistent that a certain way of life must be maintained at all costs, even if keeping up appearances means *not* welcoming everyone. For Higham (1993), “One legend puts the immigrant, and all he represents, at the center of American experience. Another relegates him to the periphery” (4).

This dissertation has been an attempt to understand the politics of American immigration policy focusing on a unique group of immigrants: refugees. While refugees or “political immigrants” have sought safe haven in the United States since the eighteenth century, and in the colonies before that, global refugee law would not develop through international cooperation until a sense of urgency pervaded politics during and after World War II. The United States Congress, and a series of presidents, would offer patchwork legislation from the 1940s to the late 1970s in response to various international humanitarian crises, but it would take the last year of President Jimmy Carter’s presidency for the U.S. to finally adopt a set of domestic policies on refugee resettlement that met international standards.

The U.S. government has a simplified view of how resettlement should look. In the first step, the refugee arrives in America, and she and her family are taken care of initially by local offices of national refugee resettlement organizations (RROs) that work with various government entities. Second, the refugee is given, on average, six months of free housing and food stamps, and is expected to quickly find employment, regardless of English fluency. Last, through the simplified expectation of “making it” and achieving the American dream, the refugee “assimilates” and becomes American. This scenario, however, is unrealistic. The refugee resettlement process is never this simple, nor obstacle free, and while many refugees, even within the Bhutanese community, have achieved a considerable degree of vertical mobility and economic success in less than six years, widespread doubt and fear about long-term success persist amongst the Bhutanese.

Using the dual languages of policy implementation and integration, I have attempted to dissect the politics of refugee resettlement through two innovative empirical chapters. The



first focused on the opinions of 18 policy implementers in Georgia and California. These are federal, state, and local public servants, and staff with privately-run, refugee resettlement organizations. Using the Hierarchical Integration Model, I determined that Georgia's refugee resettlement program encourages a distance between the state refugee coordinator and the actual implementation of the refugee program. The key relationship in that state was between the privately-run refugee resettlement organization (RRO) and the refugee clients. But California employed a high level of hierarchical integration in despite having a more elaborate resettlement program. So, despite having a more complex structure - more veto points where things could go wrong and policy implementers could deviate from the goals of the program - California's resettlement program was more efficient and better organized. The main reason is the leadership of the state refugee coordinator who has managed to minimize conflict by allowing many of the county coordinators to take on more responsibility.

In the second empirical chapter, I focused on outputs, the oft-forgotten part of policy implementation or even design. In this chapter, I used textual analysis to analyze how policy implementers thought about integration in each state, and then tried to connect those ideas to the experiences of Bhutanese refugees. I incorrectly presumed that the policy implementation framework of the previous chapter would allow me to set up expectations about how resettlement policies would be received. If California had a higher degree of hierarchical integration than Georgia, than surely refugees would experience a more seamless resettlement experience. However, neither states' refugees experienced a smooth transition into American life. With few exceptions, the Bhutanese participants in this project felt betrayal and alienation from their RROs and caseworkers, which I have termed "integration distress," and a poor capacity to absorb all the information that was passed on to them to

achieve the goals of adjustment and incorporation into this American life, which I called “integration responsiveness.” This has created a deep and destructive “implementation gap” between the goals of the state program, and its actual application.

In Chapter 1 and more so in Chapter 4, I referenced the Most Different Systems Design framework to justify why I used Georgia and California for my comparative case study of resettlement policy. The logic of this design is that the dependent variable often stays the same, across cases, despite different variables. But *my* logic in choosing this design was flawed and my expectations were not met. I committed a grave methodological error by selecting on the dependent variable. I chose the MDSD framework because I needed a theoretical basis for picking the states and knew I could not simply justify my selection due to personal history. But I knew all along that Georgia and California could not possibly have the same outcome and as such were never a good fit for the MDSD. Like the “failed” refugee survey that ultimately never was (referenced in Chapter 4), I need to take more care to provide a solid and well-thought out theoretical and practical justifications for my methodological choices for future projects.

But what I could not have anticipated when I began this project was how similar they would be in getting resettlement wrong. Despite my elegant theory of hierarchical integration in Chapter 5 and my findings about California’s resettlement program having more veto points and a better resettlement model than that of Georgia, both states fail to account for the needs of their clients by failing them twice. First, by poorly outlining the specifics of self-sufficiency and then by each state’s implementers having widely differing understandings, intra- and inter-state, about how these self-sufficiency goals are to be achieved.

## B. A Policy Feedback Redesign of Resettlement Policy

So, how can all of this be fixed? I have stressed from the first chapter of this dissertation that the key unit of analysis and observation in resettlement policy is the subnational American state – the federal unit that is given discretion and freedom to implement and structure its resettlement program with little instruction from the federal government. While this dissertation was an examination of resettlement policies in Georgia and California, my recommendation could apply to any of the 49 U.S. states that still have resettlement programs. What seems to be missing from the big picture is that despite the bureaucratic necessities of the state resettlement plans, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, the Office of Refugee Resettlement does a poor job of making sure that states are clear about the language used in their plans, and more importantly, of shifting the focus from the federal government to the states. What I am calling for is a fundamental shift in how the United States government sees refugee resettlement. While the federal government has the first role in the process as gatekeeper, the United States Refugee Admissions Program needs to have more subnational control and/or input in the process.

To achieve this goal, substantial changes need to be made in individual state legislatures, but these changes will not help refugees unless there is a large-scale change in the way of thinking about resettlement. The answer is through the theory of policy feedback. Political scientists have described the role that American political institutions play in improving or reducing inequalities and motivating residents to not only participate in the political process, but also develop a better sense of citizenship. Under this new approach, the focus is on how policies influence politics, and not the other way around. According to Hacker et al. (2007), inequality in America is not an unexplainable phenomenon: it is the

consequence of poorly-designed public policy. Either Americans were unaware of the long-term consequences or the policies were designed in such a way to keep them hidden, but the reality is that even as way more Americans are dependent on the government, they are often hurt in the long run by this dependence because of poor policy design. As such, “Policies ... must be grappled with as both products and producers of politics” (4).

The literature on policy feedback has covered the GI Bill (Mettler 2005); Social Security (Campbell 2003); welfare (Howard 1997, Soss and Schram 2007, Soss 2000, Howard 2016); higher education (Mettler 2016); Medicare (Jacobs 2007, Morgan and Campbell 2011); and the New Deal (Mettler 1998). Taken together, they provide a powerful argument for the role that institutions and the processes of policymaking and policy implementation have in shaping specific outcomes of residents, voters, or citizens. The theoretical framework that binds them all is policy feedback.

How is refugee resettlement policy designed? Is the goal to include “interpretive effects” that create a sense of belonging, which in turn solidifies refugees’ trust in the government that later manifests into genuine political interest in efficacy? Or is resettlement just welfare policy, but under a different name, and one that aims at keeping recipients dependent on the system? While the latter seems implausible, given the federal and state governments’ urgency in integration measures aimed at employment and self-sufficiency, there is no empirical evidence to support otherwise. Unpacking these policies and determining their design, implementation, and reception has been one of the key goals of this dissertation.

For Soss and Schram (2007), policy feedback breaks with the classic idea of “system theory” that David Easton posited in the 1950s. It is not enough to view politics

as creating policies (Easton's system "outputs"), but to view policies as the *source* of politics. From that perspective, refugees should be considered a potential "source of politics," who rely on institutions – and institutional design – to create different political realities (Mettler 1998, Campbell 2003, Mettler 2005, Howard 2016).

In her study of policy design and participation, Campbell (2007) notes that programs designed to be universalistic lead to greater participation by recipients, but the opposite occurs when policies have specific, targeted audiences. Why? While both types of policies create feedback, positive and negative respectively, the key ingredient is the inclusion of what Pierson (1993) called "interpretive effects." These are policy design criteria that "shape both individuals' stakes in politics and public affairs and their sense of standing as members of the political community" (Campbell 2007, 123). As such, what connects the G.I. Bill, Social Security, and Medicare in their collective ability to create positive feedback are "interpretive effects" where policies were designed to benefit recipients in the short- *and* long-term and gave recipients a reason to become involved in politics. These policies all had the ability to improve the standard of living for recipients, which gave them more political resources to become more civically engaged, which directly lead to recipients' ameliorated interest in their own political lives.

By focusing on Social Security policy, Campbell (2003) was able to elegantly describe the importance of policy design. It's not just about the needs of a democracy, but also how the democracy is structured. The key assumption is that *how* a policy is structured affects much more than just its outcomes; rather, it also motivates the policy's recipients to care about said policy, most likely in ways they otherwise would not have. This becomes vital then for the policy's longevity. Poorly-designed policies that are

created without paying much thought to feedback are doomed to negative feedback loops where policy recipients may receive desired outcomes but are less likely to be motivated to become involved themselves in future policy creation by paying it forward to feeding back into the system. This is exactly the expectation of a well-designed, positive feedback loop: “Policy begets participation begets policy in a cycle that results not in equal protection of interests, but in outcomes biased towards the politically active” (Campbell 2003, 2).

While Social Security empowered senior citizens to become actively involved in the political process and gave them a reason to care about civic engagement, the opposite occurred for welfare recipients (Campbell 2003). These individuals were forced to meet with caseworkers, and these interactions caused welfare recipients to feel belittled and small, and more like dependents on a system that wanted them to feel dependent on the government while simultaneously being critical of said dependence if the recipients failed to meet the deadlines for certain programs.

As early as 1975, the federal government recognized that handling the refugees from Southeast Asia (then termed “Indochina”) would require extraordinary government cooperation. President Gerald Ford created the Interagency Task Force on Refugees to examine the problem. By 1976, Congress and the task force were already arguing over the best way to handle the crisis, as well as questions over what refugees needed to survive in America. The transcript from one congressional subcommittee hearing on the Interagency Task Force is telling in its honesty and clairvoyance: “Efforts to deal with the psychological and emotional dimensions of the refugees’ resettlement are likely to fail unless they reflect a knowledge of the unique culture of the people” (Whorton 1997, 108). Unfortunately, this was met with disagreement by Ms. Taft, the task force representative

who, in response, said, “I do not believe they face unusual mental health problems.”<sup>44</sup>

Other early reports and studies of refugee resettlement point to problems and discrepancies in resettlement programs across the states, but nothing is mentioned of how these seemingly administrative and bureaucratic issues could be detrimental to the health of the refugees. Further, many of these reports read like they were written by authors with very little direct contact with the actual refugees. A 1982 report by Kogan et al. noted “structural issues affect the program staff’s abilities to carry out several important functions, such as making timely decisions and following through” (27). Their section, “Variations in State Refugee Resettlement Philosophies,” shows how a state’s philosophy on the refugee resettlement can fundamentally alter the goals they [states] have for their new refugee immigrant populations. When one state’s philosophy is “to protect community and refugee health” while another’s is “to ensure a smooth transition of refugees into the state’s culture, avoiding negative public impacts or exploitation of the refugee,” there is cause for concern (19).

Refugee resettlement policy has not been designed to improve the political fortunes of refugees. Rather, as historically and currently imagined, it is hidden from the public’s eyes, mired in debates over state versus national power and regulation, and lacking the institutional design of other social programs in the United States to ameliorate the lives of the people it purports to help. I believe that refugee resettlement can be re-engineered with the long-term focus of newly-arrived refugees in mind. The goal, from day one, is to turn refugees into New Americans. Part of that programming must be a focus that accommodates refugee trauma.

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<sup>44</sup> Her first name was not mentioned in the hearing excerpt.

### C. Next Steps

Mitra Misha. Dan Maya Gurung. Nirmala Niroula. Menuka Poudel. Bal Khulal.

These five names are unlikely to mean much to most people, but they represent five of the estimated 55 suicides of Bhutanese refugees that have rippled across the United States since 2008 (Preiss 2013, Mishra 2014, Glionna 2014). While suicide is still a major cause of death in the United States, particularly among immigrants (Sher and Vilens 2011), the high incidence of Bhutanese suicides is shocking because this community represents one of the newest groups of refugees to be admitted to the United States, with the initial wave starting in 2008. In response, the CDC produced a report, identifying several key factors that all played a part in the Bhutanese suicides they investigated including lack of English fluency; family problems and separation; and “difficulty maintaining cultural and religious traditions” (Ao et al. 2012, 1).

This dissertation project makes a large contribution to not only the nascent field of Critical Refugee Studies but also to the ongoing expansion of advocacy and intellectual efforts on understanding mental health. Specifically, my labelling of the struggles of the Bhutanese refugees’ inability to cope with resettlement, which I have termed “integration distress,” is the biggest finding of this dissertation and the one that has the most potential to be expanded upon in further work. I would like to address this in three ways: in the context of mental health policy broadly in the United States, the established pattern of resettlement struggles with Southeast Asian refugees (as documented in this dissertation), and by expanding the initial research protocol and looking at Bhutanese refugees in other states.

Two additional substantive fields of inquiry concern broader patterns in American politics. The first is partisanship and the correlation between party-control of state



legislatures, gubernatorial rhetoric, and the implementation of different types of resettlement programs. Does partisanship play a role in the identification and implementation of integration outcomes? What are the consequences for refugees? Are refugees more likely to integrate in red or blue states? The second is about policy diffusion. What Daniel Tichenor did for immigration, I want to do for refugee resettlement policy. Many histories of immigration have been written, but none have examined how these policies have evolved at the individual, subnational, American-state level. Using historic/APD analytic models and a meta-analysis of public opinion data, I want to investigate trends in how residents in different states have responded to refugees over time, why states have adopted certain resettlement structures, and if and when states adopt their resettlement procedures from other states.

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