Gendered Subjectivity in Refugee Resettlement Processes: From Somalia to Lewiston, ME

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Gendered Subjectivity in Refugee Resettlement Processes:

From Somalia to Lewiston, ME

An Honors Project for the Program of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies

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Bowdoin College, 2018

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For Mom, who can always sing a song of me, and Dad, whose songs I know and will sing forever.
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Introduction

In the summer of 2017, I interned for one of the nine federally funded refugee resettlement agencies in the United States. As one of five unpaid college students in the office, my duties ranged from paperwork, to database update, to briefing refugee caseworkers on the proper protocols for resettlement assistance programs. The work of resettlement agencies is crucial to ensuring that bureaucracy runs smoothly, and that each family receives the services they are legally entitled to. The programs dedicated to this process vary from state-to-state and agency-to-agency, but generally operate under the same general principles. Early that year, the President signed Executive Order 13769 halting refugee admissions into the country and prohibiting the entry of those from seven Muslim-majority countries. On July 12, the refugee ban went into full effect. The precarity of the refugee resettlement system had never been more apparent.

That summer, I wrote guidelines for the updated Preferred Communities (PC) program who’s goal I recorded myself saying for an instructional webinar, “is to facilitate the successful resettlement and integration of culturally and linguistically appropriate services” to refugees. The PC program encourages Intensive Case Management (ICM) for only the “most vulnerable” refugees. To be eligible for ICM a refugee has to be registered as a “single-head of household,” “woman-at-risk,” “elderly without adequate family support,” “LGBT,” or as “having physical disabilities or medical conditions.” The goal for all refugees in the PC program, whether receiving ICM or not, is a “success” rate of 80%, “success” being defined as “self-sufficient, able to navigate US systems, and connected to community resources within one year.” Part of my job
was to audit the database of resettlement cases, ensuring that refugees receiving ICM were, in fact, eligible.

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This paper applies feminist scholarship to the lived experiences of gender and integration of refugee resettlement to the United States. My case study traces resettlement from postwar Somalia, to the old mill town of Lewiston, Maine. As refugee women transcend national borders and are prescribed new cultural norms they become systematically categorized within an essentialist framework. It is the institutionalized categorization of for example, “woman-at-risk,” and an understanding of female refugees as a collective identity that, I argue, becomes worthy of feminist critique.

I use the words “feminist” and “feminism” to qualify the work of various scholars in the field of gender and sexuality studies. Their work has greatly influenced my own scholarship and has contributed to my understanding of what is referred to widely as “feminist theory.” It is their work that grounds, by providing a theoretical framework, the lens from which I have chosen to study refugee resettlement to the United States. Their theories hold great weight in the field and are both deeply provoking and widely criticized. My work is both an assessment of the limitations of their theoretical scholarship in the context of refugee resettlement to the United States, and an assessment of the limitations of refugee resettlement from the perspective of this feminist theoretical framework. I use the following questions as my guide: Where does a feminist understanding of hegemonic and subjective knowledge fit within the globalized process of refugee resettlement? And what relationships of power are embedded within that process?

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Chapter one, “Gendering Exile: Becoming a Female Refugee,” begins in Somalia. I trace the movement of Somalis from the Jubba River Valley to United Nations refugee camps outside of Nairobi, Kenya. This movement, I argue, as facilitated by the United Nations and United States, is emblematic of a larger project of western intervention in the Global South. I trace this intervention from the Cold War era to the present. This history, I argue, when understood from a Foucauldian theoretical framework, acts as a mediated system of institutional control which crafts the refugee as its subject. Using the work of Sandra Bartky, I argue that this control should be understood as gendered control, where refugee women in particular, become the gendered subjects of refugee resettlement institutions.

An application of a feminist theoretical framework provides a more nuanced understanding of how power manifests between institutions and gendered subjects. I explore how the concepts of subjective knowledge (Sandra Harding), strategic essentialism (Gayatri Spivak), and patriarchal bargains (Denize Kandiyoti) work within the refugee resettlement apparatus. These concepts challenge Foucault’s theory of docility, providing a feminist platform from which I analyze how a gendered subjectivity of Somali women is produced by institutions of the United States and United Nations.

Chapter two, “Gendered Citizenship: Refugee Woman as American Worker,” looks specifically, at the discursive manifestations of institutional control. I am interested in how the formal process of integration to the United States, as facilitated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United States, relies on and perpetuates certain essentializing understandings of refugee women. I trace the inclusion of women into the legal framework of refugee resettlement from WWII to the present. I am interested in the changing ethos of resettlement practices by the United States, which I argue, influences the gendered
institutionalized subjectivity of refugee women. It is from these institutions that Somali women are understood not only as gendered refugees, but also, as gendered new Americans.

Using policy documents published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and cultural orientation curriculums created by the United, I come to an understanding of how the gendered subjectivity of refugee women manifests within the Western institutions of resettlement. Cultural orientation cover topics ranging from finding employment and paying bills, to “asking questions!” and “self-reliance.” The curriculums for these programs, as the stated by the UNHCR, “help you prepare for your first few months in the United States. It tells you what to expect as you find a place to live, look for work, meet Americans, and adjust to American culture and society.”

The “refugee woman” as defined by these documents, is a self-sufficient working woman who contributes to the American economy while holding on to her own cultural values. The expectations for women who enter into the refugee resettlement programs of the United States are, I argue, a product of western ideology rooted in citizenship, individualism and equality.

Lastly, in chapter three, “Gendered Belonging: Making Lewiston Home,” I follow the subjectivity of Somali women as represented in documents of resettlement, to a community of Somali women living in Lewiston, ME. I am interested in how institutional subjectivity manifests in the lives of these women, and in what ways their lived experiences challenge, subvert, or apply said subjectivity.

The women and men with whom I spoke to for this project welcomed me into their places of work and places of worship, eager to answer my questions and help me learn. It is from shadowing and interviewing members of the Somali community that I present in chapter three an

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1 2012 – English_Welcome_Guide.pdf
alternative narrative to, and expose the limitations of, the gendered subjectivity produced by UN and US refugee resettlement agencies. The names of the women who are quoted in this chapter have been changed to protect the privacy and anonymity of my interlocutors. With the exception of Fatuma Hussein, a notable public figure of the Somali community in Lewiston, the identities of these women are strategically protected.

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Theory, writes Sandra Harding, allows us to discern “discrepancies between the methods of knowing and the interpretations of the world provided by the creators of modern Western culture and those characteristic of the rest of us.” While Harding’s use of the word “us” falsely distills feminist standpoint into a universalizing identity, her epistemological inquiry holds true. An understanding of where our knowledge comes from and how that knowledge is reproduced is a critical step in breaking down gendered power relations. Research into the production of the “female refugee” as subject serves as a feminist epistemological inquiry into social and institutional relationships of power. This paper is an application of feminist theory onto the globalized process of refugee resettlement to the United States.

As a student studying the resettlement process of Somali women, I am conscious of the role I play as an outsider when I enter into their spaces. The information I present in chapter three is not representative of a complete experience or full understanding of resettlement to the US. The knowledge I gained from my time in Lewiston is a tool I use to further analyze refugee resettlement from a feminist perspective but is not platform from which I speak for, or to, the experiences of these women. This project is an inquiry into how feminist theory can be applied to better understand where institutionalized power and gendered relations manifest.

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2 Harding in, Mann and Patterson, *Reading Feminist Theory*, 14.
Chapter 1. Gendering Exile: Becoming a Female Refugee

Lewiston, Maine, situated alongside the Androscoggin river, is a small city of just over 36,000 people. As one drives through the geography of residentially-located strip malls and affordable housing complexes, the city’s relative deprivation becomes obvious. Less than a mile from Bates College, residential Lewiston is a composite of multifamily duplex apartments and early-20th-century homes. The city continues to struggle in its attempts to build a strong post-industrial economy: 70% of the population became unemployed after the Bates Textile Mill closed in 1961, and by the early 2000s, 46 percent of the population was still living below the poverty line.

Beginning in 2001, however, Lewiston began to experience rapid demographic and cultural changes, and over the past decade and a half, the city has come to be known as a “great success story” by the news media for the unprecedented integration of African refugees. Mini marts on street corners advertise everything from pizza and beer to halal meats and homemade sambusa. Lewiston has transformed from a homogenous community of Mainers to the state’s epicenter of ethnic and religious diversity with new storefronts, restaurants, and ways of life introduced and sustained by hundreds of new residents – Somali refugee families.

The community living in Lewiston represents only a small fraction of the population that fled postwar Somalia in the early 1990s. About half of those living in Lewiston are of Bantu origin, a minority group of slave-descendant non-ethnic Somalis. Over a million people have been affected by the conflict, which was accompanied by massive human rights violations and

3 “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts.”
4 Scontras, “Maine Voices”; Besteman, Making Refuge, 110.
international humanitarian concern. The Guardian named Somalia “the world’s most dangerous place,” and the International Monetary Fund declared living conditions in the country to be “among the lowest in the world.” Even today, there is a protracted movement of refugees out of the country, and Somalia ranks high on international development and human rights indexes as a nation of high concern. Refugees from Somalia have since been resettled across the world, with significant Somali populations located in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and across Western Europe.

The Somali community in Lewiston is the largest collective group of Somali refugees currently living in the United States. Most are women and secondary migrants – individuals who self-relocated from elsewhere in the country and have chosen to live in Maine on their own accord. Many Somali refugees cite the slow-paced life, public school system and sense of community as their main draws to Lewiston.

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Refugees, specifically female refugees and particularly those now living in the United States, are often depicted through two contrasting poles of existence: life before resettlement and life after. Such discourse has been ubiquitous, especially within the news media covering Somali refugees. A 2017 article titled “Maine Community Has Refugees and Resentment” published in US News, for example, writes that “[African teenagers have] fled brutal civil war, famine, and oppressive regimes to find themselves here, at an ordinary high school pre-prom fete.” These two poles, often depicted by the humanitarian community as a “before” and “after,” become

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7 “Fragile States Index Annual Report 2017 | Fragile States Index.”
8 Berns McGown, Muslims in the Diaspora, 14.
9 Somali Bantu Community Association (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018.
10 Galofaro, “Maine Community Has Refugees and Resentment.”
synonymous with a story of “victimhood to emancipation,” or “terror to normalcy” facilitated through refugee resettlement. Refugee women in particular exist at the intersection of their womanhood and their refugee status within this paradigm. Through the process of resettlement, they often come to represent a “successful” journey from the Global South to the Global North – one in which their arrival to the United States gets conflated with the adoption of a western feminist agenda of “normalcy” and “emancipation.”

Bringing women from the Global South to the United States is viewed not only as a humanitarian feat, but as contributing to the macro project of globalizing women’s rights. The tendency to depict migratory bodies only in the “before” and “after” is reflective of a broader tendency by the humanitarian community of needing to mark and define the progress and culmination of their efforts. Humanitarian organizations exist because there is a certain need to be filled. Their success hinders on their ability to take people from the “before” to the “after.” Thus, the “after” gets celebrated not only as a mark of institutional achievement but also as a celebration of the adoption of the western lifestyle. The image of Somali girls dressed for their high school prom, for example, crafts a narrative of western exceptionalism and an identity for these girls that is quintessentially American. The story of refugee resettlement as told through the successes of the “after” – such as attending high school prom – emphasizes the relationship between American citizenship and western notions of female liberation.

Refugee women – both those living in camps and those fortunate enough to be resettled – cannot and should not be understood as simply moving from one pole to another, as from victimhood to emancipation. Resettlement to the United States offers opportunity and safety that does not exist in war-torn Somalia. But to conflate resettlement in the American context with female emancipation, specifically and simplistically, generates a universalizing conception of
feminism in which U.S. citizenship and female liberation are conflated. The tendency to view resettlement in the United States as a liberating achievement of these women suggests that life prior to resettlement can serve as the theoretical antithesis to western female empowerment. Work that relieves the suffering of refugee women and work that provides them with a safe and promising future is commendable, and necessary. But the narrative of refugee resettlement is not as simple as “saving” women from oppression to liberation.

Refugee women’s transition from Somalia to the United States can be traced through various institutional powers and must be understood by their geographic transition across borders and between legally governing entities. The globalized political economy includes not only the exchange of physical resources like agriculture and technologies, but the exchange of discourse and ideology as well: conceptions of western feminism can be found worldwide. Postcolonial feminists emphasize this globalization as an extension of western hegemony. Understanding the transition between a refugee woman’s “before” and “after” must include not only the physical movement of bodies between nation states, but the transitory aspect of discursive power as well.

Somali women’s journey to U.S. citizenship and Maine residency represents a significant transformation in the lived experience of these women, what scholars of migration refer to as their “refugeeness.” Their stories of migration represent a lived reality of changes in international policy and political ideology throughout the 1990s and well into the 21st century that shape the way the female refugee as subject has been institutionally reconstructed. From Somali village life, to refugee camps in Kenya, to the refugee resettlement program in the United States, these women have been the subjects of various states and social structures – the disciplining institutions of their subjectivity. The refugeeness of the Somali women living in Lewiston can,
employing a theoretical lens, be analyzed by their changing subject positions within the institutions involved in their path towards resettlement.

*Civil War in Somalia*

Prior to arrival in the United States, Somali Bantus were categorized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as “a persecuted minority with a history of slavery who had no other place to go.”\(^{11}\) Their story towards resettlement begins with forced displacement – a product of civil war and state collapse – often exacerbated by persecution and marginalization. Siad Barre, former President of Somalia, came to power in a political coup in 1969, nine years after Somalia’s independence. In the midst of Cold War pressures, the regime initially allied with the Soviet Union, adopting communist slogans and showing support for the Eastern bloc.\(^{12}\) Barre renamed the country the Somalia Democratic Republic, and governed on the pretense of Soviet-based “scientific socialism.”\(^{13}\) Barre actively supported the USSR through the mid 70s, openly preaching communist ideology, until the Soviets chose to back the Ethiopian government against Somali-inhabited territories. Siad Barre quickly turned to the United States for international support, providing the Carter administration with access to military bases in exchange for massive amounts of foreign aid. In 1980, the United States opened an operating naval base on the Red Sea, and throughout the 1980s, sent hundreds of millions of dollars to Somali military and economic budgets.\(^{14}\) These funds were used primarily for spending on defense and war technologies against rebel forces active throughout the country. Even with this

\(^{11}\) Besteman, *Making Refuge*, 69.
\(^{13}\) Rutherford, *Humanitarianism under Fire*, 3.
\(^{14}\) Brune, *The United States and Post-Cold War Interventions*, 15.
enormous influx of aid, inter-clan warfare began in the late 1980s and quickly spread from the
capital city Mogadishu to the central and southern regions of Somalia.\textsuperscript{15}

Siad Barre’s militarized regime fell to intensified clan-based militia warfare in 1991.
After only thirty years of independence, Somalia entered a state of constant and protracted
instability. Violence persisted between powers of Interim President Ali Mahdi Mohamed and
General Mohamed Farah, rebel leader of the United Somali Congress. Mogadishu, located along
the coast of the Indian Ocean, became engulfed in coup violence that quickly spread to rural
towns and villages throughout the country. Over 500,000 people died of war and famine in 1991
alone, and over a million more escaped to neighboring countries, fleeing threats of civilian-
targeted kidnapping, banditry and extortion.\textsuperscript{16} Somalia quickly gained international notoriety, as
thousands of displaced people fled from brutal conflict and ongoing anarchy. Reports of mass
executions, destruction of private agricultural land, massive looting of goods and livestock,
destruction of civilian homes, and systematic violence against women. Became national news.
Atrocities amassed and by 1992, an average of 3,000 Somali people died each day.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Bantu Identity}

The population of about 8,000 Somali refugees in Lewiston is only a fraction of the
nearly 535,010 people who have been relocated from war-torn Somalia since 1995.\textsuperscript{18} The
ensuing post-war conflict influenced and in many cases restructured the entire nation –
displacing Somali communities from multiple regions of the country, including Mogadishu and

\textsuperscript{15} Hammond, “Somali Refugee Displacements in the near Region,” 3.
\textsuperscript{16} Gardner, El-Bushra, and Catholic Institute for International Relations, \textit{Somalia - the Untold Story}, 8
\textsuperscript{17} Refugees, “Refworld | Human Rights Brief.”
\textsuperscript{18} Marfleet, \textit{Refugees in a Global Era}, 49.
rural towns and villages. Twelve thousand of those selected for resettled to the United States are Somali Bantus, a minority group which qualified for group resettlement from Dadabb refugee camps in Kenya in 1999 by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. A significant portion of the Somali Bantu refugees now reside in Lewiston, along with other ethnic Somalis from elsewhere in the country.

Bantu society, as is Somalia in general, is a traditional patriarchal society. Male-domination, especially in the Jubba River Valley where the Bantus live, can be characterized by who controls resources like farmland within the family. Traditionally, land is individually acquired by inheritance or purchased or through gift-giving. Women in agricultural villages have very limited independent access to land and are heavily dependent on either their fathers or husbands for land allocation. Somali Bantu women typically marry at a very young age – generally between 13 and 16. Some are co-married in polygynous relationships and may or may not live in the same compound with the families of their co-wives. In such households, the husband is responsible for delegating a plot of land to each woman and her children. Men are also responsible for controlling the type of harvest, the division of labor, and the allocation of excess wealth. In interviews with Bantu women now living in Lewiston, changes in expectations of women’s responsibilities were cited as some of the biggest changes in adapting to life in America.

The Bantus are a non-ethnically Somali population of semi-subsistence farmers, the majority of whom are slave descendants brought to Somalia by Arabs during the colonial period.

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20 Ibid., 200.
21 Somali Bantu Community Association (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018.
from parts of East Africa. For this reason, the Bantu community cannot be defined by a single ethnic lineage.\textsuperscript{22} Islam has been integral to the region since the first century, and today over 95% of the Somali population identifies as Muslim.\textsuperscript{23} The Somali Bantus practice Sunni Islam and, like ethnic Somalis, some Bantus are affiliated with the clans that dominate the social structure of the country.\textsuperscript{24} These people have experienced widespread discrimination from Italian colonizers as well as the dominant ethnic-Somali populations of the northern and central regions.\textsuperscript{25}

The Somali Bantus inhabited one of the most fertile and arable regions of the country prior to the outbreak of civil war.\textsuperscript{26} Their land has been systematically targeted as a valuable resource for urban elites throughout periods of intensified conflict and famine, and in 1991 many villages were destroyed by armed militia invasions engendered by the growing civil war. These raids are emblematic of the struggle of Somali farmers to maintain legitimate control over agricultural territories after state law nationalized access to land and water.\textsuperscript{27} Drought and other natural disasters intensified conflict as resources like water and fertile land became scarce.\textsuperscript{28} Bantu farmers were routinely and severely affected by conflict-intensified famine, as their food preserves became highly sought after as an increasingly rare and politicized commodity.\textsuperscript{29} Many Bantu villages were systematically destroyed after such raids. These farming-specific challenges

\textsuperscript{22} Somali Bantu Community Association, “Our History.”
\textsuperscript{23} Berns McGown, \textit{Muslims in the Diaspora}, 27.
\textsuperscript{24} Besteman, “Representing Violence and ‘Othering’ Somalia,” 124.
\textsuperscript{25} Gardner, El-Bushra, and Catholic Institute for International Relations, \textit{Somalia - the Untold Story}, 7.
\textsuperscript{26} Besteman, “Polygyny, Women’s Land Tenure, and the ‘Mother-Son Partnership’ in Southern Somalia,” 197.
\textsuperscript{27} Besteman, “Representing Violence and ‘Othering’ Somalia,” 127.
\textsuperscript{28} Gardner, El-Bushra, and Catholic Institute for International Relations, \textit{Somalia - the Untold Story}, 10.
\textsuperscript{29} Human Rights Watch, “Refworld | Human Rights Watch World Report 1994 - Somalia.”
and history of discrimination would later be cited by the United Nations as reasons to target Somali Bantus for resettlement.

**Subjectivity**

The refugeeness of Somali women is shaped by both their experience of patriarchal traditions and displacement in Somalia, and by the institutional structures which come to define them as refugees. Michele Foucault’s work on population control provides a basis for understanding the ways in which people are subject to the power of disciplining institutions. In his analyses, Foucault aims to “create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects.” Subjectivity – a theory of the self – refers to the positionality of identity within systems of power. Foucault argues that it is through top-down, institutionalized control, that individual subjectivity is defined, and thus disciplined. These institutions include everything from the government and media to the family, but for the purposes of this paper, I refer specifically to the institutions of refugee resettlement. Institutional discipline “[produces] subjected and practiced bodies” – what Foucault defines as “docile bodies” – in a relationship of power. Under Foucauldian social thought, “docile bodies” are produced under institutional control that seeks to define subjectivity for political ends. There is, writes Foucault, “political investment” given to the control of the body; “power relations have an immediate hold upon it.” Foucauldian social theory is used to think about how the institutions in our world act to discipline and thus control human population through defining the subject positions of individuals. The ability to socially discipline, writes Foucault, was “one of the great innovations

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31 Ibid., 182.
32 Ibid., 173.
in the techniques of power in the eighteenth century,” leading to “the emergence of ‘population’ as an economic and political problem.”

I apply the term “refugee regime,” a concept used by scholars of international migration, to denote broadly and in aggregate institutions that control the refugeeness of Somali women. A regime, defined as “a system or planned way of doing things, especially one imposed from above,” denotes an authoritarian, tactical method of control. Using Foucault’s definition of an institution as a system for enacting power for certain, strategic ends, the “regime” becomes an appropriate term for an entity which assumes control and power over its subjects. Anthropologist Catherine Besteman writes that the refugee regime is “set up to maintain inequality, disempower refugees, and protect the borders of the global north, in addition to providing care for disabled people while global powers determine where they will be allowed to go.” The refugee regime includes all actors with the authority to subjugate female Somali refugees. In the case of the Somali women who came to the United States in the early 2000s, there were two prominent institutions involved in facilitating their permanent residence in Lewiston: the United Nations and the United States. Foucauldian theory offers an analytical lens with which to view the disciplining and discursive power of these two institutions.

Western Intervention

The United Nations and United States entered Somalia less than a year after the fall of the Barre regime, solidifying their role in the refugee resettlement process. Massive carnage and a diaspora of people out of Somalia spurred the international action. The UN Security Council

34 “Definition of REGIME.”
35 Besteman, *Making Refuge*, 64.
established the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I), “Operation Restore Hope,” in April of 1992. The mission acted in protection of humanitarian bases throughout the country and deployed over 3,500 UN military troops. By December of 1992, facing increased international pressure, the Bush administration declared Somalia a foreign policy priority. The United States sent 28,000 troops to Somalia as a Unified Task Force (UNITAF) to support the ceasefire and humanitarian efforts of the United Nations. President Bush’s Mission to Somalia, reported the New York Times, was “an operation that thrusts the United States into a new post-cold-war role as a military force on behalf of humanitarian, not strategic ends.” Between 1992 and 1994, the United States poured large amounts of humanitarian assistance into Somalia in coordination with UNOSOM I and later UNOSOM II (1993-1995) security apparatuses. UNOSOM II ended after a self-proclaimed “failed three-year effort” in March of 1995, following the U.S. withdrawal the previous year. The efforts of the UN and U.S. to aid Somalia during this time have been heavily criticized as ineffectual and misguided. Specifically, the framing of the Mission as strictly humanitarian largely ignored the problem of warring factions and continuous conflict throughout the country.

President Bush addressed the nation on “The Situation in Somalia” in December of 1992, saying, “The people of Somalia, especially the children of Somalia, need our help. We’re able to ease their suffering. We must help them live. We must give them hope. America must act.” In October of 1993, almost one year later, President Clinton briefed the United States on its role and

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36 Cavallera et al., “Culture, Context and Mental Health of Somali Refugees: A Primer for Staff Working in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Programmes.”
37 “Somalia - UNOSOM II: Background.”
39 Wines, “MISSION TO SOMALIA; Bush Declares Goal in Somalia to ‘Save Thousands.’”
40 Leonard and Ramsay, Globalizing Somalia, 44.
41 Brune, The United States and Post-Cold War Interventions, 17.
42 Peters and Woolley, “George Bush: Address to the Nation on the Situation in Somalia.”
responsibility in Somalia’s “humanitarian crisis.” The U.S. Mission to Somalia, he said, comes at a time when “people are looking to America to help promote peace and freedom in the post-cold-war world.”

The international response to the conflict in Somalia by the United Nations and the United States between 1992 and 1995 is emblematic of shifting relations between the Western world and nonwestern countries. In sharp contrast to the relationship sustained between the United States and Somalia during the 1980s – where both countries used each other as Cold War allies – the framing of the U.S./Somali relationship has shifted to one where the U.S. is donor and Somalia is recipient. Humanitarian efforts by the United Nations and the United States became synonymous with international peacekeeping efforts burgeoning in the post-cold war political climate. This ideology, and the on-the-ground policy initiatives that came from it, form the basis of the international refugee regime. The discourse of humanitarianism evokes an imbalanced relationship of power. It is through this political relationship that the disciplining effect of the United Nations and United States begins. Even if temporally brief, “Operation Restore Hope” and “Mission to Somalia” were influential in beginning to frame Somalis, and particularly Somali women, as subjects of U.S./UN humanitarianism, and thus, as displaced victims to be emancipated through western intervention.

In what Mark Duffield describes as the governing of borderlands, “leading governments, UN agencies, NGOs and private companies gained unprecedented access and varying degrees of influence over the international affairs of many weaker or contested states” throughout the 1990s. By the end of the Cold War, Duffield argues that the existing mutually strategic political alliances between western powers and developing nation states were replaced with relationships legitimized by humanitarian necessity, giving states like the U.S. unprecedented influence within

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43 Reuters, “THE SOMALIA MISSION; Clinton’s Words on Somalia.”
44 Duffield, “Governing the Borderlands: Decoding the Power of Aid,” 309.
countries like Somalia. As an example, remember that in 1980, the U.S. was closely allied with the Barre regime in a bilateral relationship of resource exchange. When the United States enters Somalia in 1992, this relationship is replaced with a unilateral relationship of humanitarian aid facilitated by the United States. The humanitarian framework of this post-conflict intervention, when viewed through a Foucauldian understanding of institutional subjectivity, frames the female refugee as a beneficiary subject of emergency western aid. The epistemological genealogy of “refugee as beneficiary,” and thus, “refugee as victim,” is rooted in post-cold war politics in which western hegemony is fueled by humanitarian feat. Institutional power of the refugee regime is predicated on notions of international security. Duffield is apt in noting that this strategy, while framed as explicitly humanitarian, is also explicitly aimed towards western ends. In this post-cold war political framework, foreign insecurity such as Somali state warfare, is framed as a threat to international safety. As the West secures more on-the-ground influence in Somalia, it maintains both political legitimacy and cultural hegemony. If knowledge is power, the ability of the United States and United Nations to frame Somali refugees as humanitarian subjects solidifies their institutional capacity for subjugation and control.

Camps

During the period of UN and U.S. humanitarian intervention in Somalia, between 1992 and 1995, the United Nations also became increasingly involved in aid efforts directed towards neighboring countries. Of the thousands of displaced Somalis who fled their homes, 800,000 people found refuge in Kenya and Ethiopia, and 90,000 more in Djibouti. In 1991, the United Nations took over temporary settlement services from the Kenyan government, establishing three

camps in rural Kenya, about seven hours outside of Nairobi, to house the displaced Somali population. The three camps, named the Dadaab refugee camps, were originally planned to host only 90,000 people, but it is estimated that over 500,000 people actively live in one of the Dadaab settlement sites. Today, over 100,000 Dadaab residents are third generation refugees whose parents were also born in the camps. Dadaab eventually grew into five separate settlements – Ifo, Dagahaley, Hagadera, Ifo II and Kambioos, and is the second largest refugee camp in the world.\textsuperscript{46} A very small proportion of refugees living in the Dadaab camps have or ever will be granted refugee status in the United States or another western country – close to less than five percent.\textsuperscript{47} It is here, that Somali Bantus were selected for U.S. resettlement by the United Nations. The official, documented process of the resettlement of Somali women to Lewiston begins in these camps under the jurisdiction of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

\textit{Somali Bantus and the United Nations}

Beginning in 2001, approximately 12,000 Somali Bantus were submitted for resettlement processing by the UNHCR, representing only a small fraction of the Somali refugees seeking resettlement services.\textsuperscript{48} The Somali Bantus, have, according to UNHCR, “always [been] treated as second-class citizens” even when living in the Dadaab camps.\textsuperscript{49} Their history as a minority in Somalia prompted the United Nations to select them as a particularly vulnerable group qualified for resettlement services. Other Somalis selected for resettlement to the U.S. did not go through the same process, called “group determination,” facilitated by the UNHCR. Bantu resettlement to

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\textsuperscript{46} Hussein, “I Grew up in the World’s Biggest Refugee Camp – What Happens When It Closes?”
\textsuperscript{47} Horst, \textit{Transnational Nomads}, 176.
\textsuperscript{48} Nyabera, “Somali Bantus Leave for America with Hope for a New Life.”
\textsuperscript{49} Clayton, “Somali Bantus Begin First Stage of Journey to United States.”
\end{flushright}
the United States was predicated on their subjectivity as a victimized minority group. The group resettlement of Somalis based on perceived “ethnic determination” has “created a redefinition of what it means to be Somali Bantu,” writes Besteman, and was quickly considered to be a highly desirable label associated with eligibility for resettlement.50

Contrary to the story told by the UNHCR, the Somali Bantu population had never before coalesced into a single politicized population. With the onset of civil war, however, farmers of the Jubba Valley were, for the first time, grouped together as a geographically-defined population of subsistence pastoralists. While Italian colonialists are speculated to be the first to use the term “Bantu” to distinguish villagers in the Jubba Valley, the term did not enter popular discourse until UN intervention in 1991.51 During this time the area was repeatedly targeted by militia raids and singled out as a location of a specific population holding minority status. Paradoxically, it is their Bantu identity that attracted the attention of violent rebel groups to their villages, but also qualified them for UNHCR resettlement services.

The process of being chosen for resettlement should be understood in point, as an active project of self-construction by Somalis from the Jubba River Valley. Reports from field workers tell stories of “Somalis exchanging their views on what they think the UNHCR wants to hear from them in order to be given asylum,” found Besteman. It is through and during this process that they “embraced the Somali Bantu label as personally meaningful, [and] claimed precolonial tribal and linguistic associations that were required of Somali Bantu identity” as understood by the United Nations.52 This construction of Bantu identity can be described as one project towards self-determination within the UNHCR resettlement apparatus and underscores the legitimacy of

50 Besteman, Making Refuge, 79.
51 Ibid., 42.
52 Ibid., 62.
institutionalized subjectivity. The framework implemented by the United Nations to classify qualifying refugees for resettlement is a process of western knowledge construction. By adapting this framework, the Somalis from the Jubba River Valley made themselves legible to the refugee regime. The discursive power of the United Nations over the cultural identification of Somali refugees highlights the ways in which refugee resettlement can ultimately be understood as a hegemonic institution.

*Women in Wartime*

Many of the Somali refugees, both the Bantus and those belonging to other ethnic groups, are women fleeing postwar conflict and displacement. Over 51% of refugees living in Dadaab are female, many of whom have been separated from male family members during and after the civil war.53 Particular attention has been given to the women fleeing Somalia since the early 1990s by humanitarian aid and refugee relief organizations for accounts of sexual- and gender-based violence, and targeted kidnapping. Their experiences not just as refugees, but specifically as women, is of particular importance to their stories of exile and resettlement. The gender of refugee women, like the Bantu identity, has been institutionally constructed through the resettlement process.

The majority of international attention towards women fleeing Somalia focused on gender-specific wartime experiences. Human Rights Watch reported extensively on human rights violations throughout the country after the war, much of which can be characterized as sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV). A 1994 Human Rights Watch brief on *Women in Somalia* for example, reported that “during the civil war the number of rapes by soldiers and bandits was

53 “Dadaab Refugee Camps, Kenya.”
‘massive’ in scale, and according to one source, systematic.”54 Attacks on women’s bodies are a common and strategic tactic of war. The systematic raping of women in Somalia was further complicated by the ubiquitous practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), a practice that is particularly prevalent in rural communities of the country. For many Somali women, especially those who have experienced some form of genital cutting, forced penetration can lead to serious health complications and further physiological trauma. Somalia’s instability and the constant movement of people has heightened international concern for the status of women, who have been the targets of horrific gender specific violence even as they pursue safety and security.

It is here that female refugees are institutionally framed as gendered casualties of wartime violence. This framing permeated the international community, marking Somali women as particular feminine subjects under the supervision of western powers. The intensified humanitarian attention given to Somali women after the collapse of the Barre regime is reflective of broader trends of foreign investment in the plight of nonwestern women. Beginning in the 1990s, international humanitarian strategy reflected a rising devotion to gender-specific aid and more broadly, a growing emphasis on women’s rights. In September of 1995, just four years after Somalia’s collapse, Hillary Clinton gave her now famous speech at the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing, where she declared women’s rights are human rights and human rights are women’s rights. “[A]s long as girls and women are valued less, fed less, overworked, underpaid, not schooled, [and] subjected to violence in and outside their homes” said Clinton, “the potential of the human family to create a peaceful, prosperous world will not be realized.”55 This sentiment by the First Lady of the United States set precedent for the need of

54 Refugees, “Refworld | Human Rights Brief.”
55 “First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton Remarks for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women.”
a gender-specific framework to address the specific forms of violence faced by women around the globe. Clinton’s speech, one that simultaneously sustains U.S. hegemony and propagates western feminism, is emblematic of institutional gendered subjectification. Marking these women as gendered victims of the Global South makes them legible within the globalized system of discursive western hegemony. The refugee woman as an international subject becomes part of the “un-emancipated” grouping of “problematic” subaltern female victims. Without their full emancipation, says Clinton, the “human family” will continue to suffer as consequence.

Clinton’s discourse, representative of many international development and human rights efforts at the time, is part of a western hegemonic discourse that understands refugee women as its subject. Through defining the female refugee subject, western knowledge, such as that propagated by Mrs. Clinton, is awarded discursive power. This power not only acts to subjugate and discipline female Somali refugees, but also acts to maintain the hegemony of institutions within the refugee regime.

Gender Lens

The Foucauldian theory of subjectivity has proven useful in understanding the dual role institutions of the refugee resettlement regime play in the lives of Somali women. While organizations such as the UNHCR facilitate the important process of refugee resettlement to the United States, they do so within a paradigm that relies on the globalization of western discourse. A Foucauldian theoretical framework understands refugee women as the subjects of this discourse, a discourse which defines and categorizes Somali women into western conceptions of humanitarianism and women’s rights. As this chapter has shown, the United States and United Nations are key actors in implementing this institutional control over refugee women.
The gendered aspect of Somali refugeeness is vital to understanding the institutionalized subjectivity of these women. Sandra Bartky points to the proliferation of “disciplinary regimes of femininity” which she defines as top-down, strategic uses of institutionalized control that define the female body with strict definition and clear expectation. Bartky argues that state institutions function to actively discipline, and thus assume control over not only the “docile,” but particularly the “docile female” body. As “unemancipated” subjects of Clinton’s “human family,” or as victims of gender-based violence, refugee women become gendered through resettlement. The refugee regime acts as a specific institutional power in which the female body becomes a “docile body” through the processes of institutionalized migration between Somalia and the United States. It is through this gendered subjectivity that institutions like the UN and U.S. make female refugees legible to hegemonic western discourse. We can thus read the victimization of women as a feminizing act that frames refugee women as subordinate to dominate western powers. Building on Foucault, we can understand the female subject as specifically gendered through various mechanisms of institutional power.

In tracing the movement of Somali women from conflict-driven displacement, to temporary settlement camps, to the legal process that grants them citizenship status in the United States, I highlight the particular points at which their bodies become gendered and therefore, as Foucault might argue, disciplined. This process, as facilitated through the discourse of western institutions, acts not only to subjugate refugee women, but must also be understood as a contribution to the hierarchy of global power relationships. Through defining, and thus institutionally subjugating the female refugee subject, a hegemonic western epistemology of female Somali refugeeness is given authority.

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Foucauldian theory states that an individual’s subject position in society is determined and disciplined by the institutions under which she lives. This theoretical framework emphasizes the power that the United States and United Nations refugee regime has over the female refugee as subject. The theory of institutional power, while useful, also acts to reproduce essentialized subject positions. Foucault defines the “docile subject” for example, as “ready to accept control or instruction; submissive.” This theoretical framework is, however, limited in its understanding of the refugeeness of Somali women solely as displaced victim. To constrain refugee women to a theoretical understanding of docility would, I argue, only reaffirm the institutionalized gendering that Bartky exposes. Foucault places important emphasis on the power of institutions but fails to recognize the limitations of his theory in subverting such power.

Feminist theory that prioritizes the knowledge of lived experience – in this case the refugeeness of Somali women – acts to subvert hegemonic understandings of essentialized gendered subjectivity. Reality, argues Sandra Harding, can have a single structure “only from the falsely universalizing perspective of the master.”57 The refugee regime, I argue, relies on a universalizing master perspective. For the purposes of my analysis, the master perspective comes from empirical knowledge created by western institutions of refugee resettlement – specifically that of the United States and the United Nations. A Foucauldian framework understands the master perspective as that of disciplining social institutions. He writes for example, that “the truth of the subject,” is “in the other who knows.”58

While Foucault is useful in recognizing the power of western institutions in their discursive and ideological reach, he fails to recognize the power that subjects exercise over their own lives, identities, and epistemologies. Feminist theorists like Sandra Bartky explore how

57 Harding in Mann and Patterson, Reading Feminist Theory, 15.
58 Foucault, The History of Sexuality, 70.
gender becomes relevant to Foucauldian understandings of control across different systems of power; subsequent gender theorists offer an important lens to complicate this narrative of disciplining institutional power over the submissive Foucauldian subject. Drawing on several prominent scholars, I will show how the refugeeness of Somali women challenges the disciplining power of the refugee resettlement regime.

In opposition to a universalizing “master perspective,” Harding writes that “feminists share a profound skepticism regarding universal (or universalizing) claims about existence.”

Rather than relying on knowledge produced by “the master,” Harding argues for knowledge produced by feminist standpoint. Standpoint theory is rooted in two schools of thought: first the alliance between power and knowledge, and the second “the problematic politics of essentialized identities.” Scholarly inquiry into the institutionally produced knowledge of Somali female refugeeness shows how the refugee resettlement regime does both. The institutions of this regime simultaneously produce an essentialized version of the female subject while maintaining hegemonic power through the creation of knowledge about these subjects.

The subjugation of female refugees by institutions of the refugee resettlement regime such as the United Nations and the United States are only part of a full understanding of their refugeeness. The other, and perhaps most important part of these women’s refugeeness is the agency they embody throughout their lifetime, across various social landscapes and in reaction to various institutional powers. Research into the lived experiences of the women who are resettled from Somalia to the United States reveals a more nuanced understanding of their experiences as subjects of resettlement. If we accept, like Foucault, that institutions have power over their subjects, we must also accept that subjects have power within the institutions in which they exist.

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59 Flax in Mann and Patterson, Reading Feminist Theory, 18.
60 Harding in Mann and Patterson, 18.
Many feminist scholars have written and thought about this symbiotic relationship between the subject and the institution.

Post-colonial feminist scholar Gayatri Spivak, for example, provides a useful theoretical claim that challenges the subordinating discipline of Foucauldian power structures. Spivak’s theory of “strategic essentialism” argues that women may consciously and purposefully adopt and reproduce essentialist discourse about their identity.61 Used often “among marginalized or disenfranchised groups when they experience a need in situations of asymmetrical power relations,” strategic essentialism understands subjectivity as a tool for empowerment.62 In claiming identification as a Somali Bantu, for example, Bantu women can be said to have strategically adapted an essentialized subjectivity institutionalized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. By doing so, these women become targeted by the refugee resettlement regime for group resettlement to the United States.

In receiving aid from the United Nations and United States, refugee women from the Global South can be said to have placed themselves in a theoretically victimized subject position. This process, I argue, is an example of what Sandra Bartky refers to as a “disciplining regime of femininity.” The aid distributed to Somalia by these institutions was deployed on the basis of humanitarian necessity in the wake of nation-wide emergency. Western intervention, when framed as strictly humanitarian, subjugated the Somali people, and specifically Somali women, as victims. Claiming this victimized identity – while a feminizing and thus further subjectifying act – was however, necessary for these women to receive the aid they needed and deserved, and should not be viewed merely as a passive act of self-subordination.

61 Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”
While refugee resettlement can ultimately be viewed as a system of global power imbalances, it is important to reconcile this power with the aid refugee women are receiving. While actors of the refugee regime subjugate and thus control Somali women, Somali women are ultimately beneficiaries of the aid provided by the same institutions. Deniz Kandiyoti writes that women “strategize within a set of concrete constraints,” what she calls patriarchal bargains. These bargains are the strategies women use to “maximize security and optimize life options” in the face of oppression. As receivers of international aid, refugee women can be said to have bargained, or strategically essentialized, female victimhood within a globalized patriarchal system of international aid. Institutionalized subjectivities may be appropriated at various time for the benefit of the female subject.

Humanitarian aid and refugee relief organizations function as a system of power – one that, as Foucault would argue, subjugates the very people they are trying to help. In this system, Somali women have primarily been framed by the international community as targets of gender and sexual-based violence – marking them as particularly vulnerable to displacement and other humanitarian concerns. Although this is an accurate description of elements of their lives, some scholars of gendered humanitarianism have warned against a pattern of treating foreign women of post-conflict nations simply as victims. It has been argued, for example, that these frames “represent women refugees principally as vulnerable victims, thus essentializing a particular set of gendered roles.” But existing within a subject position that precludes agency does not mean that these women are living a refugeeness that precludes agency as well.

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64 Refugees, “Victims and Vulnerable Groups in Southern Somalia.”
65 Freedman, “Mainstreaming Gender in Refugee Protection,” 603.
By viewing refugeeness through a feminist theoretical framework, we can see that the Foucauldian power of these institutions to define the female refugee subject as “victim” is limited. As I have shown, the lived experience of this subject position gave Somali women tremendous and, in some cases, life-saving opportunities. By “strategically essentializing” the framework created and maintained by international aid organizations, they gain access to resources such as healthcare, food, housing, and acknowledgement of their gendered conditionality. Claiming female victimhood is a necessary patriarchal bargain for these women.

Assuming that women of the Global South who receive western aid are powerless to Foucauldian institutional control contributes to a dangerous stereotype that categorizes all women of minority cultural groups as “victims without agency.”

Rather than as passive receivers, this story frames Somali refugees as active agents of their own resettlement process acquiescing to an institutional framework of victimhood: a strategic essentialization of identity. This can be seen in the process of Bantu self-actualization, the process in which “Somali Bantu” became an embodied identity label, which led many of the Somali refugees living in Lewiston towards resettlement. The self-identification of these refugees as a marginalized group, coupled with their precarious positionality as women, can be viewed as a feminist compromise – what Kandiyoti describes as a patriarchal bargain. In entering into the refugee resettlement regime, these women were further labeled as female victims of the Global South. Interventions by the United Nations and United States both imposed victimizing discourse on these women and provided them with needed aid relief and a path towards U.S. citizenship.

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Gender functions in a variety of complex ways to affect how women navigate in and are perceived by their world. The gender of displaced Somali women fleeing their country, for example, marked them as both targets in the eyes of their militia attackers and as victims in the eyes of the West. Essentially, they escape certain gendered regimes in Somalia, only to encounter new ones imposed by the resettlement regime. Epistemological feminist inquiry accepts and seeks to understand the relationship between the knowing and the being. In this case, that is the relationship between the refugee women and the institutional production of knowledge about her refugeeness.

Feminist social theory – as it has been and continues to be honed for contemporary application and relevance – offers a lens from which to view the experience of these women. Their unique subjectivities – as women, as refugees, and as a population from the Global South – gives them a historically marginalized positionality. Postcolonial feminism works to break down and subvert hegemonic colonial knowledge; it contests the legacy of colonial discourse, and therefore works to challenge institutionalized power relationships and social hierarchies; privileging the knowledge of the oppressed becomes a political epistemological stance.

The historical and political background of the Somali civil war, which led to diasporic displacement and the subsequent humanitarian and security concerns propagated by the international community, is the first step in Somali women’s story of resettlement. In chapter two, I trace this story through the policies and programs of resettlement in the United States. I use gender to frame my analysis – showing how disciplinary regimes of femininity function throughout the resettlement process and manifest in institutional discourse.
Chapter 2. Gendered Citizenship: Refugee Woman as American Worker

The United Nations estimates that less than one percent of displaced persons worldwide are selected for resettlement each year. In 2001, when the first wave of refugee families arrived in Lewiston, the United States brought a total of 4,939 people of Somali origin into the country, a large percentage of the 68,411 total refugees resettled in the U.S. that year. Refugees selected for resettlement to the United States are subjects of a system created over 60 years ago in response to WWII displacement. The refugeeeness of women who enter the United States must be understood within the changing political context of the international refugee resettlement program. It is through this program that displaced Somali women were housed in temporary refugee camps, chosen for resettlement, and eventually settled in the United States. As discussed in chapter one, it is under this institutionalized system that Somali women become the gendered subjects of refugee resettlement. I have traced this subjectivity as it emerged under UN and U.S. intervention in Somalia from the Bantu villages of the Jubba River Valley to Dadaab resettlement camps in Kenya.

This chapter looks at the framing of “the female refugee” as a taxonomizing designation within the official discourse and documents of resettlement institutions. I will trace the explicit inclusion of Somali women into the legal framework of refugee resettlement, emphasizing the historical context from which this emerges. My evidence is drawn from detailed document analysis of publications from the United Nations and United States. I divide these sources into two distinct categories: (1) UNHCR handbooks and guidelines intended for a professional audience, and (2) cultural orientation documents (financed by both the United Nations and

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67 “UNHCR Population Statistics - Data - Resettlement.”
United States) intended to aid the integration process of recently resettled refugees. I focus specifically, on three documents published by the United Nations: the 1990 *Policy on Refugee Women*, the 2002 *International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration*, and the 2011 *UNHCR Resettlement Handbook*. These policy papers represent the changing discourse on female refugees over two decades; it is this discourse I argue, that contributes to the specific construction of refugee subjectivity in the United States.

In tracing Somali women’s refugeeness from displacement in Somalia to written representation, this paper writes an epistemology for the subjectivity of refugee women who are resettled to the United States. This epistemology is heuristic to the refugeeness of Somali women. An understanding of the institutional framework which guides the resettlement of Somali women is, I argue, crucial to understanding what Sandra Harding would consider the “master perspective” of refugee resettlement. The inclusion of “women” and “gender” in the official refugee resettlement program of the United Nations and United States shaped the institutionalized subjectivity of Somali women who are resettled. I will provide a brief history of the creation of the refugee resettlement program to preface the inclusion of gender into the integration practices that emerge out of the Cold War era.

**Historical Background**

The legal definition of refugee is grounded in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. Article 14 of the Declaration states “everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.” In 1951, The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created, also by the

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UN General Assembly, as the official organization responsible for the international selection and monitoring of refugee resettlement.\(^6^9\) Proposed initially as a temporary three-year body, events following WWII led to the permanent creation of the High Commissioner.\(^7^0\) The first UNHCR Convention of 1951 defined a refugee as a person who,

“owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership or a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”\(^7^1\)

This is a universally respected definition that is awarded to individuals through Refugee Status Determination (RSD) by the United Nations, often in the country of first asylum, in this case, in Kenya.

The first refugees to legally enter the United States as defined by the UN were a wave of displaced Eastern Europeans fleeing World War II. At this time, refugee policy in the United States operated as a system of ad hoc, politically motivated and temporally limited legislative acts targeted at specific populations of displaced persons. In 1948, following the arrival of over 250,000 Europeans to the United States, President Harry Truman signed the *Displaced Persons Act*, proposed by Congress.\(^7^2\) The act was created “to authorize for a limited period of time the admission into the United States of certain European displaced persons for permanent

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\(^7^0\) Horst, *Transnational Nomads*, 108.  
\(^7^1\) “UNHCR Resettlement Handbook,” 18.  
\(^7^2\) “History of The U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program.”
Politically motivated and limited in scope, the act narrowly defined which displaced persons would be qualified for resettlement services to the United States by “persons who entered Germany, Austria, or Italy on or before December 22, 1945.” By Truman’s own calculations, more than 90 percent of European Jews were excluded as most fled after December 22nd. Even so, this new legislation allowed 400,000 unscreened Europeans to resettle to the United States – an astounding number, especially compared to today’s standards.

The Vietnam War spurred the next major wave of refugees entering the United States. In 1975, after the arrival of over 130,000 Indochinese refugees, President Ford began a process of institutionalizing and further bureaucratizing the permanent U.S. resettlement program. Under the jurisdiction of the Defense Department, Ford commissioned $98 million dollars to the creation of the Interagency Task Force for Indochinese Refugees (ITAF). Leadership of ITAF moved from the Department of Defense, to the Department of State, to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and in 1977 to the newly established Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). ORR mandated that state governments interested in resettlement must apply for federal funds through a designated refugee resettlement state agency to receive assistance from ORR.

In 1980, Congress passed the Refugee Act, adopting international guidelines issued through the United Nations High Commissioner which provided the legal basis for refugee resettlement services in the United States today. Under the current administration, resettlement is administered through local Voluntary Agencies (VOLAGs) on behalf of ORR, in consultation with the Untied Nations.

73 “Legislative History of the Displaced Persons Act of 1948.”
74 “Harry S. Truman: Statement by the President Upon Signing the Displaced Persons Act.”
75 Bloemraad, Becoming a Citizen, 128.
76 Ibid., 129.
77 “History of The U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program.”
Following WWII and in reaction to the increasing population of displaced Indochinese in the United States, the “anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant sentiment [that] characterized American views of refugees,” writes Besteman, was further bureaucratized.\textsuperscript{78} The “open-door” policies of resettlement that welcomed many non-Jewish WWII Europeans to the United States were replaced by much harsher protocols and heightened security concerns. Unlike the logic of general inclusion that existed “when the capitalist world was geographically expansive,” writes Duffield, post-cold war policies were much more discerning and increasingly selective.\textsuperscript{79} Repatriation rather than resettlement became the preferred strategy advocated for by powers in the West, encouraging the UN to return displaced persons to their country of origin rather than seek permanent resettlement in the United States. Refugee-receiving states like the U.S. became increasingly insistent on methods of categorization to prohibit certain refugees from requesting resettlement services. Gone was the “automatic refugee status” generously prescribed to displaced (non-Jewish) WWII survivors.\textsuperscript{80}

It is within this paradigm that the Somali Bantus as an ethnically discriminated group came to be targeted and defined for the purposes of resettlement. The Somali Bantus selected for resettlement to the United States in 2001 were vetted in a process of “group determination,” a process in which demographically-qualifying individuals are awarded expedited resettlement. According to the UN, group determination is used in situations of mass influx, “where the reasons for flight are generally known and the number of arrivals would overwhelm capacities to determine refugee status individually.”\textsuperscript{81} The Somali Bantus were resettled as \textit{prima facie} (“in absence of evidence to the contrary”) referring to the lack of scrutinized individual screening that

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{78} Besteman, \textit{Making Refuge}, 61.
  \item\textsuperscript{79} Duffield, \textit{Global Governance and the New Wars}, 6.
  \item\textsuperscript{80} “UNHCR Resettlement Handbook,” 50.
  \item\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 19.
\end{itemize}
took place. Since 1992, the United States had been resettling Somali refugees by the thousands; 1,570 in 1992, 2,506 in 1995 and 10,405 by 2005, but in 2002 one year after they had been selected, none of the Bantus had arrived in the United States and in 2003, only 803 out of the 12,000 selected were safely resettled. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) moved the Bantu population from Dadaab to a new Kenyan refugee camp, Kakuma, to await transportation headed to the United States.

The attention given to the labeling of refugees represents an important ideological shift within western refugee-receiving countries. The idea of “the dependent” or “dangerous” refugee is a post-cold war identity construction. Refugees granted access to the United States under the 1948 Displaced Persons Act were not treated with the same hesitancy that refugees coming from war-torn nations of today are. Rather, those fleeing the Eastern bloc were welcomed as “a unique potential for economic growth and also a proof of the failure of communism.” In sharp contrast to the framing of refugees as a positive means of advancing western politics, Somali Bantu refugees were described by the UN as, “a persecuted minority with a history of slavery who had no other place to go.” Viewed in the changing historical context of refugee resettlement to the United States, this language, while perhaps true, frames the Somali refugee as displaced victim. The rationale for bringing refugees into the country changes significantly with the exigencies of the times.

Aruna Rao and David Kelleher, in their analysis of “institutionalized gender,” remind us that “organizations are not neutral bodies, [but instead] are microcosms of institutional contexts

83 Besteman, Making Refuge, 73; “UNHCR Population Statistics - Data - Resettlement.”
84 “Our History.”
85 Horst, Transnational Nomads, 15.
86 Besteman, Making Refuge, 69.
from which they spring.”

Refugee resettlement is, I argue, a microcosm of a much larger system of international relations and humanitarian intervention. From the ad hoc creation of the U.S. refugee resettlement program in a post-WWII political climate, the process of resettlement has and continues to develop within the political climate of the time. This has become apparent most recently with the Travel Ban established in 2017. The framing of “refugee woman” as a subject throughout this process must be viewed as a product of political relationships between and within the various institutions of refugee resettlement. As Foucault writes, institutional power must be understood as politically driven, and thus historically situated. Somali women enter this apparatus as gendered subjects of governmental warfare, gender-based violence, and ethnic discrimination.

According to the most recent Refugees Resettlement Handbook, published in 2011, the UNHCR claims that their work “is humanitarian, social and non-political.” A brief look at the creation of female Somali refugee subjectivity through the refugee resettlement apparatus, however, reveals that the institutionalized subjugation of women is, in fact, inherently political. Framing the work of international intervention as strictly “humanitarian and social” is an act of political negation. Just as UN and U.S. intervention in Somali in the late 1990s must be understood within the context of post-cold war political relationship, as discussed in chapter one, so too, does the refugee resettlement program of today. While perhaps in theory, refugee resettlement to the United States as an issue of fundamental human rights should be considered an apolitical phenomenon, it is not. The women who come to the United States exist within a subjectivity that is deeply and inherently politically controlled by western institutions. It is for

87 Rao and Kelleher, Unravelling Institutionalized Gender Inequality, 7.
88 Foucault and Rabinow, The Foucault Reader, 173.
this reason I argue, that Besteman’s use of “refugee regime” is applicable and useful to the feminist study of institutionalized subjugation. The refugee regime that emerged after WWII is, she argues, “fundamentally about protecting the global system of national sovereignty by containing and monitoring people out of place because they have fled across an international border.”\textsuperscript{90} Refugees, and for the purposes of my analysis, specifically refugee women, enter as subjects of a transnational political relationship between the Global North and the Global South.

\textit{Representations of Gender}

Just like refugee resettlement, women’s rights must also be understood as a microcosm of institutional politics; refugee women sit at the intersection of these two institutions. A gender-specific humanitarian framework that addresses specific violences faced by women was created and institutionally revised throughout the last decade and a half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Female refugees should not and cannot be understood devoid of gender. The UNHCR recognizes this necessity and has made great strides in legitimating the needs of refugee women as they differ from that of refugee men. Refugee women, and specifically those under the jurisdiction of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, are subjects of this framework; a framework in which they are discursively defined and therefore made to be legible as women by western actors of refugee resettlement.

Missing from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for over thirty years, the inclusion of a gender-specific refugee framework both in the United Nations and United States is a fairly recent phenomenon. It is also a phenomenon that relies on essentialized understandings of gender identity and the female experience. I will trace this gender-specific

\textsuperscript{90} Besteman, \textit{Making Refuge}, 62.
paradigm as it emerges within the United Nations and more specifically, within the UNHCR. Using the *UNHCR Policy on Refugee Women* published in 1990 and the *UNHCR Resettlement Handbook* published in 2011, I engage with the epistemology and inclusion of women into resettlement institutions. It is here, that printed discourse emerges as a disciplining institution from which to analyze the creation of “female refugee” subjectivity.

*Evidence of Essentialized Gender*

In 1984, the Parliament of the European Union became the first international body to establish the need for a gender-conscious interpretation of the Geneva Convention spurring international attention to the specific concerns of women that emerge within the context of postwar civilian protection. In a statement addressed to all EU member states, Parliament called for the need to recognize that women “face harsh or inhumane treatment because they are considered to have transgressed the social mores of the country.”

The following year, the United States High Commissioner for Refugees adopted similar protocol and in 1984 the UNHCR adopted Conclusion No. 39, *Refugee Women and International Protection*, stressing for the first time, “the need for UNHCR and host governments to give particular attention to the international protection of refugee women.” In 1987, the UNHCR expanded the idea of “particular attention” in recognizing that refugee women “[necessitate] special attention in order to improve existing protection and assistance programmes,” and called upon “all States and concerned agencies to support the efforts of the Office in this regard.” As gender-specific protocol emerged out of accrued attention to women in post-war communities, the United

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91 Freedman, “Protecting Women Asylum Seekers and Refugees,” 179.
Nations enacted further institutional strategies towards advancing these new policies with the refugee resettlement program.

**Gender in Refugee Handbooks**

In 1990, the UNHCR published a briefing titled, *Policy on Refugee Women*, a ten-page document which outlined a comprehensive framework of policies relating to refugee women. This document was meant to guide future organizational work and assist in “the integration of refugee women into programming and project activities.” Expanding the idea that refugee women deserve “particular attention” (as noted by the UNHCR in 1984), the 1990 policy document places particular attention on women’s societal roles. The “socio-cultural and economic” roles of refugee women and “the change in these roles created by the refugee situation,” the document states, must be recognized, in the programs and protocols of the UNHCR. Women’s roles in society are emphasized throughout the 1990 *Policy* as evidence for differences between men and women, and the justification for why refugee women deserve particular institutional attention. It is through a more accurate understanding of and support for these “changing roles,” that the UN seeks to “encourage the dignity and self-sufficiency;” “increase [women’s] status and participation” and provide female refugees with “access to better employment, education, services and opportunities in their society.” The 1990 policy briefing recommends these goals be achieved through a process of female-minded “mainstreaming projects” which are to be integrated into the UNHCR’s existing policy framework. The 1990 *Policy on Refugee Women* mentions several times that these policy changes will not result in

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94 Ibid., 5.
95 Ibid., 5,7.
segregated “special women’s projects,” but will manifest instead, through the adaptation of current policy.\textsuperscript{96}

Today, refugee resettlement is guided by the 2011 *UNHCR Resettlement Handbook*, the most up-to-date policy document concerning the resettlement of displaced persons. The 2011 edition includes all updates since the previous 2004 edition and as noted in the High Commissioner’s forward, emphasizes “more fully the specific needs of vulnerable groups and reinforces the centrality of age, gender and diversity appropriate approaches to all UNHCR’s resettlement protection efforts.”\textsuperscript{97} Since the 1990 policy briefing on women, the UN has and continues to update its programs and protocols directed towards women. The purpose of the *Handbook* is to offer “resettlement management and policy” guidance to those involved in global refugee resettlement. This includes extensions of UNHCR such as resettlement countries like the United States and other NGO partners. The *Handbook* is divided into eight sections: (1) Resettlement within UNHCR’s Mandate, (2) The Evolution of Resettlement, (3) Refugee Status and Resettlement, (4) Managing Resettlement Efficiently, (5) Protection Considerations, and the Identification of Resettlement Needs, (6) UNHCR Resettlement Submission Categories, (7) Basic Procedures to Follow in Processing Resettlement Submissions, and (8) Partnership, Liaison and Media Relations. Mention of “gender,” “women,” and “girls” are found throughout all sections.

In accordance with United Nations practices of gender mainstreaming, the 2011 *Resettlement Handbook* does not have one specific section on policy guidelines for refugee women. Rather, as the 1990 *UNHCR Policy on Refugee Women* suggests, the needs of refugee women have been integrated within all sections of the *Handbook*. As of 2005, the United Nations


\textsuperscript{97} “UNHCR Resettlement Handbook,” 1.
at-large has applied gender mainstreaming to address the gender-specific concerns of women under its jurisdiction. There is a noticeable shift here, from “mainstreaming refugee women” in the 1990 *Policy on Refugee Women* to “mainstreaming gender.” The UNHCR defines gender mainstreaming as “both a strategy and a process of transforming gender relations. It ensures that the different interests, needs and resources of displaced women, men, girls and boys, are taken into consideration at every step of the refugee cycle.”98 Using this strategy, the UN declares that “questions of gender must be taken seriously in central, mainstream ‘normal’ institutional activities and not simply left in a marginalized, peripheral backwater of specialist women’s institutions.”99 As a result of the accrued attention given to the female refugee within the resettlement apparatus, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has enacted guidelines, policies and recommendations that target the specific needs of women which are to be integrated into all aspects of the UN’s work.

According to the 2011 *Handbook*, while the UNHCR is largely responsible for the identification of refugees for resettlement, it is the resettlement states themselves that offer permanent places of residence and therefore, “play a key role throughout the identification, pre-departure, and the post-resettlement integration process.”100 Successful integration into the resettlement community, defined as a “legal, economic and socio-cultural process,” states the UN, is the culminating goal of the resettlement process. After integration, the UNHCR hopes that all refugees, regardless of gender “live independently,” “participate in the social life of their new country without fear of discrimination,” and “adapt to the lifestyle of the host society.”101

101 Ibid., 34, 35, 53.
Resettlement is largely defined by the UN with an integration model that prioritizes the learning of host country norms and values.

As western nations began closing their doors, making it increasingly more difficult for refugees to find refuge within western borders throughout the 1990s, the UNHCR created specific programming for the integration of refugees into their respective host countries. “Recognizing that receiving communities are more likely to endorse and support national resettlement policies when integration is ‘successful,’” writes Hillary Charlesworth, “UNHCR launched a broad integration initiative in 2000,” with “guidelines on reception and integration of refugees in their new communities.”

A significant part of the resettlement process is now devoted to “cultural orientation” – a curriculum used to introduce new Americans to their new lives in the United States. The cultural orientation program addresses challenges like family life, housing, employment and expectations of the workplace, but very little about how to integrate into these confusing, nuanced and in some cases oppressive cultural realities.

As described in the 2011 *Handbook*, issues of gender, and a specific focus on advancing the needs of women, is best met through practices of “mainstreaming.” In tracing Somali women’s journey out of Kenya and into the United States, I argue that it is now through mainstreaming practices of integration that refugee women are further gendered as subjects by institutions of resettlement. Cultural orientation is an important step in the institutionalized resettlement process and is, I argue, emblematic of the historical paradigms of international politics and women’s rights as discussed earlier in this chapter. The 1980 Refugee Resettlement Act, in addition to defining federal responsibilities, gives individual states a significant role in the administration of resettlement programs. One of the biggest responsibilities of these

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102 Charlesworth, “Not Waving but Drowning, 10”.
103 Bloemraad, *Becoming a Citizen*, 129.
agencies is administering programs of cultural orientation and integration to newly arrived refugees. It is here, within the curricula and expectations of cultural integration, that refugee women are further framed with a specific, gendered subjectivity.

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Cultural integration and physical settlement into the United States is a continuing and ongoing process. It is one that, as chapter three reveals, transcends the official process facilitated by state actors. When refugees are selected for resettlement, they receive mandatory cultural orientation before they arrive and once they are resettled in their respective host cities. Lesson plans for these orientation programs can be found within the cultural orientation packets published by various resettlement agencies of the United States and often refer to the guidelines published by the United Nations. Cultural orientation programs cover topics ranging from finding employment, paying bills and driving, to the importance of “asking questions!” and “self-reliance.” These documents, as the introduction to a 2012 English Welcome Guide states, “help you prepare for your first few months in the United States. It tells you what to expect as you find a place to live, look for work, meet Americans, and adjust to American culture and society.” Photographs of notable refugees like Madeleine Albright, Albert Einstein, and Gloria Estefan as well as smiling women wearing hijabs decorate the pages of these documents.

The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants developed the Somali Bantu Community Orientation curriculum in 2004, funded in part through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement. The curriculum’s goals, as stated under “Objectives of Community Orientation,” are to provide an understanding of: (1) the client’s home and community in the United States, (2) the role of the resettlement agency and

104 2012 – English_Welcome_Guide.pdf
other service providers, (3) the rights of refugees in the United States, and (4) individual responsibilities. Under the section headline “Why are the Somali Bantu being brought to the United States?” the curriculum states,

“Accepting and welcoming the Somali Bantu extends the vital American tradition of opening its doors to people fleeing persecution. In addition the Somali Bantu have made conscious decisions to be resettled in the United States with the understanding and expectation of becoming productive members of society,” which is akin to the earlier philosophy of immigrants as contributors. Here, the U.S. legitimates Somali Bantu resettlement by their ability to productively contribute to their new country. In the following section, I will show how this notion of productivity, rooted in neoliberal values of individualism, have become central to the integration process and framing of refugees who resettle to the United States. It is under this framework that, states the UN, gender is mainstreamed as a particular area of concern. I argue however, that in applying gender mainstreaming to the process of creating productive citizens, the refugee woman is awarded a specific type of gendered subjectivity, namely, “the American worker.” This subjectivity, I argue, is a product of a particular historical moment in which both western feminism and western markets rely on neoliberal individualism.

**Self-Reliance**

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees places an acute emphasis on individual determinism and self-reliance for the integration of refugees. As stated by the 2011 *Refugee Resettlement Handbook*, the UNHCR seeks to help increase the self-reliance of refugees.

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106 Ibid., 21.
in a “sustainable manner and with dignity.” Here, the Handbook defines self-reliance as “the social and economic ability of an individual, a household or a community to meet essential needs (including protection, food, water, personal safety, health and education).”

The emphasis on refugee self-reliance is a notable and recurring theme in cultural orientation as well.

My focus here is specifically on the expectation of economic self-sufficiency for new American refugees. Economic self-sufficiency becomes a stand-in I find for what it means to be successfully resettled to the United States, defined by the UNHCR as the “capacity to live independently of government and other external sources of income support.” Essentially, refugees resettled to the United States are expected to stop using any form of state welfare by the time government resettlement services expire. The International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration published in 2002 by the UNHCR states that “while there is a consensus internationally that economic self-sufficiency is a pivotal goal of integration, there are significant differences in expectations about how soon after arrival this should be achieved and about the importance of self-sufficiency in the integration process.” In the United States, economic self-sufficiency is considered vital to the integration process and is expected to be achieved within eight months of arrival. For comparison, in most Nordic countries, refugees are expected to achieve economic self-sufficiency over a period of five years.

Policies that prioritize values like self-sufficiency and individuality are emblematic of a rising neoliberal discourse of privatization and rights-based individualism. Intertwined with this narrative of self-reliance and economic self-sufficiency is refugee employment, an equally prevalent narrative throughout resettlement documents. “In those countries with a principle

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emphasis on early employment,” like the U.S., states the UNHCR in the 2002 *International Handbook*, “it is understood that integration is best facilitated though the social and economic benefits accruing from participation in the labour force.”¹⁰⁹ In a subsequent section, the *Handbook* goes on to state that “as well as providing the means for economic stability, employment has a powerful influence on one’s capacity to participate equally in the receiving society.”¹¹⁰

It becomes clear that the refugee women who enter the discourse of UNHCR documents are valued by their economic contributions to the United States. The framing of refugees in economic terms represents a shift away from the security concerns that dominated the discourse around refugees throughout the 2010s to a discourse around the economic threat refugees bring to their respective host countries. For many, refugees are viewed as negatively impacting and placing an unfair burden on U.S. taxpayers. Conflated with this message is the understanding that as bodies move across borders, their “right to exist” within the host country is based on their ability to become successful workers. Work, states the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the “primary source through which we define ourselves and our role both in the wider society and in the family.”¹¹¹ It is refugee women’s participation in the American workforce I argue, that becomes the metric by which she is assessed as “integrated,” and thus valued, in the United States, or not. This economic discourse is also intimately tied to expectations around gender and women’s rights.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 173.
¹¹¹ Ibid.
Femonationalism

Foucault, in his analysis of the disciplined body, acknowledges the economic incentives of institutional discipline. The “political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use,” he writes. And, he continues, “[the body’s] constitution as labor power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjugation.”\textsuperscript{112} The refugee woman, as Foucault would say, is both a productive body and a subjugated body – her potential for productivity in U.S. society relies on the specific subject formation she is awarded.

In her book, \textit{In the Name of Women’s Rights: The rise of femonationalism}, Sara Farris coins the term “femonationalism” to talk about the appropriation of the liberal feminist discourse by right-wing “nationalists and neoliberals” to advance anti-Islamic and anti-refugee agendas. She uses the example of civic integration programs, Europe’s version of cultural orientation programs, as example. These programs, she says, “urge migrants both to acknowledge women’s rights as a central value of the West and to assimilate to western cultural practices.”\textsuperscript{113} This process rests on generalized “claims regarding the inherent misogyny of Muslim communities and [applies] them to all non-western migrants.”\textsuperscript{114} When American homes and the American workforce are framed as egalitarian spaces, American society becomes a place that fosters female empowerment and equality between the sexes. This idea, through employment initiatives that explicitly target the female refugee, becomes conflated with ideas of propagating women’s rights in the United States, and thus, propagates a secular western liberal feminism.

Policies of the civic orientation programs of Europe, argues Farris, “are informed by the neoliberal logic of workfare and individual responsibility and have blended together with the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{112} Foucault and Rabinow, \textit{The Foucault Reader}, 173.
\bibitem{113} Farris, \textit{In the Name of Women’s Rights}, 2.
\bibitem{114} Ibid., 3.
\end{thebibliography}
right-wing ideology of homogeneity and superiority of the (western) nation as well as with the western feminist notion of emancipation through work.” It is through this amalgamation – of women’s work and women’s rights – that western, second wave feminism is sustained as the dominant narrative. Cultural orientation packets, while intended to offer guidelines and techniques for integration into the host country, posit that women are unable to integrate to the United States without first adapting western ideals of gender equality through employment opportunity. This belief, writes Farris, “posits that the dominant racial group will support the subaltern racial group’s fight for equal rights only if the former believes it has something to gain in the process.”115 In this case, by resettling the female refugee to the United States, and integrating her as worker, the United States actively works to advance western feminism onto subaltern bodies, and onto the Global South at-large.

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The refugee regime has made particular language and policy choices which come together to discursively define the “female refugee” as she exists in the United Nations and United State resettlement process. In aggregate, this discourse describes the “female refugee” as an “empowered survivor,” maybe of sexual- and gender-based violence, who leads a “self-sufficient” and “normal” life in the United States. She has support and recognition for her familial roles and responsibilities, she has not sacrificed any cultural values and she is accepted by her new community.116 The obvious goal of the UNHCR for this woman is the productive and successful integration to a new life in the United States. This culminates in a narrative of economic success that breeds empowerment, independence, and helps to “define her [new] role

115 Farris, In the Name of Women’s Rights, 8.
in society.” As evidenced in the 1990 *Policy on Refugee Women*, and reiterated in the latest 2011 *Resettlement Handbook*, it is a woman’s role in society that separates her as a gendered subject and it is through employment that she accrues resettlement outcomes equitable to that of her male peers. As quoted above, the UN writes that it is through work, that refugees in the United States may be able to “participate equally in the receiving society.”

*Women and Family Life*

CORE: Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange, is a program financed by the U.S. Department of State to help arriving refugees navigate their new lifestyle. CORE has developed several cultural orientation curricula, which are now available online and in multiple languages for refugees to view before entering the United States. CORE’s website features user-friendly info on the U.S. resettlement process and “life in the United States.” A one-page info sheet on their website titled “Employment for Refugee Women,” states in a bolded abstract, “Employment in the United States is very important to your family’s future and well-being, as well as to your own development and financial stability as a woman. All adults, women and men who are between the ages of 18 and 64 and are able to work, should make finding a job a priority.”

As mentioned in the 1990 *Policy on Refugee Women*, changes in roles within the family post-displacement and even post-resettlement is an identifiable concern, especially for women. While individual resettlement states are not under legal obligation to uphold policy recommendations from the United Nations, the UNHCR states that “the unity of the family” is a

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118 “Employment for Refugee Women.”
“fundamental principle of refugee protection.” It is important to note the emphasis the UN has placed on a woman’s role within her family unit, and the cultural and personal significance this role may hold. It is apparent however, that just like with “successful integration,” successful family life for refugee women in the United States has also been conflated within the resettlement paradigm with her economic potential. In CORE’s curriculum “work” and “family” are intimately connected are mutually reinforcing. “Employment for Refugee Women” states, for example, that “Americans value independence in both men and women. In many families, both the husband and the wife work and in some families, the wife earns more than the husband.” It is in this paradigm I argue, where working mothers are model citizens, that femonoationalism manifests within the discourse of refugee resettlement.

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The expectations of work, family, and emancipation are, however, only an imagined reality of the United States. The notion that American women are liberated and self-sufficient within the workforce is a hoax, but is one firmly propagated by institutionalized resettlement. CORE states, for example, that “a workplace also affords you the opportunity to interact with a diverse group of people and learn about American culture and values. [Going to work] will greatly contribute to your independence and self-sufficiency.” Refugee women are held to standards which define their productive contributions, level of integration, and social emancipation through work. In reality however, they often enter a system that is unable to deliver such services. Many American women, especially women of color, are not economically

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119 “UNHCR Resettlement Handbook,” 173; Note: that promotion of “family unity” is protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) which states: “the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.”
120 “Employment for Refugee Women.”
121 Ibid.
self-sufficient, as these documents would suggest. By setting up the expectation of self-sufficiency through work, the U.S. and UN respectively, take no responsibility for systemic or institutional inequalities that prevent many women in the U.S., refugees or otherwise, from achieving this goal. This, I argue, is another act of political negation by the refugee regime.

*State Simplification*

The standard to which refugee women are deemed legitimate citizens – namely, economic self-sufficiency – is I argue, a process of institutionalized legibility. Forms of knowledge used by the state, are, writes James Scott, ultimately and inevitably based on methods of simplification. State simplification he explains, “makes the phenomenon at the center of the field of vision more legible and hence more susceptible to careful measurement and calculation.” Thus, from the state, an “aggregate synoptic view of a selective reality is achieved, making possible a high degree of schematic knowledge, control, and manipulation.”\(^\text{122}\) It is this “utilitarian simplification” that renders the state’s population legible and thus susceptible to various forms of measurement and control.\(^\text{123}\) Scott argues that an “intellectual filter” is necessary to reduce complex realities into manageable dimensions for the purposes of state governance.\(^\text{124}\)

The politics of measurement originated, writes Scott, with the concept of homogenous citizenship in the modern era. It was necessary for the legitimacy of state power to encompass the entirety of the state border, and thus, for the means of this legitimacy to be legible to all. And so, as all of France came under the same centralized rule, a new state nationalism was born.

\(^\text{122}\) Scott, *Seeing like a State*, 11.
\(^\text{123}\) Ibid., 21.
\(^\text{124}\) Ibid., 22.
France became a single national community “where the same codified laws, measures, customs, and beliefs would prevail everywhere.”\textsuperscript{125} Homogenous citizenship relies on both the concept and legitimacy of standardized forms of measurement. It is through these state-defined metrics that a national population becomes legible for state control. Scott is apt in emphasizing the historical power relations embedded in these systems of measurement where with top-down measurement also comes top-down “control and manipulation.” It is important to recognize however, that the prerogative for political measurement was utilitarian, rather than simply exploitative.

Utilitarian standardization provides a useful theoretical framework for thinking about how methods of categorization function to make populations legible under state control. Unlike nationals, refugees enter the United States as foreigners who need to be made legible through, and for, state power. It is under this process that Somali women are made the institutionalized subjects of the U.S. refugee resettlement program. To guide the reception and integration of refugees into the country, the U.S. makes refugees legible through state-defined metrics that are also used to categorize and make legible the national population. Evidence of Scott’s understanding of state simplification can be found in cultural orientation programs as extensions of UNHCR guidelines for the integration of female refugees into the United States. Somali women who resettle to the United States are understood within the same metric as national-born citizens. This process fuels state nationalism, solidifies state borders, and is ultimately, I argue, what crafts refugee women into “American workers.”

\textsuperscript{125} Scott, \textit{Seeing like a State}, 32.
As discussed in chapter one, “gender,” as relevant to the refugee resettlement apparatus, has been created and understood as a specific categorizational tool. These specific gender categorizations are reflected throughout the refugee resettlement process: individuals selected for screening are marked by sex, the UNHCR has specific protocol in place for female refugees, and after resettlement, female refugees are given gender-specific resources to aid their transition to the United States. This process, part of an international feminist agenda that has coalesced in the United Nations into gender-mainstreaming, is ultimately an essentializing project. How does this project – one that first and foremost proposes to provide women with the necessary gender-specific resources they deserve – function within a feminist theoretical framework?

In chapter one, I apply strategic essentialism to the practice of Somali women claiming the essentialized Bantu identity. Spivak’s theory is particularly relevant to the essentialized discourse found in gender-mainstreaming efforts of refugee resettlement. When Spivak first used the term in an 1984 interview with Elizabeth Gross she stated,

“I am fundamentally concerned with that heterogeneity but I chose a universal discourse in that moment because I felt that rather than define myself as repudiating universality, because universalization, finalization, is an irreducible moment in any discourse – rather than define myself as specific rather than universal – I should see where that discourse meets its limits and its challenge within that field. I think we have to choose again strategically, not universal discourse but essentialist discourse.”\(^{126}\)

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Here, Spivak argues for the necessity of essentialized subjectivity or in other words, the “given tools of the movement.” In the context of western gender equality, gender-mainstreaming and women’s rights, the essentialized category that unites these ideas relies on a universal female identity, one that systematically creates and institutionalizes the essentialized “female subject.” Spivak asks, “Where can the unexamined universalizing discourse of a certain sort of feminism become useful for us since this is the hegemonic space of feminist discourse?”127 Spivak sacrifices a utopian intellectual purity of “feminist practice” for a practical and necessary “anti-sexist” agenda.128

The UNHCR states that all refugees, independent of their given gender identity, deserve resettlement services in which each individual may accrue similar and necessary support. An emphasis on “equity” and “equality” is reflected throughout the 2011 Handbook, when for example, the UN states that “all groups must have equal access to UNHCR’s protection, services and resources, and be able to participate equally in the making of decisions that affect them.” Through addressing issues of “inequality” and “discrimination” in the resettlement process, the UNHCR hopes also, to “safeguard against inadvertently contributing to further discrimination and injustice through the use of procedures and practices that neglect age, gender and diversity considerations.”129

In contrast to intellectual purity, gender-mainstreaming practices within the refugee resettlement system is, I argue, an example of an anti-sexist “equity” agenda, rather than a feminist agenda. The protocols set in place by institutions of refugee resettlement are ultimately not subversive to larger patriarchal structures and ideologies. Clearly, economic self-sufficiency

128 Ibid.
is not the path towards gender equality in the United States. The workplace is for many women, a site which perpetuates gender inequality rather than subverts it. The practices and protocols set up to address the specific needs of refugee women are rather than in feminist ideas like subjugated knowledge, are rooted instead, in ideas of neoliberal individualism. Such a system breeds, rather than subverts systematic inequality.

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Hawiya Abdi Aden, a Somali Bantu refugee selected for resettlement “has never even seen a washing machines, nor a flush toilet, nor a commercial airliner,” reports the UNHCR in a 2002 feature titled *Somali Bantus prepare for life in America*.\(^{130}\) This discourse represents a point of clear and intentional framing of Somali refugees by the international community. It acts to maintain the unilateral relationship between Somalia and the United States – where Somalis gain western freedom, and the West maintains a legitimate control of power by propagating ethnocentric freedom.

An understanding of “refugee woman” as a specific deictic term within the UNHCR apparatus reveals that her subjectivity is specifically and strategically created. It is through the essentializing discourse of targeting the female refugee that the United Nations hopes to transform gender relations. Taking this goal seriously means trusting that through gender-specific policies and guidelines, women will be allotted greater equality and more freedom. Gender-mainstreaming – that is taking the specific needs of women into account during the resettlement process – is believed to actively transform the gender relations experienced by these women. Furthermore, the UNHCR states that gender mainstreaming will also “safeguard against inadvertently contributing to further discrimination and injustice.”\(^{131}\) Through these

\(^{130}\) Clayton, “Feature.”
mainstreaming practices, the UN seeks not only to mitigate the injustices felt by women, but to contribute to stopping any such further experiences of inequality.

The institutional structures that make up the resettlement regime, notably the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United States Office of Refugee Resettlement, are responsible for determining the legal process through which Somali refugees have come to live in Lewiston, Maine. Chapter one has historically situated Somali women’s “culture of exile” by tracing their movement out of Somalia through the jurisdiction of these international western powers. In tracing the movement of Somali women from conflict-driven displacement, to temporary settlement camps, to the legal process that grants them citizen status to the United States, I have highlighted the particular points at which their bodies become gendered.

It is within the documents of the resettlement apparatus that we see the physical legacy and discursive consequences of imperialism. It is here that neoliberal understandings of productivity and individuality have crafted a narrative of the unemployed, welfare-reliant pathological refugee. Refugee women’s participation in paid employment is, states the UNHCR, “particularly important for the long term economic stability of female-headed refugee families. Participation in paid work can speed the process of integration for refugee women (through language acquisition and social contact) and prevent their isolation in the home.”132 The framework of integration adopted by the United States predicated on values of individuality, crafts the “female refugee” as subject as a productive and empowered New American. In contributing to the United States economy, she not only proves her right to citizenship, but accrues advantages of all “economically-liberated women” of the liberal United States. The

female refugee is only viewed as productive through a specific western lens in which she is crafted as a self-sufficient worker and economic benefactor.

The experiences of female refugees who enter the United States must be understood within the changing political context of the international refugee resettlement apparatus. It is through this process that the displaced female bodies of Somali women are housed in temporary refugee camps, chosen for resettlement and eventually allotted citizenship to the United States. The United States’ response to foreign conflict and the people who are displaced because of it is emblematic of how displaced women fit into a broader narrative of international development, human rights, foreign security and international intervention. The Somali female refugee finds herself as the subject of this regime – her experience of resettlement is thus directly influenced by her politicized position in this process of migratory foreign aid.
Chapter 3. Gendered Belonging: Making Lewiston Home

Fatuma Hussein resettled as a refugee to Lewiston, Maine, in the winter of 2001. Coming from Atlanta, Georgia, where she had originally been placed by the United States Office of Refugee Resettlement, Hussein and her family were one of only four other Somali families living in the area. Today, Maine is home to more than 20,000 refugees hailing from Somalia, Iraq, Congo, Sudan and Burundi. Hussein is one of the many Somali refugee families who were drawn to Lewiston in search of affordable housing, intimate neighborhood culture, and state welfare benefits. The subject position of female refugees including Hussein, influences resettlement at every intersection. The bureaucratic process involves the transfer of bodies between home country, temporary resettlement country, international bodies such as the United Nations, national governing bodies of the United States like the Department of Homeland Security, and finally, the governments and communities of individual states within the U.S., in this case, the state of Maine. It is through this process that the bodies and identities of the women who are resettled to the United States experience explicit gendering of both their individual and collective subjectivities. This gendering becomes linguistically obvious and transcribed through the documents of refugee resettlement programs.

Chapter two, “Gendered Citizenship: Refugee Woman as American Worker,” outlines this transcribed subjectivity as it exists in the legal and programmatic framework of the United Nations and United States. It is from the practices of these two governing entities and their expectations for refugees, specifically female refugees, that a certain gendered subject appears. This subject, the “refugee woman,” comes to be defined through her “social roles” and in the

133 “Catholic Charities Maine Refugee Immigration Services: FAQs.”
expectations laid out for her upon arrival. Based in expectations of individuality, economic productivity, and self-sufficiency, the female refugee subject is framed as a new American worker able integrate into her community.

In this chapter, I compare the institutional framework established for refugee resettlement to lived experiences of women’s resettlement in Lewiston, ME. The subject formed through what Foucauldian analysis considers the disciplining refugee regime is an essentialized manifestation of the “master perspective.” Feminist scholars recognize the limitations of understanding women simply as disciplined bodies of state institutions. Sandra Harding’s contribution of feminist standpoint offers the theoretical imperative for work which seeks to, rather than valorize the relationship between power and producers of knowledge, subvert this coupling in an effort to prioritize instead, subjugated knowledge of the “disciplinary.”

The contemporary subject formation of refugee women must be understood as a process that began under President Truman and continues today under the Trump administration. Chapter two outlines a brief history of how policy of the U.S. refugee resettlement program has evolved since the 1950s. Within the context of Lewiston, ME – where hundreds of refugee families, many headed by single women, now live – subjectivity transcends the boundaries as defined by institutions of refugee resettlement. Refugee resettlement to the United States, a system rooted in bureaucracy and political relationships, is not a feminist project, nor does it claim to be. Efforts of anti-sexism such as gender equality and gender mainstreaming are necessary and valiant. But such efforts rely on fundamental essentialized understandings of women and gender. The lives of Somali women living in Lewiston and elsewhere in the United States, are nuanced, multifaceted, and complex. Theory that seeks to understand the subject-making power of the institutions under
which they live must recognize the limitations of institutional control and the capacity of women
to transcend the institutionalized refugee framework.

Integration to Lewiston

“As a refugee you don’t have control of where you get resettled. But if you settle, once
you come into the United States… you can go anywhere. We were resettled in urban
cities, places where it’s very expensive, high crime rates, all kinds of dangers.
Everything you’re running away from [in Somalia] are in big cities.”

Once in the United States, refugees have the same rights as anyone else to move freely
within the country under an inter alia statute adopted by the UNHCR in 1951. Inter alia awards
refugees “the right to freedom of movement, access to the labour market, education, health care
and other social services.” Somali refugees living in Lewiston have asserted this right, as
Lewiston has never been an official resettlement site designated through ORR (the Office of
Refugee Resettlement).

Beginning in 2001, a significant proportion of Somali refugees in the United States began
moving to Lewiston, many from Clarkston, Georgia, right outside of Atlanta. Refugees who
moved to Lewiston since 2001 mention the draw of a small city already filled with other Somalis
as a key motivator for choosing Lewiston as her new home. Hussein describes this process as a
kind of verbal technology of their “very oral community.” After the first few families started
moving, everyone else soon followed. “We are very very dedicated to each other,” she said. “I

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134 Hussein (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018.
135 “UNHCR Resettlement Handbook,” 34.
think it was one person who lived in Portland, who had a brother in Atlanta who said ‘hey move to Maine. You are going to get comfortable affordable housing, education that’s much better.’ It’s safe.”

When the Somali Bantu population arrived, however, both groups (Bantus and Arab-descending ethnic Somalis) experienced new forms of racial and ethnic discrimination. “The tension is there” one Bantu community member told me. “And we are seeing it every single day.” The initial integration into Lewiston’s majority-white and economically disadvantaged city was not the welcoming and accommodating community many families had expected. Almost immediately, Somalis received hurtful and upsetting hostility towards their arrival from local Lewistonians, and the Bantu population in particular, faced prejudice from the ethnic Somali population who had arrived to Lewiston several years before; the self-actualized Bantu identity was no longer the most strategically advantageous refugee subjectivity. Somali refugees suffered from exclusion and hateful slander fueled by a racist, nationalist and Islamophobic ethos. Such hostility penetrated both the private and public realms of women’s lives, greatly coloring their resettlement process.

Lewiston Today

The 2011 UNHCR Resettlement Handbook states that while the UNHCR is largely responsible for the identification of refugees for resettlement, it is the resettlement states themselves, like the U.S., “that offer permanent places of residence,” and therefore, “also play a key role throughout the identification, pre-departure, and the post-resettlement integration

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136 Hussein (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018.
137 Somali Bantu Community Association (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018
process.\textsuperscript{138} Resettlement, writes the High Commissioner, is a “partnership activity” – it must be seen as a collaborative effort between the United Nations and receiving states like the U.S.\textsuperscript{139} In November of 2016, Republican Governor Paul LePage pulled Maine out of its partnership with the federally funded U.S. refugee resettlement program. While the Catholic Charities Maine branch, a former U.S. resettlement agency, remains a support center for the community, they no longer receive financial support from ORR. In a letter addressed to President Obama, LePage wrote that he had “lost confidence” in the program, writing, “the federal government has proven to be an unwilling partner with states in ensuring that refugee resettlement does not unduly put American lives at risk.”\textsuperscript{140}

Government-supported anti-refugee sentiment has an enduring legacy both in Lewiston and in Maine at-large. In August of 2016, then Presidential candidate Donald Trump spoke passionately to a raucous crowd outside of Portland City Hall. Warning against the dangers of allowing more refugees into the country, Trump told supporters, “we’ve just seen many, many crimes getting worse all the time, and as Maine knows – a major destination for Somali refugees – right, am I right?”\textsuperscript{141}

President Trump has since called for a “shutdown” of Muslims entering the United States.\textsuperscript{142} His first term in office can since be classified by heavy-handed restrictions in refugee resettlement, coupled with explicit Islamophobia. On January 27, 2017 the President issued Executive Order 13769, “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” which effectively suspended the entry of refugees from seven Muslim-majority

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 1.
\textsuperscript{140} Charns, “Maine Pulling out of Federal Refugee Resettlement Program, LePage Tells Obama.”
\textsuperscript{141} MacQuarrie and Wang, “Mainers Defend Somali Neighbors against Trump.”
\textsuperscript{142} The Editorial Board, “Opinion | A Trump Travel Ban We’ve Seen Before.”
countries, including Somalia. In late September 2017, the President declared that a cap of 45,000 refugees would be allowed into the country over the following year. This is the lowest Presidential Determination number since the Refugee Act became law in 1980, giving the president this power. In 2016 Obama set the cap at 110,000.

Such anti-immigrant sentiment, however, is not limited to that reflected in the government and media. In recent years, particularly following the diversification of Lewiston and surrounding towns by refugee and immigrant populations, white-supremacist and xenophobic hatred towards the Somali population has grown. Jean Harper, a Lewiston resident and online commenter on www.newamerican.com, a conservative news outlet, wrote in response to a story about Somali assimilation, “We need more city officials standing up against this invasion. Americans don’t want this.” In response to this comment, an anonymous commenter, with a pseudonym All American Chutzpah wrote, in 2017, an ordered list titled “An ethnic and racial pogrom for the 20th and 21st centuries.” The list reads as follows:


143 “HIAS Calls Trump Administration’s Refugee Ceiling Shameful.”
144 Hirschfeld Davis and Jordan, “Trump Plans 45,000 Limit on Refugees Admitted to U.S.”
145 Cort Kirkwood, “Lewiston, Maine, Mayor Rebuked for Advising Somalis to Assimilate.”
146 Ibid.
Extremism surrounding racial, ethnic, and religious intolerance is a reality of the context in which Somali families moved to and began their new lives in Lewiston. Hussein attributes these sentiments generally, to ignorance and shock.

“The city of Lewiston had no idea. [Lewistonians] think, ‘these Somalis, they’re crazy people. They hide nothing. They go up and down Lisbon Street wearing bright colors, hijabs.’ We clearly became foreigners.”147

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Under the section headline “Why are the Somali Bantu being brought to the United States?” the cultural orientation curriculum funded by the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants states,

“To the credit of the U.S. State Department, and with the help of Americans living in the communities where these refugees will come to make their homes, the Somali Bantu will get a fresh chance to live their lives in peace and freedom.”148

It is here, and in statements reflected throughout the United Nations and other U.S. resettlement mandates, that the institutional resettlement apparatus sets a framework for the female refugee subject. Here, the U.S. is credited for offering a “fresh chance” to integrate into a safe, welcoming, tolerant, and productive community. After all, as the 2002 United Nations semi-annual magazine *Refugees* reported in an issue dedicated to Somali Bantus, resettlement is an “incredible new adventure [in which] the choice between America and Somalia is ‘between fire and paradise.’”149

147 Hussein (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018.
149 *Refugees Magazine*, "America Here We Come,” 2.
The framework propagated by the United Nations in which refugees enter the U.S. represents a blatantly paradisiacal idea of reality. Massive human displacement, systematic rape, the death of family members and countless such atrocities following the Somali civil war and state collapse amount to unimaginable horrors. But the American context which awaited them can hardly be described as “incredible heavenly safety.” The extremist statements published online cannot be isolated to one group or one individual. These comments represent a larger and perhaps resurfacing phenomenon in the United States of bigotry and intolerance; the institutionalized expectations of refugee resettlement represent an idealized version of reality.

In its emphasis and insistence on the gender-equality between men and women as a fundamental paradigm of American culture, cultural orientation curricula reinforce the dominate narrative of subaltern cultures as an unequal opposite to that of the West. The narrative that subsists within the documents of the UNHCR and U.S. resettlement agencies is one of strict, essentializing binaries where, for example, in the U.S. we have running water and gender equality, and in Somalia, “the other” does not. These narratives live in the humanitarian aid “before” and “after” discourse represented in such simple claims as “in the United States both women and men work outside of the home.”\footnote{CORE Cultural Orientation Curriculum.} It is these narratives, and in other such falsities that the “disciplined” refugee woman emerges as an essentialized figure of the refugee resettlement agencies’ imagined conscious.

“Somali Bantus are now settled in the United States, living a life they never thought of, and a life their ancestors never had.”\footnote{“Our History.”} This statement is published on the Somali Bantu Community Association’s website. While most Somali women in Lewiston will show nothing but gratitude and optimism for the opportunities awarded to them post-resettlement, the
expectations set out for them during the resettlement process are an idealized representation of the truth. They represent, rather than factual substantiated claims of reality, anecdotal accounts, perhaps of a “best-case-scenario.” These descriptions of the United States, in which, as cultural orientation curriculums insist “men and women work equally outside of the home,” must be read with a certain skepticism. The “female refugee” which is both the subject and subjectivized audience of these accounts must be read with a similar level of skepticism and interrogative incredulity.

Refugee Resettlement in Lewiston

When the first wave of Somali refugees arrived in Lewiston there were no local resettlement organizations or other resources specifically established to ease their transition. Hussein remembers that “when we first moved to Maine, Maine is very white, we didn’t have specific or specialized culturally or linguistically appropriate services. It was chaos. There was a lot of confusion. The state didn’t know what to do with us.”152 Because they had relocated, Somalis who arrived to the United States through standard U.S. resettlement protocol had received the government-mandated cultural orientation education and had been aided by a resettlement agency in their arrival city. Catholic Charities, one of the nine official federally funded refugee resettlement agencies, started a Lewiston-based branch in 2003, but the resources available for refugee resettlement remained scarce.153

Today, facing a retreat in support from the United States federal government, refugee resettlement services in Maine have fallen under the responsibility of private organizations such as the Portland-based Maine Immigrant and Refugee Services (MIRS), the Somali Bantu

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152 Hussein (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018.
153 Besteman, Making Refuge, 123.
Community Association of Maine (SBCA), and the Lewiston-based Immigrant Resource Center of Maine (IRCM). Maine Senators Susan Collins and Angus King have shown limited support for these organizations. In September of 2016, the Senators announced the Immigration Resource Center of Maine (IRCM) would receive $300,000 from the Maine’s Office on Violence Against Women through the “Grants to Enhance Culturally Specific Services Program.” “The Immigration Resource Center of Maine’s culturally specific services ensure that members of Maine’s East African community have the tools, support, and education they need to live free from fear,” both Senators said in a joint statement following their donation.154 This funding and similar grants from private donors support the majority of the work done by local refugee assistant programs. It is under grants like this that resettlement becomes a “partnership activity” financially supported by, but no longer under the jurisdiction of pre-existing U.S. institutions.

The Somali Bantu Community Association of Maine (SBCA) was founded in 2005 with a small cohort of Somali Bantus who had recently moved to Lewiston. The “Welcome!” page of their website reads: “We continue to build an integrated and strong community of people who respect and care for one another.”155 “The Center” as board members refer to SBCA as in casual conversation, runs several programs “with a mission to assist the Somali Bantu refugee community with the transition to our new lives and home here in Maine.”156 Located within walking distance of downtown Lewiston, SBCA is housed in a one-story complex surrounded mostly by apartment buildings and single-family homes. Community members stroll in and out during the day (The Center is open Monday through Friday), sometimes seemingly just to hang out. As Hodan told me, “In The Center, we always welcome anybody. We ask them what the

154 “Collins, King Announce $300,000 for Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Advocacy in Immigrant Community | Senator Susan Collins.”
155 “Somali Bantu Community Association of Lewiston/Auburn, Maine.”
156 “Mission.”
needs are. If we [can] help, we help.” It is through the Somali Bantu Community Association of Maine and other such locally-run community organizations that U.S.-led cultural orientation programs in Maine have largely been replaced. While these organizations existed before LePage discontinued Maine’s refugee resettlement program, these organizations have, for almost two-decades now, replaced the work of the United Nations and United States in resettling Somali women. It is here, in these organizations that women self-organize and define for themselves the types of U.S. citizenship and community they need and deserve. It is in places like The Center, that new female subjectivities are born, nourished and can thrive in Lewiston, ME.

Hodan Mohamad is one of the seven women who sits on the 12-seat Board of the Somali Bantu Community Association of Maine. Her self-described role in The Center “is to represent the women and the organization and [to] always speak for the women if there’s issues… always bring to the table and discuss with the Board and figure out how we can help.” Upon further reflection she concluded matter-of-factly, “I am always here for the women.”

A central focus for Hodan and The Center at-large is to support the specific needs of Somali Bantu women living in Lewiston, many of whom are single mothers. While the needs of the Somali community are lengthy and vary from counseling, tutoring, violence mediation and conflict resolution, translation services, transportation, and immigration services, the majority of the people who use these services, all available through The Center, are women. “It’s easier” Hodan says, for Somali men in Lewiston to find their new way of life and to “figure their ways around.” But women, she says, “are kind of stuck… so they will come here and we help them

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157 Somali Bantu Community Association (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018.
158 Somali Bantu Community Association (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018.
with anything.”\textsuperscript{159} The Center has several programs intended to aid the transition and security of women in the community including Basket Weaving, Community Farming, the Cultural Telling Room, and the Women’s Empowerment Program.

The Women’s Empowerment Program began in 2012, initially at The Center, but quickly relocated to private residences. The idea was to create women’s only spaces for female refugees that would be beneficial to the community. But “women were not talking” at these initial meetings held at The Center, so the program initiated smaller community gatherings for women in their apartments and homes. With some grant funding, women in leadership positions were paid to organize, lead, and record the outcome of these meetings. Today, The Women’s Empowerment meetings are one of the most successful programs coming out of SBCA, which has grown to include basket weaving and new drivers programming as well. Yasir, Executive Director of SBCA, reflects that after these initial female-led meetings, The Center has evolved, “the women can now, are thinking on their own, so now more women are driving, and more women are going to school and more women are going to work.”\textsuperscript{160} When Somali women began talking with each other they “experienced a reduction of stress and in increase in self-esteem. Incidents of domestic violence decreased in our community, and women became more confident in confronting abuse and in communicating their problems.”\textsuperscript{161} According to the SBCA website,

“Somali Bantu women face challenges on three fronts: the prejudice of the white American community, the prejudice of the immigrant community of Somalis of

\textsuperscript{159} Somali Bantu Community Association (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018.
\textsuperscript{160} Somali Bantu Community Association (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018.
\textsuperscript{161} “Women’s Empowerment Project.”
Arab descent, and the prejudice within its own community, based on traditional
tribal gender roles. Challenging the gender roles within the Bantu own community
has been complicated by these outside prejudices, which create a climate of hostility
that is triggering for a population so recently faced with atrocity and genocide.”

In the future, SBCA hopes to initiate a women’s-only exercise program that encourages
everyday movement, walking, and light exercise. “In pairs or in threes when they are talking
about their experiences back home and all of the sudden they will walk for a mile and a half or
two miles without even knowing… we are always responding to the need and now the need is
that people need to be exercising” Yasir told me. This new program would act as a therapeutic,
community-building and processing activity and will encourage healthy habits. Since moving
to the United States, the Somali community faces new health concerns such as high blood
pressure, diabetes, and obesity. This new program, again a women’s-only space, encourages
women in the community to talk to one another and to engage with other women in their
community.

Talking and processing with one another is perhaps one of the most important resources
The Center provides for members of the community of every age. Cultural Telling Room
(Kasheekee) is a story-telling program held for two hours every Friday for children in the
community to listen and learn from the experiences of their parents and adult role models.
“Somebody will volunteer to tell our stories, and our kids are like ‘are you kidding me!?’” says
Yasir.

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162 “Women’s Empowerment Project.”
163 Somali Bantu Community Association (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018.
“Bantu Youth are getting lost between an American culture that is not native to them while at the same time, they have left behind Bantu culture. Without strong cultural programming, they cannot achieve confidence in their Bantu identity, which will enable them to develop healthy attitudes toward themselves and also towards their new country.”

Maintaining the cultural integrity of the Bantu community is vital for SBCA as an organization that supports successful resettlement and integration for Somali families.

Like most Somalis in Maine, Ayaan moved to Lewiston with her family in search of a better life. As is common, Ayaan lived in Dallas, Texas and New Hampshire before making her final move northward. “Maine is a calm place” she says. “Good for the kids. It’s a place for us to raise our kids without any problems.” Reflecting on living in bigger cities, women speak of issues adapting to the metropolitan lifestyle. “You are expected to do everything everybody else does. Nobody has the time to slow down for you. It’s a big city, it has to go the way it goes, and you will be falling through the cracks.” Lewiston, Ayaan says, “is not better than anywhere else,” but it is smaller and has a slower place. Ayaan left a job at Tyson to move to Maine. The preference of resettlement agencies, Hussein tells me, is for refugees to stay in their original site for at least three months. If you move within thirty days, then the federal assistance program will follow you to your new location. But, if refugee families move after thirty days, then she says,

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164 “Cultural Telling Room (Kasheekee).”
165 Somali Bantu Community Association (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018.
“the agencies keep the money.” It is for this reason that many refugees do not move, or at least not right away.

“But once you stabilize, you come to realize, OMG, this is a crazy place that they moved me to. I have no community, I don’t understand. So what we did in my case, is that people recognized that they needed a better life, a better place, a safe place. A community where they can belong and they’re not worried about guns and all that. So that’s why we moved and you see this wave of Somalis coming.”166

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In Refugee Resettlement: An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration, published in 2002, the UHNCR writes that “High expectations of employment, communicated at an early stage, are also thought to reduce the risk of resettled refugees developing a long term dependency on social support payments and services.”167 The U.S. refugee resettlement program promises federal assistance to newly arrived refugees for up to ninety days after arrival. Intended to reduce dependence on welfare programs and ensure that refugees do not come to expect lasting subsistence funds from the United States federal government, a narrative of individual self-sufficiency permeates in the discourse of United Nations resettlement guidelines.

In contrast, the narrative propagated from the Somali Bantu Community Association is one not of individual autonomy or individual self-sufficiency, but of community-sufficiency, collective well-being and collective resources. Rather than insisting that self-sufficiency be

166 Hussein (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018.
achieved through employment, the women at SBCA define self-sufficiency much more broadly. Successful community engagement means using The Center for temporary child care and after school programming for children; it means working through The Center in the Basket-Weaving programs or getting paid to lead meetings. The Women’s Empowerment Program coming out of The Center is predicated not on a narrative of empowerment-through-individualism, but rather, on empowerment-through solidarity. This emphasis on solidarity extends beyond just that of the Somali community. It is a narrative intended to encompass the Lewiston community in aggregate, creating an integration strategy that is much more of a “partnership” than the ninety-day max federal funding supplied by the federal government.

Hussein founded United Somali Women of Maine in 2003. The organization’s aim was to bring “familiar language and cultural awareness to immigrant women,” and focuses on bridging the Somali-Mainer divide with an emphasis on gender and sexual violence.168 “We founded the Somali Women [organization] and we started mobilizing ourselves” she said.169

“I was resettled as an immigrant, a young person going from place to place, system to system. And when you’re young you don’t know how to navigate these systems, you lack the language and education. Its very hard, right? And so, it came natural to say, we need a center that will empower, educate and help women and their children become self-sufficient.”170

This was fifteen years ago. Her organization has since grown into an independent non-profit, Immigrant Resource Center of Maine (IRCM) whose goal is “to assist immigrant and refugee women and children living in Maine in a manner which reflects their gender and cultural

169 Hussein (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018.
170 Hussein (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018.
practices.”\footnote{171 “Who We Are.”} “We were going to do all of it to walk people through those services and enable them, because ultimately, they’re the ones in charge of their lives.”\footnote{172 Hussein (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018.} IRCM is one of many other Lewiston-based organizations who work with Somali refugees.

IRCM’s Mission Statement reads: “The mission of Immigrant Resource Center of Maine (IRCM formerly known as United Somali Women of Maine) is to support refugee and immigrant communities by offering culturally and linguistically sensitive services to promote a healthy and equitable Maine.” This focus on Maine’s community at-large is crucial to understanding the work of IRCM and their engagement with Lewiston. “We are all from one community,” states a bolded quote on the IRCM website. “Whether we are from Somalia or Lewiston or Auburn, Maine. We all need to learn to work together, to accept each other, to grow together, no matter what our religion or cultural background is.”\footnote{173 “The Difference We Make.”} Speaking at a 2012 TEDx event in Atlanta Georgia, Hussein reiterates her message that Somali women are here to better the Lewiston community at-large.

“We are people who are here to build Lewiston, Maine to contribute to the economy to the state. We are people who work so hard, we are people who pay taxes. Better yet, refugees don’t move out of the state. When my daughter turns eighteen, I am hoping that she goes to Bates College,” she tells a captivated audience.\footnote{174 “We cannot afford to divide ourselves: Fatuma Hussein at TEDxDirigo,” TEDx; Hussein's daughter is currently a junior at Bates College in Lewiston, ME.} Hussein frames the Somali people as hardworking, dedicated and relatable members of the Lewiston community. Here, she uses the same hegemonic language of resettlement institutions, appealing to their expectations and
placing herself with the U.S. culture of belonging. By framing themselves as vital and integrated citizens, their plight becomes the plight of the city as a whole; the Somali population deserves not only tolerance, but equality and recognition for their contribution and city-wide integration effort. Women, insists Fatuma,

“are strong regardless of what cultural background you come from, regardless of what religion you come from. We are the centerpiece that holds the family together…. Women are the movers and the shakers and that’s what happened in Somalia. Women [are] very empowered, very powerful.”

Resettlement for these organizations looks like community development and cultural preservation, rather than just individual self-sufficiency and employment. While practical assistance programs are also in-place like registering for driver’s licenses, paying bills and learning how to drive, such programs through SBCA and IRCM, are integrated with efforts towards cultural preservation and community development. These programs are initiated through group efforts with emphasis placed on a pedagogy where Somali women teach other Somali women and Somali women teach other Somali children and other Somali women teach Somali men. These programs are also apt at adapting to the community’s needs, when for example, Women’s Empowerment Program meetings moved into the private sphere of women’s homes. It is through this adaptation that women in the community were paid, not for the first job they could get, but for one that was developed for them, by the Somali Bantu community itself. The Basket-Weaving program too, initiated by leaders of the Women’s Empowerment Program acts as additional revenue building for The Center and employment for Bantu women. Their hand-

175 “Somali Women’s Roles in Maine.”
made products range from $10.99 to $129.99 and are available for online purchase. It is programs like these, all of which have an element of cultural preservation, that are at the heart of The Center’s work. “In my family our kids speak my language, nobody will come in and speak any language. I always ask them to have the culture, my culture in my home. That is what will be going on. I don’t want them to lose their culture, I don’t want them to lose their language,” Ayaan told me.\textsuperscript{176}

\textit{Revisiting Gender Theory}

In 2014 Fatuma was named a “Mainer to be thankful for” and in 2017 she received an honorary degree from Bowdoin College. Her story represents just one example of the hard work and sustained effort of the refugee movement in Lewiston. The Somali population in the West represents a huge movement of culture, religion, language and bodies across borders. Understanding the implications of such a diaspora is incredibly important in the wake of the ever-globalizing 21\textsuperscript{st} century. The phenomena of hundreds of African Muslims suddenly relocating themselves to one of the whitest regions of the United States shocked not only the local Lewiston community, but quickly drew national media attention. The “success” story of the Somali population in Lewiston has been picked up by outlets ranging from \textit{The Portland Press Herald} and \textit{The Bangor Daily News} to \textit{The New York Times} and \textit{Al-Jazeera America}.

Muslim women are often considered to be one of the most obvious markers and lived representation of subaltern communities. Their role in society, both symbolic and pragmatic, has become an increasingly politicized phenomenon. It is for this reason that understanding how institutions like refugee resettlement craft a subjectivity for Somali women living in Lewiston,

\textsuperscript{176} Somali Bantu Community Association (Lewiston, ME) in conversation with the author, March 2018.
ME is so salient. Their resettlement to the United States has come to represent at its best, multiculturalism, tolerance and American exceptionalism, and at its worse, bigotry, Islamophobia, sexism, and fear. The way Muslim women living in the United States have been represented in the media, online, by our President, and in everyday discourse is a reflection of a politicized history in which the Global North sustains a powerful hold over the Global South.

It is within this history that an empirical narrative has been crafted by one world power for and onto the imagined community of subaltern Muslim women. Refugee women, and in this context, Somali refugee women living in Lewiston, are subjects of this narrative. It is a narrative bounded by expectations and certain understandings of gender and femininity, as well as equality and empowerment. It is a narrative bounded by the freedom imagined by western feminism. The strength and resilience of refugee women that define their everyday reality might be understood as a complimentary reaction to this narrative but is in no way restricted to it.

Gayatri Spivak, in her integral essay *Can the Subaltern Speak*, first published in 1988, discusses the role that essentialized discourse plays in maintaining the neocolonial global order.177 She also discusses the necessity of this essentialization for projects like anti-sexism which requires a certain level of hegemonic discourse. This juxtaposition is at the crux of gender mainstreaming in refugee resettlement. As Judith Butler writes, “[the feminist] turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate [her] emancipation.”178

Expectations of gender are concerned with defining the ways in which new American women fit within a paradigm of inclusion or exclusion. Where the goal of resettlement, as stated by the UNHCR and reflected in the goals of cultural orientation curricula, is “social integration

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177 Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”
to the United States,” the language used to distinguish between men and women acts to determine who is prepared for “inclusion” and who is destined instead to “exclusion” in the United States. It is here that discourses of gender function to determine a culture of belonging and perverse citizenship is conflated with misogynistic subaltern gender norms. What standards then, does the “female refugee” need to conform to in order to fit herself into this “culture of belonging” – one I argue, that is predicated on notions of gender-equity and women’s empowerment?

This frame is relational; it places female refugees who do not work inside the home as “less empowered” than their native-born American liberal feminists who demand female employment and that domestic responsibilities be shared equally between spouses. In accepting the framework that the UNHCR integration guidelines and cultural orientation curricula propagate – that is encouraging work outside of the home for the best possible route to an “American way of life” – women who fit this idealized “female refugee subject” are considered to be more integrated and therefore are more American, than her neighbor who “fails” to adopt such a lifestyle.

When the UNHCR claims to “rescue” the Somali Bantus, this rescue narrative gets conflated with a liberal western feminist discourse. But Ayaan says that inside her home is her culture. Where home-life, rather than as something to reject in the adaptation of a western lifestyle, is a means in which she regains autonomy and sense of well-being. The Women’s Empowerment programs created through the Bantu Community Organization occurred in these women’s homes where they felt the most comfortable.

Integration, as defined by women living in Lewiston, relies on maintaining cultural practices learned in Somalia – this is completely missing from any “cultural orientation” as
crafted in a narrative where resettlement means assimilation, rather than integration, coupled with the promise that women will not have to give up any culturally held beliefs. A Women’s Empowerment curriculum in which women take refuge in the familiar and safe domestic spheres of their homes requires a decoupling of “empowerment” from western notions of the “liberal working mother.” This understanding, while perhaps contradictory in the anti-sexist agenda of U.S. cultural orientation packets, requires a theory of subjectivity that accepts cultural nuance and contradiction.

We understand gender as a learned and performed phenomenon. These culturally-produced and culturally-sustained understandings are institutionally maintained through agencies like those of the refugee resettlement program which rely on the concept of “gender” to perform its job. The job of the UNHCR is to facilitate the transition of Somali women into the United States in a way that is “culturally sensitive” and “gender inclusive.” This is good, and necessary work. But this work, Spivak would argue, supports an explicitly anti-sexist, rather than a feminist agenda.

It is within strategic essentialism that women accept the patriarchal bargains that surround them. As I have discussed in chapter one, and as many scholars of globalization insist, it is also through such practices that the Global North maintains hegemonic status in the global order and the Global South remains “docile” and “disciplined.” Postcolonial feminist scholarship emphasizes the construction of new theoretical frameworks which materialize out of the everyday. The politics of the everyday is where subjectivity is not essentialized, but nuanced. It is in the everyday that contradiction is practiced and celebrated. It is in the everyday where Somali women accept, adapt to, and perform many intersecting and overlapping identities. It is in studying everyday reality that we see how refugee women both embody and reject the
institutional control of Foucauldian institutional power; where, whether implicitly or explicitly, their relationship with essentialized discourses of the UNHCR and U.S. resettlement agencies is strategic.
4. Conclusion

Engaging with feminist theory means applying a critical lens to the construction of social relationships. Understanding social reality in this way, as relational to gender and sexuality, reveals power structures embedded within, for example, refugee resettlement agencies. Feminist theory straddles the intimate spaces of everyday interactions and the historical legacies of colonial power. This work is both deeply personal and ultimately political.

Refugee resettlement to the United States is important, necessary, and fair. Providing a place of refuge to displaced persons around the globe is well within the means and duty of the United States. The critique of this system as presented in this paper is not a condemnation of a system in which thousands of people now have access to safety and opportunity that they would not have had before. My analysis of the categorizational process of giving refugee women specific types of aid and care is critical, but not pejorative. I am interested in the subjectivity produced by this categorization and the limitations of its application.

Foucault places an important emphasis on the power of institutions to discipline subjects. While acknowledging the limitations of theories of the “docile body” has given way to attention towards acknowledging self-actualization for the female subject as a type of oppositional, post-colonial feminism, the reach and power of the institutions which create and impose power over her cannot be understated or ignored. Somali women who live in Lewiston, Maine, are the subjects of a variety of institutions. The discursive power of these institutions must also be recognized as an oppressive force. It is the relationship between the institutionally disciplined Somali refugee subject, and the strategically adopted Somali refugee subject, that is the focus of this paper, and in many ways, reveals a paradox of feminist theory. In applying a feminist theoretical framework to refugee resettlement, I have argued for two seemingly contradictory
theories to emerge. One, in which essentialized gendered subjectivity imposes western
hegemony (Foucault, Bartky, and Harding), and the other, where such essentializing has been
adopted for means of escaping other systems of gender-based power and for adopting an anti-
sexist agenda (Spivak and Kandiyoti).

By viewing refugee women as active participants of their own gendered subjectivities,
they become not only receivers of hegemonic knowledge but producers of subjugated
knowledge. In decoupling “the knowledge” from “the institution,” the relationship between “the
knowledge” and “the being” surfaces through the everyday. Feminist standpoint theory seeks an
alternative to the empirical “master perspective.” Harding believes that individual experiences
should ground the beliefs we honor as knowledge, rather than that produced by institutional
powers. The women I spoke to and the organizations with which they work do not constitute one,
singular form of subjugated knowledge. Nor do they come together to represent a new, “Somali
female refugee feminist” theoretical framework.

The stories I write about in chapter three serve as a counter narrative to Foucauldian
discipline. It is in acknowledging the lived experiences of these women as capable of subverting
(or strategically adapting) institutional subjectivity that constitutes this work as a contribution to
feminist scholarship. This is theory of the quotidian. This is theory of basket-weaving and
walking and talking and serving tea in living rooms and on carpeted mosque floors. Subjugated
knowledge produces theory that is reflexive and representational and unique, rather than paternal
or disciplining.

“What I find useful,” writes Spivak, “is the sustained and developed work on the
mechanisms of the construction of the other.”179 Institutionalized refugee resettlement to the

179 Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 90.
United States is, I argue, one of these mechanisms. In this paper, I take an epistemological stance in questioning the essentialized gendered subjectivities created and sustained through refugee resettlement. I trace historically and critically the processes through which certain western norms became codified in UNHCR documents and propagated through refugee resettlement to the United States. Through this practice, the female refugee subject emerges as a product of American values of self-sufficiency, individuality, and work ethic. This ethos constructs how refugee women are viewed as new and productive citizens, where legitimate citizenship is awarded to the working and “liberated” western woman. Boundaries are exclusionary; boundaries define who belongs and who does not. The theoretical understanding of belonging built by the refugee resettlement regimental understandings of gender, women, and equality is strictly bound to one gendered subjectivity. It is a subjectivity created for subaltern women by western institutions in which inclusion is traded for hard work, self-sufficiency, and assimilation.

Feminist theory is often paradoxical and cannot be distilled into a single framework. The conclusions drawn from feminist scholarship may in fact, lead only to more questions and further inquiry. In this paper, I question the integrity of the systematic essentialization of Somali refugee women. An essentialized framework, I argue, such as that found within the documents of refugee resettlement, valorizes understandings of sex that are inherent and biologically reinforced. It is such a framework that scholars of gender and sexuality recognize for inscribing a binary between men and women that insists on divisive gender roles. This binary is what, for example, creates certain standards of femininity and masculinity that are institutionally prescribed.

Proposing an alternative to the categorizational nature of how the UN represents refugee women, or to the best practices of integration for Somali women who come to the United States, is outside the scope of this paper and outside the scope of my expertise. This work is not meant
to answer all of the questions. It is however, an exploration of how essentialist narratives of
gender roles become institutionally understood and reinforced. Refugee resettlement is, I argue, a
case study from which to understand the mechanisms in which gender becomes legible to the
state, and the limitations of these mechanisms of legibility within the lived experiences of
women themselves.

What I present in this paper is a methodological exercise in applying feminist theoretical
scholarship to a particular set of institutionalized social relationships, in this case, to the refugee
resettlement of Somali women to Lewiston, ME. Under a Foucauldian theoretical framework,
refugee resettlement becomes a regime; one that disciplines the gendered refugee subject. This
discipline, I argue, is rooted in humanitarian intervention, western feminism, American
individualism and ideas of the legitimate citizen. I take my evidence from documents published
by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and resettlement agencies of the United
States. It is within these documents that power manifests within institutional discourse. This
power, I argue, must be questioned for its universalizing conceptions of subaltern women, but
must also be recognized for its necessary application within the resettlement system. How do we
reconcile this institutionalized essentialism with the impact it has on the communities it claims to
help? This question is, I believe, at the crux of feminist scholarship. Feminist theory offers
important insight into how institutional control creates a regimental understanding of gender; this
understanding must be questioned for the power it reinstates but also recognized for its
practicality within certain bureaucratic systems.

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“Ya’ll tryna convert?” I was asked before being handed a scalding cup of sweet tea by a
Somali woman about my age. I had been sitting in the back of afternoon prayer in the Masjidul
Salaam Mosque, unsure of where to look other than to the colorful carpeted floor. My intellectual inquiry into the paradoxes of feminist theoretical integrity and actualized subjective experiences brought me into a community of Somali refugee women. The knowledge produced by this community transcends that of the resettlement bureaucracy and my work. I am so grateful for the men and women in Lewiston who supported this project and welcomed me into conversation. Their stories are imperative to understanding how gender is affective, not institutional. Their stories of displacement, resettlement and everyday life in Lewiston offer insight into the gendered subjectivities of refugee women which transcends that of the UN and U.S. resettlement apparatus.
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