

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: PUBLIC MOBILITY AND THE IMPACT ON SOCIAL NETWORKS: UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIETAL AND TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNICATION OF MIGRANT NETWORKS FROM A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

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In considering the realities of 21st century society, research cannot overlook how livelihoods are becoming increasingly defined by one's (in)ability for and agency over movement, i.e. mobility, especially on the transnational scale. Simultaneously, the relational turn of public relations scholarship has emphasized a network perspective, examining how a set of relations among social actors—be it people, groups, or organizations—create systems that comprise, maintain, and/or disrupt society (Yang & Taylor, 2015). As such, public relations should be inclusive of the depth of multiple, rich, and mobile relationships in social networks that span national borders. Yet the development of the network perspective in public relations has not been without its limitations, notably the absence of public perspectives, actions, and realities—all of which impact the communicative interactions that produce their social networks. This research thereby incorporates a public perspective through insights from people who migrate to highlight an increasingly important dimension to public formation and relationship

dynamics: mobility. In doing so, this dissertation takes an innovative qualitative approach to social network analysis (SNA), which integrates a visual network mapping exercise alongside qualitative interviews and ethnographic observations. Findings captured how the enactment and context of mobility impact migrant network dynamics across the world as well as their subsequent communication behaviors and relational expectations, particularly with U.S. civil society organizations (CSOs). They further depicted an organizational perspective that highlighted three dichotomies to how CSOs perceive and maintain their social networks, and showcased the role of mobility as an underlying context generating distinct actors, ties, and positioning. Findings lastly emphasized entanglements between social and other forms of capital as well as patterns in who is perceived as having versus needing capital.

As such, this dissertation proposes the conceptualization of the mobile social network ecology, a concept that integrates social network analysis and the experiences of public mobility by accounting for distinct publics and organizations perceptions. It allows for public relations to better consider the impacts of the enactment and context of mobility on key public relationships, inclusive of the distinct publics of the modern world, the CSOs that seek to serve them, and their linkages to civil societies on a transnational scale. Additionally, in noting the significant ties between migrant publics and migrant-serving CSOs, this dissertation connects the exchanges of (social) capital within a mobile social network ecology to relational power dynamics and differentials, emphasizing their lived, embodied impact as well as introducing a new salient category: spatial capital. All together, these contributions advance public relations in reckoning with the transnational, globalized dimensions of the modern world, showcasing how public mobility shapes and complicates our fundamental societal connections and presenting unique takeaways for the field in scholarship and practice.

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APPROACH

by

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## Dedication

*To Dr. Kathleen Gorski, who taught me to ask good questions, to care for the  
communities we research, and to always have extra snacks.*

*1955-2018*

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## List of Abbreviations

BPRM	Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration
CSO	Civil society organization
INGO	International nongovernmental organization
IRB	Institutional Review Board
IRC	International Rescue Committee
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
NPO	Nonprofit organization
OPR	Organization-public relationship
ORR	Office of Refugee Resettlement
SIV	Special Immigrant Visa
SNA	Social network analysis
STP	Situational theory of publics
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USCIS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
USRAP	United States Refugee Admissions Program

## Chapter 1: Introduction

In considering the realities of 21st century society, research cannot overlook how livelihoods are becoming increasingly defined by one's (in)ability for and agency over movement, i.e. mobility, especially on the transnational scale. Simply speaking, mobility can be understood as movements through place and space in relation to geopolitical, cultural, economic, and historical power (Dutta & Shome, 2018; Samek, 2017). In a modern era with tandem growth in globalization, communication technologies and the proliferation of digital devices and platforms, the impact of mobility on communication are boundless and borderless. People are moving, for voluntary and involuntary reasons, such as being forced to flee their homes, persecuted for who they are—situations in which mobility is inflicted upon them. Transnational movement inherently leads to cross-border connections and subsequent questions about how these relationships are maintained, navigated, and generated following the enactment of mobility.

The current global communication landscape demands that public relations be inclusive of the depth of multiple, rich, and mobile relationships in social networks that span national borders (Sison, 2017; Wang, 2006; Yang et al., 2012). As L'Etang (2009) remarked, public relations “needs a new understanding of its own changing identity...to cope with the effects of worldwide diasporas and displaced persons” (p. 612). In order to fully integrate the realities of public mobility into public relations scholarship, this project seeks to interlink mobility and migration with social network theory and analysis. Migrants and transnational migrant communities are salient as key publics for global public relations, including by nation-states (Bravo, 2015), and have the potential to serve as micro-boundary spanners, a unique communication role that can influence publics in multiple regions (Choi et al., 2021).

The relational turn in public relations scholarship has emphasized a network perspective, examining how a set of relations among social actors—be it people, groups, or organizations—create systems that comprise, maintain, and/or disrupt society (Yang & Saffer, 2019; Yang & Taylor, 2015). This furthers the epistemological shift to relationships as a primary focus for public relations scholarship, particularly building and maintaining relations as a strategic communication effort with the potential to result in mutually beneficial relationships (Ferguson, 2018; Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015; Toth, 2010). From this perspective, communication is a social process of behaviors involving signs and symbols inherent to the essence of relationships to the extent there can be no distinction between communication and relationships (Verčič et al., 2001)—to examine a relationship is to consider its communicative interactions. Shifting to a network perspective advances the field beyond the dyadic limitations of relationship management theory that isolates relationships as only existing between two social actors, notably prioritizing organization-public relationships (OPRs) (Heath, 2013). A network perspective acknowledges and highlights the varied interactions among multiple social actors and how the patterns of those relationships implicate each actor and the network in which they reside (Heath, 2013; Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015; Zhou, 2019). This macro-level focus on relationships more thoroughly explores the links between communication and organizing in society by considering the broader environment and more definitely illustrating the evolution and interactions of relational structures (Yang & Saffer, 2019; Yang & Taylor, 2015).

Yet the development of the network perspective in public relations has not been without its limitations. The majority of networked public relations research has focused on interorganizational networks, the interactions between organizations, and the implications of those organization-organization relationships. It has neglected the role and significance of publics and their relationships with each other and organizations, including the overall impact on a network (Zhou,

2019). Network ecologies recognize and highlight all social entities as possibly connected, including the interactions and influence of publics and their relationships (Yang & Taylor, 2015; Zhou, 2019). Iannacone (2021b), for example, found that the global, interpublic relationships of an international non-governmental organization impacted how those publics perceived their relationship to the organization itself, including softening critiques and increasing their perception of trust. Without incorporating public perspectives, actions, and realities, the field cannot present a full public relations theory of network ecologies, spotlighting the need to consider publics, their distinctions, and their characteristics more thoroughly within a network perspective. If public relations represents the discursive and relational possibilities of public communication processes that encompass not only relations to publics, but also relations in and for the public (L'Etang, 2009; Verčič et al., 2001), then a public relations approach to networks should be inclusive of diverse and distinct public groups, including those dubbed publics. As such, this research highlights an increasingly important dimension to the formation of publics and their subsequent relationship dynamics: mobility, understood in simple terms as one's movement through space.

There are often assumptions of stasis and stability when it comes to publics. Ever since Dewey's (1927) conceptualizing of the term public was framed in regard to the nation-state, understandings of publics in the field have been largely limited in considering a mobile or transnational dimension. While rhetorical scholars like Fraser (2014) have explored transnationalism with regards to the public sphere, public relations has largely remained bounded by the Westphalian norms of public sphere theory, publics, and their communicative behavior. Though living in an increasingly globalized world, publics are perceived as belonging to a nation and their movements through or beyond a place are not considered as influential on their formation, issue response, or communicative norms. Network perspectives have emerged alongside a prominent

“valorization of stasis, boundedness, and roots” (Cresswell, 2020, p. 3), which simultaneously undermines the mobilities of groups like the homeless, migrants, refugees, and nomads. As such, I question how public mobility, especially on a transnational scale, may redefine the understanding of social networks by including a critical component to many modern publics, their communicative norms (i.e., the interactive behaviors that foreground their relationships and inclusion in the public), and their relationships.

My purpose of this research is two-fold. First, I expanded the conceptualization of social networks in public relations by introducing mobility and, in turn, examining its impact. Second, I provided the perspectives and insights from people who migrate into public relations scholarship, which importantly identifies the needs, interests, and challenges of a population with distinct experiences of mobility, recent Afghan refugees to the U.S. Together, these two purposes advance public relation’s considerations of mobility as a factor to significant relational and societal ties. I thereby present lessons into the facilitation of relationships with migrant publics both for migrant-serving civil society organizations (CSOs) and also for those organizations whose purpose is not inherently migrant-centric but whose operations may overlap with these populations. Alongside these two purposes, I also utilize an innovative qualitative approach to social network analysis (SNA), which allows for networked public relations scholarship to better consider the nuances and details foregrounding patterns of interactions within social networks.

### **A Mobile Outlook on Social Networks**

Theoretically, this project integrated the concept of mobility into public relations scholarship on social networks to expand the field’s understanding of the interactions, patterns, and dynamics of relationships between social actors on a transnational scale. By recognizing and valuing the geographic mobility of publics, public relations can explore how movement: (a) reflects cultural,

economic, geopolitical, and historical power (Cram, 2019; Dutta & Shome, 2018), which (b) impacts the communicative interactions between social actors that (c) ultimately shape the various, entangled relationships within a network. In recognizing public mobility, network theory can better acknowledge and examine the transnationalism of networks and the communicative actions within those networks, especially considering migration fosters social relations that connect societies across state borders, be it familial, economic, political, and/or cultural ties (Foner, 2000; Glick Schiller, 1999; Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2004). Overall, examining the concept of public mobility within social networks advances the understanding of relational processes in public communication and the larger societal implications (L'Etang, 2009; Sommerfeldt, 2013a, 2013b).

As such, I examined both networked public relations scholarship and the new mobilities paradigm of rhetorical studies in order to harmonize ideas of (im)mobilities into SNA. Putting both concepts into conversation evoked the underexplored question of how public mobility impacts social networks. This exploratory project emphasized the lived experiences and contexts of transnational mobility that lurk within communicative norms and choices, particularly those that establish and maintain significant public relationships, i.e. the discursive processes of communicative interactions to/for/in the public (L'Etang, 2009; Verčič et al., 2001); this focus helps further public relations as a field invested in both public perspectives and in communicative consequences for publics, organizations, and society as a whole.

### **Incorporating Migrant Perspectives**

In centering the perspectives of publics who have experienced mobility in network ecologies, I secondly aimed to further integrate insights from people who migrate into public relations scholarship. Mass migration is a defining feature of the 21st century and the globalized world (Esses et al., 2013; Valentini et al., 2016). While it is not a necessarily new phenomenon, its

continued exclusion in public relations theories represents a significant gap in the field's ability to contribute to relevant and modern communication conclusions, especially with regards to theories of all public social actors and the inclusivity of civil society. Mobility has always been inherent to human life, yet mobile people, such as those who have migrated, are traditionally socially and economically marginalized, facing political voicelessness, hostility, and fear (Andrews, 2018; Cresswell, 2020). While not all migrants are marginalized nor marginalized in the same way, certain bodies and pathways face distinct acts of exclusion and/or symbolic violence (e.g., Cisneros, 2012; Iannacone, 2021a), including those who are undocumented (Andrews, 2018; Bishop, 2019), and refugees and asylum-seekers (FitzGerald, 2019). These pathways often represent a form of forced migration, an involuntary or coerced movement as due to persecution, violence or human rights violations (UNHCR, 2014). Incorporating not just people who migrate but those who have been forced to migrate as social actors and communicators in various network ecologies is one step in shifting global public relations' focus to excluded, marginalized, or overlooked communities, allowing for a deeper consideration of circumstances, identities, and needs in communication (Bravo, 2015; Gregory & Halff, 2013). Indeed, other academic disciplines, notably sociology, have noted the cross-border connections of migrants, as people retain ties to social actors in one place while creating new ties elsewhere (Waldinger, 2013), but lack the thorough inspection of the public communication surrounding these interactions and its societal implications, such as can be the focus in public relations.

As such, this dissertation established how migration represents mobility, grounding the experiences of migrant publics into understandings of their traditionally transnational social networks and the communication that enacts them. Doing so explores the spectrum of social relationships more broadly, including cross-border connections and communication. If public

relations is to be responsible for fostering trust among distinct groups and unique ties (cf. Sommerfeldt, 2013b), scholarship must represent distinct publics—in this case, those impacted by mobility and marginalization—to refine the understanding and practice of how to foster such trust and bridge differences. Integrating the perspectives of those who migrate is not just about providing a space for frequently overlooked voices, but also about identifying potential next steps and actions for organizations and individuals representing, advocating for, and assisting sub-altern publics (Dutta-Bergman, 2005). This dissertation examines the communicative and relational needs and norms of a distinct migrant public often marginalized in the U.S., thereby providing insights to the fostering of ties with and inclusion of this population. It advances public relations focus on and efforts toward relationship building.

Notably, I investigated the lived experiences and communication of an example of marginalized migrant publics by incorporating two distinct types of participants: individuals who have migrated, and the organizations that seek to serve these populations. Doing so not only brings a tangible dimension to the concept of transnational mobility, but also speaks to the different interactions and social ties that encompass acts of transnational migration from a personal and organizational perspective. As will be further detailed in subsequent chapters, I recruited individuals who have migrated as participants, notably members of the Afghan migrant community. Significant numbers of Afghan individuals and families have migrated to the U.S. since the early 1980s—an era of Afghan history encompassed by political instability (Batalova, 2021). More recently, however, the departure of the U.S. military from Afghanistan, the subsequent rise of Taliban rule, and the turbulent evacuation of Afghan allies has resulted in a notable increase of migration between Afghanistan and the U.S. (Batalova, 2021). Since the Taliban’s capture of Kabul in August 2021, more than 74,000 Afghan migrants have arrived in the U.S. as part of Operation Allies Welcome,

the largest evacuation since the Vietnam War (International Rescue Committee, 2022); many more are expected to continue to migrate to the U.S. through other immigrant and resettlement pathways (International Rescue Committee, 2022). This population and their forced transnational migration represents a unique, drastic experience of mobility and resettlement, calling for an examination into how they both form and maintain ties across the world, including in Afghanistan and in the U.S. as their new country (and society) of residency. These participants were able to directly speak of the experiences of transnational mobility and of the perceived impact on their social networks, including the communicative navigation and norms of new and established relationships with individuals, groups, and CSOs.

In addition, I incorporated the perspectives of CSO representatives—be they employees or volunteers—who work with and for migrant publics as a means of societal assistance. More specifically, migrant-focused organizations covered services of resettlement, housing, and legal/labor rights for those who have recently migrated to the U.S. These organizations tend to be a significant actor in the social networks of migrants resettled to the U.S. (notably those whose pathways include asylum-seeking, refugee resettlement, or migrating without documents), as their responsibilities entail welcoming, establishing, and helping these individuals and families in their new country and society. Including their perspectives captured the wider spectrum of organizational social actors and partners who are connected to migrant publics, thereby encompassing these unique social networks more thoroughly. I also examined how organizations navigate the mobility of their publics and any transnationalism within their social networks, the subsequent strategies for generating and maintaining significant ties, and how that is considered with regards to the organization's operations.

## Research Questions

In total, this dissertation explored five research questions surrounding the transnational social networks of mobile publics. First, I investigated the social networks of Afghan refugees as prominent migrants to the U.S. and as a distinct public defined by mobility (particularly forced), and the communicative practices and norms that sustain their social networks, including the maintenance and navigation of cross-border ties. Sociological research has noted how migrants retain ties in other nations as they seek to establish new ones in the aftermath of migration (Waldinger, 2013, 2015). This dissertation explored the enactment and context of mobility and its impact on the generation and conservation of relationships as well as the communicative interactions that they reify or resist those relationships. As such, the first research question asked:

RQ1: How, if at all, do migrants, as an example of mobile publics, perceive and maintain their social networks?

This question took a distinct public perspective to social networks, aiming to explore characteristics of communication practices (i.e., frequency, channel, duration, content) used to maintain relationships and the perceived quality of those relationships (i.e., strength/weakness). In its breadth, the question allowed for the examination of many features of SNA in the context of mobility, including salient nodes and ties, relationship strength and diversity, and network positioning. Given the responsibilities of public relations to build inclusive relationships that foster civil society and promote the interests of all social actors (Sommerfeldt, 2013b), it is important to integrate the perspectives of a group often on the periphery and detail the unique needs of the population.

Second, I aimed to ensure that the exploration of migrant social networks is inclusive of relationships with societal institutions, which have previously been overlooked in migration studies

in favor of kinship or interpersonal networks. Migration, whether voluntary or forced, almost inherently entails introduction to new institutions and organizations. For those whose path to the U.S. has been more vulnerable (i.e., resettlement or seeking asylum), this tends to immediately involve organizations, such as national resettlement agencies, their local non-profit partners, and the other organizations that often lay at the heart of civil society (Putnam, 2000; Sommerfeldt, 2013a, 2013b; Taylor, 2009, 2010). Relationships with these CSOs can represent important connections that may help foster a sense of trust and belonging in both a new society and a new nation for a public that is frequently marginalized and excluded from essential communication processes (Andrews, 2018; Bishop, 2019; Iannacone, 2021a); this can include the meaning-making fundamental to civil society and the generation of social capital (Saffer, 2016; Sommerfeldt, 2013a, 2013b). As such, the second research question is:

RQ2: How, if at all, do migrants, as an example of mobile publics, perceive their relationships with and involvement in civil society organizations as a part of their social networks?

This question again emphasizes a public perspective in exploring the perceived existence and quality (i.e., strength/weakness; trust) of significant societal relationships foregrounded by public communication and how it may extend to and widely impact social networks. By asking about involvement, this question spoke to the communicative practices (i.e., frequency, duration, channel, etc.) that are ingrained in these relationships. Considering the public perspectives can help detail and assess the perceived quality and strategies of the relationships in a network more holistically, including whether the efforts of an organization is adequate when communicating with a global and/or diverse public (Iannacone, 2021b).

For the third and fourth research questions, this project diverged from its public-centric focus to ensure inclusion and consideration of organizational perspectives on public mobility and social networks. As noted for RQ2, relationships between migrants and CSOs represent an important connection that may have implications for the wider social network and the generation of trust. It is important to understand the implications of public mobility for the organizations that seek to serve those groups. CSOs mediate in situations that are complex, uncertain, and pertaining to public welfare, be it social, economic, environmental, or political causes (Schwarz & Fritsch, 2014). SNA research has long sought to understand the role of networks in solving complex societal issues, including through CSO networks (Atouba & Shumate, 2010; Doerfel & Taylor, 2017; Sommerfeldt et al., 2022; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang, 2020). This can include issues surrounding and pertaining to migration. Holding significant social standing, CSOs often serve as community leaders with dense social networks (Nielson et al., 2019). As such, the next two questions were:

RQ3: How do CSOs aimed at serving migrant populations perceive and maintain their social networks?

RQ4: How, if at all, does the mobility of their migrant publics impact CSO perceptions and maintenance of their social networks?

In exploring the organizational perspective, these questions examined the characteristics of communication practices (i.e., frequency, channel, duration, content, strategy) and the quality of relationships (i.e., strength/weakness) for migrant advocacy CSOs with particular attention on the impacts of mobility, including the presence and dynamics of unique actors and ties.

Lastly, in addition to examining the perceptions of both Afghan migrants and CSOs on the quality and characteristics of their social networks, this dissertation notes the significance of the relationships between distinct actors to the generation of social capital, an important relational

resource that builds trust and norms between actors and across networks (Putnam, 1993; Saffer, 2019). Mobility should not be excluded from considerations of the generation of social capital, as it is not isolated from larger societal processes (Kauffman et al., 2004), and may play a part in whether/how trust and collaboration are facilitated for the betterment of society. This is especially notable as mobility may lead to distinct groups coming together and needing to cooperate, oftentimes including populations who are excluded from civil society (Cresswell, 2020; Dutta & Shome, 2018). I briefly reviewed how this exists in the U.S., where certain migrants are both rhetorically and politically marginalized. If the generation and maintenance of social capital is a public relations responsibility (Sommerfeldt, 2013b), then scholarship must include further examination of how trust and norms are built under unique contexts, including explorations of whether/how this social capital is accessible to specific groups and throughout a network. As such, the fifth research question was as follows:

RQ5: How do the relationships between migrants, as mobile publics, and CSOs aimed at serving migrant populations impact the facilitation of social capital among them and within their network(s)?

In examining the facilitation, exchanges, and nuances of social capital in social networks delineated by mobility, I sought to identify key insights to the dynamics between a marginalized, migrant public, the CSOs that purport to serve them, and society as a whole.

### **Method Overview**

This dissertation also utilized an innovative, qualitative approach to understanding social networks in public relations. A network perspective does not require a quantitative network analysis, though that has been a popular method for understanding network connections (Luxton & Sbicca, 2021; Yang & Saffer, 2019). Qualitative approaches to networks emphasize the complexity

and tensions of relationships and interactions between social actors, highlighting context, meaning-making, and agency in the dynamics of social networks (Decuyper, 2020; Dobbie, 2018; Hollstein, 2011); qualitative methods of data collection and analysis provide an important interpretive framework for acknowledging external forces, such as mobility, that shape networks and ties (Luxton & Sbicca, 2021). Through this research, I reincorporated a qualitative approach to social networks for public relations through the use of ethnographic observations (Atwell Seate et al., 2022; Desmond, 2014; Tracy, 2013), participant interviews (Hollstein, 2011; Tracy, 2013) and participant diagramming, namely a visual network mapping exercise (Copeland & Agosto, 2012; de Freitas et al., 2021; Hollstein, 2011; Luxton & Sbicca, 2021; Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2019).

More specifically, I merged the traditional sociogram approach to visual network mapping (cf. Heath et al., 2009) with the quadrant dimensions invoked by Hersberger (2003), and the color-coding steps used by Dobbie and colleagues (2018). Combining this exercise with a preceding and following round of interview questions allowed for in-depth exploration of social networks from a qualitative approach for both the migrant participants and the CSO representatives. Additionally, the use of distinct techniques of ethnographic observation while on-site with migrant-serving CSOs allowed for further perspectives about the impacts of transnational mobility on communicative social networks, forming a complex crystal of experiences through the collection of rich visual, textual, and embodied data (Tracy, 2010). This overarching protocol allowed for deeper consideration of context and meaning-making in social networks, and was particularly useful for examining the nuances of networks that have undergone change in light of mobility.

### **Preview of Dissertation**

Chapter 2 presents an in-depth review of the existing literature surrounding the new mobilities paradigm and networked public relations scholarship. First, the chapter establishes the

foundational dimensions to mobility and SNA, notably in public relations as opposed to other disciplines. Second, the chapter explores the role of social networks and mobility on society, particularly conceptualizations and actualizations of civil society. Lastly, the chapter provides an overview of the case of recent Afghan refugees to the U.S. to understand the experiences of this research's participants as an example of a distinct group of forced migration in its overarching examination of how mobility shapes our social connections.

Chapter 3 explores the method of SNA, both for the purpose of reviewing how it has been accomplished and for establishing the protocol of this dissertation. Specifically, it begins by briefly overviewing the history of quantitative and qualitative approaches to SNA before discussing qualitative practices more in-depth, notably techniques utilized in this research protocol (i.e., visual mapping, qualitative interviews, and ethnographic observations). Following this review, the chapter proceeds with detailing the overarching elements guiding its design (i.e., paradigmatic alignment, researcher reflexivity, and ethical considerations). It then explains the data collection procedures (i.e., recruitment, participants, and distinct protocol) before discussing data analysis and the assessment of quality in qualitative research.

Chapter 4 then details the findings to the five research questions surrounding the transnational social networks of mobile publics. First, RQ1 found how network transformations are incurred due to the enactment and context of mobility, including in the maintenance and navigation of cross-border ties. Second, findings to RQ2 emphasized migrant participants' perception of and involvement with resettlement agencies and other migrant-serving nonprofit organizations in the U.S. as a means of integrating into the nation's civil society. In examining the implications of publics mobility for the organizations that seek to serve those groups, RQ3 highlighted three dichotomies to how CSOs perceive and maintain their social networks, which speak to the actors,

relationships, interactions, and positioning within the networks. RQ4, then, showcases the role of mobility more in-depth by emphasizing it as the context underlying the social network ecology. Lastly, RQ5 examined the generation of social capital within these shared networks of migrant publics and migrant-serving CSOs, finding entanglements between social and other forms of capital as well as patterns in who is perceived as having versus needing capital.

Chapter 5 presents the distinct theoretical contributions of this dissertation. More specifically, it proposes and details a mobile social network ecology that integrates mobility and SNA through insights from both migrant publics and migrant-serving CSOs. From there, it examines the practical considerations of the mobile social network ecology, particularly for organizations whose purpose revolves around and/or operations include migrant publics. Furthermore, this chapter speaks to the flow of (social) capital within a mobile social network ecology, linking the exchanges to relational power dynamics and differentials, emphasizing their lived, embodied impact as well as introducing a new salient category: spatial capital. The chapter also presents this dissertation's methodological contribution to the qualitative approach to SNA in networked public relations scholarship. Lastly, it discusses the limitations of this research as well as avenues for future scholarship.

Overall, this dissertation represents an important study for public relations in light of both compelling recent events (i.e., the Taliban control of Afghanistan and subsequent increases in migration to the U.S.) and significant advancements in the field (i.e., the growth of networked studies). By utilizing mobility as the connection between this set of circumstances, this research helps to further network theories and better account for overlooked perspectives in public relations. This inclusion should advance communication and public relations theory because it entails a thorough consideration of the circumstances, identities, and needs ascribed by a context of mobility,

a significant feature in a modern globalized society. As such, this project hopes to situate theory in relevant and salient dimensions to traditionally sub-altern public communication. Furthermore, I aims to do so by returning to the qualitative roots of SNA, and utilizing innovative techniques for a robust, exploratory study. In terms of public relations as a practice, this dissertation presents insights to navigating relationships with a distinct, marginalized migrant public.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

With tandem growth in globalization, communication technologies and the proliferation of digital devices and platforms, the 21st century has highlighted how communication occurs in complex, entangled networks of people, groups, and organizations as a basis of modern society (van Dijk, 2012; Yang & Saffer, 2019; Yang & Taylor, 2015). These networks are the entanglements producing and produced by society, representing the diversity, strength, and ramifications of our public relations. For scholars and practitioners concerned with the navigation and communication of public relationships, networks are essential to examine. Fittingly, social network theory and method has emerged as a paradigm within public relations scholarship for examining the structure, dynamics, and outcomes of interactions among social actors, including individuals, organizations, and nations (Page & Capizzo, 2021). Yet, unexplored and increasingly salient to these social networks, is public mobility, its potential for the transnational, and its overarching impacts on the progress of society. As such, this chapter presents an in-depth review and subsequent proposed integration of (im)mobilities and SNA, specifically with regards to the new mobilities paradigm and networked public relations studies.

Network theories have concerned themselves with relationships among actors, the influence and consequences of these connections, and the maintenance and transformation of networks (Kent et al., 2016; Yang & Taylor, 2015). For public relations research, insights into relationship building and effective communication must thereby be grounded in understanding the complexities of networks, and important connections have already been made between network theories and crisis communication (Jin, 2020; Podnar et al., 2012; Schultz et al., 2012), corporate social responsibility (Golob et al., 2018), organization-public relationships (Kent et al., 2016; Yang & Taylor, 2015), activist public relations (Saffer et al., 2013) and public relations ethics (Yang & Taylor, 2014; Yang

et al., 2016). However, the theories surrounding social networks have yet to grapple with the complexities of public mobility, particularly on the transnational scale, leaving questions as to how events like migration impact the communication behind social interactions and ties.

This section hereby establishes the foundational elements to both (im)mobility and SNA as a theory, before proposing a new, mobile conceptualization of social network ecologies for public relations. It then considers the subsequent questions of such a unification, such as the role of social networks and mobility on society, particularly civil society. Ultimately, this chapter aims to provide the needed conceptualizing to consider the impact of public mobility on social networks and more fully integrate the realities and relationships of publics who have experienced mobility into public relations scholarship.

### **(Im)Mobilities**

In order to explicate a study that unites (im)mobility and SNA, it is first essential to explain each in turn. This section provides a basic overview of mobility and immobility, as well as underscores its significance. The chapter will continually return to the unique dimensions and implications of mobility, but this first passage supplies the fundamental elements needed to understand the research at hand.

#### **Definition & Significance**

Mobility is a concept that is defined by and examines one's (in)ability for and agency over movement. In its most simplified conceptualization, mobility is the movement through space and place, existing alongside its inverse immobility, i.e. stillness or stasis (Samek, 2017). As Cram (2019) posits, "often, we might think about mobility as something that's individual: How do we move from place to place and what are the different obstacles that we might face, whether physical

or emotional?” (p. 108). Mobility might be seemingly mundane, yet it can be representative of larger societal patterns such as the entrenched ideologies, meanings, and practices of our societal norms and cultures (Samek, 2017). Delineating the expansive potential of this concept, Cresswell (2010) asserted that:

...mobility involves a fragile entanglement of physical movement, representations, and practices. Furthermore, these entanglements have broadly traceable histories and geographies. At any one time, then, there are pervading *constellations of mobility*—particular patterns of movement, representations of movement, and ways of practicing movement that make sense together. (p. 18, emphasis original)

Mobility is therefore not just physical movement (travel through/to/from), but also intertwined with the shared meaning of that movement, and its embodied and experienced practice (Cresswell, 2010).

Mobility’s inverse, immobility, references constrained movement or “the inability to be mobile, that is, to operate openly across a variety of locations” (Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2014, p. 764). Also known as “moorings” (Urry, 2003), immobility is stillness, stasis, fixity and anchoring. Yet, the two concepts are not binaries of performance, but are rather inherently linked. Moorings are as significant as mobilities in the grander scheme of patterns of movements, their practice, and their meaning, both historically and contemporarily (Dutta & Shome, 2018). (Im)mobility as a whole must be the focal point. This dissertation integrates the concept of (im)mobility into SNA to further understand how the ability and agency to move through place and space impact societal relationships between publics and institutions, and the broader implications for a network as a whole.

As such, this project explores (im)mobility not just as individual, one-off acts of public movement, but acknowledges mobility as entrenched patterns of movement and stasis of distinct publics; this movement (or lack thereof) exists in relation to and is socially produced by

geopolitical, cultural, economic, and historic power (Dutta & Shome, 2018; Samek, 2017).

Implicated in and impacted by relations of power, (im)mobility “shapes meanings of space and the political subjectivities of those who exist in space” (Harris, 2018, p. 22). (Im)mobility is imbued with meaning, constituted by and constitutive of communication; movements of bodies and capital are “rendered (im)possible through communication, and at the same time serve as the foundations for the reproduction of discourses, communicative processes, and communicative frameworks that create the conditions of immobility” (Dutta & Shome, 2018, p. 3967). Mobility is a relational, intersectional feature (Dutta & Shome, 2018; Jensen, 2011), and, as such, may impact the formation, existence, and social interactions of publics, thereby making it a salient and significant factor to consider in our understanding of relationships and social networks.

Integrating SNA and mobility joins public relations scholarship with the new mobilities paradigm. The new mobilities paradigm (Cresswell, 2010) has been gaining traction as a critical approach for understanding the rhetoric of bodies, space, place, and their interactions. Whereas previous scholarship, particularly that of transportation and migration studies (Cresswell, 2020), assumed human movement as a fundamental occurrence due to the push and pull of places, a new mobilities paradigm suggests “a diverse array of forms of movement across scales ranging from the body...to the globe” (Cresswell, 2010, p. 18). (Im)mobility has been used as a critical, rhetorical framework exploring “both the rhetoricity of place and the bodies that move in and through places” (Samek, 2017, p. 209), notably in how the material and discursive manifest meanings. (Im)mobility has been an approach to examine how discourse produced in and by specific cultural dimensions describes and prescribes movement and stasis as well as its “implications for the possibilities of corporeal movement and understandings of space/place” (Harris, 2018, p. 22). Mobility scholarship has revisited historical and/or rhetorical events including Monument Push (Cram, 2019), the white

slavery controversy (Harris, 2018), the rise and fall of LGBT neighborhoods (Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2014), and the 1977 International Women's Year torch relay (Samek, 2017). It has utilized autoethnographic accounts to reflect on embodied experiences of the researcher and analyzed discursive markers of place to supplement historical accounts.

The joining of the new mobilities paradigm and SNA progresses our understanding of movement by capturing its importance on public interactions and relationships. By placing movement as a component of social networks, scholarship can contemplate and depict people's, especially group's, ongoing involvement with and experiences of (im)mobility and how it might manifest in social interactions and relationships. This approach helps to recognize movement as a non-linear, meaningful, affective process that is entangled in larger social norms and power dynamics. Though overlooked, mobility has always been inherent to human life and its recognition entails a need to examine its impact of actors, structures, and contexts (Cresswell, 2020; Kaufmann et al., 2004). Integrating mobility into SNA can assert the significance of transnational movement, and the importance of the fluidity of peoples, practices, and issues in the modern world. I now turn to address the concepts of social networks and SNA in public relations.

### **Foundational Concepts of Networked Public Relations**

Across scholarly disciplines, social networks are understood to be a set of actors, including individuals, organizations, nations, content, and locations, and a corresponding set of ties that link actors together, including the interactions and relationships that establish whether and to what degree two units are connected (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011; Marin & Wellman, 2011; Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015; Tsai et al., 2020; Wasserman & Faust, 1994; Yang & Saffer, 2019; Yang & Taylor, 2015). In basic terms, a social network construes social actors and social ties, or a group/groups of people who interact regularly (Madden et al., 2021; Valente, 2010; Yang & Saffer, 2019).

Communication has been highlighted as a significant element to social networks, serving as an important mechanism to establish links between actors (Yang & Saffer, 2019). More specifically, social interaction can be identified and examined through patterns of contact as exemplified by the transmitting and exchanging of messages between social actors in complex relationships (Kent et al., 2016; Monge & Contractor, 2000).

Thus, networked public relations studies have emerged as a salient approach to understanding and evaluating public relationships among social entities in a variety of contexts. For example, research has examined patterns of contact in internal communication networks (Sommerfeldt & Taylor, 2011; Treadway et al., 2013), nongovernmental organizations' (NGO) interorganizational networks (Doerfel & Taylor, 2017; Sommerfeldt et al., 2022), social media networks (Beard & Yang, 2011; Himmelboim et al., 2014; Saffer et al., 2013), governmental and public diplomacy networks (Dong et al., 2023; Taylor & Doerfel, 2003, 2011; Yang & Taylor, 2010), community building networks (Toledano & Maplesden, 2016), and competitive corporate networks (Burt et al., 2013). Networked public relations scholarship explores questions of the impact of public relations and public relations practitioners in facilitating social networks and their contributions to various social actors and society. This section hereby details the foundational concepts explored in networked public relations scholarship, including nodes and ties, relationship strength and diversity, and network positions.

### **Nodes and Ties**

At the foundation of social networks are social actors and social ties. First, social networks include social actors, also referred to as nodes or vertices, who may be individuals, groups, organizations, or nonsocial actors like texts and artifacts (Kent et al., 2016; Yang & Saffer, 2019; Zhou, 2019). Second, social ties, also referred to as edges, refer to the relationships between actors

or nodes, operationalized as connections that capture relational (i.e. communication) activities such as time spent together, collaboration, affinity, bonding, trust, and/or type of exchange (Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015; Wasserman & Faust, 1994; Zhou, 2019). Yang and Saffer (2019) summarized that:

...three core features of public relations that can be nodes or ties in the field's research: (1) communicators (e.g., organizations, groups, individuals, etc.); (2) messages (e.g., any organizational communication content, public discourse, social media content, etc.); and (3) publics (i.e. individuals, activists, stakeholders, etc.). (p. 2)

Networked public relations scholarship has thereby emphasized the significance of ties, or relationships, as the foundational building blocks that determine the structure of a network (Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015; Zhou, 2019). As such, studies examine and assess connections among nodes, viewing the relationship as the primary unit of analysis (Kent et al., 2016; Monge & Contractor, 2003; Saffer, 2016). This includes evaluating the quality and patterns of relationships within a network as well as questioning how relationships are manifestations of and simultaneously manifest social actor influence (Borgatti et al., 2013; Saffer, 2016; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Significant to answering these questions are data that represent shared points of communication or relational interaction, including variables like frequency of exchange, relational stability, symmetry/reciprocity of communication, centrality, etc. (Kent et al., 2016; Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015). Research has also examined the homophily between ties (Atouba & Shumate, 2015; Sommerfeldt et al., 2022).

### **Relationship Strength and Relationship Diversity**

One particularly relevant measure of relationships within SNA in public relations, and a prominent feature of networks overall, is relational strength. More specifically, network relationships are frequently classified as either strong or weak ties, in which strength is measured through (a) amount of time (b) emotional intensity (c) intimacy and mutual confiding and (d)

reciprocal services (Granovetter, 1973, 1983; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang & Taylor, 2015). Both types of ties can be salient and beneficial for social actors; public relations scholars have especially noted that organizations may “utilize a mix of weak and strong ties to influence their environments and adjust their activities to social expectations” (Yang & Taylor, 2015, p. 96).

Strong ties are characterized by close and frequent interactions between social actors. They represent network consolidation as actors such as organizations spend more time and effort on sustaining fewer, strong ties within their network (Uzzi, 1996; Yang & Taylor, 2015). This can lead to higher levels of trust between network actors as well as impact network embeddedness, or the fixed, repetitive links between social actors that generate further exchanges and opportunities (Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015; Uzzi, 1996; Yang & Taylor, 2015). By developing strong ties marked by intense and close relationships, actors ensure a deep embeddedness due to a more likely shared and/or overlapping social network (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017). This emphasizes a strong local cohesion characterized by intense and close relationships with their immediate connections, but often at the detriment of a global network cohesion characterized by a broader spectrum of connections (Yang & Taylor, 2015). It may also result in closed processes and reduced efficiency (Burt, 2004).

Weak ties, on the other hand, are characterized by distant and infrequent relationships that require less resources, time, and effort (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017). As such, they are associated with broader social spectrums through the facilitation of organizational expansion across looser, wider networks (as opposed to closer conglomerates) (Hite & Hesterly, 2001; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017). Investing in the development of weak ties allows actors like organizations to explore new opportunities and to access new information by connecting with distinct nodes that serve as a novel source (Burt, 1976, 1992; Gilpin, 2010; Rowley et al., 2000; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang &

Taylor, 2015). An overabundance of weak ties can leave a network lacking focus or meaning (Perry-Smith, 2003).

Relationship strength can be indicative of a network structure, and is both impacted by and can impact the communication strategies of social actors within said network (Yang & Taylor, 2015). Relationship strength can thereby showcase fluidity in network ties, but has been limited in that strategy is the primary explanation of transformation. Relationships strength is an important measure of network structure, but it currently overlooks the greater structural and contextual pieces from which communication cannot be removed, especially those elements of the modern, transnational world. In particular, I wonder how the mobility of social actors might impact the relationship strength of both pre-existing and new ties within a network.

Relationship strength is closely connected to relationship diversity, or the variance of actors, attributes, and/or ties within a network (Monge et al., 2008; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017). Within networked public relations scholarship, the concept has been operationalized as examining whether and how organizations connect with others from different sectors as well as interorganizational relationships between actors of different levels of institutionalization (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017). The concept has also been framed as network heterogeneity in which the diversity of key resources between social actors, including power, is emphasized (Wu, 2016). Relationship diversity is linked with the facilitation of resource exchange because transactions are found to happen between actors holding different or distinct resources (Reagans & Zuckerman, 2001; Rodan, 2010; Wu, 2016). Whereas relationship strength speaks to the quality, impact, and combination of specific ties, relationship diversity speaks to the potential of the network as a whole as a means of resource and information exchange in its communicative connections. In particular, I am concerned with the

unexplored question of how the movement of social actors, or public mobility, might impact the relationship diversity of a network.

### **Network Positions, Structural Holes, and Brokerage**

Another significant feature of networks and simultaneous salient area of research for SNA in public relations is network positioning, or the location of specific social actors amongst the various social ties within a network. In particular, scholarship has been interested in whether and how certain network positions benefit a focal actor, including more control over and access to resources (Madden et al., 2021). For example, degree centrality is one relevant concept in the study of network positions; it examines the number of connections one social actor holds with other actors, including a variety of types of ties, as one way to measure the influence the focal actor has within the network (Doerfel & Taylor, 2004; Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015). Actors with multiple quality relationships are likely to be more visible in a network, in terms of recognition and reputation, as well as more present in a network, in terms of their involvement and investment in other social actors (Doerfel & Taylor, 2004; Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). However, counting the number of relationships a social actor holds within a network does not capture the overall structural importance of said focal actor. As such, many networked public relations studies have turned to Burt's (1992) structural holes theory to understand the benefits and complexities of establishing relationships with other actors in a social network (Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015).

Structural holes are communication gaps between the nodes in a network, representing a separation between individuals, organizations, and other social actors who would otherwise be capable of working together (Burt, 1992, 2001, 2002; Kent et al., 2016; Madden et al., 2021; Sommerfeldt, 2013a; Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015; Stohl & Stohl, 2005; Yang & Taylor, 2015). While reasons for the lack of connection can vary, structural holes often arise in relation to both the

structural constraints and opportunities within a network, frequently existing among distinct, disparate groups (Madden et al., 2021; Yang & Taylor, 2015). In response to the existence of structural holes within networks, structural hole theory has emphasized the significance of brokerage, a concept that highlights how linking otherwise disconnected actors can be advantageous.

Brokerage occurs when, within a social network, actors connect other social actors that would not otherwise be linked, bridging across the gap of the structural hole and creating a beneficial network position for the broker. More specifically, Burt (1992, 2001) examined actors' network positions to illustrate how they may benefit from connecting separated groups by brokering the flow of information and controlling the activities that link actors together. Through thorough environmental scanning, organizations can develop intentional relationships with diverse and important actors, in turn accessing further resources with low cost and without developing unnecessary ties. Brokerage is thus both a strategy and is strategic for organizations. As a strategy, organizations that seek to broker focus their relationship building on deliberate, collaborative interactions with a broader, more heterogeneous spectrum of actors (Burt, 1992, 2002; Stohl & Stohl, 2005; Sommerfeldt, 2013b). Brokering is strategic for social actors in that it opens the doors to many benefits for the broker, including more access to and control over resources from unconnected actors, including novel information, and leading to greater autonomy within the network (Kent et al., 2016; Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015; Yang & Taylor, 2015).

In terms of network impact, bridging structural holes may help with communicating differences, considering the interest of all parties, and establishing mechanisms for improved trust and representation among actors (Burt, 2002; Sommerfeldt, 2013b). Of significance, then, are the actors who act as gatekeepers, boundary spanners, or who otherwise act as brokers by bridging

structural holes (Kent et al., 2016; Valente, 2010). More specifically, networked public relations studies have emphasized the role of practitioners as boundary spanners, who aim to cultivate and sustain relationships for an organization that influence the network, both in structure (cf. Sommerfeldt, 2013b; Yang & Taylor, 2015) and in shared meaning (Saffer, 2016). Structural hole theory thus depicts an important responsibility for public relations as a field—and its practitioners—in identifying brokerage, and thus brokers, as characteristics of effective relationship development and management.

However, Kent et al. (2016) explored the significant—yet often overlooked—darker implications of network position and connections, which highlight the role and risks of power. Power is a dynamic property of social relationships—as opposed to an actor attribute per se—with both negative and positive connotations (Kent et al., 2016). Yet, according to Kent et al. (2016) it is exploitation and power-over, or the ability to dominate those with no or less power, that has characterized the development of SNA and integral perspectives like structural hole theory. When it comes to networks, power is shaped both by the ability of actors to influence others, but also by the position of actors within the network; certain positions provide more access to and control over resources. As such, within networks, power manifests not only as power-over, but also as power-as-access in which actors' network positions, connections, and capacities to obtain resources are linked to power's function of access. Central actors, unsurprisingly, have greater access through their centrality, connecting to resources and information in a manner that decreases their dependency on a larger spectrum of others while simultaneously increasing others' reliance on them as a central actor. Power is thereby activated or achieved through an actor's ability to arrange and control their network by emphasizing their own centrality through acts of brokerage. What is dubbed strategic may also be exploitation (Kent et al., 2016). Brokerage itself conceptually relies on a certain degree

of exploitation being perceived as appropriate. In seeking to broker across structural holes by connecting with unique partners, social actors might be “taking advantage of knowledge or resources of other individuals and members of a social network” (Kent et al. 2016). Brokerage can be an unethical communication orientation based in power over others through manipulating access to resources by controlling the flow of information and relationship building within a network, all while improving one’s own position and status.

### **The Absence of Publics**

It is important to note one of the most prominent limitations within networked public relations studies as well, notably the absence of publics. Conceptually, SNA examines connections between all actors and nodes within a network as a central tenet to its epistemology; for networked public relations scholarship, this translates to the inclusion of both organizations and publics, whom are theoretically communication equals within the network (Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015; Yang & Saffer, 2019; Yang & Taylor, 2015). However, within networked public relations studies, it is evident that publics have been relegated to a secondary role given their absence from research in favor of examining organizations as nodes, organizational activities as ties, and interorganizational relationships as a whole (Zhou, 2019). The field has largely overlooked the interactions and impacts of publics in social networks.

The concept of a public is one of the most foundational, and simultaneously one of the most confounding, in public relations research and practice. The origin of the term is frequently traced back to Dewey (1927), who described a public as a group of people who face, recognize, and in turn seek to solve certain problems, particularly in regard to a specific nation-state. From that basis, the public relations understanding of a public centered around issues has only grown. Cutlip and Center (1971) defined a public as “a group of individuals who together are affected by a particular action or

idea. Thus, each issue or problem creates its own public” (p. 128). The works by Grunig and colleagues (see Grunig, 1978, 1989; Grunig & Repper, 1992; Kim & Grunig, 2011) especially reinforced the idea of publics as forming around issues in relation to organizations, in what is called the situational theory of publics (STP). STP assumes that “publics form around specific situations or issues produced by the consequences that organizations have on people outside the organization” (Grunig, 1989, p. 5). “Disconnected systems” of people with a common experience form into publics in order to engage in “collective behavior” (Grunig & Repper, 1992, p. 138).

However, there have been some notable critiques of Grunig’s conceptualization of publics as well as with the term generally. For example, the term is frequently used interchangeably with words like audiences and stakeholders, leading to confusion over the distinctions (Hallahan et al., 2007). STP has especially been critiqued for its inability to capture the dynamic and discursive nature of meaning and relationships (Curtin & Gaither, 2005; Pieczka, 2019); this approach to publics is limited in its presentation of static assumptions of social identities that in turn predict communicative behavior, rather than considering the contextual negotiation of identities and relationships that create fluid, dynamic publics within networks (Iannacone & Ashby-King, 2023; Pieczka, 2019). This dissertation aligns more with co-creational understandings of a public as an ongoing process of agreement wherein there are shared interpretations of events and shared interests within an environment (Botan & Taylor, 2004).

This approach affords further connection to the rhetorical scholars who have delved deeper into the linkages between ideas such as publics, the public sphere, and the features of the modern world such as digitality and transnationality (Pfister, 2018). Hauser (1999), for example, stressed the conceptualizing of the public sphere and thereby publics around networks of vernacular rhetoric implicating public opinion. This theorizing has only become more salient in the advancement of

digital communication technology (Pfister, 2018). It is particularly notable for this dissertation given scholarship that emphasizes the entanglement between human mobility and digital technology, such as how certain infrastructures enforce a digital border (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2022). Furthermore, rhetorical scholarship has stressed that publics are connected across nation-state boundaries and have, in turn, questioned the implications of these connections for public deliberation and the shaping of attitudes and/or policy (Pfister, 2018). Fraser (2014) notably sought to transnationalize public sphere theory, particularly in accounting for publics whom are not members of the political citizenry of a sovereign state yet who have equal needs to participate in political life. This dissertation embraces the acknowledgement of the digitized and transnationalized world on the development of publics and seeks to bring similar recognition to public relations.

Notably, regardless of the field's ongoing struggle to unite over a conceptualization of the term, the different approaches to public relations all recognize the importance of publics. As Zhou (2019) noted, "the equal emphases on organizations and publics are also manifested by major public relations theories and previous paradigms" (p. 6). These include dominant theories, particularly those from a strategic management perspective, like the excellence theory (Grunig, 1992). More co-creational and critical approaches that extend beyond and/or confront the functional characteristics of public relations especially "celebrate the incorporation of other social entities into public relations research" (Zhou, 2019, p. 6). Yet, publics are overlooked as a social entity in the advancing paradigm of networked public relations. The challenge of incorporating and empirically analyzing multi-mode networks has led most networked public relations research has to focus on one node in their analysis, which cannot accommodate both organizations and publics (Zhou, 2019). As such, most public relations research chose to examine interorganizational networks, or relationship networks among organizations, with particular attention on their "interactions,

hyperlinks, partnerships, and co-occurrences” (Zhou, 2019, p. 1). This notably overlooks the non-organizational ways in which people come together to communicate as collectivities.

The absence of publics has some significant implications, both in theory and in practice. The exclusion of publics, their interactions, and their relationships impedes the development of the networked paradigm in public relations; more specifically, the absence of publics ensures that a theoretical model of a public relations network ecology is not adequately measuring the impacts of organization-public relationships (OPRs) (Zhou, 2019). Even more, the exclusion of publics simultaneously entails not recognizing or measuring public-public relationships, overlooking their importance on the network as a whole (Iannacone, 2021b; Zhou, 2019). Furthermore, in practice, the exclusion of publics omits their perspectives and voices for the prioritization of the organization/organizational voice; this ignores intergroup and micro levels of communication that are crucial to civil society (Taylor, 2010; Tsai et al., 2020).

With regards to this dissertation, the absence of publics in networked public relations studies is a clear limitation that may explain why elements of public mobility are underexplored. By excluding publics in SNA, scholarship simultaneously excludes their perspectives, their lived realities, and the subsequent issues that incur their formation. As a lived experience, transnational movement, i.e. migration, arguably impacts the development and existence of publics, underscoring the need to examine the role of public mobility on social networks. This dissertation proposes to alleviate this issue by using a qualitative approach to incorporate public perspectives of mobility and its perceived impact on social networks, alongside a more traditional organizational viewpoint. The mobility of social actors presents a context that complicates the field’s understanding of many foundational network concepts, including the perception, maintenance, and navigation of social relationships.

## **Social Networks and Mobility: A Conceptual Unification**

To unite the concepts of mobility and social networks, and in turn study its unification, two additional elements must be discussed. First, I explain networks as ecologies from both a networked public relations and rhetorical approach in order to provide the premises of a mobile social network ecology for public relations. This lays the path for mobility to be theoretically incorporated in studies of SNA. Second, I present migration as representative of mobility, thereby grounding mobility as a context to be empirically studied by identifying migration as an act that produces key actors of mobility. From there, the first research question of the dissertation is presented.

### **Network Ecologies**

Within communication scholarship, social networks have been likened to ecologies and/or conceptualized through an ecological approach. Traditionally, ecology is a field of the natural sciences that examines the study of relations between organisms and their environment. SNA aims to similarly emphasize the connections between entities and the greater, societal environment, attesting to the importance and influence of interactions and relationships. Two communication approaches to network ecologies are salient here: the public relations network ecology approach from Yang and Taylor (2015), and the rhetorical ecological approach as primarily established by Edbauer (2005). The introduction of both approaches allows for a fuller consideration of social networks as dynamic and unbounded, with possibilities for understanding the role of mobility.

### ***Network Ecologies in Public Relations***

For public relations scholarship, an ecological approach to social networks aided in the advancement of the field's relational turn beyond the dyadic (Yang & Taylor, 2015). In an invited presentation in 1984 that was later published as a full manuscript, Ferguson (2018) called for the field of public relations to address that pivotal second word of its name—relations—and advance

the exploration of relationships in the academic discipline. Since then, relationships and particularly the study of OPRs have developed as a key worldview of public relations (Toth, 2010). However, the dyadic nature of OPR scholarship was questioned, emphasizing the limitations of isolating one relationship between one organization and one public (Heath, 2013; Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015; Yang & Taylor, 2015). The integration of network theories aligned with the need to recognize the multiplicity and entanglement of public relationships. Not only do organizations form different types of relationships with different actors, but they are also impacted by the interactions between other social actors.

For public relations scholarship, an ecological approach to the study of networks examines the impact of organization(s) on their networks by incorporating multiple relationships and the evolution of and interactions of those relationship structures (Yang & Taylor, 2015). It positions organizations as ordinary social actors within the ecology with its own complex relationships, rather than situating the organization as the center and primary point of a network (Zhou, 2019). Conceptually, this approach emphasizes all societal actors as possibly connected, including organization-public relationships, interorganizational relationships, and public-public relationships (Zhou, 2019). In practice, the network ecology approach examines the societal impacts of communication ties beyond just organizational benefit, explores the qualities of such ties, and identifies relational outcomes (Yang & Taylor, 2015).

More specifically, networked public relations studies may examine network dynamics on the variety of sources, patterns, and consequences of changes in a network structure (Ahuja et al., 2012; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017). An ecology approach to social networks within public relations recognizes the spectrum of relationships that an organization may have, calling into question the impact of overlapping social connections. As such, it conceptualizes networks as dynamic,

complex, and transformative social structures in which the network itself and the relationships within evolve over time (Doerfel & Taylor, 2017; Monge & Contractor, 2003; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang & Saffer, 2019).

**Actor Agency.** Equally significant to this approach is the role of agency in network dynamics. Whereas some studies take a structurally deterministic approach to network dynamics, in which the dynamics are seen as given features in social reality that enables or constrains behavior, an ecological approach stresses the ability of an actor to shape their own networks (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017). Agency can be understood as the capacity of an actor to express control or willpower. For SNA, it is operationalized as the intentional choices and enactment of certain communication behaviors and strategies (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017). Social actors, especially organizations, are identified as active agents whose decision-making and consequential communication strategies can change their structural position and relationships, impacting, in turn, the network as a whole (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang & Taylor, 2015). For example, Madden et al. (2021) noted that both pre-existing, static dynamics, such as position in a previous network, and active agency on the part of social actors to elect into a network can delineate new network opportunities, structure, and overall dynamics.

Public relations' studies have emphasized the strategy of networks and networking, highlighting how organizations can intentionally and strategically construct their networks and shape network dynamics (Fu & Li, 2019; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017). In viewing organizations as active agents, their communication strategies arguably impact their network position and relationships, as well as impact the network as a whole (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang & Taylor, 2015). While some predetermined, static dynamics have been noted as significant (Fu & Li,

2019; Madden et al., 2021), studies largely highlight organizations' capabilities and capacities for shaping their network (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang & Taylor, 2015).

More specifically, the characterization of networks as strategic assumes communication as a strategy for manipulating resources and discourse to achieve objectives; in this case, network strategies are, then, a communicative approach to achieve organizational objectives through the building and maintenance of certain kinds of networks (Botan, 2006; Burt, 1992; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang & Taylor, 2015). Examinations into organizational network strategies are, thereby, assuming that organizations can and do intentionally create, control, and transform their various network structures, allowing them to adapt to meet organizational goals and evolving societal needs (Burt, 1992; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang & Taylor, 2015). For example, Yang and Taylor (2015), in their initial introduction of network ecologies for public relations, developed a typology of strategies for certain network outcomes, based on concepts like organizational scope, relationship strength, and relationship diversity. Configuring their immediate network ecology thus not only helps organizations manage their relationships with multiple stakeholders, but also helps them reach various goals and benefits (Fu & Li, 2019; Saffer, 2016; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang & Taylor, 2015). These may be social, economic, or political in nature, including enhancement to organizational reputation, support for favorable policy resolutions, or benefit to local communities (Fu & Li, 2019; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017).

However, in spotlighting actor agency and the resulting enacted strategies, this approach may at times overlook the contextual clues and historic forces at play within a network ecology. While some scholars, notably Fu and Li (2019), have noted the significance of antecedents in advancing our understanding of organizational relationship building and the ability of strategically generating certain, preferred relational outcomes, what is not addressed is the impact of context

more broadly. Social networks can and do reflect the previous experiences, knowledge, prominence, power, and connections of its various actors (Kent et al., 2016; Madden et al., 2021; Zaheer & Soda, 2009). SNA should include examinations of wider contexts and how they impact network formation, structure, and dynamics, and then additionally explore how those contexts refine and/or limit network strategies for social actors. For the purpose of this dissertation, relevant contexts to examine include patterns, experiences, and histories of mobility among social actor groups, thus needing to further explore the idea of network ecologies through a rhetorical perspective that speaks to context.

### ***Rhetorical Network Ecologies***

Within rhetorical scholarship, ecology became “a threshold concept, offering a rhetorical framework that indexes the study of networked discourse, new materialism, and systems thinking” (Jones, 2021, p. 338). In particular, writing studies and pedagogy developed an ecological turn that advanced understandings of networked communication by incorporating a variety of concepts such as complexity, virality and circulations (Gries & Brooke, 2018; Hatfield, 2019; Hawk, 2007). The rhetorical approach to network ecologies is based on communication as inherently in flux, in which social connections, reified by and reifying rhetoric, are not fixed but reflect networked flows representative of lived and historical forces (Edbauer, 2005). The ecological approach within rhetorical studies thereby recontextualizes human interaction beyond isolated incidents and interactions to be cognizant of wider, fluid frameworks of transformative and transforming interactions based in ever-changing contexts (Edbauer, 2005; Rivers & Weber, 2011). The rhetorical conceptualization of network ecology highlights interactions as contextual to “forces, energies, other rhetorics, moods, and experiences” (Edbauer, 2005, p. 10); it suggests an unboundedness to our communication in which social actors are never outside prior and ongoing

structures, highlighting their existence beyond the immediate and direct (Edbauer, 2005).

Examinations into social actors and social ties need to be cognizant of the dynamism and context that prescribes and refines the connection in that moment, as well as note its constant potential for change with impact to actors and the network as a whole.

Additionally important, the network ecology, as conceptualized in rhetorical studies, integrates the idea of movement into public communication in recognition of the fluidity of our connections (Edbauer, 2005). Social actors and connections, especially communication, operate in a “larger world of dynamic, interrelated, socially constituted systems that are constantly in flux” (Rivers & Weber, 2011, p. 192). The social field, and social actors, shift and move in relation to and in spite of other events, impacting our communicative connections (Edbauer, 2005). Network social ecologies are thus never fixed or permanent, but representative of circulating temporal, historical, and lived events (Edbauer, 2005). Social network ecologies are thus unbounded, dynamic moments of social connection between actors, fraught with the potential of transformation at the hands of movement, fluidity, and mobility. As such, a rhetorical approach to network ecologies inherently encompasses circumstances of mobility, making space for the impact of that movement to be questioned and considered.

### **Conceptualizing the Mobile Social Network Ecology**

Ultimately, there are significant takeaways from both ecological approaches to the conceptualizing of social networks. From an ecological stance, social networks include but do not center organizations or their benefits, focusing instead on the complex entanglements of all social entities and their impact on each other and the network, and thus society as a whole. The corresponding interactions and relationships within social networks are dynamic because they exist within intersections of temporal and historical contexts, in which the lived and the remembered

impact communicative practices and the enactment of social ties. Social networks are thus sensitive to both active agency on the parts of actors as well as their previous experiences, positions, and knowledge. As such, mobility and fluidity become important dimensions for understanding a social network, though this has often solely considered in the abstract (i.e., the transformation of ties as a form of movement, or even social actors' change in network positions as a form of movement). However, when this ecological understanding is integrated with the idea of mobility as transnational movement, a feature that is increasingly defining modern social networks, we are pushed to simultaneously consider physical movement as an impactful context.

As such, I hereby conceptualize social networks in the following four premises to account for mobility within social network ecologies and its impact on SNA overall. First, social networks reflect the varied communicative interactions between social actors, including individuals, groups (i.e. publics and stakeholders), organizations, governments, and nations. SNA is an inherently ecological examination of the connections and their implications on the actors themselves and society at large. Second, movement is inherent to social networks, actors, and interactions. Networks are dynamic, always shifting in relation to the contexts in which they are en/acted. Social actors not only re/act in relation to events, encounters, and affects, but also physically move through time and space, creating a salient context in which communicative ties are impacted. Third, interactions and relationships within networks are both manifestations of and themselves manifest temporal, historical, and lived contexts as well as contexts of public mobility. Fourth, by recognizing the contextual and fluid dynamics of social networks in the modern era we must simultaneously acknowledge their potential for transnationalism. Social network connections exist, operate, decrease, and transform both because of and in spite of institutionalized borders, including but not limited to geopolitical boundaries.

As such, this dissertation operates under the assumption that mobility is a context that will and does impact the communicative practices within a network and is particularly concerned with how the introduction and consideration of a mobile public changes communicative interactions, complicates relationship building, and may also transform the network itself. In order to study such a situation, I now present migration as representative of (im)mobilities on a transnational scale, thereby underscoring people who migrate, or migrants, as mobile publics to be considered in SNA.

### **Migration as Representative of (Im)Mobilities**

Mobility is an overlooked factor in the creation and existence of publics as it not only shapes modern identity formation through related rationalities and affects, but is also part of the fabric on which social relations are woven (Jensen, 2011). This dissertation asserts that those who migrate represent relevant publics because the process of their transnational movement embeds them in social fields comprising states and civil society actors, all of whom impact and are impacted by said process of migration and acts of mobility (Waldinger, 2015). Recognizing individuals and groups who migrate as belonging to distinct, transnational publics (re)produced by acts of (im)mobility allows for better scholarly consideration of their identities, interests, and issues, including the impacts of (im)mobility on their social networks and the encompassing communicative interactions. In order to understand migrant publics as key actors for studies of mobility, this section discusses the terminology surrounding migration and the transnational dimension of modern migration.

#### ***Terminology***

For the purposes of this dissertation, individuals who have migrated between nations will be broadly referred to as migrants. The term migrant serves as an umbrella term that captures the various types of migration an individual may experience or enact. This can include voluntary and involuntary (i.e., forced) movement, seasonal and other cyclical patterns of migration, short- and

long-term migration, the various paths and timelines of migration, and the different types of migration as determined by national policies. For example, immigrants are an example of migrants that are distinct because they move from their home country willingly, permanently, and often through official and/or approved national means; in the context of the U.S., immigrants utilize documents like a green card, U visa, T visa, etc. to help them settle permanently and work without restrictions. While an important population of migrants, referring to only immigrants overlooks those who migrate unwillingly, non-permanently, and through other means such as: seeking asylum, seeking to enter a nation as a refugee, utilizing other distinct visas like the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV), and migrating to a nation without documentation. The choice, or lack thereof, to migrate (as well as how long for and in what conditions) is an important component to public mobility and any subsequent transnational social networks. As such, I will rely on migrants to acknowledge the wide variety and nuances of transnational migration.

It is also important to distinguish between migrant publics broadly and diaspora communities. Diasporas have been conceptualized as the dispersement, movement, migration, and settlement of a people away from their established, ancestral homeland (Bravo, 2015; Glick Schiller, 1999). Members of a diaspora may share a national origin through birth or a common identity, composed of cultural beliefs, practices, language or religion, that link to a common ancestry (Bravo, 2015; Glick Schiller, 1999). The common heritage may not be linked to a contemporary state (Glick Schiller, 1999). Emphasizing migrants as publics, rather than diaspora communities, underscores the transnational dimension of migration and how the process may enact various new forms of transnational communication constituted by (im)mobilities that further generate and disrupt agency and identity formation (Dutta & Shome, 2018).

### ***Transnationalism***

In evoking migrants as social actors implicated by mobility, a key dimension of their existence and communication is transnationalism. I use the word transnationalism and its corresponding concept, the transnational, intentionally in this dissertation. The concept of the transnational entails the “political, economic, social and cultural processes that extend beyond the borders of a particular state” (Glick Schiller, 1999, p. 96). It recognizes and juxtaposes non-state social actors alongside nation-states, emphasizing how each can constrain and shape the other (Glick Schiller, 1999; Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2004). As such, it inherently highlights the significance of international mobility and migration, emphasizing global migrant networks of social relations that connect ideas, goods, civil and political engagement in origin (home) and settlement (host) societies (Foner, 2000; Glick Schiller, 1999; Green & Waldinger, 2016).

Transnationalism among migrants is not necessarily a new phenomenon (Glick Schiller, 1999), but it has some distinct features in the modern era. Notably, technology has advanced so far as to drastically reduce the costs and time associated with travel, including international (Foner, 2000; Guarnizo, 2001, 2017; Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2004). Advancements in communication have especially impacted the ability to maintain transnational networks of belonging for migrants due to technological progress that allowed for more frequent and intimate contact with home societies (Foner, 2000). Thus, in studying mobility through understanding migration and migrants as examples of its lived realities, social networks are not only entangled with practices, perceptions, and power of movement, but also productions and producers of transnational social connections.

### ***Migrant Networks***

Migration studies within sociology have highlighted how migrants maintain social connections in prior locals despite their international movement and even settlement (Glick Schiller, 1999). Through various forms of communication, migrants establish interconnected networks of

relationships across national boundaries that are inherently social and include factors of their home and host environments (Bravo, 2015; Glick Schiller, 1999, Waldinger, 2015). These can be familial, economic, political, and/or cultural ties that unite societies of different nations into a conjoined ego social network, in which maintaining multiple identities and loyalties is perceived as normal (Foner, 2000). Kin networks are especially examined within sociology (Green & Waldinger, 2016; Park & Waldinger, 2017; Waldinger, 2015), with less emphasis on the connections between societal institutions or civil society organizations. Scholarship within this field has showcased that migrants extend and embed their networks in relation to their migration (Green & Waldinger, 2016), illustrating the potential for mobilities to impact SNA.

At the core of migrant social networks are communication practices; in sociology's migration studies, communication is noted as the most important act for "fostering ties among families internationalized by migration" (Park & Waldinger, 2017, p. 4). Their communicative practices encompass the generation and maintenance of relationships around the world.

Communicative actions may include:

building kinship networks that extended across two (or more) states; starting businesses that either facilitated or were dependent on cross-state connections; forming organizations oriented toward both receiving and sending states; using their influence to affect sending-country policies, whether for reasons connected to self- advancement or political commitments; or pressuring the host society government to secure policies that would advance sending-country goals. (Waldinger, 2015, p.17)

New forms and lower costs of communication technology have also consistently transformed the possibilities for migrants to maintain transnational social networks and the ensuing connections across borders as a result of the process of migration (Park & Waldinger, 2017; Portes et al., 1999, 2017). Existing literature about migrants and migration highlights that the social actors, interactions, and ties within migrant social networks change in relation to their transnational movement, pointing

to the need for a further examination of mobility's role within SNA and its impact on communicative interactions.

This need is emphasized when acknowledging that, though transformative, migration is not a homogenous experience, and this can impact the communicative capacity necessary to sustain cross-border relationships (Bravo, 2015; Green & Waldinger, 2016). Costs, resource constraints, privilege and the digital divide all impact the communicative possibilities of migrants in their potentially transnational networks (Waldinger, 2013, 2015; Green & Waldinger, 2016). Oftentimes the international inequalities motivating migration also generate inequalities in the ability for transnational communication (Waldinger, 2013, 2016), reifying mobility as not only physical movement but entangled in representations and histories of power. The digital divide is particularly notably in hampering access to transnational communication practices that sustain cross-border ties, as especially in line with poverty and poor infrastructure capacity (Waldinger, 2015). Transnational connections may be sustained on a selective basis, abandoned altogether, or may be otherwise unenduring (Waldinger, 2015). These differences highlight a gap in understanding the connections that migration produces and the communication that fosters these ties.

Understanding migration as lived experiences and representations of mobility highlights the latter's potential impact in social networks and the need to integrate it into analysis. As such, understanding migrants as members of distinct mobile publics with transnational connections allows for the operationalizing of mobility in SNA while simultaneously acknowledging the realities of the globalized world and fluidity of network ecologies.

### **Research Question 1**

Thus far, this dissertation has not only reviewed the basic elements of both the new mobilities paradigm and networked public relations but has also proposed a theoretical

understanding of social networks as dynamic ecologies that encompass the physical mobility of social actors. Furthermore, it has noted the current lack of public perspectives as a concerning gap, and pushed for the inclusion of distinct migrant perspectives, whose communication is implicated by mobility and frequently incurs a transnational dimension. Therefore, in order to explore the public perception of social networks with regards to experiences of mobility, the first research question is as follows:

RQ1: How do migrants, as an example of mobile publics, perceive and maintain their social networks?

This question seeks to uncover how public mobility impacts social networks and their dynamics, including their social relationships and interactions, from a publics perspective. In its breadth, the question allows for the examination of many features of SNA in the context of mobility, including salient nodes and ties, relationship strength and diversity, relationship maintenance, and network positioning. Notably, this examination will occur through the use of a visual network mapping exercise and a corresponding interview with Afghan refugees to the U.S. as a distinct example of migrant participants in order to facilitate the identification and details of key actors, relationships, and network characteristics. It also thereby aligns with the new mobilities paradigm's focus on how movements socially produced by geopolitical, cultural, economic, and historical power become instilled with meanings (Cresswell, 2006; Massey, 2004).

### **Social Networks, Mobility, and Society**

This dissertation further notes that SNA inherently examines the connections and implications of social actors on society at large. First, this section details how social networks link to not just society, but to civil society at that, explaining the significance of the concept in public relations, the salience of social relationships, and the role of civil society organizations (CSOs).

Second, this section explores the connection between mobility and society, particularly the devaluation of mobility and the groups implicated by it, leading into a discussion of how some migrants are marginalized in society. From there, this prospectus presents the corresponding research questions 2-5.

### **Social Networks and (Civil) Society**

While seemingly simple, the conceptualization of social networks as an assortment of nodes and ties should not be seen as a reductionist “aggregation of isolated entities” (Yang & Saffer, 2019, p. 3). Rather, the concept of social networks must be understood, examined, and valued holistically (Yang & Saffer, 2019). Social networks are considered the essential foundations of society given the inherent importance of social connections, and their structures, dynamics, and patterns can have tangible and intangible consequences on the actors, ties, networks, and thus society itself (Burt, 2009; Sommerfelt & Yang, 2017; Taylor & Doerfel, 2005; Yang & Saffer, 2019; Yang & Taylor, 2015). More specifically, social networks comprise society, and society is, in turn, a reflection of those networks and the dynamic relationships they represent (Yang & Taylor, 2015). Heath (2006) described society as an assortment of collectivities whose variety of communicative processes define and enact a shared reality and cooperative relationships in the face of uncertainty and risk. Connecting this definition to a network perspective, we can understand social networks as representative of society in that they are collections of social actors whose communicative interactions connect them—as individuals, organizations, institutions, nations, etc.—into a potentially functional collectivity collaborating over shared goals or issues. The dynamics, structure, and features of social networks thereby reflect society at large, but also point to the potential of social networks as a process that enacts civil society, a significant focus in public relations scholarship.

### *Civil Society and Social Networks*

Civil society is “a mediating space between private and public spheres in pluralistic democracies” (Sommerfeldt, 2013b, p. 282) in which individuals and groups have the agency to form independent organizations and purport multiple public spheres that capture their varied and changing interests and concerns. Civil society is characterized by “private and public associations and organizations, all forms of cooperative social relationships that create bonds of trust, public opinion, legal rights and institutions, and political parties that voice public opinions and call for action” (Alexander, 1998, p. 3). It is a communication process among social actors, grounded in the belief that relationships among organizations, associations, groups, and individuals can create better livelihoods for all members of society (Putnam, 2000; Taylor, 2010). Civil society is “the soil” that nourishes public spheres unique to the common interests of particular civil society groups (Sommerfeldt, 2013b). Taylor (2009) defined civil society as “the process of interactions that lead to relationships, build trust and create social capital” (p. 77). It is enhanced by individual participation in civic organizations (Putnam, 1993). This can include a broad variety of organizations such as religious groups, cultural organizations, activist and social movement organizations, professional organizations, universities, unions, media, international donor organizations, NGOs, and even sports teams and little leagues (Sommerfeldt, 2013b). These are, here on out, referred to as civil society organizations (CSOs).

Civil society is a phenomenon internal to all societies, dependent on the networks of actors, independent from the nation-state, whose social interactions balance conflict, consensus, and collaboration (Sommerfeldt, 2013b; Taylor, 2010). In other words, networks represent the potential of social connections and interactions to improve society through cooperation over shared issues and interests while valuing the differences and distinctions between all social actors, as an integral

part of the communication process to generate trust. Additionally, civil society is notably independent from the nation-state and may serve as powerful entities to counteract and mediate the state as a social actor (Dutta-Bergman, 2005; Sommerfeldt, 2013b). Understanding interpersonal and interorganizational linkages as markers of not only society, but the potential for civil society is thus an important component to the conceptualization of social networks in public relations scholarship.

Particularly important in the fostering of civil society is the creation of stable interpersonal and intergroup relationships based on trust (Taylor & Kent, 2006). Relationship building is seen as a key characteristic of civil society (Sommerfeldt, 2013a), especially those across different social groups (Narayan, 1999). In fact, civil society is at its best when there are relationships of affinity and cooperation throughout social networks (Hadenius & Ugglå, 1996). Without these traits, society is incapable of accomplishing shared goals and unable to function effectively (Renshaw, 1994). As such, civil society relies on the establishment of trust, affinity, and cooperation, features known as social capital (Sommerfeldt, 2013b).

Furthermore, within public relations, the idea that civil society networks are co-creational underscores how communicative ties among actors create shared meanings that impact the network as a whole and its distinct nodes (i.e., Kent et al., 2016). Rather than counting the existence of civil society partners and CSOs as evidence enough, the presence and quality of relationships between these actors are of greater importance (Sommerfeldt, 2013a; Taylor & Doerfel, 2005). More specifically, a co-creational approach to SNA focuses on whether and how relationships between social actors create shared meaning, or “the shared interpretation of events and information” (Saffer, 2016, p. 185). From this perspective, SNA links to co-creational values due to shared considerations of a) publics as equal social actors within a network (Taylor, 2010) and b) relationships as holistic

of society and its potential through the creation of shared meaning (Saffer, 2016; Botan & Taylor, 2004). Embodying co-creational assumptions, civil society as a communication network serves as both a process (i.e., the generation and maintenance of quality relationships) and an outcome (i.e., the existence of and benefits of these quality relationships) (Sommerfeldt, 2013a; Taylor, 2010). As such, in understanding networks of relationships as the foundations of civil society, the maintenance of those relationships, especially with regards to the production of social capital, falls under domain of public relations as a key responsibility for practitioners and communicators (Sommerfeldt, 2013a; Taylor, 2009; Taylor & Doerfel, 2005, 2011).

### ***Social Networks and the Generation of Social Capital***

Relational outcomes of social networks are significantly highlighted in scholarship, particularly with regards to the generation of social capital. Social capital is “a relational resource that can emerge as communicators negotiate relationships and meanings that establishes norms, builds trust, and positions communicators to facilitate the exchange and mixing of resources and information within and across networks that may provide value to members of a network and/or the network itself” (Saffer, 2019, p. 283). It “refers to features of social organization such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action” (Putnam, 1993, p. 167). As apparent in both quotes, social capital is seen as a significant societal resource that can, in cyclical fashion, further improve the communicative processes from which social capital arises, paving the way for the development of civil society.

In the form of networks of association, mutual trust, and norms of reciprocity, social capital is a group level phenomenon that exists only in the relationships among actors (Coleman, 1988) and is integral to facilitating positive outcomes for both individuals and collectivities (Paxton, 2002). High levels of social capital lead to cooperation and solving collective problems (Coleman, 1988;

Putnam, 1993) whereas low levels of social capital are associated with competition, struggle, or centralized authority (Brown, 1998; Newton, 1997). According to Sommerfeldt (2013b), “social capital fosters cooperation and provides a framework to achieve social, political, and economic goals that, in its absence, would not be possible” (p. 284) and is thus thought to strongly contribute to a vibrant civil society.

From a network perspective, social capital emerges through the communicative interactions between actors, notably those of negotiation and meaning-making, to achieve shared goals; social capital does not belong to nor only assist in the goals of one entity, but resonates throughout a network’s connections (Lin, 1999, 2008; Saffer, 2016, 2019; Willis, 2012; Yang & Taylor, 2015). For example, studies in degree centrality have found that the act of an organization engaging in collaboration with other social actors not only situates the organization as a central actor in a network, but also results in better relationships between actors, helping to generate social capital and thus civil society (Doerfel & Taylor, 2004; Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015). Thus, when social actors work together toward shared objectives, it generates social capital in the form of shared norms or values that then further cooperation and collaboration in social relationships (Yang & Taylor, 2015).

Civil society is dependent upon social capital, particularly a generalized trust that bridges relationships between different individuals or groups (Narayan, 1999; Paxton, 2002). Societies with trusting intergroup relationships and greater generalized trust promote increased cooperation and participation in civic life (Putnam, 1993). Understanding how to better foster social capital and civil society is a significant charge for public relations (Ihlen, 2005; Sommerfeldt, 2013b; Sommerfeldt & Taylor, 2011; Taylor, 2009, 2010), as the work to create environments of trust and better intergroup relationships can change the world. Networked public relations studies have thereby

asserted that relationship building and management within a network can lead to social capital as a benefit to the whole network (Taylor & Doerfel, 2011; Sommerfeldt, 2013a).

Furthermore, social capital from a networked public relations perspective is evident not only as a relational benefit for civil society actors (i.e., relationships are instruments for attaining social capital), but is also apparent as the relationship itself. More specifically, Sommerfeldt (2013a) found that relationship quality accounted for such a high percentage of variance in social capital variables that relationships are analogous to the social capital of an actor. He noted that “the substance of beneficial relationships is akin to the social capital embedded within them, making social capital not only an outcome of relationships, but of the relationship itself. Good relationships are organizational social capital, and vice versa” (p. 9). Thus, if relationships and relationship-building interactions are integral for the growth and generation of social capital, then the social connections within networks are important points of focus to understand how exactly social capital may be created, maintained, or lost.

For the purposes of this dissertation, social networks are not just quantifiable visions of communicative ties that prove the existence of civil society, but also representations of social actors living and interacting within a society whose levels of trust, cooperation and benefits for all may continually transform in the wake of modern issues. The lived experiences and historical forces that arguably impact our meaning-making processes should be ingrained, such as the realities of modern mass migration, represented as public mobility. Thus, if social networks represent civil societies, then asking how public mobility impacts social networks also questions the impact of public mobility on the generation and maintenance of civil society and social capital. As such, it may be significant and salient to focus on the role of CSOs in the social networks of mobile publics.

### ***Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)***

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are often described as third-party institutional manifestations of civil society, with functions that reside in between that of the state and of the market (Ossewaarde et al., 2008; Wiktorowicz, 2002). CSOs mediate in situations that are complex, uncertain, and pertaining to public welfare, be it social, economic, environmental, or political causes (Schwarz & Fritsch, 2014). With goals of fostering public good in reference to a wide set of issues, these organizations are significant actors in local, regional, national and global facets of civil society, and are considered to be some of the most trusted institutions (Schwarz & Fritsch, 2014). Their role can include creating awareness, influencing public opinion, and calling for action surrounding a variety of issues (Schwarz & Fritsch, 2014). This can include issues surrounding and pertaining to migration. Holding significant social standing, CSOs often serve as community leaders with dense social networks (Nielson et al., 2019). As such, they represent an important dimension for the aims of this dissertation.

Notably, CSOs include non-profit organizations (NPOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Sommerfeldt, 2013b; Taylor, 2009, 2010). First, NPOs represent an important site for communication scholarship due to their significant role in civil society, such as impacting corporate and government practices and policies (della Porta & Diani, 2006; Dempsey, 2009; Lewis, 2005). As a distinct organizational type, NPOs are not traditionally driven by profit, but motivated instead by the promotion of social change and reliant on support, legitimacy and resources for their cause(s) (Mynster & Edwards, 2014). In fact, NPOs frequently frame their overarching purpose in terms of bridging and fulfilling the legitimacy gaps between societal expectations of public welfare and the lived ramifications of institutions and institutional action (Heath & Waymer, 2009).

NGOs, secondly, represent a specific subset of non-profits, distinct as “formal (professionalized) independent societal organizations whose primary aim is to promote common goals at the national or the international level” (Mertens, 2002, p. 282). Scholars have established NGOs as important actors whose relationships and communication greatly impact civil society (Duhé & Sriramesh, 2009; Sommerfeldt & Taylor, 2011), including contributions on a global scale (Taylor, 2005). In fact, NGOs are one of the most prominently researched organizations among those that constitute civil society (Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015; Taylor, 2009). Many studies into NGO operations seek to highlight the role and impact of their communication in modern societies (Mynster & Edwards, 2014). These include examinations of international non-governmental organizations (INGOS), which operate in culturally diverse and institutionally complex contexts (Iannacone, 2021b; Schwarz & Fritsch, 2014).

Often operating in resource-scarce environments, CSOs and their communication are shaped by their material realities, leading to a variety of strategies and techniques for attaining organizational (and societal) goals (Meisenbach & Feldner, 2011; Peruzzo, 2009; Schwarz & Fritsch, 2014). This includes the maintenance and cultivation of significant relationships with a wide variety of publics, who may represent multiple, distinct, national, political, and/or cultural backgrounds (Iannacone, 2021b). Many CSOs have been noted as dependent on their strategic communication and public relations functions as a means of navigating the relationships and interactions within their environments (Sisco, 2010; Sisco et al., 2013). Significantly, their strategic communication impacts not only their relationships or organizational goals, but also the societies in which they operate, as an inherent feature of their existence (Iannacone, 2021b).

CSOs and their relationships are notable due to their distinctness and their potential impact on both other social actors (publics and organizations), and on civil society (Doerfel & Taylor,

2004; Hadenius & Ugglå, 1996; Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015; Taylor & Doerfel, 2003; Taylor & Doerfel, 2011). CSO relationships both require resources to be generated and maintained, but, in turn, also represent a unique resource and means for accessing and benefiting from resources (Ihlen, 2005). Previous literature has emphasized the significance of networking in organizational efforts and of strategic network building as a relationship management responsibility (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017). Iannacone (2021b), for example, noted how an INGO benefitted when it allocated more control in its relationship with volunteers, yet faced challenges in its cultivation of relationships with diverse, marginalized publics due to the lack of affordances it provided. The importance of network building and cultivation has especially been noted for NGO-donor networks and their implications on civil society; notably, scholarship determined a need for quality relationships as a means for optimizing trust, cooperation and social capital for both organization survival and societal progression (Sommerfeldt, 2013b; Taylor & Doerfel, 2005). CSO networks have furthermore been examined for their role in solving complex societal issues through cooperation (Atouba & Shumate, 2010; Doerfel & Taylor, 2017; Sommerfeldt et al., 2022; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang, 2020). There is a need to further explore and consider not only the relationships of CSOs, but how they are perceived, enacted, and influenced by the wider social networks in which they exist.

## **Mobility and Society**

Integrating mobility into public relations scholarship on social networks may complicate the assumptions of civil society networks, especially who is included within them and how the conditions of society may be changed. This subsection discusses the overlap of mobility and society, including the implications for groups associated with mobility, notably migrants. Mobility has, arguably, always impacted society and its development. As a principle of modern society,

mobility is enacted in relation to the specific contexts, embedded actors, local and national policies, and individual strategies that can each permit and/or repress movement in its various forms (Jensen, 2011; Kaufmann, et al., 2004). In turn, mobility may constrain or assist larger societal processes (Kaufmann et al., 2004). Society and mobility have a symbiotic relationship, in which meanings and understandings of both develop in relation to one another.

It is especially important to recognize that mobility can be a marker of social inequality, and the perceptions of the (im)mobile are indicative of mechanisms of power (Jensen, 2011; Kauffman et al., 2004). Mobility is not a universally accessible resource, both in the actual physical movement and in the meanings applied to certain movements with certain societies. Partially dependent on an individual's or group's access to economic, social, and cultural capital, (im)mobility can be enabled or constrained by the uneven power relations and circumstances of disparity (Jensen, 2011; Kaufman, 2002; Kaufman et al., 2004; Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2014). Differentials in power thereby reify inequalities in the discursive spaces, articulations, and processes in the practices and representations of public mobility (Dutta & Shome, 2018; Jensen, 2011). Certain sorts of people perform certain types of mobile practices, in turn both producing and a product of relationships between people and space.

Consequently, the devaluing of mobility aligns with the entrenched suspicions of mobile people, who frequently face acts of threats, fear, and hostility (Cresswell, 2020). Mobile groups are typically marginalized, sometimes to the extent of being excluded from civil society (Cresswell, 2020; Dutta & Shome, 2018). Civil society serves as an ideal communication process among social actors in which quality relationships are built through shared meaning-making that results in social capital that, in turn, betters society for all members. However, arguably, some mobile groups like homeless people, nomads, and migrants exist beyond the ideals of civil society (Cresswell, 2020;

Dutta & Shome, 2018). These groups instead are excluded from the communication process that allows for their issues and perspectives to be discussed openly for the generation of social change. Some migrants can exemplify the realities of both transnational and marginalized social networks, in which both dimensions are due to their experiences of (im)mobility.

### ***Migration & the Marginalization of Mobility***

International migration is “an inherently political process” (Hirschman et al., 1999, p. 15), reflecting the inequities of mobility as well as the implications for civil society belonging, notably observed in the evident marginalization of those who migrate—especially in a forced or involuntary context. Certain migrants do not have the protection associated with belonging to a society, instead facing ever-present uncertainty about issues that may potentially remain unaddressed within their extended social network (Bishop, 2019). Instead of co-existing as equal members of a civil society, migrant publics are often in a “perpetual state of liminality and limbo” (Bishop, 2019, p. 3). This is most evident with regards to legal status in a nation-state; for migrants without documents in the U.S., scholarship has noted how the uncertainty inherent to their existence in society oppresses opportunities to actively belong (Bishop, 2019).

Furthermore, the U.S. discourse about migration overwhelmingly operates in ways which dehumanize, delegitimize, and exclude migrants, especially through acts which strip them of agency (Chavez, 2001; Cresswell, 2020; Esses et al., 2013). Whether likened to a ghost (Check & Jackson, 2015), an alien—a term that has literally become synonymous for the foreign bodies of, especially illegal, migrants (Lechuga, 2015), a disease carrier or as the disease themselves (Ono & Sloop, 2002), or a pollutant (Cisneros, 2008), migrants are highlighted as a frightening “Other.” Their foreignness is emphasized (they are not from here—the community, the country, the planet), evoking an uncertainty that signifies their intentions and their impact as risks to public health,

society, and the natural world. The metaphor of the migrant as a criminal is especially entrenched in the dominant discourse in terminology like “illegal immigrant,” or “illegal alien.” Throughout U.S. history, conceptualizations of migrants have converged with ideas about crime and immoral behavior (Gerber, 2011). As early as the 1930s, the rhetoric of “illegal aliens” carried significant influence, especially for the Mexican body, by drawing from multiple narratives of economics, crime, and stereotypes (Flores, 2003; Flores, 2020). A spatialized, socio-political condition, illegality conceptualizes migrants and certain bodies not only as outside the law, but also as outside of belonging—a demarcation that rhetorically distinguishes migrants from the material and symbolic privileges conferred on citizens and those who pass as citizens (Anguiano, 2015; Cisneros, 2012; Flores, 2020; de Genova 2010).

Furthermore, migrants who face marginalization also do so in the form of politically voiceless—it is thereby challenging for them to speak out against those who oppress them or the oppressive/distortive narratives about them (Andrews, 2018). Those considered fit to speak publicly about migration are the governments and media that in turn frame the subject for a wider audience, leaving migrants themselves to be constituted, implicated, and oftentimes incriminated, through secondhand accounts (Bishop, 2019). This is further exacerbated by their lack of representation in elected government and in fields such as media, law, or education, engendering little-to-no self-representation in mediated content (Bishop, 2019).

Overall, the marginalization of certain migrants in society highlights the need to better understand how their mobility impacts their existence in larger societal institutions and processes, especially those whose purpose is to improve society. As such, within this dissertation, I examine the experiences of Afghan refugees to the U.S. as a distinct example of a migrant population whose mobility represents and manifests certain forms of marginalization.

## Research Questions 2-5

In considering social networks, civil society, and mobility, it is evident that there are unexplored connections and impacts between the concepts. Civil society, which can be generated through the relationships between social actors in a network and the subsequent creation of social capital, should aim to better society for all. Yet, it is apparent that certain populations can be marginalized and excluded from the communicative processes of meaning-making essential to civil society. However, simultaneously, the existence and operations of CSOs intend to mediate if not alleviate such issues, including the marginalization faced by distinct migrant populations, thereby serving a role in potentially generating social capital within a civil society network that includes mobile publics. As evident from the previous discussion of literature, the concepts of civil society, social networks, and mobility bleed into one another, and merit the need to empirically establish how they may be connected. As such, there are a few questions this dissertation proposes in this area, first:

RQ2: How, if at all, do migrants, as an example of mobile publics, perceive their relationships with and involvement in civil society organizations as a part of their social networks?

This question expands upon the previously discussed RQ1 by specifying a need to examine the role of CSOs in the social networks of mobile publics, exploring the perceived quality (i.e., strength/weakness; trust) of significant societal relationships and how it may extend to and widely impact social networks. By asking about involvement, this question also speaks to the communicative practices (i.e., frequency, duration, channel, etc.) that are ingrained in these relationships, especially those between an advocacy organization and the public it purports to assist. Given the importance of relationship quality as a marker of social capital and thereby civil society

(Sommerfeldt, 2013a), exploring civil society relationships in the context of mobility may provide new understanding for how public mobility impacts social networks from a holistic, societal perspective. Studies of migrant networks have traditionally overlooked their social ties and interactions with societal institutions in favor of focusing on transnational kinship connections. This question not only rectifies this but centers mobility as an integral component of societal belonging, examining the relationships and relational quality for a population who can face exclusion.

Alongside understanding the role of CSOs in the social networks of mobile publics from a public perspective, this dissertation also proposes to understand their involvement from an organization viewpoint. Given the existence of CSOs specifically designed to serve migrant populations, these organizational accounts represent a salient perspective on the mobility of publics and any corresponding impacts on social networks. As noted for RQ2, relationships between migrants and CSOs represent an important connection that may have implications for the wider social network and the generation of trust. Holding significant social standing, CSOs often serve as community leaders with dense social networks (Nielson et al., 2019). It is important to understand the implications of public mobility for the organizations that seek to serve those groups. Thus, this prospectus asks the following two research questions:

RQ3: How, if at all, do CSOs aimed at serving migrant populations perceive and maintain their social networks?

RQ4: How, if at all, does the mobility of their migrant publics impact CSO perceptions and maintenance of their social networks?

In exploring the organizational perspective, these questions seek to understand the characteristics of communication practices (i.e., frequency, channel, duration, content, strategy) and the quality of relationships (i.e., strength/weakness) for migrant advocacy CSOs with especially attention on the

impacts of mobility. As such, in order to explore the impact of public mobility on social networks holistically, this project seeks to examine the role and significance of civil society organizations within networks, especially as a means for considering the relationship between mobility and larger socio-communicative processes.

Lastly, as evidenced in the literature, the relationships between distinct actors can be fundamental to the generation of social capital. Mobility should not be excluded from considerations of the generation of social capital, as it is not isolated from larger societal processes (Kauffman et al., 2004), and may play a part in whether/how trust and collaboration are facilitated for the betterment of society. This is especially notable as mobility may lead to distinct groups coming together and needing to cooperate, oftentimes including populations who especially require societal assistance and advancement (Cresswell, 2020; Dutta & Shome, 2018). This project noted how this exists in the U.S., where certain migrants are both rhetorically and politically marginalized. If the generation and maintenance of social capital is a public relations responsibility, then scholarship must include further examination of how trust and norms are built under unique and often challenging contexts, including exploration of whether/how this social capital is accessible to specific groups and throughout a network. As such, the fifth and final research question is as follows:

RQ5: How do the relationships between migrants, as an example of mobile publics, and CSOs aimed at serving migrant populations impact the facilitation of social capital among them and within their network(s)?

### **Chapter Conclusion**

Throughout the preceding sections of this chapter, there is a clear need to question and clarify whether and how public mobility might impact social networks, with particular attention to

the corresponding consequences on relationship management on a fundamental, societal, and transnational level. This dissertation operates under the assumption that public mobility is a context that will and does impact the communicative practices within a network, particularly between the mobile public and other social actors, and that these changes to the communicative interactions not only complicate relationship building, but also transform the network itself. More specifically, by recognizing and valuing the mobility of publics, public relations can explore how movement a) reflects cultural, economic, geopolitical, and historical power (Cram, 2019; Dutta & Shome, 2018), which b) impacts the communicative interactions between social actors that c) ultimately shape the various, entangled relationships within a network.

### **The Case of Recent Afghan Migrants to the U.S.**

In order to examine this phenomenon and its implications for public relations, this dissertation examines the case of a distinct migrant population, recent Afghan refugees to the U.S. As noted in Chapter 1, significant numbers of Afghan individuals and families have migrated to the U.S. since the early 1980s—an era of Afghan history encompassed by political instability (Batalova, 2021). In the past 40 years, more than 6 million Afghans have been driven out of their country due to conflict, violence, and/or poverty, marking it as one of the world’s largest and longest displacement situations (UNHCR, 2023). For the purposes of this dissertation, I focus on more recent events between/within the U.S. and Afghanistan that led to the Taliban takeover of Kabul, a regime that has only further exacerbated the issue of displacement (UNHCR, 2023) and from which the migrant participants of this research have suffered. The departure of the U.S. military from Afghanistan, the subsequent rise of Taliban rule, and the turbulent evacuation of Afghan allies has resulted in a notable increase of migration between Afghanistan and the U.S. (Batalova, 2021). Since the Taliban’s capture of Kabul in August 2021, more than 74,000 Afghan

migrants have arrived in the U.S. as part of Operation Allies Welcome, the largest evacuation since the Vietnam War (International Rescue Committee, 2022). While by no means a complete history or examination of Afghanistan-U.S. relations, this dissertation notes the following recent events as integral to understanding the experiences of its participants as an example of a distinct group of forced migration.

In the two decades since U.S. forces toppled the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, both countries have been embroiled in the subsequent “forever wars” and entangled in an era defined by tumultuous relations of violence, peace negotiations, and changing policy (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). The final U.S. troops were set to withdraw from Afghanistan by Sept. 11, 2021, regardless of the state of affairs in the country, including ongoing Taliban attacks (Council of Foreign Relations, 2023). On Aug. 15, 2021, the Taliban overran Kabul, the nation’s capital, following its previous seizing of provincial capitals and border crossings, resulting in a return to a Taliban regime in Afghanistan (Council of Foreign Relations, 2023). Chaos erupted in the nation as thousands tried to escape. In response, the U.S. deployed 6,000 troops to evacuate U.S. and allied personnel, secure the international airport, and help evacuate the thousands of Afghans who worked with the U.S. (Council of Foreign Relations, 2023). The U.S. additionally expanded the legal protections and refugee status for vulnerable Afghans, including those who had previously worked with and/or supported the U.S., human rights defenders, and political activists (Council of Foreign Relations, 2023; International Rescue Committee, 2022).

As such, tens of thousands of Afghans have resettled in the U.S. through various legal pathways. One is the short-term/temporary stays reliant on Congress and the passing of the Afghan Adjustment Act, which would provide a pathway to a more permanent residency (Barros, 2022). The second is a pathway to residency via the Special Immigration Visa (SIV) programs that have

existed since the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009 (Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2023a). This pathway is for a person who qualifies for lawful permanent residence under one of several programs, having previously been employed in Afghanistan for a period of at least one year by, or on behalf of, the U.S. government (Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2023a). This overlaps with yet is distinct from the SIV program available to persons who worked with the U.S. Armed Forces or under Chief of Mission authority as a translator or interpreter in Iraq or Afghanistan (Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2023b). Both allow the immigration of special immigrants based on previous work experience with the U.S. abroad, but were enacted under different governmental policies. About half of the Afghans who have resettled in the U.S. following the Taliban takeover are eligible for the SIV process (Barros, 2022). Other pathways include filing for humanitarian parole, seeking asylum, applying for family reunification, or appealing as a refugee (Barros, 2022). Despite the distinct legal options, many refer to the situation (and population) as one of Afghan refugees.

The situation is one that has called on the work of many CSOs including resettlement agencies and various nonprofit organizations, the latter of which the Biden administration partnered with as a means of providing Afghans temporary assistance with housing, food, material goods, employment, healthcare, etc. (Barros, 2022). Resettlement agencies, on the other hand, are inherently embedded in the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), which is managed by three federal entities: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) which is part of the Department of Homeland Security; Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM) which is part of the U.S. Department of State; Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) which is part of the Department of Health and Human Services (Ambar, 2022). After registering with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), individuals applying for refugee status are referred to USRAP and one of the nine voluntary agencies who are federally funded in leading the

refugee resettlement process (Ambar, 2022). These overarching national organizations work with their domestic affiliate agencies across the country to confirm the location in which a refugee will be resettled (Ambar, 2022). All 50 states and D.C. have an office that oversees and provides federal funding for the resettlement programs in that state, and while the majority are managed by government departments, some states have a nonprofit entity in charge (Ambar, 2022). Agencies at the national and local level are contingent to the resettlement admissions and funding decisions by the president and their administration (Ambar, 2022).

Those legally entitled to refugee rights and protections have access to various services and support provided by the domestic affiliate agencies, including an initial 90-day period of funds/rent, furnishing, food, etc. Longer-term cash, medical assistance, and social services are also available through the ORR as tools for supporting the integration of refugees into local communities (Ambar, 2022). At 18 months following the evacuation of Kabul, many Afghans are at this point of resettlement in which they are meant to integrate into American society, find jobs, learn English, despite the ongoing challenges that have delayed access to many services and benefits (Barros, 2022). As such, Afghan refugees are an example of a distinct, mobile population whose migration incurs questions about their inclusion into civil society and the plight of their needs in the U.S. Integrating their perspectives into networked public relations scholarship not only evokes the enactment and context of mobility as an important part of social connections, but also presents significant insights in how to build relationships with and support this population.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented an in-depth review of the existing literature surrounding (im)mobilities and SNA, specifically with regards to the new mobilities paradigm and networked public relations studies. It established the foundational dimensions to both before providing a new,

mobile conceptualization of social network ecologies for public relations. It then explored the role of social networks and mobility on society, particularly conceptualizations and actualizations of civil society. The global landscape demands that public relations be inclusive of the depth of multiple, rich, and mobile relationships in social networks that span national borders, including those of recent Afghan refugees. Ultimately, this chapter has provided the conceptualizing and questioning necessary to move forward with studying the impact of public mobility on social networks and more fully integrate the realities and relationships of mobile publics into public relations scholarship.

## Chapter 3: Methods

SNA is both theory and method; whereas earlier sections highlighted the former, this paper now transitions into the latter, expounding the methodological histories and criticisms of SNA before detailing the design of this project specifically. In positing that social life is primarily and significantly created through networks of relations between nodes, SNA is an interdisciplinary method that has traditionally been aligned within the quantitative paradigm (Belotti, 2015; Dobbie et al., 2018; Luxton & Sbicca, 2021). However, network research is not required to use quantitative network analysis as network perspectives should not be seen as prescriptive of one approach, but rather as an orientation to the social sciences, such as a lens for examining connections among organizations, publics, stakeholders, messages, and issues (O'Connor & Shumate, 2018; Yang & Saffer, 2019; Yang & Taylor, 2015).

As such, this section begins with a very brief review<sup>1</sup> of the quantitative traditions of SNA and its corresponding limitations before describing the often-overlooked qualitative foundations and approaches to network research. Subsequently, the chapter discusses qualitative practices more in-depth, notably techniques utilized in this research protocol (i.e., visual mapping, qualitative interviews, and ethnographic observations). While such a review of methodological literature may prove untraditional, it is arguably necessary. Qualitative approaches to SNA are largely absent in public relations and communication research; bringing in the context from other disciplines helps to ground the methodological choices of the dissertation as a whole. Following this review, the chapter proceeds with detailing the overarching elements guiding its design (i.e., paradigmatic alignment, researcher reflexivity, and ethical considerations). It then explains the data collection procedures

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<sup>1</sup> These reviews are not meant to represent the entirety of the history of quantitative or qualitative methods with regards to social networks, as it is not within the scope of this dissertation to include more than the necessary summaries.

(i.e., recruitment, participants, and distinct protocol) before discussing data analysis and the assessment of quality in qualitative research.

### **Methodological Approaches to Social Network Analysis**

This section reviews the quantitative traditions of SNA and its corresponding limitations before describing the qualitative approaches to network research, with specific attention given to their alignment and conceptualizing of boundaries. It also makes a point of noting the area of qualitative network studies that this dissertation falls.

#### **Quantitative Methods and SNA**

Traditional SNA has largely developed within the quantitative paradigm with highly technical and mathematical language and approaches (Heath et al., 2009; Hersberger, 2003). Quantitative SNA aims to analyze the structural properties of networks, generating numerical data on social relations (Luxton & Sbicca, 2021). These properties include strength, intensity, composition, density, frequency, and direction of network relations. Traditional SNA is further based on the quantitative mapping of networks, which aligns with graph theory in its utilization of mathematical models that display findings as sociograms for data analysis (Heath et al., 2009; Hersberger, 2003). As such, within the quantitative approach, networks are visually and conceptually represented as bounded, allowing researchers to make claims about the aforementioned properties and their implications (Heath et al., 2009).

Given the reliance on measuring the properties of connections between nodes, advancements in computational technologies and computer modeling techniques have also developed quantitative SNA (Tubaro et al., 2016). Especially significant were the creation of and improvements in: large, available volumes of computer-readable data; cheaper processing power; and, accessible tools for

analysis and visualization (Trier, 2008; Zhang & Watts, 2008). However, the prioritization of quantitative SNA, and its corresponding mathematical analyses of increasingly extensive, electronic datasets, is not without its concerns and critiques.

There are significant limitations to the scope of SNA when solely utilizing quantitative approaches and its corresponding mathematical techniques (Hersberger, 2003). Largely, traditional, quantitative SNA is critiqued for its inability to capture the context, depth, and diversity of social networks (Belotti, 2015; Dobbie et al., 2018). Quantitative analyses do not consider the how and why questions when examining large sets of data (Whelan et al., 2016). While this provides insights for characterizing ties between individual nodes, it overlooks “how social networks are experienced or about how they are embedded within social, spatial, or temporal contexts” (Whelan et al., 2016, p. 3). In overlooking the contexts of interactions, research simultaneously omits recognition and insight of the environment of social network structures (Hersberger, 2003). As such, qualitative methods have a unique if not overlooked role in SNA.

### **Qualitative Methods and SNA**

Despite the privileging of quantitative approaches, SNA has roots in qualitative traditions as well, even if they are underrecognized (Belotti, 2015; Heath et al., 2009). Some of the earliest studies in social networks drew on qualitative methods, particularly ethnographic approaches that originated in the field of social anthropology (Dobbie et al., 2018; Decuyper, 2020; Knox et al., 2006). More specifically, initial SNA studies were anthropological, ethnographic explorations of the structure of kinship and other interpersonal relationships (i.e., Barnes, 1954; Bott, 1957; Mitchell, 1969). Subsequently, researchers in the social sciences continued to develop a tradition of qualitative approaches in their examination of social networks, particularly from an interpretivist stance (Whelan et al., 2016).

Generally, qualitative SNA examines the significance and salience of relationships between individuals and with regards to their social environments (Dobbie et al., 2018). It aims to trace the entanglements and contexts that constitute, reify, or disrupt specific practices, aligning with recognition of social networks as cultural formations (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Decuyper, 2020; Knox et al., 2006; Luxton & Sbicca, 2021). Within individual-networks and organization-networks, the examination of context is emphasized, especially in terms of the influence of culture, narrative, and content (Whelan et al., 2016). Qualitative methods are seen as capable of determining themes in social networks that are overlooked in quantitative approaches, identifying the forces that shape networks and the subsequent nature of ties (Hersberger, 2003; Luxton & Sbicca, 2021). Studies can utilize a variety of qualitative data and forms of data collection to the meanings and forms of relationships, including: observation, interviews and open-ended questions, document analysis, and archival research (Hollstein, 2011; Dobbie et al., 2018). That is not to undermine the findings or purpose of quantitative SNA studies, but note that these qualitative methods can contextualize network measurements to better understand how or why a node or tie comes to exist (Luxton & Sbicca, 2021). The focus in qualitative approaches is on exploring and incorporating various perspectives, not shying away from complexity or contradictions, as opposed to aiming to provide objective facts about the networks (Dobbie et al., 2018).

Overall, calls to ground social network research in their social contexts have simultaneously pushed for a return to and advancement of SNA's qualitative foundations (Luxton & Sbicca, 2021; Whelan et al., 2016). As the potential and value of network analyses aligned with qualitative inquiry is further recognized, there is a need to explore the practicalities and nuances of this qualitative incorporation, including the construction, visualization, and analysis of networks as a part of research design process (Decuyper, 2020; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). As such, the next sections

further explore the alignment between network analysis and qualitative approaches, highlighting both the relevant dimensions of this research and the concept of bounding social networks.

### **Alignment between Network Studies and Qualitative Methods**

Examining networks from a qualitative perspective is not merely about the use of qualitative techniques, but must ensure an appropriate fit between the research objectives and method. The aims of this dissertation encompass two of the six areas of network studies identified by Hollstein (2011) as being aligned with qualitative research: network orientations and assessments, and network dynamics. As an area of qualitative network study, network orientation and assessment studies seek to understand how people locate themselves and others in their social networks, as well as their perceptions about these social locations and subsequent connections (Hollstein, 2011). For example, Wong and Salaff (1998) explored senses of belonging in studies on integration strategies in migrant networks. According to Hollstein (2011), qualitative studies of network orientation and assessment place emphasis on “individual perceptions, meanings, orientations, and strategies” (p. 407) in not only ego-centric networks, but also networks with, within, and between organizations.

Given that network orientation and assessment studies the evolution of networks, the second salient area of this dissertation is understanding network dynamics, or the exploration of “issues related to the formative conditions, dynamics processes, and change of networks” (Hollstein, 2011, p. 408). This area strongly links to that of network orientation and assessment because the orientation and strategies of actors, based on their perceptions of their location and connections, are one of the primary insights into network formation and change (Hollstein, 2011). In focusing on public mobility, this dissertation examines how movement impacts the overarching perception of networks as well as the choices and agency of social actors in their network strategies, capturing

network flexibility and fluctuation (Fu & Li, 2019; Hollstein, 2011; Madden et al., 2021; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017).

## **Networks and Boundaries**

Whereas quantitative approaches have techniques for designating the networks of their studies as a bounded entity (Heath et al., 2009), a qualitative approach to the pursuit of network boundaries is perceived as both more complicated and simultaneously less necessary. Traditionally, there are two general strategies to bounding network actors in qualitative SNA: realist and nominalist. First, realist strategies assert network boundaries based on the individual actors' recognition, whereby actors are thereby able to define the network structure under the assumption that the limits of a social network are known by the actors themselves (Heath et al., 2009; Smith, 2014). Importantly, this does not claim that all actors acknowledge or maintain relationships with all nodes of the network, but have a general sense of who is included and/or excluded within their social networks (Smith, 2014). Realist strategies link well to network orientations and assessment studies because they address individual perceptions of the social networks they inhabit. However, these strategies are limited in that there may not be a sense of collectivity among actors as they describe their social networks (Laumann et al., 1992; Smith, 2014). Second, nominalist strategies assert network boundaries through the objectives of research and the imposition of an a priori conceptual framework (Heath et al., 2009, p. 650). The research questions drive the imposition of boundaries as well as the selection of network actors and type(s) of ties that define the network (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011). However, bounding a network in such a way that prioritizes analytical reasoning or institutional context may overlook certain actors and/or ties as well as discount networks as porous and dynamic (Smith, 2014).

In this dissertation, I align with scholarship that emphasizes the use of both realist and nominalist strategies because a conjoined approach contrasts the conceptualizing of networks as static, bounded entities. In many SNA studies, there is an assumption that a network is and can be reasonably complete, leading subsequent research to fail to account for the dynamism of networks (Whelan et al., 2016). Scholars have argued against the notion of networks as collectivities with definite boundaries, pushing instead for recognition of a) how networks constantly alter in shape over time and b) the impossibility of capturing a network in its entirety (Antonucci, 1985; Crow, 2004; Heath, 2009). Conceptually, network boundaries should be understood as “permeable, partial, and dynamic” (Heath et al., 2009, p. 658) and not necessarily connected (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011). Subsequently, scholars should approach the study of networks with that instability in mind. In fact, relinquishing such assumptions allows for scholarship to acknowledge and address ways in which individuals may be largely disconnected or isolated entirely from a social network structure (Smith, 2014).

As such, I incorporated both realist and nominalist strategies in this dissertation to account for the dynamism of social networks. First, for the research design phases of recruitment and sampling, I enacted nominalist strategies; I actively selected who qualified as relevant actors and/or nodes in the social networks under study based on the research questions. More specifically, I examined how recent Afghan refugees perceived their social networks following experiences of transnational mobility, highlighting overall structure, dynamism, and communicative norms. I also incorporated the perceptions of CSO representatives from resettlement agencies and migrant nonprofits (in sectors like legal rights, housing and material goods, and general welfare) to further understand the impact of public mobility on social networks. This allowed for the project to understand the ties between migrants and CSOs, and to underscore the importance of a clearly

defined organizational perspective. Furthermore, in this design, CSOs served as important gatekeepers and “name generators” that provided the names of additional network members (Heath et al., 2009, p. 650); this is especially significant given that migrants often represent vulnerable and/or hidden populations (Tracy, 2013).

While nominalist strategies helped with early phases of this project, realist strategies were, secondly, incorporated into the data collection processes of participant interview and mapping techniques. As further described, participants were asked to express their social networks in a variety of ways, including orally and visually. Doing so allowed me to not only explore actor perceptions of their social networks and the corresponding dynamics, but also account for the limitations of the nominalist strategy. Rather than relying on just myself to determine the social network, participants had a voice in the boundaries of their social networks, if any. This approach also conceptually aligned with networks being unbounded, unstable, and overall changing creatures that reflect the flows of people, time, and contexts.

### **Qualitative Techniques for SNA**

This section discusses qualitative practices more in-depth, notably visual network mapping, qualitative interviews, and ethnographic observations as distinct techniques for a qualitative approach to network studies.

#### **Visual Network Mapping**

Visual network mapping is a type of graphic elicitation technique that generally instruct participants to draw “visual representations of a concept, experience, or belief” (Copeland & Agosto, 2012, p. 514), notably those that are more complex, abstract, or challenging to capture in oral data collection methods alone. Graphic elicitation techniques incorporate diagrams and drawing

based on the context of the research to stimulate participant recall of knowledge and experiences, frequently complementing data collected in interviews (Bagnoli, 2011; Copeland & Agosto, 2012). These techniques can be considered a creative means of expressing entangled interactions and relationships (de Freitas, 2012a, 2012b; de Freitas et al., 2021). Their adoption and use in qualitative research is increasing, particularly flowcharts, timelines, freeform diagrams, and network maps based on concentric circles (Copeland & Agosto, 2012; Heath et al., 2009).

In this dissertation, I focused specifically on the traditional use of mapping as a means of eliciting visual participant-generated data on social networks in qualitative SNA research. Broadly speaking, mapping situates data collection in participant's visual expressions of meanings and perceptions, particularly those of local and global relations (de Freitas et al., 2021; Wheeldon & Fraubert, 2009). Mapping operates to locate, project, and distribute the proximities of existence, both the physical/material and the abstract/intangible (de Freitas et al., 2021; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). In particular, mapping helps to conceptualize collectivities and the corresponding concerns regarding place and belonging, such as maps of one's historical and social locations (de Freitas et al., 2021). Mapping as a data collection method affords participants the space to personally create visual representations of their experiences, including those of their social networks as a means for describing their relationships (Hollstein, 2011; Wheeldon, 2010; Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2019).

Network mapping generally falls under the method of relational maps, which “function to illustrate the conceptual distance between the participants and other people or objects, with the importance of the persons or objects diminishing as distance increases from the participant” (Copeland & Agosto, 2012, p. 515). As a graphic elicitation technique, network maps can reveal assumptions about relationality and capture its nonlinear and dynamic qualities (de Freitas et al., 2021). Mapping is an exploratory means of both generating and analyzing relational data that helps

probe deeper into the details and patterns of participant social connections, ultimately representing an integration of qualitative methods into the description of social networks, their structures, and their components (Luxton & Sbicca, 2021). Two types of visual network mapping are relevant for the purposes of this dissertation: sociograms and social network maps.

### *Sociograms*

The most common method for mapping social networks, sociograms are an egocentric, hierarchical mapping technique that comprises concentric circles to indicate ranges of relational closeness within a network (Antonucci, 1986; Heath et al., 2009). Utilized and refined since the 1960s, sociograms are easy to facilitate and provide flexibility to meet research objectives (Dobbie et al., 2018; Hogan et al., 2007; Ryan et al., 2014). First, researchers either provide participants with a blank sociogram structure or ask participants to draw a blank map themselves (Copeland & Agosto, 2012). Often, researchers include an example of a completed map as well (Wheeldon & Fraubert, 2009). Upon drawing or receiving the blank sociogram, participants are asked a name generator question, such as “please think about the important people in your life” (Dobbie et al., 2018, p. 210). These names are then to be placed on the sociogram. Participants are instructed to position the people they felt were most important closer to the center circle, which represents the participant themselves either by placing their name or the word self in said center circle; people they felt less close to or felt were less important were placed farther away from the center circle (Dobbie et al., 2018). Additionally, participants are asked to label, in some capacity, their relationships with each person (Dobbie et al., 2018).

Though they are their own form of unique data, sociograms are often integrated into the interview process, becoming a catalyst for deeper reflection and rich data through the generation of dialogue and narratives (Belotti, 2016; Dobbie et al., 2018; Ryan et al., 2014). This occurs both a)

as participants construct their maps and any uncertainty, hesitancy, or choices about their relationships emerge in visible and audible ways and b) in follow-up interview questions that ask participants to describe their networks, the process of creating them, the specifics, and the limitations (Dobbie et al., 2018; Heath et al., 2009). Sociograms as a process and a product become a unique source of data, and, when paired with interviews, results in unique insights about participants' social networks.

A further dimension to utilizing sociograms as a method for visualizing social networks is the inclusion of different colors to represent distinct types of relationships, as seen in the work of Dobbie et al. (2018). The authors had participants assign one of three colors to the different social ties marked on their sociograms based on the perceived supports or drawbacks to/from a relationship. This additional act to the mapping process afforded participants the space to visualize their relationships with more nuance, concretizing the complexity of sometimes overlapping, contradictory ties.

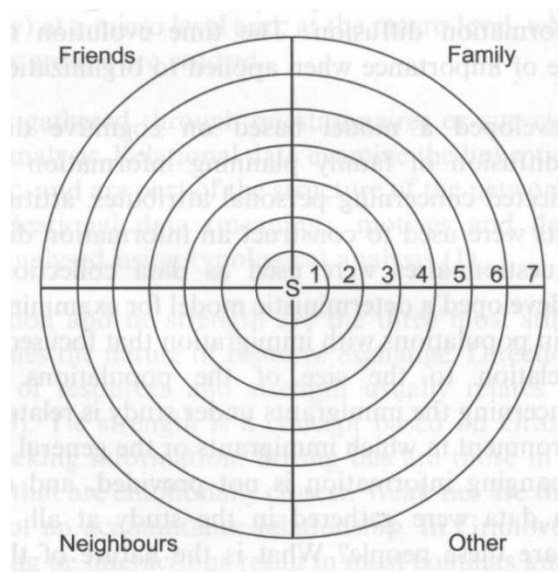
Ultimately, sociograms are a useful tool for capturing not just relationships, but also for uncovering how people perceive and visualize the entirety of their social network; it has been noted as particularly beneficial when working with vulnerable populations whose relationships may be more complex (Dobbie et al., 2018). As a mapping technique, the process and product of sociograms are one means for conceptualizing the dynamism of people's perceived social connections and experiences (Tubaro et al., 2016). It is unsurprising, then, that the next type of visual network mapping derives from sociograms.

### ***Social Network Maps***

Built upon the idea of sociograms, social network maps are an adaptation to the process of participant-generated visualizations of their social connections. Still using the hierarchical,

concentric circles to collect egocentric network data, social network maps are distinct in their introduction of overlaid quadrants, as seen in *Figure 1* (Hersberger, 2003). For basic versions of the map, the quadrants typically include family, friends, neighbors, and others, but these categories can be adapted as needed to meet the research objectives (Hersberger, 2003). Similar to the process of constructing sociograms, participants are instructed to place particular data points, notably people/social connections relating to the research topic, in a relevant and/or salient circle and quadrant. The distance from the center circle still corresponds to degrees of relational closeness while the quadrants serve to label the relationship (Hersberger, 2003). In a unique step, following the marking and labeling of the map with social connections, participants are then instructed to draw lines between the actors on the map who are connected to each other; this adds another layer of visualizing the connectivity as well as density of an individual network (Hersberger, 2003).

*Figure 1: Example of Hersberger's (2003) Social Network Map*



### ***Benefits and Limitations***

Across the two types of relevant mapping techniques for this dissertation, there are clear benefits and limitations to address. The inclusion of mapping results in a valuable and unique

process of data collection wherein the product (i.e. map) is itself a form of data that, when using a semi-standardized design such as a sociogram, allows for cross-case comparison (Hollstein, 2011; Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2019). Additionally, the procedures for creating the map afford a more creative, participant-generated form of engagement to probe relevant experiences and perceptions (Wheeldon & Fraubert, 2009). This process pushes beyond the stereotypical soliciting of rehearsed narratives, instead providing a strategy for aligning with participant systems of meanings in the context of relationality (Hollstein, 2011; Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2019). In fact, mapping enables further identification of and reflection upon complex actions than what can be accomplished solely in interviews because of its inherent ability to represent experiences beyond linguistic and conventional limitations (Copeland & Agosto, 2012; Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2019). Mapping acknowledges that people learn, think, and communicate through words, graphics, and images, and subsequently affords the space for a layered expression of participant perceptions of social connections by taking those differences into account (Wheeldon, 2011).

Ultimately, graphic elicitation techniques, including visual mapping, is a complementary form of data collection, helpful in triangulating or crystallizing the data collected using a range of other methods (Copeland & Agosto, 2012). It can be helpful for identifying themes and trends, can elicit data related to emotions, and yield deeper, more complex insights when paired with other non-graphic techniques, notably interviews (Copeland & Agosto, 2012). In fact, the most salient drawback to mapping is arguably its inability to be used in isolation; despite generating unique forms of visual data in the maps themselves, these drawings and visualizations suffer from decontextuality without subsequent verbal modes of inquiry (Copeland & Agosto, 2012).

Further limitations to the use of mapping include the time requirements for its facilitation and analysis, as well as variation in the participant's ability and willingness to complete the

instructions (Copeland & Agosto, 2012). Just as mapping is beneficial due to its recognition of individuals' different cognitive abilities with regard to language, linguistics, and images, so too can it be limited by participants' capacities for thinking spatially (Copeland & Agosto, 2012).

Participants may struggle to understand the requirements of the visualization exercise, may vary in the number of actors/items they map out, and/or may otherwise resist more intensive drawing instructions (Copeland & Agosto, 2012).

### **Qualitative Interviews**

Qualitative interviews are a foundational approach to discovering what others feel and think about their social world. Equally subjected to the implications of paradigmatic alignments as any other methodological tool, qualitative interviewing, from an interpretive perspective, is a process of shared sense-making between researchers and participants (Roulston, 2010). The emphasis is not just on gaining background information, but on co-constructing accounts for emic understanding of issues or experiences within a specific moment or setting (Roulston, 2010; Tracy, 2013). Qualitative interviews have been a useful tool to previous studies of relationships in the field of public relations, including organization-public relationships (Hung, 2005; Iannacone, 2021b). They have also been utilized in mixed methods studies of social networks (Crossley et al., 2009; Crossley, 2010; Dobbie et al., 2018; Luxton & Sbicca, 2021; Marin & Wellman, 2011), including within the field of public relations (cf. Madden et al, 2021). For solely qualitative approaches to SNA, qualitative interviews result in interpretive data on actors and their elucidations of their social networks, including the relationships between nodes, as the mechanisms and conditions that shape the network as a whole (Luxton & Sbicca, 2021).

Interviews are highlighted as an important tool for qualitative SNA, notably studies of network orientations and assessments. In particular, unstructured or semi-structured interviews with

open-ended questions allow participants to express their own systems of relevance and salience (Hollstein, 2011). In this approach, participants are to be recognized as experts with the capacity to define their problems and objectives, express meaning, and assign relevance because “their perception of their environment (context of action) is shaped by their specific social standing” (Hollstein, 2011, p. 407). Open, inductive interviews can thereby allow for the in-depth, exploratory research process necessary for cases where individual meanings can be expected to vary (Hollstein, 2011). Ultimately, these types of qualitative studies on network orientation and assessment can be integral for understanding both how and why networks matter as well as how they evolve over time (Hollstein, 2011). In this dissertation, I included qualitative interviews as one of the main methods, notably as a partner to visual mapping techniques. Given that the purpose of this research is to explore the actors’ perceptions of their social networks and the role of mobility within it, qualitative interviews were a useful tool for accessing in-depth descriptions of experiences.

### **Ethnographic Observations**

Alongside the visual mapping exercises and interviews, I utilized a number of ethnographic techniques to explore the research questions of this dissertation. Ethnography is the combination and culmination of multiple, embodied, contextual methods of fieldwork in which the researcher is situated in the setting(s) of participants (Jowett & O’Toole, 2006). Ethnographies focus on a plethora of cultural elements, not only asking questions about significant practices like ceremonies and rituals or even daily practices like routines and language, but also sharing firsthand those practices as well as the background, environment, problems and social relationships of a studied group or place (Tracy, 2013). As a method, these techniques highlight the importance of collecting rich, detailed data by being enmeshed in the community, group, or place in question (Geertz, 1973). Though originating in anthropology, ethnography has advanced as a qualitative method across

fields, including in communication and in studies that illustrate the nuances of relationships and dynamics (Tracy, 2013). Typically, an ethnography is the process and result of a prolonged period of time in which a researcher is immersed in the field (Jowett & O’Toole, 2006), though focused ethnographies have emerged as a more contained, shorter study into a particular setting or issue (Quintanilha et al., 2015). This dissertation lies closer to the latter as it is not a full ethnographic undertaking, but rather I replicated ethnographic techniques as a portion of my data collection and overarching methods.

As this dissertation examined perceptions of social networks, my ethnographic undertaking was guided by Desmond’s (2014) work on relational ethnography, which spotlights connections as the foundational principle of ethnographic research rather than group- or place-based boundaries. Relational ethnographies “show how things hang together in a web of mutual influence or support or interdependence to describe the connections between the specifics the ethnographer knows by virtue of being there” (Desmond, 2014, p. 554). They examine minimally two types of actors who share a social space, but occupy different positions; these actors are bounded by mutual dependence, struggle, or both (Desmond, 2014). For this dissertation, I followed Desmond’s (2014) emphasis on dynamics: how are actors enmeshed with one another and how does the social space (i.e., network) reflect orientations toward, away from, or between actors? I notably explored this through three ethnographic techniques: observation through witnessing, ethnographic interviews, and textual analysis.

Ethnographic observation is an overarching term to capture the process of interacting within the studied setting(s) of the field, including watching, listening, asking questions, collecting documents, and reflecting (Tracy, 2013). Researchers have had different orientations toward their place in the field and how to conduct observations, and for this dissertation, I turn to the orientation

of witnessing. Whereas observing is often perceived as an innocent or neutral activity, witnessing reminds researchers of the power of surveillance in fieldwork and “the disciplining power of the gaze” (Tracy, 2013, p. 77). Witnessing as a form of ethnographic observation prescribes a fully embodied experience through a range of senses, calling on researchers to holistically bear witness to the lives of the people they are researching (Tracy, 2013). In this sense, researchers are not vaguely operating in the field like a shadow on the wall, but actively testifying to the aspects of the world they witness (Tracy, 2013). Witnessing acknowledges the presence and impact of the researcher in the field, and thereby aligns with the constructivist epistemology undertaken in this dissertation, particularly in recognizing the social world as co-constructed/co-contested and interactions as a negotiation of meaning (Tracy, 2013).

While undertaking ethnographic witnessing, two further techniques emerge: conducting ethnographic interviews and collecting organizational documents for textual analysis. Ethnographic interviews are emergent, informal, and spontaneous conversations that serve as a form of interview data (Tracy, 2013). They are specifically started by the researcher in the field, performed as a casual exchange but often representing important information and insights (Tracy, 2013). Organizational texts represent the distinct communication of an organization in various forms, including its digital messaging. These were compiled as part of the overarching ethnographic techniques to serve as a basis for textual analysis. Textual analysis can serve as a significant supplement to other ethnographic techniques and are analyzed as the description and interpretation of the content, structure, purposes and consequences of the text (Tracy, 2013).

### **Research Design: Guiding Elements**

Having explained the qualitative approach to network studies, this chapter hereby proceeds with detailing the protocol of this dissertation. It describes the paradigmatic alignment of this

research as well as overviews the researcher reflexivity statement and ethics guiding the research design.

### **Paradigmatic Alignment**

In this dissertation, I undertook an interpretivist approach as my paradigmatic alignment. Paradigms prescribe the philosophical assumptions that guide how scholars understand and study the world, including the nature of reality (ontology), the nature of knowing (epistemology), and the nature of valuation (axiology) (Tracy, 2013). Researchers ascribe to certain paradigms, and, as such, their research needs to align with those genre expectations.

An interpretivist approach, also referred to as a social construction, constructivist, or constructionist approach, understands the social world is (re)produced through communication and interaction (Tracy, 2013). In terms of ontology, interpretivists highlight the co-construction of reality in the communication between people; there is no one discoverable true reality, but constant dialogic tensions between speech communities to establish shared grounds of what is real (Mumby, 1997; Tracy, 2013). In terms of epistemology, knowledge is thereby produced in social interactions, placing emphasis on shared meaning-making or sense-making. In terms of axiology, interpretivist approaches highlight the importance of understanding each other through communication, noting the significance of empathy and understanding others' perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs in a non-judgmental manner (Tracy, 2013). If social reality is based on meaning and context, then it is integral to acknowledge social reality as a process grounded in the negotiations of distinct perspectives and, in turn, value that dynamism (Hollstein, 2011). An interpretivist approach, in recognizing this fluid nature of social reality, accentuates studies and practices grounded in the agency of peoples and participants, and their perspectives of social life.

The paradigmatic assumptions of interpretivism also highlight how to conduct qualitative research, including the role of the researcher and the nature of certain methods. An interpretivist approach seeks to describe a system of relationships in social life through participant interviews that underscore the meanings, experiences, and perspectives of individuals; it emphasizes intimate and personal information that centers sense-making (Luxton & Sbicca, 2021). As such, the researcher is seen as the instrument of qualitative research (Miles et al., 2014; Tracy, 2013); they co-construct the data with participants in the social setting of qualitative data collection, investigating sensemaking as a shared activity for articulating and capturing a particular version of affairs (Roulston, 2010). Rather than viewing textual data—be it field notes or interview transcripts—as factual reports, data is treated as situational accounts through which participants, under the constraints and opportunities of the research setting, “engage in explaining, attributing, justifying, describing, and otherwise finding possible sense or orderliness in the various events, people, places, and courses of action they talk about” (Roulston, 2010, p. 218). In noting the role of the researcher in the process of design, data collection, and data analysis for an interpretivist approach, it is important to include researcher reflexivity.

### **Reflexivity Statement**

The inclusion of vulnerable migrant populations in qualitative research calls for cultural sensitivity (Quintanilha et al., 2015) and self-reflexivity (Tracy, 2010). Self-reflexivity is the recognition of how our identities, actions, and biases impact not only our research, but also the field and the participants; it stresses honesty and transparency about the full experience of the research project (Tracy, 2010). I must acknowledge that I am a white, educated, middle-class woman whose own experiences of transnational migration have been voluntary and positive. In terms of the latter, in both of my experiences migrating to a new country long term (first to Belgium in 1998, second to

the United Kingdom in 2011), I had adequate financial support from both familial and professional sources to have a stable and safe livelihood. I was even able to stay in touch with my family, friends, and support network in the U.S. (though easier in 2011 with the advancement of digital technologies). In both instances, I was migrating to areas where the population is majority white, and so I never had to grapple with my skin tone being a marker of visibility and difference, which can lead to acts of xenophobia and/or racism. Additionally, even in the context of learning a new language, the quality of my previous education was never doubted or dismissed. These are all privileges of my transnational migration experiences, which shape my identity to this day; however, they may sharply differ from what my participants encounter(ed).

Furthermore, I must address my own expectations and understandings of transnational migration to and resettlement within the U.S. from a previous professional experience. Between 2015-2017, I worked with migrant communities in Western Massachusetts, particularly focused on creating and managing educational opportunities for migrant K-12 students as well as engaging with various community partners. This work familiarized me with the resettlement system, especially as enacted in Massachusetts and how it intertwines with educational and social issues. However, I need to note that this was a distinct time period in which former president Trump had severe anti-migrant, anti-refugee rhetoric and policies. While the actions of the presidency during this time have had lingering effects, my experiences will differ from what I witness in my current research. Thus, while my professional time with migrant advocacy/support organizations can be useful for rapport-building and entering the field, I cannot assume that my viewpoints are fully shared by other CSO representatives.

Ultimately, I carry with me certain identities, experiences, privileges and biases that will need to be confronted as I design, conduct, collect, and analyze this research project. As such, I aim

for my procedures to emphasize participant agency, voice, and comfort, which further connects to the overarching paradigmatic values of interpretivism, particularly empathy and reflection for holistic understanding. This further speaks to the overarching ethics guiding the research design.

### **Ethical Considerations**

First, the inclusion of vulnerable populations, such as Afghan refugees, invokes conversations about research benefits, especially feelings of imbalance between researcher and participant benefits. It is easy to see the benefits to the researcher and thereby important to consider how one gives back to the vulnerable community. Volunteering (of time, effort, and/or knowledge) may be one such manner of giving back to the community of study, alongside a monetary honorarium for participants (Quintanilha et al., 2015). While the subsequent section on research protocol details the compensation plan, it is important to consider how long-term commitments to others may result in tensions with regards to relational ethics. Relationships formed for research may not remain grounded in research and even extend beyond the research aims and/or timeline (Iannacone & Anderson, 2022). The use of ethnographic observation ensured I grapple with the corresponding ethical questions from forming relationships outside the context of research.

Second, the research project may need to more thoroughly consider privacy throughout data collection. Communities with low education, living with poverty, or from developing or nondemocratic countries typically have higher concerns about the privacy of data (Quintanilha et al., 2015). As such, I could not depend on audiovisual, or even just audio, recording, and was flexible in how data collection was accomplished for the purpose of ensuring participant protection. Participants were informed that their participation is voluntary, they can decline to answer specific questions, and they can end participation at any time. Participants could also decline to be recorded, though none did. In the case of a virtual interview, only the audio recording was kept and the video

file was immediately deleted. Furthermore, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, and they were briefed on a wide scale of anonymity options surrounding how data may or may not express recognition. More specifically, participants were asked which of the following data they want to make confidential: names of actors (people and organizations) on their social network map, elements of their identity (such as gender, sexuality, religion, or ethnicity), and any locations (i.e., hometowns or other important places). I also instructed participants to use broad labels (i.e. “sister” or “school”) when completing their social network map.

Third, the inclusion of vulnerable populations complicates the conversation of research risks. The process of forced migration can be fraught with turmoil and trauma, and recounting those experiences (even in discussions of its current impact) can be a harrowing, emotional experience for participants and the researcher. Qualitative research is sometimes likened to therapy given their similarities in active listening to personal issues, leading to concerning perspectives of the researcher as a therapist or friend (Mitchell & Irvine, 2008). However, a therapist listens with the aim of helping, whereas discussions with researchers may leave questions of whether participants are and remain comfortable with emotional accounts shared in data collection (Mitchell & Irvine, 2008). It further questions whether the rapport of the researcher is commodified, commercialized, and manipulative to access those emotional accounts (Mitchell & Irvine, 2008). Additionally, researchers themselves may be at risk of emotional burnout with such sensitive topics (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007, 2009; Mitchell & Irvine, 2008). In order to navigate this, I informed participants that they may take breaks to process their emotions and that a list of potential resources was available, though none voiced a need for it during/following the research protocol. I also took time to process my own emotions following harrowing experiences of data collection through memo writing and ensuring I did not overschedule data collection sessions.

## **Data Collection: Recruitment and Sampling, Participants, and Protocol**

This section delves into the protocols for data collection, explaining the recruitment and sampling, participant details, and distinct qualitative techniques for SNA. In particular, it discusses the conjoined visual network mapping exercise and qualitative interview process, as well as procedures and details to the ethnographic observations. A full protocol for the conjoined mapping and interview exercise as well as the ethnographic observations can be found in Appendix A. These procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

### **Recruitment and Sampling**

In this dissertation, I recruited two distinct types of participants, Afghan refugees and CSO representatives. As such, I required multiple approaches to recruitment in recognition of the difficulties of accessing these groups, particularly migrant populations who are viewed as vulnerable and/or hidden. In both approaches, migrant-serving CSOs were noted as the initial point of contact and gatekeepers to further participants and network members. While this may seem like prioritizing the organization as an actor in social networks, it is more a choice of practicality as these organizations have transparent and accessible points of contact, and, sometimes, procedures for requesting research participation. Individual migrants/migrant communities were hard to reach without the preexisting connection to a known organization or network. CSOs served as significant gatekeepers to both their members and their wider network of both peoples who have migrated and other relevant service providers.

First, I followed traditional recruitment and sampling processes by cold calling/emailing migrant advocacy/service organizations to take part in the research, including utilizing my personal and professional networks. From there, I utilized snowball sampling to recruit relevant participants. Snowball sampling relies on referrals from participants who know others who fit the criteria of the

research, and is often useful for reaching populations who are difficult to recruit (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). It is important to remember that (a) access of this type was a constant negotiation and (b) still resulted in only ever accessing certain members of a community, never a whole community (Desmond, 2014).

While these methods are more traditional to qualitative research recruitment, they may be inadequate for reaching these more niche subsets of populations. CSOs may be reluctant or unable to respond due to: being short staffed, being too busy/overworked, being hesitant of communicating with outsiders, or a combination of all three.<sup>2</sup> As such, I also utilized an additional form of data collection as a simultaneous form of recruitment: ethnographic observation at one (or more) relevant migrant advocacy/service organizations. Ethnographic observation through volunteering at CSOs helped to form the relevant connections necessary to recruit participants, such as through rapport and relationship building, as well as provided the opportunities to include observational data to the research project.

As part of recruitment, I offered compensation based on the duration of time partaking in research activities. Compensation amounts differ due to distinctions between the two types of participants, notably that migrant populations are a hard-to-reach population. Scholarship recommends providing compensation for under researched, marginalized groups because they often do not have the luxury of free/leisure time (Ojeda et al., 2011). Migrant participants were offered compensation on a sliding scale related to the mid-Atlantic state's local real living wage, a strategy that aligns with ethics of care (Warnock et al., 2021). The living wage is the hourly rate that an individual in a household must earn to support themselves and their family in a given town, city, or

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<sup>2</sup> These challenges are both something I witnessed in my professional capacity and something which was shared with me in personal communication with a representative of a migrant service organization in the mid-Atlantic region.

geographic area. In the relevant mid-Atlantic state, the living wage is roughly \$20 per hour for one adult with zero children (Glasmeier, 2023). For CSO representatives, participants were offered a gift card of their choice that reflects the time spent partaking in research activities. All participants were offered compensation, but some chose to decline it.

## **Participants**

### ***Migrant Participants***

Two types of participants were recruited, totaling 21 participants (inclusive of pilot interviews). For the research questions exploring migrant perspectives, participants were over the age of 18, had migrated to the United States from another nation, utilized and/or were in association with a migrant advocacy/service organization, and were proficient in the English language<sup>3</sup>. Given the location of my research institution as well as the focus on ties with a migrant-serving CSO, this group of participants became further defined by nationality and a specific pattern of mobility, notably those of Afghan heritage who have resettled within the mid-Atlantic area. As such, in this dissertation, I focused on Afghan refugees and their perceptions of their social networks following forced migration to the U.S. Many participants qualified for migration to the US through the Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) available to “persons who worked with the U.S. Armed Forces or under Chief of Mission authority as a translator or interpreter in Iraq or Afghanistan” (U.S. Department of State, 2022). Those who did not themselves hold an SIV were able to migrate because a family member (i.e., male relative such as a father or husband) held one. More specifically, *Table 1* captures the details of the migrant participants:

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<sup>3</sup> This last criteria was required by the Institutional Review Board and limited who was able to participate in this research, rather than allow for protocol that utilizes an interpreter or other language services.

Table 1: Migrant Participants

Pseudonym	Nationality	Age Range	Gender	Time in US	CSO Association
Asmar	Afghan	25-34	Male	1-3 years	Yes
Saed	Afghan	25-34	Male	1-3 years	Yes
Hasan	Afghan	25-34	Male	< 1 year	Yes
Aneesa	Afghan	25-34	Female	< 1 year	Yes
Salmaan	Afghan	25-34	Male	1-3 years	Yes
Huda	Afghan	25-34	Female	< 1 year	Yes
Yaasir	Afghan	18-24	Male	1-3 years	Yes
Rihaab	Afghan	18-24	Female	1-3 years	Yes
Pilot Participant 1	Oceanic	25-34	Male	10-15 years	N/A – pilot study
Pilot Participant 2	Asian	25-34	Female	5-10 years	N/A – pilot study
Pilot Participant 3	Asian	18-24	Female	5-10 years	N/A – pilot study

Details on the pilot participants are intentionally vaguer both a) to protect their anonymity as international students at a mid-Atlantic institution and b) because they were included to test the visual mapping and interview protocol. More specifically, three pilot studies with international students had each individual go through the full mapping and interview process in order to understand a) the timing, feasibility, and challenges of the mapping exercise, and b) the richness and complexities that could emerge through semi-formal interviews. Upon reflection, their distinctiveness from the main migrant sample was beneficial because it helped me to identify some themes specific to Afghan refugees and the impacts of the context of their unique mobility. Pilot participants' interviews and social network maps were not recorded; notes were kept on the process of the mapping and interview exercise, as well as memos on general findings from each pilot study. Pilot study notes/time of research were not considered in the totals of data collection. For Afghan

migrant participants, I collected 394 minutes of data from the combined interview and visual mapping protocol, totaling 6 distinct maps<sup>4</sup> and 82 pages of transcripts.

### ***CSO Representatives***

For the research questions exploring organizational perspectives, participants were over the age of 18 and members of a migrant advocacy/service organization, including employees and volunteers. While potentially considered distinct, it was appropriate to consolidate both formal employees and more informal volunteers into the same participant category because they often share an affinity to the organization, particularly those that are non-profit CSOs. Volunteers represent individuals who are actively choosing to involve themselves with and identify themselves as part of the organization in a way that is arguably similar to employees who officially represent the organization (Iannacone, 2021b); this can include actively engaging with public relations responsibilities. Many CSOs have public relations, but it may be underdeveloped because it is condensed into a part of larger responsibilities for individual representatives who oversee a plethora of roles (Dyer et al., 2002). Subsequently, for CSOs, organization positions may be relevant if the responsibilities include public relations activities such as fundraising, event management, information campaigns, board relations and recruitment, and volunteer management (Dyer et al., 2002). Once again, when framing roles in terms of responsibilities, volunteers may perform significant public relations activities for a CSO and are thereby a relevant organizational representative for research. *Table 2* captures the details of the CSO participants, including their position within the organization.

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<sup>4</sup> There were two instances whereby participants chose to conduct the mapping exercise and interview process together, notably due to language constraints, resulting in one map per duo.

Table 2: CSO Representatives

Pseudonym	Organization	Position	Gender
Blaine	Resettlement Aid NPO 1	Community Outreach Manager	Male
Cory	Resettlement Aid NPO 2	Executive Director	Female
Maria	Religious Charity	Pastor Associate	Female
Louise	Shelter/Housing NPO	Case Manager	Female
Maya	Legal Advocacy NPO	Volunteer Child Advocate	Female
Bridget	VOLAG	Volunteer Family Mentor	Female
Miranda	VOLAG	Program Analyst Manager	Female
Charley	VOLAG	Resiliency Coordinator	Female
Niall	VOLAG	Volunteer Coordinator and Community Engagement Specialist	Male
Xara	Labor Rights NPO	Program Director	Female

While the participants had distinct titles, each of them had responsibilities the oversaw or impacted the management of internal and external relations through their communication at seven distinct organizations. *Table 3* establishes the purpose and operations of each represented organization.

Table 3: Purpose and Operations of Represented CSOs

Organization Pseudonym	Purpose and Operations
Labor Rights NPO	This organization serves seasonal migrant workers by helping them access public benefits, medical/dental care, education, and emergency material needs. It additionally provides assistance to acquiring legal advice and representation.

Organization Pseudonym	Purpose and Operations
Legal Advocacy NPO	This organization protects and advances the rights and best interests of immigrant children, particularly while they are in deportation proceedings. They advocate from custody and release to the ultimate decision about whether the child will be allowed to remain in the U.S. as well as push for changes in immigration policy.
Religious Charity	This city parish serves the migrants in its community including service referrals, assistance with medical care and legal aid, and occasionally can provide monetary assistance for rent/expenses.
Resettlement Aid NPO 1	This organization supports our newly resettled neighbors with household and furnishing needs, job and career support, and assistance accessing partner services
Resettlement Aid NPO 2	This organization help address the gaps in the resettlement process especially in delivering material goods and helping access support, education, and outreach
Shelter/Housing NPO	This organization welcomes displaced immigrants and promotes self-sufficiency by providing safe housing and access to medical and legal services
VOLAG	This organization is a domestic Volunteer Agency (affiliate agency) that oversees the resettlement of refugees in a particular location, including managing the Reception & Placement (R&P) program at that locale.

For CSO representatives, I collected 652 minutes of data from the combined interview and visual mapping protocol, totaling 8<sup>5</sup> distinct maps, and 171 pages of transcripts.

It is important to note that these categories of participants may overlap. Individuals may meet the criteria of both having migrated to the U.S. as well as be employees or volunteers of a migrant advocacy/service organization. In the process of data collection, two individuals qualified

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<sup>5</sup> Two participants preferred to list out significant social network actors as they worried that the time commitment of the mapping exercise would be too intensive.

as both categories of participants, but each responded to recruitment calls with a specific identity at the forefront. One noted they qualified as an Afghan migrant and as such went through the migrant protocol; the other noted they qualified as a CSO representative and thereby went through the CSO protocol (importantly, this participant also did not qualify as an Afghan migrant). Both were able to and did note their distinct experiences as migrants and CSO representatives as well as how they intertwined. These instances are clarified in the findings section, when relevant.

All forms of data collection with both types of participants occurred between November 2022 and January 2023. While this time period overlaps with the lingering COVID-19 pandemic, participants did not note it as a relevant factor to their social networks or otherwise bring it up in relation to the research questions and exercises.

### **Visual Network Mapping Protocol**

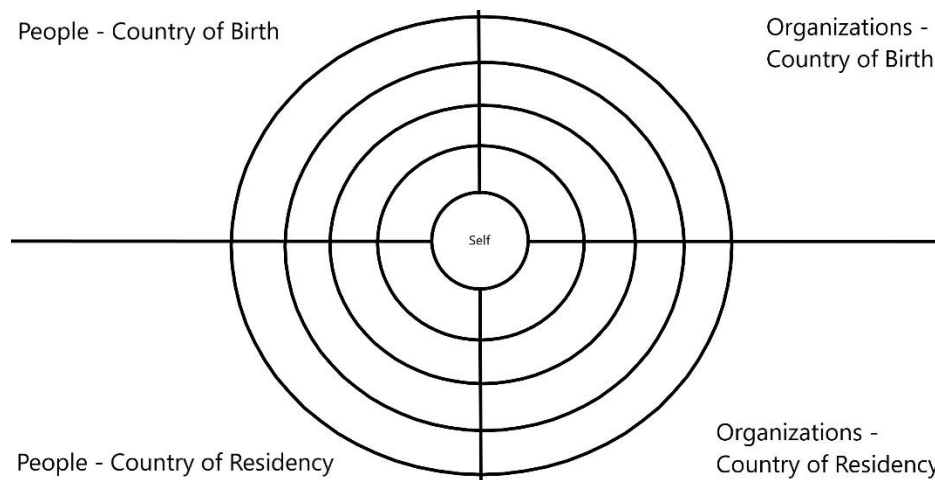
In this dissertation, I incorporated visual network mapping into my data collection process with both subsets of participants, i.e. participants who have migrated and participants who are members of migrant advocacy/service organizations. Both shall be discussed herein and anonymized examples of maps can be found in Appendix B and Appendix C.

#### ***Visual Network Mapping with Migrant Participants***

In order to explore migrant perceptions of their social networks and the impact of their inherent mobility, I combined elements of the traditional sociogram and the social network map. As shown in *Figure 2*, this mapping exercise still utilizes concentric circles with the “self” in the center circle. For this project, however, quadrants reflected the transnationalism of migrant participants and the inclusion of both people and organizations in a social network. As such, quadrants were divided into a country of birth side and a country of (current) residency side as well as a people half and an organization half. More specifically, the four quadrants are “People - Country of Birth,”

“Organizations - Country of Birth,” “People - Country of Residence,” and “Organizations - Country of Residence.” In doing so, this part of data collection spoke to RQ1 and RQ2 in allowing migrant participants to display their perceptions of their social network broadly, but also with explicit consideration of CSOs. It is relevant to note that these boundaries may still overlook important actors in the social life of transnational migrants, namely those who are not located in either the country of birth or the country of residence; follow-up research questions aimed to address this limitation and asked who is not included.

*Figure 2: Blank sociogram example for migrant participants*



There were three parts to the visual network mapping exercise. As with the traditional sociogram and social network map approaches, the first step was to instruct participants to think of relevant actors who are important in their life, including people and organizations, and to place them in the relevant quadrant and circle depending on the degree of relational closeness. Asking them to place social actors with regards to relational closeness illustrated one sense of relationship quality by denoting the strength or weakness of a relationship. Additionally, listing out the relevant social actors illustrated the relationship diversity, or the heterogeneity/homogeneity, of a given social network. Second, participants were asked to color code these actors through the use of either

stickers or highlighters/markers. In line with the work of Dobbie et al. (2018), this dissertation used the following color scheme:

- Red - these relationships have been impacted by the transnational movement of the participant
- Yellow - these relationships are unaware of the transnational movement of the participant
- Green - these relationships have helped or supported the participant through their transnational movement

Color-coding helped to uncover relationship quality by specifically marking whether some (if any) relationships have been impacted by or have impacted the transnational mobility of the participant. The green label also helped to identify instances of social capital before, during, or after the transnational movement of migrants by emphasizing relationships that were helpful and/or beneficial.

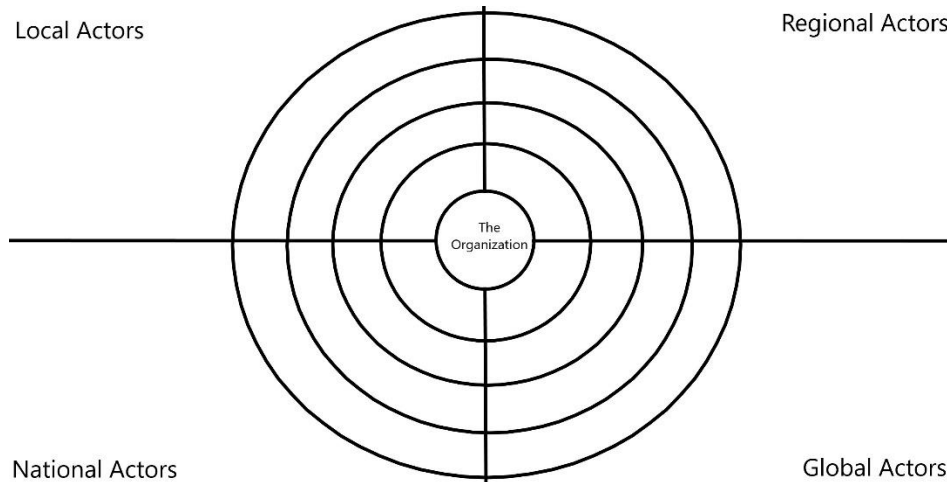
Lastly, in line with the social network map step conducted by Hersberger (2003), participants were asked to draw lines between the actors who know each other and/or are connected to one another. This illustrated network positioning, including cases of structural holes and/or brokerage. Examples of maps completed to the various stages were available in case of any confusion with the instructions.

### ***Visual Network Mapping with CSO Participants***

In order to explore how members of migrant advocacy/service organizations perceive the organization's social network, distinct adaptations were made to the visual network mapping exercise. Once again, as seen in *Figure 3*, concentric circles and quadrants were utilized; however, the center circle was labeled "the organization" instead of "self." Additionally, quadrants were divided in terms of the level of operation of distinct actors, namely: local, regional, national, or

global/international. More specifically, the four quadrants are “Local Actors, Regional Actors, National Actors, Global/International Actors.” In doing so, this part of data collection spoke to RQ3 in allowing CSO participants to display their perceptions of the organization’s social network broadly.

*Figure 3: Blank sociogram example for CSO participants*



There were only two parts to this exercise. First, participants were asked to think of important actors, including individuals, groups, and organizations, in the social network of the organization. Listing out the relevant social actors illustrated the relationship diversity, or the heterogeneity/homogeneity, of a given social network. They then placed them in the relevant quadrant and circle depending on the degree of relational importance. Asking them to place social actors with regards to relational closeness illustrated one sense of relationship quality by denoting the strength or weakness of a relationship. Second, in line with the social network map step conducted by Hersberger (2003), participants were asked to draw lines between the actors who know each other and/or are connected to one another. This illustrated network positioning, including cases of structural holes and/or brokerage. Examples of maps completed to the various stages were available in case of any confusion with the instructions.

## **Qualitative Interview Protocols**

As previously noted, visual mapping techniques should not be used in isolation, but rather be a complementary tool to other forms of qualitative data collection such as qualitative interviews. This section details the process of utilizing mapping and interviews in conjunction. First, prior to any of the graphic elicitation techniques, I began this data collection procedure with some general, opening interview questions including demographic information and questions surrounding either the participant's migration to the U.S. or their role and involvement with the migrant service/advocacy organization. This served two main purposes: one, it allowed for some rapport building prior to the more complex process of visual mapping and two, it allowed for confirmation that the participant matches all necessary criteria and requirements. It additionally made space for any questions from the participant about the research process, privacy concerns, etc. Following this first round of interview questions, participants were then led through the relevant visual mapping exercise, as described above.

After completing the visual mapping component of data collection, participants were asked a further set of questions about the process of mapping their social network and the resulting visual. This included questions on the social actors, their closeness/importance to the self/organization, their connections throughout the network, and—if applicable—their color coding (see Appendix A for the full list of questions for both sets of participants). Utilizing short, open-ended questions that aim to have a participant best describe their visual map helped to ensure that the ensuing discussion results in a detailed account of their perceptions of their social network, answering RQ1-3.

Furthermore, follow-up interview questions on the visual map provided space to account for the inconsistencies and limitations of the exercise. This included interview questions that account for RQ4 and RQ5, which cannot be easily visualized. For example, CSO participants were asked

how the various relationships in the social network of the organization are impacted by the migrant publics they seek to serve, if at all, alongside other questions pertaining to RQ4. Both sets of participants were asked about the benefits, trust, and norms of their relationships as a means of exploring RQ5. For example, participants were asked “how, if at all, does x relationship help or benefit you?” or to expand upon shared meaning-making with certain actors.

Additionally, as previously mentioned, the map prompt may inherently exclude important social network actors and ties outside the set boundaries. Follow-up questions sought to account for this. Participants may also need probing questions to better consider past ties of significance simply because current relationships are more immediately salient (Dobbie et al., 2018). In-depth, follow-up interviews allowed the data collection process to extend who is captured as part of the social network as well as consider the implications of time and context sensitivity (Dobbie et al., 2018).

### **Interview Logistics**

These interviews and the accompanying mapping exercise for both types of participants occurred over the course of one sitting in both face-to-face and digital settings, though the former ensured a more feasible and accessible experience for participants. For conjoined mapping and interview procedures that occurred virtually, participants were sent a digital image of a blank map, which they could fill on applications like Windows’ “Paint” or macOS “Preview” or print. Participants were also given the option of manually drawing their own social network map in the style of the blank map they were sent. In this scenario, it was more difficult to observe participants during the mapping process over video telecommunication functions (i.e., Zoom) because the participant and their actions were limited due to the dimensions of what a computer camera could capture. Ultimately, having a virtual option still resulted in a thorough and rich data collection process and also allowed for flexibility that better served some members of the Afghan refugee

participants. Elements like the location of the research become key decisions, and for groups like migrants, it also becomes a matter of childcare options, bus timetables, and transportation access (Farnsworth & Boon, 2010).

Given the inclusion of migrant participants, I had to consider the realities of cross-lingual and cross-cultural communication. Previous scholarship including migrants has noted the significance of cross-lingual and cross-cultural communication on social interactions, particularly in the research setting (Quintanilha et al., 2015). While this research did not actively seek out translators and asked that migrant participants had a proficiency in the English language as mandated by the IRB, there were instances whereby language became a prominent factor in data collection. More specifically, there were instances whereby participants chose to conduct the mapping exercise and interview process together, notably due to language constraints. Though less than ideal, this did allow for more perspectives from female Afghan refugees. In the specific instances of this study, these women had a male relative (i.e., husband, brother) to help with any language difficulties.

### **Ethnographic Observations**

For this dissertation, I additionally explored my research questions through three ethnographic techniques (c.f., Atwell Seate et al., 2022; Madden & Levenshus, 2021): observation through witnessing, ethnographic interviews, and textual analysis. First, I conducted ethnographic witnessing at various organizational sites, putting me in the field with both types of participants. Organizational sites included CSO warehouses, offices, and field sites. More specifically, I conducted approximately 21 hours (specifically 1,242 minutes) of ethnographic witnessing at 2 distinct organizations (Resettlement Aid NPO 1 and Resettlement Aid NPO 2) across the mid-Atlantic region from November 2022 to January 2023. This time frame and commitment allowed

me the chance to partake in a variety of their main responsibilities and embed myself in the relational network I was examining, wherein I was able to generate distinct insights and themes. On site, I partook in the daily tasks of the organization, acting as another set of hands or similar to a volunteer. There were three main types of on-site activities:

- **Volunteer Orientation:** A shorter training with leaders of the organization to understand the purpose of the organization, how volunteers are utilized, and how they are connected with members of refugee communities to assist with resettlement.
- **Donation Drop-Off Days:** A full-day commitment to picking up furniture and household goods at the organization's warehouse to then bring to the apartments of recently resettled refugees. Refugee families were also on site, and it served as a great opportunity for volunteers and migrants to meet and interact. Typically, drop-offs included stops at more than one location.
- **Home Setup Days:** A full-day commitment to setting up furniture and household goods at the apartments of incoming refugee families. This included unloading the moving van(s) and carrying all material goods into the home space, typically within an apartment complex. Groups had a) a team leader who has undergone further organizational training and participated in multiple home setup days and b) a variety of new and experienced volunteers, sometimes coming as groups from other institutions (i.e. churches).

There was additionally one ad hoc special event for which I was on-site:

- **Shopping Day:** Intended for newly arrived refugee families, this event provided migrants with access to an assortment of donated items including clothing, kitchen utensils, baby supplies, etc. It was a co-hosted event between four local CSOs in the mid-Atlantic region

and also had support from corporate organizations. For this event, I assisted in setting up/taking down the space and managing a food table and check-in area.

Being on site put me in contact with CSO representatives, including both employees and volunteers, members of migrant communities, representatives of other types of organizations (i.e. corporations, schools), and places like cultural and religious centers. To ensure data quality during witnessing, I took field notes before, during, and after any time onsite, using both traditional notepads and writing utensils or electronic devices (i.e., personal iPhone, personal laptop). Occasionally, I recorded myself on my personal iPhone to speed-up the note-taking process and ensure that all important information is recorded, resulting in both audio recordings and speech-to-text notes; speech-to-text notes were later edited for clarity (i.e., spelling and grammar). In total, ethnographic witnessing resulted in the creation of 18 pages of notes (single spaced). Time spent in field was tracked using a spreadsheet, which captured the date of the ethnographic witnessing, the site at which it took place, the amount of time on site, the organizations present and mentioned, details of the task including who it was for, themes, and links to relevant documents (such as memos). *Table 4* better depicts the breakdown of hours spent on-site as well as details to the other individuals on site and corresponding ethnographic memos.

*Table 4: Details to Ethnographic On-Site Data Collection*

Activity	Time Conducted	Location of On-Site	CSO Reps. Present	Migrant Public Reps. Present	Pages of Ethnographic Memos
Volunteer Orientation	72 minutes	Online - Zoom	3 organization leaders 15 volunteers	N/A	3 pages single spaced
Donation Drop-Off	360 minutes	Organization warehouse and apartment complexes in the	10 total with 2 organization leaders and approx. 8 volunteers	11 family members/ clients of the CSO	5 pages single spaced

		mid-Atlantic region			
Home Setup Days	510 minutes	Apartment complexes in the mid-Atlantic region	40 total across different on-site days. 3 consistent organization leaders and approx. 37 volunteers	10 family members/ clients of CSO across different on-site days	6 pages single spaced
Shopping Day	300 minutes	Parking garage of a cultural site in the mid-Atlantic region	Approx. 35 different CSO reps. Including employees and volunteers	100+ members of migrant community/ clients of CSOs	4 pages single spaced

Furthermore, for this dissertation, I was approved to conduct brief informal on-site interviews, the purpose of which was to for clarification or verification of any observations (as needed) and to develop fuller explanations of what occurred (Atwell Seate et al., 2022). More specifically, while on-site for ethnographic witnessing, I would introduce myself as a researcher and then have conversations with other members present in the field, including on topics such as how they became involved with the organization, how long they have been involved and what that involvement looks like, as well as the benefits and challenges associated with involvement. I aimed to converse with as many of the other members as possible. Most individuals were comfortable if not downright eager to share their experiences, but some were uncomfortable with my position as a researcher. Conversations were summarized into my notes and any identifying information was not included. Frequently these conversations were shorter or more succinct due to the physical demands of being on-site – it can be hard to focus on conversation when you are carrying a couch upstairs.

Lastly, I collected texts in the form of emails sent through one organization listserv because emails served as the primary means of communicating with the volunteer and donor publics of the

organization<sup>6</sup>. More specifically, I collected emails from Resettlement Aid NPO 1 from Sept. 1, 2022 - Dec. 31, 2023, totaling 100 emails. In reviewing these emails, there were clear instances of distinct types of emails; more specifically, *Table 5* showcases the six categories that appeared across the collected email data.

*Table 5: Details to Ethnographic Email Data Collection*

Email Type	Description of Category	Percentage of Data Set
Call-to-Action: Volunteers	These emails called for volunteers to sign up for upcoming service opportunities including Donation Drop Offs, Home Setups, and special events. These were typically circulated on a weekly basis	46%
Call-to-Action: AdHoc	These emails called for people to take action on behalf of the organization, including donating money, voting for the organization in awards, and applying for open positions	20%
Updates	These emails detailed the recent work of the organization, including how many apartments were set up or items donated. They frequently included photos, gave shoutouts to specific volunteer groups, and offered personal reflection from organizational leaders	20%
Call-to-Action: Household Items	These emails called for people to donate specific household items that the organization was running low on and often included links to deals on sites like Amazon	6%
Events	These emails announced organizational events for people to attend	6%
Organization Survey	These emails included calls for volunteers to take an organizational survey about their experiences, and a circulation of results.	2%

For each type of email, I chose one representative email to include for further, more in-depth analysis.

It is important to note how the context of the study impacted the design of the ethnographic research. One of the more salient risks of this research project is the protection of privacy throughout data collection. Communities with low education, living with poverty, or from

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<sup>6</sup> Only one of the organizations, Resettlement Aid NPO 1, approved that I could collect and consider their emails as data. This was represented in my CSO Letter of Support to the IRB.

developing or nondemocratic countries typically have higher concerns about the privacy of data (Quintanilha et al., 2015). Specifically, more recent migrants who fled due to crisis scenarios (war, prosecution, etc.) are deeply concerned with their privacy and anonymity because of their social connections remaining in their country of birth or in a previous country of residency. They fear the risks of retaliation and harm to their social connections should their participation in the research or honest perceptions be found by those in power. For many individuals in this scenario, this fear especially manifests in discomfort with photography or visual representation of themselves. Given these privacy concerns, at no point did I take photographs or videos of any field observations, including locations/sites, participants, etc.

### **Data Analysis**

This section outlines the data analysis process used in this research project. In doing so, it considers the various types of data collected, notably textual data like interview transcripts and ethnographic observation documents (memos and organizational emails) and the visual social network maps.

#### **Textual Data**

For this dissertation, I used a reflexive thematic analysis approach to its textual data. Reflexive thematic analysis (TA) is an approach to data analysis that highlights the process of identifying patterns in data, and then interpreting them in relation to theory (Braun & Clarke, 2020). It represents a qualitative technique to analysis and fits best within overarching qualitative frameworks, such as the interpretivist paradigm used in this dissertation (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Thematic analysis recognizes patterns and themes within the data, which become categories for analysis (Bowen, 2009). Reflexive TA can be used for inductive or deductive coding that captures

both semantic and latent meanings in a process of theme development that accounts for its theoretically flexible nature as an analytic process, which marks it as an appropriate choice for this research's aim to integrate the two distinct areas of SNA and mobility studies (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Reflexive TA is inherently subjective in that its analysis relies on the interpretive work of the researcher and their reflexivity surrounding their own assumptions alongside any data and theories (Braun & Clarke, 2020, 2021). Researchers are situated distinctly and approach data through their own social, cultural, disciplinary, ideological and political positionings (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The overall process thereby requires an immersion into one's own identities as well as the close reading, re-reading, questioning, and reflecting of the data (Bowen, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The process starts with open coding of the data, which is unstructured, organic and allows for evolution of codes to capture the researcher's expanding understanding of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2020; Lindof & Taylor, 2019). A code, more specifically, is an analytical unit capturing at least one observation or facet of the data as a step in the generation of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Focusing on the emic significance within the data, open coding is the interpretation of data rather than the assigning of data to preexisting codes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Codes themselves may be varied in nature, and data do not need to be neatly segmented nor do all lines of text need to have codes applied (Braun & Clarke, 2020). For this research, textual data including interview transcripts, ethnographic observations, and various organizational documents were all uploaded to NVivo, a computer software that provides digital tools to assist with the organization and analysis of qualitative data. Inputting data into NVivo creates a study database that optimizes storing, coding, and analysis because all relevant information is within one location. As a program, NVivo does not generate its own codes or outputs, rather all coding and analysis is still conducted and completed by the researcher and thus the TA principle that the researcher cannot be removed from

analysis is maintained. Each document was coded independently prior to the development of themes, which compared codes across cases.

If codes represent one facet to the data, then themes are the multi-faceted, more complex crystals reflecting multiple observations or dimensions to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Developed by researchers through the consideration and analysis of codes, themes are “the patterns of shared meaning underpinned by a central organizing concept” (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 39). Themes pull together seemingly disparate data and/or codes, conjoining latent and apparent meanings across an entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2020). They must be the outcomes of coding and any developed prior to coding are likely to be only topic summaries and/or one-dimensional rather than richer representations of shared meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

For this dissertation, after each document of textual data was coded independently, themes were generated in relation to the distinct research questions and the theoretical lenses of SNA and mobility. More specifically, codes from interview transcripts with migrant participants were compared in order to develop themes for RQ1 and RQ2, which explore the migrant perspective of social networks as an example of a mobile public. For example, codes like “safety” “the Taliban” and “digital channels” led to the theme of “Disruption to Cross-Border Interpersonal Ties.” Similarly, codes from interview transcripts with CSO representatives were compared in order to generate themes for RQ3 and RQ4, which examine the organizational perspective on having mobile publics within a social network. For example, codes like “localized” “global actors” and “collaboration” led to the theme of “Dichotomy of Glocal: Relationship Diversity among Hyper-Local Networks surrounding Global Issue.” RQ5 explored the facilitation of social capital across networks and participant types, and so codes from all transcripts were considered, like how “trust building” (a code from CSO representative data), “motivation for connections” and “helpful ties”

(codes from migrant participant data) were integral to the generation of the theme “Social Capital as a CSO-Led Product and Process.” Ethnographic memos and organizational documents were also coded independently and then compared with the relevant transcripts for all research questions. To continue with RQ5 as an example, the theme “Navigating Place and Space” was generated by comparing codes across cases, including distinct types of textual data, such as “transportation” (a code from CSO representative data) and “place making” (a code from ethnographic memos and organizational documents). While this section has highlighted the analysis of textual data, the next explains how visual data (i.e., social network maps) were included in the overarching process of generating and corroborating themes.

### **Visual Maps as Data**

As previously mentioned, the maps created by participants are their own form of data. While not disregarding that these maps need to be understood within the context of corresponding interviews, it was also important to have a plan to analyze the visual characteristics and topical dimensions of the network, as they are thick, rich data within themselves (Decuyper, 2020). The visual maps produced by the participants of this project illustrated patterns for concepts like relationship strength (through the use of concentric circles representing ‘closeness’), relationship heterogeneity or homogeneity, and network positioning, including identification of structural holes and brokerage. As such, the visual maps produced by migrant participants help uncover important details for RQ1 and RQ2, whereas the visual maps produced by CSO participants expressed salient information for RQ3. However, literature exploring qualitative approaches to SNA has been limited in its conclusions on how to conduct a qualitative, visual analysis; furthermore, many of the available concepts are overly embedded in mathematics (Decuyper, 2020). As such, within this dissertation, I followed in the footsteps of Decuyper (2020), who proposed five topological

dimensions of networks that can be analyzed from a qualitative, visual perspective: regions, centers, density, interfaces, and infrastructure.

First, regions encompass and examine concentrations of nodes and interactions within a network, oftentimes enacting bounded spaces within a wider, more freeform and fluid network (Decuyper, 2020). Analysis involving regions must be cautious with regards to time, as they don't necessarily highlight chronological events (Decuyper, 2020). Second, visual analysis might pinpoint centers, or nodes that are heavily connected within a network or particular region; they are frequently noticeable by having star-like forms that showcase their multiple connections (Decuyper, 2020). This can help identify brokerage. Third, density captures the interconnectedness of nodes. This speaks to network positioning, including the existence of structural holes. Fourth, interfaces "designate areas in a network where overlap is being forged between different regions" (Decuyper, 2020, p. 84). This, again, speaks to the possibility of brokers existing within a social network. Finally, analysis of the infrastructure of a network refers to examining the different types of nodes, especially as distinguished by color coding, that constitute the network and how they, in turn, relate to regions, interfaces, etc. (Decuyper, 2020). This helps identify relationship heterogeneity/homogeneity within a social network.

With regards to this dissertation, social network maps were analyzed in two ways. First, I referred to maps while coding distinct individual interview transcripts in order to see not only how the spoken data explained the finished map product, but also to see whether/how the social network map corroborated the codes of the transcript. For example, many CSO representatives verbally highlighted the prominent of local connections (codes like "local actors" and "localized") that were simultaneously visible on the distinct maps. Second, I analyzed maps independently according to the dimensions of Decuyper (2020) to examine again the corroborative nature of the data as well as

whether any unique patterns were apparent beyond those captured in the interview process. For example, analyzing and comparing each CSO representative map for density further confirmed the existence of structural holes at the non-local levels, reaffirming the significance of localization. On the other hand, the analysis of the network infrastructure of migrant participants' maps highlighted the lack of relationship heterogeneity and subsequently the prominence of CSO representatives as network centers, whom frequently had the most ties and were color-coded as helpful actors. This particular scenario helped with themes for RQ1 and RQ2 in depicting the characteristics of migrant networks and the role of CSOs. The social network maps ultimately served as another salient form of data to assist in the generation of themes, and were equally subject to the principles of reflexive TA, including the development of shared meaning according to the interpretation, analysis, and subjectivity of the researcher.

### **Qualitative Research and Quality**

Reflecting on the standards and markers of quality for qualitative research is integral to assess the quality of this research project. Understandings of quality in scientific research have largely emanated from quantitative research and the positivist paradigm, which emphasize the significance of validity (Tracy, 2010). Validity can be understood as what is acceptable and appropriate data within a research epistemology, pointing to data as trustworthy, just, and well founded (Freeman et al., 2007). The concept is often linked with objectivity and reliability as a means of highlighting accuracy in qualitative inquiry (Abrams et al., 2015; Denzin, 2009; Tracy, 2010). Despite its status as a conventional notion, validity ultimately marks an encroachment by quantitative traditions and may not be an applicable measure in all qualitative research paradigms (Roulston, 2010). Indeed, when guided by a constructivist approach, as this project is, research may

challenge the general standards of validity to instead emphasize other markers of quality (Kelle, 1997).

In order to ascertain the quality of this qualitative research, this project turns to the 8-point framework by Tracy (2010), particularly the fourth point of credibility. This framework identifies multiple pathways for delineating quality that do not rely on the standards of reliability and generalizability. The concept of credibility provides an interesting counterpoint to positivist notions of validity. While it too alludes to the trustworthiness and plausibility of the data, it is enacted through distinct practices rather than positivist ideals. More specifically, to assure the credibility of their data, researchers should focus on in-depth “thick” descriptions (Geertz, 1973), crystallization, and multivocal research.

Crystallization builds off the gaps of triangulation, which asserts that a conclusion is credible when multiple sources of data, frameworks, theories, or researchers reach the same conclusion (Tracy, 2010). However, whereas the notion of triangulation typically assumes a single correct reality, crystallization aligns with interpretive, critical approaches that view reality as multiple, fractured, contested, or socially constructed (Tracy, 2010). It emphasizes a metaphor of qualitative research as a crystal in which the different facets represent the distinct experiences, insights, and expectations of various stakeholders (Tracy, 2010). Researchers are still called to the practice of multiple data sources, voices, theories, and lenses as a means of capturing not a singular truth but a complex multi-faceted crystal of divergent, contradictory experiences (Tracy, 2010, 2013). This is paired with the practice of multivocal research, which includes multiple and varied voices to attend to a variety of opinions, viewpoints, and cultural differences (Tracy, 2010).

This project attends to crystallization and multivocal research in a variety of ways. First, as previously described, crystallization is achieved through the use of multiple methods to gather data

and corroborate themes, including interviews, mapping, ethnographic observations in the form of witnessing and textual analysis of organizational documents. Additionally, the premise of this study speaks to crystallization as it is rooted in two distinct communicative theories: social network analysis and mobility. In approaching data collection and analysis with two distinct theories as lenses, this project captures the multifaceted experiences and insights of participants in the perception of their social networks. Second, the project includes multiple voices including the researcher, migrant participants, CSO representatives, and individuals who are both migrants and CSO representatives. These practices allow for a plethora of perspectives about the impacts of transnational mobility on communicative social networks, forming a complex crystal of experiences through the collection of rich visual, textual, and embodied data. Findings were, as such, marked by rich descriptions and abundant details that “account for the complex specificity and circumstantiality of their data” (Tracy, 2010, p. 843), including the distinct details of participants’ experiences and long, detailed quotes.

As such, there is less concern with the question of saturation, another positivist marker of quality for qualitative research that suggests there is a certain number or amount of data that needs to be captured for a study to be valid and credible (Tracy, 2013). Developed in line with grounded theory, saturation initially spoke to the point in which important insights are exhausted from the data and subsequent theorizing was well saturated and comprehensive; it has since been more widely applied as the point in research when new data generates little or no change to findings, evoking a measure of sample size (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). It has largely come to reflect the dominant positivist paradigm and their numerical expectations, rather than justifying research design in the values of qualitative research, such as whether the data can provide a rich and complex account of the topic studied (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). When considering the complexities and

breadth of transnational migration as a lived experience, it seems inappropriate to negate even a single insight as insignificant due to its singularity. The stories and perspectives of each participant in this research, particularly those that underwent forced transnational migration, were rich with insights on its implication in a wider social network and how it transformed their livelihoods.

That being said, in their systematic review of the empirical assessment of saturation in qualitative research, Hennink and Kaiser (2022) did additionally assert that an effective sample size for qualitative methods is much smaller than that argued for by positivist norms. Speaking to qualitative interviews as a method, they found that saturation was reached in under 25 interviews, or more specifically, between 9-17 interviews when the researched population was relatively homogenous (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). This project meets these criteria in its total interviews (n=21, inclusive of pilot interviews) as well as with regards to distinct participant subsets (migrant participants n=11, inclusive of pilot interviews; CSO representatives n=10). Qualitative interviews alone resulted in 1046 minutes of audio data and 253 pages of transcripts. Furthermore, as previously noted, this is only one form of the data collected for this dissertation. For this dissertation, I also collected 14 social network maps, and conducted 1242 minutes of ethnographic observation, resulting in 18 pages of memos. In total, this project included 2,288 minutes (approximately 38 hours) of data collection, and 285 pages of documentation. Ultimately, the plethora of data collected for this project highlights the credibility of the research for theoretical development on the complexities of mobility to public and organization social networks.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the method of SNA, both for the purpose of reviewing how it has been accomplished and for establishing the protocols of this dissertation specifically. Qualitative approaches to SNA are largely absent in public relations and communication research, but this

dissertation fills that gap by providing an innovative means for qualitatively exploring social networks. As such, the chapter overviewed the various, necessary protocols for this research, including its paradigmatic alignment, its recruitment and sampling, its ethical considerations, its data collection, and its data analysis. The latter two stages (i.e. data collection and analysis) considered visual network mapping, qualitative interviews, and ethnographic observations as unique processes and products of data, all of which can generate in-depth, rich findings about social networks. By returning to the qualitative roots of SNA, this dissertation utilized innovative techniques for a robust, exploratory study.

## Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter details the findings to the five research questions surrounding the transnational social networks of mobile publics. First, RQ1 sought to explore the social networks of migrants, as a distinct public defined by mobility, finding how network transformations that are incurred due to the enactment and context of mobility, including in the maintenance and navigation of cross-border ties. Second, RQ2 aimed to ensure that the exploration of migrant social networks is inclusive of relationships with societal institutions, wherein participants emphasized perception of and involvement with resettlement agencies and some other migrant-serving nonprofit organizations in the U.S. as a means of integrating into the nation's civil society, rather than a broader range of CSOs. In examining the implications of publics mobility for the organizations that seek to serve those groups, RQ3 highlighted three dichotomies to how CSOs perceive and maintain their social networks, which speak to the actors, relationships, interactions, and positioning within the networks. RQ4, then, showcases the role of mobility more in-depth by emphasizing it as the context underlying the social network ecology. Lastly, RQ5 examined the generation of social capital within these shared networks of migrant publics and migrant-serving CSOs, finding entanglements between social and other forms of capital as well as patterns in who is perceived as having versus needing capital.

### **Findings to RQ1**

The first research question sought to understand how migrants, as an example of a mobile and potentially marginalized public, perceive and maintain their social networks as an act of aligning public relations with migration studies. The findings largely speak to the network transformations that are incurred due to the enactment and context of mobility. First, migrant

participants perceived and described their social networks as now isolated in the country of residency, the U.S. Rather than developing a plethora of new ties upon migrating, their social networks have stagnated in growth. Second, migrant participants perceived the maintenance of their existing, transnational ties, i.e. those within Afghanistan, as being disrupted due to both the enactment and context of mobility. As such, participants voiced issues in the facilitation of their social networks following their transnational migration. Given that the participants experienced the combination of mobility and subsequent marginalization, their communicative capacity to generate new connections as well as sustain cross-border ties was impacted, pointing to the potential for social networks to shrink and stagnate.

### **Isolation in the Generation of New Ties in the Country of Residency**

This project found that migrants have perceived their social networks as stagnating now in the new country of residency, wherein they feel a sense of isolation in their ability to foster new ties in the U.S. Participants voiced and visualized their social networks as having a limited number of actors, including both people and organizations, despite its transnationalism. Visually, the social network maps from migrant participants had fewer actors and ties (especially when compared to the maps produced by CSO representatives), and even the process was more stunted; oftentimes participants were prompted about certain categories of actors (e.g., neighbors) before said actor was included and/or discussed, as opposed to recalled naturally as important. This generally resulted in more actors in the “country of birth” half of the map rather than the “country of residency” half of the map, suggesting it was a case of remembering past times rather than reflecting on current dynamics.

Participants also voiced a perception of isolation in the discussion of their social network maps. For example, both Rihaab and Yaasir expressed that they didn’t really know anyone in their

respective ESL and high school classes. Even Saed, who noted classmates as a part of his network, explained that because “we can see [classmates] one-to-two times a week...the relation is still building. This is an initial stage.” The perception of the lack of closeness or affinity was not only limited to class relationships, but discussed widely and especially when contrasting their lives before migration.

This perception of isolation was especially stark in comparison to their previous life in Afghanistan and their perceptions of their previous social networks. Asmar captured this sentiment: “One thing in Afghanistan, the majority of people are very social. They are used to gatherings, used to having parties, going to one another’s house, and all those things. Here in the U.S., life is very different. People are not very social.” Mobility, especially between nations, can lead to comparisons regarding the quality of people’s social networks, and this case emphasized a stagnation in which a perceived lack of actors simultaneously highlights a lack of interactions. Asmar continued on this point, stating “it’s very hard...to get used to this kind of life...I see people have less interaction and they are very isolated. There’s no social activity as if everyone is living alone and there’s not much going on with their life.” Participants felt like they did not have many if any connections across their network in the U.S.; this applied beyond the interpersonal context, illustrating a lack of connection to potentially significant organizations.

While the perceived relationship to distinct CSOs is discussed in response to RQ2, when reflecting on organizations broadly, especially those that may serve as an employer, many participants felt equally isolated. Hasan explained: “Actually I don’t know anyone right now...I don’t know any other organizations...back in Afghanistan, we had a busy life...we’re just stuck here in our house.” This is compounded when considering their opportunities for employment, which was repeatedly noted as one of the largest challenges for many migrant communities. While I

was on-site at a volunteer orientation for part of the ethnographic data collection, the training facilitators explained the scale of the employment issue in terms of the Afghan parolee population; some of these migrants previously worked as interpreters/translators for the US government, but as they've resettled in the U.S., it is clear that these types of positions are not as common or reflect different language needs. As such, "there has ended up with 70,000 people vying for a few jobs in this area, and people will instead need to shift to other fields" (1.4 Ethnographic Memo). Whether staying in their field or shifting careers, participants do not feel like they have the professional connections within their network. Though still young, in speaking of his future, Yassir expressed: "I wish...there was an organization or someone that's really helped me with my career because I know it's hard for me to start now." Migrant participants perceived themselves as isolated from the employers who would hire them, the connections who would help them get a foot in the door, or even those who would help them once they were employed. As Asmar explained:

They have difficulties finding job and being heard. I know some families, for example, there is an old mom is there with many kids and she cannot go to get job. Not because she does not speak English. There are so many other issues. If she goes and find job to work, who is going to take care of her kids, for example?

As this quote exemplifies, even the promise of employment does not negate the isolation from other resources that help individuals maintain their livelihoods. The quote also speaks to the idea that to be isolated is to be unheard, that the social network does not reflect the needs of those within it.

### **Disruption to Existing Ties in the Country of Birth**

Many of the migrant participants witnessed disruptions to their social networks, especially in terms of maintaining their transnational ties. A disruption can be understood as a drastic change that interrupts the regular components of an event, activity, or process. For social networks, disruptions speak to drastic alterations in existing ties. In particular, their connections to people and

organizations in their country of origin were largely disrupted because of both mobility as an action (i.e., movement) and mobility as a context (i.e., the reason for and dynamics of mobility).

### ***Disruption to Cross-Border Interpersonal Ties***

First, the enactment of mobility in the form of transnational migration led to participants being physically distanced from many important actors within their social networks, thereby impacting their capacity to sustain existing, transnational ties. Primarily, this was noted with regards to their family members who remained in Afghanistan. The significance of family members still in their country of origin was visually illustrated—many listed their family within the inner ring of the “people - country of birth” quadrant and noted the disruption to their family ties (i.e., red color coding) as a fundamental change to their social network. Saed, for example, explained that “the Afghan community is a family-oriented community” and so to be far from family, including on a separate continent, in a new nation and different time zone, intrinsically changed their ability to connect with family members. Evidence of this disruption is best seen in the story of Aneesa. She was eight months pregnant with her first child at the time she and her husband were able to flee Afghanistan for Qatar, where she gave birth before migrating to the U.S. when her daughter was only a few months old. Her mother and mother-in-law are the most important actors in Afghanistan for Aneesa, yet her transnational mobility means she has not been able to turn to them as frequently as she wishes or needs at a time when many women rely on their interpersonal, female connections. Speaking of her overall experience, she said:

Both of us [her and her husband] didn't have any experience about having a kid, and how to handle the kid, so that was a little hard for us. Back in Afghanistan, we had a big family from both sides. Our mother, and brothers, sisters, families - they supported us a lot. Since they weren't here with us, that was a little scary and also a little hard for us.

The distance from their family and their support mark a disruption to their social network connections, which had a real, affective impact on their lives.

Many of the participants attempted to alleviate this disruption by relying on digital technology, including social media like WhatsApp, to maintain their connections with those who were physically far from them. Salmaan, for example, explained that he was still able to interact with his family in Afghanistan frequently: “We have a WhatsApp system. We have video chat. We do talk. I talk to them every single day [for] like three, four, five minutes.” While he wishes they could connect for lengthier periods, he expressed his gratitude that they can still communicate on a regular basis. While some participants noted the use of other digital apps, like Facebook Messenger, many primarily used WhatsApp and saw it as key for maintaining transnational ties, especially those that may share personal and/or private information. Asmar expressed “I’m really thankful to WhatsApp because so far it has been free, and I believe it is safer compared to Facebook Messenger, and some other social media.” Asmar’s point about safety illustrates that the disruption of ties is also reflective of mobility as a context.

Second, the context of mobility (i.e., the reason for and dynamics of mobility) is a salient factor in the migrant participants’ perception of disruption to their existing, transnational ties. SIV participants, those who migrated to the U.S. under the SIV offered to Iraqi/Afghan individuals who worked with the U.S. government, perceive themselves and their social network connections still in Afghanistan as unsafe following the evacuation of the U.S. and the fall of Kabul to Taliban rule. As Salmaan bluntly put in response to why he fled Afghanistan, “Because I was not safe. I worked with the U.S. I was not safe.” Because of their previous and current connection to the U.S., participants expressed great fear for their connections, again often significant family members, who remain in Afghanistan, leading to distinct behavior in the maintenance of these ties. As NA explained:

My two sisters and one my brother and father and mother, they are living in Afghanistan, so I’m worried about them. We are not refugees. We are SIV. That shows that we work with American people and we helped them when they were in Afghanistan, so I’m worried about

them...Believe me, every night I'm thinking about my brother and about my sisters, and about my father and mother. That's the hardest thing in my life right now.

Participants actively fled from threats of persecution, threats they perceive as still existing within their network; as such, the disruption is not solely a reflection of transnational mobility, but also the context and dynamics that surround that mobility. More so, this context implicated that the connection to one social actor greatly threatens other connections.

The context of transnational mobility resulted, for many migrant participants, in a social network whereby ties are disrupted in the name of safety, i.e. it emphasizes a distinct communicative behavior and the reason for such action. For example, this entanglement of safety and disruption is especially emphasized in one of Asmar's story about his transnational mobility:

Last year, when the Taliban came and took our house, took Kabul, many armed Taliban one day, that day that I left my house...I had to go to Uzbekistan and Afghanistan border, and then from there I had to go to Turkey, and from there to Germany. Then after spending many weeks in Germany, I had to finally fly to the U.S...After I left for Missouri, I heard that armed Taliban entered our house, they broke into our house. They [the Taliban] were saying that there are some reports that the residents of this house are hiding some weapons, [that they] used to work with the U.S. Army...There were a lot of rumors. They entered there, they checked everything. They still had their allegation that we are hiding weapons. They took a lot of cash that I had left for my family, for my parents, and the rest of relatives. They took all of [it] and they said they were going to come again. After that happened, the whole family left that house for two days and nights...they were threatened that the Taliban would come again, and if my family raised their voice, if they go and complain, the Taliban were going to kill all of them.

This experience and the perceived ongoing threat unsurprisingly impacted how Asmar maintained the ties in his social network. Even though he's been thankful for WhatsApp for staying in touch with family and friends, he noted that, "After the Taliban took over, it's very hard to communicate with them. First of all, I don't think that the way we communicate with them is safe, especially in south Afghanistan. I am always conservative when I talk with them." He actively altered his communication behavior with these significant ties, emphasizing a disruption in a strong, interpersonal relationship.

Similarly, those in his network have had to alter their ties with Asmar:

Many of my friends that I was friends with [on] Facebook and social media, after the takeover of Taliban, they have unfriended me. Many of them have blocked me because they were concerned that if their cellphones are checked, they could find out that he has, for example, friends living in U.S.A and some other countries....They have sent me messages saying, "I have unfriended you, don't mind because we are not living in a good place now." I understand them.

Again, his story emphasizes the disruption to existing, transnational interpersonal ties, which can no longer be maintained as they once were due to the context of mobility that resulted in a lack of safety between Asmar's connections. While the enactment of mobility can alter social networks, Asmar's story showcases how the context of mobility can be equally significant to any network transformations, in this case, the disruption of personal ties. The importance of mobility's context was also relevant when considering transnational organization-public relationships between migrant participants and institutions in Afghanistan.

### ***Disruption to Cross-Border Organizational Ties***

While the enactment of mobility can also place physical distance between migrants and some organizations, the context of mobility was noted as much more significant to perceptions of organizational relations following migration. Many participants noted that disruption occurred between them and organizations in their country of origin, but this was typically much more intentional. More specifically, for the participants who migrated to the U.S. from Afghanistan, following the Taliban takeover, many could not or would not retain relationships with organizations in their home country.

On one hand, this disruption was represented by the closing of organizations and, thereby, their ties, under Taliban rule. If a disruption is a drastic change that interrupts the regular components of an event, activity, or process, then the closing of organizations unsurprisingly impacts the ability of others to interact with it. Salmaan gave some insights to this dynamic with

regards to his own place of employment, a hospital with connections to the U.S. government and military: “The organization, everything is gone...When I came here, my job, everything was destroyed.” Salmaan lost an organizational tie representing his professional identity, but he was also speaking more than figuratively: “When I was at work when the Taliban [took] over, we destroyed everything...my laptop, work computers.” The context of Salmaan’s mobility, i.e. the return to power by the Taliban and his previous work with the U.S., meant that his connection to his previous work place could literally not exist as he knew it.

On the other hand, some participants chose not to continue interacting with organizations because of what they’ve come to represent under Taliban rule, focusing instead on the hope of creating new ties in the U.S. Aneesa, for example, was in dentistry school prior to the fall of the Afghan government. She was “busy practicing in a clinic and...was seeing about 20 patients every day.” However, she now “doesn't have any interest to have connections with any organizations...[instead] just focusing to start a new life here with the new culture.” She especially “wants to join a center just to start again in the medical field.” As a woman, she would no longer be allowed to study or practice dentistry under the new regime in Afghanistan, and so the organizations she was once connected to no longer reflect her values or identities. Rather, she emphasizes a desire to align with organizations that respect her values and experiences.

Furthermore, the choice to not continue an organizational connection also reflected perceptions that the organizations in their country of origin could no longer serve them. When on-site collecting ethnographic data for this project, it was expressed multiple times that many foreign credentials, especially academic, were invalid if not nullified in the U.S. (1.4 Ethnographic Memo). Many migrants could not turn to their previous organizations for help within the U.S., professionally or academically, because of the distinct national systems of education and

employment. The lived experience of this was illustrated when I was on-site with Resettlement Aid NPO 1 for an apartment drop-off day. Following the delivery of furniture to a newly resettled Afghan family of five, volunteers were treated to a home cooked lunch, leading to a poignant story from a fellow volunteer, an Afghan refugee himself:

Upon hearing that I'm a researcher at the university, Kalan shared that he too had been an academic in Afghanistan—a professor of Persian literature whose own poetry was just starting to receive national attention. He had spent years researching, publishing, and just trying to survive graduate school - as I myself was doing - to finally land a dream professor position. But then it was gone in the blink of an eye. With the fall of Kabul and the takeover of the Taliban, he fled Afghanistan, ended up in a large metropolitan area on the east coast, and focused on getting his wife evacuated as well. Life as he knew it disappeared. Kalan wants to reestablish himself as a professor in the U.S., has even taken some classes at my own university to help with language acquisition, but it feels impossible at times. His old university, his degree - they do not offer the connections, channels, or credentials to join the academic community in the U.S. He has to instead focus on reinventing himself. (12.13 Ethnographic Memo)

The story of Kalan highlights how disruption is both reflective of the context of mobility and an intentional choice in light of new needs, again because of the context of mobility.

Overall, this finding illustrates not only that social networks are transformed by mobility, but that the enactment of mobility and the context of mobility have implications for the social network of the migrant public, including significant ties being disrupted. Disruption has the potential to impact interpersonal and organizational relationships within a network and points to the need to consider beyond “extending and embedding” to a full range of network changes.

## **Findings to RQ2**

Whereas the findings of RQ1 established a sense of isolation from and/or disruption to their networks in both the U.S. and Afghanistan, the second research questions explored how migrant participants perceive their relationship and involvement with CSOs specifically. In particular, participants highlighted their perception of and involvement with resettlement agencies and some

other migrant-serving nonprofit organizations in the U.S., rather than a broader range of CSOs. When reflecting on these connections, two main themes emerged. First, participants perceived specific interpersonal relationships with organizational representatives as, at least in part, depictive of the overall quality of relationship with these CSOs. Secondly, beyond the interpersonal ties, migrant participants showcased a fluidity to their perception of the CSOs in their networks that vary in relation to whether they felt that their expectations are met throughout their resettlement in the U.S.

### **Interpersonal Ties as a Marker for Organizational Relationships**

When discussing their connections with CSOs, migrant participants largely referred to specific interpersonal relationships with representatives of these organizations. Primarily, these were organizational members who were deemed closest to them like family mentors. Many migrant-serving CSOs utilize a mentor-partner program in which a U.S. citizen volunteer is paired with a migrant individual or family; the volunteer is meant to assist them with life in the U.S., including helping them to obtain resources, sharing information, and being a point-of-contact for questions and concerns. These relationships were extremely significant, visually situated in the 1st or 2nd innermost ring of the “people - country of residence” quadrant with green color coding, and frequently expressed by participants when they were asked specifically about important organizations in their life. For example, Yassir, whose family’s resettlement case is managed by VOLAG, did not note VOLAG itself as overly important, but turned the conversation to their family mentor Elena.

Me: Do you feel you're close to any of the organizations in the United States or have there been any that have helped you?

Yassir: [Elena] and her friends... These five guys, they really help us. When we first came we were in a hotel. The [VOLAG], the organization that was connected with them, they were supposed to help us, but it took a long time to find us a home or house. [Elena] really

helped us with that and they find us at home and whenever we want to go somewhere, they really help us.

Though Yassir noted that his family mentor and her friends are connected to VOLAG, his emphasis is on the significance of Elena herself and her ties with the family. To him, it was not about the relationship with the organization, but the CSO member who represented it, a sentiment in which he was not alone.

Participants even went as far as to say they consider family mentors to be part of the migrant family, emphasizing the significance of the tie. Salmaan, for example, speaks to his family mentors minimally once a week if not daily, and speaks of them with immense gratitude: “They’re not anymore my mentors. They’re my family now. I really love them like my family. These people, they help me a lot when I get here. They take care of everything: appointments, doctors, kids, groceries, everything.” Hasan also voiced that the family mentors were closer to family than mere organizational representatives:

My two family mentors - they’re very important to me. For me, they’re part of my family...They help me a lot. Believe me, they helped me a lot. Since I was in Qatar, they collected everything for us...everything [that] we need at the moment, like dishes, beds, clothes for my wife, clothes for my baby, for me. They’re helping us a lot. You know I love them too much.

The services from and thus connection to specific organizational representatives partnered to migrants and their families are an extremely important actor in their network.

Further conversation identified the type of support and help that migrant participants received from these interpersonal relationships. Many perceived the family mentors to provide both material goods, companionship, and help with problem-solving, ultimately serving as an important actor to help with a variety of concerns. In fact, when it came to problem-solving, new residents in the U.S. thought of family mentors as more significant than other more familiar community members. Yassir shared that:

If we had some problems or whatever, we would contact [Elena] because she was closer to us and we didn't know that many immigrants that live in [city]. Even if we know some, they were new too. They were the same and that's why the only ones that we really know was [Elena] and friends.

Whereas other migrants may share language and/or experience that can be useful, the family mentor was seen as the one with the actual knowledge and connections to help. Hassan's story further showcased the level and type of support associated with this tie, particularly in relation to the challenge of employment:

[My family mentors] are trying to find a job for me at the University Medical Center. They're trying just to make a connection with me and with them, so send me the-- They made my resume. They applied a job for me in University Medical Center. Maybe I would work...as a research fellow in endocrinology or maybe in biomedical research. They're just trying to connect us with society.

The emphasis is both on the presence of the interpersonal relationship, the wider connections of these CSO representatives, and how they can be/are utilized to help migrants—especially as it contrasts with the perceived usefulness of migrant networks, which are seen as limited. Rather, these interpersonal ties represented positive interactions with the organization because of the ability to leverage its network of resources.

However, just as interpersonal ties impacted the perceived quality of the organizational tie, the (mis)actions of organizations also seemed to shape interpersonal dynamics, particularly with case managers, who are formally employed by resettlement agencies to oversee the resettlement resources and procedures of a migrant individual or family. Asmar, a refugee who has also worked at a migrant-serving CSO, noted how when services from other organizations in the network were delayed (such as governmental procedures), migrant clients were quick to blame CSO employees:

Sometimes [services] take long time, but they don't easily understand it. They talk to us in a way as if we are our enemies. They think that food stamp is approved late because we did not take action on time and we stopped it, or we have been holding it with them with us, and we are not giving them food stamp. The EBT card, just an example or Medicaid, for example, Medicaid is not in our hand. Medicare is not in our hand. Cash assistance which

comes from county is not in our hand, but they don't know all those things. They think that everything is smoothly done at the government level, but when it comes to these resettlement agencies, it is the employees who fold it on purpose to hurt the clients more involved.

In some ways, the perceived inefficiencies of CSOs are seen as a personal affront by employees against the refugees; it takes on an interpersonal dimension rather than being seen as an issue of bureaucratic procedures between organizations. Thus, just as the use of organizational connections were a positive factor in the evaluation of interpersonal ties to organizational representations and the organizational relationship as a whole, the mis/disuse of these connections is equally impactful.

Overall, when prompted about connections to important organizations, migrant participants highlighted the role of specific CSO representatives and how these interpersonal ties were significant, particularly in whether/how they connected them to various aspects of U.S. society (i.e., resources, information, places, and employment opportunities). While these interpersonal ties were a significant marker in the evaluation of relationships with CSOs, participants at times still separated the two and spoke of CSOs more broadly. In particular, as the next finding illustrates, migrant participants have a fluid perception of the CSOs in their networks that vary in relation to their perception of whether their expectations are met throughout their resettlement in the U.S.

### **Perceived Expectations over the Course of CSO Involvement**

With an excess of service roles and responsibilities, CSOs are perceived as having boundless connections that can and should be optimized to assist the migrants with joining American life. They are expected to vouch for migrants in housing situations as co-signers to leases, to oversee the process of receiving public benefits, and to connect migrants with monetary and material resources that ease their financial situation. As Saed expressed:

What the resettlement agencies do, they have their own relationship with the rental communities for their refugees and they rent the house for the refugees...They have

connections with different donations... This impact means I was, at least for a year, not paying out-of-pocket to buy some stuff. It impacted me a lot financially.

Saed had first-hand experience of the help offered by migrant-serving CSOs and spoke of those initial services with praise, underlining how these organizations have important connections for migrants. These high expectations for connection also applied to the employment sector, an especially challenging area for new migrants to the U.S.; many expect CSOs to have ties that can be pulled on to help them find jobs. As Asmar noted, “I’m not sure how they do [it], but they are connected to different job markets...they are widely connected...and they refer employees to them.” The emphasis is, again, on the organizations having beneficial relationships within their own network that migrants can turn to. While there was praise for CSOs for optimizing these ties, there was also disappointment at the limitations within the CSO network and the timeframe that new migrants have to these connections.

The high expectations for CSO services can generate an equally high disappointment threshold when those expectations go unmet. For context, many key resettlement agency services (e.g., one-time payment per refugee to assist with early expenses and other time-limited cash and medical assistance services) end after an initial three month period of resettlement in the U.S. (Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, n.d.; Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2023). After that, many migrants instead need to turn to other nonprofit organizations, who are often limited in what they can provide due to a lack of funding. This shift in what is provided and by who often comes as surprising to migrants. Asmar is a refugee himself and has also worked in a couple of roles with a resettlement agency, largely managing the communication between organization and migrants in light of this service gap:

They’re not serving the clients as they were expected—that is always a complaint from the clients...it is very challenging after three months because the other [organizations] that we refer clients to, they are not simply giving rent. They do their best to find [clients] a job, and

they have to be able to get to work and make some money...for most clients, it's against their expectations.

Having only three months of access to some of the resources and connections that resettlement agencies as a CSO can provide is a point of contention for many in the migrant community. Further services also end after the one-year mark (Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, n.d.; Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2023). The expectation of support in the form of both services and connections is perceived as unmet due to what comes across as random time limitations, creating a needs gap that impacts the relationship between organization and migrant.

This disappointment is only furthered by other perceived slights of CSOs as they attempt to manage any remaining needs across the process of resettlement in the U.S., especially in terms of employment and long term adjustment (two major challenges noted by the migrant participants). As Saed noted:

In theory, not in practice, in theory, there are lots of things to be done by the resettlement for the immigrants and the newcomer...Those who are implementing this, they don't have the general knowledge...For example, someone is coming here with a background of engineering, with the background of nursing, with the background of postal service, with different background, they don't have ideas to help go through all these...another big challenge is that case worker are not always responding well due to the lack of awareness of the social service work...they have to know how to work with immigrants from the first step to the second step then third step.

Saed's statement shows that CSOs are not perceived as being as insightful with the migrants' experience and background, or as useful in connecting migrants with field-specific organizations and opportunities within the job market. Expectations of other key support services are met inadequately with many feeling like their unique professional background and even their uniqueness as an individual undergoing resettlement was overlooked. There was a perception of resettlement agencies as "going through the motions" by participants who had been in the U.S. at least a year. Working with nonprofits did not fill this gap as they too were perceived as very slow and inefficient.

Overall, the perception of a welcoming into U.S. society by CSOs fades after the initial time period for integral services as migrants find themselves with access to less resources, reliant on less efficient connections, and a strong push to be self-sufficient. The expectations of boundless connections from CSOs - and thus an excess of support - goes unmet, and as such migrants have a more disappointed perception of their involvement with CSOs.

### **Findings to RQ3**

In this dissertation, participants represented resettlement agencies, or the domestic VOLAG affiliates, as well as nonprofit organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These CSOs provide various types of services to different types of migrants, including refugees, parolees, asylum seekers, and SIVs. Despite the differences of these organizations, the findings for RQ3 revealed clear similarities in how these CSOs perceive and maintain their social networks. This project highlights three dichotomies of the networks of migrant-service/advocacy organizations. First, the dichotomy of service identifies the significance of distinct actors within organizational networks, yet complicates their overall relationships with CSOs. Second, the dichotomy of glocal showcases how the enactment of a global issue on the local level implicates the relationship diversity within organizational networks, but presents unique instances of collaboration. Lastly, the dichotomy of importance challenges interactions as the only marker of significant ties to the network structure by introducing impact as an actor characteristic that acknowledges a more contextual perspective.

#### **Dichotomy of Service: Organized for yet Reliant on Other Actors**

By examining the social networks of CSOs aimed at assisting and advocating for migrant publics, particularly those whose mobility has incurred subsequent marginalization, this project

uncovered a dichotomy of service. Participants perceived the networks as simultaneously operating for others while being reliant on others, and the presence of and interactions with these actors largely defined the network. Significantly, these findings identify that publics play a complicated role as actors in CSO networks, both in their reception of services and their links to others, especially other interpublic relationships. Yet, this does not discredit the importance of other organizational actors (both external and internal to the CSO). As such, these networks seemingly depict a dichotomy in which CSOs are organized for others (in this case the mobile, migrant publics) and thus are simultaneously reliant on others.

***Organized for Others: Publics as Network Actors***

At the heart of the CSOs represented in this study are, unsurprisingly, the publics they serve, notably migrant individuals, families, and communities. Though the CSO representatives used distinct terminologies for their organization (whether it be migrant families, residents, farmworkers, or children), the meaning is the same: the primary actors of importance in the organizational network are the distinct migrant publics. This significance was visually represented across the mapping exercise. In fact, the majority of the social network maps have the migrant publics of the CSO placed within the first or second ring of importance. For example, Maya placed immigrant children in the first ring of the “global actors” quadrant of the Legal Advocacy NPO social network. Cory’s map of the Resettlement Aid NPO 2 social network shows “families” as clearly marked in the first ring of the “local actors” quadrant. Blaine, the Community Outreach Manager at Resettlement Aid NPO 1, also noted “families” as a significant actor by placing them in the second ring of the “local actors” quadrant of his map. The differences in these placements are manifestations of the distinctions in each participants’ role and the organization they serve. Blaine has a more outward facing role as Community Outreach Manager who organizes volunteers

compared to Cory whose role as an Executive Director puts her in direct contact with the families that the organization serves. In their roles, both Blaine and Cory are serving migrant individuals, families, and communities who have largely been approved to stay within the U.S., having secured the necessary visa or status (such as a SIV for Afghan individuals) and/or have the right to remain in the U.S. Maya, as a Child Advocate, perceives immigrant children as more global due to the variability and transience of their journey; many communicate with the Legal Advocacy NPO prior to or as soon as arriving to the U.S. and before any long-term stability is decided or denied (including deportation). As such, the immigrant children are perceived more as global and/or transnational actors. Regardless, migrants—in their varied contexts—are perceived and visually depicted as incredibly significant to these CSO networks.

Additionally, migrant publics are significant not solely as temporary recipients of services, but as creators of important connections for the CSOs, especially to other migrant families and individuals. In noting the significant actors in the Resettlement Aid NPO 1 social network, Blaine touched on how the role of migrant families evolve for the organization:

A lot of the family, at least the Afghan families, because of 20-ish years of resettlement, a lot of them do have family who are here. Some of them, it's their parents. Some of them, it is a distant cousin. The families are also involved because they often end up being the ones who advocate for the newly arrived folks ... There are a bunch who will get involved with these organizations. Especially Afghan, when there is a family who has arrived already and they're just waiting for us to set the apartment, a lot of times they will come with a cousin or a friend they knew who's already been here for a couple of months or a couple of years.... The families play a pretty big role in that as well.

In the case of Resettlement Aid NPO 1, migrants are not only those that the organization initially serves, but also a public that, in turn, aids the organization further in time; they connect them with other migrants who need help, particularly their own family members or friends who have just arrived in the U.S. As such, the interpublic relationships become important ties for the organization,

particularly in furthering the service they provide by linking them to other members of the migrant publics who need help.

Furthermore, in helping those new individuals and groups navigate their relationship with the organization, interpublic relationships may be a form of trust-building that CSOs can rely on to operate its services. Louise noted that at Shelter/Housing NPO, many of their current residents, migrants who would otherwise be homeless without the aid of the shelter, followed in the footsteps of family members who were former Shelter/Housing NPO residents. She noted, “We get a lot of people whose cousin was at Shelter/Housing NPO three months ago and now they're here.” As such, she visually depicted both of these actors on the social network map, with current residents in the innermost ring and former residents right behind them in the 2nd ring and a strong tie (i.e. interpublic relationship) between them (see Map Figure). She further expanded on the relationship between current and former residents, noting:

I think there was trust, a lot of trust between residents and former residents, and more so than there was between residents and employees. I think it was a good thing... I think the best person to inform you of an experience is someone who has just been through. The same or a similar thing and who would be better than somebody who understands perfectly your culture, your language, and your trauma.

Her statements capture that the interpublic relationships often contain a level of trust that can help the organization in turn when former migrant clients guide current migrant clients through the process. Organizations are thus not only able to connect with further migrants, but benefit from the quality of those interpublic relationships. As such, publics are a significant actor in these networks not only as receivers of organizational services, but also as generators of new ties and trust through interpublic relationships, noting the continued need to include the connections and consequences of (inter)public relationships, including how they may impact organizations' operations and networking.

Interestingly, participants representing agencies (i.e., VOLAG) did not list migrants as part of the organization's social network despite referencing them throughout their interviews. This visual absence presents two possible explanations. One, the migrants are seen as inherently part of the organization and thus are already represented by the innermost circle of the social network map. Two, migrants as the receiver of organizational services are not seen as a part of the CSO's social network. Rather than asserting one option over the other, considering both of these possibilities as a truth captures the nature of this dichotomy of service. Migrants are both inherently a part of this social network, as the reason for and receiver of the organizations' operations, but are also a marginalized member of society and the social networks they inhabit; CSOs may acknowledge that some migrants, particularly those who underwent forced migration, cannot and/or should not be relied upon as contributing members of the network due to their limited resources and capital. Migrants are perceived as the end goal, the intended recipient, rather than a part of the process because reliance needs to instead be on other organizations actors. CSOs are organized for others, yet reliant on others for the survival and operations of the organization, and that is reflected in participant's perception of the wider network through the presence of strong ties to other external relations (i.e. organizations) and internal relations (i.e. employees, staff, and notably volunteers).

***Reliant on Others: Interorganizational and Internal Relationships***

The second part of the dichotomy of service is thereby the reliance on other actors, with notable emphasis on key interorganizational and internal relationships.

**Interorganizational Relationships.** When examining the maps of CSO representatives, it is immediately apparent that other organizations play a huge role in these networks. Even in numbers alone, most organizational maps list more organizations than people, groups, or distinct publics. This significance of external relations was also expressed in interview data; every participant was

able to articulate a plethora of organizations, particularly other migrant-serving CSOs, which are significant in their organizational network because of the overarching mission to assist and provide services for migrant publics. For example, though he is the Community Outreach Manager for Resettlement Aid NPO 1, Blaine noted the distinct interorganizational relation with Resettlement Aid NPO 2, whom he placed in the innermost ring of the local actors quadrant:

A lot of the families that we set up apartments for get funneled to Resettlement Aid NPO 2 through either word of mouth or just directly through us. They usually help with more secondary things. If there's a specialty item that we couldn't source, they'll get car seats, they'll get winter clothing, they'll help families pay rent in an emergency. They'll help get them connected to culturally appropriate doctors...I think it's 80% or 90% overlap in families.

As the interview quote depicts, this interorganizational relationship is greatly entwined and necessary for each organization to succeed in its purpose of assisting migrant families in accessing material goods during their resettlement in a large city on the east coast, notably with Resettlement Aid NPO 1 overseeing the furnishing of apartments and Resettlement Aid NPO 2 providing additional and specialty material goods. Though distinct, their purposes reveal a shared value to serve migrant publics in a way that is only possible through interorganizational relationships with other CSOs. Some of the organizations noted were designed specifically to serve migrant populations, others were relevant because they provide assistance with other elements of the marginalization not unique to migration but that individuals and families may incur after migrating to the U.S. (i.e., SNAP benefit, WIC benefits, skills-training).

Largely, these interorganizational ties were discussed by highlighting the relevance of personal relationships between organizational representatives. For example, Blaine from Resettlement Aid NPO 1 discussed that when working with certain organizations and agencies, representatives remember and rely on the individual ties more than an organizational process, contacting each other interpersonally rather than more formally:

This is my personal opinion, most of our work and communication is carried off on a very interpersonal level for the most part. The agencies will send us formal emails being like, "Hey, here's who we're sending you..." [but] we've usually gotten a call from them, a day or two before.

While there can be formal structures in place between the organizations, especially in terms of sharing information about migrant publics or services for them, many participants perceived developing and invoking an interpersonal connection with other organizational representatives as more effective.

Furthermore, the interactions with these actors range in quality, especially in terms of frequency of message exchange where more recurrent communication indicates greater importance; simultaneously, the frequency of exchanges and the importance of an actor in a network reflected the needs of the migrant publics. For example, Louise spoke about the connection between Shelter/Housing NPO and local government-funded health clinics, one of the foremost listed organizations of importance in the local quadrant of her social network map. She explained that:

We would call them constantly. We were constantly driving clients to [the local health clinic]. I think the place that I picked clients up from and dropped them off at the most were these clinics. Having access to medical care for the first time in sometimes years was, I think, life changing for people.

As the quote exemplifies, this interorganizational relationship consisted of frequent interactions over different channels (i.e., in-person, telephone) suggesting an importance that is confirmed by its correlation with the needs of the publics being served (many of the migrants served by the CSOs have had limited access to healthcare opportunities, both outside of and within the U.S.). Some participants, such as Cory, also noted significant daily communication with other organizations that provide access to material goods because many of the migrants served by CSOs arrive with minimal resources and need both basic items (i.e., beds, cooking appliances) and those essential to comfortable living (i.e., winter coats, baby supplies), ultimately reflecting the importance of

interorganizational connections as it relates back to the needs of marginalized, migrant publics.

Other interorganizational relationships perceived as less important had more ad-hoc communication in response to specific issues, problems, or crises. Ultimately, the interactions and thereby relationships between organizations, especially CSOs, are a significant presence to these networks and the ability of each organization to operate, especially in the name of serving marginalized and in this case mobile publics.

**Internal Relationships.** The reliance of CSOs on others for the survival and operations of the organization, includes key internal relations, such as employees, staff, and notably volunteers. Each organizational representative was present on at least one social network map, yet volunteers emerged as a more prominent presence. In many of the interview and mapping exercises with CSO representatives, participants communicated that volunteers were a significant actor for the organization. For example, Blaine from Resettlement Aid NPO 1 placed volunteers in the innermost ring of local actors and noted that “our warehouse would not be able to function without about 10 volunteers who come regularly. Same thing with our setups. We have probably about 5 to 6 volunteer leads that make it possible for me to do that.” The data overwhelmingly points to the importance of volunteers as an organizational actor, showcasing a reliance on their presence within and interactions throughout the network to the operations of the CSOs.

Due to their significance, long-term committed volunteers were in part perceived as internal to the organization and thus not always visually marked on the social network maps; presumably, there was not a need to mark them explicitly because the organization was already front and center on the map. For example, Niall, the Volunteer Coordinator and Community Engagement Specialist who is responsible for recruiting and maintaining volunteers for the Refugee and Immigration Services Department of VOLAG, did not place volunteers on his social network map. Yet, he spoke

of the significant work and overall importance of the organization's 100+ volunteers, especially with regard to their program that pairs volunteers with a refugee family: "It's not just your average volunteer role where you, I don't know, do something for a day. It's quite intensive help with a struggling family that's just come over because they've fled some horrible situation." The work of volunteers is significant to the operations of VOLAG in serving their migrant publics and perceived as an inherent component to the organization. In the specific case of Resettlement Aid NPO 2, I learned on-site from their volunteer orientation that technically the organization is 100% volunteer-operated (1.4.2023 Ethnographic Memo); it is unsurprising that Cory's map was visually absent of volunteers because they are the core of the organization. Long-term committed volunteers though traditionally considered distinct because of their lack of formal employment with an organization comprise an important part of the internal organization structures of these CSOs—a significance that becomes represented in mapping exercises in very different ways.

The perception of long-term, committed volunteers as internal to the organization is emphasized when compared to the perception of ties that serve as a source of volunteers. These organizations typically represent different community and/or faith groups from where they frequently receive one-off volunteer requests, which still assist in the operations of the organization, but on a less time-intensive or committed interval. As Blaine explained in his interview:

Then there are just church, faith groups, donor groups, community groups. Those are the people I work with the most outside the individual volunteers. Those groups, some of them come once a month, some of them come once every three months, or once a season...They're the ones usually a good stepping stone to the other. They're there. They're not on the day-to-day, but they are a pretty critical part.

Interactions with these entities are more reactive and ad-hoc, in which the CSOs respond to requests to host volunteer groups and are thereby distinct from the more frequent communication and shared purpose with committed volunteers. As such, despite being sources of volunteers, these actors were

placed in the outermost ring or beyond, indicating a distinction in not only their interactions and importance, but also in the perception of them as internal to the organization; they are not perceived as part of the CSO, but instead represent another interorganizational relationship to be maintained that results in transient volunteers.

Ultimately, the dichotomy of service illustrated in this project reveals that CSO networks are complicated even before considering transnationalism and mobility (since service to publics and reliance on others is not exclusive to those concepts), and these nuances are relevant to understanding the wider network. Participants perceived the networks as simultaneously operating for others (i.e., migrant publics) while being reliant on others (i.e., other CSOs and volunteers), and the presence of and interactions with these actors largely defined the network. The dichotomy of service emphasizes that service for and reliance on others challenges understandings of publics as inherent and volunteers as internal to CSOs, thereby questioning the boundaries of an organization and its implications for networks as a whole.

### **Dichotomy of Glocal: Relationship Diversity among Hyper-Local Networks of a Global Issue**

Glocalization is a concept that considers how the global is localized; it was frequently used in relation to global corporations who may choose to act strategically and tailor their products, services, and marketing to local contexts (Maynard, 2003). For public relations practitioners, the correlated idea of the glocal more broadly captured communicating in a manner aligned with a target country/audience (Valentini, 2007). By examining the perception and maintenance of CSO networks within the context of mobility and transnationalism, it is apparent that CSO representatives perceive their networks as united by a global issue yet highly localized. They are glocal and it characterizes the relationship diversity within their network as well as the quality and norms of their interactions.

Starting at the macro end of this dichotomy, participants perceived and articulated the transnational dimension of their work and network, highlighting how migration, particularly forced, is a global issue, which would suggest an increase in relationship diversity. Rather than being limited in scope, serving migrant publics is a global phenomenon that suggests networks are less bounded and more transnational. In possibility, this would be inclusive of a plethora of diverse actors and ties as transnationalism shapes the network. This was best exemplified in the social network map of Maya from Legal Advocacy NPO, who was distinct in noting a plethora of global and national actors across sectors, such as governments, immigrant rights organizations, foreign press, etc. From there, Maya was able to articulate a variety of benefits, resources, and opportunities across these relations, stating “I also put other immigration organizations like United We Dream, UNICEF, and others are also helping fight this global issue really.” To her, having a network impacted by transnationalism allowed for global connections and opportunities, especially in being united by a shared cause (i.e., to serve migrant publics).

However, Maya’s perception was notably distinct; overall, the majority of CSO representatives could acknowledge the global dimensions of their work (due to the global scale of transnational migration) but perceived their networks as very localized and subsequently not relationally diverse. This is especially evident when considering the visual data of this project: most of the CSO maps show an abundance of ties in the local quadrant, whereas participants were either unable to name a global actor in their network or named considerably fewer. As Cory from Resettlement Aid NPO 2 succinctly put it, “The majority of the actors fall within the local quadrant just because we are very grassroots.” The emphasis is on action at the local, if not micro, level in the focus on particular individuals, groups, and communities who need assistance. As such, the

networks as a transnational whole have minimal relationship diversity in terms of actors across quadrants.

Furthermore, the CSO social networks were perceived as having minimal relationship diversity across sectors within that local quadrant. The local actors significant to these CSOs were frequently other CSOs including other migrant service organizations, health care centers and organizations, schools, food banks, and other general non-profits and/or NGOs. There was limited representation of corporations and employers as well as transportation authorities in the local quadrant as well. For example, beyond public transportation agencies, local forms of government were excluded from the maps unless prompted, signifying an area where these CSO networks may be lacking network heterogeneity. In the case of Cory, local government actors were not perceived as part of the social network of Resettlement Aid NPO 2 because she perceives the local government as not viewing migrant publics (particularly vulnerable ones) as relevant. She stated:

From the local government, we don't really interact with them at all. It would be great if we had a better relationship with them, but again, everybody's so busy and helping refugees is not at the top of a lot of people's lists, because they're not voters, and they're not necessarily paying taxes right away, and they're just not influential constituents that they're the most concerned about.

Her perspective articulates both a gap in the network heterogeneity, as well as a possibility for why these connections are not present. Another participant, Niall, also did not include local government until he was asked to reflect on the gaps on his social network map for VOLAG at which point he noted a monthly meeting that included the mayor's office. In those meetings, the resettlement agencies in the area shared their concerns, such as housing, in hopes to put the local government "in the loop" and ultimately impact policy, but the overall interactions were perceived as limited in actuality.

The glocalization and subsequent network homogeneity resulted in noteworthy nuances of collaboration, wherein it is widely acknowledged between actors that their organizations cannot be isolated in their efforts. The shared focus on how global migration becomes embedded at the local level joins these organizations together in the attempt to alleviate the issues that befall the publics who migrate and face subsequent marginalization. As Louise noted when discussing the relationships between Shelter/Housing NPO and other shelters, “It’s a comradery thing and I think usually it’s not competitive because we all understand the struggle.” Niall similarly shared the collaborative environment between VOLAG and the other resettlement agencies in the area:

We have really tight relationships with them. We have quarterly meetings to run through everything like the-- All three of us have been doing and what we plan to do for the next quarter and stuff just so that we're sharing the load and we're sharing information...how have you mitigated these issues, or what have you been experiencing? What have your clients been experiencing?

The glocalization of these networks, in which a global issue (i.e., issue homophily) is enacted at a local level, seemingly fosters a degree of collaboration, but not without its nuances. It is important to note that these instances of collaboration were most commonly between CSOs of the same organizational type and purpose (i.e., attribute homophily). Louise was distinctly referring to the ties with other shelters, and Niall was describing the relationship with other resettlement agencies. There are evident pockets of collaboration between similar organizations seemingly because the scale of the issue (i.e., global migration and resettlement) is much larger than the scope of any one organization.

CSOs that serve mobile publics, particularly vulnerable and marginalized mobile publics, ultimately perceive their networks as glocal. One participant, Cory, in describing the localization of global migration even expressed that she wished “more people could think of it as think globally and act locally.” The dichotomy of glocal implicates the relationship diversity within these

networks. On one side, the global scale of migration calls for increased network boundaries, actors, and opportunities, even uniting similar organizations in purpose and generating collaborative interactions. On the other, this global phenomenon is largely enacted in a local context for the CSOs, in turn localizing their network and limiting its relationship diversity, prompting a potential for competition. Ultimately, this dichotomy captures that CSO representatives perceive their networks as existing in a transnational context from which the markers of relationships are impacted.

### **Dichotomy of Importance: Interactions and Impact Underlying Ties of the Network Structure**

By examining transnationalism and mobility with the networks of CSOs who serve mobile publics (i.e., migrants), this project presents a unique complication to the assumption that ties of interaction undergird entire network structures. More specifically, this project uncovers a dichotomy of importance that highlights the significance of not only interactions, but also impact to network structures. The previous dichotomies of this section have outlined and established that interactions are still a significant component to understanding social networks; however, some actors were perceived as a part of the network regardless of the traditional interactional markers of ties such as frequency of exchange, collaboration, or time spent together.

This project found that certain actors were perceived as present in and connected to the organization and its network because of their impact, construed more specifically as their decision-making power. Participants commonly ascribed the global impact to two main international organizations: the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), though the latter received more attention. Speaking of the role of the UNHCR and their placement in the Resettlement Aid NPO 1 network, Blaine explained:

It's basically how families are matched to host countries or resettlement countries...They, in a good year, do about 250,000...We know of them and that's about it...We don't interact with their world headquarters or whatever. UNHCR, you cannot have this without it.

The work of the UNHCR in overseeing the resettlement of refugees across the world directly impacts the existence and operations of Resettlement Aid NPO 1 and so the global actor is pertinent to the organization's social network despite the absence of communicative interactions. This impact was further described by Niall, who situated the UNHCR and the IRC in VOLAG's social network map despite noting that "we don't have like contact with them. They're just like big, fat global actors that we know of." Justifying their presence, he stated:

The UNHCR makes decisions that then affects us...The UNHCR, actually, has-- I'd say power to decide where refugees go. Whether they get refugee status, they're more of the decision-makers. Where the IRC are more of a watchdog charity that is helping refugees, but they're not necessarily making those decisions that the UNHCR are, but they will certainly hold them accountable for the decisions they make and do work around the edges.

The global actors' presences on the social network map emphasized the importance of impact to a social network structure. Specifically, actors with impact in the form of decision-making power were relevant despite the lack of interactions.

The presence of and connections to an actor due to their impact was also relevant on the national level of CSO social network maps, especially in regards to national bodies like the U.S. government. The U.S. government, and in particular the president, has the right to set the number of refugees being resettled in a given year as well as oversees immigration policies like the Afghan Placement Act and Assistance or Uniting for Ukraine (Ambar, 2022). These decisions have a prominent impact on the CSOs according to participants, regardless of whether they were an agency or an NGO. As Niall explained:

I think all of the national decisions pending how many refugees are going to be admitted to the U.S. How many each year? What's the ceiling going to be? That's set by whatever administration's in power. That greatly affects what our capacity is. What our funding is. They decide on funding. They decide on how much help we're going to get really.

For VOLAG, there is an immediate impact from the decisions by the U.S. government to their operations, especially because refugees are entitled to services and support from domestic agency affiliates (Ambar, 2022). In deciding how many and who, the U.S. government directly defines the expectations of VOLAG's services, even though it is one of many local affiliates. Other CSOs, like NPOS, felt equally impacted, and many referenced the long-lasting damages inflicted by the decisions of the Trump administration. As Blaine from Resettlement Aid NPO 1 explained, "The Trump administration gutted resettlement. They were skeleton crews...The turnover rates in resettlement are high during the good years, let alone one where you literally can't say you're going to have a job for six months because funding keeps getting cut." In responding to mobility, particularly by seeking to restrain it, the decisions of the Trump administration greatly impacted the internal functioning of the CSO actors, threatening their survival. Additionally, it had long-term ramifications for the network in light of the fall of Kabul in 2021 and the evacuation of Afghanistan, which put an even greater strain on the system and its ability to serve incoming migrant publics. This was evident at the nonprofit and agency level, with Niall from VOLAG commenting how "The thing is, it was [after] the Trump administration, and he'd set the annual ceiling so low...We didn't have all of the resources we needed to help these people either. It was a real challenge." As such, the network and the organizations within it are particularly vulnerable to the decisions of large actors that exist at a national level.

This is not to say there are never interactions between CSOs and national actors. For example, Niall discussed the relationship between VOLAG at the domestic level and its national counterpart that oversees the agency. On one hand he noted their impact, stating: "Again, it's their decision-making. They have the power to hire, fire, give us more funds, go through our books, look at all the work we've been doing." Yet, on the other, he noted the frequent interactions with this

body for assistance as well as information such as “how everything's going in the resettlement world, what's going well with your volunteers, what's not.” While a dichotomy seemingly introduces an either/or scenario, what is apparent here is that interactions and impact may represent a spectrum of ways in which connections within a network may be perceived, including scenarios of both/and.

As such, by examining transnationalism within CSO networks, it is evident that network structure is also in part defined by impact. Rather than relying solely on communicative interactions between actors such as message exchange, participants invoked power and decision-making as an important tie between actors in a shared network, thereby referring to the contexts and conditions in which interactions between all network actors can occur. Decisions by actors at a global and national level impact whether and how the interactions between local actors can happen. By examining transnationalism in social networks, particularly of CSOs serving mobile publics, this project finds that network structures can include and are ironically impacted by those with impact, or the power to delineate the conditions and contexts in which interactions occur.

#### **Findings to RQ4**

The findings for RQ3, especially the last dichotomy underlying the significance of impact within a network, reaffirm the importance of considering networks as ecologies in which context can be critical to the perception and maintenance of networks. The findings for RQ4, the examination of how mobility impacts network perceptions and maintenance, are a natural continuation of the ecology conversation, specifically in that mobility is the underlying context impacting the actors, relationships, and behaviors within these social networks. CSO participants perceived their network as one defined by the transnational mobility of their migrant publics. More specifically, they perceived mobility as an underlying reason generating the network, or, more

specifically, the formation and maintenance of their organizational network related to the issue and enactment of forced, transnational migration to the U.S. Just as the existence and transformation of ecosystems is dependent on the presence and regulation of energy, so too are social network ecologies defined and altered by an undercurrent of mobility, a property that manifests in our exchanges and environments. Notably, the production of mobility by some actors (i.e., migrants) generates a social network ecology, which evokes the existence and purpose of other social actors (i.e., migrant-serving CSOs) while challenging the structure of others, generates specific, necessary niche relationships, and prioritizes certain communicative behaviors, all of which reflect the conditions and context of the transnational mobility.

### **Mobility as Transformative in the Generating and Challenging Social Actors**

Just as organically the production of energy allows for other organisms to exist in the natural world, the production of mobility by some actors (i.e. migrant publics) is a transformative property that calls for other actors to exist, including resettlement agencies and certain NPOs, and challenges the structure of pre-existing institutions. As Miranda explained, VOLAG is a domestic branch of an international resettlement agency that exists to handle the resettlement of refugees in local contexts in relation to (a) the national refugee cap set by the U.S. president and (b) the decisions made by their national and international spearheads. VOLAG and other agencies exist in response to the mass forced migration that occurs globally, a type of transnational mobility that often incurs marginalization and requires special services from CSOs.

Similarly, the representatives of NPOs noted how their organizations exist because of mass mobility and the subsequent marginalization of many mobile publics, including in response to limitations of agency operations and capabilities. For example, when I was on-site at a volunteer orientation for Resettlement Aid NPO 2, the training facilitators explained how the organization

was founded in 2019 to oversee assistance to refugee families in the mid-Atlantic area “beyond the basics of agency support” including the provision of material goods (i.e., food and clothes) as well as educational opportunities (1.4.2023 Ethnographic Memo). Blaine further described how mobility leads to the need for NGOs beyond agencies when describing Resettlement Aid NPO 1:

[We were] founded because when a family comes here, they each receive a resettlement stipend. Some of that goes to the agency to cover operating costs. Whatever doesn't has to go to making sure the family is moved in according to federal standards. The federal government requires that there be like a couch and beds for everyone in the family for it to be considered like a habitable place...the federal requirements are the bare minimums. It is, this is what you need to do to not be committing like a humanitarian crime against a newly-arrived family, but it doesn't necessarily mean that's enough for them to be okay or stable. [We] started because we were like, well, we can offset arguably probably the most expensive part of resettlement, which is just getting furniture and beds.

To summarize, Resettlement Aid NPO 1 exists because the transnational mobility of forced migration to the U.S. results in certain needs and realities that are not met by agency intervention alone, necessitating the involvement of other organizations. The production of mobility by some actors calls for the existence of other actors.

The existence of these CSOs, which inherently consider transnational mobility to serve those who enact it, stand in contrast to other societal institutions in the social network ecology, whose services may impact but do not necessarily center migrant publics. Rather, mobility may actively challenge the structures of these organizations, speaking to its overall transformative capability within a network. Significantly, this transformation is complex as the fluidity of mobility and how it is enacted can be difficult to establish long-term changes, even when there are underlying patterns. This was best exemplified in the case of Xara and the work of Labor Rights NPO, which focuses on the experiences and rights of migrant agricultural workers. As a distinct type of migrant, they are often more mobile, moving cyclically in relation to the harvest season and also dependent on the

success of certain crops. She explained how this mobile public and their distinct needs challenge the standard structure of other societal institutions:

From a systems perspective, we do have more Latino families, more Spanish-speaking people who are settling in an area over time, but also because a lot of them are temporary, there isn't a big shift in what is actually made available because it's a temporary count...I was speaking with someone from the local hospital a couple of months ago and they're like, "We know that there's a need to have interpreters here, but because we don't really have the numbers to capture that that's actually a patient population that comes, we don't know how to justify that cost."

Transformation, in terms of hiring more interpreters to improve service, is both needed and hindered by the mobility of the shared migrant public whose presence requires better language services but whose transience leads to their perspective being uncaptured. Xara noticed a similar issue with schools, which are often unprepared for the influx of bilingual/ELL migrant students in the fall as if they “don't know how to plan for those students until they're already there, and then by the time they try to think what could be something that we would do to help them, they've moved on again.” Labor Rights NPO works, in part, to push for transformation that align with patterns of mobility, especially among those not inherently attuned to migrant publics. The example showcases how mobility generates new social actors like Labor Rights NPO and challenges the structures and procedures of other social actors in the network like hospitals and schools. Overall, the production of mobility by migrant publics is akin to the production of energy by producers in the natural world—it is a transformative property that generates the existence of other actors and challenges other structures in the environment, such as the procedures of existing social actors.

### **Complicated, Necessary Ties: Niche Relationships in Network Ecologies**

As an undercurrent to the social network, mobility also delineated the need for certain ties between social actors, which exist due to the context and conditions of mobility. The production of mobility by some actors (i.e., migrant publics) thereby not only ascribes the inclusion of certain

actors in a network, but also ascribes distinct connections, which are not inherently voluntary and/or positive. Rather, these relationships can be perceived as more complicated, nuanced, or even tense despite the frequency with which they interact. In the context of this project, three complicated relational niches emerge due to the presence of transnational mobility: Agency-Nonprofit; CSO-Housing Organizations; and, CSO-Law Enforcement.

### ***The Agency-Nonprofit Niche***

One of the first types of complicated relationships that are enacted in networks generated by transnational mobility are the ties between resettlement agencies and nonprofits, especially those who serve migrants at the same local level. Agencies are meant to provide the services and support that refugees are entitled to according to U.S. legislation, as outlined by the State Department's Reception & Placement Program (R&P) and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in the Department of Health and Human Services (Ambar, 2022). NPOs also serve migrant publics (including but not inclusive of refugees), but are not inherently connected to or affiliated with government legislation or funding, and may thereby cover a wider breadth of services and populations. The two are conjoined in their efforts to serve migrant publics, often calling on each other for assistance, but this does not inherently generate a positive relationship. As Cory from Resettlement Aid NPO 2 explained:

The resettlement agencies, we have a unique relationship with in that we want to have a good working relationship with them because we do have to go to them when we have a particular issue with the family that we want to raise assistance with. We also know that they're not always the greatest and they sometimes say things and don't do them or don't deliver. That's another delicate balance that we have to maintain there.

To use her exact words, the relationship is delicate —a fragile tie of necessity that can easily be damaged when it feels like either is not living up to the expectations of the connection.

More specifically, regardless of any frequency of interaction out of necessity, these types of ties represent a complex entanglement of expectations over the commitment to serving marginalized, migrant publics. Blaine, for example, expressed his frustration over the unmet expectation of agency contributions:

The agencies themselves, and you will find this out, are notoriously bad at communicating outside of their own spheres... a lot of agencies will have one specific program that could benefit everyone, but they don't necessarily share or send that to clients from other agencies because they're worried that if the other agency can prove that they were providing more meaningful use or something, they may lose funding the next year.

Despite placing various agency affiliates and branches in some of the more inner rings of his social network map, Blaine simultaneously showcased a frustration at the quality of these interactions, regardless of their frequency of exchanges or the perceived importance of the actor. As Cory more frankly described, "Look, there's some agencies that are great and some case workers that are great and there's others that are terrible and you don't know what you're going to get." Her quote captures her perception of the relationship: the connection between nonprofit and agency is not inherently positive. Both agencies and nonprofits emerge in relation to the production of mobility, and are put into connection with one another due to the shared mobile publics. Yet, the necessity and frequency of their interactions does not denote other characteristics of quality, and instead may reflect more complicated or even tense ties.

### ***The CSO-Housing Organizations Niche***

Second, the relationships between CSOs that serve migrant publics and housing actors are also fraught with tensions that are undermined by the necessity of these ties. For agencies in particular, housing is one of their expected tasks for incoming refugees who qualify for agency aid and other CSOs equally noted the importance of providing adequate housing for all migrants, even those unqualified for agency aid. Yet, in seeking to provide this basic human right, the CSOs

represented in this study often perceived complicated ties with housing organizations. For example, for migrant publics in an urban area, CSOs typically rely on relationships with “massive apartment complexes” (a phrase reiterated in interviews and on-site) that oftentimes are managed and owned by the same company. Speaking of this, Blaine, who visually marked housing in the second innermost ring of of the social network map for Resettlement Aid NPO 1, noted that:

It's a catch-22 because we rely on these apartment complexes where they live that are not great apartment complexes. They're really, I would call them, slum lords that run them that are taking advantage of the fact that these folks can't go anywhere else. They are stuck there.

Again, the emphasis is on the tension between necessity and negativity when it comes to the relationship with housing actors. The conditions of the apartment complexes were further witnessed during fieldwork. More specifically, while on-site at an apartment setup for Resettlement Aid NPO 1, it was evident that the overall state of the apartment itself was disappointing:

At first, you're distracted by the wide windows and charming views, by the volume of the freshly vacuumed carpet, but it soon becomes clear that these are surface level amenities. One of the bathrooms reeks—a scent of sewage strong enough to be more than anything stained into the caulking of the tile floor, more than anything our mop and cleaning detergent could handle. We closed the door to the bathroom as we worked. Even the cleanliness of the carpets is soon forgotten when cockroaches scamper through it. No one has brought any bug sprays or traps. It's hard to feel like you're setting up someone's new home when the state of the space screams for exterminators and plumbers, not volunteers. (9.26 Ethnographic Memo)

The apartment was a necessity for the incoming family of six, but its conditions, though deemed fit by the apartment complex, left much more to be desired.

The need for housing can also overlap with the need for employment, leading to unfit living situations or even experiences of exploitation for vulnerable migrants. As Xara from Labor Rights NPO bluntly put, “The orchards that we work with all provide housing. I would not call it great, but it's there.” The organization feels compelled to maintain a relationship with the orchards that hire the cyclical migrant workers, but simultaneously acknowledges the inadequacies of the conditions it

provides their shared migrant publics. Louise also asserted the problematic ties that emerge due to the rarity and necessity of housing:

Some of these employers...would offer accommodation. They would offer that the person could stay there, and we never felt comfortable sending someone, but sometimes people would tell us they were going, and that was that. A couple of times this happened, I don't want to say they got stuck out there, but something happened, they didn't get paid properly. Those were the types of things that came up.

The organization may connect to employers that provide housing but are also concerned for the potential of exploitation. The undercurrent of transnational mobility within the network thereby creates tense relationships that CSOs must engage in as a means of serving their migrant publics.

### ***The CSO-Law Enforcement Niche***

A third example of tense relationships that co-exist within the transnational, mobile networks of the CSOs are the interactions with and thus ties to law enforcement organizations, including local police, Border Patrol, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). These complicated relationships can represent distinct stances to immigrants and immigration policy that exist and interact within a social network ecology, often resulting in ties strong in frequency but weak in affinity.

In acknowledging the existence of these tense relationships, Maya noted how the proximity of Legal Advocacy NPO to the southern border meant the network included “obviously law enforcement and Border Patrol and ICE.” These law enforcement organizations, in many senses, represent the opposite of the work of the Legal Advocacy NPO, oftentimes engaging in the cruel, inhumane responses to immigrants that the organization seeks to circumvent and prohibit. Yet, despite these oppositional approaches to immigration, the two actors exist within the same network because of that very transnational mobility; both organizations exist in response to the same global phenomenon. The organization’s network has to maintain a relationship experienced as a downright

negative connection. This is evident in Maya's case of needing to associate with the detention centers that hold the migrant children she advocates for:

These detention centers, they won't give us a heads up when something happens... I had a child who I was talking with, we did everything, and then suddenly, I just got an email saying, hey, they got deported back to their home country last night... Without telling us or anything. That's the bad relationship... It's a rocky relationship with specifically the detention centers around here.

Again, the law enforcement organizations have the capacity to and often do act in ways that counter the efforts and service of the CSO. Yet, they co-exist and interact within a network due to the production of mobility that results in specific niches of complicated and tense ties.

Furthermore, these relationships can be described as traditionally strong ties based on the frequency of exchanges. Louise noted that not only did the network of Shelter/Housing NPO include law enforcement actors, but also that she was frequently communicating with them: "I was also constantly contacting immigration detention centers and ICE and DHS," often because shelter residents had ankle monitors and needed to check in with the law enforcement organization. This led to interactions with ICE, and its detention centers in particular, multiple times a week. Yet, while the frequency of interactions would suggest a strong relationship between the two organizational actors, it actually held a tension that would become embedded in the lived experiences of those interactions. As Louise explained:

Sometimes we would have to call ICE to get people out of detention centers and it was so weird. Everything seemed very subjective... It was strange that we knew the horrible things happening, but I had to try to schmooze an ICE officer on the phone into giving me information.

Focusing solely on the frequency of those interactions overlooks the nuances that mark the relationship as tense and complicated.

However, some participants did not always spurn the connection to law enforcement organizations, in particular the local police whom they felt had a more open stance toward migrant

publics especially in the context of shared understanding. Charley from VOLAG described a number of positive encounters with local police because of the presence of individuals who “support refugees and immigrants within the justice system and in the police department,” including an Afghan police officer who “understands both sides culturally and he speaks all the languages.”

Niall also noted the significance and potential of positive relations with local law enforcement:

I think it's good to have a connection with the police should any issues come up. Because the police need to have an understanding of where these people are coming from, the difference, the adjustment they're going to have to make. We've had police come in and give trainings to us and things like that. Maybe we'll have to call them. Maybe we'll have to use their services because there's been an issue and stuff, so they help out.

His quote emphasizes that the undercurrent of transnational mobility requires understanding from both parties in that migrant publics need help learning and adjusting to the laws of the U.S. and that the local police need information on the conditions and context of transnational migration. There is, then, the potential for the CSO-law enforcement niche to have strong ties of affinity depending on their stance surrounding transnational migration, further pointing to the complexities that encapsulate the relational quality of necessary ties.

Ultimately, the inclusion of the emergence of specific ties of necessity, or niches, in a social network underlined by mobility accounts for patterns of relationships that go beyond interaction frequency in analyzing the quality of said relationships. The concept of necessary, niche connections acknowledges the complexities, tensions, and multiple characteristics that may define a relationship between actors.

### **Relying on Digital Channels due to Transnational Mobility**

The mobility underlying the network ecology, including the presence and connections of certain actors, also impacts the specific behaviors of actors, particularly how they can respond to the fluidity of mobility. Even more specifically, CSO actors identified and prioritized significant

communication behavior, notably the reliance on digital channels, that reflect the mobility of publics. As such, this section details how mobility as an undercurrent to a social network also impacts the strategies and behaviors that facilitate ties.

First, the mobility that underlies the network requires the use of communication that aligns with its transnationalism; it relies upon communication that can circumvent geopolitical borders. In particular, the transnational mobility at the heart of the network emphasizes the significance of digital communication channels. As Blaine from Resettlement Aid NPO 1 explained:

In the modern age of resettlement, there are...people who run these massive networks, who are refugees themselves, who run these massive communication networks. About like, when the smugglers are coming, what the tide is on those islands, and how to get out. There are WhatsApp groups that show paths to get through to Europe.

The use of digital communication technologies is an ingrained part of modern mobility, especially in this context of forced transnational migration. Blaine continued in asserting its importance, stating “I think we can't ignore that that's going to be a major thing moving forward in communication. Whether it's for the families here, the families coming here, or the people stuck in between.” The characteristic of transnationalism in a mobile network generates a prioritization of using digital technologies and channels from one actor (migrant publics) that in turn influences the other actors of the network (CSOs).

As such, second, CSO actors highlighted their own use of digital communication for maintaining their network because of the mobility inherent to said network. As Cory from Resettlement Aid NPO 2 expressed, “The families we communicate with fairly regularly, they are reaching out to us always asking for help with X, Y, or Z. It's almost all over email, text messages, WhatsApp.” Blaine also shared how “when Kabul fell, one of the links we used to send out was like a Google Doc that was just, here are scams that the Taliban are running.” In fact, many of the basic programs these CSOs operate to serve their migrant publics rely on digital channels to a degree. For

example, both Bridget from VOLAG and Cory from Resettlement Aid NPO 1 noted the significance of digital WhatsApp groups between volunteers in order to access and share both information and material goods. Xara from Labor Rights NPO similarly noted how they, as well as the orchards in their network, use WhatsApp to stay in contact with migrant publics, which is especially important because they are a more cyclical or seasonal population:

We do get messages from the people who we work with whenever they've gotten back to Mexico and mostly on WhatsApp... especially when they're maybe preparing to come back to the area and giving us an update about what the plans are.

These migrants are more frequently mobile than some of their resettled counterparts, and the network actors rely on digital channels when they are out of the area.

Digital channels have even extended the outreach and service of CSOs in some cases. For example, Blaine noted how the family service manager for Resettlement Aid NPO 1 is “a part of a couple of massive WhatsApp groups” for regular communication, but the organization has also used digital channels to go beyond its normal mission: “We have gotten emails from families that are hiding out in basements in Kabul and have been like—We have been able to connect to either sponsors or organizations.” The transnational, mobile publics have relied upon digital channels, including to connect with CSOs, who have also, in turn, used digital communication to provide beyond their typical service capacity.

In particular, WhatsApp was noted as a significant, more so than any other digital communication channel. As Louise from Shelter/Housing NPO captured “There's not a universal WhatsApp number for Casa. If there was, it would be blowing up constantly.” Even as a case manager, she would “get some calls on my WhatsApp number...from families and Haiti and the DRC” who wanted to check in to see if family members had arrived at the shelter. In one case, she had “family members from a Nigerian man who was in detention sent me his information and said,

‘Hey, can you check on him? Did he make it?’ He was there the next day.” WhatsApp stood out clearly as a prioritized means for migrants and organizations to communicate. It is an internationally available freeware with instant messaging and voice-over-IP service (Metz, 2016) and is thereby perceived as more accessible and reliable when accounting for transnational mobility. As Blaine confirmed, “Everyone has a smartphone, or like a SIM card. I can't guarantee they'll have a laptop, but they definitely have a WhatsApp.” WhatsApp is a strategic channel for CSO actors to maintain with both their volunteers and their publics because of the mobility inherent to their network. Blaine further captured its importance, expressing:

There are families who their journeys start and end with a WhatsApp group, which is like, here's how you would get to a secondary country. Then there will be WhatsApp groups about how to apply for resettlement. Then when they arrive in that country, that will be added likely to WhatsApp groups of whatever is appropriate for them linguistically or culturally.

WhatsApp is a prime example of the entanglement between mobility and digitality, and how that impacts network actors, including the CSO actors who maintain this digital behavior.

Ultimately, actors have modified their behavior due to the conditions of their network, notably the mobility and subsequent transnationalism underlying it. More specifically, migrant publics, and in turn CSOs, have relied upon digital channels, especially WhatsApp, to maintain their network. This includes their interactions with each other, and notably the ability of the CSOs to serve these publics.

### **Findings to RQ5**

The fifth and final research question explored how the relationships between migrants and migrant-serving CSOs impact the facilitation of social capital among them and within their network(s). In particular, participants highlighted that social capital as a product and process were CSO-driven within their network, oftentimes done on behalf of the migrant publics they serve.

Additionally, they emphasized the entanglement of social capital and other forms of capital, notably economic, cultural, and symbolic; the presence and facilitation of these speaks to the social capital within a network, especially when conceptualized as trust and norms. Lastly, this project stressed the importance of navigating space/place as a factor of accessing and facilitating various forms of capital, including social; this finding particularly underlined nuances to the mobilization of a network.

### **Social Capital as a CSO-Led Product and Process**

When it comes to the facilitation of social capital among migrant-serving CSOs, migrant publics, and their broader networks, one clear finding is that social capital, especially when conceptualized as trust, is perceived as a CSO-led initiative, particularly by CSO representatives. Efforts by CSOs were described as integral to the generating and spreading of social capital in their networks, especially by bridging their connections to migrant publics. For example, Charley from VOLAG noted:

We want to increase social connections, increase coping...just try to increase social connections for social support because they don't have it...We just had [an event] for Ukrainian women because they were so isolated. Building social capital, social community, social connection. There's no one else to do that.

Her story emphasizes a common perception among participants: that migrant-serving CSOs are responsible for creating and sharing social capital, but are also the only ones with access to it. The organizations and their operations are perceived as essential to the product and process of social capital. Xara from Labor Rights NPO shared a similar stance, especially in noting the bridging of the CSOs: “We’re doing a lot of liaising between the clients that we work with and the systems they’re trying to access.” This is particularly accomplished through CSO representatives, who are

depicted as a reliable source of information for migrant communities and, as such, the means for building trust with these distinct publics whether it is by word-of-mouth, social media, etc.

Overall, migrant participants seem to agree, despite any negative perceptions to organizational efforts, that CSOs and their representatives were trustworthy or had built trust between them. As Hasan briefly put, “they're nice people. Yes, I can trust them. They're nice people. They're just trying to help me a lot. Help me just to find a job, paying my apartment rent. They're trying to receive all the benefits that I have. They're nice people, yes.” Whether this trust furthered faith in their wider networks is unclear, though some like Asmar were skeptical: “In general, I trust most of those organizations that I am involved with...it does not mean that all organizations are 100% trustworthy.” Organizations in the U.S., and U.S. citizens, were still perceived as not knowing much about Afghan refugees, the context of their mobility, and the details of their resettlement, leading participants to note they didn't have strong recognition within their wider societal networks but that they had hope in this changing in the future.

As such, this project found that social capital, particularly when conceptualized as trust and recognition, was a resource given to migrant publics by CSOs, and that reflects shared norms between CSOs, especially CSO representatives. More specifically, social capital was perceived as emerging because of a sharedness between migrant-serving CSOs that then benefits the migrant publics. This was especially emphasized in a conversation with Bridget from VOLAG:

Bridget: Working with all of these organizations just puts me in a life of kindness. Everyone is so kind...The people that you're working with all seem to understand this is one world, we're all in it together, and we're all working on this together...It's just a better world to live in.

Me: Sounds like there's a lot of shared empathy.

Bridget: It's more love than empathy. It's been incredible...it's very much just knowing all of the really good people in the world.

This discussion articulates a sense of unity among CSO representatives due to a shared value of recognizing and serving migrant communities; it is a norm of kindness and love that establishes an understanding to CSO interpersonal relationships. Niall from VOLAG shared a similar sentiment: “The bulk of these organizations...and the people I interact with on a daily basis are just made up of everyday folk that are trying to make the world a better place.” He too is speaking to a shared purpose that unites CSO representatives and ultimately leads to actions for/on behalf of migrant communities. This product of social capital (i.e., the shared norms between CSOs and their representatives) impacts the process of social capital (i.e., building trust and recognition for migrants) enough that participants noted a concern of turnover in organizations as a challenge to maintaining and advancing social capital.

Ultimately, participants clearly identified a perception that the facilitation of social capital was a CSO initiative, led by the organizational representatives and given to migrant publics. Building trust, recognition, and social support was seen as an outcome of the shared norms between CSO representatives. This was the clearest depiction of the product and process of social capital in isolation, whereas the other findings of this section point to how its facilitation is intertwined with other distinct actions.

### **Entanglement with Other Forms of Capital**

Social capital speaks to the wider resources that an actor can mobilize, and this finding emphasizes that by noting that the facilitation of social capital between migrant-serving CSOs, migrant publics, and their wider networks is entangled with other forms of capital, including economic, cultural, and symbolic. More specifically, because the mobility of migrant publics has led to marginalization in various forms, there’s a plethora of needs to consider alongside social capital. As Maria from Religious Charity explained, there’s a responsibility for CSOs:

To make sure that when they come here, at least they have the opportunity to build whatever safe and secure environment they want, and that they have the minimum resources to at least be able to live a good life here...Because many migrants come to this country and sometimes they find situations that are probably worse than the ones they left behind.

In her words, migrant-serving CSOs must recognize a range of factors that marginalize migrant communities in the U.S., leading to the need for various, distinct types of capital - almost as a prerequisite to the facilitation of social capital. As Cory from Resettlement Aid NPO 2 further described:

There's language barriers, there's transportation barriers, there's just making people aware of what resources are out there and what they can do...For them to know where to go, or how to get there, or to be able to communicate with them in a language they understand, those are all challenges that they face because they come from a whole other part of the world.

Her quote emphasizes that the context and consequences of mobility are relevant to the facilitation of capital between CSOs and migrants, and throughout the network. Many of the migrant participants noted these intense needs impact perceptions of social capital, such as Saed who expressed: "It takes time and courage to trust someone...I have difficulties with trust...with all of these actors because everything is totally new." His statement illustrates that the facilitation of social capital, such as trust within a network, cannot overlook the entanglement of other forms of capital.

### ***Economic Capital***

One of the primary capital concerns is access to economic capital, or resources that either are money, can be transferred into money, or represent aid to/ease of monetary constraints. Migrants may hold minimal economic resources prior to, during, and after experiences of mobility, especially depending on the context of mobility and subsequent consequences (such as unemployment and heightened job insecurity); in fact, for some of the migrant participants included in this research, their compensation represented their first dollars earned in the U.S.. Economic capital was depicted

as a more pressing need than other forms of capital. As Cory from Resettlement Aid NPO 2 reflected:

It's almost like the ring system [on the map] in terms of what they need. We're so focused on the middle, like food and clothes and housing, the most critical things. It's so hard to focus on anything further out from that because we're still trying to just get the basic necessities taken care of.

Economic capital is likened to the innermost ring of the network - the most important resource for CSOs to oversee and migrant publics to access. Bridget from VOLAG emphasized this urgency, speaking with passionate concern for the migrant families she works with and their future following organizational intervention: "They're not going to be able to make enough money to survive...in six months, they have to be able to do this on their own." Access to economic capital is critical in that it represents survival; it is a fundamental, significant need that must come prior to other forms of capital. Similar to the first finding of this section, economic capital is discussed as being passed from CSO to migrant participants, highlighting that there are important interactions and cooperation within an organization's network that results in benefits to the migrant publics they serve.

### ***Cultural Capital***

Cultural capital, including actively and passively acquired knowledge, expertise, and/or qualifications that surmise educational and cultural backgrounds, was heavily emphasized as a key component of CSO work and migrant livelihoods. Many migrant participants noted the significance of opportunities to learn about the culture of the U.S. as well as the importance of being in proximity to other migrant community members, both of which help to minimize culture shock. CSO representatives similarly spoke in bulk about responsibilities that emphasized promoting cultural capital among migrant communities. As Maria from Religious Charity expressed:

Whatever the case we take, we make sure the person at least gets the education and knowledge about where he is, where she is, what to do, and that they are not alone in case they need something...The world does not work the same as the U.S. When you migrate to

the U.S., the expectations of your behavior are absurd because, as a migrant, you have no knowledge of anything. You just come with the knowledge of your country which is absolutely different... First, you don't know how to access the system. Second, you don't know the rules of the game, and, third, you are going to fail and make mistakes.

Her quote captures the layers to the need of cultural capital for those who migrate to the U.S., particularly a) that it is lacking upon migration, b) that limits the ability of migrants to access their networks and the resources within, and c) that CSOs are thereby responsible for helping to facilitate this capital. The emphasis is on a unilateral flow of cultural capital from CSOs to migrant publics.

However, equally important in the facilitation of cultural capital, is how it flows through organizational members, notably in the form of ensuring representatives are informed and understanding of the distinct backgrounds of migrant publics. For example, in speaking about how the organization operates especially in sharing material goods, Cory from Resettlement Aid NPO 2 noted:

There's lots of cultural [context], even simply donating clothes - okay but are the clothes modest looking? We have to make sure the clothing's culturally appropriate. When we do emergency grocery deliveries, we work with a particular company and volunteer who understand that meat needs to be halal...we're making sure everything is culturally appropriate

The organization is cognizant of the distinct cultural backgrounds of their clients and in turn seeks to ensure that their efforts acknowledge any cultural differences, speaking to the generation of cultural capital. Yet, in volunteering with Resettlement Aid NPO 2 at one of their large scale donation events, the flow of cultural capital is not always effective in reaching all organizational representatives:

After finishing the set up of donations and opening the gates to the 100+ members of the migrant community serviced by IROC, I was put in charge of the food and coffee table. I was passing out donuts as quickly as the many kids in attendance could eat them. However, my catering speed and efficiency took a stumble when one woman stopped to ask me if the donuts were halal. Truthfully, I had no idea—while I figured the ingredients might be fine, I wasn't sure if there was a risk of cross-contamination with animal grease through frying. More so, I hadn't even considered the possibility of that issue. I had assumed that the organization knew what they were doing in offering certain things. Similar to other points

over the course of the day, I was confronted by the meandering way information was passed through the organization's representatives, if at all. (10.15 Ethnographic Memo)

The flow of information and capital is not limited to between organization and public, but must also be relayed through an organization and its representatives.

In fact, migrant participants noted having a role in the facilitation of cultural capital, notably due to the need to educate organizational representatives and U.S. citizens. In a sense, they strive to actively pass along details to their backgrounds, providing information and knowledge to others.

This was best exemplified in a story shared by Yassir:

Once in our school, there was a party for graduation - last year, for seniors. They have the pig and also the beef meat...Our religion, we can't eat pork and the beef. One of my friend, he said, "Come eat." I said, "I can't eat it" and he was like making me to eat it and I explained why I can't eat the pork. I don't want to eat it but he said, "It's delicious, come eat it" and when I explained all the things about it and then he knew that's what's going on and he said that's okay, fine.

When events, spaces, or information do not take into account their distinct backgrounds, migrant participants like Yassir noted a need to explain, especially in order to make it a more welcoming space. The presence of cultural capital in all actors may impact feelings of trust and recognition. His story also highlights that though other organizations, like schools, are in a network with migrants and migrant-serving CSOs, the flow of cultural capital may not efficiently spread through the wider network. This can limit later attempts to build trust and facilitate social capital.

### ***Symbolic Capital***

Though less emphasized, the data of this project still pointed to some stark entanglements of social capital and symbolic capital, which can be understood as an actor's perceived legitimacy and the subsequent rights and power afforded to them. In particular, documentation that legitimized the presence and livelihood of migrants exemplified a form of symbolic capital that impacted perceptions of trust. For example, Saed discussed needing to turn over formal and informal

documentation to different resettlement organizations: “Every document that we are thinking of, they have. From the social media, from the residency cards, from the SSN, the green card..they have a copy of that...they have a collection of all information.” These organizations had access to intimate details of migrants and their lives despite migrants having limited prior interactions with the organizations. The documentation largely legitimized the presence of migrants and afforded them certain rights and opportunities, and signified an important, intimate capital now shared between public and organization. As such, some, like Saed, felt that this obligated the migrants toward the organization, enacting a sense of trust because they had access to that information.

This system of obligated trust through the sharing of confidential information, an example of symbolic capital, was also apparent when volunteering. For example, one of my first days on-site with Resettlement Aid NPO 1 resulted in the following observation:

For set up days to work, there is an immediate expectation of trust. More specifically, that volunteers can be trusted with confidential information because for them to be on-site relies upon having the addresses of migrant clients. While addresses can be a matter of public record, they also represent a personally identifiable form of information that can be considered more intimate. They’re something we may choose to share, with friends or family members or those we feel we can trust. Members of the migrant publics served by this organization don’t have that agency or choice in how their address information is shared. Because their mobility has resulted in needing various housing services, these migrant publics are obligated to put trust in organizational volunteers, who have access to their address information and will physically be in the space itself. (9.19 Ethnography Memo)

Addresses are something that legitimize the presence of a person in the U.S., especially in scenarios whereby one is relocating, providing access to opportunities and services within that vicinity (i.e., personal IDs, library cards, etc.); addresses represent a symbolic capital that is situationally shared between organization and publics, creating a sense of obligated trust toward the organization and its representatives.

Instances whereby members of migrant communities lack certain documentation reaffirms the significance of documentation as a symbolic capital that legitimizes the presence of migrants, affords them certain rights, and in turn impacts the facilitation of social capital. The lack of this symbolic capital leads to a lack of resources, and thereby a lack of trust within the wider network. This was emphasized in the tragic story from Maria from Religious Charity:

We have a very sad case, for example, that was last year. We lost a member of our community that was very active because he had some health problems. He needed a liver transplant. In the hospital, he was not put on the waiting list because he had no visa...It was sad. The whole process to see somebody just gone like that because of a paper.

Maria further noted keeping these details, specifically the impact of not having a visa, from the wider community she works with to prevent the loss of hope and trust in the system—many of the people her CSO services are still waiting for appropriate documentation. Her story showcases the impact of symbolic capital in accessing other forms of capital, such as resources, and how that reflects the facilitation of social capital within a network.

Ultimately, participants discussed the significance of the facilitation of other types of capital as a priori or simultaneous to the facilitation of social capital. Significantly, in many instances, the facilitation of capital reflected organizational access to quality relationships, norms of understanding, and—thereby resources—that could be operationalized on behalf of migrant publics. This stands in contrast to migrant publics mobilizing their network on their own, suggesting a reliance on CSO intervention and involvement.

### **Navigating Place and Space**

Part of the ability for CSOs and migrant publics to facilitate capital, especially social capital, relied upon their ability to navigate place and space, including the action of place-making. More

specifically, concerns surrounding transportation, access, and the control over places and spaces highlight novel nuances and norms in network mobilization.

Many participants, including both CSO representatives and migrants, noted the need for, and frequent lack of, transportation as an integral part of accessing capital and resources, be it material goods or employment opportunities. Some even included transportation services on their social network maps. Niall from VOLAG, for example, put the DMV on the periphery of the organization's network map; he explained:

Our clients need transportation. It's a real springboard getting them transportation and getting them set up with a license is the springboard to self-sufficiency. It's a big step in being able to function well in the U.S. Go out and get your own groceries. Go to the mosque if you want, go to the temple, go to the church, whatever. Go do your own thing. Live your own life.

His quote exemplifies that the ability to navigate place and space were crucial to accessing various capital, from the tangible of groceries to the intangible of becoming further embedded into a community such as through a faith institution. Other CSO representatives additionally noted, in particular, the need for trucks to move material goods, for public transportation stops and services near migrant communities, for funds that can be utilized by their migrant publics to purchase cars, and for volunteers and representatives to drive frequently in order to serve migrant publics—all of which point to the nuances in mobilizing a network for facilitating coordinated action. In fact, the demands or expectations of driving for CSO representatives as an example of needing to navigate place/space to facilitate capital was evident in this project's ethnographic observations. For example, it was stated during an Resettlement Aid NPO 2 volunteer orientation that volunteers should expect a lot of driving (1.4 Ethnographic Memo) and other volunteer tasks with Resettlement Aid NPO 1 heavily rely on volunteers being able to drive between the warehouse and family apartments (12.13 Ethnographic Memo). CSOs are dependent on their representatives being able to

access and utilize transportation as a means of navigating place/space, especially when the migrant publics cannot. It is necessary for mobilizing the larger network of relationships and resources.

Additionally, CSOs relied upon access to space in order to facilitate capital, particularly economic capital in the form of material goods, between them and migrant communities. Many noted the importance of organizational storage space for this exact reason, such as Blaine from Resettlement Aid NPO 1 who emphasized the following when discussing how some migrant-serving CSOs fail: “I think they didn’t have enough space, their volunteers were run ragged, and, frankly, we would have been too if we didn’t have the warehouse.” He really highlights how the organization’s operations are impacted by their two distinct warehouse spaces, which were included as sites in the ethnographic data collection. These two spaces (in the same lot) are seemingly organized by type of furniture or items, whether it is mattresses, bed frames, or smaller things like hygiene products and cleaning supplies; they allow the organization to store the material goods needed for their apartment set-ups (12.13 Ethnographic Memo). Similarly, the lack of space was noted as a challenge to the facilitation of economic capital; as Cory from Resettlement Aid NPO 2 explained, “people often want to do donation drives for us, which is fantastic, but we don’t have a physical space to store things.” Access to space thereby stood out as a critical component to the facilitation of mainly economic capital, which was previously noted as being an important precursor to the facilitation of social capital between CSOs, migrants, and their wider networks. It again points to a nuance of mobilizing a network and its resources, particularly those that are tangible.

Lastly, this finding also brings to light questions about the state of a place or space, and who has control in the act of place-making and how that impacts the facilitation of cultural capital and social capital. Throughout data collection, it was evident that CSOs are largely in charge of the place-making process, from the resettlement agencies who find housing and supply basic furnishing

to the nonprofit organizations who provide further furniture and material goods, including elements that would or could reflect objectified cultural capital. This question how the facilitation of capital is impacted by the control over place-making particularly peaks around decorative elements that go beyond mere functionality to instead express atmosphere, aesthetic, and an overall sense of welcome and belonging. These items may be examples of objectified cultural capital, but also just speaks to whether a space is set up with a specific individual or group in mind. One of my first days volunteering on-site at an apartment set up for Resettlement Aid NPO 1 exemplified this tension:

The tablecloth was ugly. That's all I could think as I tried to make the rectangular tablecloth fit the oval table, which I had just cleaned—its mahogany surface shining. I was fiddling with a fabric birthed in the intersection of the 60s and 70s, a spiral of paisley and tie dye in reds, oranges, and browns. The tablecloth was ugly, but I didn't go to the warehouse to see the options, and had already been informed that the team leader thought all apartments needed a tablecloth. Maybe it was just a matter of different personalities and idiosyncrasies—maybe someone would love this tablecloth, but regardless, it brings up the question of place-making. When mobility enacts a marginalization that involves housing, it can't only be a matter of accessing a space but also who gets to put it together, who (and what culture) does it reflect. The migrant publics of this organization have to immediately invest faith in this organization who says it will make a home for you, a space for you—you have to put trust in their efforts and intentions. Maybe it doesn't matter—furniture can be moved, art hung elsewhere, and tablecloths hidden in drawers or thrown away. But there's a lingering question: does a space reflect the person or people inhabiting it? (9.19 Ethnographic Memo)

In this example, the organizational representatives had control over even the minute details of place-making—the choice of a tablecloth, but it reflects the significance of place-making in its ability to foster a sense of belonging through the overall state of a space. Migrant families have to trust the organization, speaking back to a previous perception of obligation in the facilitation of social capital, yet they may feel unrepresented or considered in the place-making process or product. Further days on-site showcased that the choice of decorative items was largely the personal preference of the CSO representative gathering the item from storage (12.13 Ethnographic Memo).

As such, the control over the state of a place through place-making identified norms that may be exclusive to migrant publics.

Building on this, the mobilization of a CSO network of relationships to assist with migrant housing highlights norms that center the organization rather than reflect those its serving. For example, in volunteering with Resettlement Aid NPO 1 at different apartment set ups, there was no clear difference in what was provided despite a family's distinct background; place-making was approached in the same way for an Afghan family as an Ecuadorian family (9.26 Ethnographic Memo). This contrasted organizational communication that stressed the cultural significance of certain items, notably rugs. More specifically, a Dec. 6th, 2022 email titled "587 Rugs" expressed the importance of rugs for Afghan refugee families, yet the same amount of rugs seem to be delivered at an apartment regardless of family background. Though the organization recognizes and promotes the cultural significance of rugs, its operational patterns reflect norms of efficiency: a certain number of rugs per apartment. This may reflect CSOs themselves being limited in what resources they can pull through their network, and even the limitations in time and staff to strategize resource allocation. Regardless, the organization's control over place-making was also control over objectified cultural capital based on organizational norms rather than the norms of its migrant publics.

Ultimately, this project finds significance to the navigation of place/space, including movement to/around a space, access to a space, and place-making. The ability to navigate place/space affords network actors the means of facilitating capital, establishing norms, and enacting social capital for themselves, other actors and the wider network.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

With more than 100 million people displaced across the globe (UNHCR, 2023), the enactment and context of mobility is more critical than ever, particularly wherein forced migration overlaps with communication as ramifications to our social connections. In this dissertation, I have argued that the mobile realities of the 21st century are a salient factor and context in the enactment and examination of social networks, and, thereby, the relational responsibilities of public relations. This includes not only the generation, maintenance, and improvement of significant societal ties, but also speaks to public relation's normative role in contributing to civil society (Sommerfeldt, 2013b). The current global communication landscape demands that public relations be inclusive of the depth of multiple, rich, and mobile relationships in social networks that span national borders, including migrant publics and their transnational ties that are salient for global public relations (Bravo, 2015; Choi et al., 2021; Sison, 2017; Wang, 2006; Yang et al., 2012). In this dissertation, I sought to fully integrate such realities and relationships into public relations scholarship. In particular, interlinking mobility and migration with social network theory in an innovative qualitative approach to SNA research allowed for the emergence of detail, nuance, and complexity in its data as a form of unearthing significant theoretical and practical insights.

One, from the findings of this dissertation, I propose the conceptualization of the mobile social network ecology, a concept that integrates social network analysis and the experiences of public mobility. It allows for public relations to better consider the impacts of the enactment and context of mobility on key public relationships, inclusive of the distinct publics of the modern world, the CSOs that seek to serve them, and their linkages to civil societies on a transnational scale. The first section of this chapter details the four premises of the mobile social network ecology, with consideration of both public and organization perspectives. Two, in noting the

significant ties between migrant publics and migrant-serving CSOs, I connect the exchanges of (social) capital within a mobile social network ecology to relational power dynamics and differentials, emphasizing their lived, embodied impact as well as introducing a new salient category: spatial capital. All together, these contributions advance public relations in reckoning with the transnational, globalized dimensions of the modern world, showcasing how public mobility shapes and complicates our fundamental societal connections and presenting unique takeaways for the field in scholarship and practice.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, it proposes the mobile social network ecology and addresses each of its four premises. Premise 1 asserts the importance of publics as agentic social actors in a network ecology whose experiences and (non)desires impact the overarching dynamics. This is reified in an examination of the role of publics and interpublic relationships for CSOs. Premise 2 attests the salience of movement as enacted by social actors in the wider network ecology by underscoring how the mobility ascribed a) exclusion from civil society for Afghan refugees and b) involuntary ties for migrant-serving CSOs. Premise 3 showcases how relationships and interactions within a network ecology, including those between migrant publics and important CSO representatives, reflect a myriad of contexts, such as how CSOs strategically prioritize digital channels for communication due to a variety of lived and mobile contexts. Premise 4 recognizes the potential of transnational ties within a mobile social network ecology by introducing the concept of issue impact actors.

Following the conceptualization of the mobile social network ecology, this chapter secondly presents the practical applications. These insights may be helpful for migrant-serving CSOs or those otherwise embroiled in a mobile social network ecology (e.g., those organizations whose purpose is not inherently migrant-centric but whose operations may overlap with these populations). This

section discusses how the presence and salience of involuntary ties and issue impact actors may complicate CSO network strategies. Then, it overviews how the mobile social network ecology a) prescribes a public relations responsibility to foster ties with migrant publics and b) presents insights for navigating such relationships.

Third, in review of findings to RQ5, this dissertation asserts that the exchange of capital within a mobile social network ecology represents the flow of distinct types of power within a network, inclusive of the proposed spatial capital and aligning with Bourdieu (1986; 1997). These forms of capital and power are salient in the navigation of relational ties within a network and in public relations' responsibilities to foster relationship-building efforts. Power is not only a theoretical or conceptual abstraction, but has lived, embodied impact, particularly for marginalized publics reliant on the mobilization of capital. Lastly, this dissertation addresses the novelty of its method for the field, acknowledging the contribution of a qualitative approach to SNA grounded in participant perspective through an innovative visual mapping exercise in tandem with in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations. As such, this chapter reflects upon the method's usefulness in research, providing insights for its future use before concluding with limitations and future research avenues.

### **Proposing the Mobile Social Network Ecology**

In this dissertation, I propose the mobile social network ecology as representative of the integration between mobility and SNA, detailing four distinct premises in its theoretical conceptualization. In examining the social networks of a migrant public, specifically those of Afghan refugees in the U.S., it is apparent that the enactment and context of mobility is a component to network transformation. This was reified in the organizational networks of CSO representatives, whose communication strategies and behaviors reflect an underlying mobility to

their network ecology. As such, this dissertation showcases that mobility as a public experience is entangled with representations and histories of power (Cresswell, 2010; Dutta & Shome, 2018; Samek, 2017) and captures the importance of movement on public interactions and relationships. Namely, physical movement and the conditions surrounding it are an impactful context for the examination and facilitation of social networks. In particular, findings help to illustrate four premises of a mobile social network ecology, suggested by this dissertation in Chapter 2 and referenced in the table below. This section subsequently details each premise with consideration of both public perspectives and organization perceptions of their social network ecology.

*Table 6: The Four Premises of the Mobile Social Network Ecology*

<p><b>Premise 1</b> Social networks reflect the varied communicative interactions between social actors, including individuals, groups (i.e. publics and stakeholders), organizations, governments, and nations. Social network analysis is an inherently ecological examination of the connections and their implications on the actors themselves and society at large (Yang &amp; Taylor, 2015).</p>	<p><b>Premise 2</b> Movement is inherent to social networks, actors, and interactions. Networks are dynamic, always shifting in relation to the contexts in which they are en/acted. Social actors not only re/act in relation to events, encounters, and affects, but also physically move through time and space, creating a salient context in which communicative ties are impacted</p>	<p><b>Premise 3</b> Interactions and relationships within networks are both manifestations of and themselves manifest temporal, historical, and lived contexts (Edbauer, 2005) as well as contexts of public mobility.</p>	<p><b>Premise 4</b> By recognizing the contextual and fluid dynamics of social networks in the modern era we must simultaneously acknowledge their potential for transnationalism. Social network connections exist, operate, decrease, and ultimately transform both because of and in spite of institutionalized borders, including but not limited to geopolitical boundaries.</p>
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The organization of this section is as follows. First, this dissertation discusses premise 1 by asserting the importance of publics as agentic social actors in a network ecology whose experiences and (non)desires impact the overarching dynamics. This is reified in an examination of the role of

publics and interpublic relationships for CSOs, which notably focuses on the significance of publics who have experienced an issue firsthand (i.e. transnational migration) in an organization issue network. Next, the second premise asserts the salience of movement as enacted by social actors in the wider network ecology by underscoring how the mobility of Afghan refugees incurred an exclusion from civil society. It also discusses how the enactment of mobility impacts all social actors in a shared network ecology by showcasing the existence of involuntary ties for migrant-serving CSOs. Then, the third premise showcases how relationships and interactions within a network ecology reflect a myriad of contexts, now inclusive of public mobility. It emphasizes this characteristic by examining the relational expectations and interactions between migrant publics and important CSO representatives. It also notes how CSOs strategically prioritize digital channels for communication due to a variety of lived and mobile contexts. Lastly, the fourth premise recognizes the potential of transnational ties within a mobile social network ecology by introducing the concept of issue impact actors in CSO networks whose existence is a convergence of shared issues and transnationalism.

### **Premise 1: The Inclusion of All Network Actors, Ties, and Forces**

First, social networks reflect the varied communicative interactions between social actors, including individuals, groups (i.e. publics and stakeholders), organizations, governments, and nations. Social network analysis is an inherently ecological examination of the connections and their implications on the actors themselves and society at large (Yang & Taylor, 2015). Thus, it is inclusive of the social actors who enact or perform mobility, the forces which prompt patterns of mobility, and the plethora of actors, texts, and interactions that must make sense of that mobility. Importantly, this premise elucidates the role of publics as social actors, which has been absent in networked public relations scholarship (Zhou, 2019). In the case of this research, Afghan refugees

not only shared experiences of transnational mobility, but also expressed an agency in their network dynamics. Additionally, the CSO representatives of this dissertation equally expressed the significance of publics and interpublic relationships as part of their social networks. Thus, a seemingly straightforward premise is actually one predicated on the inclusivity of all relevant actors, forces, and interactions. As such, this premise is first exemplified through the discussion of migrant publics as agentic actors whose (non)desire are salient to the wider network ecology. Then, this significance is reified through a discussion of the role of publics and interpublic relationships to CSO network interactions.

### ***Mobility, Migrant Publics, and Actor Agency***

This dissertation importantly rectifies the notable absence of publics from networked public relations scholarship (Zhou, 2019) by integrating a unique case of people undergoing drastic life changes that alter their perceptions and expectations of themselves and their ties within a wider network. It is a critical counterbalance to the privileging of organizational voices and interorganizational relationships in SNA (Zhou, 2019) that highlights publics, too, frame their communication and thus meanings and relationships in relation to the actors and forces of a network ecology. For migrant participants, while articulating and mapping the varied actors of their social networks conveyed a perception of isolation, they also expressed the role of larger, societal forces at play. It aligns with the assertion from Rivers and Webers (2011) that communicators are never solitary agents but rather exist within a complicated system that puts them beyond any immediate surroundings or contexts. Participants negotiated the meaning of their existence within a wider ecology as well as expressed their own agency in the shaping of this network.

As such, this dissertation extends public relations ecological perspectives that stress agency within social networks (e.g., Madden et al., 2021, Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang & Taylor,

2015) by finding that publics also actively strategize in the maintenance of their social networks, including because of/in light of experiences of transnational mobility. Networked public relations scholarship has attested that actor agency is important to network dynamics and transformation, notably that decision-making and communicative strategies can help actors to shape their own networks and impact structural positioning and specific relationships (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang & Taylor, 2015). More specifically, research has highlighted that organizations strategize to build their networks so as to achieve certain objectives, ultimately altering their immediate ecology such as through the choice and quality of ties to derive benefits like resources, information or social capital (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang & Taylor, 2015). In highlighting the impact of mobility on the conditions of social networks, it also becomes evident that migrant publics do not inherently acquiesce to resulting dynamics, but are equally strategic about and shape their networks intentionally. In particular, publics can and do strategize to alter their social networks in relation to the opportunities and constraints of the wider network mobile ecology. Through this dissertation, I thereby propose that networked public relations scholarship take into account publics' (non)desire for a relationship, bringing the relationship management critiques from Waymer (2015) into a network level of analysis.

In this case, the action and context of mobility impacted participants' perception of and strategizing about certain relational ties, including whether they would seek to maintain these connections regardless of previous affinity. It was not merely that transnational migration put physical distance between actors (though that plays into the details of if/how a tie is maintained), but also the perception of a connection in relation to distinct objectives and values. Publics actively chose to disrupt, end, and/or abandon transnational organizational ties following experiences of mobility because they either no longer served the aims nor represented the identities, experiences,

or livelihoods of said publics. For example, many participants either were women who had received higher education in Afghanistan or were men who had supported their female family members in their pursuit of education. However, following the takeover of the Taliban, societal organizations including the prior educational institutions of participants were no longer able to support the education of girls and women. In turn, participants elected to abandon maintaining these previously significant ties because there was a misalignment of values. Organizations are not the only social actors to be strategic and intentional with whom they form and maintain communicative relationships; publics also alter and shape their networks because of and in spite of lived experiences and thus the contextual negotiation of identities, meanings, and relationships by publics is significant to network transformation.

Furthermore, in strategizing on how to shape their social networks, publics consider the wider mobile social network ecology and what constraints/opportunities it affords. In this way they, like organizations, aim to be strategic in their relationship building in conjunction with their current and aspired curation of social ties (Yang & Saffer, 2019). For example, despite their previous significance to the identities and livelihoods of publics, some education and employment institutions in Afghanistan were abandoned. Not only was the physical distance a constraint to maintaining ties with these organizations, but they were also perceived as being unable to assist with current and aspired objectives, such as finding employment in the U.S. Instead, participants wanted to direct their resources, time, and effort into fostering new ties in the U.S. These ties would not be constrained by transnationalism, and could also afford opportunities for employment. It showcases that publics too are intentional in assessing their needs and the wider mobile social network ecology to prioritize communication with certain nodes to foster relational ties. This aligns with the description of organizational network strategy from Sommerfeldt and Yang (2017) in that,

as a social actor, publics may seek to build networks strategically by altering their immediate ecology in pursuit of perceived benefits. Publics too articulate agency in the shaping of their social networks in relation to the impacts of mobility.

**(Non)Desire for Relationships and Network Dissolution.** In particular, this dissertation further extends existing scholarship about the relevance of actor agency in the transnational mobile social network ecology by highlighting public choice in the dissolution of network dynamics such as the abandonment of ties. In this case, just as participants noted they aspired and strategized to be more embedded within American ties, their articulations of strategically shaping their network also manifested in the dissolution of ties. Participants made active decisions to forgo pre-existing organizational relationships after migrating with clear rationales for dissolving certain network dynamics. Importantly, this integrates public choice into the relational ties of social networks, merging work from the relationship management paradigm that asserts the significance of publics' desire for relationship (Waymer, 2015) and its implication within the context of transnational mobile social network ecologies.

More specifically, Waymer (2015) argued against the assumption that only organizations could set the parameters of a dyadic relationship with a public, critiquing not just the absence of the perspectives of publics but also the expectation that they always wanted a relationship. This commentary is even more applicable at the network level of analysis wherein further forces, ties, or opportunities may impact publics to feel dissatisfied with another social actor and wish to remain communicatively separate from them. Waymer (2015) noted that this communicative distance could be expected between publics and organizations that have harmed them, persons they know, or persons like them—a phenomenon that is captured in the findings of this dissertation. Participants communicatively distanced themselves from Afghan social institutions that continue to harm

persons like them under Taliban rule, whether organizations that deny other women and girls an opportunity for education or the institutional enactment of Taliban violence and norms against the Afghan citizens. As such, in proposing the mobile social network ecology, I not only assert the importance of recognizing publics as relevant social actors, but also emphasize the significance of their agency and (non)desires to the transformation of network dynamics.

### ***The Importance of Publics for CSO Network Dynamics***

The importance of publics as social actors in the wider network ecology is also salient from the perspective of CSOs and how they approach the issue(s) at the core of their connections. SNA research has explored the formation of CSO issue networks in which of cooperation these civil society actors can address issues through leveraging influence, supporting join issue interests, activities and information to advance issue development and even civil society efficacy (Atouba, 2019; Atouba & Shumate, 2010; Doerfel & Taylor, 2017; Sommerfeldt et al., 2022; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang, 2020). Previous scholarship on issue networks have privileged interorganizational relations (Yang, 2020), ultimately neglecting the thorough examination of the nuances of publics as network actors and/or within network dynamics, particularly the role and impact of publics who experience the issue firsthand. While Yang (2020) did note that “in some contexts an issue may attract a large number of resource-constrained constituents (e.g. millions of refugees)” (p. 50), left unexplored is the presence of these very publics and their experiences with focus issues in the formation and maintenance of CSO networks. In contrast, this dissertation identified that migrant publics were perceived as essential within the network of migrant-serving CSOs, including in their current and subsequent interactions.

As identified in RQ3, CSO participants viewed their mobile publics, those who have firsthand experience of forced transnational migration, as a significant actor within their

organizational networks. CSO representatives perceived their organizational operations and communication as being in service to their migrant publics, illustrating how communication social networks offer opportunities for interaction among organizations and their key publics (Yang & Taylor, 2015). In this case, the inclusion of the strong ties with publics who have experienced the issue of transnational migration firsthand links the importance of publics with scholarship of issue networks in that this key actor “outlines what an NGO does and does not do” (Yang, 2020, p. 48). The motivation of serving this distinct public not only captured who operations are done for, but also nuances to the “multidimensional explanations of why and how NGOs form ties” (Yang, 2020, p. 48), such as their reliance on interorganizational relationships and volunteer ties. The varied communication interactions reflect the entirety of the network, including, prominently, the publics whom these CSOs serve. While previous studies of issue networks have focused on the impact of public attention (Sommerfeldt et al., 2022; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang, 2020), this dissertation situates public experience as being equally important in holistic understandings of issue network ecology because it asserts the inclusion of key publics who have experienced the issue as fundamental to networks and their dynamics.

In this dissertation, I notably found that key mobile publics with whom CSOs held strong ties (i.e., the migrant publics they served) were additionally significant in providing new connections to the organizations as well as bolstering those resulting weaker ties via interpublic relations. As Yang and Taylor (2015) noted in describing a network perspective, “the identification of publics is insufficient...it is also important for an organization to understand how its publics interact with each other” (p. 100). In this vein, CSO representatives articulated how migrant publics created important connections for the organization to other individuals, groups, and members of the migrant community. Their strong ties with their target mobile public (i.e., current migrants) thereby

generate weak ties with secondary mobile publics (i.e., incoming migrants). This interpublic connection becomes a means for organizations to efficiently build new relationships, which is not always possible (Yang & Taylor, 2015); it also seems to align with work by Doerfel and Taylor (2017) in that this interpublic linkage reifies a lifeline of support for the CSOs as there is a steady stream of migrants linked to their operations. Additionally, these interpublic ties between current and incoming migrants were perceived as having more trust, something from which the organization could benefit. Weak ties are not always or inherently conducive to higher trust levels (Yang & Taylor, 2015), but the interpublic trust may have cross-network implications. Namely, the quality of the interpublic relationship may bolster what would otherwise be a new, weak organization-public tie, especially in the greater context of a mobile social network ecology.

Ultimately, the first premise speaks to the inclusivity of the plethora of interactions, actors and forces within a wider mobile social network ecology, such as those who enact or perform mobility, the forces which prompt patterns of mobility, and those ties that must make sense of that mobility. As such, it ensures that networked public relations scholarship grapples with the impact of publics as a social actor within a network ecology. In highlighting publics' agency and (non)desires as salient to network dynamics, their presence and interpublic connections are additionally significant to CSO network perceptions and interactions. It reifies that including all social actors, interactions, and forces within network dynamics is essential for organizations to understand the quality of current and future ties, particularly in the strategizing around a core issue. Rather than having a limited conceptualization of the role and impact of publics, their experience with the issue (i.e., transnational migration as an example of enacting mobility) and their subsequent communication behaviors are noted as essential in the dynamics of the mobile social network ecology.

## **Premise 2: Movement within Social Networks**

In its second premise, the mobile social network ecology expresses that movement is inherent to social networks, actors, and interactions. Networks are dynamic, always shifting in relation to the contexts in which they are en/acted. Social actors not only re/act in relation to events, encounters, and affects, but also physically move through time and space, creating a salient context in which communicative ties are impacted. Edbauer (2005) critiqued the underlying *situs* in conceptualizing rhetoric as it stipulated a fixed-ness as a characteristic of both social fields and texts. Through this dissertation, I extend that argument to social actors themselves in that the assumed *situs* to their role and relations within a network overlooks important contexts of movement, notably mobility. For Edbauer (2005), the acknowledgement of the flux and circulation of social fields and texts also recognized that rhetoric was an accumulative amalgamation of messages, contexts, and constraints existing in relation to one another. Similarly, this dissertation asserts that mobility adds another dimension to understanding social networks by realizing the accumulation and transformation of texts, ties, and expectations. This premise is first exemplified through the discussion of migrant publics and how the context of their mobility can incur exclusion from civil society. Then, it is illustrated in the perception of involuntary ties in CSO networks.

### ***Mobility & the Exclusion of Migrant Publics from Civil Society Networks***

Within this research, the Afghan migrant publics notably showcased experiences of mobility, highlighting how social actors cannot be assumed as fixed and incorporating the context of movement into the structure and dynamics of the network ecology. For the migrant participants of this research, their mobility came about in relation to the Taliban rise to power in Afghanistan, and their physical movement incurred changes to their social network, such as the presence of new actors and ties (notably CSOs that oversee the resettlement of refugees to the U.S.). As suggested by

scholars of the new mobility paradigm (e.g., Cresswell, 2010, 2020; Dutta & Shome, 2018), their mobility also reflected an entanglement of political power (such as the disruption of organizations in Afghanistan) and overarching international relations (specifically U.S.-Afghanistan relations) that altered participants' expectations and communicative behavior in the maintenance of their social networks (such as their assumptions about CSO involvement). The enactment and context of mobility are salient factors to a network. Most importantly, this dissertation highlights how the context of mobility can incur social network changes that exclude a mobile public from civil society.

Mobility is an important and transformative element to the ecologies of social networks, but also proposes that the distinct public experiences of transnational migration have ramifications for the inclusion into and fostering of civil society for these mobile publics. This dissertation found that the experience of mobility left Afghan refugees feeling isolated from key institutions and opportunities in the U.S., and facing disruption (intentional and involuntary) to connections in Afghanistan. These migrant social networks depicted minimal overlap with those forming civil society. This aligns with scholarship in migration studies and communication that discuss how certain groups, such as migrants, can be marginalized from the connections and exchanges that represent an opportunity to publicize their needs and prompt action (Cresswell, 2020; Dutta Bergman, 2005; Sommerfeldt, 2013b). More specifically, this dissertation shows how its migrant participants are excluded from civil society both in a) having minimal connections to organizations and groups that represent civil society (Putnam, 1993; Taylor, 2009), and b) having limited means to publicize their needs and interests as a means of prompting action and mediating the role of the state (Sommerfeldt, 2013b).

The Afghan refugees included in this dissertation expressed challenges in connecting to civil society such as their struggles to generate ties with American citizens and CSOs, showcasing limited opportunities to belong. Simultaneously, participants face the risk that their rights as refugees may be revoked, such as losing their work permits and deportation protections as soon as summer 2023 unless Congress passes the Afghan Adjustment Act (Montoya-Galvez, 2023). It evokes a sense of what Bishop (2019) called a perpetual limbo or uncertainty. Operating with uncertainties but without connections not only showcases a limited means of bringing a critical publicity to their issues, but also emphasizes an exclusion from a civil society that can concern itself with and center those needs to mediate the relationship between the state and the public (Sommerfeldt, 2013b). As such, this project underscores how the enactment and context of mobility can not only be a transformative property to social networks, but also be a precursor to in/exclusion from civil society networks.

### ***Public Mobility & the Impact of Involuntary Ties in CSO Networks***

The actors who enact mobility are not the only ones to be impacted by its enactment and context, as evidenced by the inclusion of and narratives from migrant-serving CSOs. For migrant-serving CSOs, the public mobility inherent to their networks is perceived as enacting an issue network surrounding the context of forced transnational migration to the U.S. (c.f., Heath & Palenchar, 2008; Hecló, 1978; Sommerfeldt et al., 2022; Yang, 2020). CSO participants, as detailed in response to RQ4, perceived mobility as an underlying reason generating the network, or, more specifically, the formation and maintenance of their organizational network related to the issue of forced, transnational migration to the U.S. This is an important distinction: mobility itself is not inherently an issue, but the patterns of mobility and how they connect to distinct historic, cultural and sociopolitical power structures enact certain affordances and regulations that can be socially

constructed as an issue. This not only aligns with Yang's (2020) assertion that an issue is socially constructed and thereby susceptible to different interpretations by distinct actors, but also with migration scholars like Hirschman et al. (1999) who noted that international migration is inherently entangled with social perceptions and political processes. CSO representatives who served as participants described their networks as centered around the issue of forced, transnational migration to the U.S. RQ3 can thus be read as how CSOs perceive and maintain their social networks as issue networks through three dichotomies (i.e., of service, glocal, and importance), specifically in which their service, relationships and resources are all a means of progressing the issue and its solution.

Understanding of issue networks have largely revolved around assumptions of organizational agency and voluntary ties within a network, from which other actors may make meaning of dyadic alliances (Yang, 2020). However, this dissertation found and emphasized the presence of complicated ties within CSO networks that were overall perceived as involuntary, or forced relationships. These involuntary ties illustrate the unique ways that mobility as a factor have connected certain actors, potentially unwillingly, across the larger social network ecology. This dissertation significantly establishes that network ecologies and subsequent SNA are limited when only focusing on voluntary ties. This is not meant to neglect the still significant scholarship of voluntary ties and organization agency within network building, but to remember that it is not a matter of "either/or" in network ecologies. Rather, the presence of both voluntary and involuntary ties should be considered in tandem.

More specifically, the presence of public mobility in the organizational networks ensured the inclusion of tense ties such as between nonprofits and resettlement agencies, CSOs and housing organizations, and with the various levels of law enforcement, notably because of the U.S.-specific regulations surrounding patterns of mass forced migration. While these social actors can be

described as issue stakeholders within an issue network (Yang, 2020), they are, importantly, perceived as required relationships and undesired ties. The CSO issue network thereby experiences salient involuntary connections when mobility is recognized as a factor in the social network ecology. Important to this dissertation, involuntary ties were not only perceived as required for organizational operations, but also as significant and strong connections, culminating in tense, complicated ties within an organizational network. CSO participants noted the need to work closely and frequently with organizations whose ideologies or values conflicted with their own, representing relationships they would rather not have but need to engage with in order to serve their mobile publics. In some senses, these involuntary ties were with actors perceived as contributing to the issue (i.e, Border Patrol, ICE, detention centers), and interactions with them were done as a means of serving publics. These ties were not only undesired, but perceived as less trusted.

This juxtaposition presents some important reminders. One, that though strong ties are characterized by close and frequent interactions between social actors (Uzzi, 1996; Yang & Taylor, 2015), it is only one part of measuring such quality, alongside intimacy, mutual confiding, and reciprocity (Granovetter, 1973, 1983; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang & Taylor, 2015). Frequency of interactions alone does not inherently result in the affinity of intense and close relationships, which can lead to higher levels of trust (Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015; Uzzi, 1996; Yang & Taylor, 2015). As such, two, the presence of strong ties does not necessarily equate to the presence of positive ties; research needs to consider whether the relationship is perceived as voluntary.

Ultimately, this second premise expresses that movement is inherent to social networks, including the ways and contexts in which social actors physically move through space and time. Just as a social network ecology is not fixed in its understanding of interactions and texts (Edbauer,

2005), neither are social actors always foregrounded by *situs* as a fixed space-location, implicating the overarching dynamics of a network. The Afghan refugees, as an example of migrant publics, expressed how their experiences of mobility incurred a sense of exclusion from civil society. This inclusion of movement is additionally relevant for the whole social network ecology, not just the actors who enact mobility. Within this dissertation, involuntary ties were seen as a necessary component to CSO networks that need to be further considered in conjunction with voluntary ties and the overarching network dynamics manifested by public mobility. Mobility is thereby a salient dimension to understanding social networks and its amalgamation of texts, ties, and relational expectations.

### **Premise 3: Relationships as the Manifestation of (Mobile) Contexts**

The third premise notes that interactions and relationships within networks are both manifestations of and themselves manifest temporal, historical, lived contexts (Edbauer, 2005), as well as mobile contexts. As Edbauer (2005) noted, the social is not fixed but a networked space of flows, connections and contexts such as situational exigencies, external conditions, and constraints; it is always in a state of flux rather than a grounded reality, representing an amalgamation of processes. Relationships are formed, maintained, and exist in a constant fluidity with “varying intensities of encounters and interactions” (Edbauer, 2005, p. 12). This dissertation builds upon this by noting that the contexts in which interactions and relationships are manifested include mobility, which premise 2 stipulated as an inherent component comprising the social network ecology. The interconnected and fluid nature of relationships is reflected in how participants refer to the current state of their network as well as their hopes for its evolution. More specifically, Afghan refugees identified behaviors and expectations that account for their mobile, transnational, and temporal context, especially with regard to being included in American civil society. Additionally, CSO

representatives noted their communicative strategies as entwined with the lived context of the publics they serve, including their mobility and digitality.

### ***Publics Interactions, Tertius Iungens, and Expectations for Inclusion***

In reflecting on past, current, and future ties, publics' understanding of their connections to organizational and interpersonal actors in their networks reflects the "effects and concatenations of our local ecologies" (Edbauer, 2005, p. 22). This included not only the lived, historic, and temporal dimensions identified by Edbauer (2005), but also the enactment and context of mobility, as stipulated by this dissertation. For example, while the action of mobility led participants to prioritize digital channels to communicate with their significant family ties, the context surrounding that mobility (i.e., the rise of the Taliban) also meant that participants feared for the safety of their family members still in Afghanistan and what may be trackable through digital channels. This was reinforced in considering the historical context of U.S.-Afghanistan relations and how participants' previous support of and current residency in the U.S. bolstered concerns and the potential of violence. Their current communication behavior illustrated these multiple, overlapping dimensions—though they relied on digital channels, participants ultimately had interpersonal conversations that were shorter, more conservative, and vastly different from how these relations were previously characterized. These narratives captured interactions as manifesting a plethora of connections and forces, such as between them, their family, and the Taliban. Notably, the interconnected nature of relationships was exemplified in the U.S., particularly in regard to how participants interacted in the hope of inclusion to American civil society.

While participation perceived their social networks as currently outside of civil society, they did not depict it as inherently external to it, highlighting that with network transformation comes new expectations of its dynamics and the hope of/potential for inclusion. In particular, this

dissertation found that migrant interactions in the U.S. reflected the context of mobility and how it incurred their exclusion from civil society. This further delineated their expectations for inclusion as well as the temporal significance of their connections to organizational representatives. More specifically, this research showcased that its migrant participants' strategies to generate new ties were entangled with their lived experience of being disconnected from previous relationships and expectations of being embedded in American civil society networks through the *tertius iungens* (Kent et al., 2016) of organizational representatives. Previous studies in networked public relations scholarship have highlighted the generative possibilities of social actor agency, such as the work by Madden et al. (2021) that showcased it as relevant for electing into a network and generating new ties and opportunities. This dissertation extends this theorizing by putting it in the context of a migrant, marginalized public whose strategizing is not a removed process but interwoven with various mobile, historic, and temporal contexts that color their expectations of other social actors and their own network positioning.

In the case of this research, because of the isolation from and disruption to significant civil society ties across their transnational networks, participants strategized toward or actualized strong ties with the few CSOs with whom they had contact. These relationships fit the literature's depiction of strong ties in that participants either had or wished for frequent communication, emotional intensity, and intimacy with the migrant-serving CSOs (Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015; Uzzi, 1996; Yang & Taylor, 2015). Equally important, the expectation and behavior of strong ties with organizations represented the manifestation of various contexts, enacting a dual strategy of accessing distinct resources and benefits as well as becoming embedded into a shared network—that of American civil society. By developing strong ties marked by intense and close relationships, actors ensure a deep embeddedness due to a more likely shared and/or overlapping social network

(Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017). Strong ties between the migrant public and the migrant-serving organizations were perceived as the “in” to civil society, both as the connections to other important institutions and its normative potential of representation and publicity (Sommerfeldt, 2013b; Taylor, 2009). Their interactions thereby reflected their mobility (i.e., wishing to be embedded in a new society), the historic context of their networks (i.e., the disruption to other significant ties in their former society), and, as the next two paragraphs details, the temporal context of their interpersonal CSO relationships.

In particular, the expectations and behaviors of strong ties culminated around the organizational representatives that migrant participants perceived as being able to bridge the communicative gaps of their social network, enacting a strategizing toward what Kent and colleagues (2016) called the *tertius iungens*. A Latin phrase for the “third who joins others” (Kent et al., 2016 p. 91), it is an orientation that emphasizes ethically uniting unconnected actors to develop relationships between multiple parties to address community issues. It was evident that migrant participants perceived case managers and volunteer mentors as the social actors most ingrained in both civil society and in the unique case/experience of the migrant. These organizational representatives showcased a potential for enacting *tertius iungens*, especially in their significance in welcoming migrant participants to the U.S.—a temporal dimension to this relationship. Participants emphasized the importance of interpersonal ties to these organizational representatives, particularly in whether/how they connected them to various aspects of U.S. society (i.e., resources, information, places, employment, etc.), which spoke to the opportunities of the tie to help them generate additional ties, center their needs and result in greater autonomy. They perceived them in line with what Kent and colleagues (2016) described as the means of establishing cross-cultural connections to unite members of a community and their plurality of interests.

However, that same temporal dimension that emphasize the benefits of these ties can also manifest drawbacks. The connections to certain organizational members and the resources they have are asserted and constrained by the U.S. policies that regulate them. The expectation of *tertius iungens* via the organizational representative is one thought to last until embedded within the network—a presumption of ample time, efforts, and intimacy in the cultivation and maintenance of migrant relationships. Yet, this relationship and the interactions that sustain it will also reflect the limitations in both practitioner ability and organizational capacity (e.g., funding that only extends for 3 months). If/when the *tertius iungens* is not enacted or the hoped for results and benefits do not manifest, it is not just a matter of a failed strategy. Rather, this is entangled in lived experiences and emotions, often further characterizing the disappointment from expectations going unmet. At the heart of the matter, it is not only that certain needs are unfulfilled but also that it represents a continued exclusion from civil society and the possibility of affecting the conditions of their existence (Sommerfeldt, 2013b).

### ***Context and CSOs' Strategic Digital Interactions***

The third premise of the mobile social network ecology is also evident from the perspectives of CSOs. Within this dissertation, CSO communication strategies reflect a myriad of temporal, historical, lived and mobile contexts. The acknowledgement of publics, interpublic relationships, and the context of their experiences with transnational mobility stipulated conditions on how to maintain key relationships. In particular, recognizing the social as interconnected situational exigencies, conditions and constraints highlighted significant communication channels and behaviors needed for CSOs to foster important ties. The presence of and details to CSOs' target and secondary publics (i.e., current and incoming migrants) provided nuance to how the organizations, in turn, maintain their network and operations of service, especially through digital channels.

As articulated in response to RQ4, CSO actors identified and prioritized a reliance on digital channels, notably WhatsApp, in reflection of the transnational mobility of their publics. The lived experience notably includes the digital experience and in this research, reiterates the entanglement between human mobility and digital technology (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2022). In this case, CSO representatives detailed how organizations modified their behavior to privilege digital channels in the formation of weak ties (particularly with incoming migrants) due to the mobility and subsequent transnationalism underlying their social networks. This aligns with the assertion from Yang and Taylor (2015) that new media technologies are useful for the facilitation of weak ties, such as with those who may not have regular access to or contact with the organization. The strategic use of digital channels afforded the organizations further opportunities to serve impacted publics. As such, this case further captures that instant messaging and mobile instant messaging, such as WhatsApp, is an increasingly common form of digital communication across industries to facilitate dialogue between practitioners and key stakeholders (Mashiah, 2021).

Ultimately, the third premise of a mobile social network ecology recognizes that the interactions and relationships within such networks are both manifestations of and themselves manifest temporal, historical, lived and mobile contexts. The social is not grounded in one reality but reflects a variety of fluctuating factors (Edbauer, 2005). This state of flux implicates not only the network dynamics but also how the social actors within them interact with and strategize in relation to one another. For the Afghan refugee participants, that was evident in their (unmet) expectations surrounding CSOs and their interactions with organizational representatives as a means of inclusion. These relationships were shaped by a myriad of contexts and perceived as entangled with the past, present, and future identities and livelihoods of the migrant participants. For the CSO representatives who participated in this research, their strategic prioritization of digital channels

reflected the transnational and mobile contexts salient to their networks. The presence of multiple publics with experiences of transnational migration signified which channels to use for important tie-building. These insights again speak to relationships as formed and maintained in a constant fluidity of interconnected encounters, conditions, and expectations.

#### **Premise 4: The Potential for Transnationalism**

By recognizing the contextual and fluid dynamics of social networks in the modern era we must simultaneously acknowledge their potential for transnationalism. Social network connections exist, operate, decrease, and ultimately transform both because of and in spite of institutionalized borders, including but not limited to geopolitical boundaries. The participants in this research illustrated the variation in transnational ties and their significance, capturing how geopolitical boundaries and policies implicate their network dynamics (such as U.S. policies that limit resettlement funding creating a tension with migrant-serving CSOs). Social networks should be recognized as discursive transnational spaces, and may thereby align with the call from Fraser (2014) to “locate normative standards and emancipatory political possibilities precisely within the historically unfolding constellation” (p. 10). How, as Nash (2014) asked, can social spaces be reflective of and responsive to ordinary people when considering the burgeoning transnationalism of network ecologies? This premise is best exemplified by the recognition of issue impact actors, defined as social actors with outsized power over an issue that stretches beyond geopolitical boundaries and implicates other actors within a shared network.

#### ***CSO Networks and the Issue Impact Actor***

Within this dissertation, the role of issue impact actors reflects the shared issue priorities and transnationalism of the mobile social network ecology. These contexts enact a distinct actor identifiable through the convergence of different levels and types of homophily (Atouba, 2019;

Atouba & Shumate, 2010, 2015; Sommerfeldt et al., 2022). In asserting that CSO participants perceived their network as an issue-network surrounding forced migration to the U.S., the characteristic of ties as either homophilous or heterophilous become a relevant and significant marker of network dynamics. More specifically, the presence of issue homophily (Sommerfeldt et al., 2022) not only depicted the formation and quality of CSO ties, but when countered with geographic heterophily (Atouba & Shumate, 2015) captured a distinct type of network actor and dynamic, namely the herein proposed issue impact actor.

Civil society networks and their levels of cooperation have previously been examined for homophily, or the tendency to have connection and contact with similar social actors more so than dissimilar social actors within a network (Monge & Contractor, 2003). Homophilous ties have been linked with maximizing coordination among social actors, particularly for building sub-sectors of civil society wherein the shared relationship between similar CSOs are a form of collective agency for the mobilization and promotion of public interests (Atouba & Shumate, 2010; Doerfel & Taylor, 2017; Shumate et al., 2017). When examining ties as homophilous, this can be in reference to homophily at the institutional level (i.e., shared institutional characteristic), geographic level (i.e., shared physical location), or the attribute level (i.e., the features of an organization or even type of organization) among interorganizational relationships (Atouba & Shumate, 2015); Sommerfeldt and colleagues (2022) recently expanded this latter category by examining the significance of issue homophily, or “the propensity for organizations to build ties based on shared issue priorities” (p. 265). More specifically, CSOs may form ties with others based on shared issue priorities or focus as a means of coordinating activities, information, and resources in the name of advancing the issue as well as to express identity alignment and values (Sommerfeldt et al., 2022; Yang, 2020). While the latter was captured within the findings, this dissertation more importantly showcased distinct

ramifications in the convergence of issue homophily and geographic heterophily within a transnational social network that point to less intentional collaboration. The context of public mobility on a transnational scale resulted in migrant-serving CSOs sharing the issue of forced migration (issue homophily), but simultaneously captured distinct scales of operation (geographic heterophily) that promoted the presence of the issue impact actor. This distinct type of network actor evokes subsequent network dynamics that complicate the field's understanding of relational quality.

For this dissertation, issue homophily was significant in how CSO participants perceived the breadth of their organizational social networks given the global dimension of transnational migration. More specifically, CSO participants noted the significance of national and global actors with whom they did not always (if ever) interact but who were perceived as an important part of their organization's social network nonetheless because of shared issue focus. These actors were perceived as present in the network because they shared issue priorities with the CSOs represented by participants, regardless of the level of interaction (which can be minimal or even nonexistent). These are weak ties in that they are characterized by distant and infrequent relationships that require less resources, time, and effort (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017), yet still perceived as significant.

More importantly, these global and national social actors were perceived as present and significant because they had impact on these issues through their decision-making power and effects (as detailed in the dichotomy of importance in response to RQ3). Smaller and/or more localized CSOs react to the presence and decisions of these larger, more powerful social actors (such as the UNHCR or the U.S. government) without necessarily interacting with them communicatively. This goes beyond the understanding of weak ties as a strategic means to explore new opportunities and/or access new information (Burt, 1976, 1992; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang & Taylor,

2015); CSOs are almost required to (re)act in relations to the decisions of these social actors. Yet, this does not instead reflect cooperation and/or strong ties, but rather identifies an obligatory symbiosis between issue impact actors and other social actors in a shared network. While this aligns with the findings from Sommerfeldt et al. (2022) that issue homophily can generate ties between CSOs without significantly impacting its strength, it also presents an important relational nuance. Namely, issue homophily in a transnational social network may be significant for identifying key nodes in a network and the subsequent dynamics of interacting with them. In this case, issue impact actors were identified as nodes having an issue focus that situates them within issue networks, and, subsequently, a power over the issue and thereby other social actors within the network.

Simultaneously, the significance of geographic heterophily illuminated further nuances to the concept of issue impact actors. More specifically, nodes with issue homophily but geographic heterophily within a social network may suggest the presence of an issue impact actor, whose power over a certain issue has implications across geographic boundaries. An issue impact actor does not need to share a physical location as the ego organization to still have importance, presenting a nuance to network dynamics (i.e., the role of a removed, distant social actor within an issue network ecology). It reasserts what Sommerfeldt et al. (2022) noted as the need to consider multiple mechanisms in CSO relationships.

The geographic heterophily of the issue impact actor is especially distinct when compared with the overarching perceived localization of ties among actors that share a global issue, which otherwise suggest a relevance to geographic homophily among tie formation and quality (Atouba & Shumate, 2015). Many participants noted the glocal dimension of their organizations' social networks and its implications for relational diversity, namely that as much as it presented opportunities beyond boundaries it was largely enacted in a local context. The significance of

geographic homophily to significant ties even among a shared global issue homophily blended the micro and the macro in the formation and maintenance of network dynamics. For as much as the global is significant, it is (re)acted to locally. This aligns with other public relations scholarship that “embraces a fluid continuum of hybridity, recognizing that the glocal and local are always blended in ways that reflect the power structures or the ontologic, the lived realities of the territory, and the material processes of the milieu” (Curtin et al., 2015, p. 49). In particular, this dissertation highlights the network structures and dynamic that affords some actors global reach and power, while the existence and operations of others only permeates a local dimension. It speaks to the potential of transnationalism within the mobile social network ecology and the ways in which it implicates overarching network dynamics.

### **Practical Applications of the Mobile Social Network Ecology**

By conceptualizing the mobile social network ecology, additional practical applications need to be considered, particularly for migrant-serving CSOs or those otherwise embroiled in a mobile social network ecology (e.g., those organizations whose purpose is not inherently migrant-centric but whose operations may overlap with these populations). First, this section discusses how the presence and salience of involuntary ties and issue impact actors may complicate CSO network strategies. Second, this section discusses how the mobile social network ecology a) prescribes a public relations responsibility to foster ties with migrant publics and b) presents insights for navigating such relationships.

### **Challenges to CSO Network Strategies**

This dissertation establishes considerable takeaways and questions for future public relations practice in CSO issue-networks surrounding migration and mobility. The qualitative approach to

SNA for migrant-serving CSOs reaffirmed the significance of perspective to organizational networks (Sommerfeldt et al., 2022). It also highlighted that the perception of certain connections within the mobile social network ecology present complications and nuance to communicative strategies. More specifically, involuntary ties and issue impact actors may limit an organization's overarching capacity to strategically build relationships across their network.

First, the presence of involuntary ties may impact overarching network strategies in that needing to spend time and effort on involuntary ties may limit an organization's capacity for fostering voluntary ties. If strong ties often inhibit a broader spectrum of connections and global network cohesion, that is likely to be inclusive of strong, involuntary ties because the level of commitment is similar in that interactions are frequent, require more time and effort, and thus result in fewer ties within a network (Uzzi, 1996; Yang & Taylor, 2015). For example, nonprofits who perceive resettlement agencies as a necessary yet tense relationship for their organization's operations additionally noted needing to be in frequent communication with them regardless of their opinion of the agency's work, values, or priorities. In needing to spend time on involuntary ties, CSOs have less availability to facilitate other, desired ties whether that is in the form of strengthening new or existing ties, or building more, weak ties across the network. Including involuntary ties as a component of SNA for issue networks challenges key propositions of networked public relations scholarship (cf. Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang & Taylor, 2015), such as whether the size of an organization's operating scope impacts the quantity and/or quality of involuntary ties and how that implicates their subsequent tie-building strategy. Not only may this be an avenue for future research on CSOs, their networks, and the advancement of issues, but practitioners may benefit from questioning which relationships are (in)voluntary and the exchange of resources in the maintenance of these ties.

Second, similarly, the presence of issue impact actors may be significant to CSO network structures and strategies. In needing to (re)act to the decisions made by powerful, national and/or global actors surrounding an issue, CSO operations can be limited even on the local level in how they serve certain publics, and also in their communicative capacities. Regardless of the minimal existence of the interactions with them, issue impact actors seemingly have a centrality that increases others' reliance on them (Kent et al., 2016). Practitioners may need to question how this reliance on and reaction to the communication/decisions from issue impact actors shape and/or alter their network strategies, including whether/how it results in collaborative relationships within a network (Doerfel & Taylor, 2004) or even the means to explore new opportunities and/or access new information (Burt, 1976, 1992; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017; Yang & Taylor, 2015). This dissertation highlights that the network dynamics of issue impact actors need to be further examined in terms of organizational strategies and implications for practice.

### **Relationship Building with Migrant Publics**

Incorporating the perspectives of a migrant public, especially surrounding their experiences of mobility, illustrated important practical insights for networks including said mobile, migrant publics. Participants were able to describe what their network had been in Afghanistan, what it now was as resettled refugees in the U.S., and what they hoped it would become, especially in terms of joining American society. As such, through this dissertation, I assert important practical applications from the qualitative publics approach to SNA, notably in better understanding migrant publics. This section discusses how the mobile social network ecology a) prescribes a public relations responsibility to foster ties with migrant publics and b) presents insights for navigating such relationships. It poses means in which the existence, needs, and interests of marginalized

migrant publics, such as Afghan refugees, may be incorporated into dominant discursive arenas and thereby enact a civil society inclusive beyond the immediate political citizenry.

For public relations practice, this dissertation presents a clear public responsibility. To facilitate the inclusion of those migrant publics whose mobility has resulted in a marginalization from civil society, public relations should be utilized to foster relationships with those publics. Previous scholarship has noted that relationships are crucial for empowering publics to establish a critical publicity of their needs as a means of affecting the conditions of their livelihoods as a collective advancement for society (Sommerfeldt, 2013b). Relationships are thereby integral to and representative of civil society (Sommerfeldt, 2013a; Taylor, 2009). Civil society manifests when groups are connected in networks characterized by affinity and cooperation (Sommerfeldt, 2013b), and this potential needs to be reflected within a mobile social network ecology.

By explicating four premises to a social mobile network ecology, nuances to navigating network dynamics also emerge and present a capacity for the facilitation of civil society that includes mobile social actors. The (re)turn to rhetorical network ecology scholarship reifies that singular moments of communication are never a contained, neutral affair between sender and receiver, but exist in relation to — if not inherently infected by — the pulsating, accumulating flux of texts, actors, and forces within a network (Edbauer, 2005; Rivers & Weber, 2011). Relationships between social actors within a network do not speak to a singular moment or message but must consist of multiple distinct, even mundane texts to facilitate public attention and deliberation (Edbauer, 2005; Rivers & Weber, 2011). Public relations efforts at relationship building, the key to fostering inclusive civil society (Sommerfeldt, 2013a, 2013c; Taylor, 2009; Taylor & Doerfel, 2005, 2011), needs to be designed with the context of the wider mobile social network ecology in mind, including the temporality of all previous communication and any potential future co-optations and

counterpoints. Through this dissertation, I add that this “trans-situationality” (Edbauer, 2005, p. 20) incurs a transnational dimension with regards to efforts for migrant publics to be included in civil society as the action and context their mobility across state borders defines their expectations and behaviors of relationship building. As such, facilitating relationships with migrant publics should not only follow River and Weber’s (2011) recommendation of multiple, coordinated texts for multiple audiences within an ecology as an avenue for building connections between social actors, but also be reflective of the patterns and lived experiences of mobility as a fluctuating force in the development of network ties.

For example, an institution wishing to build a relationship with a migrant public should utilize a communication strategy that a) targets not only members of the migrant public but also their closest ties within civil society like a resettlement agency or nonprofit, b) designs messaging with regards to the historic, temporal, lived, and mobile contexts in which said public communicate about a topic and c) acknowledges the communication channels and behaviors of said public. A program designed to offer aid to Afghan refugees cannot just be communicated as a solitary notice from organization to this migrant population, but should consider how organizational benefits and opportunities have been framed in Afghanistan by Afghan and American peers alike, during the bureaucracies of the resettlement process by various international and domestic agency officials, on U.S. military bases by army personnel, and in the final resettled locale by case managers and CSO representatives. It will take into account the entanglement of human mobility and digitality (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2022). Then, it should not be a singular messaging opportunity, but multiple communication efforts with said public, migrant-serving CSOs, and other relevant social actors, utilizing the channels identified as salient by said public. Even within network analysis,

public relations can serve as a cultural interpreter (Sommerfeldt, 2013b) that assesses and integrates the various cultural frames that currently endure and previously existed within a social network.

### **The Social and the Spatial: Capital, Power, and Relationship Building in Social Networks**

The mobility of social actors incurs the joining of distinct groups within a mobile social network ecology, accentuating questions of cooperation, inclusion and belonging—particularly in relation to whether mobility has incurred other dimensions of marginalization such as exclusion from civil society (Cresswell, 2020; Dutta & Shome, 2018). In this dissertation, I aimed to examine its role in the generation and facilitation of markers of social capital, including trust and collaboration. Having established the concept and premises of a mobile social network ecology, this section turns specifically to the fifth and final research question, which explored the flow of social capital within the network ecology. The findings identified three clear themes that implicate not only our understanding of SNA, but also public relation’s responsibility of relationship-building to generate social capital and facilitate civil society (Ihlen, 2005; Sommerfeldt, 2013a, 2013b; Taylor, 2009, 2010; Taylor & Doerfel, 2005, 2011). As such, my final theoretical contribution from this dissertation is to connect the exchanges of (social) capital within a mobile social network ecology to relational power dynamics and differentials, emphasizing their lived, embodied impact as well as introducing a new salient category: spatial capital.

More specifically, in highlighting how the facilitation of social capital was perceived as a CSO-led process deeply entangled with the mobilization of other forms of capital (i.e., economic, cultural, and symbolic), I assert that the exchange of capital represents the flow of distinct types of power within a network, aligning with Bourdieu (1986; 1997) and implicating strategies of network positioning and relationship building. This power is not only a theoretical or conceptual abstraction, but has lived, embodied impact, particularly for marginalized publics reliant on the mobilization of

capital. Furthermore, in emphasizing the navigation of place and space to the facilitation of social capital, I introduce the concept of spatial capital as another form of capital, and thus power, salient in the navigation of relational ties within a network and in public relations' responsibilities to foster relationship-building efforts.

### **Social Capital and The Mobilization of Power in Social Networks**

In examining the facilitation of social capital among migrant publics, migrant-serving CSOs, and their shared networks, it was evident that the entanglement of social and other forms of capital represents the theoretical impact of power on network positioning and relationship building as well as reflects the lived, embodied impact of power through capital mobilization. Bourdieu (1986) expanded the enmeshment of power and capital beyond wealth alone to encapsulate various capital that affords certain forms of power. These four types of capital included economic, social, cultural, and symbolic; each has an impact in the determination of power and status within society (Bourdieu, 1986, 1991, 1997; Wolf, 2018). Findings from RQ5 highlighted that migrants can face marginalization that results in distinct, overlapping needs for capital and that there are patterns as to how such varied forms of capital are exchanged. As alternate forms of resources beyond money, all capital can be examined for differentials in power distributions within society (Wolf, 2018). Similarly, the exchanges of capital within the shared, overlapping networks of migrant publics and migrant-serving CSOs identify power differentials between the social actors.

In this dissertation, the patterns of capital exchange highlight the power differentials between the organizations and the migrant publics, capturing the “power struggles between resource-rich and underrepresented members of society” (Wolf, 2018, p. 309) within a shared network. On one hand, CSOs have the social capital within their network to act as the traffic directors of all forms of capital, mobilizing the resources among network nodes through their own

relationships and recognition (Bourdieu, 1997). For example, CSO and migrant participants noted the flow of capital from the organization's larger network (which migrants may otherwise not have access to) to the specific publics in need, whether they are material goods from donors or information on cultural norms. On the other hand, there were detailed instances of capital not being passed along, wherein organizational volunteers and societal institutions were unsure of the cultural conventions that would account for Afghan migrants, and thereby representing that the cultural capital of migrants was not flowing to the wider network. For migrant-serving CSOs, they accumulated and converted different types of capital, thereby establishing and maintaining a position within the overlapping network and aligning with scholarship that highlights how capital manifests ranking in social order (Bourdieu, 1986, 1997; Wolf, 2018). Yet migrant publics are perceived as lacking capital or having immaterial cultural capital. It reifies the social standing of migrants as receivers of capital (Bourdieu, 1986, 1997; Wolf, 2018), which overlooks the significance of information on their identities, backgrounds, and experiences for relationship-building and the generation of social capital (Sommerfeldt, 2013a). It may speak to why many migrants feel misunderstood within American society, but does not negate the importance of the exchange of other capital and resources to them.

Rather, the presence and sharing of economic, cultural, and symbolic capital seemed to precede the facilitation of social capital in social networks comprising migrant publics and the CSOs that aim to serve them. In this way, this dissertation builds upon Bourdieu's (1997) concept of social capital, which characterizes it as the sum of the resources that a social actor can effectively mobilize. The means to survive through economic capital such as money and material goods, the information and knowledge to make sense of U.S. culture and institutions, and the symbolic documentation that allows one to be seen as legitimate and afforded certain opportunities—all of

these were depicted as prior and/or simultaneous to social capital. Participants highlighted that the active facilitation of other capital were required to establish and/or maintain trust within their social networks. If reading this in line with Bourdieu's (1986, 1997) theorizing, then the alternative forms of capital represented other types of power that could challenge existing inequalities; as such, participants articulated more trust in their networks in relation to the amount of power they had access to.

The (re)turn to capital as power provides an important theoretical contribution to the public relations scholarship of social capital (Ihlen, 2005; Sommerfeldt, 2013b; Taylor, 2009, 2010; Taylor & Doerfel, 2005, 2011). Even within network analysis, scholars have affirmed the significance of social capital, describing it not only as a relational benefit for social actors but also for the network itself as a means of facilitating civil society networks (Taylor & Doerfel, 2011; Sommerfeldt, 2013a, 2013b). Importantly, social capital is characterized as analogous to relationship and relational quality (Sommerfeldt, 2013a). In merging perspectives, if social capital equates to relational quality (Sommerfeldt, 2013a) and also the mobilization of other forms of capital that represent power (Bourdieu, 1997), then relationships within a network can be understood in reference to power. More specifically, a relationship can be indicative of the perceived and actual power dynamics between social actors within a shared social network, which itself has various types and degrees of power continuously exchanged through the flows of communication between connections. Relationship building then, or the generation of social capital, can be considered in relation to the access to, provision of, and mobilization of distinct power opportunities. The trust and norms associated with social capital (Putnam, 1993; Saffer, 2019, Sommerfeldt, 2013b) can also be understood as speaking to dimensions and enactments of power. For the public relations responsibility of generating social capital to foster civil society inclusive of all—even those

marginalized—publics, this points to relationship building as being a matter of the exchanges of power.

### ***Lived Impact of Capital of Power***

Equally significant to this theorizing is underscoring the lived dimension of power exchange, or in the case of this research, emphasizing the embodiment of resource mobilization. In this dissertation, I asserted that the action of capital being mobilized is critical in how mobile groups assessed the social capital of their network, particularly by linking it to the flow of distinct power within their social network. Publics, especially marginalized ones, may need to see the effective mobilization take place rather than just rely on knowledge that certain actors possess certain capital. In particular, the mobilization of capital may showcase a means for those groups to have the power to enact their existence in a safe and recognized way while physically and communicatively integrating into a new society. In its simplest form, power is the resources to survive, whether it be material, economic, or informational. The emphasis is on the enactment of facilitating other forms of capital (their own types of distinct power) as a precursor to perceiving social capital (i.e., the power dynamics in the form of relationships, trust, and norms that ensure access to other forms of power) in a network.

The case of Afghan refugees, their immense needs for capital in the US, and the ways in which organizations work to serve them is an important reminder that concepts like power, social capital, or its operationalized form of trust (Saffer, 2019), have a lived embodied existence. What is trust but a reliance on people to come to your aid—to help you make sense of the world when everything is new? What is trust but help in surviving and in being seen within society? For SNA, Bourdieu’s approach to social capital indicated equal significance between the quantity of actors in a social network and their quality, or their possession of capital (Wolf, 2018). This dissertation

submits some amendments based on the mobile social network ecology: a) that also important is not just the possession but the active sharing of that capital with those who need it, b) that relational ties can be judged in terms of how they exchange capital, and c) that the evaluation of shared capital (or the lack thereof) impacts the facilitation of social capital between actors, particularly those who have and those who have not. Put more simply, it is not just that social actors have power but that they share it with us, that we judge our relationships in reference to this exchange of power, and how we perceive and whether we trust our network's and thereby society's power dynamics.

### **Spatial Capital and the Architecture of Social Networks**

When examining mobility as a factor in social networks, including its impact in the process and product of facilitating capital, there is a significant, overlooked entanglement of space—to physically move is to exist throughout space(s); in this case, that can be seen in the migrant mobility through the macro of distinct geopolitical spaces and the minute of local public and private spaces during resettlement. I hereby introduce the concept of spatial capital to SNA. While it has been somewhat explored in fields like urban studies and geography, my research in this dissertation extended that spatial capital is relevant to the structure of communicative social networks, the interactions within them, and the relationship-building efforts of public relations. As this is a germinating idea, it will need further development beyond this initial conceptualization.

#### ***Conceptualizing Spatial Capital***

Seeking to “translate Bourdieu into geographic contexts” (Gallemore et al., 2019, p. 1393), other fields have emphasized spatial capital as both a quality of specific locations in terms of their access to resources as well as a property of people (Forsberg, 2019; Huang et al., 2018, Sen & Quercia, 2018); it is detailed as interwoven with other forms of capital and reflective of power differentials in social spaces (Mace, 2017). For this dissertation, spatial capital is thereby

conceptualized as both a product and a process that entangles space and the people within. As a product, spatial capital are embodied and digital spaces that are safe, accessible, inclusive, and thereby a means of obtaining other forms of capital. As a process, spatial capital is the access to, facilitation of, and navigation of space, including physical/embodied spaces and virtual/digital spaces; this process is inherently entwined with mobility in that one must have access to mobility as a dimension of spatial capital (i.e., the agency to move through space and place is an embodiment of spatial capital). Within this research, spatial capital as both a product and a process was exemplified by both migrant and CSO participants on global and local scales.

Spatial capital as a product was showcased in discussions surrounding distinct spaces for CSOs and migrant publics. The warehouse of HNB represented a means for the organization to access and retain capital (i.e., donations) in a safe and reliable manner, whereas organizations without this spatial capital were not afforded the same opportunities and thereby impacted their interactions within a network (i.e., unable to provide exchange of services with other actors). For migrant participants, housing provided an example of the nuances to spatial capital; whereas an apartment space in itself can be seen as an important resource, there are further questions on the condition of the space that impact its spatial capital. Is the space safe in terms of its location but also physical and hygienic conditions? Is the space reflective of the needs and values of Afghan refugees? Public/societal spaces, like schools and hospitals, are equally susceptible to complications in spatial capital, especially whether they are inclusive (i.e., does the school provide halal foods) and/or accessible (i.e., does the hospital/medical center have the means of accounting for insurance complexities faced by migrants). In this way, spatial capital is a product in the distinct spaces and how their qualities allow for the existence and movement of certain peoples through them.

Speaking next to spatial capital as a process, this is notably exemplified in the transnational mobility of the migrant participants. Throughout their migration to the U.S., they had to continually negotiate access to distinct geopolitical spaces whether it be accessing an airport in Afghanistan to evacuate, an American military base in Qatar, Germany or the U.S., or even navigating resettlement in American society itself. The ability to access certain spaces (such as nations like the U.S.), to facilitate their quality (which was largely controlled by others), and to navigate them largely speaks to the livelihoods of migrant publics. For CSOs, the mobility of volunteers was a relevant factor in the facilitation of capital, especially transporting economic capital (i.e. material goods) from the organization to migrant publics. The ability to access and navigate spaces is in itself a spatial capital that becomes entangled with other forms of capital.

### ***Spatial Capital and Network Dynamics***

Spatial capital became a salient component to specific ties and the interactions that sustain them, aligning with the previous assertion that network interactions may revolve around and be judged by the facilitation of capital. In this research, I identified two ways in which interactions and spatial capital became an entangled element characterizing relational ties. First, certain ties may expect and/or demand spatial capital, particularly the navigation of spaces to enact objectives. This was especially relevant if objectives were shared between actors in a network. The above reference to volunteers needing to transport material goods is one such example; volunteers are expected to use their bodies and resources (i.e. cars) to be mobile, enacting spatial capital, to enable the organizations' operations of serving migrant publics. Yet, it is a shared goal that volunteers especially elect into, in wishing to assist in the provision of services. While this unity in purpose may lessen the perceptions of demanding spatial capital, it still may be an integral part of internal

public relations between an organization and its representatives. What are the relational opportunities from recognizing the expectations for spatial capital between actors in a network?

Second, this project identified tensions over control of spatial capital as a salient component to specific ties and their encompassing interactions, namely the question of who has power to facilitate a space and its characteristics and the others who access it. This was represented by organizations that establish housing for migrant publics and the migrants themselves who come to occupy them. In bringing up questions surrounding the décor and cultural capital of home spaces, there can be backlash: is the presence of any space better than nothing if space itself still a resource? Yet, spatial capital also speaks to the quality of these spaces including whether it facilitates further capital, and these factors can be judged by social actors (just as other forms of capital can be) especially if others controlled it. This speaks to the wider tensions that Nayen (2019) identified in her autoethnography *The Ungrateful Refugee* where she noted that the American resettlement system is a basic human obligation that in turns celebrates the acquiescent migrant, the refugee who does not nitpick or ask questions but solely performs gratitude. The presence of spatial capital and whether it is facilitated in the interactions between social actors can thereby be a relevant marker of how a relationship is evaluated.

Furthermore, the access to and control over spatial capital is applicable to networks as a whole, particularly how the power over spatial capital implicates a network structure. More specifically, access to or lack thereof spatial capital dictated the presence of certain actors in a network, seen in many migrants' need for public transportation to reach other organizations including employers. Without transportation, or the ability to navigate and access distinct spaces such as a job site or office, to reach them, those social actors were not perceived as within the network nor were ties able to be generated with them. It additionally implicates those with the

power to facilitate spatial capital, as their decisions greatly impact the overall network structure. In this case, local/regional government bodies and transportation authorities provide minimal spatial capital to migrants, in the form of unreliable, inaccessible, or non-inclusive transportation options (i.e., poorly managed bus schedules, transportation stops far from places of work and/or residency, information only in English, etc.). It also reaffirms the public perception of CSOs as facilitators of capital, specifically the expectation of them to advocate for and/or provide spatial capital on the behalf of migrant publics (such as representatives lobbying for bus stops near the apartment complexes that house refugee communities). As such, power over spatial capital includes control over its quality as well as who has the option to gain spatial capital, ultimately characterizing a network's structure and dynamics.

### ***Spatial Capital and the Relational Responsibilities of PR Practice***

This dissertation thereby established spatial capital—in product and process—as another form of capital and thus power (Bourdieu, 1986, 1997) whose impact includes the perception and enactment of relational ties and network dynamics. As such, in line with the preceding section, spatial capital as a power is an important marker for the relationship building responsibility of public relations and the interconnected generation of social capital (Ihlen, 2005; Sommerfeldt, 2013a, 2013b; Taylor, 2009, 2010; Taylor & Doerfel, 2005, 2011). To foster social capital, relationship building efforts may need to reflect the differentials in spatial capital as a part of the power dynamics implicating relationships within a network, including navigating a) the details of spatial capital for certain actors, ties, and overarching network dynamics, b) the impact in providing access to other forms of capital, and c) the overarching perceptions to the control and exchanges of spatial capital. For example, public relations can be useful in negotiating the demands of spatial capital among CSO volunteers by highlighting its purpose and providing guidelines to mitigate the

inequities of organizational demand versus individual effort (i.e., provide directions and details of parking, be forthright in the amount of expected driving/mileage). With regards to how it impacts network dynamics, public relations can be the means of highlighting a need for spatial capital (i.e., the need of migrant publics for accessible and reliable transportation) to other social actors with control over such capital (i.e. public transport authorities) to ultimately facilitate the flow of spatial capital through a network.

While public relations cannot typically control the building of physical spaces, it can oversee the engineering of social networks and communicative efforts to account for distinctions and differentials in spatial capital. Public relations can be the architect of communicative spaces. If, as a product and process, spatial capital is a power represented by safe, accessible, inclusive spaces that provide a means of obtaining other forms of capital, then how do our communicative efforts both enact and also facilitate the access and navigation of such spaces? Public relations is a means of recognizing and publicizing who is safe and included in our communicative networks as well as acknowledging which communicators and topics have access and challenging the dominant discourses and actors that control spatial capital for others. It can seek to equalize in pointing out inequities and promoting alternatives, whether it be in diagnosing physical spaces that do not account for the cultural distinctions of migrant publics, designing digital campaigns that factor in mobility and its impact on communicative behaviors, or identifying in-person and digital counter-spaces that vocalize the needs and interests of often marginalized groups.

### **Methodological Contributions**

While this dissertation has presented a number of theoretical considerations for the study of social networks and its entanglement with mobility as well as practical applications for CSOs who serve migrant publics, it also proposed a methodological contribution in the form of a qualitative

approach to SNA for public relations. In this project, I used an innovative visual social network mapping exercise in tandem with in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations to collect a plethora of detailed data that crystallized distinct themes. The visual mapping exercise most notably provides a new technique for networked public relations scholarship and, as such, this section captures brief considerations of its usefulness in research and practice, its nuances in applying, and its flexibility for future use.

The visual social network mapping exercise proved to be a useful tool to qualitatively examine network perceptions, generating insights into network connections, quality, and constraints from both publics and organizations. Visual mapping evoked a lived dimension to SNA as participants detailed relevant social actors, the salience of certain communicative ties, and the ways in which their social networks are enacted and transformed. As a method, it is useful for public relations scholarship because it helps us to understand how people perceive their networks, the flow of capital within those networks, the development of meaning, and any changes to network dynamics. It is a tool that can be modified for public or organizational perspectives, allowing for further in-depth exploration of shared societal networks and how public relations facilitates them. Integrating more cases of visual social network mapping will foster further comprehensive qualitative work in public relations beyond interviews and case studies. Additionally, visual social network mapping may be a practical tool for organizations in their own environmental scanning efforts to consider the significant social actors they engage with, gaps where they may need to facilitate more communicative ties, and even understanding where resources and other forms of capital come/go within their network. In fact, in many of the closing moments of interviews with CSO participants, they noted the usefulness of the mapping as a thought exercise.

However, there are noteworthy nuances to the method that need to be addressed. As noted in Chapter 3, graphic elicitation techniques, including visual mapping, is a complementary form of data collection that should not be used in isolation due to the decontextuality of the visualizations without verbal inquisition (Copeland & Agosto, 2012). While I did analyze the maps themselves as a form of data, this was done alongside interview transcripts and even ethnography notes to crystallize the themes to the networks. Interview transcripts ensured that participants described their social network in distinct detail, how it manifested as a map, and the mapping process overall. Ethnographic observations help to situate a researcher within these networks and engage firsthand with the communicative actions that facilitate and maintain connections. Without these additional methods, the visual mapping network could not provide in-depth details or themes of the networks between Afghan migrants and the CSOs who aim to serve them.

Furthermore, not all participants may be able or willing to complete the exercise due the time requirements for its facilitation (Copeland & Agosto, 2012). During data collection, some participants asked for notable modifications to the exercise including a) not engaging with it because of its perceived timeliness (in these instances, participants provided a list of social actors instead) and b) completing it jointly with another participant due to perception of difficulty. This latter point was specific to migrant participants concerned with the language component of not just the mapping, but the entire research participation process. Though the interview questions in the research protocol could be amended to garner similar insights without mapping or with multiple members partaking in mapping, it is arguably more rigorous when done as an individual exercise. In comparison to merely listing organizations, visual social network mapping encourages participants to not just think of relevant social actors and ties distinctly, but to also consider them in relation to each other.

On that note, visual social network mapping presents unique opportunities for the future of networked public relations scholarship. It can be conducted in-person or virtually, and include distinct layers of meaning-making from placing the actors in a ring/quadrant to color-coding to connecting them all together. In retrospect, incorporating color-coding into the organization-centric mapping protocol may be a beneficial modification. Participants who classified as CSO representatives mapped a plethora of nodes/ties that, when detailed in interviews, showcased a lot of nuance; as such, a color-coding scheme may have been useful for uncovering further meaning in the mapping alone, and one participant even chose to color-code her map anyway. Regardless, visual mapping exercises present a flexibility in their protocol that allows scholars to use them in distinct contexts, such as by adjusting the center actor, modifying the quadrant labels to suit research questions, or forgoing quadrants altogether to focus on just the concentric circles of the sociogram model. Further exploration of this method and the qualitative approach to SNA will help underscore the “why” and “how” details that guide network behavior, quality, and transformation.

## **Conclusion**

### **Limitations**

There are some limitations to discuss with regards to this project. First, as a qualitative approach to SNA that highlighted network orientation, assessment, and evolution (Hollstein, 2011), this study prioritized perception as evidence of the existence and significance of ties over more grounded and/or observable measures. As such, there is always the potential for actors’ perceptions of their relationships and networks of which they are a part to be misinformed or inaccurate compared to quantifiable data. For this study, however, actor perceptions to these social locations and connections illustrate important nuances to meanings, norms, and capital within a network as

well as significant findings to the integration of a distinct mobile public. Perceptions, in this case, are equally insightful to the communicative interactions of social actors. Furthermore, a cross-comparison of perceived relationships to a more quantifiable measure could invoke unique findings between how social actors perceive themselves in a network versus what is actively happening. This could include (mis)matches over relational norms or concepts like network boundaries, which differ in flexibility/rigidity depending upon the methodological approach (Hollstein, 2011).

Second, it is important to note the potential presence and impacts of power dynamics in the data collection process, particularly those between myself as the researcher and the migrant participants involved in this dissertation that may have shaped certain participant responses involving trust. As an American individual from a formal institution collecting data about the experience and context of transnational mobility, which included recording participant interviews, there is a chance that some participants felt they could not be completely transparent with me about whether or not they trusted the organizations within the U.S. Many, in fact, seemed inclined to state they had trust in these institutions and the nation as a whole, in a way that contrasted some of their other stories and perspectives. This could be a matter of cultural differences in understanding trust as an American individual in conversation with Afghan refugees, but may, as noted, be indicative of concerns surrounding their access to these institutions. In the consent process and opening of the interview, I explained that participation in the research will have no impact on their relationship with a service organization or the services they can/will receive from them. Regardless, the combination of the lack of American connections, the ties and power held as a researcher, and any perceptions to how it may help or harm their wider network may have been reflected in how participants chose to answer questions.

Third, continuing the discussion of involving Afghan refugees in this research, it is important to acknowledge that they are not representative of all migrant experiences within the U.S. Rather, the experiences of Afghan refugees in the U.S., particularly their stories of transnational mobility, were considered because of their distinctiveness as an example of a mobile and marginalized public. Migration is not a homogenous experience (Bravo, 2015; Green & Waldinger, 2016). Costs, resource constraints, privilege and the digital divide all impact the communicative possibilities of migrants in their potentially transnational networks (Waldinger, 2013, 2015; Green & Waldinger, 2016). For some migrant publics, their experiences of mobility may not have resulted in marginalization, including the exclusion from civil society, but may instead reflect voluntary migration that resulted in very different implications for their social networks. Regardless, what I claim in this dissertation is that the enactment and context of mobility, in any case, will impact the social network ecology and thereby strategies of the mobile public in question. The experiences of Afghan refugees in the U.S. is not universal, but mobility itself, especially transnational, is still significant.

Lastly, in utilizing the visual social network mapping exercise as a qualitative technique to SNA, there were some relevant limitations. While many participants noted the significance of digital communication to their social networks, the maps themselves did not organically account for the digital. This was easily rectified in practice by instructing participants that important actors and interactions may exist in the digital realm, but it presents a question of how to better situate the digital in visual mapping exercises. Furthermore, in choosing to ascribe certain quadrants for participants (both organizational representatives and migrant publics), it is important to realize that doing so inflicts certain boundaries. These boundaries, as an enactment of nominalist strategies for qualitative approaches to networks (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011; Heath et al., 2009; Smith, 2014), may

limit and/or confuse participants and the actors they consider in mapping. For CSO representatives, there was confusion over the category of “regional actors” and whether that meant solely actors at the state level or a broader consideration. For migrant participants, the binary of country of birth (Afghanistan) and country of residency (U.S.) at times meant the exclusion of other important actors in other countries both relevant to the journey of migration (i.e., Germany, Qatar) or not (i.e., Canada). It is important that if enacting these quadrants, then other steps in the protocol account for their limitations such as by clarifying any categories or including questions that ask beyond the pre-given boundaries.

## **Future Research**

Having made substantial theoretical, practical, and methodological contributions in this dissertation, I also present the following avenues for future research that a) further the mobile social network ecology through the integration of other distinct types of migration/mobility, b) account for the nuances of homophilous and, c) explore the role of interpersonal ties for CSOs in an issue network.

### ***Integrating Further Cases of Migration and Mobility***

Given the proposal of a mobile social network ecology, avenues of future research may wish to further explore this concept and its premises by invoking studies with other distinct migrant publics or other forms of mobility. Migration is not a homogenous experience (Bravo, 2015; Green & Waldinger, 2016) and incorporating other populations of people who have migrated may be informative in explicating the transformative potential of a mobile social network ecology. In particular, there is a need to incorporate groups whose transnational mobility manifests in voluntary forms of migration (compared to forced migration) and to incorporate those whose migration journey does not incur an exclusion from civil society. Examining the connections between other

distinct migrant publics who are more embedded in civil society may present significant insights into the formation and maintenance of these integral societal ties through public relations.

Similarly, future research may want to further unpack the distinctions in how mobility is enacted beyond just a stance of transnational migration. On the one hand, this can include perspectives of more temporary and/or cyclical mobility (i.e., tourists, international students, migrant worker populations). On the other hand, it is important to remember mobility also speaks to the inability or lack of agency to move, i.e. immobility (Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2014; Urry, 2003). Scholarship exploring a mobile social network ecology needs to examine how immobility of populations impacts important social connections, such as with the inability of those who have migrated without documents to return to their countries of origin on their own terms. In proposing a mobile social network ecology and its premises, this dissertation opens the door for more thorough exploration into that very integration of (im)mobility and SNA for the purpose of being inclusive of the modern identities, interests, and needs that emerge through experiences of mobility.

### ***Exploring Markers of Homophily/Heterophily***

While the majority of ties perceived within CSO networks could be described as having issue homophily, this dissertation also found distinctions in how that overlapped with other characteristics of homophilous/heterophilous ties. Shared organizational type continues to be an important connector within social networks (e.g., Atouba & Shumate, 2015; Doerfel & Taylor, 2017; Shumate et al., 2005), as collaboration was most frequently perceived as between organizations of shared type and purpose (i.e., shelter-shelter, NPO-NPO, and agency-agency). Yet, this dissertation also expands that contrasting types of homophilous/heterophilous ties are integral to understanding the complicated nature of CSO relationships. This not only reaffirms the need to view homophily as a layered concept in which multiple markers may indicate certain network

dynamics (Sommerfeldt et al., 2022), but also push future research to examine how the contrast and blend of homophilous and heterophilous characteristics in network ties dictates relationship formation, maintenance, and quality. From this dissertation, I recommend further examination in this area, notably in assessing the combination of homophily/heterophily across types of features (attribute, institution, issue, geography) within network ties.

### ***Unearthing the Interpersonal Connections in Organizational Network Analysis***

Another venue of future research for not only migrant-serving CSOs, but all CSOs embroiled in issue networks is examining the presence and impact of interpersonal connections. Within the findings of this dissertation, there were clear instances wherein interpersonal connections become relevant to an organization and its network as a whole, including those between the member(s) of the public and individual organizational representatives and even interpersonal relationships between representatives of distinct organizations. The overlap of interpersonal communication and public relations, particularly in relationship management, has long been established (e.g., Grunig et al., 1995; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Toth, 2000) as well as critiqued (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2015). Yet, the logics of interpersonal communication has not been thoroughly explored with regards to networks and their dynamics, despite other social actors like publics maintaining multiple, simultaneous connections to an organization through distinct activities and individual links (Smith, 2012). Future research on CSO social networks may want to ask what is the role of interpersonal ties in complex networks, particularly those generated by acts of mobility and driven by aims of service.

In particular, this dissertation attests that while networked public relations studies have highlighted interorganizational ties, many of the interorganizational ties of participants were perceived through an interpersonal lens. These interpersonal relationships showcase fixed, repetitive

links that generate further exchanges and opportunities in the name of serving mobile publics, ultimately consolidating time and effort for organizational operations—all of which characterize strong ties (Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015; Uzzi, 1996; Yang & Taylor, 2015). Even the use of distinct channels that sometimes minimize an interpersonal context (i.e., digital media) was described as an interactive form of social bonding (Auger & Cho, 2021) For future research, it begs the question of whether a plurality of strong interorganizational ties across contexts have a salient and significant interpersonal dimension. Equally important, the interpersonal dimension of interorganizational relationships is not without its risks. In examining the role of interpersonal connections within a network, future research should consider how network dynamics and outcomes may shift and/or transform at the loss of one individual, should they maintain significant, strong ties for an organization.

## **Final Remarks**

This dissertation extends public relations by integrating mobility and SNA, proposing the mobile social network ecology and capturing distinct characteristics and relationships of the modern world. In doing so, this research stipulates the importance of the perspectives and experiences of publics to the field, notably in the theorizing of networked public relations scholarship. Highlighting public mobility has evoked salient actors (i.e. publics, issue impact actors) and ties (i.e. involuntary ties, interpublic connections) beyond traditional interorganizational linkages, reminding us of the importance of the inclusivity and multiplicity of public relationships in the 21st century (Sison, 2017; Wang, 2006; Yang et al., 2012) and the breadth of possibilities to their maintenance. As such, this dissertation advances the relationship building responsibilities and effort of public relations, notably in how these serve to manifest civil society, by emphasizing a qualitative approach to network orientations and dynamics through a focus on the enactment and context of mobility. It

additionally illustrates the significance of the entanglement and sharing of capital, including spatial, within a social network, tasking public relations as the architect of social networks responsible for recognizing and publicizing power differentials.

Furthermore, this dissertation integrates migrant publics and their transnational ties by highlighting the perceptions and experiences of recent Afghan refugees to the U.S. This not only acted in furthering the salience of migrants for global public relations (Bravo, 2015; Choi et al., 2021), but also endeavored in importantly identifying the needs, interests, and challenges of a population with distinct experiences of mobility. With many around the world facing forced displacement and at risk of further marginalization upon resettling elsewhere, it is more important than ever for organizations and societies to foster inclusive, collaborative ties with distinct migrant populations. As such, this dissertation was able to present lessons into the facilitation of relationships with migrant publics both for migrant-serving CSOs and also for those organizations whose purpose is not inherently migrant-centric but whose operations may overlap with these populations. By reflecting upon the realities and complexities of mobility, the communication, and as such relationships, between migrants, migrant-serving CSOs, and broader societal networks can strive to better generate positive social changes. All together, these contributions advance public relations in reckoning with the transnational, globalized dimensions of the modern world, showcasing how public mobility shapes and complicates our fundamental societal connections.

## Appendices

### **Appendix A: Research Protocol**

The following provides full research protocol of this dissertation as approved by the IRB. It starts with the visual social network mapping and qualitative interview protocol for participants who qualify as migrants. Next, it details the visual social network mapping and qualitative interview protocol for participants who qualify as representatives from migrant-serving CSOs. Finally, it provides the approved protocol for on-site ethnographic observations and the various techniques.

#### **Mapping and Interview Protocol for Participants who Qualify as Migrants**

Thank you for your time to participate in this study. The purpose of this research is to further the understanding of public relations on a transnational scale by considering migration and how it impacts our social relationships and networks. You will share your views and experiences of migration as well as be asked to create a map of your social network. In turn, you will be asked to discuss your map, the process of mapping, and your social networks and how it may span transnationally. This research is part of a larger dissertation project.

You will go through a preliminary round of questions before taking part in a visual network mapping exercise. An example of a first-round question is “What was your process and experience of migrating to the U.S.?” A second round of questions will follow the mapping exercise in order to discuss the final product and process of the exercise. Examples of questions include:

- Tell me about the actors in x quadrant. How do you communicate with them?
- Tell me about the people/organizations you’ve marked in red/yellow/green.
- What was it like to think of the people and organizations who are important in your life? Were there any challenges to this process?
- Are there any people or organizations who aren’t represented in this map? If yes, who?

In total, this process will be between 60-120 minutes to account for each stage.

[I will read through consent form here. If participants were emailed the form in advance, I will confirm that they received and read the form; if not, I will read it to them. After finishing, I will ask “are there any sections or parts of the form you did not understand?” If no, we will proceed. If yes, we will discuss any confusing or misunderstood sections. If this still does not result in full understanding, I will offer to send a translated copy to them in a language of their choice. I will then ask the participant if they would like to proceed with their understanding of the consent form in English or if they would like to reschedule and wait for a translated copy. I will reassure participants that rescheduling, and waiting is completely appropriate and remind them that their participation is voluntary.]

[ Following the review of the consent form, I will give participants the opportunity to showcase their consent. I will state “If you agree to participate, you can sign your name below. Or, you may consent verbally.” If participants choose to provide verbal consent, I will read the verbal consent prompt on the consent form. Participants will either sign a consent form or provide verbal consent to participate. Participants will also be asked permission to be recorded. If yes, turn on the recorder and continue. If the participant agrees to participate but not to be audiotaped, I will take notes instead. If the participant does not agree to participate, stop.]

***Opening Interview Questions (10-15 minutes)***

The first round of questions will include demographic information and questions surrounding your migration to the U.S. These questions aim to establish a common understanding of your background prior to going into the visual network mapping exercise (Copeland & Agosto, 2012; Hollstein, 2011). Questions include:

- What is your age/gender/ethnicity?
- When did you first arrive in the U.S.?
- What was your process and experience of migrating to the U.S.?

### *Visual Mapping Exercise (20+ minutes)*

For the visual network mapping, you will be given a sociogram map [hand participant the blank map]. As you see, it is divided into quadrants and with “self” listed in the center circle; each quadrant is labelled either “People - Country of Birth,” “Organizations - Country of Birth,” “People - Country of Residence,” and “Organizations - Country of Residence” (see Figure 1). First, the PI will instruct you to think of relevant actors who are important in your life, including people and organizations, and to place them in the relevant quadrant and circle depending on the degree of relational closeness.

[At this point, I will ask the generator question: “please think about the important people and organizations in your life. Place them on the map where you think they best fit.” I will also have an example to showcase here. At this point I will also inform participants that can use broad labels (i.e. “sister” or “school”) when completing their social network map.]

Second, you will be asked to color code these actors through the use of either stickers or highlighters/markers, with accordance to the following color scheme:

- Red - these relationships have been impacted by the transnational (i.e. international or multinational) movement of the participant
- Yellow - these relationships are unaware of the transnational (i.e. international or multinational) movement of the participant
- Green - these relationships have helped or supported the participant through their transnational (i.e. international or multinational) movement

[At this point, I will hand the participant either colored markers/highlighters or stickers and guide them to color code their social network map. I will have another example of a map at this point to showcase.]

Lastly, you will be asked to draw lines between the actors who know each other and/or are connected to one another.

[At this point I will guide participants through connecting the different actors in their network by asking “who in your network knows each other.” I will have a final example of a map at this point to showcase.]

### ***Closing Interview Questions (30+ minutes)***

The second and final round of interview questions aims to understand the network map (product) and mapping (process) of the participant. Questions include:

Understanding who actors in social network are (RQ1/RQ2/RQ5):

- Tell me about the actors in x quadrant. (RQ1/RQ2/RQ5)
  - How long have you known them? (RQ1/RQ2; perception of relationship quality)
  - How do you communicate with them? How frequently? Through which channels/mediums? (RQ1/RQ2; maintenance of relationships/communication practices)
  - Why/how are these actors close to you? (RQ1/RQ2; perception of relationship quality)
  - Similarly, why/how are these actors important but far from you? (RQ1/RQ2; perception of relationship quality)
  - How, if at all, do these relationships help or benefit you? (RQ5; social capital)
  - How, if at all, do you trust these actors? (RQ5; social capital)
- Repeat per quadrant.

Understanding the color-coding decisions (RQ1/RQ2/RQ5):

- Tell me about the people/organizations you’ve marked in red.
  - How have these relationships been impacted by your migration? Has this been positive or negative? (RQ1/RQ2; perception of relationship quality)
  - Has this impacted how close you feel to this person/organization and/or whether your trust in them? (RQ1/RQ2/RQ5; perception of relationship quality; social capital)
  - Has this impacted your ability to communicate with this person/organization? If yes, how so? (RQ1/RQ2; maintenance of relationship/communication practices)
  - Has this impacted the shared meanings, resources, or support between you and this actor? If yes, how so? (RQ5; social capital)
- Tell me about the people/organizations you’ve marked in yellow.
  - How are these relationships unaware or unaffected by your migration? Has it been positive or negative that these people/organizations are unaware of your migration? (RQ1/RQ2; perception of relationship quality)
  - Does this unawareness impact your trust in these people/organizations? (RQ1/RQ2/RQ5; perception of relationship quality; social capital)

- Does this unawareness impact or affect how you communicate with this person/organization? If yes, how so? (RQ1/RQ2; maintenance of relationship/communication practices)
- Has this impacted the shared meanings, resources or support between you and this actor? If yes, how so? (RQ5; social capital)
- Tell me about the people/organizations you've marked in green.
  - How have these relationships helped or supported you through your migration experience? (RQ1/RQ2; perception of relationship quality)
  - Has this impacted how close you feel to the person/organization and/or your trust in them? (RQ1/RQ2/RQ5; perception of relationship quality; social capital)
  - How do you communicate with these people/organizations? (RQ1/RQ2; maintenance of relationship/communication practices)
  - Has this impacted the shared meanings, resources or support between you and this actor? If yes, how so? (RQ5; social capital)

Understanding the ties and connections (RQ1/RQ2):

- Tell me about how the ties within x quadrant are/are not connected. (RQ1/RQ2; perception of network positioning)
- Tell me about how the ties between quadrants are/are not connected. (RQ1/RQ2; perception of network positioning)

Understanding the process:

- What was it like to think of the people and organizations who are important in your life? Were there any challenges to this process? (RQ1/RQ2)
- Are there any people or organizations who aren't represented in this map? If yes, who? Why do they not fit within the map? (RQ1/RQ2) For example, are there any people or organizations in other countries that are not represented in the map but are connected and/or important to your life?

## Conclusion

These are all my questions, thank you for taking the time to participate in the study. I really appreciate you sharing your experiences.

- Is there anything you feel we've missed that you would like to discuss?
- Do you have any questions for me?
- If I have questions regarding your answers, could I contact you in the future?

[At this point, I will turn off the recording device (if applicable). I will ask the participant which of the following data they may want to make confidential: names of actors (people and organizations) on their social network map, elements of their identity (such as gender, sexuality, religion, or

ethnicity), and any locations (i.e., hometowns or other important places). Finally, I will then discuss the process of compensation with the participant].

### **Mapping and Interview Protocol for Participants who Qualify as Members of a Migrant CSO**

Thank you for your time to participate in this study. The purpose of this research is to further the understanding of public relations on a transnational scale by considering migration and how it impacts our social relationships and networks. You will share your views and experiences of working with/alongside/on behalf of migrant groups as well as be asked to create a map of the migrant advocacy/service organization's social network. In turn, you will be asked to discuss your map, the process of mapping, and your social networks. This research is part of a larger dissertation project. The outcomes of the project may provide some insight for how civil service organizations (CSOs) strategically cultivate, maintain, and navigate relationships in social networks while aiming to serve a marginalized public defined by their mobility, i.e. migrant groups.

If you identify as a member of a migrant advocacy/service organizations, either as an employee of the organization or a volunteer, you will be asked to describe the communication choices and strategies for cultivating relationships with mobile, migrant publics. You will go through a preliminary round of questions before taking part in a visual network mapping exercise. An example of a first-round question is "What is your role at the organization?" A second round of questions will follow the mapping exercise in order to discuss the final product and process of the exercise. Examples of questions include:

- Tell me about the actors in x quadrant.
- How are they important to the organization?
- How do you communicate with them? Are there concrete strategies to maintaining these ties? If yes, what? If no, why not?

In total, this process will be between 60-120 minutes to account for each stage.

[I will read through consent form here. If participants were emailed the form in advance, I will confirm that they received and read the form; if not, I will read it to them. In both scenarios, I will ask if there are any questions or concerns.]

[ Following the review of the consent form, I will give participants the opportunity to showcase their consent. I will state “If you agree to participate, you can sign your name below. Or, you may consent verbally.” If participants choose to provide verbal consent, I will read the verbal consent prompt on the consent form. Participants will either sign a consent form or provide verbal consent to participate. Participants will also be asked permission to be recorded. If yes, turn on the recorder and continue. If the participant agrees to participate but not to be audiotaped, I will take notes instead. If the participant does not agree to participate, stop.]

### ***Opening Interview Questions (10-15 minutes)***

The first round of questions will include demographic information and questions surrounding your involvement with the migrant advocacy/assistance organization, such as questions about professional history. These questions aim to establish a common understanding of your background prior to going into the visual network mapping exercise. Questions include:

- What is your age/gender/ethnicity?
- What is your role at the organization?
- How long have you been involved with the organization?
- Were you previously affiliated with the organization in any other way (such as participant, volunteer, or other)?

### ***Visual Mapping Exercise (20+ minutes)***

For the visual network mapping, you will be given a sociogram map [hand participants the map here]. As you can see, it is divided into quadrants and with “the organization” listed in the center circle; each quadrant is labelled either “Local Actors, Regional Actors, National Actors, Global/International Actors” (see Figure 7). First, you will be asked to think of important actors,

including individuals, groups, organizations, and nation-states in the social network of the organization. You will then need to place them in the relevant quadrant and circle depending on the degree of relational importance.

[At this point, I will ask the generator question: “please think about the important people and organizations for the migrant advocacy/assistance organization. Place them on the map where you think they best fit.” I will also have an example to showcase here.]

Second, you will be asked to draw lines between the actors who know each other and/or are connected to one another.

[At this point I will guide participants through connecting the different actors in their network by asking “who in your network knows each other.” I will have a final example of a map at this point to showcase.]

### **Closing Interview Questions (30+ minutes)**

The second and final round of interview questions aims to understand the network map (product) and mapping (process) of the participant. Questions include:

Understanding who actors in social network are (RQ3/RQ4/RQ5):

- Tell me about the actors in x quadrant (RQ3/RQ4/RQ5).
  - How are they important to the organization? (RQ3; perception of relationship quality)
  - How long has the organization been connected to them? (RQ3; perception of relationship quality)
  - How do you communicate with them? How frequently? (RQ 3; relationship maintenance/communication practices)
  - Are there concrete strategies to maintaining these ties? If yes, what? If no, why not? (RQ3; relationship maintenance/communication practices)
  - Why/how are these actors important but relationally far from you? (RQ3; perception of relationship quality)
  - Are these relationships impacted by the migrant publics you serve? If so, how? (RQ4; impact of public mobility)
  - How, if at all, do these actors/relationships help or benefit you? (RQ5; social capital)
  - How, if at all, do you trust these actors/relationships? (RQ5; social capital)

- What are the shared meanings or norms between you and these actors? (RQ5; social capital)
- Repeat per quadrant.

Understanding the ties and connections (RQ3/RQ4):

- Tell me about how the ties within x quadrant are/are not connected. (RQ3; perception of network positioning)
- Tell me about how the ties between quadrants are/are not connected. (RQ3; perception of network positioning)
- How are these ties impacted by the movement of the migrant publics the organization serves? (RQ 4; impact of public mobility)

Understanding the process (RQ3/RQ4):

- What was it like to think of the people and organizations who are important to the organization? Were there any challenges to this process? (RQ3/RQ4)
- Are there any people or organizations who aren't represented in this map? If yes, who? Why do they not fit within the map? (RQ3)

## **Conclusion**

These are all my questions, thank you for taking the time to participate in the study. I really appreciate you sharing your experiences.

- Is there anything you feel we've missed that you would like to discuss?
- Do you have any questions for me?
- If I have questions regarding your answers, could I contact you in the future?

[At this point, I will turn off the recording device (if applicable). I will then discuss the process of compensation with the participant].

## **Ethnography Protocol**

Participants will be observed by the PI at regular intervals (weekly or biweekly) between September 2022 – September 2023 at the various CSO sites including CSO warehouses, offices, and field sites. Participants will mostly be CSO representatives, including employees and volunteers. Some participants may be migrants due to the nature and operation of the CSO. Observations will not begin until letters of support have been obtained from the CSOs.

Drawing from previous ethnographic research, several activities will be performed during the observations to ensure data accuracy and quality. First, the PI conducting the observation will take field notes via traditional notepads and writing utensils or electronic devices (i.e., personal iPhone, personal laptop). The PI may also record herself on the iPhone to speed up the note-taking process and ensure that all important information is recorded. Second, the PI will also interact with participants and participate in meetings, informal conversations, and daily tasks.

Third, the PI may conduct brief (10-20 minutes long) informal on-site interviews. The purpose of these interviews is to ask for clarification or verification of the PI's observations (as needed) and/or to develop fuller explanations of what occurred. With participants' permission, these interviews will be audio recorded. If they decline to be recorded, the PI will take notes. After conducting the interviews, the PI may use transcribing services to transcribe the recorded interviews verbatim. Identifying information is captured during recordings, that information will not be included in any reporting of findings.

Fourth, the PI may also request or review non-classified documents, such as training manuals, social media policies, organizational charts. The PI will not have access to confidential/classified areas and information.

Given the privacy concerns of some of the target populations (see risk section below), at no point will the PI take photographs or videos of any field observations, including locations/sites, participants, etc.

**Appendix B: Example Anonymized Map from Migrant Participant**

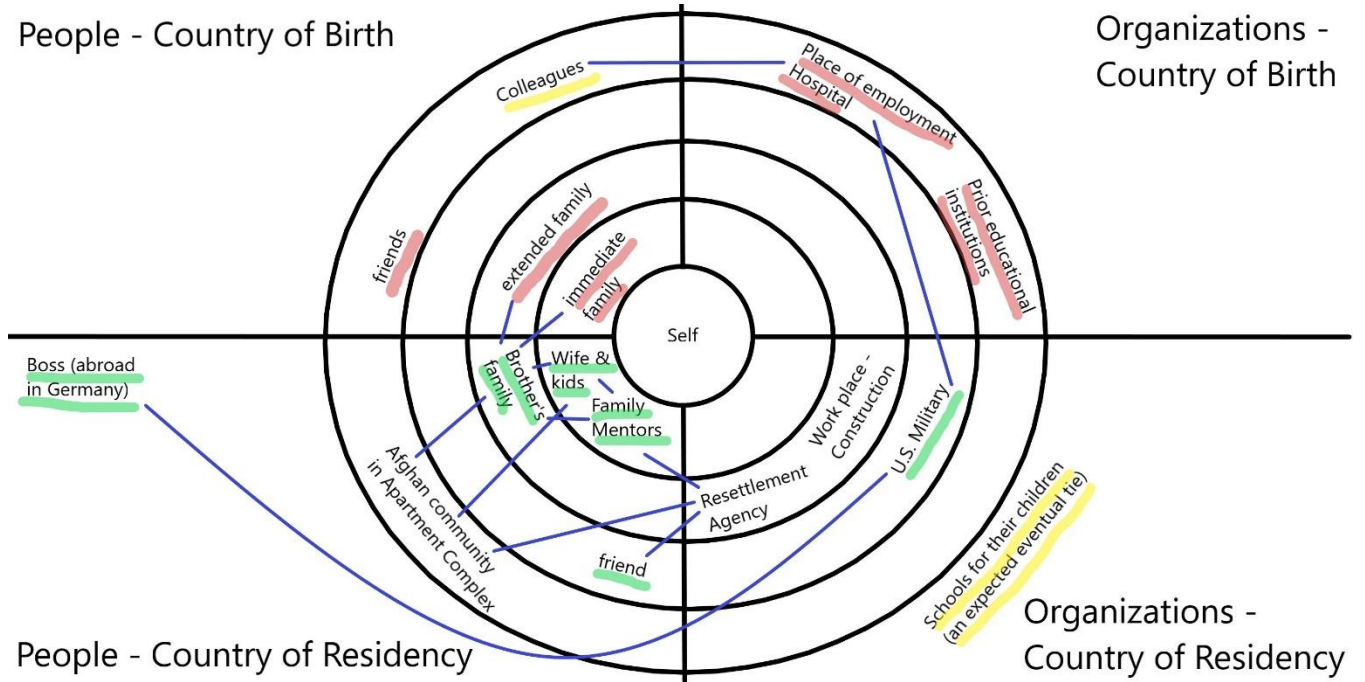


Figure 4: Example Anonymized Map from Migrant Participant with Labels, Color Coding, and Connections

### Appendix C: Example Anonymized Map from CSO Representative

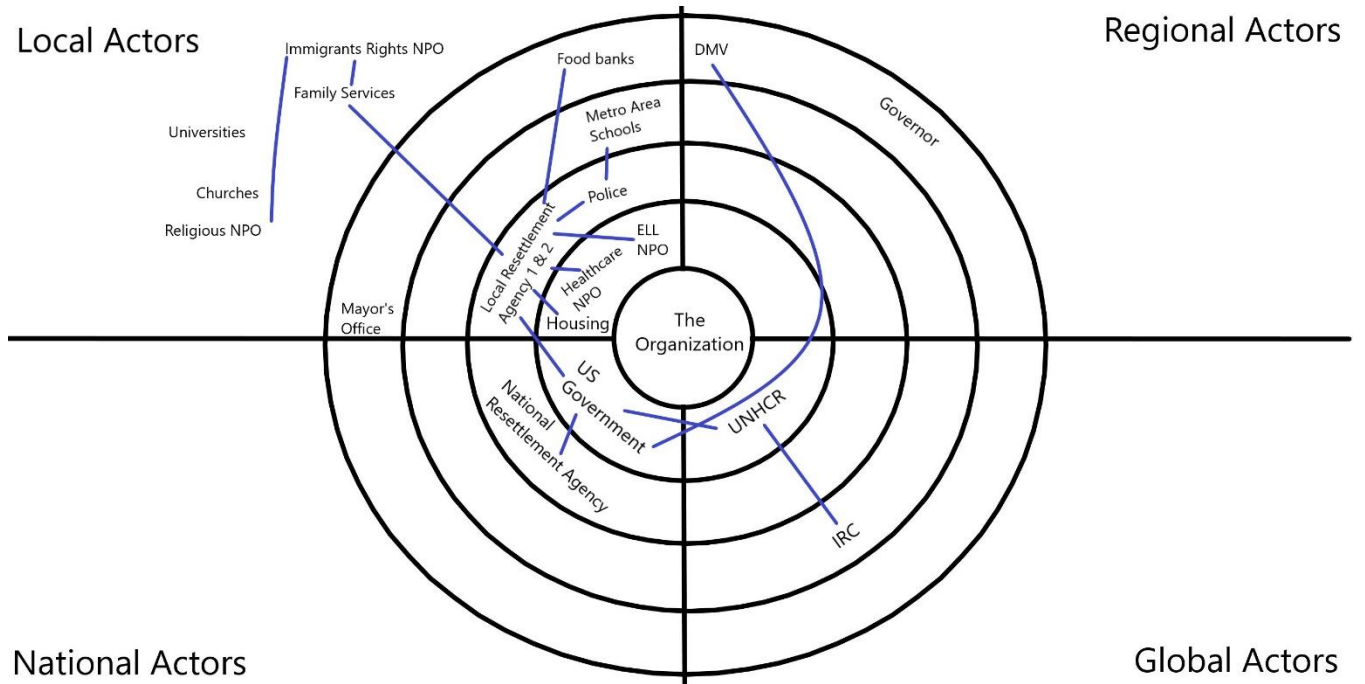


Figure 5: Example Anonymized Map from CSO Representative with Labels and Connections

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