

## PROVIDING RIGHTS THROUGH INDIVIDUAL COMPASSION

### *The ambivalent rights talk within refugee resettlement work*

#### Abstract

The article analyses the social constructions of rights as they come about through Swedish delegations preparing refugees for resettlement in Sweden, under the Cultural Orientation Programme (COP). COPs are analysed as an activity that manifests a need to convey rights. Fieldwork was conducted through video observations of COPs in Kenya and Sudan. Our empirical findings show how the Swedish officials engage in talks about rights through positioning the refugees as unaware of, and incapable of, claiming rights. Rights are also highlighted as obligations with correct ways of realising them. This study manifests the clash between rights as universal and rights tied to citizenship where, during COPs, rights are conveyed as particularly Swedish, positioning the refugees on a receiving end of the conversations. However, the study also shows how the participants do make claims, sometimes resisting the hierarchies during the talks.

#### Keywords

Resettlement • refugees • Sweden • Cultural orientation programme • Human rights

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## Introduction

Current research on refugees and human rights centre much on the situation of stateless persons and the subordination of vulnerable migrant groups. Voluminous studies depart from Hannah Arendt's famous reflection that rights can be realised only in a political community where humans are not judged by the characteristics defined to them at birth, but through actions and opinions (Arendt 1951, Ch. 9), and the argument that human rights must be rooted in the practices of right-holders themselves (Bhabha 2009; Douzinas 2007; Ingram 2008; Gündoğdu 2015). Other studies focus on the role of law in protecting the vulnerable migrants (see for example Betts 2010; Noll 2010; Lindahl 2008), or explore discrepancies between legislated rights and rights in practice (Lundberg 2011; Jönsson 2014). Attention has furthermore been given to how rights are constructed and used within the often hierarchical contexts that form the very meetings between 'rights providing' state officials, and 'rights receiving' refugees (Englund 2004, Massoud 2011, Merry 2006). As regards children's rights more specifically, Ann Quennerstedt points to the lack of studies envisaging how these are constructed and invented in local contexts. While few scholars have explored subjective dimensions of human rights (Stenner 2011), international treaties concerning rights are, as Quennerstedt argues, usually the starting point for academics as well as for advocates promoting rights. Questions about the emergence of rights and their construction in local contexts have not drawn much scholarly

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interest in for example the field of children's rights (Quennerstedt 2013). This is important for critical stances contesting inclination towards consensus building in the scholarly discussion on rights. Furthermore, in light of the large focus in research on negotiations amongst states and the monitoring of rights by different organs and proper implementation techniques, a global rights industry, where rights are viewed as natural and taken for granted, has emerged that overshadows critical approaches to rights as historically situated and constructed in local contexts. Paul Stenner (2011), in a similar vein, concludes that there is little scholarly interest in trying to understand how human rights are legitimated locally.

As a backdrop of the above, the focus of the current article is a local context where rights, as talks and as formal entitlements, are central. We aim to describe and analyse the meaning and social constructions of rights as they come about through a group of officials preparing refugees for resettlement in Sweden, under the so-called Cultural Orientation Programme (henceforth, COPs). COPs are held by the Swedish Migration Agency and constitute an important part of UN high commissioner for refugees' (henceforth UNHCR) resettlement process<sup>1</sup>.

In this article, we argue for the need to highlight complexities that revolve around the work of providing rights to refugees from the Horn of Africa. This does not mean that we argue for human rights in themselves to be rejected. As shown by, for example Massoud (2011), human rights may provide hope and have side effects that change living conditions mundanely. Rather we explore

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local constructions of rights as contextually situated. Whereas, the group of refugees will be granted rights formally, we believe that it is important to also show how talks on rights in local contexts come about. The contribution of this article lies in empirically enhancing an understanding of how rights talk take place within refugee humanitarian efforts like resettlement, in meetings between third country state officials and refugees.

This study is based on fieldwork carried out, by one of the authors, in 2011 in the refugee camps in Dadaab in Kenya and in Khartoum in Sudan. It is based on observations of a total of nine COPs. These COPs were held for a group of 342 Somali refugees residing in Kenya and 249 Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees residing in Sudan. The meetings between the Swedish delegations and COP participants about to be resettled were video-recorded through placing a camera in one corner of the room in which the COPs took place. The video observations resulted in approximately 60 hours of recording. Apart from this, field notes were taken regarding information of the context of the programmes. In this article, examples from the study will be analysed to highlight negotiations between Swedish officials and the participants regarding their future life in Sweden. The focus of our analysis in this article is the meetings between the Swedish delegations and persons going through resettlement and participating in COPs. We aim to discuss micro-inventions of rights by highlighting negotiations over rights in the context of COPs. In what ways are rights conveyed through the programmes? How can we understand the power dynamics that come into play between the right providers (delegations) and the right receivers (refugees)? Furthermore, we are interested in how the COP participants make claims for rights in this context. We start by giving an overview of what a COP is as well as provide a contextual understanding of the fieldwork. Then we move on to discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the study and elaborate upon the meaning of rights as socially constructed. Here, we will also discuss the contradiction between rights as universal and rights tied to citizenships and how this contradiction relates to the resettlement process. We continue with describing the aims of the COPs. Then the methodological considerations regarding video observations and ethical challenges linked with this method will be reflected upon. The next section of the article will present three empirical examples where we analyse how seemingly what could be viewed as rights are talked about in different ways. In the final part of the article, the main findings of the study will be discussed.

### **The Swedish resettlement programme: Granting rights to refugees**

Resettlement is an administrative solution to make sure that refugees are given the opportunity to become part of a political community and as a result access institutionalised rights. It is one of the UNHCR's durable solutions for the global refugee situations. It targets those refugees who have fled their countries of origin and whom are unable to return home or stay in the country where they have sought refuge. In these cases, refugees are subject to resettlement in a third country, often in the West. Resettlement actualises a core idea within 'rights theory' noted initially by Arendt, namely the fact that rights are related to statehood. In practice, a person can enjoy his rights solely as a member of a political community.

Sweden has been carrying out resettlement since the 1950s and is accordingly one of the oldest resettlement countries with an annual allowance of 1900 persons. The COPs are part of the Swedish

resettlement programme. As a means to prepare refugees who have been granted Swedish permanent residence on quota, COPs are held for 1½ days in the country from where they are resettled. During the programmes, refugees are informed about their upcoming resettlement process on various aspects of Swedish society such as the employment market, housing and education. In the life of the refugees, this phase is marked by change in terms of moving to another country. This change also involves being provided with rights that are recognised and institutionalised in Sweden. These rights are brought up during the programmes within a variety of activities.

The officials taking part are selected by the Migration Agency through an internal recruitment process. Each delegation consists of seven officials from the agency, municipalities, and the employment office. They work within the field of migration/integration in Sweden. Prior to the COPs, a preparation course is held for the delegations in Sweden where they are given suggestions on topics to highlight during the programmes. Much of the information handed to the delegations included practical information regarding topics such as housing, employment situation, learning the language, the education system, day care facilities for children, health controls, and the plane journey to Sweden to name a few. The suggestions handed to the delegations also included a section titled 'everyday life, rights, and responsibilities'. The information stated in this section includes the following: rights and responsibilities, children's rights and women's rights (internal document). Rights are hence seen as an integral part of what resettlement will lead to in Sweden, marking the transition from refugees to becoming Swedish citizens.

### **The Cultural Orientation Programmes in Kenya and Sudan 2011**

In recent years, due to wars and conflicts in the Horn of Africa, this region has seen a development of difficult refugee situations. Thousands of people have been forced to leave their homes and seek refuge in neighbouring countries like Kenya. The UNHCR has highlighted the need for resettlement countries to focus on this area, especially the situation in Dadaab, which is one of the largest refugee camp-complexes in the world. In 2011, Sweden paid special attention to this region in their resettlement programme.

### **The COPs in Dadaab and Nairobi, Kenya**

After the breakdown of the Somali state in 1991, approximately 400,000 Somalis crossed the borders to neighbouring Kenya (Horst 2006). This immediate acceleration in people entering the country led the Kenyan government to seek international assistance. In early 1990s, the UNHCR opened refugee camps across Kenya, including in Dadaab, a town located about 100 kilometres from the Kenya–Somalia border. The camps in Dadaab are still running, demonstrating the continuous problematic situation of large numbers of people who neither can return to Somalia nor become part of the country to where they have fled. In 2013, it was estimated that approximately 430,000 persons were residing in the camps in Dadaab (UNHCR 2013).

In 2011, the Migration Agency granted permanent Swedish residence to a total of 342 people in Dadaab and Nairobi. Most of these persons had lived in Dadaab refugee camps since the 1990s, which meant that many of the children were born and raised in the camps. Whereas one family was of Sudanese origin the rest

were originally from Somalia. A smaller group lived in Nairobi, in Eastleigh, a predominately Somali neighbourhood. The refugees were offered COPs before being resettled. The programmes were not obligatory. However, most of the refugees participated as they were encouraged to do so in order to receive important information about Sweden. Approximately three weeks before the resettlement, a delegation that was sent by the Migration Agency, carried out five COPs – four in Dadaab and one in Nairobi.

## The COPs in Khartoum

Sudan has been hosting Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees since the 1960s due to long drawn out war and conflicts between Eritrea and Ethiopia. The eastern borders of Sudan have thus been an important gateway for people from the neighbouring countries. According to the 2011 global resettlement needs report, at the end of 2009, it was estimated that Sudan was hosting approximately 113,000 refugees from Eritrea. It was also estimated that there were 9,200 Ethiopians residing in the country (UNHCR 2011). Whereas some Eritreans and Ethiopians live in refugee camps in the eastern parts of Sudan, many also reside in larger cities such as Khartoum and Port Sudan.

In 2011, the Migration Agency resettled 249 persons from Sudan who were given permanent Swedish residence. These persons were from Khartoum, Port Sudan and the refugee camps in Eastern Sudan. The group resettled from Sudan were from Eritrea and Ethiopia. Whereas some of the refugees had come to Sudan in the 1980s, others had only been in the country for a couple of years, fleeing the recent political hardships in Eritrea. Four COPs were held in Khartoum in 2011. The refugees in Sudan were also encouraged to participate in COPs in order to receive information about Sweden. Although the programmes weren't obligatory, most refugees participated. The refugees were bussed from their homes to Khartoum in order to receive the information.

## Rights as struggles within resettlement of refugees

We draw on an understanding of rights as negotiations or struggles taking place at a micro level, and to understand these, it is central to set out from the position of rights-holders themselves (Ingram 2008; Squire & Darling 2013), and the local context (Massoud 2011, Merry 2006, Stenner 2011) – in our case, refugees going through resettlement to Sweden and participating in COPs. Like other studies on human rights, our study also relates to the connection between the state as duty-bearer and individuals as rights-holders (Dembour 2010). But unlike most other contexts, our field is characterised by a remarkably wide discretion for the state officials in choosing what rights they want to bring up, and the fact that the rights-bearers lack knowledge about their new home country. Compared to, for example, the meeting between Swedish migration authorities and asylum seekers having rights as asylum seekers and who also lack knowledge about Sweden, resettled persons are formally included under all Swedish rights legislations but practically excluded since they have not yet entered Sweden. Hence they may be understood as 'citizens to be'. Our study provides knowledge about how rights are constructed in a specific context where persons who have never been to Sweden shall be provided with information about what it means to be a right-holder in Sweden.

While there are different understandings and several 'worlds of human rights' (Dembour 2010, Baxi 2006), often when speaking about international relations and rights, there is a tendency of taking rights as something objective (Epstein 2014). According to Nash (2009), human rights are socially constructed. They do not rest on firm foundations but rather vary in different times and places. The social construction of human rights implies an emphasis on 'social', namely how, within local contexts, rights are constructed to become taken for granted. In our study, this relates to the question how rights are being constructed and negotiated within the very meetings during COPs. Human rights are also part of structures. By this, Nash means that structures are frames that shape how we think. But they are more than mere ideas; they organise resources, both moral and material. Whereas moral resources relate to the ability to persuade people to think and act in certain ways, material resources relate to our basic material needs such as food and shelter. In the case of COPs, the structure can be referred to the humanitarian intervention of resettlement, which includes the idea of granting the refugees rights as well as providing them with basic needs such as food and shelter.

According to Haddad (2003), resettlement is a process of re-territorialisation and hence it is a solution that redefines the refugee's relationship to a space of sovereignty. This actualises the management aspect of resettlement where refugees are relocated. Hence, it also upholds the idea of human rights as being intimately linked to belonging to the nation state since it is through resettlement that refugees are being granted basic human rights. The idea of rights being linked to the need to be part of a nation state can help us understand how and why efforts such as COPs take place. We may be able to understand the basis from which the Swedish officials feel the need to 'hand over' rights to a refugee group that is not yet viewed as included within the Swedish society.

Resettlement actualises the immense power nation-states possess in regulating and controlling who can be included in the political community and how their enjoyment of the rights comes about. This comes down to the relations created by the officials representing the nation-state and those about to enter the nation-state. Nash argues that realisation of human rights is a matter of a 'cultural politics' where culture includes a complex flow of meaning in everyday life (2009). Furthermore, cultural politics of human rights involves a 'contestation and reframing of some people who are seen as "other", the widening of the frame to include people who do not count as fully "human"'. (2009, 5) If we relate this to resettlement, this process can also be seen as a widening of the frame where 'the Others', in this case the refugees, are to be included within the Swedish society. The COPs becomes the arena where this inclusion is taking place.

No studies have focused on how the construction of human rights and the negotiations taking place within Swedish refugee resettlement practices. In her study on the resettlement process of Cambodian refugees in the United States, Ong (2003) shows how professionals would depart from the idea of empowering women, actualising the need to inform them about their rights in the United States. The work of the professionals also included efforts of forming the refugees into what was thought of as 'ideal American citizens' adhering to American norms and values. This process resembles what Epstein (2014) refers to as the historic process of colonial norm entrepreneurs spreading their 'right norms and values' ignoring the perspectives of the local people. Sweden is internationally recognised for being at the forefront when it comes to realising the rights of women and children. These particular rights can be viewed

as an integral part of the Swedish national image (Towns 2002). It is hence not a surprise that the instructions handed to the delegations from the Migration Agency states children and women's rights as particular topics to be raised during the COPs.

The fundamental contradiction between rights as universal and rights as related to citizenship and governed by states becomes apparent within COPs where the rights are intimately linked to the idea of being a Swedish citizen. In this study, we will explore how rights are constructed in certain ways for the citizens to be. An important point is that the social construction of rights within COPs also needs to be understood in regard to preconceived ideas of the particular refugee groups. What becomes interesting is thus both what rights are being highlighted in the programmes as well as to investigate how rights are constructed for this group of refugees.

## Preparations for resettlement: The aims of COPs

The programmes are supposed to prepare the participants for the relocation and as noted are developed by the Migration Agency. The very definition of the programmes such as culture orientation indicates that they aim to navigate the new citizens into the Swedish society and its culture. Those about to be resettled in a political community where rights are granted are to be equipped for what it will entail. In this process, the importance of the meetings and conversations between the officials and participants are highlighted:

It is important that the personal meetings include opportunities for refugees to reflect on the upcoming change that resettlement entails. To encourage their understanding of how the move will affect them, what they can expect in the new country, and what the country expects from them (Migration Agency 2009: 16).

What we see is that the information given to the refugees are to include both what rights claims they can make as well as obligations they will have as citizens of Sweden. But looking closer at protocols, reports and evaluations of COPs also suggests a reinforcement of images of refugees as in need of civilising through information. In a protocol from the Migration Agency, the arguments given for COPs are that refugees in Dadaab have lived in camps for a very long time and thus have little information and experience regarding life in a 'normally functioning society' (Migration Agency 2011). Here the differences between the respective situations in the former country and the new one are highlighted as an important factor. It should also be noted that the concept of 'normal functioning society' is a term highlighting the situation of the people going through resettlement as deviant. Consequently, a dichotomy of 'normal' versus 'abnormal' is actualised. Hence, there is an underlying assumption of a need for civilisation of the persons whom are to become Swedish.

Another idea that permeates the COPs is that communication may actively engage the participants in their introduction process. This is viewed as an important means to counter dependency and passivity among refugees (MOST 2008), underlying the assumption that with individual rights comes individual responsibilities and this is something new to the participants. What becomes clear here is that COPs are based on an conjecture of difference where refugees are thought to be prone to passivity and hence in need of activation through communication exercises about their new society. The work of COPs hence reinforces an idea of what Malkki has termed 'the national order of things' (Malkki 1995:5). This phrase refers to a taken for granted classification of people into national kinds, in our case this is operationalised through a perceived need for the refugees to be reincorporated into a new

community. Whereas this includes both providing refugees with information about rights, it is also based on preconceived ideas of refugees as a distinct group, in need of cultivation.

In total, nine COPs were carried out in Kenya and Sudan in 2011. In Dadaab, the COPs were held outside the refugee camps in IOMs compound whereas the COPs in Khartoum were held in hotel suites that had specially been hired for the programmes. Each COP was held for 1½ days including several topics being highlighted. For the adults, the programmes were divided into separate sessions dealing with information from the municipality officials, employment officer, information about the journey to Sweden and other general information about Sweden. Separate COPs were held for children and youths where specific information and activities were developed for them. Such activities included showing various images of Sweden, letting the children watch Swedish cartoons and learn a few Swedish words and sentences. For the youths, youth sessions were held where topics such as the education system was highlighted along with information about spare time activities and gender roles.

## Methodological approach

### Video observations

The video recording was carried out by one of the authors who carried out the fieldwork. The camera was set up and the researcher would remain in the room observing and listening to the conversations carried out between the delegations and the COP participants. Using video recording as a way to gather data brings forth a set of questions regarding how the participants may react to being filmed. Overall, most participants didn't show any resistance towards the camera. When it comes to the delegations, they would at times ask if something interesting had been recorded. These questions can be understood as perhaps a way of manifesting curiosity towards the researcher and the study, as well as nervousness. Their question opened up for a conversation on the study itself and an opportunity to make the delegations comfortable and inform them about its aims. When it comes to the COP participants, in many cases, the video camera also proved to be a way to come in contact with some of the participants and initiate conversations. The visibility of the technique also provided more opportunity to spur conversations regarding the study, ethics, and to answer the questions of the participants (Sparrman 2005).

There are several reasons why video recording was chosen as a method. The main interest of the study was the very conversations taking place between the officials and the COP participants. Video recording proved to be the most practical way of gathering data, given the short time of the fieldwork. This, as well as the many participants in the COPs, made it difficult to remember all the names and faces. Making it difficult to relate voices to a specific person during the analysis process, video recording enabled to capture the environment in which the COPs took place in a way that field notes cannot. The video recording served as a kind of note-taking of the physical environment (Pink 2007). Furthermore, video recording became an important way of capturing conversations that revolved around specific images, which was common during the COPs. Another reason for the use of video recording was that the method enabled to observe facial expressions and body language during the conversations.

Several measures were taken to ensure that concerns of the participants in the study could be addressed as adequately as possible. Information letters were sent to the delegation members as well as the COP participants, in which they were asked for consent to participate.

Apart from this, the researcher also introduced herself before the programmes and allowed the participants to ask questions about the study. The children's groups were also given a separate presentation of the study, where they were asked if they wanted to take part in the study. In accordance with Swedish legislation (*The Act Concerning the Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans* 2003:460)<sup>2</sup>, the study was also subject to an ethical trial by the Ethical Vetting Board. Obviously the hierarchical relationship between the persons going through resettlement, on the one hand, and a researcher from a Swedish university, on the other, can never be eradicated. Therefore, it was important to continuously reflect upon whether there were any indications from the participants that they did not want to be part of the study. A few persons said that they did not want to be filmed, upon which they were not. Furthermore, the consent and conditions for participation were discussed throughout the field work, with continuous information to the refugees regarding the study and the video recording.

The analysis began during the transcription process where the material was ordered thematically in relation to the different activities recurring during the COPs such as the journey session, school session, women's session and youth session to name a few. The main focus of the original study was the programmes that were held for children and youth hence a large part of the data is from the programmes for children and youth (Muftee 2014). However, since our main interest in this paper is to analyse how rights were talked about in general, all sessions, including the ones held with adults, have been included in the analysis. After the initial themes were created, the material was categorised depending on the different topics discussed such as family, gender relations, employment market, education, multicultural society, travel/the journey and corporal punishment. Within these categories, among other practical information, different rights were articulated such as the right to education, children's rights, women's rights, right to work, right to not be discriminated, etc. Because of the time limit, rights were often informed about, in a short manner. Apart from this, our analysis showed the recurring practice of presenting rights as obligations, differentiation towards refugees, and as acts of individual compassion. These themes will be presented in the following where empirical examples are given of when the representatives engage in presenting certain rights that according to them this group of refugees need to be informed about.

## Talking rights

### *Rights through differentiation*

The first example is from a meeting during a COP that was held in Dadaab. The officials Rebecca and Sophie (not their actual names) are speaking to a group of girls between the ages 13 and 18 about various facilities and opportunities they will have in Sweden. The session is divided between boys and girls in order for the groups to be able to discuss specific issues and ask questions that they may not want to ask in gender mixed groups.

*Rebecca: I understand that maybe girls from Somalia, Kenya and other countries around here get married when they are quite young.*

*Farah: I don't want to get married. I want to continue my education.*

*Sophie: Yes!*

*Rebecca: Good!*

*Sophie: But when do most girls get married? About what age here in Kenya or Somalia?*

*Farah: When she receives her first period.*

*Rebecca: And when is that?*

*Amran: From 13*

*Sophie: Ehh, in Sweden you are not allowed to get married before you are 18.*

*Rebecca: It is a law against that so it means that you are not allowed to get married in Sweden.*

In this example, the agenda of Rebecca and Sophie is to let the girls know that in Sweden, one cannot get married before the age of 18. This information is based on the idea that the girls taking part in the COPs belong to a context where they are prone to be married at a young age. Rebecca first mentions how she has heard that girls get married early in Somalia and Kenya and then asks a rhetorical question when most girls get married. By doing this, she puts forward a generalised notion of several countries in the region as having this issue. What the two officials wish to convey is that being married off during childhood is not allowed in the new country.

While Rebecca puts forward the topic, she takes her time, reflecting on how to ask the question. The COPs are not more than 1½ days long, which means the officials had to give a lot of information in a short time. Often the information would be given through showing an image or just briefly informing the participants about something, but at times the officials engaged the participants in a conversation by asking questions. This usually happened when the topic was viewed as particularly important by the officials, which seems to be the case in this example. Furthermore, both Sophie and Rebecca's positive affirmations on the answers of the girls as well as the following questions in order to keep the conversation moving, also shows their engagement and enthusiasm for the topic.

A problematic aspect that is made apparent here is how, what seems to be a way of informing the girls about the law against child marriage, also leads to ignoring the voices and wishes of the girls themselves. Whereas Farah firmly tells the officials how education is important to her, she makes a claim for education when she promptly tells about her wish to attend school. In our understanding, Farah here makes a claim to the right to education. But what she also does is to show resistance towards the generalisation being done by the officials, who base the information provided on a preconceived idea of the girls' background. Farah's statement is, however, disregarded and ignored by Sophie and Rebecca who are more concerned with highlighting the differences between Sweden and the countries of Somalia and Kenya. What thus can be seen here is how talks regarding rights are conveyed through simultaneously causing and strengthening differentiation towards the girls but also almost turning the right to not getting married early into an obligation. We will come back to how talks regarding rights are ambivalent and sometimes brought up as obligations within COPs in a later example.

### *Rights as given through individual compassion*

The second example is from a COP session with a group of youths in Dadaab. Here, the official, Sophie introduces the topic of the law

against corporal punishment, another law that is manifested as a right the children will have in Sweden.

*Sophie: Eh, one thing that is very important for you to know is that in Sweden it's against the law to hit a child. That means in school, or at kindergarten or nursery school, the teacher can never hit a child. And, eh, that is also forbidden for parents as well. So no one, no one adult, no one grown up, can ever hit a child. What do you think about that?*

*(Pause)*

*Sophie: What do you think?*

*Asad: it's good.*

*Sophie: it's good. Yeah! (Smiles and nods while looking at Asad)*

*Rebecca: Is it the same here or is it different?*

*Asad: it's different.*

*Sophie: It's different.*

*Rebecca: What's the difference?*

*Amran: There, it's not allowed to beat a child, but here children are beaten by the teachers and parents.*

*Rebecca: oh!*

*Sophie: ok, yes that's a bit different then.*

*Rebecca: (Shakes her head) the teachers will never beat you in Sweden.*

This conversation is led by the agenda of the officials who invest effort in making the children realise the uniqueness of the law against corporal punishment. Rebecca's question 'is it the same here or is it different' introduces the idea of *difference*. When the children answer according to what the representatives are looking for the Rebecca and Sophie seals the topic off by confirming the difference. Again, just as we saw in the last example, the conversation is more or less led by the officials who introduce certain topics and ask leading questions in order to make the participants answer in certain ways.

The last sentence in the conversation where Rebecca, while shaking her head, tells the children how teachers in Sweden will never hit them, actualises the idea of having provided the group with information about something important but also something that will be new to the them, thus highlighting the future country as superior in terms of actualising the rights of children.

In these instances, the officials base their information on assumptions of what they think the young refugees need to know. Sophie does her very best to bring forward rights and values, which she see as specific for Sweden. But we also note in the examples that in the midst of this provision of information on rights – or 'handing over' information – the participants are positioned at the opposite end, as lacking rights. Furthermore, their voices and perspectives are not given room. As noted by Diana Mulinari (1996), when the notion of rights is exchanged to an idea of need, individual compassion

becomes the driving force and supersedes ambitions of listening. At an individual level, the point of departure for the officials is that this particular group, because of their background, is in need of these laws and rights. Handing over information practically becomes an act of kindness and generosity. This positions the officials on a giving end whereas the refugees are positioned at receiving end of rights instead of rights-bearers capable of rights claiming. At the same time what also becomes apparent is that the participants, in fact, refrain from participation. This can be seen in how Asad choose to respond briefly to Rebecca's questions. His way of answering through looking down and responding in a lower tone may be interpreted as not being willing to engage in any extensive conversation. Choosing not to answer or being brief is a frequent way for the participants to handle questions during the COPs (see further Muftee 2014).

What becomes clear in this example as well as the previous one is the particular kind of engagement and interest towards rights for women and children during the COPs. The officials would often highlight how the women's lives would dramatically change due to resettlement to Sweden and how important it was to talk about this and let them know the freedom they would gain. Similar tendencies have been shown in Jessica Jönsson's (2014) study of social workers' perspectives on social work practices with undocumented migrants. Jönsson highlights the tensions between human rights-inspired ethical principles for social work and social work practices with undocumented migrants. She shows how the social workers, in her study, made use of a victim discourse while talking about the women and children. While the men more often were perceived as criminals or individually responsible for their situation the women and children were to be helped. The perception bears on a kind of charitable work where human rights are formulated through a compassionate humanitarianism (Gündoğdu 2015: 78). But as we see this compassionate humanitarianism tends to silence the refugees. A way to resist in the COPs is, as we understand the above example, to disregard the negotiation in the first place.

### **Rights as obligations**

Whereas sometimes rights are presented by emphasizing differences and what the participants lack, there are other instances where rights are talked about in a way that make them into obligations. One idea that tends to be regarded in this way is the value of having right to freedom of one's own choice. The example presented is from a youth session during a COP in Khartoum where Susanne is just about to end her session. Before ending the session, she decides to say something that she finds very important for the group of girls to know.

*Susanne: We will soon end but I shall say, in the future you will make many decisions by your own. And I want you to know that you got the right to make your own decisions. Life in Sweden right now is not just about getting married and having children. It is, it is also important but it is important for you to get a good education and to get a life that you create by yourself.*

The way Susanne chose to end a whole session with this information shows how this is something that she finds particularly important to highlight. After leading the session in a rather light manner, her voice and face turn more serious. She also speaks slowly while looking at all the participants in the group as making sure that she is addressing everyone. The session in itself has revolved around information about

the Swedish education system and what kind of spare time activities youths in Sweden have. When Susanne decides to end the session, she highlights importance of the right to make your own choices. This becomes the take-home message for the entire session.

Susanne wants the girls to understand that in Sweden they will have the right to make their own decisions. This right stems from the idea of individual freedom to lead a life based on their wishes. Again, as we have seen in previous examples this right is pitched against the girls' background that is assumed to revolve around strong expectations of getting married and having children. This, argues Susanne, is not what life in Sweden is about. More importantly, one should get an education and create a life of one's own. The right of choice is paradoxically made to contain the obligation of a good education and not 'only' getting married and having children. The right to create one's own life and make own decision is thus not entirely open. It is intertwined with ideas of what the girls need to change in terms of priorities as well as what the representative view as important. The example actualises the idea of the need to enlighten the group with what it means to live in Sweden. Here we see a resemblance with the idea of providing rights going hand in hand with cultivating and teaching how to make the best of the rights being granted. It very much highlights how rights are not simply universal, but instead tied to becoming a member of a community through cultural and social adaptation. What Susanne here does is to act 'norm entrepreneur' making use of the language of human rights (Epstein 2014).

## Discussion

In this article, we have shown how persons going through resettlement are informed about what it will mean to become a citizen in Sweden. Our examples illustrate that on the level of interactions, rights are indeed never talked about as straightforward but instead intermeshed in context in which they are brought up and made use of (Epstein 2014). Whereas rights form an important aim of the COPs we highlight how this information portray hierarchies between rights-provider and rights-receiver. Our empirical findings show how rights are talked about through differentiating them towards the COP participants, stemming from a pre-conceived idea that the participants do not know about these rights. Rights are also conveyed through a kind of engagement, which more or less positions the participants on a receiving end of the conversations, silencing the perspectives of those at the center of the programmes. Furthermore, rights are made into obligations, the obligation of realising the rights in specific ways.

Practices of COPs where rights are highlighted through individual compassion also results in presumably positioning the participants as being grateful, grateful for all that Sweden is providing them by choosing them, letting them into its community, and thereby enjoy human rights. In a way, resettlement can be viewed as a kind of compassionate humanitarianism (Gündoğdu 2015) where individual nation states by choice provide human rights to a group of refugees. This act of humanitarianism seems to trickle down to the COPs where the officials, manifest individual compassion through viewing the refugees as being in need of rights, and in various ways, engage in providing these rights.

The empirical examples presented in this study are from sessions that were held with youths. We have not aimed to compare how rights were presented to children, youth and adults. We do know that the officials were given general directions of presenting children and women's rights and our empirical examples shows that these rights were indeed highlighted for the young participants.

Both children as well as women's rights can be viewed as important hallmarks of the Swedish society and an important part of state policy (Towns 2002). Furthermore, according to Malkki (1995), within humanitarian refugee work, women and children are often made to represent the vulnerable refugee, the bare human. Nash argues that the cultural politics of human rights are about working for inclusion of the 'other', those who have previously not been viewed as fully human. Paradoxically, through practices such as COPs where rights are, as gesture of humanitarianism, being handed to the former refugees, the young COP participants are both being included but also positioned as 'Others'.

Although this particular study focuses on a local practice within resettlement, refugees are confronted with state officials within migration management in general. The delegations consisted of officials who work in various strands of migration and introduction processes in Sweden. Hence, talks about rights are likely to occur in many other kinds of encounters between refugees, other migrants and state officials. The findings of this study opens up for further research on how rights are talked about within state management of migration but also how refugees makes claims on their rights. How these talks are carried out provides us with important knowledge about what kind of power relations are manifested within migration processes. Rights are thought of as having a counter effect on violent management of migrants, they should protect, not only symbolically but also in practice.

The talks during the COPs manifest the clash between rights as universal and rights tied to citizenship. The COPs are used as platforms where Swedish citizenship is being presented in an ideal light. Moreover, the very talks are situated on a basis of providing rights to the refugees who are presumed as unaware of them, which resembles what Arendt highlighted, that refugees are presumed as having lost the position to make rights claims once they lose the protection of a nation-state. The platform of COPs is not designed to provide room for claims but rather information of rights. However, the participants do make claims, sometimes as means to question the information or the preconceived ideas being the basis for the information. Information based on the idea of refugees as unaware seem to turn COPs into platforms where the officials highlight rights as a goodwill gesture rather than recognising the importance for the participants to actually be heard and claim their rights.

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## Notes

1. Resettlement is the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another state that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent settlement.
2. The translation of the title comes from the Swedish Research Council ([www.vr.se](http://www.vr.se)).

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