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Old Roots: Place-Making and Hybrid Landscapes of Refugee Urban Farmers

Missy Ward-Lambert
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OLD ROOTS: PLACE-MAKING AND HYBRID LANDSCAPES OF REFUGEE URBAN FARMERS

by

Missy Ward-Lambert

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Human Dimensions of Ecosystem Science and Management

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2014
ABSTRACT

Old Roots: Place-Making and Hybrid Landscapes of Refugee Urban Farmers

by

Missy Ward-Lambert, Doctor of Philosophy
Utah State University, 2014

Major Professor: Ann Laudati
Department: Environment and Society

This dissertation explores the ways in which a place-based perspective that emphasizes the interconnectedness of physical environments and social worlds contributes to an understanding of some of the complex ways that refugees integrate into and resist their new environments post-relocation. Qualitative methodology, based on participant observation techniques, in-depth interviews, and a photography project, was employed to examine the agricultural experiences of 30 refugees living in Salt Lake City, Utah. All research participants were recruited through their participation in a local urban farming program for refugees. Seventeen of these individuals—from Burundi, Sudan, Bhutan, the Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, and Cuba—consented to participation in the in-depth interviews and photovoice stage of the project. In addition to a discussion of the epistemological and methodological choices that structured the research project, three papers are presented. The first paper examines the role of farming activities in the place-making processes of participants. The second paper
describes the physical and symbolic landscapes of hybridity that can be “read” upon
the landscape of this particular urban farming site. The third paper contains
methodological reflections on the unique challenges and sites of opportunity that
exist in research with refugee populations. Policy implications and suggestions for
further research are discussed.

(213 pages)
Old Roots: Place-Making and Hybrid Landscapes of Refugee Urban Farmers

Missy Ward-Lambert

This research project was designed to analyze the relevance of place and the physical environment to the adjustment processes of refugees. This dissertation contains the results of qualitative research with a group of 30 refugee urban farmers living in Salt Lake City, Utah. Seventeen of these individuals—from Burundi, Sudan, Bhutan, the Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, and Cuba—participated in interviews and a photography project focused on their experiences with agriculture in their home countries and since their arrival in Utah. The results of the research show the connection between the refugees’ work as farmers and their sense of place since arriving in the United States. Participants reported material and emotional benefits from their farming work, as well as challenges. The research results also provide insight into the process of cultural hybridization and cross-cultural exchange experienced by the participants. A discussion of some challenges inherent in doing research with refugees is included, and policy implications and suggestions for further research are discussed.
Dedicated to my children:

May you always do whatever you can't not do.
l’exil s’en va ainsi dans la mangeoire des astres
portant de malhabiles grains aux oiseaux nés du temps
qui jamais ne s’endorment jamais
aux espaces fertiles des enfances remuées

exile thus goes into the feeder made of stars
bearing clumsy grains to the birds born of time
which never never fall asleep
in the fertile spaces of stirred up childhoods

-“Birds” by Aimé Césaire

I promised to show you a map you say but this is a mural
then yes let it be these are small distinctions
where do we see it from is the question

-From “An Atlas of a Difficult World” by Adrienne Rich
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Ann Laudati for her continual encouragement and articulate guidance, and my committee members—Dr. Claudia Radel, Dr. Peg Petzelka, Dr. Cinthya Saavedra, and Dr. Steven Camicia—for their assistance throughout the qualification and research process. I am grateful to Utah State University and the Department of Environment and Society for scholarships and funding opportunities throughout the course of my doctoral program. It is with deep gratitude that I acknowledge the farmers at New Roots of Utah who generously shared their knowledge and expertise with me, and the New Roots staff members (especially Jesse, Grace, and Supreet) who helped me meet and connect with the farmers who participated in this research.

Special thanks to my family and friends for supporting me throughout the research and writing process—especially and always to Joe, Kya, and JD, who have lovingly braced me through every new stage.

Missy Ward-Lambert
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about the trauma of exile, what Said described as the “unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” by exile (2000, p. 173). For refugees, forced to leave home and go to places often not of their choosing, traumas and challenges related to displacement are a fundamental part of the experience. However, as Turton observes, “the experience of displacement is not only about the loss of a place, and the pain and bereavement this entails. It is also, and inevitably, about the struggle to make a place in the world” (Turton, 2005, p. 278). Emphasizing only the displacement of refugees may create an image of them “as a category of ‘passive victims’ who exist to be assisted, managed, regimented and controlled—and for their own good” (Turton, 2005, p. 278)—but although refugees are unquestionably displaced people, they are also emplaced people who make choices, negotiate, and effectively create new places as they bring the weight of their historical sense of place into new spaces.

Despite the centrality of issues like place, agency, resistance and emplacement in the refugee journey, Sampson and Gifford note that researchers have tended to focus on the “traumas leading to displacement” and that though trauma and displacement are of course crucial areas for research,

...relatively little attention has been given to the concurrent and ongoing process of forced replacement and the establishment of connections to place among refugees in these contexts. The focus on displacement has left a gap in our understanding of emplacement
The academic literature on refugees has focused primarily on the process of displacement, underemphasizing refugee’s choiceful processes of emplacement and place-making. Additionally, the literature typically emphasizes social integration, leaving a gap in our understanding of the role of the physical environment in refugees’ sense of place and newly-reconstituted personal landscapes. My research aims to respond to these gaps in the literature by emphasizing the agency of emplacement techniques that refugees use, both assimilation and resistance techniques, in the context of adjustments to both social and physical environments.

The present research re-centers refugees’ interactions with their new physical environments by focusing specifically on a group of refugees participating in an urban farming program in Salt Lake City. By making the research itself “emplaced” on the farm and connected localities, and asking questions about the role of agricultural practice in facilitating both integration into and resistance to the receiving community, the ground is laid for an examination of interconnected social and environmental place-making techniques and evaluation of the hybrid landscapes that emerge from these techniques. This research draws heavily upon the geographic literature on place, while maintaining the interdisciplinary character of refugee studies, to frame the analysis.

The central research question considered in this project is: What roles do activities undertaken in the physical environment occupy in the adjustment processes of refugees post-relocation? The chapters of this dissertation contain
individual papers, designed to be read independently in that they utilize distinct research questions and draw upon specific literatures, which taken together move toward this overarching research question. In Chapter 2, I will discuss my epistemological orientation and the sample selection and data collection methods used in this project. In Chapter 3, I will analyze the ways in which the participants in my study engage in farming as a place-making activity in intertwined social and environmental worlds. In Chapter 4, I will look at the ways in which this refugee garden can be “read” and interpreted as layered hybrid landscapes, reflecting the complex dimensions of cultural hybridity from diversity to assimilation. Chapter 5 contains my methodological reflections on the ethical difficulties of doing fieldwork with and writing about refugees. In the conclusion in Chapter 6 I will offer some suggestions for further research and action.

In this introductory chapter, I will lay some groundwork upon which all of these research questions rest. First, I will provide some statistics on refugeeism as a global and local trend, background information about the resettlement apparatus in the United States and Utah specifically, and an introduction to New Roots of Utah, the organization that connected me with all of my project participants and allowed me to conduct research activities in their garden site in Salt Lake City. I will then offer a brief primer on theories of displacement, emplacement, rootedness and reterritorialization in refugee studies, connected concepts that run continuously through all of the chapters to follow. This primer will describe several ways in which the material realities of refugees have been popularly understood and academically theorized.
Background on Refugeeism

According to the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR, 2011), around 43 million people were displaced from their homes by the end of the year 2010; roughly one-quarter of these people would be politically categorized as refugees. Refugees, according to the generally-accepted international definitions created by the United Nations in 1951,¹ are people who have left their home countries due to a crisis or threat and find it unsafe to return. Not all people who leave home under duress are considered refugees, however; the majority of displaced people globally are categorized as internally-displaced people (IDPs), people who have been forced to leave their homes but have remained within the political borders of their country of origin (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, 2013). Flows of IDPs are extremely fluid and the experiences of IDPs variable, as the displacement may be long-term (due, for example, to armed conflict) or short-term (in the case of natural disasters or political emergencies; see IDMC, 2013), and as different structural factors interact to impact the resources and resiliency of the displaced populations.

These definitions and descriptive terminologies are contested and fail to capture the full scope of the material realities of all displaced people. Accordingly, the 1951 United Nations definition of refugees reflects a particular construction of

---

¹ The United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) states that a refugee is a person “who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of 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.”
which people may be categorized as refugees. As a judicial definition, it excludes many people who might be categorized as refugees under broader or more sociologically-oriented definitions (see Van Hear, 1998). The debate regarding which people should be regarded as refugees is important for academic inquiry, but is outside the scope of the current paper since all the participants in this research study fit easily within the confines of the judicial definition of refugee. In this dissertation, the word refugee will be used to refer to individuals who meet the 1951 definition and have been involved in the global apparatus of refugee resettlement.

**Global Trends and Statistics**

UNHCR reported that as of January 2013, there were 10.5 million refugees around the world. According to the report, the year 2012 saw “the highest number of newly displaced refugees during any 12-month period since the beginning of the 21st century”: one million new refugees fleeing persecution and conflict in their countries of origin (UNHCR, 2013, p. 4). Most of these one million people were fleeing Syria, Mali, Sudan, or Democratic Republic of the Congo. Despite this high number of new refugees in 2012, the January 2013 figures still represent a slight decrease in the total number of refugees from the year before. Global and regional refugee trends and flows change regularly in response to changing patterns of war, conflict, and political upheaval. As of 2010 Afghanistan was the primary source country of current refugees around the world, followed by Iraq, Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Myanmar.
At the end of 2012, approximately 81% of the world's refugee population could be found living in poor countries. Over 1.6 million refugees were in Pakistan and over 800,000 in the Republic of Iran. Other countries with significant refugee populations were Germany, Kenya, Syria, Ethiopia, Chad, Jordan, China and Turkey. Refugees can be found in informal and formal encampments, in cities and towns, recognized by formal channels or living on their own, receiving services or experiencing extreme marginalization. Some refugees aspire to return to their home countries, while others hope for permanent resettlement in a new locale. Less than one percent of the world’s officially-categorized refugees are offered resettlement in one of the 18 countries in which UNHCR facilitates resettlement (UNHCR, 2002).

**Refugees in the United States and Utah**

The United States is one of the countries that offers resettlement through UNHCR. In 2012, approximately 52,000 refugees arrived for resettlement in communities across the United States. Though this number represents a small proportion of refugees worldwide, it reflects nearly 75% of UNHCR-resettled refugees (UNHCR, 2013). Since 1980, when the United States formalized its resettlement program, approximately 1.8 million refugees have been permitted into the United States; an estimated 35 to 40% of these are children (BRYCS, n.d.).

In Utah specifically, 8,103 refugees from 47 different countries, speaking 33 different languages, were resettled between 2000 and 2009. The largest national groups reflected in Utah's refugee population are from Somalia, Yugoslavia, Sudan,
Burundi, Iraq, Iran, Burma, and Bhutan (Utah Department of Workforce Services, n.d.), though these population proportions are constantly changing as waves of refugees arrive, usually several years after a major crisis in their countries of origin (Henley, personal communication, 2013). Most of these refugees in Utah have been resettled in the Salt Lake valley, the most populous region in the state.

**Resettlement**

Valtonen describes this resettlement process as “the activities and processes of becoming established after arrival in the country of settlement” (2004, p. 70). Resettlement is often understood as a process that is driven by the engagement of programs and institutions run by the dominant culture. Refugees arriving in Utah are resettled with the assistance of several public service agencies, both state-administered agencies and non-profit organizations, which help new arrivals with basic necessities such as housing, employment and livelihood resources, and general assistance in navigating the new community. This safety net can also help refugees access language classes, job training, translation services, weather-appropriate clothing, health care, assistance with administrative needs, treatment for trauma, cultural training, social events and groups, and other forms of assistance designed to facilitate the safety, health, and integration of the refugees into their new communities. These agencies play a front-and-center role in assisting refugees during their transition to a new place. As time passes, refugees also come to rely upon religious institutions (Allen, 2010) and other institutions and sub-communities.
Clearly, these resettlement institutions play a critical role in helping refugees, who generally arrive with few material resources of their own, to begin to navigate the new place and culture and fulfill their most immediate material needs. However, the resettlement apparatus has also been critiqued for its ideological underpinnings. For refugee resettlement programs in general, the process of “becoming established” is oriented toward assimilating refugees into the dominant economic and social systems in the host country and creating conditions for self-sufficiency. In a critique of the resettlement apparatus, McSpadden observes that resettlement policies as established by the state are “aimed at producing economic self-sufficiency in the shortest time possible, typically three months” (1998, p. 157). She also describes the “worldview” underlying U.S. refugee resettlement programs, which reflects “general American cultural values including the high value placed upon individual achievement” and promotes the idea that ultimately the responsibility for success is placed on refugees themselves rather than on the resettlement system or broader society (p. 157). McSpadden goes on to assert that the ultimate goal of the American resettlement apparatus is assimilation: “Few expect that the assimilation will happen easily; however, it is accepted that for the process to happen at all, the refugee must be changed and must adopt appropriate American behavior” (p. 158).

A large body of research suggests that the process of integration into a new community and socialization to new norms and behaviors is important to refugees’ sense of well-being, physical health, and feeling of social inclusion (Kennan, Lloyd, Qayyum & Thompson, 2011). There is considerable literature about the importance
and process of integration of refugees, but it often under-interrogates the assumption that integration is desired by all parties, when it is clear that sometimes refugees prefer not to integrate into their new culture, or prefer to integrate partially but maintain other elements of their home culture. The literature also tends to under-interrogate the distinction between integration and assimilation, sometimes under-emphasizing the ways in which refugees feel pressured to overtly reject elements of their own culture and history in order to embrace American ideals. In a photojournalistic account of the Somali diaspora in the United States, Roble and Rutledge include this note about assimilation:

Americans seem to expect Somalis to assimilate.... Most Americans now think that they should be able to draw the road map of assimilation, but many Somalis have decided that they want to draw the map for themselves. Actually, most Somalis avoid the word assimilation. Abdirashid Warsame explained his difficulty with the concept by saying, “America may be a melting pot, but I don’t want to melt.” Somalis seem to prefer the concept of participation, the notion that they can participate in U.S. culture without letting America define the meaning of their lives. (2008, p. 8)

This distinction between assimilation and participation is important for apprehending the spectrum of integration upon which refugees operate, ranging from attempted assimilation to outright resistance and with countless gradients in between.

The assimilation model perpetuates the idea that refugees have been traumatized into passivity. However, McSpadden notes that refugees themselves are not passive participants in resettlement (despite the fact that they are so often perceived and represented in the West as “poor, uneducated and ignorant” [1998, p. 157]) and resettlement does not always proceed exactly as agencies expect. Rather,
Refugees are actively engaged in negotiating their own transitions by making choices about accommodation and resistance. Since the time of McSpadden’s writing, a number of innovative refugee-support programs have emerged throughout the United States (including in Utah) to deal with these issues of refugee autonomy and engagement with the broader community. One example of a program type that has been spreading rapidly is the refugee community garden, designed to create fields of resource autonomy for refugees interested in producing and selling their own food. The pioneering refugee community garden was developed by Tufts University in Lowell, Massachusetts, and the model has since spread across the country to at least 50 different communities (Brown, 2011).

**New Roots of Utah**

In Salt Lake City the New Roots of Utah program, a refugee urban farming and community gardening project, has been developed and administered as a collaboration between Salt Lake County Community Resource Development and the International Rescue Committee. The New Roots program is an urban farming initiative designed “to build healthy refugee communities through urban micro-farms and community gardens in Salt Lake County” (Utah Refugee Coalition, n.d.). Currently utilizing a 1.5-acre parcel of land in Salt Lake County, New Roots offers growing space, equipment, and technical support to refugees and new-immigrants. The three main purposes of the program are:

1) To provide land for low-income community members to grow food and receive 100% of the proceeds of market scales.
2) To increase the availability of fresh, culturally-desirable food for newly resettled communities of refugee background.
3) To create a pathway towards larger-scale farming for refugees interested in returning to their agrarian roots. (Utah Refugee Coalition, n.d.)

In past growing seasons, refugee farmers have come from such diverse countries as Sudan, Burma, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Bhutan, Chad, and Burundi. The vast majority of the participants report farming backgrounds in their home countries. The New Roots program provides access to growing space as well as training on local farming conditions and support as the farmers access local markets (Utah Refugee Coalition, n.d.). All my research participants were recruited due to their participation in the New Roots market farming program, based on the idea that grounding the research in a particular ecological site would enable the analysis of the role that the physical environment plays in the adaptation process of the participants. The New Roots program will be discussed in more detail in Chapter II.

**Displacement and Rootedness in Refugee Studies**

The word *refugee* does not, in popular discourse in the United States and elsewhere in the West, tend to reflect the deep complexities of agency and negotiation amidst profound dislocation. Pupavac describes a common discourse that tends to represent “the present archetypal refugee as traumatized victim and its negative, the scrounging bogus asylum seeker” (2008, p. 274). MacDonald writes about the common “political construction of refugees as inherently powerless and helpless (1998, p. 119), and Uehling emphasizes that these representations of powerlessness and helplessness have created an “image of refugees that circulates

These problematic representations lead to misunderstandings of refugees’ lives and situations, as well as material impacts on the economic, political and social realities of refugees (MacDonald, 1998).

In addition to the impacts of problematic representations and popular misapprehensions, there are in fact a number of difficulties with the word *refugee* which, as a politically practical term, suggests a homogeneity that does not actually exist in refugee populations. For one thing, the circumstances leading to displacement and refugee status vary widely from place to place and event to event:

> Each war waged across the world today is thus the result of multiple causes: social wars and urban revolts of wretched people left behind by development, ethnic wars that conceal the interests of diamond mining or petrol companies, revolutionary guerrilla wars that have long since lost contact with any social movement, Islamist rebellions that combine the grievances of a region abandoned by a too distant state… where the conflict has not brought results and for lack of any other solution, combatants from each side have become professionals of permanent warfare. (Agier, 2008, p. 9)

In addition to their widely varying experiences, refugees also move from the pragmatics of their previous identities—constituted by language, country, culture, and religion—into a space of singular identity: refugee, an identity constituted entirely by displacement (see Brubaker, 1992). In both popular perception and academic literatures, refugee experience tends to be essentialized, with inadequate attention paid to differential experiences based on gender (see Monzel, 1993), race, class, or other factors. Refugees in the United States are a Singular Other, grouped and constructed by public perceptions of the losses they have suffered. Thus,
representing refugees (as a non-homogenous group defined, both practically and discursively, by a common experience of geographic loss and relocation) requires an awareness of the disparate histories of individuals within the context of the very real commonalities of displacement, loss, and trauma.

**Displacement, Loss and Trauma**

In his book *On the Margins of the World: The Refugee Experience Today*, anthropologist Michel Agier considers the changing global landscape of refugees and reflects on “the existential context that all inhabitants of this strange ‘country’ share” (2008, p. 3). In his assessment, the journey into refugeeism is typically marked by three stages: first, the destruction; second, a period of confinement (as in a refugee camp); and third, “the moment of action, still uncertain and hesitant: the search for a right to life and speech” (p. 4). This third stage is typically marked by the arrival in a new place, in what is often understood by observers as the beginning of a “new life,” though for refugees the arrival and action stage is far more complex than simply beginning anew. Agier’s assessment may be seen as denying the material heterogeneity of refugees, or as providing an analytical umbrella for the common elements of the refugee experience. Throughout this study I will occasionally adapt his language of the three stages for the purpose of identifying themes and creating a chronological sensibility, but without claiming that this framework will account for the experiences of all people; to borrow Loomba’s language, I will use his framework as “a helpful shorthand” while recognizing that it does not account for “the workings of class, gender, location, race, caste or ideology
among people whose lives have been restructured by colonial rule” and resultant geopolitical ruptures (1998, p. 15).

Even with this awareness of profound heterogeneity, however, it is fair to say that the odyssey of displacement and resettlement is typically rife with traumatic experiences throughout all three of the stages described by Agier. Individuals’ resources and resiliency are different, and the particulars of the trauma vary from person to person, but involuntary displacement always contains an element of loss. For refugees, the displacement event itself typically occurs as a result of war or political turmoil, famine, environmental disaster, or other forms of violence and threat. Additionally, the process of arriving in a wholly unknown place (either for a transitional period of confinement or for more permanent resettlement) may carry its own traumas: isolation, poverty, cultural shock, and the mental traumas that accompany loss of family members and loved ones. Receiving countries are not uncomplicated “safe harbors,” but also present new sets of difficulties and potential traumas for newly-relocated refugees.

Alayarian (2007) notes that newly-arrived refugees face practical difficulties and stress—legal issues, housing difficulties, language problems, socioeconomic disadvantage, unemployment, racial violence, crime, bullying, educational barriers, etc.—as well as complex emotional issues related to “mourning, loneliness, and a loss of identity” (p. xviii). As a result of these traumas and challenges, it is common for refugees and asylum seekers to experience severe psychological distress (Simich, 2006). As Robert G. Blair notes, “…adaption is made more difficult when the refugee has experienced horrific trauma in his or her native country” (2000, p.
23). Because of the traumatic experiences of many refugees, much academic literature on refugee resettlement deals with the impact of this trauma on their resettlement experiences and relationships (see George, 2012; Johnson, Thompson & Downs, 2009; Kaplan, 1998). However, the literature also tends to emphasize the traumas associated with displacement event(s); less attention is paid to the traumatic elements that accompany the resettlement process itself. In fact, many refugees feel that they cannot express their difficulties with the new place or run the risk of being perceived as ungrateful and undeserving by the host community (McSpadden, 1998).

Underpinning all of the material and emotional difficulties of the displacement process is the “existential context” referred to by Agier when he wrote that “a new population is being formed out of this confusion, this mixture of impasse and rejection, these wars that never come to an end” (2008, p. 10). In the Foreword to Alayarian’s book on the work of The Refugee Therapy Center (2007), R.D. Hinshelwood writes about the trauma of “losing all the signs and signifiers of our world:”

It seems to me that the trauma of refugee status is particularly corrosive. It does the usual harm of devastating our own self-image and sense of permanence in the world, but it does more. It is a dislocation from our familiar domestic geography and culture; and that must wrench from our grasp all the external markers by which we know ourselves and our worth. (p. xiii)

Hinshelwood rightly notes that the liminal quality of refugeeism denotes a rupture of familiar culture and sociality as well as geography. In fact, the
interconnectedness of physical and social geographies is fertile ground for examinations of the relationships between people and places.

Place and Rootedness in Refugee Studies

Refugee studies is a multi-disciplinary field that aims to describe and theorize various elements of the refugee process. A relatively young field (Robinson, 1993, p. 215), refugee studies has used theory from different social science disciplines to explore questions about the effect of displacement events on displaced people as well as sending and receiving communities. In the 1990s, as the social sciences in general underwent a ‘spatial turn’ (Hakli, 1994), conversations about space and place became more prevalent in the discourses of refugee studies. At first, an essentialism that naturalized the relationship between people and place tended to dominate the discourse. In essentialism in human geography, people are viewed as having natural connections to their place of origin, their “roots,” and it is postulated that when a displacement event severs those roots and physically removes people from their homelands, refugees would experience psycho-social trauma and possibly a decline in moral behavior (Malkki, 1992). The cultural meaning of “roots” grows out of an essentialist conception that localizes people and cultures in one particular place, which also essentializes that place as a fixed location with a specific, static character of its own (Massey, 1994). Brun notes that “In this more essentialist understanding of the relationship between people and place, to be territorially uprooted means to be torn loose from culture, to become powerless and to lose one’s identity” (2001, p. 18). This emphasis on the
“uprootedness” of refugees has bled into policy conversations and permeates media coverage of refugee issues.

This essentialist rendering of relationships between people and place has been heavily critiqued. Critics of an essentialist perspective on refugee studies have argued that static, naturalized models of the people-place relationship do not work in a globalized world where people are “chronically mobile and routinely displaced” (Malkki, 1992, p. 24). Moreover, treating “refugee” as a static category—or the *once a refugee always a refugee* rendering—can fundamentally trap a person’s identity into a space of loss and perpetual longing, undermining their depicted capacity for agency (Malkki, 1992). Critics have also questioned the narrative of helpless uprootedness, noting that

> Even though people have to flee, they are not torn loose from their culture, they do not lose their identity, and they do not become powerless. Refugees are not passive victims in an abnormal state of being, rather they are active agents who are able to develop strategies and thus still function socially. (Brun, 2001, p. 18)

In response to oversimplified essentialism, some theorists have sought to de-naturalize the relationship between people and the places they have lived.

However, this de-naturalization can also be problematic since displacement does bring with it concrete difficulties, including the loss of social, political and economic standing (Kibreab, 1999). Sampson and Gifford explain that “adopting positions that completely denaturalize the people/place/identity relationship is equally risky in a world that continues to distribute rights and social membership along territorial boundaries” (2010, p. 117). Moreover, the described experiences of many displaced people suggests that the “unhealable rift” between a person and
their familiar places is as real and concretely experienced as Said described it to be (the “unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” [2000, p. 173]), and that there is a real trauma in the loss of a homeland and the loss of a legible landscape.

This research aims to work in the fruitful moderate spaces between essentialism and de-naturalization, to reterritorialize (Brun, 2001) the relationship between people and places. Brun argues that reterritorialization is a frame through which observers can merge the spatial, social and emotional experiences of displaced people, while keeping both past and present places in the frame. As Sampson and Gifford (2010) put it,

Important for understanding the relationship of people who become refugees and place is a position somewhere in-between: one that recognizes the strong sense of connection to places left behind and their associated traumas while at the same time recognizing the possibilities of constructive (re)building of connections to place within a context of resettlement. (p. 117)

This research utilizes reterritorialized methods and questions to describe the place-based experiences of a small group of people who have experienced refugeeism. In reterritorializing these relationships, I am not making the claim, as others have, that non-Western people are “naturally” more “rooted” in the land, or fixed in place in a unique and unchangeable way (see Hastrup & Olwig, 1997). Rather, I hope to emphasize the material and analytical importance of space and place while persistently approaching “the refugee/IDP as active social agents in the migration and displacement process, even when their predicament is rooted in the restriction of freedom and choice that result from the violent coercion exercised by an external
agent” (Riaño-Alcalá, 2008, p. 4). In other words, though refugees are impacted and constrained by the international political system, they maintain their ability to be self-representing and self-determining.

By examining issues like place attachment, place-making, and the creation of hybrid landscapes in the context of a major displacement event and subsequent re-emplacement practices, this research draws upon participants’ past and present relationships with place and physical environments. My sample was drawn from participants in the New Roots program—a name that reflects a play on the concept of uprootedness—and as I’ve examined journalistic coverage of this and similar programs, I’ve found the concept of rootedness employed repeatedly as a trope. However, the seeds of agency are often buried in what first appears to be an essentialist rendering. For example, The New York Times published an article in 2011 entitled “When the Uprooted Put Down Roots,” reflecting an ability to see refugees as uprooted but still agented (Brown, p. 12). These reterritorializing questions—What does it feel like to make a new place your own? What do new roots feel like? What do the physical land, the soil and the sun, have to do with this process?—found their way into interviews and casual conversations throughout the course of this project, and underlie, in a sensory way, the more apparently-abstract theoretical research questions that compose each section of this dissertation project.
CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

One overarching purpose of this research project is to capture the role played by interactions with the physical environment in the adaptation processes of refugees. In order to ground the analysis of integration, place-making, and the creation of new and hybrid cultural landscapes for this research, I focus on a specific refugee farming site in Salt Lake City as a case study. This research project began in one particular place—an urban farm where refugees plant and harvest various crops, both for their families’ consumption and for market—and grew to consider the ways that other localities acted as satellite centers to the farm, such as public markets where the produce was sold and the farmers’ families’ kitchens where the produce was prepared, often into culturally-sustaining dishes.

As I joined my participants in all of these spaces, I sought to access spatial knowledge by passing through the landscapes together. I could not physically join my participants in their pre-displacement places, but I could join them in the spaces of their emplacement in order to witness and converse about the ways in which their emplacement processes were both circumscribed and choiceful. This vision of the research project as groundedly spanning a constellation of interrelated community spaces that together composed the landscapes of refugee urban farmers is both visually and conceptually relevant. Just as my research questions seek to reterritorialize (Brun, 2001) the relationship between people and their places, the selected methodology is also reterritorialized. In an attempt to subvert the place-
based essentialisms of traditional notions of anthropological fieldwork, some researchers have worked at “locating’ the field in territorially unbounded, translocal contexts” (Turton, 2005, p. 260). Though these alternate visions of locality are critical, particularly in this era of mass migration and diaspora, this research study incorporates a reterritorialized perspective at every level, grounding this analysis not in transnational migrant space but in small plots of dirt and apartment kitchens.

In this chapter, I will first describe my research site and procedures of sample selection and consent amongst the New Roots market farmers in Salt Lake City. I will then address the underlying epistemological orientations that structure my choices of methods in working with these participants, focusing specifically on feminist and postcolonial theories. In the final section, I will describe the specific qualitative methods that I utilized to gather and interpret the data. These methods, organized into three distinct but overlapping research phases, represent a logical outgrowth of my epistemological orientation, and taken together the epistemologies and methods embody the cohesive methodology of the project.

**Research Site, Sample Selection, and Consent**

The New Roots of Utah program is designed to increase access to fresh foods for refugees living in the Salt Lake City area (International Rescue Committee, n.d.). New Roots of Utah serves two main groups of refugee gardeners. First, participants in the community gardening program are given plots of land in community gardens across the Salt Lake valley; these individuals grow crops for personal and family use.
Second, participants in the urban farming program are granted multiple rows of land on a micro-farming plot on the west side of the city (displayed in Figure 1) and provided with training and access to local markets. These “market farmers” are allowed to use some of the land for personal use, but most of the products they grow are destined to be sold at the New Roots-operated Neighborhood Farm Stand or to local restaurants. During the off-season, farmers are required to attend weekly training meetings where they learn about gardening techniques and marketing strategies (Henley, 2013). A handful of full-time and part-time program staff, as well as intermittent volunteers, assist with training and the mechanics of growing, harvesting, and selling the food.

*Figure 1.* A view of the New Roots urban farm.
In selecting my sample, I chose to work with the “market farmers,” or the participants in the urban farming training program. Initially I made this choice for tactical reasons. Community gardeners were spread out in community gardens across the valley, but all the market farmers worked together on a single market-farming plot. Because they shared space in training and gardening activities, focusing my inquiry on them enabled me to deepen relationships with the same people across various sites and to be a site-specific ethnographic participant. Later I also saw that this emphasis on market farmers opened new lines of inquiry about the technical and attitudinal changes that the market farmers, all of whom had agrarian backgrounds, made not only in respect to farming techniques but also in respect to marketing and sales techniques.

The New Roots market farmers are divided in the program according to their agricultural experience and “business development capacity,” according to an interview with program director Grace Henley. (Those who have been involved with the project for a longer period of time have already received initial training in the quality control, networking, and language skills necessary to sell produce to local businesses.) The Level 1 farmers are the newest members of the market training program; their instruction focuses on the transition to commercial planting and harvesting, and they sell their produce at the seasonal weekly New Roots farmstand, pictured in Figure 2, only. The Level 2 farmers have been in the program for at least one growing season, and in addition to selling their produce at the farmstand they may also begin to take on some easy retail clients (“sympathetic
Figure 2. The New Roots farmstand on a Saturday morning in June.

The Level 3 farmers are the most advanced market farmers, who often possess expertise in growing “specialty ethnic crops.” Their training is focused on retail marketing in competitive markets, and their produce is sold to local restaurants and grocery stores. For the growing season that I conducted my research, there were 12 families enrolled in the program as Level 1 farmers, 4 families enrolled as Level 2 farmers, and 4 families enrolled as Level 3 farmers (Henley, 2013).

The case study was suited for convenience sampling, since all consenting adults who participated in the market farming program were invited to participate in my research. After obtaining all the necessary permissions from both Utah State University’s Institutional Review Board and both local and national administrators of the New Roots program, I began attending early spring training meetings with the
Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 farmers. At these meetings, New Roots staff introduced me to all 20 families enrolled in the market farming program and I in turn introduced my project to the farmers, distributed letters of information, and obtained verbal informed consent for the initial participant observation phase of the research. No one declined entirely to participate in the research project, though some participants elected not to participate in the second stage of the project that included personal interviews and a photo project. For those who did later verbally consent to schedule personal interviews, I provided them with additional information regarding the project and obtained written informed consent from each individual. (The first-stage letter of information and second-stage informed consent signature form are included as appendices to this document.) In reference to the photo project, participants were told that their hard photographs would be returned to them but that I would make copies of some of the photos to use in my dissertation.

Participants’ names have been changed in this document to protect their privacy, though this choice is not uncomplicated since names are linked to identity in unique ways in different cultures. For example, Duchaj and Ntahirageza (2009) explore the connections between names and identity in Burundi, describing the psychological impact of retaining or changing names on individuals passing through the stages of refugeeism. Moreover, refugees’ choices about which names they use in host countries may be perceived as political and may reflect other people’s reactions to their perceived “authenticity” (see Malkki, 1992). Thus, untethering participants’ words and ideas from their real names is potentially problematic,
particularly for a group of refugees whose identities are already sites of contestation and resistance. However, confidentiality and privacy are the paramount concerns for refugee populations, so I have arbitrarily selected common names from the participants’ countries of origin which will be used here as pseudonyms.

During the initial participant observation phase, I informally interviewed and observed 30 study participants. During the in-depth interview phase of the research, I conducted 14 “kitchen visits”—in-home, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately one hour each—that involved 17 of these adult individuals who self-identified as being from Burundi (7), Sudan (4), Bhutan (2), Chad (1), Democratic Republic of the Congo (1), the Republic of Congo (1), and Cuba (1). Six of these individuals were comfortable conversing with me in English. With my Cuban participant, I spoke Spanish. For the rest, I was able to enlist the assistance of informal interpreters—generally family or community members who were working in the garden nearby—and I hired an interpreter to assist with the recorded interviews.

Basic demographic information about these 17 participants is included in Table 1 below. In addition to containing the pseudonym of the individual and the date on which I conducted the kitchen visit, the table also notes the sex of each person (a total of 10 males and 7 females), the length of time they have been in the United States (ranging from one to 12 years, with 5 years as the most common response), their country of origin, and other countries that they passed through as refugees before coming to the United States (with the exception of José, who came directly from Cuba to the U.S.). While my observations and field notes are drawn
from conversations with all 30 participants, all direct quotes included in this
dissertation are from the transcripts of the interviews that were conducted during
the kitchen visits with these 17 individuals.

### Table 1

**Demographics of Research Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Date of Kitchen Visit</th>
<th>Time in U.S.</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Other Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Al</td>
<td>4 June</td>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>12 years</td>
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<td>Gabon</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Serge</td>
<td>6 June</td>
<td>Rep.Congo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hadil</td>
<td>8 June</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hassan</td>
<td>9 June</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td></td>
<td>Egypt</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Maryam</td>
<td>10 June</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>Egypt</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Belyse</td>
<td>11 June</td>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>Rwanda, Tanzania</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>8 years</td>
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<td>Rwanda, Tanzania</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>Abel</td>
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<td>Rwanda, Tanzania</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>12 June</td>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>Rwanda, Tanzania</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>Claire</td>
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<td>Tanzania</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>José</td>
<td>14 June</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Antoine</td>
<td>15 June</td>
<td>DR Congo</td>
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<td>11 years</td>
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<td>Rwanda, Tanzania</td>
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<td>Burundi</td>
<td>Rwanda, Tanzania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>17 June</td>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>Rwanda, Tanzania</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Norbu</td>
<td>3 July</td>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Nyanath</td>
<td>3 July</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This research began as a participant-observation study and moved into more focused interrogation via creation and analysis of photographs, interviews, and exercises in intersubjective meaning-making. By working as a volunteer at the garden throughout the 2013 growing season, I was able to work side-by-side with the participants, getting to know them through farming as well as other activities. At the beginning of the project I was in the garden every weekend, but as the project progressed I began visiting the garden on average three days per week in addition to spending time in the homes of the participants for interviews (“kitchen visits”) and social events.

In the following sections, I will address the epistemological and methodological frameworks that informed my conceptualization of this research project, as well as the specific methods I employed.

**Epistemology and Methodology**

Sandra Harding (1987) deconstructs academia’s inarticulate use of the word “methods” by breaking down the study of methodology into three distinct and interrelated concepts: Epistemology, methods, and methodology. In her language, epistemology is a theory about knowledge, methods are techniques that are used to gather and analyze information, and methodology is what occurs in the spaces where epistemology and method meet. Methodology, Harding says, should involve the analysis of what sorts of epistemological assumptions are embedded in the methods that researchers choose to use. In the case of this research project, the choice of case study, formulation of research questions, and choice of specific
qualitative methods are particularly informed by two distinct and overlapping schools of thought: feminism and postcolonialism. Because feminism as a body of theory and action is a site rife with contestations—and there is no single “feminism”—postcolonial theories provide critiques and perspectives that are relevant and useful for developing a methodological approach imbued with an intersectional, transnational sensitivity. The intersecting spaces of feminism and postcolonialism are spaces of both tension and possibility in methodological theory and practice.

Feminism

Feminist research theory has at least three levels of relevance to this project. First, feminist research theory promotes the inclusion of women as research subjects and the recognition that women and men experience their environments differently, principally due to social factors. In the context of this project, it is true that the women and men working in the garden have distinctly gendered histories, experiences, traumas, and relationships to past and present landscapes, and told stories of different kinds of gendered socialization both in sending and receiving cultures and communities. Because I have cultivated a sensitivity to the gendered nature of everyday experiences, conversations often drifted into discussions of how differently women live their lives in the United States than in some participants’ communities of origin. Moreover, my experiences studying feminism allow me to be attuned to the role that gender played in the way stories were told to me, though it
is possible that I also sometimes misinterpreted the role of gender due to cultural barriers and misunderstandings.

Second, feminist research theory values sensitivity to the ways that gendered power issues can affect participants’ lives as well as the relationship between participants and the researcher, who also exists in the midst of gendered constructs. This is a critical point for this project, as I was working with individuals who are marginalized in the community we occupy together. I brought to our interactions a backpack filled with privilege: I grew up as a middle-class member of the community they arrived in as outsiders, I speak English as a first language, I am white, I am educated, and I initially approached them identifying myself as a PhD student. There were moments of complicated nexus when my femaleness interacted with all these forms of privilege in interesting ways, but I was generally conscious of my position of power: as researcher and as perceived insider. When I visited people’s homes, walking through apartment complexes filled with immigrants and people with brown and black skin, I felt conspicuously and uncomfortably like a white woman with a clipboard; I felt the weight that authoritative clipboard attached to me. Once a little girl in hijab asked me if I was a nurse. I smiled and I said no, and she said, “Well, you look like a nurse.” Throughout the project, I felt deeply conscious of who and what I looked like. While this feminist research consciousness has not resolved for me the complex issues of identity and power that I encountered, it does allow me to dwell fruitfully in the tensions.

Third, feminist research practice informs epistemological orientations and methodological decisions. Feminist research, though always attentive to gender,
not exclusively about studying what have come to be termed “women’s issues.” My research questions do not center specifically around gender—though consciousness of gender was present in my interactions with participants—but the way I formulated my research questions and structured my methodological engagement was continually informed by feminist research practice. According to Brooks and Hesse-Biber,

Feminist researchers hold different perspectives, ask different questions, draw from a wide array of methods and methodologies, and apply multiple lenses that heighten our awareness of sexist, racist, homophobic, and colonialist ideologies and practices. Some feminists use traditional methodologies but ask new sets of questions that include women’s issues and concerns, while others rework, or even radically upset, traditional epistemologies and methodologies. In fact, to unearth hidden aspects of women’s lives and those of other oppressed groups, and to reclaim subjugated knowledge, some feminist researchers continue to develop new epistemologies, methodologies, and methods of knowledge building altogether. (2007, p. 4).

Feminist research questions the underpinnings of that which is taken for granted in academia; it pries at assumptions and questions knowledge-making and prods academic dogma until it reveals spaces where women and other marginalized groups have been—consciously and unconsciously, as researchers and as “subjects”—excluded. Feminist research then aims to practically reconstruct those underpinnings to include acknowledgment of the existence of more than one gender in the world, to value the experiences of non-males and marginalized people of both/all genders, and to shine light on the ways that women and other socially- and ecologically-marginalized humans and non-humans participate in their social and ecological worlds, including as subjects and objects in academia.
Feminist research, then, needs to focus on both epistemologies and methods in order to fully explore what a feminist methodology would look like. In other words, there is no simple, neat list of methods that a person can employ in textbook fashion in order to claim that they are using feminist methodology; neither is there a guarantee that every person who studies gender is conducting feminist research. Rather, feminist methodology requires grappling with the way that methods and techniques are imbued with specific epistemological assumptions and hierarchies of power, then designing research in such a way that it can take stock of and attempt to subvert the gendered and racialized issues of power and representation that are inevitably located at the invisible center of any research project.

Feminist theory's rich history of grappling with power and representation provides me with certain tools to respond to these issues in this research project, and a theoretical basis in feminist geography provides grounding in analyzing the ways that space and place, and the use of them, are gendered constructs. Also, a grounding in feminist theory encourages me to break down the rational-emotional dichotomy that is so deeply entrenched in many academic disciplines, thereby reclaiming the power of emotion—mine and others'—as a source of knowledge. According to Alison M. Jaggar (2008), emotion and connection are epistemologically subversive and vital to the construction of knowledge. She writes: “Critical reflection on emotion is not a self-indulgent substitute for political analysis and political reaction. It is itself a kind of political theory and political practice, indispensable for an adequate social theory and social transformation” (p. 389). As I built relationships throughout the course of the research project, critically reflecting
on my emotions has been an opportunity for me to see the political context of my project in new ways.

Narrowing the lens even further, feminist standpoint theory is an important piece of the methodological puzzle for this project. Standpoint theory rests upon attention to everyday experiences, and posits that “women are more capable of producing an accurate, comprehensive, and objective interpretation of social reality than men are” (Brooks, 2007, p. 66) and that likewise, members of any marginalized group will present more accurate pictures of a social world than dominant groups can. Standpoint theorists argue that this is the case because people in marginalized groups are required to develop what has been termed a “double consciousness—a heightened awareness not only of their own lives but of the lives of the dominant group as well” (p. 63). This sense of bilingual double consciousness may be especially relevant for refugee communities, who learn to navigate not only their own cultures but also the cultures of fellow refugees and people in the receiving (dominant) community.

Of course it is not so cut and dried; standpoint theory would also suggest that some people in a refugee community may have, due to their extra levels of marginalization and consciousness, a clearer vision of the world of the garden than others, and this may be the case with women or people who belonged to marginalized ethnic groups in their homelands, for instance. Attempting to tease apart the gendered and racialized systems of hierarchy and power that exist in the refugee community garden setting, and identifying my own locus within them, is a critical part of beginning to understand this particular social world and how it is
situated in relation to other social worlds. Brooks writes that “feminist standpoint epistemology requires the fusion of knowledge and practice. It is both a theory of knowledge building and a method of doing research—an approach to knowledge construction and a call to political action” (2007, p. 55). Standpoint theory, then, brings theory into its concrete incarnations, as embedded in material social systems and political contexts, and should lead inquirers in the direction of action.

**Postcolonialism**

Another body of theory that critiques Western hegemonic discourse and the hierarchies of positivism is postcolonialism. In particular because this research project undertakes the co-creation of meaning with people who come from nations that have experienced forms of colonialism and imperialism, and moreover because the participants in some ways continue to experience neo-colonial interactions due to their current status as refugees, a postcolonial lens is helpful in my attempts to avoid further reinscribing discursively colonial language through the research process. Though the precise definition of postcolonialism is contested (“riddled with contradictions and qualifications”), “it is more helpful to think of postcolonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism” (Loomba, 1998, pp. 11-12). Always embedded in the historical realities of global European colonialism, postcolonial theory offers tools to deal with “the relation between the hegemony of Western discourses and the possibilities of
resistance, and about the formation of colonial and postcolonial subjects” (Culler, 2000, p. 144).

Chandra Mohanty (1984) writes that colonialism always involves “a relation of structural domination and a suppression—often violent—of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question” (p. 333). This two-tiered understanding of colonialism is useful for understanding how colonialism, as a systemic exercise of domination and hierarchy, is undergirded by specific ideologies and epistemologies that exist in many different settings. Postcolonial research theory therefore is concerned with ongoing suppressions of heterogeneity of subjects, and criticizes research that fails to account for the heterogeneity of any people, particularly people who have been practically and discursively marginalized in the past by colonial powers. Mohanty’s critique of Western feminists’ discursive colonization of Third World Women can be applied to any researchers who, in constructing an image of the subaltern that “carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanizing discourse” (p. 333-334), fail to account for the diversity and heterogeneity of any group of people. Sally R. Munt, in her qualitative account of the emotional geographies of female refugees, describes how such projections and suppressions, or discursive colonization, can impact refugees:

However, onto the refugee, who is subjected to such a range of socio-cultural pressures, is superimposed scores of stories from powerful others. Into her subjectivity pours: the ideologies of citizenship and nationalisms, the political economy of globalisation, the disenfranchisement of the displaced, the psychology of the victim, the rhetoric of survival, the shattering of logic by postcolonial and postmodern fragmentation, oftentimes the transcending security of religious belief, tempered with the intra-psychic projection of the other, symbols of the stranger, the threat, the poetry of freedom and
the imagination of escape – amongst many other, more idiosyncratic scripts. This is the cultural composition of a person who has been reduced to – injuriously, and against her will – an asylum seeker. (2011, pp. 559-560)

Discursive colonization, then, results in faulty and fragmenting theories as well as tangible harms within the material realities of people who are colonized and reduced by the words and representations of these “powerful others.”

The juxtaposition of postcolonial theory and feminist methodology reveals both tensions and possibilities. Third world feminists, for example, have levied incisive critiques of the ways in which Western feminists have engaged in *discursive colonization* (see Mohanty, 1984) or used the language and practice of feminism as a colonizing force against non-Western women (see Mohanty, 2003). Aihwa Ong writes that even those feminists actively engaged in the pursuit of what she calls “an unlocatable sisterly solidarity represented by internationalist feminists” have failed to account for “the complex geopolitical inequalities, global markets, and situated ethical worlds that feminists seek to intervene in” (2010, p. 518). Through these critiques of Western feminism’s problematic history (and present), there has emerged a movement to create a postcolonial feminism that merges analysis of gender with an understanding of the structural implications of colonialism and neo-colonialism, and the ways that those structures and discourses have been reenacted even within feminist movements and circles.

Merging postcolonial theory with feminist methodology’s emphasis on the concrete quotidian can be helpful in understanding “the postcolonial everyday” (Procter, 2006), or the ways in which colonial and neo-colonial practices structure
everyday experiences of the colonized, including refugees. Additionally, a
postcolonial consciousness helps me to attempt to avoid discursively colonizing
research participants by engaging in problematic-but-common representations of
“refugees as traumatized, depoliticized, feminized subjects” (Pupavac, 2008, p. 272),
or by suppressing the diversity within the group or re-entrenching “a sharp divide
between the subject and object, the researcher and the researched” (Brooks &
Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 12). I am, after all, a part of the community to which this
group of refugees have come; I am in a position of linguistic, cultural and racial
privilege; as I learn about new arrivals to my community I am also studying myself.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Thus, the methodological tools that I use in this research project have not
been selected in a vacuum; they have emerged as the logical manifestations of the
epistemological frameworks and theoretical orientations discussed in the prior
section. The tools utilized in data collection and analysis were qualitative in nature.
Denzin and Lincoln describe qualitative research as being

a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of
a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible.
These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series
of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations,
photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level,
qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to
the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in
their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret,
phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (2005, p.
3)
Given my epistemological orientation toward democratized, action-oriented, post-colonial, feminist research praxis, I value the grounding of chosen methods in the spaces where critical scholarship meets its real-world impacts. With this particular case study, where issues of power and representation were omnipresent and fluid, I attempted to construct a toolbox of methods that provide for flexibility, openness, and interpersonal engagement. (And, in the end, I did not use every method that I had planned.) With these frameworks and sensitivities in mind, the research was organized into several phases, each of which utilized distinct research methods, but all of which fall under the general rubric of qualitative research methods.

Most broadly, the initial phase of data collection incorporated methods that fit within the research method framework of participant-observation. DeWalt and DeWalt write that the method of participant observation has its roots in cultural anthropology but has since “become a common feature of qualitative research in a number of disciplines... [used] for gaining greater understanding of phenomena from the point of view of participants” (2011, p. ix). Participant observation is an ideal example of a method that grows from a particular set of epistemologies; it “represents not simply a choice of data-gathering technique but a commitment to an epistemological position that is antithetical to positivism, and that recognizes the uniqueness of people and society as objects of study” (Bryman & Becker, 2012, p. 127). The notion that participant observation represents a critique of positivism is important. In some ways, these epistemologies and embedded methods of participant observation constitute a critique of traditional ways of “doing science” or conducting academic inquiry:
The knowledge being produced by scholars, many of whom have been committed to the goal of value-free science, has bolstered the system of social domination. Primarily elites have benefited from the knowledge produced, the form in which it appears, and the restriction of conversations about knowledge to very small and elite circles. The question is: How should critical social scientists respond? (Sprague, 2005, p. 25)

This challenge regarding the knowledge-creation process of critically-minded social scientists is connected to a host of questions about representation and the true beneficiaries of research, questions that will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

As I worked through the phases of my research, I drew upon a flexible toolbox of possible methods. My timeline and plans were not fixed. I ended up doing things in a different order than I had anticipated. My interview questions changed over the course of the project, especially after a conversation with a translator where he helped me understand why some of my questions were problematic in the specific cultural context of some of my participants. The sense of flexibility and openness with which I entered the research period was rewarded; if I had been rigidly attached to a specific timeline and series of events, I likely would have felt frustrated and disappointed. As it was, I proceeded through the research following the general phase-based outline that I devised before beginning, though I did make alterations along the way.

**Phase 1: Participant Observation**

My initial stage of data collection focused on a stage of ethnographic inquiry, using participant observation and unobtrusive measures. I attended half a dozen
training meetings during the winter and began working every week in the garden, alongside the farmers and staff members, at the start of the growing season. Throughout the course of the project I used standard ethnographic techniques, mostly recording and analyzing field notes, to parse my initial impressions and identify themes that emerged through the practice of participant observation as I formed relationships with the participating farmers. “[E]thnography’s granular attention to the texture of lived experience” (Gidley, 2013, p. 374) was the lens through which these methods were selected and designed.

In the book *Practising Human Geography*, the authors note six common characteristics of ethnographic inquiry; that it: 1) “treats people as knowledgeable, situated agents from whom researchers can learn a great deal about how the world is seen, lived and works in and through ‘real’ places, communities and people”; 2) involves “extended, detailed, ‘immersive’, inductive methodology intended to allow grounded social orders, worldviews and ways of life gradually to become apparent”; 3) “can involve a ‘shamelessly eclectic’ and ‘methodologically opportunist’ combination of research methods” but must have participant observation at its core; 4) “uniquely involves studying both what people say they do and why, and what they are seen to do and say to others about this”; 5) “inevitably involves tricky negotiations between researchers’ words and deeds, both within standard field settings and between these and other settings”; 6) “involves a recognition that its main research tool is the researcher and the ways in which he or she is used to acting in more familiar circumstances and learns to act in the often strange and strained circumstances of his or her research settings. Here differently
‘theorized’ (academically and otherwise) and/or taken-for-granted worldview, ways of life, self-understandings, relationships, knowledge, politics, ethics, skills, etc., are accidentally and deliberately rubbed up against one another” (Cloke et al., 2004, p. 170). I include this dense list of the components of ethnography because it elucidates so well the methodological significance of ethnography. As a practice, ethnography is not a simple technique for data collection but is instead a methodology that encompasses and knits together epistemology, reflection, and praxis.

My choice to engage in participant observation research is both personal and theoretical, heavily informed by feminist theory that urges me “to be empathetic—to see things from the other’s perspective while at the same time retaining one’s own—[which] is a key mechanism in the intellectual work of crossing boundaries and bridging the differences” (Sprague, 2005, p. 75). Participant observation can be informed by care ethics that “move beyond critique to think through how we are implicated in uncaring relations and to engage in radically open, democratic and transformative practices for change” (Lawson, 2009, p. 212). Because this research is an inquiry into sensitive subjects that revolve around place, culture, and identity, I find it important to adapt a stance of care-based interactions that honor individuals as people, rather than as unidimensional research subjects. Moreover, because the practice of gardening and the small-scale production and preparation of food is a practice of care, embedded in historical, cultural and gendered contexts, any attempt to engage with the meaning of food, gardening and place-making was embedded in a consciousness of these contexts, as well as a consciousness of my
own history and culture. For this particular case study, engaging in a caring practice of volunteering and working together was an integral part of the research framework.

The role of power in the ethnographic process is critical. As a white woman with racial, class, academic, and linguistic privilege in the community where my participants live, and as a person who entered the garden as a researcher, I was constantly evaluating the ways that my privilege structured my interactions with the participants. This was further complicated because the farmers come from countries all over the world, so a number of different cultural contexts were at play. Additionally, refugees are considered a vulnerable population because many of them have experienced traumatic events that brought them to this new place.

Bearing these issues in mind, New Roots has certain rules about what types of questions I could ask in the garden space. I was not allowed to ask questions about traumatic events or anything that could potentially be triggering. I saw these rules as being important and protective, that leaving some questions off the table would increase the power that the participants have; they could choose to reveal or withhold many kinds of information without feeling obligated to talk to me about things they would rather not discuss. This was also helpful for me in conducting research that takes consent very seriously and seeks to represent participants in the most ethical way possible. In practice, this was sometimes more complicated. Some of my participants were so accustomed to having Americans ask them about their traumas that they have come to feel that it is expected of them to be forthcoming
about past trauma. I worked hard to keep my questions focused directly on my research questions, to avoid reifying this pattern.

This period of ethnographic inquiry, with its emphasis on relationship formation and reflexive meditation, was compatible with Ortner’s definition of ethnography: “minimally (ethnography) has always meant the attempt to understand another life world using the self—as much of it as possible—as the instrument of knowing” (1995, p. 187). Coming to see my own self-concept and experiences and ideas as a dialogical component of the research enabled me to see the project as an exercise in group meaning-making, and my findings not as “realities extracted from the field’ but [as] ‘intersubjective truths’ negotiated out of the warmth and friction of an unfolding, iterative process” (Cloke et al., 2004, 170).

For the first few months, I only attended meetings and worked at the garden on Saturdays because I was living in a city 90 miles away. For the last two months of the project, though, I moved to the same city where the garden was located so that I could go to the garden multiple times per week and attend weekend farmstands, performing ongoing ethnographic analysis while simultaneously moving into the other research phases.

**Phase 2: “Kitchen Visits” and Camera Distribution**

After a few months spent volunteering in the garden and building relationships with participants, I invited them to participate in “kitchen visits.” I call the interviews kitchen visits principally as a way of destabilizing the formality of the interview process, with sensitivity to the fact that formality is linked to power.
Though there were still present markers of formality—my tape recorder and my clipboard—I wanted to break down the power-laden atmosphere of interrogation that often accompanies interviews. In reality, these interviews were more likely to occur on couches than in kitchens, but I still referred to them as kitchen visits as a means of centering the activity that occurs in the kitchen as critical to my research. I asked questions about the plants they grew in the garden, about how they liked to cook each crop, about who cooked, about where they learned to cook, about how that food sustained and carried their cultures and histories. For those interviews where we did sit at dining room tables, people often gestured to objects or spaces in their kitchens to provide me with visual markers for their explanations of food-related activities and concepts.

The questions were open-ended, the interviews semi-structured. I entered the kitchen visits with basic questions in mind (see Appendix) and was careful not to ask questions about past trauma. Conversations often veered into unexpected territory, but this was compatible with my methodological preference for intersubjectivity. As Tracy Skelton explained,

> For my research I favour interviews that allow the space and time for people to talk about things they want to tell me. Open-ended questions let them emphasize and omit particular things, to reflect on their past to impress you with their knowledge... Allowing the space for people not to answer questions and respecting their decisions as soon as they refuse to talk about something are also about respect and empowerment; they give the interviewee some control within the interview. (2001, p. 89)

Creating an environment where participants had control over the setting and content of the interview is important if a researcher is consciously trying not to
leverage privileged status over the interviewees. In my case, I did not wish to use my membership in the dominant community, my affiliation with the service-providing organization, or my status as an educated researcher coercively. Throughout the course of the project, it became clear to me that coercion can occur even without the full awareness of the researcher; these issues will be addressed in Chapter V, which contains my methodological reflections.

During this phase of the research, I conducted 14 "kitchen visits" with 17 individuals. (This included two spousal pairs and a mother/son pair, all of whom preferred to be interviewed jointly for translation purposes or to save time.) For those who consented to participate in a kitchen visit, I visited them in their homes by myself or with a translator when necessary. The kitchen visits were semi-structured interviews that explored the basic themes elucidated in the sample interview questions in the Appendix but often moved into other conversational spaces. All the interviews were recorded, and I also took brief notes before and after the interviews since these visits allowed me to pay attention to facial expressions and non-verbal cues in a way that was difficult when we were working side-by-side in the garden. I generally didn’t take notes during the interviews, however, as it was important to me that the participants could see I was actively listening to them, making eye contact and providing them with non-verbal feedback.

In addition to asking questions at these kitchen visits, I also distributed a disposable camera to each participant. Wang and Burris (1994) coined the term photovoice to refer to the methodological practice of recruiting research participants to photographically document their personal experiences and realms of expertise.
The use of disposable cameras in qualitative research is increasingly popular, as researchers explore the role of visual artifacts in making meaning out of the personal landscapes and individual experiences of research participants (see Haaken & O’Neill, 2014). In particular, the photovoice research approach has been utilized with marginalized populations; for example, people experiencing homelessness (Miller, 2006), people with disabilities (Newman et al., 2009), (im)migrant women (Sutherland & Cheng, 2009), and refugees (Berman, Ford-Gilboe, Moutrey, & Cekic, 2001; Green & Kloos, 2009; Oh, 2012). In conjunction with the mission of exploring the lived realities of the research participants, photovoice is often used explicitly as a participatory research tool designed to increase empowerment of these marginalized groups; in Duffy’s health promotion research, for example, she uses photovoice as a tool to explore “contextual issues related to oppression and marginalization” of women (2011, p. 155) and argues that the participants in her research projects report increased levels of empowerment after participating.

In the field of qualitative refugee studies specifically, numerous researchers have used photovoice as a research tool to explore the relocation experiences of refugees, including of particularly vulnerable refugee youth and children (Green & Kloos, 2009). In her research with refugee children, Oh observes that through the use of photographs and “photo-elicitation,” researchers are able to “glean information about the material circumstances of their everyday lives, as represented by them” (2012, p. 283), but that photovoice is about more than just material representations; it is also, Oh argues, “a distinctive way of conducting
research with children that treats them as social actors rather than as victims, while taking into account their experiences of adversity” (p. 283). For refugees, who are so often constructed in methods and discourses as passive victims, this focus on participation and agency is both methodologically and practically important.

There were several reasons that I chose to utilize photovoice as one of my research methods in this project. Fundamentally, as has been explored by authors like Ennew and Plateau (2004), I envisioned photovoice as a method of sharing power and of “doing no harm;” rather than asking intrusive and potentially triggering questions of a vulnerable population of participants, photovoice is a way to allow participants to exercise agency over what parts of their life they choose to show and how they choose to frame their experiences. Productively in conjunction with this increased level of agency for participants, though, photovoice techniques can also offer researchers access into spaces and moments that they may not be able to access physically, “unveil[ing] interesting and hitherto undisclosed subsidiary subjects” (Oh, 2012, p. 283).

Moreover, I was interested in the technique as a method of making explicit the questions of landscapes embedded in my research questions, and of transferring the physicality of the research topic into physical artifacts that could be visually presented and interpreted. According to feminist geographer Gillian Rose, “Through their everyday interactions with people and objects, individuals develop certain kinds of knowledge—conscious, subconscious and ideological—and their subsequent actions based on these kinds of knowledge reproduce a social structure” (1993, p. 20). The use of the cameras was designed to explore the place-making role
of the community garden on a number of different levels related to food production and consumption. This process of observing and creating artifacts that flesh out the cultural landscapes of the participants contributed to the participants’ sense of investment in the research project and was designed to shed light on the participants’ perceptions of various spaces relevant to the project, with the hope that, as Miller (2006) has asserted, rendering a landscape of marginalization visible can create social change.

It was in this spirit that I distributed disposable cameras to each person who consented to participate in a kitchen visit. At the kitchen visits, each participant was asked to use the camera to document their farming experiences and the ways that their farming practice influences their use of space and place. They were encouraged to take photographs of anything they find relevant to their farming experience, from garden space to market space to kitchens and tables. In total I distributed 14 cameras and at the end of the research period retrieved 10 of them (one got lost, one was used incorrectly, and two were unaccounted for).

I had hoped to conclude this phase of data collection with a panel discussion, focusing on the important photovoice component of photo-elicitation, or a discussion about the contents of the photographs. When I suggested this to some of the participants, they posited that a party would be better-received than a formal panel discussion. Collaboratively, we planned a “garden party:” a potluck dinner where each family would bring food from their country made with produce from the garden and where we would semi-formally discuss their experiences in the research project and the contents of their photographs. However, the evening of the
scheduled garden party, Salt Lake City was visited by a rare, heavy rainstorm. We were unable to meet, and unable to reschedule as I was moving across the country in two days. Instead, I spent that evening in the apartment of one of the Sudanese families. Together we ate our potluck foods: my pasta salad, and their bread with a spicy chili sauce and a vegetable dish made of cooked eggplant, tomatoes, and green peppers in a tasty peanut butter sauce. It wasn’t a focus group, lamentably, but it was a kind of synthesis.

**Phase 3: Coding and Interpretation**

The final stage of research involved transcribing the interviews, then coding and analyzing the interviews, field notes and photographs before beginning the writing process. Traditional coding methods of the diverse qualitative data were helpful in synthesizing the results and making the body of data legible and cohesive, using an inductive orientation that sought to identify main themes, categories, and patterns in the data. During the initial open coding process, I discovered nearly 100 coding labels that ran through the interviews, different topics or phrases that were repeatedly mentioned by multiple interviewees. As I progressed through a more focused coding process, I synthesized and combined these coding labels, then cross-referenced them with the central themes that were represented in my field journals. During the thematic coding process, I identified which codes were best suited to respond to my research questions, then engaged in thematic coding to select quotes and ideas that were relevant to each individual paper. There were several interesting themes present that did not readily respond to my research questions—
including transitions in gender ideology and changing intergenerational relationships in refugee families—but I set these themes aside to focus on the codes that directly related to the physical environment and sense of place, place-making, hybrid landscapes, and assimilation and resistance.

In addition to writing a dissertation, I wanted to create products to make my research relevant to the community. I was unable to develop a collaborative community project as hoped. I did, though, create some usable products for New Roots. I created a document for the sponsoring agencies that detailed the place-making functions that the refugee garden plays in the lives of the gardeners, and offered a few suggestions for how the refugee garden and other related programs can support refugees as safe and nurturing spaces in the receiving community. I also provided New Roots with access to some of the photographs taken by research participants (predicated upon the participants’ full consent), which they will sell to donors at fundraising events throughout the next growing season.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed the methodological underpinnings of this research project with refugee urban farmers in Salt Lake City. Epistemologically undergirded by feminist and postcolonial theories, this project draws upon a toolbox of qualitative methods designed to illuminate the experiences and expertise of the participants while attending to ever-present and complicated power dynamics. Throughout the three phases of the research—participant observation, kitchen visits and photovoice, and coding and interpretation—epistemology and
methods are woven together to create a methodological orientation emphasizing the importance of flexibility and care in the research process.
CHAPTER III

THE ROLE OF FARMING IN PLACE-MAKING PROCESSES OF REFUGEES

Field Journal, 20 April: This morning I drove from Logan to Salt Lake marveling at the weather. It was rainy, with the clouds sitting low on the mountains. North of Salt Lake the mountains were lit bright green but the clouds hung around them like dense fog. The sky was shades of gray; rain came and went. When I arrived at the garden, I got out of my car and was greeted with the scent of wood chips and mulch. I walked past huge piles of wood chips melting in the rain. The smell of manure was there, somewhere beneath, but the rain stirred up the scent of cedar and balsam, and the woody scent overtook it all.

Refugees—often referred to simply as “displaced people”—possess a wealth of knowledge about what it means to be emplaced, displaced, and then re-emplaced somewhere else. Their very identities are publicly defined as people who have lost a place. Despite the centrality of place to describing the experiences of refugees, Spicer notes that conceptualizations of place and locality form serious gaps in the academic literature of refugee studies (2008). Sampson and Gifford also write:

Notwithstanding the importance of investigating and understanding the traumas leading to displacement, relatively little attention has been given to the concurrent and ongoing process of forced replacement and the establishment of connections to place among refugees in these contexts. The focus on displacement has left a gap in our understanding of emplacement (Turton, 2004) – about connections to place in settlement. (2010, p. 116)

It is worth asking whether the very act of defining refugees as “displaced people” may train our vision upon the meaning of displacement and away from the choiceful means by which all refugees adjust to new places, bring old places along with them, and create their own original, meaningful places in the process.
The academic literature on refugees has focused primarily on the process of displacement and social integration, leaving a gap in our understanding of the agented place-making processes utilized by refugees as well as a gap in our understanding of the ways in which emplacement is site-specific, location-specific, embedded in and influenced by particular places. However, as Turton notes, “an understanding of the link between people and place helps us to appreciate that displacement is not just about the loss of place, but also about the struggle to make a place in the world, where meaningful action and shared understanding is possible” (2005, p. 258). This research examines the ways in which displaced people are also emplaced people perpetually involved in conscious negotiations with their new environments, re-enacting the migrant tensions between assimilation and resistance—in other words, they are place-making people. To draw together the social and physical environments in order to analyze the place-making activities of refugees, I focus here on a specific group of refugees living in Utah and their farming and gardening work. The research asks the question: What is the role of farming in the social and environmental place-making strategies of refugees, and how do these place-making activities express both assimilation and resistance?

To approach this research question, I draw together the experiences of a group of people living in Salt Lake City who are refugees from several countries. All the individuals in my sample are involved in a refugee urban farming program, and all of them come from agrarian backgrounds. For this group of people, their engagement in agricultural work is a practice of place-making, embedded with both environmental and social meanings and consequences; their social and
environmental worlds are in many ways merged. In this project, working together in a garden—a space that likewise merges these worlds—provides for the creation of legible environmental and social landscapes: soil underhand, and familiar conversations about vegetables. This paper will examine the connectedness of refugees' social worlds and physical environments, focusing on the role of agricultural practice as a place-making exercise that facilitates a sense of place-belongingness.

Though much place attachment literature focuses on space as a human-constructed structure (a home, a neighborhood), these spaces are themselves constructed upon other, preexisting spaces. Environmental spaces are first removed, altered or destroyed so that human-made spaces such as houses, streets and parks can be constructed upon them. A garden is an environmental space that, though outdoors and composed of natural elements, is itself constructed. A farm is the coalition of nature and culture, built atop previously-uncultured nature. A sense of place is built out of connections to the land as we have altered it or perceived it, and engaging in agented place-making activities can be a pathway for displaced people to create new place attachments, even in a land they did not choose for themselves. Gardens are artifacts of place-making; the connection with that physical landscape—worked and changed and humanized as it is—is connected to the sense of place these participants are developing in Utah over time.
Literature Review

The analysis in this paper is situated in the context of the geographic literature on place, with additional sources drawn from other disciplines to preserve the multi-disciplinary character of refugee studies. In this literature review, I will first discuss the meaning of the term *place*, as it is distinguished from *space*, and I will define related terms such as *sense of place* and *place attachment* while mentioning the complicated nature of these terms in a globalized world. The second section of the literature review will be devoted to defining *place-making* as a concept that effectively draws together social and environmental spheres, and describing the ways in which agricultural activities may be viewed, for migrant and refugee populations in particular, as place-making exercises.

Place/Space

One of the intellectual tasks that has occupied theorists of geography has been distinguishing between *space* and *place* as theoretically-grounded concepts. In his treatment of space/place as a binary construction that has emerged over decades of conversation, John Agnew distinguishes between the two concepts this way:

Space then signifies a field of practice or area in which a group or organization, such as a state, operates, held together in popular consciousness by a map-image and a narrative that represents it as a meaningful whole. Place represents the encounter of people with other people and things in place. It refers to how everyday life is inscribed in space and takes on meaning for people and organizations. (2005, p. 84)
He goes on to suggest that space is a “top-down” formulation, “defined by powerful actors imposing their control and narratives on others,” while place is a “bottom-up” construction that rather represents “the outlooks and actions of more typical folks” (2005, p. 85). In other words, both spaces and places may be socially-constructed, but spaces represent territories and landscapes seen “from above,” while places represent “the projection of feelings of attachment, comfort and belonging” (2005, p. 85). The layers of history and meaning affiliated with particular spaces are what transform space into place.

This research project focuses on up-close examination of people’s experience with place as a locus of untangleable interaction between environmental and social spheres. The notion of place is both complexly abstract and profoundly grounded and incorporates both spatial and symbolic elements; as Kimberly Whitney writes,

*Place* is a heuristic tool that begins with, or moves from, embodiment where one wheels, sits, stands, walks in space and time. In this conceptual frame, persons and communities are “implaced” or located in particular socio-historical and physical (ecological and geographic) locations. Place is a fragrance or touch or gaze that includes both physical and social factors. Physical or environmental aspects of place include land, air, water, plant and animal lives and habitats, architecture and infrastructure of human habitats. Social and cultural aspects of place include politics, economics, histories including hidden or subjugated histories, worldviews, moral and religious imagination, the arts. These environmental and cultural factors spur the practices and spatial patterning of place and world-making, and are constitutive particulars, if you will, of place. (2001, p. 11)

In a sense, place could be defined as a physical locality upon which multiple facets of one’s lived reality converge and bear the weight of meaning, like the branch that bears fruit, or the root of the tree of the branch that bears fruit. Anthropologist Thomas Thornton argues that place is constructed of three dimensions—space,
time, and experience—and that each of these three dimensions is both environmentally and socially constructed (2007).

Drawing upon these definitions, the concept of sense of place makes Thornton’s “three dimensions of place” explicitly personal; space, time, and personal experience collapse around the embodied spatial and social existence of one individual, who feels and consciously or unconsciously makes sense of the confluence of these factors in their own life. Sense is an apt word for this concept, as the sensuality of spatial experiences may often be felt in our bodies more than understood conceptually: felt as nostalgia or belongingness or security or alienation, and triggered by sights, sounds, smells, tastes and textures. Agnew argues that a person’s sense of place can be either consciously self-defined or witnessed by others: “A strong sense of ‘belonging’ to a place, either consciously or as shown through everyday behaviour such as participating in place-related affairs, would be indicative of ‘sense of place’” (2005, p. 89). Sense of place has been defined as “the totality of perceptions and knowledge of a place gained by residents through their long experience in it, and intensified by their feelings for it” (Moonsammy, Cohen, & Williams, 1987, p. 1). Indeed, long-term connections with a particular place often—but not always—inform what one may consider to be their strongest place attachment.

In his work on the place attachments of elderly people, Graham D. Rowles (1993) identified three main “components of affiliation with the environments in our lives,” or elements of place attachment: “physical insideness,” “social insideness” and “autobiographical insideness.” He describes physical attachment to place as a
taken-for-granted sense of physical alignment with the environment, developed as over the patterns of years individuals become accustomed to the routines of familiar spaces and much-used paths. Social affinity is developed through “social rhythm and ambience,” or the patterns of social interactions that characterize spaces (homes, neighborhoods, etc.). “Autobiographical insideness” involves spatial and temporal linkages, the process by which people learn to attach their sense of identity and self-understanding to the places in which they live their lives (Rowles, 1993). (Cloke et al. described autobiographical insideness as the “autobiographical memories which connected who they were to where they were through the continual sparking of memories by the ‘incident places,’ mementoes and other bits and bobs of their lives” [2004, p. 180]). This conceptualization of place attachment is bonded to the long-term existence in and experience of a particular place (see Krasner, 2005).

However, in an increasingly globalizing and transitory world—in a world where space “loses its grip” (Agnew, 2005, p. 88)—these theories of space, place, sense of place and place attachment face challenges to their generalizability and confront the limits of their descriptiveness. Devon G. Peña (2006) explains:

Left unsaid in the conventional narrative are stories recounting what happens to a people’s sense of place when they cannot claim a “long experience” in place. What happens to diaspora peoples? Immigrants? Refugees? Those displaced by mountain-top removal, deforestation, freeway construction, or enclosure? Does sense of place survive the globalized diasporas of displaced peoples, cultural hybrids, and transnational commodity chains? (p. 3)

Or: When physical connections with places are ruptured (sometimes forcibly), what remains of senses and attachments? When relationships with space are
transformed over a period of time or in the span of a moment, what happens to relationships with place? Peña later partially answers his own questions with this possibilism: “What happens? Sometimes we simply bring place or, at the least, inherited place-making proclivities with us” (2006, p. 3).

The idea that refugees, in particular, are constantly involved in negotiating place seems obvious but is sometimes undercomplicated in the literature of refugee studies. Eastmond notes that “much refugee research to date has focused either on the processes of integration into the host society or on repatriation to the country of origin, the sedentary solutions as envisaged by the conventional paradigms of forced migration” (2006, p. 217). Problematically, the term assimilation may be used to describe refugees’ adaptation processes with no attention to the weighted historical meaning of the term as embedded in global colonial programs of forced cultural assimilation. Eastmond writes that “More recently, attention is turning to the interstitial practices and institutions through which refugees seek to build viable lives across national boundaries” (2006, p. 217), then suggests that instead of focusing on “integration, assimilation and citizenship,” researchers pay attention to the “transmigrant strategies...[that] bridge home and exile in multi-layered forms of membership and adjustment, located in transnational social space” (2006, p. 231).

In this study I am joining a chorus that destabilizes the notion of refugee assimilation as necessarily good or even truly possible, and also bringing the analysis into physical localities using the concept of place-making to ground the analysis.
Place-Making and Farming

Sampson and Gifford described place-making as “the appropriation of places” (2010, p. 117). Place-making may be understood as a re-emplacement process in which the people being resettled are active participants—*are re-emplacing themselves*. Turton emphasizes that place should be viewed “not as a stage upon which social activity is carried out, but as a product of social activity—and a fragile one at that” (2005, p. 275); this emphasizes the interactions between space and social interactions. Peña writes about

the re-emplacement of diaspora peoples who have managed to transnationalize local place-making by importing the cultural landscape, vernacular architecture, biotic baggage, and cognitive mapping traditions of their point-of-origin communities. They have crossed borders but brought their epistemologies of place. They have used these knowledge systems to re-inhabit a transnational location by means of mimicry, the re-enactment of the diversity of species and forms and of the open spaces of conviviality that define their home places. (2006, pp. 5-6)

This concept is important because it insists that re-emplaced people are not merely acted upon by their new environments and do not simply occupy a continuum of assimilation, but that they are actively engaged in the process of (re)locating place and (re)building place in and around new spaces. This process of place-making embodies tensions: for instance, the tension between “trying to claim a presence in a place” and choosing what to keep and what to leave behind (Agnew, 2005, p. 88).

Resettled people constantly inhabit these tensions as they work to understand and navigate new cultural expectations, social environments, economic arrangements, etcetera, in the new place where they are living.

That refugees must learn to navigate new social environments post-
displacement is both uncontested and irrefutable. However, refugees—and in particular refugees with agrarian backgrounds or experience in subsistence living practices—must also learn to navigate new ecosystems and landscapes. For refugees interested in growing their own food or growing food for market, this means learning a new set of growing conditions, seasons, and local techniques. Moreover, it requires understanding new social, legal, and economic contexts in which land can be used and food can be produced. In this way, physical and social environments are layered on top of one another and continually complicate one another. The physical landscape may not become legible to new arrivals without the ability to “read” the social landscape, too, and vice versa.

Clearly, the adjustment to a new place is not purely social; it is also geographic and ecological. Brun (2001) coined the term reterritorialization to refer to “the way in which displaced people and local people establish new, or rather expand networks and cultural practices that define new spaces for daily life” (p. 23). The new networks and cultural practices also extend into the biological realm, as migrants learn to plant and harvest and subsist in unfamiliar soil. Sampson and Gifford note that important for understanding the relationship of people who become refugees and place is a position somewhere in-between: one that recognizes the strong sense of connection to places left behind and their associated traumas while at the same time recognizing the possibilities of constructive (re)building of connections to place within a context of resettlement. (2010, p. 117)

This way of understanding the place-making strategies of refugees avoids the pitfalls of both simplistically-essentialized relationships between people and their
places, as well as the problematic elements of a deterritorialized understanding of people and place. A reterritorialized analysis posits that new and old and ever-changing relationships and connections with the land are a rich soil for geographic inquiry.

Place-making is an ecologically-influenced enterprise; therefore, place-making in a new environment can be complicated when a person finds themselves in an entirely different landscape than is familiar to them. Nesheim, Dhillion and Stolen note that “Rural migrants often settle in places that are quite different from their place of origin and have to adapt to new social, economic, and natural environments. This situation challenges beliefs, values, knowledge, technology, exchange systems, and many other aspects of their lives, including their recognition and use of natural resources” (2006, p. 100). One place-making tactic that has been used by countless displaced people throughout history—and that modern refugees living in the United States continue to use in various forms—is to literally build, construct and inhabit landscapes that enable the person to continue to live a familiar lifestyle, gradually developing a familiarity with new natural environments through labor. The place-making/landscape-constructing tactic that is addressed in the current study is farming and gardening.

Cultivation of traditional crops by refugees is not new, and the importance of maintaining traditional foodways in the context of preserving cultural identity and practice throughout the process of migration is well-documented. For instance, a rich body of literature analyzes groups of Hmong refugees in California, documenting their cultivation of plants including “culinary, medicinal, and
ornamental species commonly used by hill tribes in northern Thailand and by
Hmong refugees living in Thailand," with special attention to traditional medicinal
herbology (Corlett, Clegg, Keen, & Grivetti, 2002, p. 118). This maintenance of
traditional foodways accomplishes multiple purposes and is often symbolic of other
kinds of cultural continuance; it is a popular colloquialism that the last vestiges of
the sending culture in migrant communities is the persistence of traditional menus.
A garden can become “a diverse polycultural agroecological space that biophysically
and symbolically connects the migrant to her origin community. This allows for a
transnationalization of a sense of place” (Peña, 2006, p. 10). Moreover, the
knowledge preserved through traditional foodways is not only cultural, but also
ecological in nature.

Beyond cultivation of food, however, the act of gardening in a new place may
also involve efforts to make the new place familiar and legible through the
intelligibility of land-based labor (Chiang, 2010). The role of agrarian involvement
(including urban agrarian activities) in place-making enterprises is coming to be
recognized in studies of migrants and refugees. For example, the South Central farm
in Los Angeles:

South Central Farmers Feeding Families is a grassroots organization
of 360 families. The farmers created this collective organization in
September 2003 in response to City land use politics and the
development interests that drive these, and an elite-dominated
regional food bank that is at its heart anti-democratic and considers
the self-organization of the farmers to be a threat. In a collective
fashion, the farmers democratically managed a landscape filled with
native row crops, fruit-bearing trees and vines, and medicinal herbs.
They created a vibrant space filled with social life and buzzing with
the moral density that accompanies their ethic of conviviality. In June
of this year (2006), the bulldozers destroyed this urban oasis. (Peña, 2006, p. 10)

It is clear from the oral histories that participation in the South Central farm was an empowering place-making activity for participants, one in which they were able to construct new communities in a new place while also conserving cultural values through the cultivation of particular crops and the dailiness of particular activities.

Gardening and crop cultivation has been used by people in many other kinds of exile, too; Kenneth Helphand writes about the “defiant gardens” cultivated by prisoners, POWs, and interred individuals in places ranging from Guantanamo to the Japanese-American internment camps of World War II (2006). In her 2010 article on Japanese-American internment camps, Connie Chiang recounts an anecdote about one man who gardened while interred:

His sons, Ted and Paul Kogita, later explained that their father’s garden was profoundly important to him because it was something he could control and allowed him to tune everything else out. He spent hours moving the rocks around and grew so attached to them that he actually took them with him when he left Minidoka. Perhaps the rocks came to symbolize his spiritual outlet from his detention. Through his work in his garden, Kogita forged a deep connection to his place of incarceration.” (2010, p. 251)

This anecdote draws attention to the fact that though a “place of incarceration” may be both constructed and interpreted in political terms, it remains a place with natural elements, manipulated though they may be. Through acting with and upon these items of the landscape, Kogita engaged in place-making activities that resulted in place attachment, even though it was a place he did not choose and that in fact hosted and represented his oppressive imprisonment.
Similar defiant gardens have been constructed independently by modern-day refugees in the United States, but the multi-faceted usefulness of these gardens has also become visible to resettlement agencies, giving rise to the new trend of refugee community gardens and farming programs. Though of course refugees also continue to grow food independently, most community garden spaces that cater to refugees in the United States are administered by non-governmental organizations, government programs, church groups, or a combination of these and other institutional entities. It is important to ask to what extent the same agented place-making processes can occur in garden spaces that are not fundamentally structured by the participants.

A body of research that hopes to respond to these questions of emplacement, place-making and integration must consider the contexts of people’s histories—must be rooted. But Brun emphasizes that:

...it is not only the imagined place of the past that must be understood. The here and now should also be present when analysing situations of forced migration. Though many refugees and migrants feel that they live, or want to live, their lives elsewhere, they have a present life, where they need to survive, to make a livelihood, and thus through their actions construct the place where they are physically present. (2001, p. 19)

Reterritorializing the research framework (including methodologically) is one way to trace the threads of activity, identity, landscape, community and livelihood through the past and into the present, and through one distinct place and into another.
Methods

For this research project, I worked with participants in an urban farming program for refugees in Salt Lake City, Utah. The New Roots program, jointly administered by Salt Lake County and the International Rescue Committee, is designed to create increased access to fresh food for the local refugee population and to provide refugees from agrarian backgrounds with space and materials to grow food for personal use and to sell. Though the New Roots program provides access to garden space for both community gardeners and market farmers, my research sample was drawn from people who participated in the market farming program.

Sample Selection

After obtaining the necessary research permissions from the IRB, local New Roots staff, and national leadership of the International Rescue Committee, I began working as a volunteer on the New Roots urban farm in Salt Lake City. I utilized a convenience sampling method, inviting all adult refugees who participated in the New Roots market farming program to participate in my research project. In sum, 30 adults consented to my involvement as a participant observer of farm activities. In the interview phase of the research, I conducted 14 “kitchen visits”—in-home, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately one hour each—which involved 17 people from Burundi (7), Sudan (4), Bhutan (2), Chad (1), Democratic Republic of the Congo (1), the Republic of Congo (1), and Cuba (1).
**Data Collection**

As a qualitative project, the toolbox of data collection methods included participant observation, continual unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews (which I called “kitchen visits,” partially to destabilize the perceived formality and hierarchy of the interview process), and a camera project designed to capture the photovoice of the participants. Throughout the project, I worked in the garden as a volunteer, informally conversing with the farmers as I helped them plant seeds, remove weeds, and wash and sort produce for market. About half of the participants spoke with me in English, and I spoke Spanish with the single participant who preferred to speak Spanish. For those who preferred to speak in their own languages, I employed an interpreter to assist in the gardening conversations and, later, in the in-home semi-formal interviews.

During the kitchen visits, I asked each participant questions about their farming history and families of origin, the motivations and experiences with the New Roots program, their cooking and eating routines, and the process of transitioning to life in Utah (see the interview guide, which I used to loosely structure the interviews, in the Appendix). In the interviews, I avoided asking questions that could potentially trigger trauma or make my participants feel exploited; instead, I tried to focus on their personal knowledge and expertise related to farming. In order to reterritorialize the participants’ relationships with place, I asked questions about their farming backgrounds and their current work with in the New Roots market farming program. The data for this paper is drawn mostly from
the transcripts of the kitchen visits, as well as from the observations contained in my field journals.

**Data Analysis**

Throughout the research process, I kept detailed field journals with my personal observations and information given to me by program staff and participants. I also recorded and transcribed the interviews conducted at each kitchen visit. To analyze this recorded and written information, I took an inductive approach to coding designed to identify the main themes and categories, as well as the patterns that they created, in the data. After coding thematically, then combining thematic categories and re-coding them, I selected the themes and patterns that best answered my research questions, setting aside other interesting data for potential future use.

**Findings and Discussion**

This research focuses on the agricultural experiences of study participants, but their descriptions of their agrarian lives yielded rich and complex data on the linkages between place, farming, and many other aspects of the participants’ lives. Agier writes that “[Refugees’] existence is based on the loss of a geographical place, to which were attached attributes of identity, relationship and memory, and likewise on the absence of any new social place” (2008, p. 32). When participants talked about their earlier life experiences with agriculture, they described the ways that their agricultural experiences were intertwined with their livelihoods,
identities, communities, and sense of place. In fact, my attempts to code the interview transcripts into discrete analytical categories were often complicated by the fruitful entanglements of the themes and concepts in people’s words and stories. Often I would code sentences with multiple code words because of the inextricability of the concepts they contained. Any attempts to untangle concepts of livelihood, identity and community were further complicated by the language participants used to describe their experiences, which persistently re-merges all these elements in my analysis.

Most of the academic literature on place-belongingness focuses on the social dimensions of people’s sense of belonging in places. For the farmers in this study, a sense of place comes from having the ability to participate in place-making activities that develop a connection to landscape, soil, and the physical environment. In this case, the connection is facilitated by agricultural labor and activities undertaken in the garden space. The positive outcomes facilitated by this connection, as described by the participants, are both material (providing for nutritional needs, acting as an extra source of income, and providing a location for physical exercise and outdoor activities) and emotional (providing a link to source of expertise and a former way of life, enabling the development of new communities, and as an expression of culture or act of resistance). These material and emotional benefits are connected with one another, and reflect the relationships between refugees’ activities in the physical environment and their sense of their social worlds.

As mentioned above, a reterritorializing research approach traces the thematic threads of the research from places of the past through to places in the
present. In order to here move from place to place, I will first provide information about the roles of farming and agriculture in the histories and backgrounds of the participants. I will then discuss the principal agri/cultural transitions that this group of refugees has navigated in order to engage in farming activities in Utah. In the final portion of this section I will describe the benefits and results of the refugee urban farming program, as described by the participants, and will consider the connections between the participants’ place-making strategies, their memories and identities, and their development of a sense of place-belongingness in a new environment.

**Histories**

All of the participants in this research study come from agrarian backgrounds and grew up in farming families. In the interviews, none of them drew a clear line between their families’ subsistence and market farming activities; farming was less an occupation in their families, and more a way of life that provided virtually all of the necessities. As Eric from Burundi explained through a translator,

> If you have a life lived in Africa, we live first on farming. We grow up on the food. We grow varieties of food... The only things we must buy are meat, fish, things you cannot grow. But besides that, basically we grow our own things... [The] food that we sell gives money to buy clothes, to pay for school fees, to buy other things that we need to live. Even to buy a home, to be able to build a good house or a big house—it’s all about the food you grow and the income.

The participants from other countries and regions of the world echoed this sentiment, though their precise agricultural experiences varied. Some reported
growing huge tracts of cotton or other crops that were sold directly to large companies. Others grew large amounts of grains and beans then stored them to sell at market year-round. Others participated in local informal markets on a smaller scale, selling or trading whatever crop was growing in season.

This lifelong participation in farming activities marked many of the participants’ senses of their own histories and identities. Belyse from Burundi told me through a translator, “Yes, everyone was farmers. The whole family. You lived by farming and growing food and raising animals.” This expression of farmer as identity was true for those participants who always worked as farmers. Remy and Gloria, for example, told me that they had owned a large tract of land in Burundi; as Remy explained, “Yeah, we would grow some for the family to eat and then others to sell. We had a lot of land, where you can grow all varieties of food, which would give us income for school fees, medical services, to buy cows and raise animals, to pay taxes, and to buy anything.” So farming, Gloria added, was the central skill and the foundational activity of her life:

I lived a hard life. I started in farming when I was 9 years old. The clothes that I had were coming from the food of the harvest. I never got the chance to go to school, I have no...education. I started going to school when I came to America. After I came here, then I learned how to write my name.

But the interviewees who went to boarding schools, high schools and universities in cities away from their families also described the way that agricultural practice continued to define their identities even after they no longer depended upon it for their sole source of income. For example, many interviewees reported going home during school breaks and helping with the farming work.
Antoine described, in English, spending all of his school vacations doing farmwork with his family in Democratic Republic of the Congo:

> When you’re on vacation you come back home and you have to help, and to get some money also for the tuition. And in my area we used to get some work too, where we can go to work at the tea plantation to get some money for tuition. When I went to college it was the same.

All of the participants in this research came from agrarian backgrounds, but some (men only) were working in other jobs right before their initial relocations: for example, Hassan was a blacksmith, Al worked as an accounting teacher, and Antoine was a mechanic.

Two of the participants, Hadil and Serge, obtained university degrees in agriculture. Their agrarian backgrounds and identities influenced their studies. For example, Hadil explained in English that at the university, he encountered professionals who had theoretical experiences with agriculture that were different than his lived experiences: “Because when I went in university, there’s a doctor who never live but he studies. He studies and I have experience always.” Then he laughed and explained that these differences in background led to debates: “Yeah, we discussed too much! Because there is like students, they born in a big city, they don’t farm. They have different ideas.” When I asked him to give me an example of a disagreement he had with his fellow students, he said:

> For planting, you know, like we get a lecture then also we go into a farm and saw how to practice how to farm, how to plant, plant. And they, the first time, they don’t know how to take the plant and put in the soil. (laughter) Or he can dig too much and then also he kill the plant! (laughter) And we study also, you know, because when you see the soil in this area, you know can you plant it or not. So like light soil, you know this is the desert soil. This soil, you see if it have
minerals or not or something like that. And that’s good because you read and then also you have experience about something you do.

Serge also told me how his farming background influenced his understanding of what he learned at the university, explaining that “all the things I study, they already do” back at home in the fields. He said the information he learned at the university “was different—it was the same, but just another knowledge,” and that he learned scientific explanations and language that promoted the same practices as his mother had used.

The destruction experience that demanded relocation for all of these participants was a rupture: a geographic rupture, and built into it a rupture of livelihood, identity and community. For some the destruction experience was civil war or armed conflict; for others it was government eviction. We didn’t discuss these experiences in detail in our interviews, but it was clear that for all of the participants, the destruction experience involved a loss of the land on which they had learned to farm and construct not only a livelihood, but also a personal identity and sense of community. Viewed through the lens of agricultural practice and engagement, it becomes clear that these disruption events caused a multi-faceted loss that accompanies loss of land, and required of the refugees exertion to begin rebuilding in a new place.

**Agri/Cultural Transitions**

Practicing agriculture in a new place calls upon both prior knowledges and adaptability. Though all my participants had extensive farming experience, they also described the transitions they had to go through as farmers after arriving in the
United States. When I asked what kinds of transitions were required of them, all of the respondents mentioned the need to adjust to a new climate and seasons as well as to different techniques and technology, and about half of the respondents talked about needing to learn new ways of engaging with markets. This section will discuss details of these three main kinds of transitions.

**Climate and seasons.** All of the respondents, when asked what was different about farming in Utah versus their home countries, identified climate and seasons as a principal difference. Participants who grew up in different regions of the world described the specific seasonal environments in which they learned to cultivate crops. José, for example, noted, “In Cuba you can grow crops all year because the climate allows it. But here you have to depend upon the conditions and the seasons. There are six months that you can’t do much. So that’s a big difference...because the climate [here] is not as favorable for agriculture.” Abel and Belyse likewise explained that in East Africa, they grew their crops on a seasonal rotation: Abel specified, “You can plant things in September and harvest in May. Then in March you put new crops in, which would be harvested sometime in June.” So becoming accustomed to Utah and its relatively extreme climate (hot in the summer, cold in the winter, relatively dry) required the farmers to learn an entirely new seasonal calendar and new climate considerations.

This also extended to the general fertility of the land. Most of my participants learned to farm in tropical regions. Eric explained, “It’s interesting because you don’t spend that much time farming in Congo. The land is very good for it. If you want to grow cassava... You cut a piece of it and you can throw it
somewhere and just leave it there. In a few months you go back and it grew on its own. So it’s different.” They discovered that farming in Utah, with its scarce rainfall during the hot summer months, required different kinds of crop care and planning. Transferring their expertise gained from long experience onto a new ecosystem and climate was not always easy.

**Techniques and technology.** In order to adjust to the new climate, farmers also needed to adjust to new techniques and technologies. The new techniques that were most mentioned in the interviews were row measuring and irrigation. The Burundian interviewees in particular talked about how they were accustomed to farming on large tracts of land, throwing the seeds out at random. They experienced difficulty in adjusting to the small-space high-yield gardening techniques used in the farming program; as Nadege explained, “Here you spend more time measuring and doing lines and all different things. And it’s such a small thing, the land, small beds!” Adjusting to the small-scale high-yield crop placement plans designed by New Roots staff was difficult for some of the respondents. Though some saw the small-scale, row-measuring practice as a positive thing—like Hassan, who noted that he could grow ten times as many vegetables here as in Sudan, if given the same amount of space—others felt it was problematic. Several respondents said that their biggest complaint about the program was that it did not allow them enough space to plant as much as they would like or in the distributions they preferred.

Additionally, the majority of the interviewees described their adjustment to using irrigation technology when, in their home countries, they had relied more on the rain to water their crops. Some people described the seasonal planting,
harvesting and storing techniques that they grew up using to maximize crop yields during times when water was more abundant. However, access to more advanced irrigation techniques was one thing that most participants identified as an improvement in their farming practice; Serge explained that though row irrigation required labor to install, it was ultimately a labor-saving device because he did not have to use watering cans or hoses on a daily basis. Several participants from more arid or seasonally-arid climate zones talked about the difference that improved irrigation technology could make in their home countries; for instance, Nyanath from Sudan described seeing vegetables in the garden wilt on dry afternoons, and her husband Hassan also noted that he had seen drowned crops during seasons when water was more readily available. Both of them mentioned that controlled irrigation technology makes farming considerably easier once it is mastered.

**Markets.** Another key transition that participants had to make was learning new ways to sell their produce. The market farming program was specifically designed to teach refugees how to navigate new markets in the United States. Some interviewees had experience selling crops through the formal economic sector in their home countries, but more of them had participated in informal local economies. For those who had more informal sales experience, things like sorting produce according to specific program requirements, weighing, recording, and setting price points for the produce were new. Gloria agreed:

> It’s different...selling food here. Here you look at the pounds, you have to weigh it and package each pound. But there some of the people are not educated about that so with the vegetables there, maybe we just look at it and say, $20. If they [want] it then I’m done.
Or I put different prices... But here they have to weigh it, have to record it, everything.

When I asked if bargaining for prices might also occur in Africa, Gloria said, "Yes. But in America it's $1, it's $1, first time!" and everyone at the table laughed.

**Farming, Place-Making and Remembering**

The three principal transitions discussed in the previous section were mentioned in most of the interviews, and existed side by side with language indicating that farming was a return to something familiar. Remy from Burundi said:

> We are deciding to be part of the program because it helps us remember where we are from and reminds us what we were doing back home. Back home we had a large land where we could grow food. It was a beautiful country before the war started, we were eating whenever we want, we were sleeping whenever we want. It was a very, very happy life. So [at the farm here]...we are growing food, doing the same thing we have done in the past.

These two things existed side by side: Acknowledgment of the differences between farming “there” and “here,” and a sense of returning to the familiar. At first blush this seems paradoxical, but this paradox was a common thread running through the interviews. Eric said, simply, “When I’m farming, I’m home,” tapping into the complicated notion of home and suggesting that home for him is more than a place, but is connected to specific activities and notions of livelihood. This statement triggers the idea of (re)connecting with land up close—maybe landscapes, but maybe more than that actual soil and its potential yield—as a way of regaining a sense of place, a sense of home.
When I asked José if there was anything about the land here that was similar to the land in Cuba, his country of origin, he said, “The land is the same.” “The same?” I asked. “Well, no,” he said, “The land there is better, but land is land!” He went on to name differences—that the land in Cuba has more vigor, is more productive, is tropical, is more fertile; the vegetables grow on their own when the land here is cold—but amidst these differences he identified a core commonality: the act of putting a seed in the soil and helping it grow. That this basic practice could be both the same and different simultaneously was a sentiment that other interviewees also echoed.

I had expected that farmers’ descriptions of their agricultural practice would be connected to stories about livelihood and change and survival, but there was persistently more to the conversations, both in the stories and in the subtexts. My conversations with farmers were imbued with the ways in which displaced people reconstitute their notions of control and authenticity, and with the importance of investing labor in order to become acquainted with new land. Agricultural practice was, for the interviewees, a way of merging labor and recreation as well as a way of making new landscapes legible and familiar. There was no romanticism here, no sense of wilderness or essentialized relationships with the land. Rather, I heard over and over an autobiography attached to agriculture: People described how they were farmers, then they became refugees, and now they were farmers again.

These practices fit under the umbrella of place-making, or the agented intertwining of one’s environmental and social spheres of existence in order to establish new place attachments. For the research participants, the garden space
facilitated place-making activity in the form of farming that enabled people to autonomously develop a sense of place attachment and belongingness. The results of this connection were both material and emotional in nature, and in their explanations of these benefits my participants seemed to be operating from paradigms in which nature and culture—human and environment—are merged and inextricable. In this section I will discuss the named material results, then the emotional results, that farmers cited as outcomes of their agricultural place-making work.

**Material results.** Three main material results of their place-making through farming were named by my participants. The most important benefit had to do with food and nutrition, as the interviewees were persistent in their desire to eat fresh, healthy food that they had produced themselves. Some people also referred to the extra income generated by the market farming program as a benefit (though considering this is one of the main functions of the program, the importance and usefulness of income generation ranked relatively low on the list of people’s motivations for participating in the program). Finally, one of the most important benefits and motives for participation was to get exercise and stay active by engaging in outdoor activities.

**Nutritional needs.** The most commonly-cited reason for participating in the urban farming program was to access fresh and familiar food. The interviewees were united in their preference for fresh, organic food, and several people expressed distrust or distaste for the produce available in American grocery stores. Hadil explained in English:
Organic is the best for human beings and for animals, everybody. It’s less chemicals. It’s healthy for everybody. So I like the farming here because… Before, I go shopping every week in store, we buy tomato, we buy everything—when we eat, we don’t smell, we don’t think it’s nice. When I farm there [at the garden], it’s different. At harvest time every time I bring for my neighbors here little things from farming, like tomatoes… [and] they say oh it’s very different, very different taste, we like it, it’s very good.

This view that organic self-grown food is both healthier and tastier was reflected by a number of other interviewees, including José who stated that “…the vegetables are much healthier. They don’t have any chemical products and are much healthier than meat. They are produced without chemicals and insecticides, and are much better to eat.” Nyanath also said she “likes to eat normal food, not chemical food.”

Extra income. The interviewees often emphasized that access to fresh food was a more significant motivator than income for participating in the program, though this was certainly influenced by the fact that the income generated was not significant for most people; as Belyse said, “We do like to farm here because we can grow some food to eat. But if you don’t have a job, you can’t depend on it.” In other words, farming was not dependable as a regular source of income. Sonam also explained in English:

And to be honest we are not generating as much income as we spend in time and gas and mileage, but we love to do it because we get fresh food to eat. (laughter) If I spend same money somewhere else I can buy more food than producing it ourselves at the garden, but I cannot get the fresh food that I produce in the garden somewhere else. With the same money, you know what I mean.

Though the participants emphasized that the income was not their main motivation, some people did express appreciation for the sums they were able to earn.

Nyanath’s translator told me, “She said that what they get from the garden is really a
gift. They get to sell it and they get some money from it, and it’s easy.” Several of
the interviewees told me their goal for the program is to eventually own a farming
business and produce food full-time, though they were also realistic about the
structural challenges involved in doing this.

*Exercise and being outdoors.* Interestingly, more people cited exercise as a
primary benefit of their garden work than cited earned income. José explained, “I am
73 years old. So for me, it’s difficult to get serious work. So this is a way for me to
maintain myself in good physical condition. That’s why I’m participating, to keep
myself in shape.” Some interviewees referred to the lifestyle changes that occurred
when they moved to the United States, noting that the garden work was a way for
them to avoid becoming sedentary in this new lifestyle. In Claire’s words:

> So if you’re just sitting doing nothing, you instead should do
something with your body. But in Africa, you know, like here you get
food in the fridge but there, back home, you have to travel to get
water, travel to the get the wood, the firewood. And you keep doing
things, working around. But here if you want to cook, you just stand
and sit down. The [tap] water’s here, everything’s here, and it’s
different.

Basic lifestyle changes gave Claire the desire to engage in physical activity via
farming. It was common for people to link labor and leisure in their comments. Al
did so when he said in English, “Leisure is when I go to the garden, it’s like leisure
for me... because my dad he teach us and educate us, when you sit down like this,
you lose everything. You have to do something.” Several interviewees also made the
connection between physical health and mental efforts; Eric, for example, explained,
“Here if you’re just staying home, if your body’s not working hard enough, your
brain’s not working hard enough.”
**Emotional results.** Intertwined with these material benefits of utilizing place-making strategies were emotional results, which I have grouped into three thematic categories. First, participants described the connections between farm work, their historical areas of expertise, and their memories and self-concept. Second, they described the value of forming new communities around agricultural work. Finally, they explained the ways that farming was an act of cultural expression and even enabled them to resist assimilation into the dominant culture; specifically, descriptions of resistance were almost always oriented around the resistance of American food norms and the maintenance of their own cultural practices around food production and consumption.

*Expertise and memory.* Autobiographies of farming—life stories bound up in growing food in distinct places—were very present in my interviews. Most of the participants told me that they felt farm work was important because it kept them connected to who they were and what they knew. Some were matter-of-fact about this, like José who said, “I need it. I can’t sit around here all day—it would be worse... I’ve worked many years of my life. I just work. There’s nothing else.” Others, like Claire, were slightly more sentimental: “You know, the reason why I wanted to plant food was because it reminds me who I am, and brings...back to my attention...what I’ve been doing with my life, so I’m not forgetting my life. I’m growing food.” Along the same lines, Hadil told me, “I like about farming because this is my life. Sometimes here, when I’m at home I’m thinking, I go in the farm and just looking at the plants I get happy....I have something to do, I go around the farm, then I feel better.” Later he mentioned the ways that the landscape in the Salt Lake
Valley reminded him of his homeland in Sudan, saying, “When I [came] to Salt Lake—I [am from an] area around mountains, and so when I wake up and go on the farm, yeah. I look east, I saw mountain, I look west, I saw mountain—I’m very happy!” Farming provided many of my interviewees with a way to stay connected to their histories, identities, and embeddedness in landscapes and labors.

New communities. Most interviewees also named the development of community as an important impact of the garden work. Several people described their difficulties in transitioning from active, community-intensive social lives in their home countries: working together in the fields, talking to friends every night when work was done. These people felt very intensely the isolation of American nuclear-family households and the alienation of being a stranger still learning English, and they explained that the garden had become a space where they could work side by side with others, enjoy their company, and feel not-so-alone. Or, as Norbu explained through her translator, “And she said even if we could not harvest really good, we can go there and just take the fresh air. There are the people there, and she likes it. Being at home is not better than being at the farm with all different kinds. They can just love each other and they don’t feel stressed or something.”

Belyse drew many of these different beneficial threads together and stated that:

Also [the farm] is a place where you meet different people and different culture. And you go and do work as a team, so it’s better than staying home alone doing nothing. Also you are making your body active, you know, you feel that your body is active and you feel that you are working and you are motivating. And also socializing with different people.
Expression of culture/act of resistance. Though no one used the word “resistance” specifically, there were indications in our interviews that farming offered the interviewees a sense of autonomy in regards to food production that enabled them to resist assimilation into American food norms that they found distasteful. Remy explained that “We grow food because we want to eat food, raise food, and teach our kids where it comes from and how we grow the food. And also we want to eat it our way.” (As an example of eating food “our way,” Remy mentioned that Americans eat very young corn, but he prefers to let it grow to a greater maturity before eating it; planting his own corn in the garden, he explained, enables him to let his corn grow in accordance with this preference.) The idea of retaining particular values around food, including cultural norms of food production and consumption, was present in many interviews. In fact, food was the area of American culture that interviewees were most likely to position themselves in resistance to. Serge stated, “It’s difficult to eat American food,” noting that they eat it sometimes but that they prefer to eat traditional food that emphasizes vegetables: cassava leaves, beans, and other vegetables with meat or fish.

Most of the interviewees stated that they have maintained the cooking habits of their home culture. Those with school-aged children were more likely to report changes in their diets. (The most-reported addition to traditional diet was pizza.) Nadege, for instance, told me, “I like to eat potatoes, beans, squash and corn. Also there is some other American food I eat.” From across the room, her young son interjected, “Cheetos!” and everyone laughed. Nadege expounded, half in English and half through the translator “Spaghetti, hamburger, pizza, soda, American soda,
"peas," then added in English, "...and chicken. Chicken American food." More common than this adaptation of American foods, though, was patent resistance—because American food was too oily (said Hadil) or contained too much sugar (said Hassan) or tasted like supermarket chemicals (said several people). The ability to produce their own food was central to people feeling that they could autonomously retain their standards and cultural practices around food, and participation in the farming program facilitated this.

The interconnectedness of all of these material and emotional benefits is reflected in the spaces where physical and social environments are merged. Due to participants’ historical engagement with farming practices and self-identification as farmers, these material and emotional benefits occur in a space of memory, agency, and meaningful identity: a physical environment which, though different and new in many ways, provides a sense of familiarity for the participants.

**Counterpoint: “A Deep Hole”**

As a counterpoint to participants’ descriptions of their ability to participate in multi-faceted place-making activities in the refugee garden in Salt Lake, several interviewees alluded to or described in detail their prior experiences in refugee camps or transitional cities before coming to the United States. In describing these experiences, the participants employed language to describe the darkness and aridity of living temporarily in places where they were unable to work the land or produce their own food in ways to which they were accustomed.
In Agier’s analysis of the Dadaab camps in Kenya, he writes: “Day after day, a bit of life grows up on the soil of these strange towns planted in the midst of a bare and arid bush, scorched by the dry and dusty air of the burning winds” (2008, p. 53). Agier characterizes refugee camps as “the desert”—and of course many refugee camps in the world are located on arid, unproductive land (“Set down in a desert of stone or sand, in dry bush or other uninhabited or empty space, they are the very figure of a detestable liminality” [p. 62]), but Agier is also speaking metaphorically about the official precariousness of people’s limbo-like existence in refugee camps. Agier’s literal and metaphoric conception of the confinement period as a dry, dusty, arid, nonproductive space was relevant for all but one of my participants who chose to talk about their transitional confinement experiences. These participants spoke about the appeal of farming as a way to reclaim some of their pre-displacement connection to space and place, after moving through this liminal space of non-production, aridity, what Hassan called a “deep hole.”

Not all refugees spend time in refugee camps, and not all camps stay camps forever. Agier acknowledges this complexity when he writes, “Here and there hybrid and embryonic forms of social differentiation grow up. Attempted towns transform the space on which the camps are built; these gradually become places where a social and economic life is reinvented, with power relations that are non-existent elsewhere” (2008, p. 53). Some refugees spend transitional time in camps that are frozen in time and change little, while others enter and pass through enormous cities and small towns; some live in communities and tent cities of refugees, while others move alone or with their families and temporarily eke out a
living on the margins of another place where they might not stay for long. In my sample, people had all of these experiences. The majority of the interviewees in my study who had lived in refugee camps did not choose to speak in detail about their experiences there, and due to my methodological commitment to avoid triggering traumatic memories, I avoided asking for details if none were offered voluntarily. Most of the central African participants had lived in refugee camps in Tanzania, Rwanda, Cameroon, or more than one of these countries, but none of them elected to share details about that period of time.

The only participants who spoke at length about their experiences in a refugee camp were Norbu and her adult son Sonam. Their family was forced to leave Bhutan in 1993, and they spent 17 years living in a refugee camp in Nepal. Sonam was less than 5 years old when they arrived in Nepal, and he was able to study in nonprofit-run schools the entire time they lived in the camp. His parents' experience, though, was different; as Sonam explained, “They never let our parents go out and work and get money. We are provided with limited rations through World Food Program. And we are given that so we will not do any kind of illegal activities. So they just stayed at home.” When I asked Norbu to describe what that experience was like for her, she said (through Sonam's translation) that:

She was feeling so deplorable in camp. In Bhutan we used to have everything, we don’t have to buy things, we just farm and work, but when we came to camp we stay there for 17 years and we are provided with only the same kind of nutrients. They’re provided with the rations but it’s not enough for the family. And when we tried to have a kitchen garden by our tent, they didn’t let us have that [either].
Drawing from her lifelong agricultural experience in Bhutan, Norbu “liked to grow lettuce and things like that, but they didn’t let them do it.” When I asked why the camp administrators didn’t allow Norbu to cultivate a kitchen garden, she said she was told that “if people make a garden and something happens to the tent, like it comes up with a fire, there wouldn’t be any space to run. So they don’t let us do the garden.”

As Norbu described these experiences, it seemed that her inability to provide healthy food for her family caused her great physical and emotional distress. In a physical sense, she said that the limited diet of small amounts of lentils, rice, vegetables, sugar, oil and enriched flour, cooked over health-harming charcoal fires inside their tent contributed to many health problems amongst her family and the other community members:

Yeah, everything we are having right now, the refugees, they are suffering from asthma and other health issues, and some died from lung problems. And they started showing the mental stresses from the same kind of diet, no variety in the diet. And if we tell them, no one would listen to us... So people did immense agitation to get better food and stuff, but it never happened and we just kept getting the same diet forever.

Her description of the experiences also contained a sense of the emotional cost of moving from total food self-sufficiency in Bhutan into an environment where she was barred from even attempting to use her skills to provide for her family. Her sense of autonomy was harmed, and her identity as an industrious and skilled farmer was threatened.

One other group of interviewees also voluntarily provided details about the liminal period that Agier terms confinement: the group of Sudanese participants all
spoke at some length about their experiences after leaving Darfur and before coming to the United States. Their experiences demonstrate the wide range of experiences that may be considered transitional confinement—none of them lived in refugee camps, and all of them traveled independently to Cairo to flee violence in the Darfur region. Their experiences in Cairo, despite not passing through camps, epitomize the “bare life” lived by the world’s most marginalized people, to borrow a term from philosopher Giorgio Agamben; “Denied access to legal, economic and political redress, these lives exist in a limbo-like state that is largely preoccupied with acquiring and sustaining the essentials of life” (Downey, 2009, p. 109).

The Sudanese interviewees all described violent and frightening experiences they had as refugees in Cairo, ranging from police harassment and brutality to street violence against Sudanese refugees: as Sidiiq said, “You know, the police attack you for nothing there. And citizens, you go in the street, attack me for nothing. You don’t do nothing... Many people die in Egypt, for nothing.” One man in my sample was imprisoned in Cairo for over a year, and in his accounting his life in Cairo was very terrible. And government, you can’t do nothing. Like somebody, you go in the street, they touch you, and then also hit you, and you don’t have anything, they take it. And when you go to police to tell them what’s going on, [saying] ’I lost my ID, I lost my everything,’ then the police hit you and push you and maybe put you in jail and say, ‘Well, why you come in this country?’

In addition to the physical and mental danger the interviewees described, all the Sudanese participants also described a distaste for the urban environment of Cairo. Hassan’s daughter translated for him during our interview, saying “He missed the moon, the sun, the space. He said it was living in a deep hole. He said he only
bought the vegetables from the store and he never saw the vegetables growing.” All
the Sudanese interviewees said it was impossible to access land to grow their own
food, as they were accustomed to doing, after arriving in Cairo. They did not feel
that the harsh urban landscape fulfilled their physical or emotional needs. “He said
it’s a small country,” Hassan’s daughter translated, “all people lived in tall buildings
and the apartments were in tall building, so that’s why he didn’t like it... He said the
streets are really small... And there is no sun in Egypt.”

Amongst the participants in my study, only one had the ability to continue
agrarian work during his period of transitional confinement—and his experiences
were so different than the other members of the sample that transitional
confinement may not be an accurate categorization for this period of time. Serge
was raised in a farming family in the Republic of Congo, and he went on to earn a
bachelor’s degree in agriculture and work for a large sugarcane plantation. He had
begun plans to start his own vegetable farm when the civil war started and he was
“obliged” to move to Gabon. There, he said, “we were refugees in town, not in a
camp. You should pay your rent and work to get money for to survive. And I try to
get the land and I produce some vegetables there too.” Serge spent 10 years in
Gabon, and during that time he was able to obtain access to some land and raise
vegetables—onions, zucchini, morelle and other African vegetables—and sell the
produce to oil companies in the region.

In all, about half of the interviewees mentioned their inability to produce
their own food as a source of frustration during the period of confinement in refugee
camps or on their own in urban areas. The reasons that refugees are unable to farm
during periods of transitional confinement are widely varied; for urban refugees perhaps there is simply no land available. For camp-dwelling refugees, the country in which they are living may have laws prohibiting camp cultivation outside of refugee camps (Tsadik, 2009), or the camps themselves may have such policies, or the host country may prohibit refugees from working and earning money (Duff-Brown, 2013), or the land may be infertile or difficult to work. With awareness of these barriers, though, this research suggests that mindful policies around kitchen gardens and small-scale food production in refugee camps may be helpful not only with food security and nutrition, but also with the general sense of well-being, identity, and community of the refugees.

Conclusion

After his time in Cairo, missing “the moon, the sun, the space,” Hassan said he was happy to arrive in Utah and see wide-open landscapes that reminded him of home and were not too heavily populated: “He said there is lots of land here—it’s like Sudan, so he liked it.” He then talked about his love for farming and animals, and the importance of staying busy and not being home too much. In his and other participants’ accounts, their sense of place in Utah seemed to have been developed over time and through laboring with their hands in the soil. My conversations with participants revealed the inextricability of the social and environmental components of the garden: the interplay between making a landscape familiar by working in it and embracing or at least being amused by the differences encapsulated in the new social landscape. The stories collected from this project
suggest the untangleability, for this group of refugees, of their social and ecological lives, and suggest the ways in which the ability to participate in agented processes of place-making, agriculture specifically, enhances their sense of place-belongingness and their ability to autonomously accept or resist certain elements of the culture in which they have arrived.
Field Journal, 5 June: I got to the garden early this morning—no one else was there yet—and I sat in the silence for a while drinking my nettle infusion. (I heard it could help with my allergies.) The garden uninhabited still feels habited. There is a global sort of presence, facilitated I think by the hand-painted colorful signs and the stakes made of curling knotted branches. There are a lot of bees now. They buzz about like they own the place. I sit in the shade conscious that I don’t.

Figure 3. Sonam’s photo of the refugee community garden.

Any group of refugees represents a site of interacting cultures. As refugees interact with one another and with the members of their host community, all participants of the interaction are exchanging information and influencing one another (though not generally in a power-equal manner). One scholarly concept
that is useful for framing and interpreting these weighty crosscultural and transcultural exchanges is the notion of hybridity. Cultural hybridity is generally understood as the product or result of the fusion of two or more cultures (Shurmer-Smith, 2002), but as an object of debate amongst postcolonial theorists, hybridity also reveals the spaces across and between cultures, the accommodations and assimilations and resistances that characterize transcultural communications, and the role that power plays in the reflexes and negotiations that undergird processes of hybridization.

The present research project is emplaced in a constellation of interrelated community spaces connected to an urban farm for refugees in Salt Lake City, Utah, pictured in Figure 3. The farm itself represents a hybrid landscape of interacting cultures, comprised of people from many different countries who share the identity of “refugee” and of mostly-American staff and volunteers. The farm is in some ways a heterogeneous landscape populated by representatives of varying global cultures, but it also represents a complicated site of cultural exchange and transformation, assimilation, hybridity and resistance. Using qualitative methodologies and descriptive analysis, this research seeks to visualize and examine the types, forms, and landscapes of hybridity that result from the urban farming activities of the refugees. My research question is: In what ways is cultural hybridity present amongst refugees in this urban farming program? To respond to this question, in this paper I will look at the ways in which this refugee garden can be read as layered hybrid landscapes, reflecting the complex dimensions of cultural and ecological hybridity from diversity to assimilation.
The selection of a farm/garden as the site of analysis reflects this research’s emphasis on the spatiality of hybridity. Much of the literature on hybridity utilizes aspatial language, but this research seeks to consider hybridity as being embedded in specificities of space and place. This paper will situate its analysis in the fruitful connections between nature and culture (rather than separating them and discursively alienating them from one another), emphasizing that physical environments and social contexts are intertwined. The urban farm itself as a site of analysis reflects a collaboration, even a hybridity, between nature and culture. A landscape is a collaboration between nature and culture. A garden (agri/culture) is a hybrid of nature and culture. Landscapes reveal hybridity, and people enact their social hybridities on the landscapes they occupy and utilize.

Through my observations, interviews, and the photovoicees of my participants, I have identified three types of hybrid landscapes that coexisted in my research site: a hybrid cultural landscape, a hybrid garden landscape, and a hybrid landscape of power and knowledge. All of these types of landscapes encompassed sensory and symbolic forms of hybridity, and they overlapped and continually complexified one another. The concept of hybridity enables an examination of the complex presences of assimilations and differences in these landscapes, of their physical and sensory elements as well as the symbolisms represented therein. In this paper, I will first address relevant literatures relating to cultural hybridity, place, and landscape. I will then discuss the three types of hybrid landscapes that I identified in the garden space, using words and photographs from my participants to convey their perspectives and experiences as well as to support my analysis.
“Refugee” as a social category is a constructed identity. A group of refugees may represent entirely different backgrounds, nationalities, races, ethnicities, languages, gender expressions, etc., but the totality of their widely diverging experiences are, by the label, compressed into a single identity-defining word. The word refugee represents a person who has been displaced from their homeland and a person who exists on the margins of a society different from the one they were born into. There is a paradox at the heart of using the word refugee as a category, because of the simultaneous heterogeneity and homogeneity that the term engenders:

The population is a heterogeneous one: in terms of the particular conditions of its exodus, its wait in the camps or on the edges of towns, as likewise in terms of the legal status of the displaced person, refugee, or illegal immigrant. Equally heterogeneous are the causes of the warfare and violence at the origin of these departures, as well as the nationalities, ethnic and religious groups involved. Yet a more essential unity constitutes this population as a world apart, and one that is relatively unified: an identity of existence that is unforeseen, unnameable, and on the margins of common humanity. (Agier, 2008, p. 73)

To approach the meaning of refugee as category requires holding onto this paradox and resisting the tendency to oversimplify refugee identity.

The word refugee as it is commonly used suggests a melting pot in which individuals’ cultural backgrounds and differences give way to the displacement process. In reality, though, refugees’ choices and negotiations are far more complicated than a melting into homogeneity, as the previous paper on place-making discussed. “Refugee” is sometimes treated as a static essentializing
category, and even if one takes the leap to understand that refugee is actually a heterogeneous identity representing people from many different groups, then the person’s prior identity may still be essentialized and subject to assumptions about who the Burmese are, or Somalis or Cubans, when in reality each of these cultures are also results of intermixings and cultural exchanges (and the individuals who occupy the cultures even more so). The truth is, some might argue, it’s hybridity all the way down.

The word *hybridity* has a complicated and colonial history, and continues, despite much debate, to carry a certain ambiguity. It is precisely because of this ambiguity that it is a fitting framework for analyzing the complexities and manifestations of cross-cultural, intercultural and transcultural interactions. It is also a useful framework for this research project because it may be used to represent both sensory and symbolic forms of hybrid presences. To ground the descriptions and depictions of the landscapes analyzed for this research project, I will first review relevant literature on hybridity, the role of space and place in viewing landscapes of hybridity, and finally a section on movement, refugeeism, and power that specifies how this literature is relevant to this sample population.

**Hybridity**

In its most basic sense, the word *hybridity* refers to a mixture. The term was initially used in Latin to describe the offspring of “a tame sow and a wild boar” (Young, 1995, p. 6) and has since become a concept used to describe everything from “designer agricultural seeds” to “multipurpose electronic gadgets” to
“multiracial people, dual citizens, and postcolonial cultures” (Kraidy, 2005, p. 1). In social/theoretical literature on hybridity, however, the term is typically used in reference to cultural interactions and exchanges; Papastergiadis defines hybridity as “the assemblage that occurs whenever two or more elements meet, and the initiation of a process of change (2000, p. 170). Peter Burke identifies three main types of hybridity or hybridization processes: “artefacts, practices, and people.” According to Burke, artefacts reveal historical hybridization processes through architecture, art, images, texts, and so on. Hybrid practices may be “identified in religion, music, language, sports, festivals and other cultural domains” (2009, p. 21). Finally, when Burke refers to “hybrid people” he is talking about groups of people (for example, Anglo-Irish or African-American groups) and he is also talking about “hybrid individuals” who spend their lives navigating multiple cultures and the spaces in between cultures.

From its early roots in the Western biological sciences, the term hybridity has gained traction in a number of other disciplines, and the meaning and implications of the term have been contested. Cultural geographer Shurmer-Smith defines hybridity simply as that which is produced by the fusion of at least two cultures (2002), but even this definition reveals a host of embedded questions: What kind of fusion, how thorough, and controlled by whom? How are the cultures defined and delineated in the first place? Young opens the field for these questions even more by observing that “Culture never stands alone but always participates in a conflictual economy, acting out the tension between sameness and difference, comparison and differentiation, cohesion and dispersion, containment and
subversion” (1995, p. 6). If the theory of hybridity must contain all of these tensions—and, to theorize something so complicated, it must—then the conversation around all these apparent binaries and their respective middle grounds must be broad.

Postcolonial theorists in particular have tackled the task of debating the nuances of hybridity both as a theoretical term and as a practice, but these conversations have led mostly to a sense of the complexity of the term. Kraidy calls the term hybridity “maddeningly elastic” (2005, p. 3), and Tomlinson writes that “The idea of cultural hybridization is one of those deceptively simple-seeming notions which turns out, on examination, to have lots of tricky connotations and theoretical implications” (1999, p. 182). Though technically a hybrid is a “cross between two different species” and evokes the “vocabulary of the Victorian extreme right” that viewed different races as being different species (Young, 1995, p. 10), in postcolonial theory “hybridity is meant to evoke all those ways in which this vocabulary was challenged and undermined” (Loomba, 1998, p. 173).

This distinction allows theorists to approach a historical perspective that reveals the ways that colonial discourses and practices designed to “civilize” its Others and bring them into a common performance of “civilization” have actually been co-opted by power-resistant hybrid cultures and peoples. The Cuban writer Roberto Fernández Retamar, for instance, wrote about the ways that “the independistas, white and black, adopted with honor something that colonialism meant as an insult” (1974, p. 27)... “and so many of their conceptual tools...are also now our conceptual tools” (p. 11). This complex history of the term hybridity—
which encompasses everything from the racist civilizing discourse of colonialism to anti-colonial practices of resistance and appropriation—contribute to the slipperiness of the term itself, and to the ongoing debates about its meaning.

Homi Bhabha, for example, celebrates hybridity as a locus of resistance by colonized peoples. He interprets hybridity as a space in which the colonized can contaminate imperial ideas and strike back at the heart of empire, a “third space” in which subversive practices of resistance can occur (1994). Other theorists are more ambivalent. Edward Said, for example, is one of the most important postcolonial scholars and his perspective seems to have changed somewhat over time. Said’s early analysis in Orientalism (1978) contains a “portrayal of an unbridgeable gap between West and East” (Kraidy, 2005, p. 59) whereas Said’s later work states persistently that “all cultures are involved in one another, none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic” (Said, 1994, p. xxv). Said and other postcolonial theorists, including notably Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, maintain that these inter-cultural involvements and entanglements exist in colonial histories and modern geopolitical power structures, and analysis of hybridity must be situated in an analysis of power and domination in order to be productively descriptive.

**Space/Place and Landscapes**

Some postcolonial theorists have been critiqued for being too universalizing in their descriptions of the processes of hybridization. This critique is important, as it acknowledges the complexity and situatedness of hybridizing interactions
between people and groups. Grasping the meaning of hybridity requires a narrow lens and attention to specificity; as Massey writes, "That cosmology of ‘only one narrative’ obliterates the multiplicities, the contemporaneous heterogeneities of space" (2005, p. 5). Ella Shohat notes how important it is that we “discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity, for example forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political co-optation social conformism, cultural mimicry and creative transcendence” (1993, p. 110). These discriminations stop us from resting in essentialized narratives about what hybridity is and who chooses it.

After all, for postcolonial theorists, hybridity refers to blending but also persistently reveals the places that do not blend; hybridity is not a smooth and simple fusion, but a process of change and resistance and power, push, pull. Burke summarizes four categories of responses in contact zones (2009, p. 79): acceptance of the new cultural system or idea, rejection of it (“defending the cultural frontiers against invasion” via resistance or purification [p. 82]), segregation (drawing lines within the home culture itself), and adaptation (“borrowing piecemeal in order to incorporate the pieces into a traditional structure” [p. 93]). In other words, there are many processes by which hybridization can occur, and different ways in which individuals and groups exercise their agency, and the conditions and terms of these interactions are not equal.

Moreover, the spaces in which these interactions occur are not the same. Mary Louise Pratt coined the term “contact zone” to refer to “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (1992, p. 31). Her work
also acknowledges the spatiality of these interactions in a way that some of the literature on hybridity does not. In fact, as Doreen Massey notes, much of the literature takes a remarkably aspatial tone in its analysis (2005). But geography can add an important element to the analysis of processes of hybridization: where encounters take place—not only social spaces, but physical ones, too, and the constructed places that are created from the interactions between physical and social spaces—and what it means for encounters to take place in place. All contact zones, after all, are not equivalent, and will not impact processes of hybridization in the same way.

In Massey’s 2005 book For Space, she issues a call for a relational understanding of space, in reaction to common aspatial renderings of globalized processes. Her theorization of the meaning of space in globalization is based on three central propositions: first, “that we recognize space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions;” second, “that we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality,” and third, “that we recognize space as always under construction...always in the process of being made” (p. 9). Thinking of hybridity as a process that occurs in particular spaces, and perhaps as a concept that is co-constituted with those spaces, allows for a spatial turn in analysis of hybridity that apprehends its fundamental embeddedness. “It is never finished,” Massey writes of space, “it is never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far” (p. 9).
In order to emphasize the spatiality of processes of hybridization, this research project uses the concept of *hybrid landscapes* as fundamental to the analysis. A *landscape* may be defined as “the appearance of an area, the assemblage of objects used to produce that appearance, and the area itself” (Johnston, Gregory, Pratts & Watts, 2000, p. 429). To this definition, della Dora adds that “In English, the term applies equally to physical locations and to graphic and textual images; in other words, both to the land and to the way we perceive and represent the land; both to a thing and to ‘a way of seeing’” (2013, p. 688). Traditionally the word landscape has usually been colloquially used to describe the visible characteristics of the land—for example, traditional landscape art typically depicts “natural” scenery viewed from a distance, with a frame that takes in the merging of multiple elements of the scenery. However, “landscape is a broader concept than land in that it encompasses much more than the earth’s surface” (Murray, 2011, p. 84). Over time the term has come to contain a sense of the impact that humans have on their environment, and has also come to be used in a more metaphoric way (e.g., when referring to social landscapes).

della Dora notes that the traditional conception of a landscape “...implies distancing, and distancing in turn enables conceptual mastering of the environment” (2013, p. 688). Some theorists have connected linear perspectives, codified in traditional views of landscapes, as characteristics of and even metaphors for modernity (see Elkins, 1994) and for masculinist claims to dominance and objectivity (see Rose, 1993). Geographers have noted that the traditional view of landscapes is that they are objective, perceivable “absolute space,” and have then
critiqued this notion, emphasizing instead the subjective, constructed nature of landscapes and the interpretations of landscapes, noting that landscapes are “created by people – through their experience and engagement with the world around them” (Bender 1993, p. 1). In other words, Murray writes, “A landscape is a phenomenon that a particular person perceives and experiences and it includes, but is not necessarily limited to, the surface of the land, what lies beneath and above the land, as well as the memories, dreams and imagination that are centred on that place” (2011, p. 84). A landscape is, in important ways, in the eye of the beholder.

But landscapes are not purely, benignly subjective in an individualized way; landscapes are also maps of power. Rose writes that “a landscape’s meanings draw on the cultural codes of the society for which it was made” and that “these codes are embedded in social power structures,” and that moreover the representation of landscapes “helps to order society into hierarchical class relations” (1993, p. 89). Rose notes how traditional Western landscape paintings, particularly those which foreground images of landowners surveying their land, visualize, codify and celebrate the ownership of the land within the paradigm that separates owning the land from working on it. Landscapes may or may not be visible, but they are always inscribed with meaning by the individual “reading” the landscape as well as the power structures that have etched their significances onto the visible (Riaño-Alcalá, 2008). For researchers interested in making explicit the juxtapositions and inextricability of nature and culture, humans and environment, landscape is a useful term that brings together the physical and the symbolic while acknowledging the constructed, power-laden nature of the landscape.
In the current paper, the term landscape will be used to refer to precisely this insistence on the mergedness of nature and culture. As the term is used here, landscapes are spatial, physical and approachable with the senses, but they also contain the symbolism that is projected onto them. Landscapes are traditionally understood as what is seen when an observer takes a step back and looks from a distance, but modern geographic perspectives on landscape often subvert this sense of distance and instead allow for a narrowing of the lens to perceive what exists up close (see della Dora, 2013). Using landscapes as a descriptive frame also enables us to acknowledge the bidirectional relationship between people and their environments when it comes to hybridization, given that "...processes of hybridization occur within particular locations, and as they take place so they have a transformative impact on their locale" (Woods, 2007, p. 497). Landscapes reveal the complicatedness of the concept of hybridity; people may share space but they do not do so equally.

Burke gives an example of the visibility of a hybrid landscape (without using the term) in "large polyglot and multiethnic cities": “Viewed at close quarters,” he writes, “these cities often resemble cultural mosaics, composed of very different pieces” (2009, p. 92). In other words the visual-spatial aspects of the landscape reveal an underlying mixing of cultures; the landscape represents a contact zone with all its complicated dynamics batting up against each other in a visually-apprehendable way. This sensory-symbolic approach to understanding hybridity in its physical-spatial environment is not well-represented in the literature of refugee studies. It would ask questions like: In a landscape populated mostly with refugees,
what does this hybridity look like, sound like, smell like? In the landscapes of the dominant culture, how are refugees visible and how are they rendered invisible?

What does it feel like and what does it mean to be transposed from one landscape to another, unfamiliar one? Monzel notes that in refugee studies, “surprisingly few [writings] have been concerned with how it feels to be a refugee” (1993, p. 118); accessing the subjective emotions and sensory impressions of refugees should, though, be part of understanding the literal and symbolic landscapes in which they exist.

Movement, Refugeeism and Power

The concept of hybridity is useful for analyzing migration and movement, in which "increasing volumes of people move from one place to another, create new cultural and sociodemographic spaces and are themselves reshaped in the process" (Luke, 2003, p. 379). After all, migrants have intimate contact with multiple cultures and as a result develop what W.E.B. DuBois famously called “double consciousness”—“this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (1897). (Said took this idea further, suggesting that “the essential privilege of exile is to have, not just one set of eyes but half a dozen, each of them corresponding to the places you have been” [1988, p. 48].) Burke argues that “pluralism encourages the process of hybridization;” as a metaphor for this process he adapts

…the linguists’ concept of ‘code-switching,’ describing bilingual people shifting between one language and another in different situations. However, linguists also note a process that they describe as ‘interference’: bilinguals are generally unable to maintain a complete
separation or segregation between their two languages, which in practice often influence or contaminate each other. (2009, p. 70)

Cultural hybridity suggests that the borders of our cultures and identities are as porous as the borders of our language.

In the process of motion and exchange, physical borders are made both visible and transparent, and cultural borders are weakened and shifted (despite attempts by some, particularly in the Global North, to reinforce both the physical and cultural borders). Ang notes that in “a world in which the complicated entanglement or togetherness in difference has become the rule rather than the exception” (2003, p. 153), hybridity is a tool for describing “the very condition of in-betweenness” (p. 149). The “third space” that Bhabha describes as “the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space...that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (1994, p. 38) is a space that is experienced by different people in different ways. Any analysis of cultural hybridity is incomplete without attention to the role that power and privilege play in shaping the literal and metaphorical spaces that people are allowed to occupy on both sides (and in the midst of) a border, especially given that “borders breed uneven geographies of power and status” (Hyndman, 2000, p. 1). Kraidy emphasizes that “hybridity is thus construed... as a zone of symbolic ferment where power relations are surreptitiously re-inscribed” (2005 p. 460).

Gloria Anzaldúa aptly referred to these power dynamics in the lives of individuals who live in these complex spaces between and bridging cultures as occupying “borderlands” or “la frontera,” explaining:
Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. (1987, p. 25)

Anzaldúa’s work makes it clear that borderlands are not power vacuums; in fact they are sometimes constructed by and for power, and a border can be “una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (p. 25). The concept of borderlands is an important counterpoint to the rhetoric of hybridity that has sometimes been interpreted as a smooth fusion, for though cultural exchanges have often been subtle, they have not always been smooth and they have perhaps never been complete.

The experience of refugees can offer key insights into the process and nature of hybridity, as their experiences of movement are related to those of other migrants but also distinct from them, and always varied from one another. Early work in refugee studies tended to essentialize the experiences of refugees by essentializing not only their identity as a refugee but also their relationships to their homeland (see Brun, 2001). More recent work by scholars of refugeeism has celebrated the nomadic character of the Exile and highlighted the potential of statelessness to resist global hegemonic power structures (see; Bhabha, 1994; Hyndman, 2000; Soysal, 1995). More recently Sajed (2010) ”points to how class, race and language structure various experiences of mobility and citizenship and make tenuous easy celebrations of postcolonial hybridity within critical re-configurations of citizenship” (p. 363); she reminds those who write about refugees to “exercise a sense of caution in conceptualizing the fragile and unstable condition of the
migrant... to distinguish between various experiences of mobility, hybridity, and citizenship” (p. 363). Hybridity theory enables us to approach the experiences of refugees bearing this paradox in mind—the central paradox of existing in a state of hybridity that represents both acceptance and rejection, both assimilation and resistance, every day.

Hybridity is, admittedly, a controversial and ambiguous term. In some ways it is precisely because of this ambiguity that I choose to use it as a framework for this paper. Cultural exchange, adaptation and resistance is not a neat, trim, unilateral process; it is not like splicing genes or breeding two different species and calling the outcome a hybrid. Instead, the theory of cultural hybridity is messy, power-laden, and always subject to interpretation—which makes it a fitting framework for the messy, power-laden, interpretable social and cultural phenomena that it seeks to describe. García-Canclini (1995) refers to the “oblique power” of the notion of hybridity, and Noh argues that “hybridity empowers a marginalized view and encourages multilateral global flows,” or that hybridity is a tool that can be used by the subaltern to “speak back” to the powerful (2007, p. 3). By using specific sensory landscapes to interpret and describe the condition of hybridity in a refugee population, and by analyzing the ways that hybridity is enacted upon the landscape in both social and environmental ways, this research seeks to provide a portrait of emplaced hybridity with its self-contradictory character intact.
Methods

For this project, I recruited participants from an urban farming program for refugees in Salt Lake City, Utah, where I also worked as a volunteer for the duration of the project. New Roots of Utah, a collaboration between Salt Lake County and the International Rescue Committee, is a program that aims to increase access to fresh food for the local refugee population while also providing refugees from agrarian backgrounds with space and materials to grow food for personal use, and training for participation in local markets.

Sample Selection

After obtaining the necessary research permissions from the IRB, local New Roots staff, and national leadership of the International Rescue Committee, I began my project by attending training meetings with participants enrolled in the market farming program. I utilized a convenience sampling method, inviting all adult refugees who participated in the New Roots market farming program to participate in my research project. In the end 30 adults consented to my involvement as a participant observer of farm activities. I then moved on to more focused methods of data collection, including interviews and a photography project. In the interview phase of the research, I conducted 14 “kitchen visits”—in-home, semi-structured interviews—which involved 17 people from Burundi (7), Sudan (4), Bhutan (2), Chad (1), Democratic Republic of the Congo (1), the Republic of Congo (1), and Cuba (1).
Data Collection

For this qualitative research study, I utilized participant observation, semi-structured interviews (which I called “kitchen visits”) and a photovoice project to discuss issues of place-making and hybridity with my participants. I distributed a disposable camera to each person or family that hosted me for a kitchen visit, and asked them to create photographic research artifacts of their farming experiences. I encouraged the participants to take photographs in their constellations of interconnected community spaces related to farming: garden space, market space, kitchen and table. I distributed 14 cameras in total and was able to retrieve 10 of them at the conclusion of the project. (One camera was lost, one was used incorrectly, and two could not be located.)

The use of participants’ photovocies was especially important for the research component on hybridity; since I hoped to address the sensory nature of relevant hybrid landscapes in addition to their symbolic nature, being able to attempt to look through my participants’ eyes at their personal farming landscapes proved to be both conceptually and practically useful. The inclusion of photovocies was intended as a way to “[trace] methodological migrations from text to visual images” (Haaken & O’Neill, 2014, p. 80) and to provide a concrete way for participants to visually express the personal landscapes with which they are involved on a daily basis (Miller, 2006). Moreover, photovoice is a participatory tool of representation designed to increase the agency of research participants (Oh, 2012) as they explore contextual issues of power and marginalization (Duffy, 2011). The interpretations of these visual-spatial landscapes grow out of my own
experiences and perceptions, and represent just one way to read the landscapes depicted in the photographs.

**Data Analysis**

During the project I kept detailed field journals with my personal observations and information given to me by program staff and participants, then recorded and transcribed the interviews conducted at each kitchen visit. To analyze this recorded and written information, I coded thematically then combined thematic categories and re-coded them, selecting the themes and patterns that best answered my research questions. Additionally, I developed the photographs taken on each disposable camera and (with consent from all the participants) looked at the photographs alone before returning them to the participants.

My original plan was to hold a focus group after all the photographs had been retrieved and printed. At this focus group, I intended to facilitate an audio-taped group discussion about the contents of the photographs, intersubjectively analyzing the comparative contents of the photographs. Several of the research participants suggested that people would be more inclined to come to this group discussion if we held it after a potluck dinner and celebration at the garden site, so we planned accordingly. However, the day that the discussion was scheduled, there was a rainstorm and we were unable to hold the potluck or the focus group. This weather-induced cancellation resulted in significant limitations for the analysis in this paper. The group conversation was methodologically critical for elucidating the photovoice of the participants, but since I was unable to do so, it was necessary for
me to undertake the photovoice analysis on my own. This means that the
photovoces of the participants, as here represented, are being filtered through my
own perceptions and subjectivity.

I coded each photograph using descriptive labels to identify content and
perspective, then grouped the photographs into four main categories, which will be
discussed in the following section. I also made digital copies of approximately half
of the photographs, being careful not to alter the color or frames of the original
photographs, so that I could continue to refer to them after returning the original
hard copies to the participants. The image contained in Figure 4 is striking for the
way it draws the viewer into the frame: We as observers are viewing a photograph
of a person who is taking a photograph of the garden. As I coded and analyzed the
participants’ photographs, this particular image, which of all the photographs most
clearly represents my perspective as a researcher, became a touchstone for me,
reminding me of the levels through which visual information has been filtered and
my own locality in relation to the phenomena being documented.

This paper includes my analysis of the photographic renderings as well as
some of the photographs themselves in order that “drawing on visual as well as
writerly approaches can enable us to multiply the perspectives which we are able to
hold in focus at once” (Gidley, 2013, p. 374). In addition to reflecting a multivalent
approach to methodological representations of ideas, participant photography in
research also attempts “to bridge the oppressive divide between observer and
observed, the colonizer and the colonized” (Haaken & O’Neill, 2014, p. 82). Though
these power-destabilizing hopes were in me at the stage of methodological
photograph, my ultimate inability to engage the interpretations and explanations of
the photographers means that the interpretive power in this case belonged to me.
The findings in this paper will draw together quotes from interviewees and
information from my field journals as well as photographs taken by participants, in
order to read and discursively reconstruct the physical and symbolic landscapes of
hybridity of the refugees’ farming spaces.

**Photovoice Findings**

The 10 cameras I distributed yielded a total of 208 topical photographs. In
my analysis, I grouped the photographs into four main categories: 1) Photographs
that showed closeups of individual plants or rows in the garden, 2) Photographs taken from a distance showing the broader landscape of the garden space, 3) People engaged in farming activities such as planting, hoeing, weeding, harvesting, or washing or sorting produce, and 4) People cooking and eating food in their homes. Figures 5-8 provide examples of the photos I grouped into each category:

Figure 5. From Claire’s camera, an example of a photograph that shows closeups of individual plants or rows in the garden.
Figure 6. From Belyse's camera, an example of a photograph taken from a distance showing the broader landscape of the garden space.

Figure 7. From Serge's camera, an example of a photograph showing people engaged in farming activity.
Figure 8. From Nyanath and Hassan’s camera, an example of a photograph showing people cooking and eating in their home.

A breakdown of the content of all the photographs is contained in Table 2. As the table shows, the majority of the photographs taken by participants were focused on people at work. Over half of the photographs portrayed people engaged in farming tasks in the garden, and nearly one-quarter of them showed people cooking or eating in their own homes. Cumulatively, roughly 78% of the photographs contained people as the main subjects. This is interpretable as evidence that people visualize landscapes in different ways depending on the role they play in them. (Workers and agriculturalists, for instance, likely contact landscapes in very different ways than landowners and tourists.) The fact that so many of these photographs featured people at work seems to suggest that my participants’ hold a
Table 2

Photograph Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Closeups of plants</th>
<th>The garden landscape</th>
<th>People farming</th>
<th>People cooking &amp; eating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nadege</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Belyse</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Al</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sergeª</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyanath &amp; Hassan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonam</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>117</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ªSerge also took five photographs of his cars—the only non-topical photographs in the batch.

sense of peopled landscapes that depict the agri/cultural hybridization of nature and culture in the quotidian everyday.

There were a few notable consistencies in the photographs, related to the photographs’ representations of gender and nationality/ethnicity. In respect to the visibility of gender in the photographs, I noted that the photos of people working in the garden featured distributions of both women and men engaged in similar tasks side by side. However, in the photographs that featured people cooking and eating in their homes, the labor was being performed virtually exclusively by women.

There were no photographs of men engaged in food preparation tasks (though there were two photographs that did seem to suggest that a young boy was helping his
mother in the kitchen), and in fact several of the photographs showed men sitting in chairs watching as women cooked. The photographs of people eating depicted a fairly equal distribution of men and women. These results suggest an interesting topic for further research regarding changing gender roles in certain kinds of labor amongst refugees.

Roughly half of the participants who returned cameras were Burundian, and the photographs from these participants displayed a lack of cultural diversity in the photographs. Nearly all the people featured in the Burundian photographs were members of the Burundian community. The other participants (from Chad, Bhutan, Sudan and the Republic of Congo) submitted photographs that were in general less ethnically homogeneous, featuring refugees of other nationalities as well as American staff members and volunteers. This may be a result of the fact that the Burundian community I was working with is an extremely tight-knit and self-reliant community. It is also possible that there were other culturally-relevant factors at play as the Burundian participants made their photographic decisions; because of the rained-out focus group, I did not get a chance to ask. Nevertheless, from my perspective, the insularity of some of the photographs seems in some ways at odds with the celebration of cultural diversity that people expressed in our interviews. These results will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

**Hybrid Landscapes**

By using the term hybrid landscapes I root this analysis down into touchable places and pieces of land and also allow the sensory nature of hybridity to pervade
the analysis. I do not use the term landscape purely as a theoretical/analytical concept (as in “global landscape” or “diasporic landscape”; see, for example, Binaisa, 2013), but in the sense of topia, or “landscape-as-small-space” (della Dora, 2013, p. 689). Here, the landscapes are visible and sensorily accessible, often small enough that you can take in the entire landscape with an initial glance. The whole garden is visible with slow rotation of the neck; the farmstand fits on a sidewalk; kitchens are landscapes so intimate it is possible to touch everything in them by taking only a few steps. Nonetheless even these topias, as is the case with all landscapes, host a different view from up-close. In this section I will explore the physical objects/presences and symbolic contents of the overlapping hybrid cultural landscape, hybrid garden landscape, and hybrid landscape of power and knowledge in the spaces connected to this urban farm for refugees.

**Hybrid Cultural Landscape**

The first level at which hybrid cultural landscapes can be observed is the level of the senses. This kind of observation is explicitly subjective, since the only physical senses I can access are my own. On the first day of planting in the garden, I wrote this passage in my field journal:

> This morning I arrived at the garden near the community center on Redwood Road and encountered a spectrum of cultural difference: expressed visually by the many different colors of cloths worn by women working amongst the rows and furrows, expressed aurally by the cacophony of different languages being spoken. I found myself thinking about the sensory markers of heterogeneous and hybrid spaces, and about the way a common identity of refugee has been constructed out of racial, ethnic, national and linguistic variance.
In the weeks that followed I felt constantly aware of the ways that cultural
differences represented themselves visibly in the garden space. I heard different
languages spoken, and English spoken with different accents and different
vernaculars. I saw different kinds of clothing, especially amongst the women:
Brightly-colored cloths on heads and wrapped around waists, jewelry dripping from
wrists, here and there a long piece of cloth acting as a baby wrap securing a child to
a woman’s back or chest. I watch people placing their bodies into different postures
for labor. Some people always squatted while others leaned over from the waist;
some always kept their backs straight while some were rounded. When I stood
close to people, especially women, sometimes I could smell the varieties of cooking
spices that clung to their skirts.

These diversities made it clear that the garden space was a contact zone,
bringing many different cultures and ways of being into contact with one another,
but hybrid landscapes are revealed by both enduring diversity and evidence of
assimilation, and apparent assimilation was there, too. Teenagers and children were
always wearing prototypically American clothes as they translated for their parents,
for instance. English was the lingua franca of the garden, though it was spoken with
varying accents. Levels and types of hybridity were being constantly negotiated;
sometimes people crossed rows and furrows to speak with others in fragmented
English or makeshift sign language, and sometimes they stayed close to members of
their own national/ethnic communities, conversing in low tones and laughing
loudly. Figure 9, for instance, shows the corner of the garden that contains the
assigned rows of all the Burundian farmers. The garden is organized by program
experience levels, and in the case of the Burundians their plots are all located together, giving them more choice regarding whether to move out of their space and speak with farmers of other nationalities.

Later, I wrote this in my field journal:

*I feel overwhelmed when I try to think about how everyone in the garden is approaching their work, what they are bringing to it. Already the experience is cloaked in diversity: the colors, the cacophonous linguistic formulation, the culturally-shaped body language. Everyone is different. I pass the Burundian rows and their skirts seem to have caught and carried the scent of onions frying; I pass the Bhutanese rows and is that curry powder I smell? I compound the cultural diversity by the individuality of each person, and I see the spaces where I cannot even perceive the difference between diversity and hybridity.*

Throughout the research process I felt this continual tension between homogeneity and heterogeneity. In the garden, surrounded mostly by refugees, the use of
“refugee” as a category broke down quickly and was revealed to be a category convenient mostly for me as a member of the local “mainstream.” I can’t understand Burundian nor Bhutanese, but neither did the Burundians understand Bhutanese, nor the Bhutanese Burundian. I observed but often felt I didn’t understand the spaces in which the varying cultures were encountering one another, accepting or rejecting.

As I asked questions about cultural exchange and hybridity during the kitchen visits, the central heterogeneous/homogeneous paradox of being a refugee remained intact. People described the difficulties in communication that constantly arose in the multi-cultural, multi-lingual garden, but simultaneously described a sense of comfort and identity derived from being amongst other refugees. In this section on hybrid cultural landscapes I’ll offer some examples of interviewees’ perspectives on both communication and the sense of community derived from the garden, both of which indicate the spaces of diversity and hybridity that composed the cultural landscape of the garden.

**Communication.** During my kitchen visits, my interview question about multiculturalism was the one most likely to elicit an enthusiastic response from my participants. People often seemed to enjoy talking about their pasts and their interests and knowledge, but when I asked what it is like to work with people from all different countries in the garden, the person I was interviewing almost always laughed and was eager to discuss this point. Some recounted humorous anecdotes of misunderstandings that had resulted from cultural and language misunderstandings, but people’s answers also pointed to real difficulties. Nyanath,
for example, said through her translator that “the problem is the language. They don’t know each other and sometimes they want to know how to [do something]—like, it’s different from country to country, how they grow, how they harvest. But the problem is they don’t know the language, and they don’t even know some of the vegetable names.” When I asked if she found that frustrating, “She said it’s okay. Sometimes she goes to talk to them, but they speak little bit of English and she does too, so they know how to make… If they don’t have any words, someone can help them.”

Eric displayed a similar optimism; after noting through a translator that “There’s a difficult thing when we try to communicate—some are speaking French, Swahili, Kirundi, English, so there’s a combination of languages there,” he also emphasized that “We have a common thing, we all grow food there... Even if we’re not speaking the same language, we all breathe there. So we feel we are all the same.” In fact, in every interview, communication difficulties were mentioned but quickly downplayed as interviewees described a sense of having a common language with their fellow farmers. Nadege said, “Farming is the same language. You learn one word, tomato, then have new things to show. Or you just use signs and then you get to the same [idea]. Sometimes if we cannot communicate, sometimes if there is someone there to interpret then we can understand each other. But if there is no one, then we sign.” This necessary use of multi-faceted communication methods—like hybridizing English with other languages and utilizing expressive body language—was mentioned by most of the participants.
Ultimately some of the respondents felt that the farming actually facilitated their communication. Belyse explained that “Sometimes we pick some different words and teach each other,” and her husband Abel agreed that “It’s the best way to learn, the best way you can gain more language skills.” Abel went on to say that he has learned words in the garden that he has been able to use later in public, for instance in the grocery store. The visual and aural landscape of the garden enhanced the participants’ comments. Multiple languages, as well as differently- accented English and makeshift sign languages, were a constant feature of the landscape. I could listen closely and hear sounds that represented both diversity—many languages being spoken—and integration—English being learned and used. I frequently heard people using new (to them) languages as people from different linguistic and ethnic groups worked together, as in the photograph in Figure 10. The role of translation in the process of hybridization was a persistent presence.

**Community.** Even with the matter-of-fact acknowledgements of the ever-present language and cultural differences amongst the refugee farmers, some of the interviewees also noted that they found it easier to communicate with people at the farm than out in the community. Eric said “I think at the farm it’s much easier. Because...we are there for the same reason. But in public the people are in different ways. There’s nothing that we can use to be on the same page. Over there, we have farming in common so it’s much better.” Every person that I interviewed told me they had a sense of community at the garden. Norbu described the bond she felt with other people who were outsiders that didn’t speak English, as she didn’t, when
she would go to the farm and “see everybody and people who speak the same
language and other languages and feel like it’s not only me-- there are a lot of other
people who don’t speak English and they are still doing fine with it. And that might
help [her] to lessen [her] stress.”

Al described the importance for him of having a place to go and meet people,
so that he wouldn’t be stuck at home all the time after work. He explained in English
that in Africa, he was accustomed to going out every night to “visit people and you
talk about everyday life, [asking] what do you need to do, what’s wrong, what’s
going on in the town today?” But in the United States, he said,

you go to the car, go to work, come back home, stay home, and
then...that’s it. (laughter)... More time alone, less time with others. So
at the garden, we go and we meet different communities. So we have
time to share our culture, our life, say oh what you plant here? What
you plant here? What’s this, how you eat it, how you make it? So
that’s how we share. I like that... I found Nepalese, Burundi, Sudanese
and I like it.
Despite any communication difficulties, the opportunity to form connections and a sense of community with other refugees was important to Al, and many of the other respondents as well. In fact, aside from casually noting the communication difficulties, nobody complained of having problems with any of the other refugee farmers. This sense of diverse community was not very well-represented visually in the photographs farmers submitted to me, of which the majority featured members of shared ethnic groups. However, from my field observations, the landscape of the garden often contained people from different countries working together and asking one another questions.

In addition to describing their hybridizing interactions with other refugees in the garden space, participants also described certain processes of hybridization with the dominant communities in Utah—and again, this hybridization contained both acceptance and rejection. The area in which the refugees I interviewed most resisted hybridization with dominant American culture was food. With the exception of Nadege—who had many children with strong Americanized food preferences—everyone I interviewed said they still ate mostly the same food as they used to. Hadil said that American food has too much oil, Hassan cited excessive sugar, and a number of participants complained about the difficulty in finding truly fresh, organic food in the United States. One hundred percent of the photographs that depicted the preparation and eating of food had an emphasis on traditional
food cultures, as in Figure 11 that depicts the trimming of greens to be cooked, making these images symbolic of cultural resistance. When I discussed the preparation of greens with Claire and told her that I usually make smoothies with fruit and greens, she was quite surprised but she laughed and explained that she prefers her greens cooked in her traditional way, not raw and certainly not blended.

**Hybrid Garden Landscape**

The research participants’ photographs revealed a sense of landscape that revealed its hybridity and separations through its peopledness, with the majority of the images focused on people. However, the garden space itself and the crops growing in it also revealed a landscape of hybridity—complete with both integration and resistance—in several ways, most notably in the crops that were
planted there and the ways in which people used the crops. This section will consider each of these concepts.

**Crops.** The participants in my kitchen visits and photography project were all participants in the market farming program with New Roots, meaning they were receiving supplies and training from the program staff as well as assistance from volunteers. Their participation in this program fundamentally marked their farming experiences; as participants, they were instructed to use specific farming methods to ensure high crop yields on small amounts of space. In addition, farmers were told which crops to plant and in what quantity in their allotted market beds, as displayed in Figure 12 which depicts a full row of the same crop destined for market. (The tension that sometimes resulted from this power dynamic in controlling crop distribution will be discussed in the next section.)

Each market farmer was allotted two types of beds: Market beds (to be planted with crops selected by program staff) and family beds (in which the farmers were allowed to plant crops of their choosing). In market beds, farmers grew the crops they were assigned, which were selected by program staff based on market demand. To an extent these market beds still represent a type of diversity, though a managed diversity; because New Roots markets their produce to immigrants, ethnic markets and downtown restaurants, they tap into a demand for certain ethnic crops. Therefore crops like amaranth and roselle, which would be unfamiliar to the average American, featured prominently in the market bed plans drawn up by staff members and implemented by farmers. In fact, in their collaborations with New
Figure 12. Al’s photograph of some of his market beds. Each market bed contains a different crop, assigned by program staff.

Roots, some local restaurants have been able to introduce new vegetables and styles of cooking to their patrons, revealing the bidirectionality of processes of hybridization. Though much discourse about refugees emphasizes their gradual assimilation into host communities, hybrid theory provides a reminder that contact zones always involve bidirectional hybridization, or that each community influences the other. Even in the case of refugees, who are in many ways marginalized in their new communities, this case study provides an example of the ways that refugees’ integration also has impacts on the host community.

The crops that families chose to plant in their personal beds varied based on their countries of origin and presented a clearer picture of diversity since in the
family garden plots, people could grow what their family liked best without attending to market needs. Al, for instance, said that he grows green roselle in his family beds because his family prefers it, but his market beds contain red roselle because it sells better. Some of the crops being commonly planted in family beds were potatoes, tomatoes, varieties of spinach, okra, and eggplant. Hadil and Serge were growing some heirloom crops with seeds they purchased from Africa, and they had even begun selling these seeds to New Roots to incorporate into the market plans. Some of the people I interviewed were also growing crops independently; Eric showed me his backyard garden (which he said used to be larger before he started working with New Roots) and Serge gestured to the spinach vines climbing up his kitchen walls as we talked.

One area in which difference and hybridization revealed themselves was in the harvesting of crops. Hadil and other interviewees told me that in their home countries, they let the beans and peas grow for much longer, until they are “old and hard.” Figure 13 depicts a farmer harvesting starchy mature peas from the vine; because the starchy peas were not deemed desirable for market, the farmers were allowed to take home as many as they wanted. In African countries, in particular, participants reported that they tend to let the crops grow until they dry and become extra-starchy, because they are easier to store that way. Local cooking methods are adapted to the dry, starchy version. Plus, by storing them, you can get a lot more money when you sell them during a season in which they are not readily available. During the training session, program staff trained the farmers to harvest the vegetables much younger than seemed normal to many of them, and explained that
we have more readily-available methods (e.g., refrigeration) to store vegetables harvested young. When harvest time actually came, farmers had little choice in when they harvested the vegetables; making money required them to adapt their harvesting methods to local norms.

**Uses.** In our kitchen visit, Al described an encounter he had with Nepalese women in the garden, soon after he began the program, when the women told him they liked to make soup out of a plant he considered a weed:

The first year... I saw the Nepalese ladies, they come and they cut [a plant]... and I ask them, what do you use for? This is good for soup, she says! But it is wild and they use it as a food... For me, it's not food... But now they say they don't have enough. Before it was on the side and they would fill a plastic bag and collect. So we share our culture and the food we eat.
He explained that he began helping the Nepalese women harvest the plant so that they could take it home and cook it. These types of cross-cultural exchanges regarding the usage of particular plants were common. At the first farmer training meeting I attended, a conversation about the uses of okra was sparked when a group of Burundian participants mentioned that they preferred to dry okra then grind it into a tea that people can take “when they don’t have enough blood,” though the interpreter did not explain what this meant. Other farmers said that okra should be grown to maturity, but the staff said that in the United States okra is generally harvested when it is young and tender.

These examples and many others served for me as evidences of the way that language used about refugees often compresses or obscures differences, even as the refugees’ practices highlight it. For instance, the garden specializes in raising “ethnic crops” to sell to local restaurants and grocery stores, but even these crops are used in very different ways by different groups of people. At the farmstand one day, as we watched people from many different countries purchase the crops that had been harvested that morning, Alex, an American staff member, gave me a number of examples of his perceptions of which ethnic groups were more likely to buy which crops, and how they used them:

- Mustard greens, daikons and cabbage were typically purchased by Bhutanese.
- Amaranth and peas were purchased by everyone.
- Kale was usually purchased by Americans and restaurants.
- Red radishes were preferred by Americans (but Bhutanese would buy the big ones for pickling).
- Snow peas were purchased by Americans and Burmese.
- Roselle was purchased by everyone, though Africans eat the stems and Asians eat the leaves.
- Fava beans were most likely to be purchased by people from East Africa and the Middle East.
- Molokia (Egyptian spinach) and malibar (a variety of African spinach) were typically purchased by Africans.
- Squash vine was preferred by everyone, though Africans eat the leaves and Bhutanese eat the shoot.

Uses of these crops varied within ethnic groups, too, but the farmstand acted as a vegetable landscape through which ethnic variance of purchasing trends could be observed.

Though I found that all of my participants expressed a desire to maintain their traditional foodways, and that many of them explicitly made the connection between working in the garden and increasing their ability to resist American food, the purchase of crops at the farmstand did also reveal spaces of hybridity. On the day I interviewed Alex, Serge from the Republic of Congo bought a bunch of kale to take home and try for the first time, and I gave my favorite recipes for kale salad and kale soup to him and some American purchasers; the same Americans also bought a big bag of fava beans for the first time and Moona from Sudan showed them how to
slip off the waxy coating of the individual beans. Though diet and cooking appeared to be the area in which my participants most resisted assimilation, some did still express an interest in the way other refugees cooked and a willingness to try new things in a choiceful hybridized way.

**Hybrid Landscape of Power and Knowledge**

Laid over the top of the cultural landscape and crop landscape of the garden was another hybrid landscape, less approachable via the physical senses but still potent: the landscape of power and knowledge. This landscape permeated the others and affected the ways in which people were able to describe their own sense of hybridity to me as well as the ways in which I was able to perceive it. The postcolonial discourse of hybridity is explicitly a discourse about power, about the push and pull between those with more and less power in cross-cultural and cross-geographic interactions. In the case of the garden, which represented not only a heterogeneous landscape of varying global cultures but also a site of contested hybridity amongst refugees and members of the dominant local community, power differentials were continually a factor.

On one hand, most of the farmers expressed their gratitude for the space and equipment allotted to them in the program. In conjunction with this, some farmers told me they viewed the American staff as agricultural experts and appreciated having access to their knowledge. Hassan’s translator, for instance, told me that although Hassan came from a farming background, “He said he doesn’t understand that much yet, but he likes it here because everything is coming OK and they have
experts to tell him what to do." Hassan went on to explain some of the ways that his ideas about farming had changed since starting at New Roots; for example, "he said here people use the bees for the farm but there, back in Africa, they put smoke under the beehive so the bees would scramble away. Just to take the honey. Because they don't know. He said he [learned] it here."

On the other hand, some farmers also expressed frustration with the procedures at the farm, particularly those procedures that contradicted the farmers’ own experiences and knowledge. This power dynamic sometimes resulted in tension between farmers and staff. Postcolonial theorists have fleshed out the idea that interchanges between communities are not power-free. The more powerful community may exert certain kinds of behavior, at least in public, and the powerful community claims the right to control the narrative. Given that all the participants in the market farming program come from agrarian backgrounds and have extensive agricultural experience, ceding control over their planting techniques was sometimes a stressful process. Figure 14 depicts the weighing station at which mostly-American staff weigh the farmers’ produce before sending it off to market. These multi-cultural landscapes convey both assistance and control, intertwined and affecting different refugees differently

The garden represented a hybrid landscape of knowledge because all the participants, with their agricultural backgrounds in different locales, all possessed unique forms of knowledge about growing crops in different climates and ecosystems. Al explained that he had learned very site-specific agricultural techniques: “When I grow up, when I plant, there is some part that is rock. And we
have a specific plant for this rock... We can survive with the rock.” He explained the agricultural survival techniques he learned in his youth in Chad: “But if you plant cassava and [animals and birds] eat the leaves... the roots stay. Or sometimes there is a wildfire...or shepherd... But the farmers, we survive by doing farming.” He explained that these knowledges had not necessarily transferred with him to the United States: “In Utah soil you cannot even grow the long potato or cassava or even big millet,” he said.

Sometimes the awareness of these different knowledge systems led to collaboration and communication; other times I witnessed them lead to tension and conflict. For example, several farmers studied agriculture in college, in addition to having lifelong experience growing crops, and at least one of these farmers expressed frustration with feeling micro-managed on his plot and not treated like
the expert he was. In other words, sometimes the landscapes of knowledge revealed a collaborative blending and other times they were at odds; the extent of blended hybridity revealed itself on the landscape, too, in visible disagreements over depth of furrows and span of seeds.

The difficulties of mitigating power while working with displaced people have been discussed by a number of authors (see Hyndman, 2000). For instance, Harrell-Bond addresses the ways in which humanitarian workers, whether aware of it or not, occupy “asymmetrical” relationships with refugees who experience material and symbolic disempowerment through their dependency as clients of agencies that serve refugees (2002). These asymmetrical power relationships form complicated landscapes of power in which location, nationality, race, language, gender and knowledge are constantly interwoven and impacting the experiences of everybody involved in the project. Once, early in my fieldwork, I witnessed a conflict over the shape of beds that seemed to deeply challenge one farmer’s sense of himself as an agricultural expert, and was reminded of Wigley’s analysis of a conflict that occurred over nappies between staff members and a hundred Kosovar women in a resettlement camp in Australia: “Only part of what was really going on was expressed verbally while the emotional communication was powerfully felt... The passion and furor that this decision evoked indicated that the indignity touched deeper experience, much of which could only be guessed at.” (2006, p. 173)

Control over resources is symbolic as much as material, and in the case of the garden most resources were controlled by program staff. In order to maximize the amount of produce that can be grown in the small space, staff draw up garden plans,
distribute seeds, lend equipment, and supervise every stage of the growing process. While this management is a crucial part of growing the program, it also seems to have side effects. As Wigley wrote of the Kosovar case study, “For the Kosovars, the means of controlling resources appeared to represent the loss of dignity and perhaps autonomy. It may also have represented for them just another in a long line of oppressive authority” (2006, p. 175). In the case of the community garden, staff members controlled resources like space, seeds, fertilizer, equipment, and water. The most common complaint amongst interviewees was that they wanted to have access to more land; as Remy explained, “It’s not enough land. We are not just a single family, when we go to the extended family we are a big family! Basically we need maybe twenty beds, because I can count each child is going to have two beds to feed my child. And if I invite everybody, my whole family, this is too small.”

**Conclusion**

In this paper I argue that hybridity may be read on certain landscapes, but that ultimately the relative legibility depends entirely on who is doing the reading. (I am not simply a reader of the landscape; I am a part of it. Power lets us think we are mere surveyors; postcolonialism pulls the lens back further so we can see ourselves in the frame, too.) Hybridity is a sensory encounter. The concept of a sensorily accessible landscape reveals the true difficulty with the concept of hybridity. A truly hybrid landscape, after all, would be unremarkable—everyone
and everything so thoroughly blended, so perfectly fused, that one thing would be indistinguishable from the next thing. But refugees are often visible as migrants in the landscapes they’ve come to, as in Figure 15: bright headscarfs in a sea of jeans, a woman’s hands dyed with spices. A postcolonial perspective demands that researchers notice these things but that a research paradigm also asks: Through whose eyes have we as humans—and researchers—been trained to read landscapes? How can socially and environmentally marginalized/shuffled people teach members of dominant communities to read and understand landscapes differently?

Using qualitative methodologies, including analysis of the photovocies of refugee urban farmers, this research sought to visualize and examine the types, forms, and landscapes of hybridity that resulted from the urban farming activities of
the refugees. The descriptive analysis focused on the hybrid cultural landscapes, hybrid garden landscapes, and hybrid landscapes of power and knowledge that were represented in the garden space. Hybridity is a complex and slippery term, encompassing concepts that may first appear to be paradoxes: assimilation and resistance, sameness and difference, acceptance and challenge. By grounding these abstract concepts down into touchable soil and visible landscapes, this analysis sought to explore the ways in which hybridity is embedded in space and how it impacts and is impacted by space and place.

Ultimately, this research project revealed some of the difficulties of designing a research paradigm that enhances the agency and interpretive power of the participants. Despite my best intentions to decolonize my research practice and be taught by my participants in the reading of relevant landscapes, I discovered—partly because of the cancelled focus group and partly due to the requirements of academic discourse—the difficulty of intersubjective analysis. My experiences speak to the methodological challenge of developing a research paradigm in which the subjectivity of the researcher is not necessarily paramount.
CHAPTER V

IN THE FIELD: LISTENING TO AND WRITING ABOUT REFUGEES

Field Journal, 1 June: Today when I arrived at the garden I spent the first hour helping on José’s plot. I planted radish seeds, feeling the pressure of the act. What if I plant them too shallow, I kept thinking? What if I plant them too deep? What if they don’t sprout, what if they die, what if there is no money in this furrow and it is all my fault?

Research with refugees is fraught with ethical conundrums. In this paper I will reflect upon my experiences conducting qualitative research with a group of refugees living in Salt Lake City, Utah. Over the course of the project, I confronted ethical dilemmas that are relevant for any researcher working with humans as well as some dilemmas that are specific to or magnified in the refugee population, due to their traumatic histories and current status as socially, economically, and culturally marginalized community members. In the first section of the paper I will identify three key ethical difficulties that face researchers working with refugees: specifically, power and control, representation, and the question of who benefits from the research. In the second section I will describe the methodological tactics that I employed in hopes of responding ethically to these difficulties. In my estimation some of these tactics were effective and some were not, and this section will theorize regarding the relative efficacy of each tactic. The third section of the paper will be dedicated to a series of suggestions—drawn from academic literatures, the words of my participants, and my own reflections—regarding ways that researchers can continue to move in the direction of ever-more-ethical research practices when working with refugees.
Ethical Dilemmas in Conducting Research with Refugee Populations

In the social sciences, there is a canon of writing on the ethical concerns inherent in conducting research with human beings. All of the common ethical concerns about research exist in research with refugees, but are often magnified and intensified when working with refugee populations (see MacDonald, 1998; Warner, 1998). As Krulfeld and MacDonald note, “refugees represent one of the most visible manifestations of human rights abuses in the world today” due to their histories of human rights violations and the ongoing risks and challenges that accompany relocation (1998, p. 1); “Although researchers, research sponsors, and those employed in serving refugees intend no harm,” Krulfeld and MacDonald suggest that “refugee human rights continue to be violated in ways neither expected nor intended” (1998, p. 2). In this section I will describe three crucial ethical dilemmas that confront researchers choosing to work with refugee populations: first, issues of power and control; second, issues of representation, and third, the ever-present question of who benefits from the research.

Power and Control

In her work on Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees, McSpadden argues that “the active acknowledgment of power within refugee-related research design, implementation, and data utilization is more than a methodological concern; it is an embedded ethical challenge” (1998, p. 149). Broadly speaking, the researchers “control the information;” they determine “what will be studied, how it will be studied, and the subsequent analysis and use of this information” (Krulfeld, 1998, p.
In addition, the day-to-day practice of the research process reflects an imbalance of power between researchers and those termed “subjects;” Fernandes describes the power dynamics involved when researchers intrude into the lives of less-privileged groups in order to collect data, document life histories and produce ethnographies. Anybody who has conducted fieldwork can attest to the serious ethical complications that researching and writing can produce, for the entire process of fieldwork involves intruding into people’s lives, asking for their time away from overworked lives, taking their memories, their wisdom and their understanding and making it one’s own property. (2003, p. 80)

In my own research, though I was conscious of the power differential between me and the participants, I found it very difficult to mitigate even in the dailiness of the fieldwork. I was continually asking participants for their time, involving them in my research activities, and taking time out of their extremely busy schedules. I volunteered in the garden and helped them with their work, hoping to offset the time that I was taking from them, but I found it difficult to negotiate a scenario in which the exchange felt equal—and power was always present.

Beyond researcher power, however, other levels of power dynamics were present between me and my research participants. As a white, middle-class, English-speaking, educated member of the dominant community in Salt Lake City, I brought culturally-backed power and social capital to my interactions with the refugees. Because refugees are a marginalized group—“often relegated to the domain of the excluded” (Hyndman, 2000, p. xxii) or the “subaltern,” to borrow from Spivak (1988)—the dominant community already has considerable power over their lives, both materially and symbolically. Despite my epistemological
commitment to being “grounded in the interests of people” and “recognizing the materiality of conflict, of privilege, and of domination” and “making the axes of power transparent” in the context of both institutions and interpersonal relationships (Mohanty, 2003, p. 216), the persistent reality of my material and social privilege—made visible by my skin color, my confidence when speaking English, the car that I drove to interviews—was apparent to my participants.

**Representation**

Academically, questions of representation are critical both theoretically and methodologically. Fernandes defines representation as “how the identities, experiences, and activities of [subordinated] social groups...[are]depicted in academic texts as well as in non-academic representations” and explains that “There is now a vast body of scholarship that has shown the ways in which particular strategies of representation may serve to recolonize less-privileged groups by presenting them as passive victims, devoid of agency, and by inadvertently stereotyping such groups and their cultures and nations” (2003, p. 80). In the case of refugees, problematic representations in popular culture and media abound, and a number of scholars have worked to dissect the ways in which refugees are represented and how researchers can represent refugees in more careful, accurate, and humane ways.

Ley and Mountz summarize the two main questions at stake in the conversation about representation. The first question is, “to what extent is interpretation of the ‘other’ an act of social and cultural privilege, and as such an
exercise in unequal relations of power?” They go on to explain that since “The researcher is typically articulate, well educated and socially and economically privileged able to reach and influence a like-minded audience...This anxiety has raised the question for some researchers whether interpretation of the Other is ethically defensible, and under what circumstances it could be so” (2001, p. 235). This question is related to the role of power in research—not only in the way information is obtained but also in the way it is interpreted and disseminated.

The second question Ley and Mountz pose is epistemological:

Is representation of the Other even possible, when researchers are so thoroughly saturated with the ideological baggage of their own culture? When we as researchers bring so much personal and social clutter to an interpretation, to what degree does the interpretation become, at least in part and perhaps more than in part, a construction of our own biographies? (2001, p. 236)

Indeed, there are both practical and epistemological issues involved anytime one person represents another person, particularly when the representor carries more privilege, power, and social currency than the person being represented. Can the choice to represent the Other be ethically defensible? And, at the root, can it yield good and reliable knowledge at all, or are representations of the Other always built out of the experiences, biases and limited vision of the one doing the representing?

Specifically in the context of this research topic, many observers have noted that representations of refugees (in academic, media and mainstream discourses of the West) are problematic. Pupavac notes that in Western media, negative portrayals of refugees (as bogus asylum seekers and sponges on the system) are rampant, and that even “positive” portrayals of refugees rest upon stereotypes, strip
refugees of their agency, and present an image of “traumatized, depoliticized, feminized subjects.” “Professional models and sympathetic media coverage represent refugees as vulnerable survivors. Images of helpless distressed women and their children are preferred; masculine images recede here, reserved for those negative stories of bogus asylum claimants” (2008, p. 272). All of these stereotypes deny the diversity and heterogeneity of refugees, their backgrounds, and their experiences. Hyndman notes that there are multiple ways in which acts of “semio-violence” are committed against refugees: by ignoring refugees entirely, or by deliberately constructing them as “others,” or by silencing them and “dematerializ[ing] them into refugee statistics,” or by engaging in any “representational practice that purports to speak for others but at the same time effaces their voices” (2000, p. xxii). Pupavac and Hyndman, with a chorus of other writers, emphasize that not only are these stereotypes and problematic representations false, but they also have implications for the lived experiences of displaced people.

Wigley discusses the ways in which problematic representations of refugees are linked to harmful policies:

Without the opportunity to speak for themselves about their own experiences and priorities, refugees become homogenized subjects, responded to as generic stereotypes. This relates to a perception of refugees that constitutes them as the ‘problem’ requiring a range of therapeutic and corrective interventions and removing their status as ordinary people. The ‘refugee problem’ locates the problematic within the bodies and minds of those termed refugees rather than within the events that caused their displacement or within their current experiences. So, for example, when signs of suffering are interpreted as pathologised expressions of previous trauma, accountability for the potential impact of current experience is avoided. Those involved in
the provision of assistance to refugees in camps may fail to identify any contribution their policies and practices have made towards this suffering.” (2006, p. 170)

By imagining refugees as a non-diverse group of traumatized “homogenous subjects,” their subjectivity is suppressed. However, because refugees are so materially marginalized, it is often left to members of the dominant community to represent their perspectives on issues, thus perpetuating the stereotype of refugees as traumatized and ineffectual.

**Who Benefits?**

For decades scholars have wondered whether research can ever truly be ethical when it is based on appropriating the experiences of others, particularly when some claim that the knowledge produced by academic research “rarely benefits its subjects, [and] it may actually harm them through stereotyping, essentializing and colonizing strategies of representation” (Fernandes, 2003, p. 85). The question of who benefits from the research process and outcomes is crucial. Academic researchers may accrue money and prestige, advancing their career based on their research publications. Informants, whose knowledge and perspective fuels the research process, may have few or no material benefits from participating, and, as Fernandes notes, may even be harmed in concrete ways by their participation. Though review boards exist to mitigate the harm to subjects during data collection, there is less in the way of recourse for a person or group member who has been represented unfairly or in a colonizing manner.
Reflections on Methodological Choices and Outcomes

Before beginning my research project, I felt conscious of the ethical dilemmas detailed in the previous section. I was also conscious of the fact that refugees represent a vulnerable population, that many of the research participants would have experienced serious trauma, and that I was not remotely qualified to engage in conversations with the participants that could be triggering of that trauma. With this consciousness, I tried to construct a research plan that would equip me to respond productively to these serious ethical questions. In this section I will discuss several elements of the research plan that I developed before beginning the project: Epistemological grounding, consent and communication, asking and listening, participatory action techniques, and reflexivity. For each issue, I will briefly describe what I planned to do, as well as the ethical barriers and complications that continued to emerge over the course of the research.

Epistemological Grounding

As I constructed the methodological content of my research project, I paid close attention to the epistemologies that were influencing my choice of methods. I was heavily influenced by feminist theory and postcolonial theory. These epistemological orientations represent a departure from traditional positivist

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2 The title of this section, “Hopes and Impediments,” is borrowed from the title of a collection of essays by Chinua Achebe, to which I referred frequently as I was writing this section—particularly to this line from it: “Privilege, you see, is one of the great adversaries of the imagination; it spreads a thick layer of adipose tissue over our sensitivity.”
research methods which have suggested (and continue to suggest) that good researchers are objective and impartial observers of phenomena. Some scientists promote the choice of methodologies based on a way of thinking that espouses objectivity as the hallmark of scientific rigor. However, over the past few decades, a wave of scholars—notably feminist scholars—have explained why these claims of objectivity are not only untenable, but also harmful. In the process of taking up “the long struggle against lofty and privileged abstraction” (Rich, 2001, p. 65), they have created space for a new research paradigm which regards researchers as emplaced, embodied co-creators of the research process, and opens the possibility for researchers to create “linked intersubjectivity” with agented research participants. This research paradigm recognizes multiple epistemologies, understanding that traditionally “Certain knowledges, invariably Western, are valorized while others are marginalized or not recognized as knowledge at all” (Darby, 2006, p. 66), and attempts to value multiple ways of knowing and multiple modes of expression as useful and productive.

In fact, challenging positivism, objectivity claims, and the privileging of certain kinds of knowledge and knowledge production have been hallmarks of feminist research methodologies. Ekinsmyth writes that the “building blocks of feminist methodology are the acknowledgement of the partiality of knowledge, a sensitivity to power relations, faith in ‘everyday knowledges,’ openness to a diversity of approaches and emancipatory goals for research outcomes” (2002, p. 177). Feminist methodologists have created an argument for
politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the position of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people’s lives; the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity. Only the god-trick is forbidden. (Haraway, 1991, p. 195.)

In this spirit research may reflect not a positivist claim to linear objectivity, but rather posture itself as one useful instrument amongst many for “reading the word and the world” (from Freire, 1998).

In practice, this epistemological background was a crucial part of my research practice. I was able to respond to people as experts in their fields, value their knowledges, and acknowledge my own subjectivity in a way that helped me avoid the objective distancing and subsequent hierarchies that feminist theorists and others have critiqued. However, I often found myself “hitting a wall” in the application of this epistemological stance. For example, the research process highlighted for me the apparent fact that although academic research may claim to value the voices and perspectives of marginalized people, their voices must be constantly translated into academic terms in order to be fully appreciated by academics. As I write about the experiences of the research participants, placing their words into the language and context of academic theories and policy implications, I am in a sense re-enacting the privileging of certain ways of knowing.

**Consent and Communication**

Recognizing that refugees constitute a vulnerable population, I sought to emphasize consent in my research plan. I incorporated two different letters of consent—one for consent to my involvement as a participant observer in the garden
space, and another for consent to participate in the interviews and photography project. I quickly realized that there were language barriers involved, and that my letters of consent—written in the formal style favored by Institutional Review Boards—were largely unintelligible to most members of my sample population. I did explain the project carefully, but I was often relying on translators to help convey these explanations to participants and could not verify that my words were being translated precisely.

Prior to the project I expected language barriers and translation to impact my ability to communicate with participants. What I did not fully anticipate, however, was the extent to which the research participants would utilize what I came to call the “good refugee” communication style. Because the outsider status of refugees is being constantly emphasized and reinforced by the dominant community, refugees learn quickly that politeness and cooperation are important forms of currency. By the questions they are constantly asked and the ways they are treated, refugees learn that their host communities are mostly interested in certain kinds of stories and they learn to tell their stories in those ways. Moreover, they learn what sorts of comments and behaviors are not tolerated well by members of the dominant community.

In Americanah, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s recent novel about race and immigrants in the United States, an African character recognizes in an American character “the nationalism of liberal Americans who copiously criticized America but did not like you to do so; they expected you to be silent and grateful, and always reminded you of how much better than wherever you had come from America was”
This notion is compatible with Hopkins’ assertion that many refugees “have been urged to tell, over and over, to church groups and others, how grateful they are to be here, how wonderful all the kind Americans have been to them, how happy they are with their new lives, and so on” (1998, p. 6). Requests to participate in these “staged testimonials,” whether formally or informally, emphasizes to refugees that Americans demand gratitude from new arrivals, and that moreover cooperation and gratitude are one of the most important forms of currency that they possess.

It is plausible that the “good refugee” communication style made research participants feel required to consent to participate in the project, and also that it influenced the information that was ultimately communicated to me. In her work on refugeeism and boundaries, Minh-ha describes the necessity for assimilation that refugees may feel after relocation: “The irreversible sense of ‘losing ground’ and losing contact is, however, often suppressed by the immediate urge to ‘settle in’ or to assimilate in order to overcome the humiliation of bearing the too-many-too-needy status of the homeless-stateless alien. The problem that prevails then is to be accepted rather than to accept” (Minh-ha, 2011, p. 30). The pressure on refugees to be grateful, to not be a nuisance, can be intense. She cites a Cambodian woman refugee living in France who says of her refugee community “We are a disturbance. That’s the word. Because we show you in a terrible way how fragile the world we live in is... You didn’t know this in your skin, in your life, in every second of your life” (p. 30). There were many moments over the course of my research in which this “good refugee” narrative was subverted by my participants’ words and tone, but
there were also moments when I felt that they were protecting me from something, or holding back their true feelings perhaps for fear of offending me.

**Asking Questions and Listening**

As I was creating interview questions and preparing to have conversations, a few hints from methodology books served me well. One suggestion comes from Bennett (2002), who asserts “the impossibility of the cool, detached researcher and the inevitability of entangled subjectivities” (p. 160): “Most people find that these encounters work best if the interviewer also reveals something of herself” (p. 155).

In my case, being honest that I was a student with little personal knowledge of farming seemed to enable the participants to see themselves as experts, disseminating their knowledge rather than being interrogated. Attempting to “subvert the usual one-way flow of information from interviewee to interviewer” (Oakley, 1981, p. 157) was an attempt to destabilize traditional notions of formality and control in the interview processes. Acknowledgment of what Bennett termed “entangled subjectivities” contributes to a research paradigm that emphasizes intersubjectivity, or the collaborative meaning-making process that can occur when “the researcher and researched can come to an understanding of what is taking place around them and develop a sense of trust to share their experiences in an atmosphere of safety and support” (Butler, 2001, 267). Developing this sense of trust and exchange was foremost in my mind as I visualized the structure and content of the interview guides.
Another suggestion comes from Skelton (2001): “As an interviewer, I consider it important to let people know, repeatedly, how useful what they say has been... Such an interview experience is empowering for both people” (p. 89). This practice of gratitude goes beyond simply thanking people for sharing their time and thoughts; it is about truly regarding people as experts on their own lives and on the subjects with which they are intimately familiar. Munt argues that “Authorship of one’s body, authorship of one’s story, is contested territory for the putative refugee, who may have been subjected to torture, and so it becomes an imperative to recoup a narrative of selfhood, to be able to tell a story of that passage...” (2011, p. 559). In my own interviewing experiences, people responded positively to my approach that situated each interviewee as an expert, not only on their own lives but also on farming and agricultural practices. Three interviewees told me that they enjoyed talking about things from their past about which they are knowledgeable.

As I have thought about these interviewing experiences, I have come back to the literature on mental health amongst refugees—not because I task researchers with engaging in therapeutic practice outside their realm of expertise, but because the literature contains important insights into communicating with and listening to refugees. In Alayarian’s work on refugees and mental health, she notes that “Asylum seekers are distressed by the lack of control over their daily existence. Enforced dependency is unsettling for a person who may have exercised considerable power and initiative in the past and been a focus of resistance or opposition” (2007, p. xx), Refugees are often reduced to their trauma by the people they meet in their host
countries, given that the very word refugee suggests an identity founded on loss and trauma.

On one occasion I was visiting the home of some of my Sudanese participants, and their daughter told me that she had been watching YouTube videos of the armed conflict in Sudan. She was horrified by the scenes of violence; she had never seen anything like it. She told me that watching the videos, she finally understood why her classmates were always asking her about the violence she had witnessed. She said these classmates only seemed interested in hearing traumatic stories, and when she did not have any to tell, they lost interest in her. One writer on refugees and mental health suggests that “The therapist’s active interest in every aspect of the refugee client’s experience is revitalizing. To be preoccupied with the need to address only the distressing or traumatizing events too directly may lead to withdrawal from contact by the client or a sense of interrogation” (Daniell, 2007, p. 71). I believe this idea also applies to researchers, indicating the importance of developing a research approach that views refugees as more than just the sum of their trauma.

However, this can be trickier than expected when talking to refugees. In my project, I specifically designed my questions to avoid asking about past traumas. However, at one point my Burundian translator Alex told me that the subtext of my questions signaled to participants that I was asking about traumatic events, triggering discomfort in those who did not wish to talk about those things. Interaction with the new dominant culture where people are constantly asking casual questions about refugees’ displacement events, he explained, had led
some of my participants to assume that the only story outsiders are interested in is the most traumatic story. For instance, Alex explained, when I said “tell me about your history,” people assumed I was asking about their trauma stories. But, as Alex emphasized, many people don’t want to talk about those things. Maybe they are trying to forget something or maybe they are tired of being asked, he said, or maybe they have committed an atrocity in the past and are afraid of repercussions. Alex also said that my question about “what you miss about Africa” reminded people too much of all the things they’ve lost; he said Nadege got very emotional about that question and starting “thinking too much,” and that he had been trying to soften my questions so as not to trigger trauma in her.

I was fortunate to have Alex as a “gatekeeper” (see Hughes & Cormode, 1998) who structured my access to interviews and my experiences once I was there. He constantly demonstrated his skills of translating not just language, but also cultural and social context. But I was also conscious that he also shaped the interviews in particular ways; translating not just words but culture and sensitivity, he was interpreting and making choices about how to convey my questions to the interviewees and their responses back to me. In short, he was much more an interpreter than he was a translator, and a good interpreter can help a researcher with more than just language. Daniell notes: “The language of homeland is the language of childhood, relationship with parents, family, and the wider community. All the thoughts and processes of everyday life have been patterned in that
language” (2007, p. 70), so interpreters are not just translating words but also cultural context and emotional content.

**Participatory Action Research**

In my initial research plan, I hoped to incorporate methods that would fit within the research method framework of action research, which is “a process of systemic reflection, enquiry, and action carried out by individuals about their own professional practice” (Frost, 2002, p. 25). Action research is a practical, problem-solving exercise, and it also assesses the intersections between research, reflection, and action, always exploring “the idea that we can transform the values that inspire our work and give meaning to our lives into specifically critical living epistemological standards of judgment by which we judge the quality of our living theories of practice” (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006, p. 2). Participatory action research (PAR) is “based on the principles of inclusion, participation, and valuing all local voices and local ownership and sustainability” (O’Neill, Woods & Webster, 2005, p. 80). Action research or PAR is highly compatible with feminist and postcolonial research methodologies, in that it involves careful analysis of the researcher’s positionality as well as consciousness of the concrete impacts that research can and does have on individuals, relationships, and communities. Action research works toward a praxis of academia and activism, toward a merging of different ways of knowing, with a constant consciousness of privilege and power, in order to work collaboratively toward the best social outcomes.
My interest in action research and PAR grew out of my desire to conduct socially-meaningful research that would have positive material impacts on the lives of the participants. I did not want to take information from the participants, use it for my own purposes, and leave them nothing in return. However, in practice these research ideals of inclusion and participation were not realized. This was largely because I gained entrée into the research site by obtaining permission from the organizations that sponsor the program. As a result, I was perceived by participants as aligned with the organization, and the research activities that I could and could not participate in were in some ways structured by the organization that had approved my presence. In order to obtain that approval, I had to carefully delineate my research goals and approaches before beginning research, so I was not able to enlist research participants in working with me to craft methodological approaches and research questions. This meant that the participants always perceived the project as my project, not theirs, complicating my desire for collaboration and social action.

**Reflexivity**

For those who are trying to find a way to speak for/about Others without engaging in the very real problematics of representation, one important response to the difficult issues involved with representation has been to promote reflexivity, acknowledgements of positionality, and careful self-examination as necessary hallmarks of the research practice: “Resolution comes, though incompletely, through an acknowledgment of the tentativeness of an interpretation, and a rigorous process
of self-criticism to exorcise the demons of bias” (Ley & Mountz, 2001, p. 235-236). England describes reflexivity as “self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher” (1994, p. 86). The process of reflexivity also involves analysis of the way one’s social position, background, and particular set of intersecting privileges has shaped their positionality, or the lenses through which they view the world. Understanding that each of us is constantly viewing the world through not only theoretical lenses, but also cultural lenses built out of our unique life experiences, can be a starting point from which to acknowledge the partiality and contexts of our vision and interpretations. Therefore reflexivity and positionality reflect epistemologies that can be drawn upon throughout the entirety of the research process, but as England emphasizes, “Reflexivity can make us more aware of asymmetrical or exploitative relationships, but it cannot remove them” (1994, p. 86).

Because of this, reflexivity is not enough. Particularly when a researcher is working with vulnerable or marginalized groups of people, simply being reflexive does not guarantee that the research is built on ethical practices, nor does it guarantee a change in the experiences of the research “subjects” or that the “knowledge” produced from the study will have positive impacts on the lives of the participants. Moreover, Fernandes notes that “discussions of these dynamics tend to turn either into a display of guilty hand wringing, or, more commonly, into a narrow conversation about how one represents power dynamics in the texts being written (for instance, by openly talking about the researcher’s location)” (2003, p. 87), and Smith agrees that
too much agonizing about this can produce a kind of textual narcissism in academic writing, where nothing can be said without a string of qualifications, provisos, and auto-critique… More important still, this trend towards over-self-justification can also be a means by which authors claim more not less authority, so inadvertently undermining the credibility of what the non-academics have to say.” (2001, p. 27)

So hand-wringing is not just fruitless—it can also be a way of channeling more power into the hands of those who already benefit from power imbalances.

Fernandes is right in noting that fundamentally, “such conversations do not address what kinds of ethical practices should be used during the process of research” (2003, p. 87).

In Poka Laenui’s paper on the processes of decolonization (n.d.), Laenui suggests a five-step framework for understanding the decolonization process that groups and individuals move through. The phases she suggests are 1) Rediscovery and Recovery, 2) Mourning, 3) Dreaming, 4) Commitment, and 5) Action, and she adds that “each phase can be experienced at the same time or in various combinations. Like the steps of colonization, these phases of decolonization do not have clear demarcations between each other.” I would argue that for researchers who hope to contribute to a decolonial research and representation practice, overusing a “narcissistic confessional of privilege” represents getting stuck in the mourning phase and failing to dream. In this paper I am going to reflect upon my own experiences and conversations with a group of refugees and let their words guide me into the dreaming stage, a space of thinking about what a decolonial research process based on a commitment to ethical practices could look like.
Beyond Reflexivity: Toward an Ethical Practice

The ethical dilemmas discussed at the beginning of this paper have real impacts on people’s lives. Even with my best attempts to craft a methodological approach that would enable me to respond productively to these ethical conundrums, I still encountered ethical challenges, complications, and sites that were difficult to interpret over the course of my research project. However, throughout these challenges, I had the voices of my participants to help me check my privilege, stay grounded, be more careful, and develop new ideas about what an ethical practice could look like. Instead of staying silent, and instead of simply writing an autobiographical paragraph intended to serve as a cursory/compulsory acknowledgment of my positionality, I am interested in the option to “build on rather than simply move past the important insights regarding the messy politics of representation... [to] risk trying to find transformative possibilities for knowledge” (Fernandes, 2003, p. 82). This section will address several realms of possibility for a research process that dignifies refugees and honors the knowledges of refugees, rather than exploiting or colonizing them.

De-Exoticizing the Other and Re-Exoticizing the We

Work with refugees offers a unique opportunity to de-exoticize the Other and re-exoticize the We: to allow ourselves as researchers/writers and our perceptions of our dominant culture to be changed by seeing this culture, even for a moment,
through the eyes of people whom our communities have Othered. Hoffman explains:

The de-exoticization of the other would essentially consist of granting it the same degree of irreducible complexity as is characteristic of the I/we... Exoticizing the we, in turn, would consist of a similar attempt to complexify the familiar and known by self-consciously adopting an anthropological gaze vis-à-vis ourselves... would attempt to render the familiar as strange as possible, thereby showing its contingent and idiosyncratic nature.” (2006, pp. 241-242)

These two parallel tasks—rendering the familiar strange and the strange familiar—are particularly relevant for those researchers who demographically and geographically occupy dominant communities that are engaged in material and discursive colonization of marginalized groups.

One field of possibility for Western researchers doing research with refugees in the West, then, is the de-exotification of refugees as Others—not through the revelation of banalities, but through increasing textured specificity of experience, and an expanding sense of interconnectedness. If, as Chandy Mohanty contends, colonization always involves “a relation of structural domination and a suppression—often violent—of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question” (1984, p. 333), then discursive colonization likewise involves a suppression of heterogeneity. In her famous critique of the discursive practices of Western feminists, Mohanty argued that Westerners “discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby presenting/re-producing a composite, singular ‘third world woman’—an image that appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing
signature of Western humanist discourse” (1984, pp. 333-334). In this vein, the best weapon against exoticism and discursive colonization is *specificity*.

Fieldwork, in my project, was a strikingly literal term. The research site that I chose was indeed a site, and my fieldwork was work in a field, a field transformed into a garden, alongside the refugee farmers with whom I was working. My participant observation was field work, was the turning of soil and extraction of weeds and washing of root vegetables. And so fieldwork, for me, was a process of breaking down prior exoticizations of people and culture and labor. Fieldwork also transforms our valuations of cultures and ethnicities into multifaceted, ever-complexifying acknowledgments of multiple realities. It stops us from resting on easy stereotypes of Others and their daily practices. In fieldwork we ground ourselves and recommend grounding strategies to others. Working together in the garden enabled me to break down my pre-structured exoticisms and develop a sense of the diversity, complexity and richness of the lives of refugees—the diversity between groups and within each individual.

It seems that ethnographic research can be a useful tool for creating this type of specificity and undermining the homogenization of cultures and groups of people that is connected with exoticization. Yet anthropology has been critiqued, in history and in practice, for its exclusionary and hierarchical nature; for example, Trinh T. Minh-ha has written that anthropology as a discipline is mainly a conversation of ‘us’ with ‘us’ about ‘them,’ of the white man with the white man about the primitive-nature man...in which ‘them’ is silenced. ‘Them’ always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless... ‘them’ is only admitted among ‘us,’ the discussing
subjects, when accompanied or introduced by an ‘us’ (1989, pp. 65-67).

Thus, one task for a decolonial researcher is to differentiate between this anthropological goal of honoring and restoring the heterogeneity of research subjects as opposed to “the imperial task of revealing the secrets of the colonized country” (Mills, 1994, p. 43). It’s important to note that the very nature of the de-exoticization/re-exoticization project can re-entrench binary constructions of “we” and “they.” Incorporating reflexivity and being mindful of how we, as researchers, construct the categories in which we view ourselves as belonging and not belonging is critical to avoid the uncareful entrenchment of problematic binaries.

The other half of this equation proposed by Hoffman involves re-exoticizing the We, or allowing narratives of refugees to anthropologize the dominant culture. This approach may be considered an application of standpoint theory in feminism, which claims that marginalized people have a more multi-faceted perspective than powerful people do. In my interview with Claire, for example, she mentioned that in Burundi there are no homeless people. “Here I feel so bad,” she said. “If you don’t have the right documents, you are homeless.” As she spoke in Rundi, she used the word “homeless” in English, suggesting there was no word for it in the language of her upbringing. She continued: “In Africa if I see anyone in need, I will say: Come to my home. I will give you food to eat, I will give you a job to do so you can get back on your own feet and move on. But here, no way. If I see someone on the street, I stay over there.” Stories like this defy the “good refugee” voice; they reveal the sicknesses and traumas of the dominant society.
Fernandes suggests approaching research as a form of “witnessing” wherein “the witness becomes implicated in the situation or form of oppression being observed” and “the act of witnessing represents a learning process for the witness” (2003, p. 84). In this paradigm the “subject” is not being passively observed, but is an active teacher sharing the truth of their lives with the researcher. Part of re-exoticizing the We is in sitting with critiques of the We and really hearing them. It is allowing the voice of the Other to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar. It also involves creating a space for acknowledging that which the participants choose to withhold. Part of honest qualitative scholarship is acknowledging that I will never know what was withheld. Mitigating researcher-power means releasing any internal claim I feel on the withheld information that others possess.

**Disidentification**

The only way that this re-exoticization of the We can be accomplished is through a willingness to resist the impulse to become defensive when the research reveals unflattering things about me and the systems I am entrenched in. In other words, to borrow a phrase from Fernandes, this practice consists of disidentifying ourselves from our privilege long enough to let others reveal our own faults to us—as Americans, as researchers, as beneficiaries of intersecting systems of privilege. This process of disidentification can be approached as an ethical practice throughout the research process, which challenges our sense of purity of methods, of legibility of the field, of clarity of listening, and of the process of writing.
Fernandes describes the process by which recipients of privilege can gradually disidentify from that privilege:

At one level it necessitates confronting the real effects of such identities, including the personal privileges one may gain from them. At a second level, it requires being able to detach one’s own self-definition from such externally- and self-imposed identities. This may sound like a contradictory process but it is, I believe, the only way in which real questions of power, privilege, identity and difference can be simultaneously confronted and transcended. (2003, p. 33)

Disidentification from privilege involves suspending defensiveness, seeing our complicity and then, rather than being offended when other people point it out, thinking seriously about ways to disengage from it. This is a way of subverting more traditional hierarchies of helping by thinking of how we can allow ourselves to be transformed by listening to our Others. Fernandes poses an important question, though, drawing our attention back outward from ourselves: “If the act of witnessing is more likely to be transformative for the witness rather than the subject, what can we do to prevent this act from remaining oriented to the self in an exploitative way, rather than to a broader process of social transformation?” (2003, p. 86) In other words, how can we allow ourselves to be changed as a form of social change?

Disidentification from privilege also means destabilizing that which makes a researcher feel safe in their reflexivity, beginning with methods. Influenced by feminist and postcolonial literature on research, subjectivity and representation, I designed this research project to utilize qualitative methods: participant-observation, informal and semi-structured interviews, and a camera project designed to incorporate the photovoice of the participants; in other words, I hoped
to perform “hands-on, please-tell-me-in-your-own-words research” (Western, 1981, p. 426). I was not interested in “realities extracted from the field” but in “intersubjective truths’ negotiated out of the warmth and friction of an unfolding, iterative process” (Cloke et al., 2004, p. 170). Over time I confronted the gradual realization that even these, the most egalitarian, power-mitigating, heterogeneity-embracing methods I could think of, still did not free me from the burden of power. Choosing not to rest contentedly in selected methods, but to continually self-interrogate, strikes me as a task that will continuously follow a conscientious researcher.

**Being Changed**

Once we have disidentified from our privilege and suspended defensiveness, we can practice seeing ourselves and our own cultures and systems through the eyes of our Other, whoever that situational Other may be. In Chandra Mohanty’s famous essay *Through Western Eyes*, she discusses the ways in which third-world women have been constructed through the lens of Westerners. Historically the “objective, rational gaze” has been constructed as Western. But this lens could be turned on itself; as researchers, we could subvert the Westernization of the gaze and instead, as Westerners, try to see ourselves through the eyes of people in other parts of the world, or those of our newest arrivals. If as members of the dominant community we emphasize assimilation, we will not be able to take this stance. If we presume it is natural and preferable for refugees arriving in the West to acclimatize themselves as quickly as possible to Western (read: superior) ways of living, then
we will miss the opportunity to see us as they do. Rather, we can adapt Derrida’s “ethic of hospitality” toward new arrivals in cities, hearing what they say and rather than asking them to change, instead asking “these new cities of refuge to reorient the politics of the state?” (1997, p. 4). As researchers, we can benefit from “paying attention to these voices not only because they offer knowledge about the refugee experience, but because they offer a unique perspective on the international system” (Uehling, 1998, p. 123). We could allow ourselves to be transformed, and we could allow the narratives of our newest arrivals to guide counter-hegemonic impetus for the transformation of our own society’s broken places.

Perhaps one barrier to this process is the oversimplification of popular refugee narratives. Often a refugee’s story is told as a story of a person going from a bad situation into a better one, one that is constantly getting better, from a dysfunctional place to a better place. But in a sense this oversimplification prevents us from seeing the dysfunctionality of our own systems. If we looked closer, if we studied the marginalization of these new arrivals, we would see a dysfunctional America where skills are not enough to succeed. As members of the dominant culture, we place the onus on them to readjust to our society rather than letting their experiences reveal our own sicknesses, rather than letting them show us ways we could be better.

There were moments in my interviews when people moved past the “good refugee” narrative and told me about the difficulties they have experienced since coming to the United States. Nadege told me, “Sometimes I don’t have food to eat even here. Sometimes there too I didn’t have food to eat. And I know saying that is
going to surprise someone, saying I don’t have food to eat here.” And Sonam explained,

I imagined the United States in a different way. I thought like we have a money tree in US, you know, so people, when I heard people they get to US and they have big buildings and a nice standard of life back home, and I thought the same way, like when I go to US, when I be there, I’ll be a rich man, live a better life, have a better family, have a better situation. But it’s not really like that... According to my perception, according to my thinking, when I come to US it’s totally upside down. So I didn’t think that we’d have to work this hard to be better. But I know hard work back home, but you know, to be a better life and be a better person, we have to work very hard here. And with my studies, too, they just asked for some credits, not the whole thing of what we studied back home. I don’t like that idea to be honest. But most of the refugees are suffering the same thing. If they have completed bachelors or masters degree back home, they still have to fortify and because the US government does not recognize our certificate, although we have the same kind of intelligence, the same kind of content, the same kind of education. But we have to be certified on paper, that’s a thing I don’t like about US. But besides that we have a peaceful life here. We have been struggling here, but if we work hard we can have this life here. And everything is good in Utah, people are so supportive and help us, they respect each other. And the life in Utah is still good.

Stories like these take courage to tell, and can, when dignified, shed light on the possibility of change.

**Conclusions**

In this paper I have considered ethics in the context of qualitative research with refugees in the West, specifically research that is undertaken by members of the dominant community to which refugees have come. I have discussed some of the principal ethical dilemmas encountered by researchers, and described some of the tactics I utilized to respond to these dilemmas in my own research project.
(while acknowledging that sometimes my efforts were insufficient). I also made a few suggestions for dreaming possibilities of an ethical research practice. Though there is immense space for exploitation and unethical practice in research with refugees, there is also opportunity to subvert traditional research hierarchies by allowing refugees, newly arrived in our country, to anthropologize us. As researchers, we can pay attention to what others see in us, turning the research lens of the Western eye around on itself.

Feminist theorists have argued for years that objective truth does not exist for a researcher and that the process of researching is undertaken by a subjective person in a specific body, reaching and grasping but still fundamentally bound by their own skin. As researchers working with refugees, we can explore a research that draws from trauma literature without reducing participants to their trauma, and that lets refugees' stories change us rather than constantly asking how their stories changed them. This is a research that is moving toward a “post-victimology” study in which exploitative structures are fully acknowledged but so is agency, creativity, resiliency, and the human power to make and remake places wherever we are. Through it all, this is a research paradigm that insists as researchers we are emplaced too, we are broken in our own ways, and we are doing research not just to re-vision the world, but also to re-vision ourselves in the world.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Arriving as a refugee in a new place is an exercise in place-making in the new social and ecological worlds of resettlement. The existential context of displacement is rife with questions of identity, relationships to people and places, and what Said described as the “unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” by exile (2000, p. 173). Inexplicably intertwined in the upheaval and trauma of exile is place: the loss of one and the acquaintance and creation of another. There is tension, for refugees, between the value of sustaining one’s original cultural landscape(s) and place attachment(s), and mastering the nuances of the new place and culture as quickly as possible in order to survive and thrive in a new environment. The complex cultural landscapes that result from this tension and the pursuant practices of place-making may reflect simultaneously, to varying degrees, both integration and resistance.

In Ramona Ausubel’s 2012 novel No One is Here Except All of Us, a character reflects that “truth belongs to the place where it lives, like a plant.” The idea that people’s beliefs and values are developed in connection with certain places is well-developed in multiple literatures; however, in our globalizing world, notions of place and sense of place are in flux. For refugees, who have little control over the terms and localities of their relocations, there exists a constant tension between integration into a new place/culture and the maintenance of old place/culture attachments. The overlapping ecological and social place-making proclivities of
refugees—and the resultant benefits of having space in which to engage in agented place-making activities—have been underinvestigated, though a clearer understanding of this process could be helpful to communities and agencies hoping to facilitate the complex adaptive processes that refugees enact. This emplaced research project has aimed to examine this place-making enterprise as well as the complex landscapes of hybridity that result from it—both social and ecological, mapped on top of each other—and to analyze the tension between integration and resistance that exists for refugees.

The overarching research question considered in this project has been: What roles do interactions with the physical environment occupy in the adjustment processes of refugees post-relocation? In response to a literature which focuses primarily on the social elements of resettlement and adjustment for refugees, this research reterritorializes both the relationship between refugees and place and the research process itself. I conclude that a place-based perspective that emphasizes the interconnectedness of physical environments and social worlds can contribute to an understanding of some of the complex ways that refugees integrate into and resist their new environments post-relocation. As is always the case, place, for my participants, is about spaces and the meanings associated with those spaces and relationships that exist within the places. A place-based perspective allows for consideration of concepts like identity and community. In this research project, refugees' connection to the land through agriculture had implications for their sense of self and their sense of belongingness within the social and environmental landscapes to which they had come, newly.
The central research question, along with an introduction to relevant topics and literatures, was introduced in Chapter I of this dissertation. Chapter II discussed the methodological composition of the research project. In an effort to approach the overarching research question in a multi-faceted way, two other specific research questions evolved:

1) What is the role of farming in the social and ecological place-making strategies of refugees, and how do these place-making activities express both assimilation and resistance?

2) In what ways is cultural hybridity present amongst refugees in this urban farming program?

The first question, about farming and place-making strategies of refugees, was addressed in Chapter III. The second question was discussed in Chapter IV, which included an analysis of the ways in which the refugee garden could be read as layered hybrid landscapes. Chapter V contained my methodological reflections on the ethical difficulties and transformative potential of doing fieldwork with and writing about refugees. I will conclude this final chapter with a brief discussion of several implications and recommendations, as well as suggestions for further research.

Implications and Recommendations

Though this research project relied on qualitative methods to approach the experiences of a small group of participants and is not generalizable to all refugees, the overwhelming consistency of participants’ responses and perspectives reveals
some spaces for further research consideration and policy implications. Centrally, it points at the importance of coupling social and environmental systems in considerations of refugees’ place-making techniques. Other important themes that could be explored more explicitly would include place-making and different measures of well-being, the differential impacts of independent vs. institutionally-structured farming activities, the relationship between place-making and resilience, and differences in experiences between refugees of varying ethnicities, genders, ages, etcetera.

In terms of policy implications, participants’ assessments of their participation in this program serve as an endorsement for other similar programs in receiving communities. Expanding access to farming land for refugees with agrarian backgrounds is a way to increase food security and facilitate the negotiations of identity, history and community that occur post-resettlement. In this case some participants did have complaints about details of the program itself, but all of them spoke in consistently positive terms about the impact of farming on their sense of place and well-being. No one named financial gain as the primary benefit from participating in the market farming program—though this was partly because the participants did not report learning large sums of money—but the effects of having space to farm seemed almost uniformly positive, for both material and emotional reasons. This information could be useful for similar programs hoping to provide space and materials for refugees hoping to farm in their destination countries.

These results also suggest that it could be beneficial to prioritize providing farming opportunities for refugees at all stages of the relocation journey. Over the
past decade UNHCR has produced a number of reports about malnutrition and food insecurity in refugee camps, and in response UNHCR and WFP have tested several different programs, such as implementing “a more diversified food ration” (Tsadik, 2009), continuing to experiment with vitamin-supplemented food rations (UNHCR, 2008), and doing pilot testing of small-scale agricultural projects such as multi-storey gardens (UNHCR, n.d.). The multi-storey garden pilot programs in Kenya and Ethiopia, in particular, have attracted attention for their success in improving nutritional outcomes in the camp and in providing refugees in the camp with income-generating opportunities (Duff-Brown, 2013). More research could be helpful for understanding the effects of these small-scale agricultural projects on refugees’ senses of identity and community throughout their journeys.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

Though this research project focused its lens on the concepts of place-making and hybrid landscapes in analyzing the meaning and impacts of a refugee farming program on the lives of its participants, many other concepts could be fruitfully explored in this context. For example, a comparative study of different programs could yield valuable information regarding the program components that result in the greatest benefit for participants. Likewise, a study of refugees doing agricultural work independently, without involvement in a program, could provide an interesting counterpoint to this study of a program-based agricultural practice. Additionally, the small non-representative sample used in this study means that the results of this study are ungeneralizable, but related qualitative methods could also
be used with other sample populations to determine whether similar programs have similar impacts on participants in other parts of the country.

As discussed in my chapter on methodological reflections, one of the most pressing issues to be continually explored by researchers is how to best respond to the ethical challenges presented by research with refugees and create a transformative, decolonial research paradigm embedded in ethical practice. The use of specific collaborative methods to mitigate the impact of power and privilege when working with refugees, and continued honesty in self-assessment may help researchers improve our practice and, as a result, find ways to truly share the benefits of our research with those who participate in the process with us.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX
SAMPLE KITCHEN VISIT QUESTIONS

- Why did you decide to participate in the New Roots program?
- What was your farming experience before coming to Utah?
- How is farming different here than in your home country?
- How have you had to change your market practices here?
- Do you think that farming here is easier or harder than in your home country?
- Which of your family members work in the garden? How did you make that decision?
- What is it like to work in the garden with people from all different countries and cultures, speaking all different languages?
- What crops do you plant in your garden space?
- How do you use the crops you harvest from the garden?
- What do you usually cook at home? Can you tell me a favorite recipe?
- What does your family eat on a normal day?
- What is your favorite thing to cook?
- How is your style of eating different now than it used to be?
- How do you feel about the community in Utah?
- How do you feel about the landscape in Utah?
- What things do you miss the most about your previous community?
- What things do you miss about your previous landscape?
CURRICULUM VITAE

Missy Ward-Lambert

Education

2011-2014 Utah State University Logan, Utah
PhD, Human Dimensions of Ecosystem Science and Management
Graduate Certificate: Women and Gender Studies

2008-2010 Lesley University Cambridge, Mass.
MFA, Creative Writing
Emphasis: Fiction Writing

1999-2003 Brigham Young University Provo, Utah
B.S., Psychology
Minor: International Development GPA: 3.7

Employment Experience

2012-2013 Utah State University Logan, Utah
Instructor / Research Assistant
-Taught GEOG 4100: Geographic Approaches to the Human-Environment Relationship

2010-2013 Lesley University Cambridge, Mass.
Interdisciplinary Studies Instructor
-Mentored MFA students in online interdisciplinary studies classes.
-Taught online courses in Nature Writing and Mood & Atmosphere for five consecutive semesters.

2008-2011 Claret Consulting Washington, D.C.
Project Manager
-Managed a team of seven researchers contracted by the Department of Labor to complete and edit annotated bibliographies on child labor, forced labor, slavery and human trafficking.
-Compiled and wrote original annotated bibliographies containing information on over 100 countries.
-Wrote and researched a discussion paper on the conflict in DR Congo.

**Family Advocate / Translator**
- Translated documents, such as newsletters and fliers, into Portuguese.
- Provided outreach to the local Brazilian community, acquainting families with Network programs and providing translation services as needed.
- Acted as a liaison and in-home worker with the Parent Child Home Program, promoting early childhood literacy for families with preschoolers.

2005-2010

**Freelance Portuguese Translator**
- Provided verbal and written Portuguese-to-English translations for non-governmental organizations, including ProLiteracy International.
- Translated literacy manuals, health manuals, and academic presentations for use in Portuguese-speaking African countries.

2005-2006  Family Support and Treatment Center  Orem, Utah

**Abuse Prevention Specialist**
- Presented information about subjects such as personal safety, child abuse, domestic violence, depression and suicide, stress management and related topics in three local school districts and for community groups.
- Taught community parenting classes.
- Planned and facilitated social skills groups for children.

2005  Food and Care Coalition  Provo, Utah

**Receptionist**
- Assisted homeless and low-income clients by providing access to services such as food assistance, emergency shelter, dental care, and legal aid.
- Taught adult literacy and creative writing courses on a volunteer basis.

2002-2003  International Study Programs  Brigham Young University

**International Program Facilitator**
- Selected/prepared groups of students for internships in the Philippines.
- Taught classes, prepared course materials, and provided support and guidance for students and faculty members overseas.
International Experience

- June-August 2012: **Fortaleza, Brazil**. Received FIPSE Grant to work with a team from the Universidade Federal do Ceará on multicultural education programs.
- April-August 2005: **Beira, Mozambique**. Completed consulting internship with local NGO, conducted independent research on girls’ education and orphan care options, and volunteered at local orphanages and schools.
- July 2003-December 2004: **São Paulo, Brazil**. Participated in volunteer activities, gained Portuguese language fluency.
- May-June 2003: **Majuro, Marshall Islands**. Completed internship with the Ministry of Health and conducted research on malnutrition, diabetes prevention, and breastfeeding.
- April-August 2002: **Manila, Philippines**. Completed special fundraising internship with UNICEF, participated in direct mail campaigns and public awareness campaigns, visited UNICEF-sponsored schools and health clinics, visited emergency zones to distribute aid from UNICEF, studied the CRC and other international human rights documents, and volunteered at shelters for street kids.
- January-June 2001: **Voronezh, Russia**. Taught English to children and volunteered at a local orphanage.

Academic Publications


Languages

- Fluent written and spoken Portuguese
- Conversational written and spoken Spanish

Fellowships and Awards

- Dissertation Fellowship from Utah State University (2013).
- Center for Women and Gender Travel Grant (2012).
- Presidential Scholarship from Utah State University (2011-2012).
- Jacob K. Javits Fellowship from Department of Education (2009-2010).
- Association of Writers and Writing Programs Intro Journals Project short story winner (2010).
- Utah Governor Points of Light Award recipient (2004).
- Truman Scholarship regional competitor (2002).
Conferences and Presentations

- Association for Women in Psychology (Salt Lake City, 2013).
- Graduate Research Conference (USU, 2012).
  - Presenter: “Human Trafficking in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: A Natural Resource Perspective”
- Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Student Research Conference (BYU, 2006).
  - Poster: “Orphan Care Options in Mozambique”
  - Poster: “Barriers to Girls’ Education in Mozambique”
- Kennedy Center Inquiry Conference (BYU, 2003).
  - Presenter: “Commercial Sexual Exploitation in the Philippines”

Community Volunteerism

- UNICEF at BYU. Founder and President of service and advocacy group dedicated to promoting international child welfare (2001-2003).