Institutional Childhood: Negotiating Identities Post-Orphanage in Kazakhstan

by

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Spring 2019

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Title:	**Institutional Childhood: Negotiating Identities Post-Orphanage in Kazakhstan**

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Date Defended/Approved: April 8, 2019

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Abstract

This ethnography is based on 28 interviews with orphanage graduates, orphanage staff, volunteers, NGOs and adoptive parents conducted in February, 2018 in Almaty and Taraz, Kazakhstan. Former President Nazarbayev's call for deinstitutionalization of orphanages following a similar program in Russia, put orphans and orphanages under the spotlight. However, the increasing number of discussions and public activism around deinstitutionalization of orphanages in Kazakhstan does not adequately address the issues faced by orphanage graduates. Specifically, public discourse still stigmatizes orphans and orphanage graduates as indicated by low adoption rates, and high adoptee return rates. I employ Michel Foucault's (1975) productivity of power, and Erving Goffman's (1963) stigma to discuss the effects of institutional childhood and the ways orphanage graduates make sense of their experiences during and post-institutionalization. I argue against criminalizing and victimizing narratives of orphanhood in Kazakhstan, and instead suggest that orphanage graduates can employ strategies to negotiate their identities, and exercise agency in navigating their institutional and post-institutional lives.

Keywords: orphanage; Kazakhstan; institutional childhood; identity; stigma; shame

To my great-grandma Kamka for making the best *blini* and

rescuing me from caterpillars

Acknowledgements

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Glossary

domashnik	A domestic child, or a child living with her family at home.
Dom Mamy	Mother's House, a housing and training program funded by local entrepreneurs. The program offers housing and training for single mothers who otherwise would have left their children for adoption.
Dom Sveta	Light House, a public fund that run a housing program for orphanage graduates in Almaty.
Dom Yunoshestva	DY, or Youth House in Russian is a housing facility for orphanage graduates attending educational institutions or working. Orphanage graduates can reside at DY until the age of 23.
ENT	*Edinoe Natsional'noe Testirovanie*, unified national testing is required for university admission. High school students take the test in their last year of school. Admission and scholarships are dependent on the individual's scores. The test consists of five subjects: math, history of Kazakhstan, Kazakh language, Russian language, and an elective subject. The elective subject depends on the discipline an individual wants to pursue in university.
J127 Ranch	A housing and training program organized by Caring Hearts charity foundation in Taraz, Kazakhstan. The foundation is sponsored by American adoptive and Christian families, and individuals.
Komitet po Okhrane Prav Detei	Committee of Child Protection, is part of the Ministry of Education
raspredelitel'	A diagnostic center where children are examined to transfer to an appropriate orphanage.
Zhastar Uyi	Youth House in Kazakh is a housing facility for orphanage graduates over 23 years old. Most orphanage graduating residing there do not have housing or are on the waiting list for the government funded apartments.
ZAGS	Civil Registry Office
ZPR	*Zaderzhka psihicheskogo razvitiya* or mild intellectual (mental) disability.

Introduction

My interest in the experiences of orphanage graduates began with a conversation with my acquaintances, graduates of an orphanage in my hometown of Almaty. We sat on an itchy Soviet carpet with faded flower pattern discussing a comment made by a Kazakhstani lawmaker, where she called orphans "freaks". "Are we freaks?" asked one of the graduates nonchalantly. "No, it depends on how you see yourself," said the other one. Later some commentators said that lawmaker might have referred to parents who abandoned their children. Yet, I was struck by the lenient response of my acquaintance and the way that the media grabbed on the "freaks" comment with a dramatic flair. This instance points at complex ways orphanage graduates negotiate their identities, resisting victimizing and at times criminalizing views of the general public.

This ethnographic research focuses on ways orphanage graduates negotiate their identities in their everyday life in Kazakhstan. Currently the available body of research about orphans and orphanage graduates does not address the ways effects of institutional childhood manifest in adulthood, and the ways orphanage graduates themselves make sense of their experiences. In this research, I draw on the fieldwork I conducted in Almaty and Taraz in February and March of 2018, asking how growing up in an institutional environment affects orphanage graduates, and how they make sense of their experiences.

Two things in particular were the starting point for this ethnographic research– the government's move towards deinstitutionalization, and as mentioned earlier, personal encounters with orphanage graduates who helped me consider their experiences in an unexpected light. The increasing number of discussions and public activism[1] around deinstitutionalization in Kazakhstan does not adequately address the issues faced by orphanage graduates. In addition, there is no ethnographic research on the experiences of orphanage graduates in Kazakhstan. Most of the research available discusses the experiences of orphanage graduates in Russia (Disney, 2013; Kozlova,

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[1] There is growing support network for adoptive parents or foster families on the social media, as well as through communication channels such as WhatsApp messaging groups.

2013; Kulmala, et al. 2017;). However, there are important distinctions between the experiences of Russian and Kazakhstani orphanage graduates. This research does not aim to compare the Russian and Kazakhstani case here, but it suffices to say that Kazakhstan has significantly less (local and foreign) NGO support, and more undeveloped state programs. At the same time, research about orphans in Kazakhstan tackles issues of nutrition and health among children in orphanages (Hearst, et al. 2014; Turgambayeva, et al. 2015), social services for children and policy (An, 2014), and child abuse and protection mechanisms (Gherghe and Mussagaliyeva, 2014).

Kazakhstan Bez Sirot (Kazakhstan without Orphans), the joint project of Protection of Children's Rights in Kazakhstan, and *Dobrovol'noe Obshestvo Miloserdie*[2] foundation, points to the discrimination orphanage graduates face in public spheres, and the need for a center for post-institutional support. The experience of living in a highly-regulated environment followed by the lack of support services for graduates does not prepare an individual for life outside the orphanage. At the same time, the research participants who lived through institutional childhood, and are not institutionalized anymore, gave valuable insight regarding their experiences both in the orphanage and outside the orphanage.

Background: orphanage system in Kazakhstan

The orphanage system in Kazakhstan operates at the intersection of its Soviet bureaucratic legacy, state's current deinstitutionalization efforts, and its awkward attempts to follow Western practices of childcare, forming a bricolage of practices, experiences and challenges unique to its Central Asian context. The orphanage system in Kazakhstan originated in the USSR, after the reforms made to deal with a growing number of homeless children in the beginning of the 20th century. After the collectivization in the 1930s and the World War II, there was a growing number of orphaned and homeless children in Kazakh SSR. According to the 2017 *Doklad o Polozhenii Detei v Respublike Kazakhstan* (Report on the Status of Children in the Republic of Kazakhstan or *Doklad* for short) published by the *Komitet po Okhrane Prav Detei* (Children Rights Protection Committee), since the fall of the Soviet Union, one hundred thousand orphans and children without parental care were registered in

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[2] Voluntary Society Grace

Kazakhstan. The report attributed the decreasing number of orphans and children without parental care to the state's deinstitutionalizing efforts. Since then, the number of reported orphans and children without parental care decreased (by 3.6 time). The committee reports, "На начало 4 квартала 2017 года в Казахстане зарегистрировано 27 274 детей, оставшихся без попечения родителей, что составляет 49 человек на 100 тыс. детского населения в возрасте 0-17 лет"[3] (Doklad o Polozhenii Detei v RK, 2017, 85).

There are 132 institutions for orphans and children without parental care in Kazakhstan (the number is decreasing annually as a result of deinstitutionalization efforts of the state). The number of children in the institutional care, according to the 2017 report from the Komittet po Okhrane Prav Detei, makes 6223 children. The report noted that the number of children in the institutional care is higher than in the neighboring countries. There are the following types of institutions in Kazakhstan catering to orphans and children without parental care: orphanages, orphanages for children with disabilities, orphanages for infants, family style orphanages, family-based orphanages[4], orphanages with boarding and vocational schools, center for adaptation of underage individuals, etc. In institutions children are grouped by age. In family style or family-based orphanages, children are not grouped by age. Some orphanages have schools and vocational schools on the premises. In other orphanages, children attend regular public schools. Children graduate from the orphanage when they reach the age of majority, which is 18 in Kazakhstan. However, a number of orphans graduate earlier since they do not finish high school, and instead enroll in litsei, vocational school or kolledzh, community college. According to research participants, caregivers and teachers encourage early graduation, and do not provide adequate support to children who want to get into a university instead. This could be attributed to the move towards deinstitutionalization, and the need to decrease the number of children in the state care.

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[3] "As of the 4th quarter of 2017, there were 27, 274 children without parental care (including orphans) registered in Kazakhstan. This makes 49 children out of 100, 000 children in the country aged between 0-17."

[4] A family style orphanage is organized to resemble a family unit. The same caregiver works with a group of children throughout the years. In contrast, a family based orphanage involves a professional foster parents who take care of children. Professional foster parents live with the children, while a caregiver works set hours and leaves afterwards.

In Almaty, individuals who graduate from the orphanage can move to the *Dom Yunoshestva* (DY, or Youth House in Russian), a dorm-style housing to live there till the age of 23. During their residence at DY, orphanage graduates have to maintain employment or be enrolled full time at a vocational school, community college or university. At the DY, orphanage graduates follow a curfew, and have caregivers on the premises at all hours. In contrast to the orphanage, at the DY, orphanage graduates live in private rooms, and share the remaining facilities. Upon graduation, they have to enroll in the government funded housing program. After receiving an apartment, orphanage graduates are required to move out of the DY. In case they do not receive an apartment by the age of 23, they can move to *Zhastar Uyi* (can be translated as Youth House from Kazakh) located on the DY grounds. *Zhastar Uyi* offers micro-studio apartments, and requires rental payments.

In Kazakhstan, the majority of the orphans fall under the category of social orphans. According to *Doklad* there has been an increase in the work of social services directed at minimizing social orphanhood in the country. However, Sholpan Baibolova (2013), a Kazakhstani activist argues that despite these official claims there is no substantial work conducted to effectively address social orphanhood. Baibolova identified the following issues behind social orphanhood in Kazakhstan: family dysfunctions, issues in the legal system and social policies, and the low level of social infrastructure involved in preventative measures of social orphanhood. Since the majority of orphans in Kazakhstan are social orphans, the public perception of these individuals is based mostly on the micro level issues that lead to their institutionalization. As noted by Baibolova, these micro level issue refer to family dysfunctions, in some situations involving substance abuse. However, personal challenges preventing mothers from taking care of their children are not the only reason why children are removed from parental care. Yet, this individual level explanation of social orphanhood is the most damaging for the orphans as they face discrimination and stigmatization both in the institution and after graduation. I explore stigmatization and its connection to parents, mostly mothers in the second chapter of the thesis. On a macro level, as noted by Baibolova, parents, mostly mothers do not receive support to take care of their children, or, in fact, are encouraged to give up their children. One of the examples of this would be for children born with disabilities. Hospital staff encourages mothers to leave the newborn born with disabilities at the hospital mostly because of the stigma. Baibolova

argues for a holistic approach towards deinstitutionalization that involves gatekeeping mechanisms directed at saving and maintaining families. Keeping a child, according to Baibolova, in her own family should be the priority of deinstitutionalization efforts of the state.

According to the *Doklad* state allocates around 6 billion KZT (21 million CAD) for deinstitutionalization, which includes providing financial support for adoptive and foster families. The report focuses on the positive outcome of the state's deinstitutionalization efforts, and discusses and increasing number of adoptions, social work with families at risk, and adaptation of children without parental care. Sholpan Baibolova, a local activist attributed the decreasing number of children in the state care to gatekeeping programs that are not funded by the state. Baibolova gave an example of the *Dom Mamy* [5](Mother's House), an initiative organized and funded by local entrepreneurs. The report also fails to address the discrepancies between the outlined successes of deinstitutionalization and the actual experiences of orphans and orphanage graduates. Moreover, the report does not acknowledge the discriminatory view of orphans and orphanage graduates that persists in Kazakhstani society. In turn, in this ethnographic research I focus on orphanage graduates themselves to address how these individuals negotiate their identities and experiences in spite, and alongside discriminatory circumstances of institutional and post-institutional life.

Methodology: epistemological rationale

Taking the experiences of orphanage graduates as the focal point of the research and my interaction with research participants was informed by feminist anthropological inquiry. Gayle Letherby in *Feminist Research in Theory and Practice* (2003) identifies feminist methodology as a framework where a researcher evaluates methods (tools) used in production of knowledge. She sees methodological reflection as "an epistemological act" (Letherby, 2003, 5). Beverly Skeggs (2001) notes that ethnography shows various ways in which historical categories produce subjects.

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[5] *Dom Mamy* offers housing and support to young mothers in difficult situations. According to Baibolova, the workers arrive to the hospital to talk to young mothers who want to put their children to an orphanage because they are not supported by their families, or cannot afford taking care of the child. In many cases, young mothers move to *Dom Mamy*, where they are offered housing, support with child care and training for subsequent employment.

Feminism (feminisms) then, according to Skeggs (2001), is affected by various political positions in relation to gender inequality. Then, in combination, the two – feminism and ethnography – call for political change through giving voice to the oppressed.

At the same time, feminist ethnography does not claim to give the full story. Although as Kamala Visweswaran in *Fiction of Feminist Ethnography* (1994) acutely notes ethnography is perceived as "factual" in contrast to "believable" world of fiction, we cannot claim a complete re-telling of a world or lives (1). What ethnography offers, then, is detached from the world we research (ibid). It is the researcher's responsibility before the research participant to exercise self-reflexivity. Lorraine Nencel (2016) states that "[r]eflexivity is both epistemological – how we should learn about knowledge, as well as methodological – how we should do research to obtain this knowledge" (76). For Nencel (2016), the product of ethnographic work is "the outcome of the embodied, lived experience of fieldwork" (76). A researcher cannot divorce herself from the ethnographic fieldwork and the subsequent analysis and writing up.

The move towards feminist ethnography is not accidental. The research (about orphans) cited above (Hearst, et al. 2014) (Turgambayeva, et al. 2015) (An, 2014) (Gherghe and Mussagaliyeva, 2014) is divorced from the everyday lived experiences of the research participants. It does not mean the research is invalid. But it does not consider their own perception of their experiences. Saba Mahmood (2001) in writing about the interplay between religion and feminism uncovers the biases of feminist inquiry as she brings the research participants (Egyptian women practicing Islam) at the forefront of her research to decolonize the knowledge production. Alexei Yurchak (2006) takes Mahmood's theoretical framework to talk about Soviet socialism as it was experienced by Soviet people in their everyday lives. In doing so, Yurchak (2006) takes the research out of the Western antagonism and perception of Soviet Union as simply bad and oppressive. Similar to Mahmood (2001), Yurchak (2006), and many others, I take this framework to reconsider the experiences of orphanage graduates. Here, I attempt to consider their experiences beyond the limitation of the institutional childhood, and rather look at the ways orphanage graduates navigate their way and experience their everyday lives inside and outs the institutional walls. My hope is to present an ethnography that, first and foremost, was informed by the research participants themselves. At the same time, I cannot claim to be outside of this research. Nencel reminds us to reflect on one's position in research. I'm very much present in this

ethnography, and I reflect on the way my positionality is present in the research, as well as how this research affected me on a personal and professional level.

Methodology: logistics

I arrived in Almaty at the end of January of 2018. My hometown greeted me with 28 C degrees below zero, piles of solidified snow, and icicles threatening to fall from the roofs. I started the recruitment in the beginning of February right after receiving the approval of my ethics application. I contacted potential research participants I knew personally from a local church group. Most of them agreed to talk to me and tell their acquaintances about my research. In this period, I interviewed 28 individuals, including orphanage graduates, orphanage administration and staff, local activists, adoptive parents, and volunteers. 20 of the research participants were orphanage graduates, and the remaining 8 were people working with orphans, adoptive parents, foster parents, and volunteers.

The orphanage graduates I interviewed can be divided into two groups. The first group consists of individuals in their early to mid-thirties. They were institutionalized in the early 1990s up to early 2000s. The second group contains individuals in their early 20s (approximately) who have recently graduated from the orphanage. As a result, the period of their institutionalization occurred in the early 2000s and later. The main difference between these two groups in terms of their experiences of institutionalization are the difficulties and concerns they had while at the orphanage. For instance, research participants in the first group attributed their main concerns to the lack of food, clothes and safety. Participants mentioned incidents of abuse from caregivers and older children consistently. In contrast, research participants in the second group stated having all their basic necessities met, as well as having extra things in a form of gifts from sponsors. The second group also reported a lower number of incidents of abuse and concerns over their safety. They attributed this to having officials from the Ministry of Education visiting and telling them about phone numbers they could use to report abuse or mistreatment. Throughout the thesis, I do not refer to these two groups specifically. However, it is worth noting that there are differences in the experiences of orphanage graduates that are not only individual, but also systemic. In many ways, the experience of orphanage graduates reflects historical changes in the orphanage system in Kazakhstan.

I conducted most of my interviews with research participants in local coffee shops. Some of the research participants opted to meet either at their homes, offices or at a church building, etc. The weather did not allow for walks in the city that I initially planned. In Taraz, I conducted half of the interviews (along with observations) at the J127 Ranch[6] office, and the rest of the interviews at a local café.

I was initially wary of conducting interviews at coffee shops, because these places are generally crowded and noisy. I was concerned that considering the subject of the interviews, the research participants would not feel comfortable sharing their stories in these public spaces. However, possibly because the coffee shops were crowded, and noisy, the research participants were comfortable sharing their stories, and did not seem concerned. At the same time, in comparison to one interview I conducted at home of the research participant, interviews in coffee shops or offices were more structured, and we stayed on the subject at hand. Almost all participants asked me if I wanted to know anything else or clarify, and were generally eager to help with the research. A number of the research participants offered their case files (I discuss case files in Chapter 2) if it helped the research.

Throughout the fieldwork, I maintained digital voice recordings of interviews and a field journal. I took notes before and after interviews when time permitted. I also took photographs of some of the locations. I did not feel comfortable asking for photos of the research participants, as some were initially wary of the interviews because they thought they would be video recorded.

Why orphanage graduates?

For an English-speaking reader, the term "orphanage graduates" might sound strange. When I was writing my proposal for this research, I translated *vypusknik detskogo doma* as orphanage graduate, and it made complete sense in my head. However, the strangeness of the term was pointed out to me later on by an English-speaking friend and a research participant. Victoria, an American head of an NGO in Taraz, said that she did not understand why it was called graduation from the

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[6] A residential program that houses children and single mothers providing women with work and training

orphanage. She stated that aging out was more appropriate, because graduation implied certain achievement (academic or otherwise). For some time, I was thinking of changing it to something else, but then decided against it. For one, throughout the thesis I stick to the original terms in Kazakh and Russian. Since in Kazakhstan orphans who age out of the orphanage are called *vypusknik detskogo doma,* I decided to keep it as is. But also, the term reflects something peculiar to orphanage system in Kazakhstan, and other Post-Soviet countries – its connection to education. To put it better, the orphanage system is closely tied with the education system, in that the rhetoric behind orphanages reflects its Soviet pedagogical roots and current nationalist imaginings. It becomes an effort to produce a specific type of Kazakhstanis. During one of the earlier interviews, a research participant referred to orphanage graduates as state children to probably reflect the responsibility of the state in taking care of the children. I could not help but think how possessive it sounded.

Research question(s)

My research inquiry was guided by two principal questions:

1. How do orphanage graduates negotiated their identities during and post-institutionalization?

2. How do orphanage graduates resist the dominant narrative of orphanage experience that perpetuate the public imagination through media and official channels?

The interview questions were written with these principal questions in mind (Appendix A). However, I was open to following the lead of the research participants during the interviews, instead of following the exact interview questions (Appendix A). The final chapter of the thesis on mentors was not initially part of my questions, but emerged throughout the interviews. Throughout the first few interviews I noticed that not following the interview questions (and even not having a piece of paper with questions on the table) contributed to a more relaxed and informal conversation.

Theoretical framework

My thinking about the interplay between identity (production) and institutionalization were propelled by Michel Foucault's **Discipline and Punish** (1975)

and Erving Goffman's **Asylums** (1961) and **Stigma** (1963). Specifically, I look at Goffman's idea of performativity of the self, and Foucault's productivity of power in relation to institutions. I suggest that orphanage graduates employ different ways of negotiating their identities both at the orphanage and outside the orphanage. At the same time, negotiation of the self does not undermine the limitation of the institution. In fact, I recognize the limitations imposed on the individuals during and after their institutionalization. Yet, as Foucault suggests, the productive capacity of power implies that individuals result from the technologies of power. Ian Hacking (2004) notes that in Foucault power is not static, it affects and it is affected in turn. This becomes evident in the first chapter of the thesis on role of case files. The case file as a technology of writing does not only make individuals known, but also prescribes a particular subjectivity, in this case of orphans. In the following chapter, through Goffman's (1963) work on stigmatized individuals, and Elspeth Probyn's (2005) **Blush** I look at the way orphanage graduates experienced shame and stigma both during institutionalization and after. In particular, I discuss how orphanage graduates make sense of their experiences of shame and stigma, and most interestingly what potential these experiences offer. I propose that through these experiences there is an opportunity for distigmatization. In the final chapter, I explore the dynamic relationship orphanage graduates had with mentors. Contrary to the existing research on mentorship and sponsorship of orphans, the experiences of research participants suggested that the power dynamic in the relationship shifts, and can be ambivalent. Vulnerability is experienced not only by orphans and orphanage graduates, but also by some mentors. The chapter investigates the reciprocal nature of the relationship, and the ways it affects both the mentor and the mentee. Throughout all three chapters, I aim to take my inquiry beyond criminalizing and victimizing discourses employed when talking about orphans and orphanage graduates. This allows me to see small instances of resistance, where my research participants exercise their agency even in constraining situations.

One of my favorite stories illustrating resistance and agency was told by a number of research participants who were in the orphanage[7] at different times. Since the copies of the casefiles containing the information about the orphans were often stored in the caregiver's desk, orphans would often sneak in to read the files. Gani, one of the

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[7] These research participants were also at different orphanages.

research participants recalled gleefully sneaking in the caregiver's room with his fellow groupmates to read the files while the staff members were at the meeting. According to Gani, they would have one person watching out for the teachers and caregivers to return, while others read their files. I discuss this example in more detail later, but it suffices to say that this was one of the ways orphans were able to resist control (i.e. finding ways to avoid following the rules without being caught) and exercise agency (i.e. organizing to read their own casefiles).

Challenges

As a beginner researcher, I found this process challenging for a number of reasons. One of the reasons for choosing this research area was the lack of available academic works specific to orphans and orphanage graduates in Kazakhstan. Throughout the thesis, I make anecdotal references to certain background information or experiences precisely because of the lack of research. Since my fieldwork was time limited, I was concerned with recruiting enough research participants. But in fact, there were more potential research participants willing to be interviewed than I could physically accommodate. At the same time, out of 28 interviews I conducted, I could not use all of them in this thesis. There are stories left unpacked, and I hope to address them in some other form later on. In focusing my research on the experiences of individuals it was challenging not to isolate their stories. Similar to Erving Goffman, who was criticized for his micro-sociological approach, I was concerned relating my research focused on the experiences of individuals to a larger Kazakhstan's socio-cultural and political landscape, and existing academic research without generalizations.

On a personal level, I was concerned with remaining reflexive of my positionality as an outsider with no experience of institutionalization, and of finding my voice amidst existing theories and narratives of the research participants. My hope is that the readers see the stories for what they are – stories of individuals who lived through institutional childhoods, which were at times abusive and traumatic. These are stories of people who were able to create space for themselves outside the institutional walls, exercise agency in constraining circumstances, and negotiate identities that were not limited to being orphans.

Chapter 1.

The role of the casefile: State children

«Я родился в Байконуре, где испытывали военную технику. Ну радиация, ну всякая. Соответственно, я какую-то неделю рос с мамой, потому что по документам я увидел, «я отказываюсь от ребенка потому, что он себя плохо ведет». Соответственно, ты видишь эту проблему, и ты получаешь рану, ты видишь ее отношение. (…) видимо не совладая со мной, из-за того, что ты не знаешь, что делать, или она просто хотела избавиться… хотела быть свободной, (…) Да, не готова к ответственности, да. От некоторых отказываются потому, что он незаконнорожденный. Я нес в себе что не было выбора [у матери]»

Илья Сорокин

«I was born in Baikonur, where the military machinery was tested. So, radiation and all. Consequently, I have spent a week with my mother, because I could see it from the documents. "I'm giving up the child because he does not behave" Consequently, you see the problem, you get a wound, you see her attitude. (…) It seems, she was not able to deal with me, because you [her] do not know what to do. Or she just wanted to get rid of me …wanted to be free. (…) Yes, she was not ready for the responsibility, yes. Some are abandoned, because they are born illegitimate. I carried within me her lack of choice. »

Ilya Sorokin

I met with Ilya, an IT specialist in his early 30s in a lively café in Almaty on a rare sunny February morning. We knew each other from a local church group I visited before moving to Vancouver. While the café buzzed with the busy chatter of the weekend crowd enjoying their breakfast, Ilya sat concentrating on the black voice recorder on top of the napkin holder. The cappuccino he ordered grew cold, and remained untouched. His concentration wavered for a moment, as he recalled reading his case file. "Соответственно, ты видишь эту проблему, и ты получаешь рану, ты видишь ее отношение," Ilya says in an even tone. "Я нес в себе что не было выбора [у матери],"[8] he continues. He refers to the knowledge of his abandonment as an embodied experience. From the casefile, Ilya deduced that his parents were not married, and he

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[8] "Consequently, you see the problem, you get a wound, you see her attitude. (…) I carried within me her lack of choice."

assumed that that could be one of the reasons why he was left in the orphanage[9]. Ilya along with other interlocutors drew on the dry language of the casefile and the bare-bone facts and snippets written on their files and sometimes relayed by the caregivers to deduce certain truths about themselves. Their engagement with the casefile complicates its role, taking it from being a mere compilation of objectively collected data, to a folder that initiates an extensive network of relationships and affects.

In this chapter, I will be discussing the ways a casefile moves from its original purpose, counting, measuring and recording individuals, to take on a role of a technology of writing that enables a specific (dialectical) kind of network of relationship among orphans, the staff and administration of the orphanages, the state, parents, foster parents, adoptive parents, and laypeople. I will look at the way the casefile is employed by the staff of the orphanage. As a technology of writing, a casefile makes individuals known (Foucault 1995). For the orphanage system with (a number of) orphans in the care of the state, the need to count, to measure, and record every single child in her particularity and individuality is essential. Despite Soviet ideological emphasis on the *kollektiv* (collective or group consciousness), Oleg Kharkhordin (1999) through his Foucauldian reading of Soviet experiences, illustrates the ways individuality was perceived and molded to fit with the group. Kharkhordin's astute analysis of the Soviet socialist experience brings forward the individual who is recognized and scrutinized in her particularity as a member of the *kollektiv*. The Kazakhstani bureaucratic system in place, an inheritance from the Soviet Union, aims to efficiently record every single child describing her in a straightforward and somewhat indifferent (perceived as objective) language. However, the casefile becomes used in ways that it was not intended. Despite its language, the casefile illustrates the biases of the compilers, and is used to instill control through coercion and secrecy by the caregivers and the administration at the orphanages. In turn, orphans do not always subject themselves to control; they defy coercion, and dispel secrecy in their own ingenious ways.

Orphans engage with their casefiles on two levels: emotional and utilitarian. The emotional level refers to the way an individual makes connection between the casefile and her identity. For example, an emotional engagement with the casefile reflects the ways she deals with reading a letter on the voluntary termination of parental writes

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[9] I focus on stigma and silence the following chapter.

written by her biological mother, carefully included in the folder. In addition to the emotional level of engagement, orphanage graduates viewed their casefiles as a useful means of obtaining/ensuring certain rights and benefits. Orphanage graduates also displayed varying degrees of acceptance of their casefiles.

I am not necessarily interested in the question of truth in casefiles, but rather, similar to Katherine Verdery (2014), I focus on the ways the casefiles are produced and employed (used). But for orphanage graduates the factual accuracy of their casefiles was essential. Some research participants stated that they did not accept their casefiles as representative of who they were in the fullness of their personhood. In many ways, viewing a casefile as a technology of identity production is tempting. I do not want to dismiss this idea completely, but at the same time, I see identity production not as a linear occurrence or as an event. Here, I mean an identity resulting from the casefile compilation. Being identified as an orphan in the casefile does not make one an orphan with all the accompanying facets of this identity. In fact, I view identity production rather in the engagement with the casefile that takes place in various settings. Tova Höjdestrand (2009) in **Needed by Nobody: Homelessness and Humanness in Post-Socialist Russia** considers ways homeless people in Russian resist dehumanizing stigma of living on the streets of St. Petersburg despite being removed from "humanizing social contexts" (2). Here humanness becomes a key definer of normalcy or being normal. Similar to Höjdestrand's (2009) discussion of "reinterpretations and alternative meanings of humanness [that] are utilized to negotiate the status as *bomzh* [homeless]", I suggest that orphanhood, a failure at normalcy, cannot be reduced to a status bestowed on an individual by the casefile. An orphan is never just a child *sans* parents. The identity of an orphan means different things in different settings. I will attempt to unravel these relational networks in this chapter through the examination of the role of the casefile for an orphanage graduate.

The purpose of the casefile: utility

First, let's look at the casefile itself, and the intended purpose of this technology of writing. The casefile convention, a part of the Soviet institutional infrastructure, still remains in use in Kazakhstan to some extent. I cannot attest to the changes that have happened in ways casefiles are compiled today, because it would require an extensive archival research project of its own. For the sake of this chapter, I suggest viewing a

casefile of an orphan as a technology of writing that came from a totalitarian regime and is used today to account for a large number of children in state care. In Höjdestrand's (2009) analysis of the role of *propiska*, city registration in relation homelessness in Russia, she suggests that lack of registration in some cases excludes individuals from social interactions and settings, and essentially stripping them off humanness. I find the discussion of humanness in relation to homelessness in Höjdestrand (2009) relevant to identities branded abnormal through material means like registration and case files for orphans and orphanage graduates. Contrary to homeless, where a technology of writing excludes individuals from a group that benefits from social services, in case of orphans and orphanage graduates, the casefile becomes the means of inclusion into a category. Although this inclusion ensures certain rights for orphans, it also fixes individuals in specific geographic places. An example of that could be an orphan's registration via the orphanage. An individual who was born and grew up in Almaty, but whose orphanage is registered outside the city, is only eligible for housing in a different municipality. For an orphanage graduate it means an inconvenient relocation to a different city, that was never part of her life before. A casefile as a part of surveillance technology does not just account for individuals, but it also displaces them.

An average casefile folder can contain the child's birth certificate, diagnosis, and medical documentation if applicable, information about parents from *ZAGS* (Civil Registry Office), the orphanage admission decision from the Department of Education, the orphanage admission letter, benefits documentation, housing application (for apartment), host family[10] documentation, etc. As Nazym, a social worker mentioned, the casefiles are updated when changes to the child's status occur. For example, as some of the research participants noted, the housing application for a "free" apartment[11] needed to be renewed annually. A letter from the mother, where she renounced her parental rights was also included in some cases. If the child was a foundling, then there was no letter. Ilya remembered his mother's letter well. In the letter, according to him,

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[10] A host family is a family that visits a child at the orphanage and takes her home for visitations for short periods of time.

[11] Since 2013, Kazakhstani orphanage graduates received a priority on the waitlist for government housing. Although some research participants referred to the housing as "free", it technically is a rental housing. This type of housing is offered under reduced rate, with a possibility of buying out the apartment in the future. Unfortunately, there is not enough available housing. In addition, in Almaty newly built subsidized apartments are located on the outskirts of the city with a poor infrastructure in place.

she wrote about her reasons for abandoning him. Similarly, other interviewees remembered reading the letter from their mothers that were written as a part of the termination of parental rights procedure. The letters were not addressed to the children in question, but rather they employed ambivalent language directed at the institutions.

A casefile is a mass-produced plastic folder containing printed and handwritten pages. I saw one when I interviewed a social worker, Nazym in her office located on the first floor of a cold wing of a specialized orphanage facility. When she handed me a folder, I reached gingerly, unsure if it was right for me to peek inside. Nazym said it was her job to keep the casefiles updated. I opened the folder to see a picture of a blond boy who was around 7 years old. As I looked at the casefile, Nazym continued, "Если мама умерла, я должна пособие по утере кормильца успеть оформить. Если не оформлю, это для меня минус, с моей зарплаты же удержат"[12]. For Nazym the casefile was her job, for the boy, it was non-existent. He did not know there was a folder containing information about him. Moreover, the information on the file was not available to the child. He would probably not know about the casefile until he graduated from the orphanage or is adopted. It contained pages with information that identified him in his particular individuality, but at the same time reduced a living child to biometrics and descriptors. In the casefile, he became what Michel Foucault referred to as a "describable, analyzable object" who was maintained in "his individual features, in his particular evolution, in his own aptitudes or abilities, under the gaze of a permanent corpus of knowledge" (190). The documents in the casefile also pointed to the network of relations he was part of, or was lacking, as well as his legal rights and entitlements. This included information about his parents, grandparents, and personal assets of his parents.

The intended purpose of the casefile is utilitarian. But even this utilitarian necessity to keep count of the children in state care is not devoid of a power tension. In **Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison**, Foucault (1995) traces the evolution of writing as a technology of power. Individuals, for Foucault, are known through examination, which enables them to be controlled. For instance, a database of the orphans in Kazakhstan contains information on orphans available for adoption,

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[12] "If the mother dies, I need to make sure to apply for the assistance after the death of the breadwinner on time. If I don't apply, it is my fault, it will be deducted from my pay"

guardianship, custody or fosterage. A typical online file – compiled with the use of the casefile - includes a photograph of the child, date of birth, gender, color of eyes, hair, presence of siblings, any diagnosis or health issues, as well as a short description of the child's character. "She likes to play with toys" or "He is very active, can't sit still for a second. He loves attention from adults very much. Likes being held" (Kazakhstan Bez Sirot 2013). The database was created for the purposes of maintaining transparency in the orphanage administration. The need for such transparency is quoted by many potential adoptive parents, who note that orphanage administrations hide healthy children, and expect remuneration for aiding with adoption. Yet, this attempt to remedy corruption in the adoption system raises more issues and concerns related to privacy. Most importantly, the online database does not ensure that an eligible adoptive parent is able to adopt, become a guardian, get custody or foster a child she wants. Aigul, an orphanage graduate and an adoptive mother of Dimash talked about difficulties they faced in adopting their son. So, the availability of a casefile online does not ensure complete transparency, and orphans do get lost in the system, so that they cannot be adopted into a family. The casefile as a technology of writing engenders power-based relationships, and essentially, the casefile is not just a way to account for orphans in the state care. As a result, the casefile contributes to an extensive network of relationships and affects.

The role of the casefile: staff and administration

A child becomes an object of knowledge through different methods of knowledge production employed by the state officials and the orphanage administration and staff members. Here, I will look at two in particular: the gathering of information about a child through people and institutions, and examination. The first one has to do with the accumulation of previously (constructed) available knowledge about a child. Sveta, an 18-year-old university student points at the almost improvisational techniques the staff employs to gather information:

> Когда дети попадают в детский дом, о них мало что известно. У нас
> в медпункте есть медсестры, они, конечно, бегают по больницам.
> Там все узнают, откуда ребенок. (...) то, что они найдут, они пишут,
> а что не найдут, то со слов соседей, дальних родственников. То есть,
> дети могут до, допустим 16 лет, думать, что у него день рождения в

сентябре, а тут находятся родители, объявляются и говорят, а у тебя день рождения в апреле.[13]

The casefile, as Katherine Verdery (2014) notes becomes a "product of collective authorship, engaging the efforts of many operatives, including archivists" (55). In case of an orphan casefile, it is the nurses, social workers, teachers, caregivers, and other state officials. Goffman (1961) writes in **Asylums** (1961) that the existence of a casefile makes an individual "an entity about which a record can be built up – a copybook has been made ready for him to blot" (62). One becomes "anchored as an object for biography" (ibid). The individual has no say in what goes into the file, and has little to no effect on the compilation of the file. This gives the compilers authority to record an individual in a specific way, following a particular convention, that does not necessarily connect to her lived experience. I will return to the discussion of unreliability of the casefile data later in this chapter. In the meantime, it suffices to note that, as Verdery observed, the casefile with its "depersonalizing" voice "ha[s] a fragmenting effect on the person" and the person in question cannot recognize herself in the file (56). The only way, an individual had any effect on the casefile compilation was, first of all, during the examination, or as the research participants called it – *komissiya*.

The *komissiya* is the culmination of an extended period of covert observation of a child. Maya, a teaching assistant at an international childcare center in her early 30s, remembered the *komissiya* as an unremarkable event that nonetheless resulted in her transfer to a different orphanage and a diagnosis. Maya recalled:

> Четыре училки, какие-то левые женщины сидели. И они просто такие легкие вопросы задают, на которые ты особо не паришься. Как тебя зовут? Сколько тебе лет? Как твоя фамилия? Там, не знаю, там нарисуй солнышко? Нарисуй там радугу? Ну такие легкие, что бы проверить насколько ребенок...[14]

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[13] "When children end up at an orphanage, there is very little known about them. We have nurses at the infirmary, they certainly run to the hospitals. There they learn where the child is from. (…) The information they find, they include [in the casefile]. But what they don't find, they [write] from what neighbours or distant relatives say [about the child]. That means a child might think, say till he is 16, that his birthday is in September, and then his parents show up, and tell him, "your birthday is in April".

[14] "There were four teachers, some random women. And they ask these simple questions that you don't give much thought to. What's your name? How old are you? What's your last name? Or, say, can you draw the Sun? Can you draw a rainbow? Simple questions like these to check how bad the child is…"

In Maya's experience these innocent questions were a part of evaluation of the child's mental state and abilities. She recalled doing poorly in primary school as a result of an extended hospitalization, and a classroom teacher asking her to stay after class to work on her academic failings together. "Она говорила мне, допустим, напиши такое слово, солнышко, да? А я не могу написать, потому что меня там, раньше не учили этому. И она сидит, на меня смотрит как на (*постучала по столу*)[15]». Maya saw this event as the teacher evaluating her ability to learn, which essentially, sealed her transfer to a specialized orphanage for children with delays in mental development. In turn, Sveta, who was a recent orphanage graduate, remembered a psychologist being a part of the *komissiya*, "Там еще отдельно сидел психолог и понимала, то есть, человек с какими-то странностями, или человек обычный. Конечно, не знаю, как она это определяла.[16]" A child under scrutiny did not question those examining her. The komissiya held a power to examine that was both invisible and every present. At the same time, Sveta noted that the *ZPR*[17] diagnosis given to some children did not make sense. Sveta remembered a girl who lived at DY[18] and did not look like a person with the *ZPR* diagnosis. "Она так учится, как и я, свободно мыслит,[19]" said Sveta. Research participants viewed some of the transfers resulting from examination as groundless. Sveta explained it in terms of utilitarian needs. "Ну иногда они ставили (диагноз ЗПР) когда у нас переполнение было и им надо было отправить очень много человек в другой детский дом." [20]

In an everyday institutional setting a bureaucratic tool gains a new role. A casefile as a technology of power is no longer simply means for counting, recording and accounting for individuals in the state care. Through everyday engagements it becomes

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[15] "She would say, for example, write down the word "Sun". I couldn't write it, because I was not taught to write it before. And she would sit there and stare at me like I was [knocks on the wooden table] [dumb]"

[16] "There also was a psychologist who understood if a person was weird, or if the person was normal. I certainly, do not know how she determined that."

[17] *ZPR* or *Zaderzhka Psikhicheskogo Rasvitiya* can be translated as psychological developmental delay.

[18] DY or Dom Yuneshestva can be translated as youth house. It is a type of social housing for orphanage graduates. The graduates can live there until they reach the age of 23.

[19] "She studies like I do, and she thinks freely."

[20] "So, sometimes they diagnosed [children] when we had overcrowding at the orphanage, and they needed to transfer a lot of children to a different orphanage".

the means of asserting power to control. The control manifests itself in different ways[21], but here I want to consider coercion and punishment. In **Asylums**, Goffman (1995) aptly describes the ways staff at mental hospitals used information available about the inmates to control their actions by means of coercion. Goffman (1995) observes, "(…) biography attached to the documented identity can place clear limitations on the way in which an individual can elect to present himself (…)" (61). But it works only when an element of secrecy is involved. As Elias Canetti writes, "Secrecy, lies at the very core of power" (cited in Verdery 2014, 77). For Foucault (1995), the process involved in casefile writing means an individual became known to others, and I think it implies a certain level of vulnerability. Verdery (2014), too, hints at how vulnerable secrecy makes an individual feel in face of the Secret Police. In turn, the Secret Police takes advantage of one's feeling of vulnerability to assert control. Similarly, the orphanage staff having access to the file, and being able to contribute to the file, maintain a level of knowledge about a child that she herself does not have.

Sveta recalled with palpable indignation in her voice when a caregiver at the orphanage said her mother was a drug addict, when she had just returned from the mother's funeral. She fought the caregiver in frustration and anger, because for Sveta the caregiver discredited her mother without knowing her circumstances. Sveta, vexed and somewhat amused said:

> У меня, допустим, написали, что мама наркоманка, хотя она никогда не употребляла ничего такого. То есть, ей с 15 лет приходилось работать. Она мыла полы в подъездах у других людей, чтобы прокормить своих братьев и сестер. И, поэтому, забросила школу.[22]

Sveta was in contact with her mother through visitations, and she knew about her mother's circumstances. The caregiver calling her a daughter of a drug addict had a

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[21] Some of the research participants referred to the instances when the orphanage administration used the casefiles to get access to property and money an orphan had on her name. In these cases, the orphanage administration, allegedly, deceived newly graduate orphans to transfer their assets to the administration. But research participants did not delve into details, and I failed to follow up on these stories. Yet, I think it is worth mentioning to illustrate that in the eyes of orphanage graduates the administration holds a level of power than extends beyond a legal framework, and is clearly criminal in nature.

[22] "For instance, they wrote in my casefile that my mother was a drug addict, even if she had never used anything like that. She had to work when she was 15. She washed the floors in the halls of other people's apartment complexes to feed her brothers and sisters. And, that is why she dropped out of high school."

different effect than it would have had on a child who had never met her mother, and knew nothing about her. The caregiver holds certain valuable information about the child that the child wants to know about herself; this is when information stops being a benign piece of one's biography, and becomes a means of asserting power. Sveta also recalled the caregivers using information from casefiles to punish those who were acting out. Deniza, a hairstylist in her early 20s recalls, "когда они все это знают, они могут тебе открыто обзывая тебе сказать. Вот, твои родители алкаши, и ты тоже такая же![23]" A caregiver would call the child names, and say that nothing good would come out of her because her parents had these vices, essentially branding her as an addict, a criminal or simply incapable of anything. Here I do not want to go into a discussion about orphans internalizing these things, not because I do not think it is true, but rather, because I think there is more to internalization and, essentially, engaging with this piece of knowledge. I will return to the idea of identity production through a casefile in the later part of this chapter. In the meantime, I want to go back to the workings of coercion and punishment.

Orphanage graduate's engagement with the casefile

Such methods of coercion and punishment work for a limited period of time. When a child gains autonomy, and possibly knowledge of what is written about them in the casefile as well, she finds means of resisting the caregivers' attempts to exercise power. Here, I suggest looking at the ways orphans themselves employ their casefiles. First, I will discuss the ways orphans engage with the casefiles on an emotional level, and then, I will go into utilitarian level of involvement. I will conclude this section with a discussion of the varying degrees of acceptance of the casefile among orphanage graduates.

In the introduction to the chapter I referred to the ways orphans navigate this bureaucratic maze. In general, orphans do not get to read their casefiles until the graduation from the orphanage. Upon graduation, an individual receives her casefile to later deposit it in care of the *DY* administration. The casefiles can be picked up from the social worker's office. But, in many cases, as Nazym, a social worker said, the staff kept the casefiles in the orphanage and gave orphans copies only. She said, they often lost

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[23] "when they know all about you, they can openly insult you and throw these things at you. You parents are alcoholics, and you, too, are just like them!"

the original documents, and hence the social worker did not trust the graduates to keep their own documents safe. This points at the continuous infantilization of orphanage graduates. But what is more interesting here, in regards to the ways orphans engage with their casefiles, is how they find ways to access their documents. Gani (Ganz), a 19-year-old bookbinder student remembers sneaking in the teacher's drawers to read the casefiles:

> В детстве, когда учителя уходили на совещание, (…) у нас тоже как совет был. Кто-то следил за дверями, что бы учитель не пришла. Мы все это творили в 1 классе. (…) и вот свои документы так проверяли, у кого что, где родители (...) Потом меняется, кто стоит у двери идет смотрит свои документы, тот кто уже посмотрел идет и стоит на стороже[24].

Gani was not the only one to talk about sneaking in and reading casefiles when teachers were not watching. Raushan, an administrative assistant in her early 30s remembered sitting with her groupmates and reading each other's files. Her groupmates Aigul and Maya, too, remembered reading each other's casefiles and later making fun of each other. Maya said, they would tease a groupmate, because they read she was found in a garbage bin. For many, this instance of reading casefiles and learning what's written about their groupmates together became one of the moments of bonding. Many interlocutors recall gathering with their groupmates[25] with warm nostalgia. Albeit different from a *chaepitie*[26] (a tea party), this is still an occasion of a collective engagement. For children in the orphanages these occasions of sneaking in and reading their casefiles became adventures of a sort, tinged with strange discoveries about themselves. At the same time, tricking the caregivers while they were away at the meeting thinking the children were behaving allowed them to exert a certain level of autonomy through disobedience and naughtiness.

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[24] "When we were kids, teachers left for meetings, (…) and we, too, held like a council. Someone watched the doors, so that the teacher didn't bust us. We did all of this when we were in the 1st grade. (…) So, we checked out documents, who had what written, where the parents were (…) Then we switched, the one who was on the watch went to see her documents, and the one who read the documents went to watch the door"

[25] Groups at orphanages vary, but are generally are mixed-gender. Groups are organized by age, and consist of around 10 to 15 children.

[26] Interlocutors from different orphanages and different generations recall a *chayapitie* as their most memorable and favorite times of their childhoods. Some talked about doing it with their caregivers. Younger kids would eat their candy by themselves, but still consider it a tea party. As they got older, interlocutors remember gathering and sitting down together for tea and treats.

Among the compilation of various documents, interlocutors remember reading either about their parents or letters from their mothers renouncing parental rights. There were certainly varied responses charged with a range of emotions[27]. At the same time, their responses point at a reflexive approach taken by interlocutors in thinking about their childhood, the experience of abandonment, and most importantly, making sense of it for themselves. From all the interviews I conducted, I remember vividly two in particular: one was reflexive and measured, and the other was emotionally charged and vulnerable.

When I asked Ilya what he remembered about reading his file, he recalled the letter handwritten by his biological mother. According to Ilya, he had spent a week or so with his mother after his birth, and she gave him up writing that he was not behaving well. Ilya believes she gave him up because she was left by his biological father, and she had no choice. He says,

> Для меня это была рана, такая тяжелая. Но, я понимаю, что не было выбора. Я до сих принимаю, и отношусь к этому отказу положительно. Потому, что человек есть человек. И то, что в меня вложили, после 16-18 лет, это для меня сыграло большую роль. Доброта, забота об окружающих. Я готов их принять. Не важно, в каком, наверное, периоде они появятся в моей жизни.[28]

In many ways, Ilya, and other graduates who turned to religion, managed to reconcile with the fact of abandonment through faith. In Ilya's case his reconciliation was rooted, to some degree, in Protestant Christianity. Ilya remembered reading his mother's letter at the age of 19 with a less reflexive attitude, but he has grown to make peace with it. Zhenya, who worked as a professional foster mother at *Dom Sveta* (Light House), where Ilya and many others lived after graduation, remembered orphanage graduates taking out their anger on her. Zhenya said she felt they were projecting their anger – directed at their biological mothers - at her because she was their foster mother, a substitute, a stand-in person. Zhenya added, "Я поняла, что я смогу отношения со своими детьми

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[27] At the same time, it is important to consider the lack of responses, or the lack of elaboration on behalf of the interlocutors. I do not necessarily want to focus on the fact that they omitted information, but I rather prefer thinking about the information they chose to share. The shared information – on their reading of the casefile or any other experience – was, I felt, a carefully constructed narrative.

[28] "For me it was a heavy trauma. But, I understand that [she] had no choice. I, till this day, accept and view this choice positively. A human being is a human being. And all that was put in me after I turned 16- 18 years old played a huge role [in my attitude]. Kindness, taking care of others. I am ready to accept them. It does not matter at what stage in my life they appear."

наладить, только когда они свою биологическую маму простят[29]". She talked to them about their fathers, and social pressure the biological mothers might have faced in giving birth to them. Zhenya gave a different perspective on the fact of abandonment,

> Из-за того, что папа оказался слабым, и не смог быть мужчиной, и сделал гораздо меньше того, что мама для тебя сделала. Ты, если бы мама для тебя ничего не сделала, мы бы с тобой не говорили, тебя бы просто не было. Она бы просто пошла и сделала аборт, на любом сроке. [30]

She was pregnant at the time herself, and she struggled through the pregnancy, which she said the children could see. For Zhenya, this illustrated her point that a mother giving up a child did not mean it was easy, because pregnancy and labor took a lot from a woman. She told them, "Она тебя выносила и родила. И она написала письмо, пожалуйста, найдите для моего ребенка хороших родителей. И это не ее вина, что никого не нашли и, что ты застрял, что ты до 16 лет был в детском доме. "[31] Ilya who moved in with Zhenya and her husband Sasha to *Dom Sveta* (Light House) after graduation from the orphanage, embraced this view, and accepted the fact of abandonment in a productive light. It also made me think that it might have taken time for Ilya, and others, to reconcile and forgive their biological mothers. I wondered if it also has something to do with age, or possibly does not happen to some at all.

I met with Deniza on a warm midweek afternoon at a quiet small coffee shop in Almaty. She ordered a smoothie and sat across from me on a sofa that was too low for her. Her elbows were on the table, and shoulders drawn up to her ears, fingers fidgeting with a plastic straw. Her small fingernails were painted with a sparkling colorful nail polish. Her response, when I asked about the casefile, was very different from Ilya's. She said:

> Самое больное для меня это бумага – никакая бумага меня не обижала кроме одной – лежала отказная моей мамы. И когда я увидела срок отказа от времени моего рождения, я вообще была

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[29] "I realized, I would be able to establish good relationships with my children only when they forgive their biological mothers."

[30] "It is because your father was weak, could not act as a man, and did way less than your mother did for you. You, if your mother did not do anything for you, would not be talking with me right now. You would not exist. She would just get an abortion, at any time of gestation."

[31] "She bore you and gave birth to you. And, she wrote a letter, [saying] please, find good parents for my child. And, it is not her fault, you got stuck at the orphanage till you were 16 years old."

ошарашена. Вообще такой минимальный срок. Там три дня! Как можно за три дня отказаться от ребенка, я все еще не понимаю![32]

Abandonment seems to have a strong effect on Deniza's life, as she talks about her discomfort of being on her own, and the need to be around her partner as much as possible. In her wish to build meaningful relationships with her mentor, whom she calls *Mama*, and her partner, Kairzhan, Deniza allows herself to be vulnerable. She talks with raw openness about the fear of being alone, and the need to be with people with awareness of her own vulnerability. When I asked her about her mother, she said she was still hoping to find her. "Не хочу умереть не увидев свою маму[33]," she added with youthful fatalism in her voice. Fear of abandonment and the need to connect create a tangible tension that affects her relationships with others, as well as her view of herself. She realizes her heavy dependence on her partner, and until recently on *Mama*. When I asked her about Kairzhan, she said, "если бы у меня его не было, я бы, наверное, покончила жизнь"[34]. She grapples with her self-image, as she attempts to present herself as an independent young beautiful professional. Deniza mentioned surgeries she had to undergo for a facial deformity, but stated she was beautiful now. Physical attributes play an important role for Deniza. I attributed this to her profession as a hairdresser and her love of hair. Despite her wish to present herself as confident young professional woman, she struggles to reconcile this public self with her feelings vulnerability. I do not want to simplify her experience and reduce it to the casefile, but at the same time, her mother's letter in the casefile remains a tangible artefact of her abandonment. There is also a sense of limbo, where she finds herself unable to accept her circumstances and wishing to find answers, while at the same time building a fantasy of a relationship with her biological mother. Deniza's view of her biological mother, too, is ambivalent. As she recalls the letter, she says with indignation, "Хотя бы грудью бы покормила бы. У меня вообще в детстве была мечта, хоть бы меня покормили грудью, а меня вообще, чем кормили, я всегда так думала." The mention of nursing made me think about social expectations around mother's responsibility to nurture and nourish her child. This is not necessarily about love, or affection, but rather it has to do

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[32] "The most painful document for me – no other document hurt as much – was the letter from my mother. When I saw the date of the letter renouncing her rights from the date of my birth, I was shocked. It was such a short period of time! Three days! How can you abandon a child after three days, I do not understand?"

[33] "I do not want to die having never met my mother."

[34] "If I didn't have him, I would have probably killed myself".

with some innate, or what's perceived to be natural calling for a mother –breastfeeding her child. Yet, despite her palpable resentment, Deniza claims to have forgiven her mother. I do not aim to question her honesty, when she says she has forgiven her mother. I think, this is exactly the tension she is struggling to resolve.

Not everyone has an emotionally intense response to the casefile. Some of the interlocutors surprised me with their sobering candidness as they chose to focus on benefits, state care, and opportunities instead of abandonment. Sveta whom I asked about the most important document in the casefile, told me it was the *Reshenie Akimata* (City Hall Decree). She wrote:

> If you want to get any kind of benefits, as well as get an apartment. It means I can apply to any school with a scholarship, as well as take extracurricular classes outside the school [for free]. It is the most *useful* document. *Without it you are an ordinary orphan, and no one cares about you* (italics mine).

She views the case file documents in terms of their usefulness. She added that the remaining documents containing information about her parents were not useful to her. Sveta also noted that the information on the casefile about her parents was inaccurate. When she found her father, only the first name coincided with the information on the file. Her skepticism towards the casefile is heavily informed by her existing knowledge about her parents. Sveta, unlike Deniza, has met her mother, and knew of the circumstances that led to her institutionalization. This could have colored her emotional response. At the same time, Sveta gave off an impression of a pragmatic driven young woman, so her candidness, as I later came to realize, was to be expected.

Other interlocutors, too, alluded to the utilitarian nature of the casefile. However, the casefile would not be useful if there was no institutional system in place to enforce it. In Sveta's case, she would not be able to apply for an apartment if there was no such program in place to begin with. Moreover, the ability to utilize the casefile also involved her knowledge of such programs, and other opportunities created by the state. A good number of orphanage graduates did not know about their rights and the opportunities available to them. So, having those documents in itself cannot guarantee one's rights. In Taraz, the experiences of orphanage graduates differed from graduates in Almaty. Orphanage graduates lived in more precarious conditions than their counterparts in Almaty. The Almaty orphanage graduates, it seems, relied more on the state provisioned

programs and opportunities. By contrast, Taraz orphanage graduates either identified fewer state provisions available, were not informed about available programs, or fell victim to fraud from orphanage administration and staff members losing their documents and entitlements. Sergei, a 19-year-old student at a local community college told a story of a friend who was tricked by orphanage staff into giving up his savings upon graduation from the institution. This, according to Sergei, left him broke and unprepared for the life outside. Beth and Victoria, two Americans working with single mothers (most of whom are orphanage graduates) and orphans echo Sergei's sentiment. They, too, tell stories of orphans being tricked by people they grew to trust and depend on throughout their childhood. These stories point at a casefile being used against an orphan even after graduation.

I'm wary of implying that orphanage graduates take the casefile at face value. Engagement with the casefile does not imply complete acceptance of the information on the file. I'm more inclined to see their engagement with the casefile in terms of degrees of acceptance. Based on the ways the research participants talked about their relationship to the casefiles, I noticed at least three degrees of acceptance of the casefile on a factual level: 1) complete acceptance and internalization (in some instances); 2) partial or passive acceptance; and 3) denial of the factual accuracy of the casefile and its relation to the individual in question.

Complete acceptance and internalization of the casefile implies a certain level of self-victimization. An individual might explain her circumstances using the casefile. For example, an individual might embrace the narrative that portrays her parents as addicts, and engage in similar activities. It was also enabled by the staff who used the casefile to deliberately or not emotionally abuse orphans by repeatedly talking about the vices of the parents. In many cases, this happened in front of a group of people. If it was said in front of other orphans or staff members, one could no longer fantasize or present her parents in the positive light she wanted. As Goffman (1964) reminds us, the lack of control over the casefile minimizes the ways an orphan can present herself in front of others. In contrast, some might have chosen to use the narrative of the casefile (partially) as an illustration of their ability to overcome life circumstances. Sveta, who does not necessarily accept the casefile for some of its factual errors, uses the casefile to resist the common narrative of an orphan following the footsteps of her parents and their bad genes. She explains, "И поэтому, я объясняю что, вот смотрите какие у

меня родители и я. Моя мама не училась, мой папа тоже не учился. Как бы, не рисовали, не пели, не танцевали, не играли в футбол. (…) *А, я – совсем другое.*[35] ”

On the opposite side of the spectrum, some interlocutors did not accept their casefiles at all. Gani gave an interesting take on his casefile,

> Нация еще моя была уйгур. Я не знал правильно это или нет, моя нация это или нет. Из-за этого, я, то, что в документы было написано, я внимания не обращал потому, что не верил, что я уйгур. И просто поставил 5 звездочек, что б у меня вообще нации не было. Без нации короче я.[36]

Gani added later on that he did not believe the casefile contained true information. He said, “Если я даже своих родителей не знаю, я значит не знаю кто я по нации[37].” Gani disagreed with the information in the casefile, and, in fact, did something that went against Goffman's idea that inmates were limited in the ways they presented themselves because of their casefiles[38]. For Gani the casefile did not limit his making of the self. He did not ground himself in the written biography, but rather insisted on using stars to mark the omission of his nationality[39]. He chose absence, the non-existence, and lack of affiliation. As he sat across from me in a low armchair, a pop-song playing from the hidden speakers somewhere near the ceiling of the espresso house, he toyed with the idea of changing his last name. Everyone called him Gantz, he said. He liked his last name, but was thinking of changing it to something “American”. When I asked, what others thought of his lack of nationality, Gantz grinned and said that everyone found it peculiar. He added, he told people who asked about his nationality he was a foreigner. Gantz smiled a lot during the interview, his grin wide and uninhibited. He downed his cup

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[35] “And that is why I say, look at my parents, and look at me. My mother has never studied, not has my father. They kinda didn't draw, sing, dance, play soccer (…) As for me, *I am totally different thing*” (*italics mine*)

[36] “My nationality was [written down as] Uyghur. I did not know if it was right, or not, if it was my nationality or not. That is why I did not pay attention to what was written in the documents. I did not believe that I was an Uyghur. And I just put five stars instead, so that I didn't have a nationality. I basically don't have a nationality.”

[37] If I don't know my parents, it means I don't know what my nationality is.”

[38] But I should note that unlike Goffman's inmates, Gani was able to choose to ignore his nationality after graduation, when he was outside the institution.

[39] Gani also said he wanted to change his nationality to Kazakh, but could not do so because his parents were recorded as Uyghur. The reason why he chose to go for Kazakh, I think can be explained by the rise of nationalist sentiments in the country. Although one does not face outright discrimination or hostility, it is nonetheless easier to be a Kazakh, than anything else.

of already cold latte. We walked out of my favorite interview location together, closing the yellow doors of the espresso house behind us. On the icy asphalt, we faced each other for a brief moment, wished each other good luck, and said our goodbyes.

Last thoughts: in place of a conclusion

As I walked two blocks from the espresso house to my bus stop, trying to avoid the icy spears threatening to fall from the roofs of the buildings on my right, I kept thinking about Gantz and his reluctance to talk about his childhood memories, and reinvention of his self. The last thing I remembered was his infectious smile. I hoped it was a genuine one, because I felt the corners of my lips stretching upwards myself. I mentally crossed the interview off my list of interviews. It was the last one. At least, that's what I thought on that day. I had one more to come, a day before my scheduled flight that I did not take.

But now thinking about the interview with Gani, I can't help but remember the buzzing frustration and exhaustion under my skull from all the interviews. I also remember quite well an almost palpable tingling in my stomach after meeting each research participant. I was disoriented by the complexity of the experiences they kindly shared through words and gestures, omitting things at times and then throwing painful memories the next moment. Using a casefile was meant to be a first step into this experience. I did not mean it to explain the experience of growing up in an institutional environment in its entirety. Instead, I attempted to locate their experiences, and possibly ground them in a tangible artefact through the exploration of the casefile and the network of relationships it involves.

Echoing Katherine Verdery (2014), I asked what it meant to have a casefile written about you. I asked what it meant to be labeled an orphan. Seemingly straightforward questions yielded perplexing answers. Being identified as an orphan in documentation meant different things to different people. In this chapter, I looked at the way a casefile was constructed. I discussed different ways caregivers and orphanage administrations employed the casefile as a means of exerting power and control. At the same time, I looked at the ways orphanage graduates engaged with their files to negotiate their own identities. Sveta put it aptly when she said, "Сирота только по документам. А так у меня есть люди, которые мне всегда помогают, как родные. И

я не воспринимаю, что у меня нет никого, ни к кому не могу обратиться. [40]” Yet, Sveta's case, unfortunately, is not as common as I'd want it to be. She is a rare success story. But what I found profoundly valuable in her experience of orphanage childhood is a potential to negotiate one's identity, resist control, and adapt institutional programs and opportunities for her own benefit. Growing up in a total institution[41] could yield productive results. An individual can exert her own reading of the casefile, and produce an identity either based on the file or completely different from the file. Verdery (2014) talked about being an individual with a casefile on her name. Verdery (2014) turned the coercive technology of writing into an ethnography, and showed what it is like to be known, what it does to an individual and how an individual works through the knowledge produced about her by the state.

But an orphanage graduate, a success story or not, enters an environment outside the institutional walls that has a pre-existing knowledge of her, albeit having never really known her to begin with. The making of the self undergoes changes informed by the environment. Maya said with determination in her voice that she did not want to be always known as "that orphan-girl". The discomfort of identifying oneself as an orphan in front of others is fed by the stigma and shame. I will look at the stigma of being an orphan, and the embodiment of the shame that comes with this identity in the following chapter.

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[40] "I'm an orphan only on paper. I have people who help me out like family. And I do not think that I have anyone and no one to turn to [in the time of need]."

[41] Goffman (1964) would disagree with me identifying an orphanage as a total institution. But I think an orphanage can be treated as an example of a total institution because it is involved in looking after individuals deemed incapable of taking care of themselves. Hence, they are put a highly controlled and enclosed environment. For Goffman, orphanages were problematic because children were not exposed to socialization outside the institution. But, not all orphans were institutionalized right after birth. A large number of orphans lived with their families before institutionalization.

Chapter 2.

Shame and Stigma: Negotiating Identities

Introduction

Stigma and shame are in many ways intertwined experiences for orphanage graduates. There is always (even if just a little) shame in stigma, and a fear of stigma in shame. Hence, this chapter takes both stigma and shame as an attempt to untangle complex everyday experiences of orphanage graduates through their reflection on their past and present.

Stigma as a framework materialized fully during my fieldwork in Taraz, where I was introduced to Rauf, a community activist helping orphanage graduates. He struck me as a cautious, and somewhat skeptical middle-aged man. Possibly, his skepticism was a response to my relatively young age, and lack of direct connection to orphans and orphanage graduates[42]. Rauf asked me what my research was on, and the reason for choosing this topic. In my response, I boiled it down to labeling and discrimination of orphans and orphanage graduates in everyday life. Stigma, Rauf supplied in recognition of the issue. I agreed. Indeed, as I progressed with my field work, I could not help but notice instances of stigmatization that orphanage graduates were subjected to both institutionally and publicly.

In turn, shame evades concrete formulations, teetering between emotion and affect. Shame in Kazakhstani context should be addressed through the binary of honor and shame (Abu-Lughod, 1986)[43] but also, Soviet heritage of the *kollektiv* (Kharkhordin, 1999). At the same time, there are increasing Islamic sentiments, forcibly labeled traditional to Kazakhs (by pro-Islamists). This seems to be a response to a moral panic

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[42] At the same time, Rauf, upon learning that my thesis will be defended in a Canadian university, and will not be publicly available to Kazakhstani citizens criticized it for not being helpful for the plight of Kazakhstani orphanage graduates.

[43] I take Abu-Lughod's honor and shame more in terms of sentiments associated with a (nomadic) group dynamic, rather than Islam. I'm mostly interested in Abu-Lughod's discussion of relationship within a particular nomadic group, and they ways honor and shame color the relationship in the group, and with other groups. However, Islam should still be considered when talking about shame in Kazakhstan, as it steadily increases its influence.

over the departure of the younger generation from highly mythologized national identity in favor of Western ideals. In turn, for Bedouins in Abu-Lughod's **Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society** honor and shame color their everyday interactions. At the same time, honor and shame are both all-encompassing, but not fixed. Certainly, some aspects of Bedouin culture are less prone to changes, but in looking at honor and shame, Abu-Lughod points at the possibilities of shifting sensibilities through actions of the Awlad 'Ali people, and most intriguingly - poetry. It is hard to find a similar employment of poetry in Kazakhstani context, unfortunately. Yet, Abu-Lughod's honor and shame find resonance with Kazakh idea of *uyat*, shame. Despite current attempts to glorify traditional (to Kazakhs) ways of being[44], which includes shame as a technology of moral responsibility, Soviet heritage, nonetheless, plays an important role in Kazakhstan today. Here, I'm specifically thinking about Kharkhordin's (1999) discussion of the *kollektiv*, or collective consciousness in the Soviet Union. Kharkhordin traces the ways the *kollektiv* instills a need to comply with the collective goals and morale. In the discussion of the *kollektiv*, Kharkhordin remains focused on the individual. He takes a Foucauldian lens to trace practices "of self-development and self-fashioning" that lead to and contribute to the group formation (4).

Alexei Yurchak (2006) provides a critique of Kharkhordin's reading of the Soviet experiences, and insists that Soviet citizens who were portrayed as lacking agency and blindly subscribing to Soviet ideology in Western scholarship, in fact, actively engaged and reinterpreted "discourses and forms of knowledge circulated in everyday Soviet life" (18). Yurchak suggests instead to focus on the performativity, where "reproduction of the form of rituals and speech acts actually enabled the emergence of diverse, multiple, and unpredictable meanings in everyday life" with some that did not follow the official discourse of the state (25). Yet, both Kharkhordin and Yurchak point at the idea of belonging and non-belonging that affected everyday reality of the Soviet citizens. Hence, the dynamic between an individual and the *kollektiv* remain pertinent to the understanding of shame, as it points at the dangers of non-compliance one might face,

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[44] The idea of a traditional Kazakh anything is highly problematic. Proponents claim that the legitimacy of the traditional ways are rooted in history. However, it is difficult to trace their historical accuracy, and impossible to divorce from the patriarchal toxicity. Cynthia Warner (2009) gives an interesting example of bride kidnapping in Kazakhstan, where she talks about the issues with claiming the practice to be traditional for Kazakhs.

and means of addressing deviance from the group norms as a defect (that needs to be fixed).

In Kazakhstan, growing Islamic sentiments (along with nationalist views) cannot be ignored either. The religious reorientation, or rather a shifting religious trajectory towards a more active religious engagement raise a moral panic over Westernization, or the failure to uphold a stricter morale amongst younger generation. Here, shame is employed as a moral tool to ensure integrity of a genuine Kazakh and/or Muslim. The genuineness here is best explained through a distinction between ethnic Kazakhs and Russians. In the context of orphanages, I discuss further research participants differentiating between Kazakh and Russian orphans and caregivers. Policing of this genuineness takes place through *uyat*, or *uyatmen*, as many refer to men who shame others, usually women that are gaining momentum in the public discourse[45]. Again, the failure of an individual to be normal or genuine becomes pathologized, and calls for treatment. Shame exists in all of these instances, somewhere in the midst of the tension to claim a (Kazakh) nationalist identity, nostalgia for the Soviet past, and religious sentiments. Orphanage graduates, labeled abnormal by definition, and in many instances, unable to claim full Kazakhness, experience shame at the intersection of nationalism, religiosity, and Soviet legacy. Through this tension, shame seeps into the everyday discourse, and most importantly under our skin.

Originally, this research started from thinking about orphanage graduates in terms of their ability to negotiate their identities despite their complex circumstances. Stigma affects the way an individual is able to negotiate her identity for herself and others. This does not mean that stigma shuts down or reduces one's ability to negotiate her identity to pure fantasy or invention. An orphanage graduate does not necessarily imagine herself as a completely different individual, i.e. a non-orphan. Negotiation of identity is not divorced from one's real life circumstances. It works in spite, and most intriguingly, alongside these impeding circumstances. Shame and stigma coexist in the life of an orphanage graduate. I suggest looking at the relationship between shame,

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[45] There are different views of *uyat* in media. But one of the most prevalent is the image of an *uyatmen*, who shames for not upholding true Kazakh ideals. This criticism is mostly directed at women who do not act accordingly to the traditional image of Kazakh femininity. Currently, young activists in Kazakhstan are engaged in various ways of addressing *uyat*, as toxic and problematic, especially in view of normalization of gender violence.

stigma and one's body. Probyn[46] writes, "[B]ody is its reaction to dryness, the light, and history, which are enfolded fully within that particular habitus" (2005, 71). One cannot escape one's own habitus, to adopt Pierre Bourdieu's term, or at least they cannot fully deny it. Bourdieu (1977) identifies habitus as "generative principle of regulated improvisations" (78, italics mine). Here, Bourdieu is pointing at both the productive potential of habitus, and the set material conditions of an individual's life. Similarly, an orphanage graduate cannot deny the material conditions of her life, i.e. growing up in the orphanage, and what has come before that – the fact of abandonment. But this does not mean that her habitus confines her to "totalities already constituted outside of individual history and group" (71). In looking at shame, what is most intriguing is exactly what Probyn sees as reactions, or responses to external stimuli, and what Bourdieu identifies as improvisations. Approaching the experiences of the interlocutors through an improvisational lens allows a better understanding of the encounters with shame, and an individual's capacity to resist constrains of shame.

Some of the research participants stated that upon their graduation they were clearly aware of the life choices available to them outside institutional walls. This included, specifically for young women, taking sex work as their trade to make "easy and fast money"[47]. At the same time, orphanage graduate girls were allegedly known to be to be involved in sex work. The research participants remembered hearing either from the caregivers, or older new graduates living at the *Dom Yunoshestva*[48] about sex work, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and criminal activities. The caregivers, according to research participants, talked about choosing sex work as one's occupation as shameful and unworthy ways of making money. Caregivers warned girls against sex work by shaming those who were involved in the practice. They could also employ shame to punish orphans by saying that they were destined to become prostitutes, drug addicts, or

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[46] Here Probyn refers to an Australian writer Kim Mahood, reminding that shame is in the body.

[47] Maya talked about other orphanage graduate girls suggesting she took up sex work when she needed money, because it was faster, and hence easier than earning it any other way.

[48] *Dom Yunoshestva,* or as many research participants called it *DY*, is a youth house, a state funded dorm style housing for orphanage graduates. The residents have to follow a curfew, pay for their meals, and do their own cleaning. However, similarly to an orphanage, there is one adult worker present on the premises at all times for supervision. The research participants referred to the supervision as rather lax, and stated that by building better relationship with the workers, they could get away with not following the curfew.

criminals like their parents (or mothers)[49]. In general, the idea of sex work as easy money works hand-in-hand with the view of orphans and orphanage graduates as lazy, and disinterested, and lacking motivation that perpetuates the public imagination. References to sex work were also mentioned by research participants, both orphanage graduates and others. The orphanage graduates I interviewed insisted that they did not want to be involved in sex work, or to present any promiscuous behavior for a variety of reasons (some were religious). They negotiated a different identity. By doing so, these research participants, along with others, resisted a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy from the caregivers and the public.

In this chapter, I suggest considering the experiences of orphanage graduates through stigma and shame. I will argue that a stigmatized individual, an orphanage graduate in this case, can employ shame as a tool to resist the finality of her habitus (Probyn, 71). Here I do not suggest negating the restraining effect of shame in some situations. Instead, I want to shift the focus to look at the potential shame offers for the shamed. Saba Mahmood (2001) writes about agency in Muslim women in Egypt, and suggests considering agency outside the idea of resisting domination. Instead, Mahmood discusses agency "as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create" (203). In her discussion of Veena Das' work on women facing violence during the Partition, Mahmood suggests looking beyond their experiences in terms of "passive suffering", and instead implores us to explore agency "through an analysis of the language in which the pain resides" (217). Hence, if stigma and shame are generally perceived in terms of limitations imposed by the dominant discourse, Mahmood's critique allows for a different kind of language. I'm thinking of a language of shame and stigma, and the potential it offers. Similar to Mahmood's research participants, orphanage graduates who took part in this research were not passively stigmatized and shamed—each fostered their own agency and were able to negotiate their identities within their circumstances. I have now identified two ways of negotiating one's identity. In the first case, the stigmatized individual views and presents herself in spite her stigmatized identity. In the second case, the stigmatized individual

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[49] This way of shaming was not necessarily specific to the child's parents. All girls, regardless of the circumstances of their conception and abandonment were treated as if each one of them could act promiscuously. In some instances, as it will be discussed later, the caregivers were aware of the parent's (specifically mothers' circumstances), but chose to accuse them of improper behavior and stigmatize them as substance abusers and sex workers.

views and presents herself by claiming a self of an orphanage graduate to destigmatize it. In this case, she succeeds and she is an orphan. What is important here is that an individual does not deny the difficulties she faces as an orphanage graduate, but she does not perceive it as a basis for self-pity and charity per se.

I will first discuss stigma and the ways it is experienced by the stigmatized. In this chapter, I take Probyn's reading of shame in terms of its productive potential. In talking about shaming in an institutional environment, I will discuss the ways shame is used to leverage power, and how the shamed responds and uses shame herself. I will conclude the chapter by a brief discussion of shaming related to sexuality amongst girls at orphanages. Ultimately, this chapter is an attempt to think about the experiences of orphanage graduates it terms of potentiality, rather than finality.

Introduction to stigma

I take Erving Goffman's (1963) **Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity** as my main theoretical framework to talk about stigma. In this section, I will be looking at what stigma is and the moral career of the stigmatized. Goffman (1961) in **Asylums Essays on the Condition of the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates** talks about a moral career of a mental patient. He identifies a moral career as changes in the patient's view of herself throughout institutionalization. For Goffman, these changes in one's understanding of one's self follow a set pattern. In the case of orphanage graduates, Goffman's pattern shifts somewhat. Yet, I chose to talk about a moral career, because orphanage graduate's understanding of themselves follows a linear progression. I will discuss the initial instances of stigmatization that occur at the orphanage (and sometimes a little prior to one's enrollment in the orphanage) and later encounters in schools. I will touch upon the moral careers of the stigmatized outside the orphanage, including: graduation from the orphanage, enrollment in a vocational school, college, or university, as well as job hunting. Finally, I will transition into a discussion of stigma management, and then I will connect stigma to shame.

Stigma: learning to be discredited

Goffman argues that stigma is not an attribute an individual possesses, but rather it should be seen in terms of "a language of relationships" (3). He continues, "an attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another, and therefore is neither credible nor discreditable as a thing in itself" (ibid). In the case of an orphan, having no biological parents to take care of them is not a stigma in itself. Rather, an orphan is stigmatized only through the relationship with so-called normals[50]. The stigma of an orphan involves a whole network of relationships and associations. The orphan learns of her "undesired differentness" (9) through the process of socialization. Her moral career as a stigmatized person allows her to "incorporate[e] the standpoint of the normal acquiring thereby the identity beliefs of the wider society" (32). She learns throughout her moral career of what it means to be stigmatized in a particular society. Goffman gives an example of an orphan "learn[ing] that children naturally and normally have parents, even while he is learning what it means not to have any" (ibid). This simultaneous process takes place through both the relationships with caregivers, and later, when some orphans attend regular public schools, the relationships with teachers, classmates, and parents of the classmates.

The research participants identified three instances of learning about being stigmatized. The first one takes place when a child is taken to the orphanage at the age when she can remember it[51]. Dina, an economist in her mid-twenties recalled her mother leaving her siblings and herself at her uncle's house. Dina recalled, «Мы играли в саду… и… какая то дорога была… и гаишники, милицейские, полицейские … то что я помню машина такая была (полицейская) и нас посадили и забрали. (…)

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[50] Goffman identifies "normal people" as those who do not possess a stigma.

[51] This is somewhat different for children who were admitted to the orphanage as infants, and have no recollection of that time. Research participants who were admitted to the orphanage as infants said that their first memories were of them either in a crib with other crying children, or in a hospital. For them the process of learning of their stigma seems to be more gradual, in comparison to older children who remember their parents and the process of being admitted to the orphanage. Mariya, a research participant in her early 30s said that in general children who were admitted as infants were less likely to run away from the orphanage than children who were admitted much later. Especially, children admitted to the orphanage as pre-teens or teens were most likely to rebel and run away.

Ничего не сказали [смеется], просто спросили, Дина? Алмас?[52]» Dina's memory was marked by the presence of the law enforcement. She was not sure who exactly showed up at her uncle's house to take them to *raspredelitel'* (diagnostic center) before the orphanage, but despite her young age, Dina could tell that the people were law enforcement because of the way they looked, and the car they drove. Her temporary residence at her uncle's house was perceived to be illegal (possibly by those who reported it[53]), and required the interference of the law enforcement. The private family space was interrupted by the state intervention. Sergei, too, remembered being taken to the orphanage after his mother's alleged suicide. He was brought to a facility for inspection before the orphanage with other children. «Нас там на лысы постригли помню, мы лысые приехали [смеется],[54]» Sergei recalled. His arrival to the orphanage was marked by his encounter of other children like himself. For Sergei, the contrast between his previous living conditions and the orphanage were apparent:

> Когда приехали в детдом, мне понравилось, честно. Все уютно было. Большое здание, красивое. Елка по середине большая. И все интересно было. Когда мы приехали в детдом, нас сразу в столовую отправили. Теплым молоком, горячим хлебом…как сказать, дали что б мы перекусили. Ну мне очень понравилось. Обращались очень хорошо с нами[55]

A cozy building, hot food, and new clothing contrasted with his previous metal scavenging activities for money with older boys, and precarious living conditions with his mother and her alcoholic partner. Meeting other orphans, he recalled sharing stories of how each of them ended up at the institution and realizing they had commonalities. Sergei added that this allowed him to feel at ease with other children, as well as the children connected with him over having a similar experience.

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[52] "We were playing in the garden...and…there was a road…and then road policemen, *militseiskie*, or policemen, … I remember that their car was like a (police) car. They put us in the car and took us away. (…) They didn't explain anything [laughs], just asked, are you Dina and Almas?"

[53] In many cases, neighbors report to the police if there is a child living without her parents with someone else.

[54] "They shaved our heads, we arrived (to the orphanage) bald [laughs]."

[55] "When we arrived at the orphanage I liked it, I really did. It was cozy there. The building was big and beautiful. There was a Christmas tree in the center. It was all interesting. When we arrived at the orphanage, we were taken to the canteen right away. They gave us warm milk, and steamy fresh bread as a snack, so to speak. So, I liked it a lot. They treated us very well."

The second instance discussed by research participants takes place among orphans who attend regular public schools with other children who have families and live at home. Goffman (1963) writes, "public school entrance is often reported as the occasion of stigma learning, the experience sometimes coming very precipitously on the first day of school, with taunts, teasing, ostracism, and fights" (33). Sveta remembered acutely the difficulty she and other orphans faced at the public primary school they attended:

> Ну было очень сложно в школе, потому что родители детей постоянно говорили, что, вот дети из детских домов воры, дети из детских домов такие плохие. С 1-го по 4-й класс мне было ужасно сложно, потому что никто не хотел дружить. Ну потому, что у всех было такое мнение как бы, не свое, а родителей скорее всего. Там, конечно, было пару человек, которые со мной дружили, общались. Им было все равно на мнение их родителей. Да и родители так, были не такие злые.[56]

Sveta experienced her differentness from other children who had families, and lived at home both as she saw that normally children had parents, and because the parents criminalized orphans in general. Goffman describes the stigma-theory by an ideology normals use "to explain [her] inferiority and account for the danger [she] represents" (5). Sveta also recalled teachers viewing the shortcomings of orphans as their innate vices. Goffman adds that normals tend to attribute "a wide range of imperfections on the basis of the original one" (ibid). For example, according to Sveta and other research participants, teachers would say that a student was doing poorly academically and/or missing school because she was an orphan. This way of shaming orphans also had an effect on other children, who clearly identified their classmates as failures based on their circumstances. It could also work as a device of ensuring discipline in class among "normal" children. A regular student wouldn't want to identify with a stigmatized orphan by failing academically or otherwise. In other words, failing to be normal.

Not everyone had an experience of attending a public school while living at the orphanage. Children who were diagnosed with ZPR or any other mental (and possibly

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[56] "It was so difficult in school, because the parents of other children kept saying that children from the orphanage are thieves, children from the orphanage are bad. It was very rough for me from the 1st grade to the 4th grade because no one wanted to be friends with me. Everyone had this opinion, but it wasn't their opinion, it was most likely what their parents thought. There were some people who befriended me and we hanged out. They did not care what their parents thought. But then their parents were not that mean."

other) illnesses were transferred to a specialized orphanage. At these institutions[57] children attended the school that was located on the premises. The orphanage Zhanna, and some other research participants attended, had the school located a few steps across the building where they lived. They certainly had less freedom as the schedule was more consolidated than in the orphanages where children attended public schools. Here, children could not wander off after school. According to some research participants, even in cases when they lied to their caregivers about having extracurricular activities, the caregivers could give a call to the school teachers to check. There were children who resided at a different orphanage, and commuted once a week to the specialized boarding school at a different location[58]. Despite the limitations of the school that later operated like a boarding school for some children, the research participants who attended it had fond memories of their time there. They compared it to the times when they attended public schools prior. Maya recalled having no friends at the public school she attended for a little while before her transfer. "Я не понимала, что нужно дружить, строить какие-то отношения, то есть пришла-пришла," said Maya. She admitted that having no friends saddened her. After her transfer to the specialized orphanage, Maya was able to build relationships with older children and with time even with her groupmates, whom she now calls family.

Children with mental or physical disabilities face a different kind of stigmatization within the institutional walls. Goffman (1963) writes, "the more the child is "handicapped" the more likely he is to be sent to a special school for persons of his kind, and the more abruptly he will have to face the view which the public at large takes of him" (33). Similarly, stigmatization, according to research participants, mostly occurs when a child with mental or physical disabilities is admitted to a regular orphanage. Deniza compared attending the specialized boarding school with her experience at the regular orphanage. She was born with a cleft lip and had a number of surgeries. As a result, her condition impeded her speech development. Deniza said:

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[57] In Almaty, I visited Zhanuya, a specialized facility for orphans, which also admitted children with disabilities for day school. Some of the research participants mentioned Specialized Boarding School #8 for Orphans and Children Left without Parental Care. This institution catered towards children with delays in development.

[58] This took place in more recent times. The orphanage where Zhanna and her friends resided was later transformed into a specialized boarding school, where orphan and regular children commuted once a week. They returned to the orphanage or to their families in the end of the week.

Когда я поступила (в 1 детский дом) все меня обзывали. Щас я намного четче говорю, чем раньше. Меня вообще не понимали раньше. Вот. И поэтому я училась в специализированной школе на Каблуково, школа интернат номер 9. Но, в школе меня любили вообще. Благодаря школе я все-таки счастливый человек. Потому что меня там лелеяли, обожали.[59]

She was different from other children at the orphanage, because of her speech impediment and appearance. During the interview, she clarified that now, after many surgeries everything was perfect in her appearance. In the specialized school, Deniza found friends and built relationships with the teachers. Goffman (1963) talks about an individual learning of her stigma through institutionalization and ensuing contact with others like her. Similarly, Deniza learned of her visible stigma from both the orphanage and the specialized school, where she was treated differently. She stated that living at the orphanage she was humiliated, but gained acceptance that she regarded as love in the specialized school. Deniza recognized her own need for acceptance acutely. She said she took part in various extracurricular activities, "to show herself, [to say] here I am, don't forget me"[60]. At the same time, Deniza was not only aware of her difference from other orphans, but she emphasized her difference as a sign that set her apart in a positive sense. She talked about her ability to speak in a proper language, and sound like a *domashnik*, a domestic child. She compared herself to the orphans at the orphanage. Deniza saw attending the specialized school with domestic children with disabilities, as well as visiting her mentor at home as two ways on which her speech impediments set her apart part from regular orphans.

Similarly, stigmatization occurred at the orphanage too. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the caregivers had access to the personal files of all children. As a result, they could use the information about the biological parents available to them against an orphan. Research participants stated that these verbal attacks took place in case they misbehaved or sometimes even out of pure malice of the caregivers wanting to hurt the child. In some situations, the abuse resulting from stigmatization took other forms. Research participants recalled having a caregiver who brought her son to the

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[59] "When I got admitted [to the Orphanage #1] everyone was making fun of me. I speak more clearly now than I used to. No one was able to understand me back then. So yeah. That is why I attended a specialized school # 9 on Kablukova [street]. But at school, I was loved. Thanks to school, I am a happy person. I was coddled there, they adored me."

[60] «…такой активностью я, наверное, всегда пыталась показать себя, вот она я, не забывайте меня…»

orphanage while she worked. The caregiver would take away treats and gifts the orphans received to later give them to her son. In that instance, among other similar situations, the orphans once again realized their differentness. But this time it was less to do with their implied vices, and more to do with their lack of support and protection.

For orphans in Kazakh speaking groups the situation with stigmatization was in some ways different than for orphans from Russian-speaking groups. Despite being in similar circumstances, Raushan, Maya, Aigul and others remember a distinct division amongst the groups. The period of their institutionalization took place in the early 1990s, and according to the research participants they were in the only Kazakh speaking group at their orphanage. The remaining 300 children were in Russian speaking groups[61]. The orphans from the Kazakh group perceived Russian speaking orphans as immoral. Raushan also insisted that she could not take their smell. Raushan remembered sharing living space with other Russian orphans:

> Мы жили в основном казахские девочки в одной комнате. Но когда сказали, что мест не хватает, нам пришлось перейти в русскую группу и с нами русские иногда спали. Ну не долгое время. Но они так воняли. И с помощью их мы узнавали, что такое …ну что такое маты, что такое месячные, вот так. Они старше были. И мы через них узнавали постепенно[62].

Here Raushan talked about learning from Russian girls all the things that they considered improper, and even shameful. She insisted that they, Kazakh girls, were good girls, and they did not do what Russian girls did. Her groupmate Maya remembered the attitude of the caregivers in Russian groups: "у нас холл такой был, и мы все время в холе чем-то занимались, уборкой, были постоянно заняты (…) в русских группах просто покричат (…) работы не велось[63]". Maya attributed the difference among Kazakh and Russian caregivers to the cultural difference. Kazakh

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[61] This however did not mean that all of them were ethnic Russians.

[62] "We generally lived with all the Kazakh girls in the same room. But when we were told that there is not enough space we had to transfer to the Russian group, and there Russians slept in the same room with us sometimes. It was not for long. But they were so stinky. We learned with their help what…how to curse, what menstruation was, things like that. They were older. We gradually learned from them."

[63] "We had this hallway, and always were occupied with things in the hallway. We cleaned or we were busy doing something else. In Russian groups [caregivers] just yelled (…) there was no work done [by the children]"

caregivers, in Maya's view, did not want "Kazakh blood to fall this low"[64] and insisted on disciplining them more than the Russian caregivers[65].

Moral career and stigma management: after graduation

Graduation from the orphanage and enrollment in an educational institution affects the moral career of the stigmatized, and gives more control to the stigmatized over stigma management. Entering an educational institution upon graduation, and in some cases while residing at the orphanage, opens new possibilities and relationships. In this new environment, an individual may choose to pass for a normal, since her stigma is not visible. Goffman (1963) notes, "the individual's spatial world will be divided into different regions according to the contingencies embedded in them for the management of social and personal identity" (83). So, at school the stigmatized will want to pass for a normal, but in her circle of orphanage graduates, she might criticize the normals. When asked about studying with regular students, research participants recalled how *domashniki*, or domestic kids were less independent and could not cook for themselves or were lazy. Interestingly, this image of lazy and dependent children is generally associated with orphans. But the research participants had a different take, and suggest that institutionalization instilled discipline and structure, allowing them to be more efficient in their post-institutional lives. For example, Sergei attributed his discipline to the regime at the orphanage. He said while at the sports community college he had no trouble waking up early for classes, unlike his classmates who previously lived at home. Sergei's case was different from others because he moved in the college dorm instead of living at the DY in Taraz. But despite living with *domashniki* and spending all his time with them he was not quick to disclose his identity as an orphanage graduate. In contrast to living at the orphanage, the graduates gain more control over the information regarding their identity. Goffman argues that a discredited individual may choose to divide her world into groups of people who know and do not know about her stigma (95).

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[64] «что бы казахская кровь так низко»

[65] In general, the research participants discussed Russian caregivers, or caregivers working with Russian speaking groups as less involved, and caring. It was unclear if Russian groups had any Kazakh caregivers who spoke Russian. But considering the insistence of the research participants on some sort of Kazakh-Russian rivalry at the orphanage, I deduce that the majority (if not all) caregivers were Russian, identified themselves as Russian, or looked Slavic.

At a vocational school, college or university, a recent orphanage graduate faces a new environment where only the administration is aware of her status. Despite their wish to pass for a normal, they do not associate with other students as readily. For example, Sveta, who studied at one of the most expensive and prestigious universities in Almaty had trouble connecting with her groupmates. She said most of them came from wealthy families and spent too much money. "Они не понимают ценности [денег],[66]" she added. She couldn't make friends with other girls because they had different interests. "Им не интересно со мной общаться, потому что я не люблю тусовки, а они любят. У нас нет общих интересов,[67]" Sveta said in amusement. She recalled other girls, who came to study from other smaller cities asking her about local night club scene. But despite being an Almaty-native, Sveta could not recommend a single club, having never been to one. Her experience of the city was clearly different from the experiences of her peers, who, too lived in Almaty all or most of their lives.

Despite having more control over the information regarding their stigmas, some individuals become discredited in front of their peers. This is different from when they want to reveal their identities. In discrediting situations, they lose control over the information management in the face of the school/university administration. Here, I will discuss two different examples of being discredited. Gani remembered being discredited in front of his groupmates at the community college by a teacher:

> В начале я не говорил, что я из детдома. Как то, когда я нечаянно накосячил, и (…) учительница вытащила прям на середину, класса, кабинета. И говорит, Гани что ты косячишь всегда, ты же из детдома, да так. (Смеется) Я там как начал стеснятся, потом собрался, ну потом сказал, ну да я из детдома, а че так?[68]

He added that he was treated differently because others learned he was from the orphanage. Gani was blamed for things he hadn't done. He jovially laughed at the memory, and resisted all my probing into memories that I assumed were not pleasant. He regarded his nosey groupmates who gossip or treat him differently as villagers who

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[66] "They don't understand the value of [money]"

[67] "They are not interested in hanging out with me, because I do not like clubbing, and they do. We don't have common interests"

[68] "At the beginning, I didn't tell anyone that I was from the orphanage. One day, I accidentally messed up, and er…the teacher dragged me in the middle of the classroom. And she said, Gani, you always mess up, you're from the orphanage, right. (laughs) I started feeling embarrassed, but then gathered myself, and said, yes, I'm from the orphanage, so what?"

came to the city from small *auls*, (villages) or other towns. He clearly disassociated himself from them, seeing them as inferior because of their love for gossip and countryside background. At the same time, Gani insisted that he knew how to make annoying people disappear, if only mentally. He used music and completely blocked out undesired people. I thought, then, he blocked out those unpleasant memories too with decisive efficiency.

Maya had a different experience from Gani. She had just started her vocational school with regular students. She sat in the back row, hoping no one would pay attention to her, similar to her public primary school days. A social worker walked in the classroom and announced, "вот, девочки, у вас есть в группе девочка из детского дома, встань пожалуйста![69]" Maya stood up as instructed. She said her group was a calm and open one, and they wanted to get to know her. Maya laughingly remembered, "они поняли, что я не умная по математике, на, списывай. Я все контрольные просто списывала[70]". In the context of a Kazakhstani educational institution, allowing someone else to copy your test or homework signals belonging to the group. If not the mark of friendship, it is at the very least a sign of membership. This can be traced back to Kazakhstan's Soviet past. Alexei Yurchak (2006) writes about performing *svoi* or normalcy in USSR during Late Socialism (mid-1950s to mid-1980s). He writes, "The sociality of so-called "normal people" or *svoi* (us/ours) differed from the ideal-type activists and dissidents in their reading of authoritative texts and acts, and in their relationship to one another" (108). Yurchak traces "performative shift" among young Komsomol members, who performed their duties not necessarily out ideological beliefs but rather out of responsibility to their group, and their membership the group. He discusses an example of Lenin examination, that transformed into a formality, where individuals were given a pass based on being *svoi*, in other words, belonging to the group. Individuals who were not considered normal, meaning they did not subscribe to the accepted sociality of the group in question faced formal punishment.

In some cases, a stigmatized individual might choose to reveal the discrediting information about herself to others who are not aware of it. This occurs in situations

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[69]"girls, you have a girl from the orphanage in your group, please stand up!"

[70]"they realized I was not smart in math, so they were like, here you go, copy. I copied all of their tests"

when the stigmatized has a certain degree of trust, or wants to develop the relationship further. Zhanna shared one of those experiences, while we sat eating lunch on my last Sunday in Almaty. Asel's daughter was playing in the kids' play zone, while Zhanna sat across from me chatting away in her usual lively manner. Zhanna said she babysat Asel's daughter some days to help out. I asked Zhanna about her time in community college, and she said she made some friends there, and was generally a very active student. Her best friend Asema used to invite her to hang out in her home, and Asema's parents treated Zhanna well. Zhanna needed time to develop trust to share her orphan identity with Asema. In a sense, it did not happen completely voluntarily. According to Zhanna more than 10 orphanage graduates studied at the community college she attended. They received free lunches from the college canteen. Zhanna was walking with her friend when the vice principal caught her. Zhanna remembers:

> Мы вышли, а она [завучь] мне, Жанна иди туда на обед, а я ей не хочу, а она мне, иди, ты ж типа – как же она сказала – ты же сирота чета-чета такое. И Асема на меня так посмотрела, улыбнулась, она че, издевается над тобой? Я говорю, нет, нет, Асема, щас я подойду. Я пошла и сказала поварихе что я наелась (...)[71]

This happened 6-month into their friendship, and after the incident Zhanna told Asema about growing up at the orphanage and living with other graduates at the *Dom Sveta* (Light House). In that instance, Zhanna had an opportunity to lie, or to conceal some of the information, but she chose to be open with her friend. Asema's attitude did not change, and Zhanna appreciated it. For a stigmatized individual revealing information about herself is challenging because she fears that the way she was treated will change. All research participants insisted that they did not want to be treated differently. Most importantly, they did not want to be pitied. Sergei said, "Если бы мы с вами познакомились, и я бы сказал, я с детдома, не правильно было бы… как сказать, не правильно начался бы разговор. Он сразу думает о другом, сразу думает он с детдома. Уже не то получится.[72]" Sergei continued, domestic kids were nonchalant with each other, but they felt a need to pity an orphan once they learned of his identity.

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[71] "We stepped out, and she [the vice principle] said, Zhanna, go eat lunch. I told her I didn't want to, and she said, go, you're – how did she put it – you're an orphan, something-something. Asema looked at me, smiled and said, she is joking, right? I was like, no, no, Asema, wait for me, I will go. I went [to the canteen] and told the cook I had already eaten (…)"

[72] "If we have just met, and I told you, I'm from the orphanage, it won't be right … how should I put it, the conversation would start on a wrong foot. He will start thinking right away about something else, he will think he is from the orphanage. It will all go wrong."

He noticed that others changed in their faces and assumed that the orphans were beaten and abused in the orphanage. But certain types of relationship require the stigmatized to be upfront about his identity. When meeting girls, Sergei insisted that it was important to reveal his orphan identity. "Рано или поздно надо будет сказать, где твои корни,[73]" he shrugged. Sergei added, "Некоторые бывают, ладно, с детдома, так с детдома. Ничего страшного. А иногда бывает так вот: первый день общаемся, а когда узнают, что с детдома под вечер, потом на завтра им звоню, а телефон отключен и все[74]." Sergei's response to rejection was rather philosophical. There was no anger in his response to the public discourse that equally stigmatizes all orphans. Sergei said, it was not their fault that they rejected him, they probably heard bad things about orphans from someone else. As we sat in a rather empty café with a very insistent waitress checking on us very often, and making both of us uncomfortable, I asked Sergei about his plans for the future. He gave a shy smile, and said he wanted to have a family after getting his Master's degree. What kind of dad do you want to be, I asked. A caring and kind one, he laughed bashfully.

Shame in you

If at its core stigma is a sign of an individual's failure at normalcy, then shame colors the way that individual experiences her failure, and affects her attitude towards herself. As mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, I suggest looking at shame in a productive light to see how shame is performed and employed. In this way, we do not see shame as a purely disciplinary tool, for it limits the potential shame can have. Shaming as a disciplinary tool is not useful if the shamed individual is not interested in conforming. But, before I go into the discussion of the way shame is employed in a productive way, I will briefly outline how shame is performed by the shamer and the shamed.

Elspeth Probyn (2005) suggests looking at shame as deeply personal, or even corporeal, and at the same time, a vastly social experience. Probyn's view comes from

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[73]"Sooner or later, you will have to reveal your origin". In Russian Sergei says "корни", which can be literally translated as roots. The Russian version emphasizes one's belonging and connection.

[74] "Some [girls] says, an orphan? That's fine. But sometimes it goes like this: we talk the first day. By the evening of that day they learn about the orphanage, and when I call the next day, the phone is switched off."

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank's (1995) reading of a psychologist Silvan Tomkins. According to Probyn, Tomkins considered both the biological and social aspects when thinking about shame. But the most compelling part of Probyn's argument is the emphasis on the connection between shame and interest. She takes a Foucauldian stance and argues that shame is productive. She continues, "In this sense, it produces effects – more shame, more interest – which may be felt at a physiological, social, or cultural level" (15). The interest Probyn is referring to lies in one's wish to connect. Probyn writes, "Shame illuminates our intense attachment to the world, our desire to be connected with others, and the knowledge that, as merely human we will sometimes fail in our attempts to maintain those connections" (14). Shame is universally experienced, but what shames us is very individual (or socio-culturally specific). In case of shame for Kazakhstani orphanage graduates, we should consider what lies behind shame, that is the interest. What is the socio-cultural expectation one is made to be interested in? On what basis does one seek connection? In case of orphanage graduates it could vary too. One can be interested in connecting with the caregiver, or on the contrary in opposition to the caregiver, one might be interested in connecting with other orphans. Failing the expectation of the caregiver or the group of orphans elicits a corporeal reaction. It could start at the pit of your stomach, creep up your neck in red blotches and stain your cheeks with a sign of shame. Certainly, there are degrees of shame, and it does not always end up in an individual turning red. Yet what's interesting in blushing is its direct connection to the bodily response. However, be it blush, or a flutter of unease in your belly and fingertips, shame is experienced through the body. Hence, more than anything, shame is in you.

Shame can also be inherited, passed from one non-conforming body to another one. Caregivers or other staff members at the orphanage, according to research participants, employed various tactics at disciplining them by reminding the children of their parents' shameful activities. By doing so, the caregivers and other staff members suggested that the children are responsible for the shame of their parents, i.e. can be shamed instead of their parents. In some situations, they resorted to shaming based on one's stigma, be it physical or mental disability or the sheer fact of abandonment. Deniza recalled being mistreated at the orphanage by the caregivers because of her disability. At the same time, she remains acutely aware of the circumstances of her abandonment. According to Deniza, her mother left when she was three days old. In what she could

piece together from the information available on her casefile, she deduced that her parents were not married. She refers to her nationality to explain the circumstances of her abandonment:

> [М]оя национальность такова, что данные о моих родителях так все закрыто, потому что я курдянка, и у нас это большой-большой позор. Скажем, могут камнями обкидать этого человека. Бросать детей у них нельзя. Или разводиться…[75]

In Deniza's view her abandonment is in-itself shameful for Kurdish people, but it also results from shame of extramarital conception. I do not want to delve into the circumstances the mother faced leading up to Deniza's admittance to the orphanage. For one, I do not know anything about it, aside from things that Deniza shared with me in our conversation. At the same time, I do not want to shift the focus away from the experiences of orphanage graduates. I think it suffices to say that in the majority of situations, from what the research participants shared, an orphan is confronted with her mother's circumstances. Zhanna put it aptly:

> [У] многих детей — это типичная история, да, мама приехала молодая учиться, просто из какого-то аула, из какой-то деревни, сюда в Алмату, и вот закудрили-забодрили мужичок-парнишка, большая часть нашего поколения, это вот это вот, студенты, которые приехали.[76]

The shame of extramarital relationships was inflated by the lack of support from parents or the partner. Aliya, a cook in her mid-thirties said her mother left her at the hospital after giving birth prematurely. She continued, "Сама она родом из Атырау. Когда родители узнали, что она беременная, ей сказали, либо делать аборт, либо вообще не возвращайся с ребенком[77]". Aliya found her mother years later. She said she was physically repulsed by her, and could not bear to be in the presence of her biological mother. Her mother asked for forgiveness, but Aliya said it was not sincere. Yet, she added, she saw that her mother was ashamed. Probyn (2005) adds that

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[75] "because of my nationality, all the information about my parents is unavailable. I'm Kurdish, and it is a great shame for us. You could say, they would stone that person. Abandoning children is prohibited. Or divorcing…"

[76] "it is a typical story for many kids. Their young mothers came to Almaty to study from some *aul*, some village and some fella pitched them a line. The majority of that generation comprises of students that came here".

[77] "She was from Atyrau. When her parents learned that she was pregnant, they told her, you either get an abortion, or don't come back with a child."

sometimes shame cannot be "relieved by apology"[78] (71). This shame (of extramarital relationships experienced by the mother) does not necessarily manifest itself in the life of the orphan, but at the same time, it creates silence, an unspoken weight of the unknown. Her mother refused to reveal why she did not let Aliya's biological father find her at the orphanage. Aliya lived with this silence, her mother's resistance to reveal her motivation. Aliya's father died in 2010, according to her mother. She never got to know him, nor learn of their relationship. She still hoped to make her mother talk about it one day.

For the orphanage graduate, the experience of shame depends on her interest. The research participants shared a variety of instances of shame, but the underlying premise is linked to one's interest. For example, Maya and Gani remember being ashamed when they were discredited in front of their new groupmates. They were interested in passing for regular students, and failing to pass resulted in the feeling of shame. When Sveta was verbally abused by her caregiver, who claimed her mother was a drug abuser, she did not experience shame. Sveta said she knew the caregiver was lying, and she disrespected the caregiver for being abusive and mean. Sveta was never interested in appealing to her caregivers, and refused to let them check her homework or to even know anything about her academic progress.

Probyn (2005) links shame to habitus to bring back our attention to the body, or to be precise, the body out of place. Bourdieu (1990) writes, "the habitus – embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product" (56). If "histories haunt us" (Probyn 2005, 51), what about those who are divorced from a shared history? What of the bodies that were born out of place, beyond history of kin, social class, tribal affiliation, and family? The history that haunts them, then, is pieced from the casefile information, unreliable memory (of oneself or others), and the stigma of abandonment. They are out of place both literally and metaphorically. Ilya recalled standing at the bus stop for the first time on his own, and nervously trying to figure out how commuting by bus worked. Did he pay the fare right away? Or did he pay before he got off the bus? What was the number of the bus that he needed? Having grown up in Almaty, he was out of place, with no connection to the city, no knowledge to guide him through the foreign streets of his

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[78] Probyn talks about white shame and its implications in Australia. But it seemed to speak to this instance of abandonment and shame too.

hometown. According to Probyn, "shame often erupts" when "the body does not belong within a certain space" (50). Metaphorically, one's history does not extend further than some rare childhood photographs, tidbits of information about the parents, and sometimes a name (family name and given name). Aigul said she wanted to have more photos from her childhood. She said they took a lot of photographs of their adopted son, Dimash now. Photographing Dimash seems to create continuity in his belonging to a history that extends beyond his orphanage life. As for Aigul herself, she does not know her ethnicity, and she could only guess that she was mixed race. What haunts one then is this exact out-of-placeness, the non-belonging in a traditional sense, or in other words, the stigma and the shame of being different. So, what is one to do with this imposed shame of non-belonging?

Shame in your blood: menstruations, sexuality and non-conformity

Better yet, what is one to do when bleeding shame?

The majority of research participants were women. Their experiences of puberty were marked by strangeness, ignorance, awkwardness and in some cases fear. One of the research participants remembered having her first menstruations and not knowing what it was. She recalled freaking out, having no knowledge and understanding of the workings of her body. For others who were lucky enough to start menstruations later, there was a hushed, whispered relaying of the censored incomplete knowledge, be it from the caregivers or other girls in the group. For research participants who grew up having internet access and more information flow available, menstruations were not necessarily that mysterious. Some who attended regular schools had a middle-aged woman come with sanitary pads and bright brochures talking about menstruation. These gatherings were conducted in semi-secretive way, away from the boys.

Sexuality was not talked about in an open manner either. Any instances of budding sexual interest in the opposite sex were punishable. Zhanna recalled being punished when a caregiver saw her sitting on the bed with a boy. She said, a boy hugged and tried to kiss her when the caregiver saw them. Zhanna was beaten for it, and she remembered feeling bitter for the unfair treatment. Zhanna said she did not have any interest in boys then, she was too young. But in the eyes of the caregiver it was different. As mentioned earlier, Kazakh caregivers insisted on stricter moral

standards amongst Kazakh girls. Shaming for disciplinary purposes was used to condemn girls from Russian groups, and referring to their loose morals. The caregivers also insisted that girls who were promiscuous had no future, and would only end up as sex workers on the infamous Saina street.

If heterosexual relationships were tolerated, but somewhat criticized for disciplinary purposes, homosexual relationships were condemned. This reflects the current situation with LGBTQ+ community in Kazakhstan and stigmatization of homosexuality. Nationalist sentiments infused with religious views contribute greatly to this discrimination. Many of the research participants talked in somewhat hushed voices about instances of homosexual rape among boys at the orphanage. Claims that boys turned gay as a result of a traumatic experience at the orphanage were prevalent among research participants. Views of homosexuality as an inborn state of being were never mentioned. One research participant struggled to come out as a lesbian during the interview. Throughout the majority of the interview she continuously referred to her failed heterosexual relationships. At some point, she asked me to switch off the voice recorder to tell me something. As she was revealing her secret she kept gauging my reaction. When she realized, I was not going to judge her, or throw any discriminatory remarks, she relaxed, and the interview continued in a more sincere and open manner. She prompted me to switch on the voice recorder after half an hour. In the second half of the interview, she talked openly about her sexuality and relationships. "У меня были отношения с парнем три дня, самые долгие на протяжении 22 лет,[79]" she says. In comparison, her longest relationship with a girl lasted three years. During that period, she did not come out to her mentor whom she called sister, nor to anyone she knew. In her view, coming out becomes easier when one had a supportive family:

> Если бы человек рос в семье, с любовью, как я вижу, он бы любил все, жизнь. Без обид был бы, наверное. Мог бы рассказать своей семье все как есть, по полочкам разложить. Прийти с хорошим настроением, мам да, там все. А я не могу так прийти и рассказать. Даже представить себе не могу. Возможно, что-то бы изменилось.[80]

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[79] "My longest relationship with a guy, in all my 22 years, lasted three days"

[80] "If a person lived in a family with love, as I see now, he would have loved everything, life. He wouldn't have had any hard feelings. He could have told his family everything, explain it all. He would come home in a good mood, and said, hey, mom, you see, this and that. I can't come (home) and say it. I can't even imagine it. Maybe something would have changed."

Her experience in the orphanage affected the way she carried herself. She remembered having no confidence in herself, and always hiding behind the hood of her sweatshirt. She hid her shame for being different, and evaded making any meaningful relationships aside from an older orphan who later died by suicide. Her aloofness was evident during the interview, as I tried to understand what she was telling me as well my own strange reaction without questioning her honesty. It seemed she was still grappling with her sexuality and orphanage graduate identity. Giving herself a second name, different from her real name allowed for space to confront these conflicts in the way she saw herself and the way she wanted to present herself to others. She recognized having some sort of split personality, but it also seemed to me that this was not necessarily a struggle. Rather, it reflected the way she experienced things, and the way she made sense – in a split sort of way.

Shame and distigmatization of identity

In the final section of this chapter, I come back to shamed bodies out of place. Shame incites action from the shamed. Her response to shaming depends on her interest. Research participants referred to the ways of employing shame and addressing their stigmas in productive ways. For some it meant working against claims that made the foundation of their stigmas. For example, they were shamed (against) falling into the alleged vices of their parents, or generally being lazy, unmotivated, and opportunistic. In fact, surprisingly, this was the exact perception of the majority the research participants who were not orphanage graduates. Research participants who were orphanage graduates did not deny these characteristics, but instead focused on the ways of overcoming them in their own ways. Some, like Zhanna and Sveta claimed that they were born goal-oriented and active. For example, when I asked Zhanna about her dreams for the future, said she never dreamt of things, but instead considered her future in terms of goals. In turn, Sveta referred to her in-born persistence as an individual character trait. She contrasted her personality, abilities and talents with her parents' failures. Others like Maya saw the need to overcome their circumstances as a way of surviving in the world where they had no family to turn to. She sat across from me and told me a story about her dog, whom she had to give away because she had no money to feed him. When the dog came back, making his way to her across the city she cried as she hugged him, because she said she failed and could not look after him. In that

instance, Maya said, she realized she needed to stop mopping and get on with her life. The *DY* where she lived was located not far from Saina street, where sex workers stood waiting for clients daily. Saina street runs through *mikroraiony*, a suburban part of Almaty, framed by mostly older apartment buildings on both sides. Throughout its span, the street is punctured with overpasses, and minor interchanges with the traffic flowing non-stop at all hours. Maya remembered walking past sex workers, and turning back, realizing she would not be able to do it. Now, working as a teaching assistant she said she started dreaming about actually owning an apartment and having a child. These things had never crossed her mind before.

Research participants adapted to their surroundings, making space for themselves. Some claimed to succeed in life in spite of being orphans. They maintained possessing a certain level of resilience and difference from other orphanage graduates who became addicts, served time in prison, held no steady employment, and failed as parents themselves. They also compared themselves, in an indirect way, to normal individuals who grew up with families, but possibly had few personal achievements independent from their families. Other research participants recognized their stigmatized identities as inseparable part of their selves. For instance, Deniza said she was never ashamed of her identity as an orphan, and she wanted others to know that she was both an orphan and successful. Similarly, Sveta said she went back to the orphanage sometimes and told the children they could one day get into a good university and a build meaningful life like she had. There were those like Kairzhan, who reflected positively on his experience at the orphanage referring to the benefits the state care provided. He said,

> Я, например, рад, Бог знает, что случилось бы. Допустим, то, что поступил. Потому что многое увидел, многому научился, и государство там квартиры дает, какие-то питания дает. Лечение иногда бесплатное. Проживание. Я положительно к этому отношусь. И к тому же я говорю, я на многие тренинги известных людей сходил, а многие не могут.[81]

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[81] "For example, I'm glad to have been accepted to the orphanage. God only knows what would have happened otherwise. [I'm grateful] for having seen a lot of things, having learned a lot of things. The state also provides apartments, some sort of meals. Sometimes, it provides free healthcare. Housing. I have a positive view on [being an orphan]. In addition, I always say I was able to attend many trainings from famous people. And there are a lot of people who couldn't do it"

Kairzhan is not the only one who recognizes and uses the state provided benefits. In some ways, one could say Kairzhan and others echo the narratives fed by the caregivers and state officials on the positive role of the state in the lives of orphans. But it also seems that they are pragmatic and aware of their entitlements regardless. At the same time, they were not blind to the shortcomings of the state and were critical of the political situation in the country. All in all, these research participants made attempts at destigmatization of an orphanage identity through their own examples and experiences. As Kairzhan said, ultimately, there is nothing to be ashamed of.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I attempted to present an alternative view of stigma and shame experienced by orphanage graduates that participated in this research. Ultimately, my aim was to look at shame through a productive lens to see the potential it gives an individual in negotiating her identity. Some orphanage graduates take shame and employ their interest in belonging and connection to overcome their circumstances and achieve certain life goals. I recognize that my research is limited as it did not cover an extensive number of orphanage graduates. Specifically, I hadn't interviewed orphanage graduates who had more traumatic experiences, and faced a different life after graduation. This is a limitation of my research that I fully recognize. Yet, I believe interviewing a specific group of orphanage graduates allowed me to escape generalizations, and view them in their own individuality.

In fact, I deliberately decided not to include the only interview I had with an orphanage graduate who faced extremely traumatic life outside the institution. The individual was recovering from an attempted suicide two month prior to the interview, and was in a vulnerable state when I visited. I had to proceed with the interview because she insisted that she did not want to be pitied, and continuously accused me of doing just that. I also felt that I was not trained and prepared to work with a vulnerable interview participant, and would not have done justice to her story by including her here. But she taught me something I find valuable nonetheless.

She sat in her unmade bed, staring right at me and said something I dreaded hearing from an interviewee right from the start. She said I was just using her to get my degree. Months later, I still remember blood rushing to my face, and emptiness forming

in my stomach. My shame was apparent. I was ashamed not because she was right and I was using her for my degree. But rather I felt the heat of shame creeping up my skin because she poked right at my interest. I wanted research participants to know I was genuinely interested in their stories, but I was also afraid they would not trust me because I came from a background of relative privilege. Ultimately, she stabbed at my insecurity as a researcher.

My first reaction was to erase the interview and pretend it never happened. But as I sat writing about stigma and shame, I decided that working through this experience in my fieldwork would be the only way find release from the grips of shame.

For research participants, facing the shame of their stigmas, too, seemed to help them to find release and to reach a certain level of potential, or to continue to work towards reaching that potential. This chapter was not necessarily an attempt to destigmatize orphanage graduates. For as Rauf noted bitterly, a dissertation defended in Canada has little effect on the lives of orphanage graduates across the globe. But for most of the research participants the fact that they told their stories for a dissertation written for a Canadian university meant they were able to say things they wouldn't have said otherwise. All in all, I wrote this chapter with one goal in mind, to show that an individual having lived in complex circumstances was not devoid of an ability to negotiate her identity despite, or probably, because of stigma and shame.

Chapter 4

On Mentor and Mentee Relationships

On a mid-February evening I boarded the train to Taraz with Yulya, a translator in her early 30s. We were carrying a suitcase stuffed with toys for our hosts in Taraz, Beth and Victoria. Beth and Victoria run a charitable foundation and a residential program helping single mothers and orphans. The train ride that took us across the snowy steppes was about 7 hours long, and we were scheduled to arrive in the city at 2 am.

We dragged our luggage into a claustrophobically narrow compartment. The train was new, with bunk beds on one side, and a small table under the window. After a few moments of struggling to fit the luggage under the bed, and take out all the necessities out of backpacks, we settled beside each other, facing the wall. The heater picked up, and a woman from a neighboring compartment stuck her head in, asking if we had seen the porter. It was getting hot and suffocating, she complained. We agreed, breathing heavily and sweating after our organizational feat in the small space. After a short but exciting visit to the restaurant compartment on the train that reminded us of our childhood train rides, we settled back in and I took out the voice recorder.

Yulya sat next to me, leaning on the grey compartment wall. She worked as a translator full-time, but also helped Beth and Victoria with *Caring Hearts*. Her involvement with orphans started over a decade ago when she first visited an orphanage with a friend, who was an orphanage graduate herself. From her first visit to the orphanage, she remembered sitting down on the floor, while her friend sat on the couch in the playroom. She laughingly recalled being surrounded by children: "Один вот здесь висел на меня, одна — вот так вот наклонилась, руку ну, с одной стороны одна руку взяла, здесь другая. Трое на мне висят. Я такая сижу, Айя на меня смотрит, ты как мама-курица говорит. Мама-наседка[82]". Yulya prefaced it by saying they did not prepare for the visit, meaning that they did not bring any toys, games, or treats. She said, "Мы не спонсоры. Мы просто пришли с ними пообщаться, поиграть, без

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[82] "One kid was hanging from here, another one leaned and hang on my arm on one side, and one more sat here [beside me]. Three of them hang on me. So, I sat like that, and Aya looked at me, and [said] you're like a mother-chicken. Mother-hen."

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ничего, вообще, без игрушек[83]". Here, Yulya drew an important distinction that I take to define mentorship in the orphanage context. Yulya pointed at the importance of an unmediated communication between an (non-relative) adult and an orphan child that aims to minimize power imbalance. She posited herself in contrast to sponsors: individuals who come to orphanages to provide material goods, money and entertainment. She was not criticizing sponsorship, but pointing out at the difference in their approach.

I identified mentors by following criteria: they were adults (over 18 y.o.), they were present or involved in the life of a given orphan for an extended period of time, they provided support and visited the orphan often, and finally, they were not blood related in any way. In contrast, sponsors in this context were not expected to create lasting relationship, and generally provided financial support. For example, sponsors could buy clothes, mobile phones, New Year or *Nauryz* gifts, pay for vacations, etc. Zhanna Kim, the founder of the *Klub Priomnyh Roditelei* (Adoptive Parents Club) has an unfavorable view of sponsors, and mentorship (program). Kim critiques sponsors both for their lack of deeper involvement with children on an individual level, and sees their actions more as a move to make themselves feel good for having done something for the underprivileged. At the same time, the orphanage graduates who I interviewed had a somewhat different view of mentors and sponsors.

There is no academic research on the mentor/mentee relationship among orphanage graduates in Kazakhstan. In the US, a body of research that focused on the Big Brothers Big Sisters program discussed the effects of the relationship with a mentor on the cognitive, emotional and social development of youth at risk (Park, Liao, & Crosby, 2017; Grossman & Thierney, 1998). At the same time, programs like Big Brothers Big Sisters imply a well-developed infrastructure of support for all individuals involved (mentors, parents and children), as well as a long-established history in the country and abroad. The research on mentorship and sponsorship of orphans generally focused on designing support for AIDS orphans in Africa (Schenk et al, 2010; Ssewamala et al, 2014). In regards to AIDS orphans in Africa, researchers suggested community-based interventions as a means of support (Schenk et al, 2010; Ssewamala

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[83] "We are not sponsors. We came just to hang out, to play with them without any toys or anything at all"

et al, 2014). At the same time, Schenk (2009) recognized a need for implementation of program infrastructures for better management and effectiveness of these programs. In Russia, research on orphans and abused youth suggested mentorship as one of the interventions to "mitigate the negative influence of childhood abuse experiences" (Zapata et al, 2012, 317). A number of NGO based mentorship programs for orphans and orphanage graduates have been implemented in the past few years in Russia. However, the difference Kazakhstani orphans face is salient both in terms of life circumstances of the mentees, the available infrastructure of support, and presence of NGOs working in the field.

In addition to contributing to the discussion of attachment development among orphans, I will look at the individual level to trace the specific ways these relationships affect both the orphan and the mentor. Specifically, I am interested in looking at the ways orphanage graduates negotiate their identities within these relationships. Although power is present in all of these relationships, it manifests itself differently and to a different degree. Here, I'm not talking exclusively of a power imbalance, which certainly exists, but, building on the previous chapter on stigma and shame, I am more concerned with potentiality available in power. A mentor/mentee relationship suggests a power imbalance, where a mentee is dependent on her mentor. But considering these relationships in terms of one-sided dependence limits our ability to perceive ways mentees, or orphanage graduates, make sense, navigate their ways and extrapolate meaning and knowledge from these relationships. Hence, in this chapter I suggest considering mentor/mentee relationship not in terms of the limitation of power (implied by these relationships), but through the ways these relationships contribute to one's understanding of the self. Echoing the discussion of Saba Mahmood (2001) from the previous chapter, I will talk about the ways these relationships allow for other ways of conceptualizing and experiencing the self (for both orphanage graduates and mentors).

This chapter can be roughly divided into two parts. The first half tackles the relationship from the perspective of the mentor. In this case, I will be looking at Yulya and her experience of mentoring. The second half looks at orphanage graduates and their relationship with their mentors. Most, if not all, of the examples I will be looking at involve religion, in particular Christianity, as most of the mentors I interviewed identified as Protestant Christian. In a secular country that at the same time has a predominantly

Muslim population this creates an interesting dynamic[84]. Finally, I will conclude the chapter by returning to Kim's critique of mentorship to look at the ways children experience vulnerability in these relationships.

Not a mentor: hard-to-define relationships

Yulya had a calming presence. She talked in a quiet, steady voice. Her unassuming demeanor put people at ease. Her appearance was different from that of her peers. She wears straight blue jeans, and a casual tee. Her hair is blond and grazes her shoulders in wispy layers. In a way, her youthful appearance is not much different from the orphanage graduates she mentored. Yulya also worked actively in her church, helping out with youth related activities. It is her Christian background that has affected her view of orphans, but her understanding, or more importantly her enactment of the Christian values differs significantly in this respect from her fellow church-goers. Hillary Kael (2017) discusses the increasing popularity of Christian sponsorship programs that entail a more personal engagement with the Christian mentor "mirror[ing] the Protestant mentor-convert ideal" rather than the previous model of giving as an act of faith (97-98). Yulya's engagement with her mentees goes beyond the "mentor-convert ideal", because she maintains these relationships despite her mentees reluctance to convert to Christianity. I suggest, Yulya's relationships with mentees with time shifted into familial relationships.

As we sat in the rocking train, listening to the steady thud of the train wheels on the tracks, I asked her about the reason for going to the orphanage in a first place. Yulya said,

> Я помню, что, я шла с чувством, что, как бы, я, (…) такое благословление огромное этим детям иду помочь, что-то сделать, да, там, проявить какую-то любовь. (…) А, на самом деле получилось,

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[84] Roman Podoprigora (2010) traces the effects of historical events (e.g. agricultural policies, forced deportations, etc.) on the religious landscape of Kazakhstan. With the fall of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan saw an increase of protestant Christian organizations from the US and South Korea in particular (Podoprigora, 2010). Despite the influx of Protestant missionaries, Islam and Orthodox Christianity make up the majority in the country. However, Kazakhstan (through the official discourse) maintains its secular politics. In the public discourse, as noted by Podoprigora (2010), and, in generally, in my personal experience, Kazakhs, and other non-Slavic groups[84] identify as Muslim nominally, meaning they do not see themselves as orthodox Muslims. Hence, Kazakhs who identify as Protestant Christians are not considered normal. Protestant Christianity in Kazakhstan – thanks to Orthodox Christianity – is perceived as non-Kazakh, or more specific Russian.

наоборот. То есть, как-бы, совершенно стороны поменялись. То есть они были для меня благословлением. (…) я даже не осознавала, что как бы, я тоже нуждаюсь в их любви, мне тоже приятно что они меня любят, что они меня… какие-то чувства проявляют ко мне. Все наоборот. Это хорошо, потому что я не хочу быть в такой роли, что я Супермен-спаситель. Я благословляю (смеется)[85]

Yulya's perception of her relationship with the orphans reflects a mutual need, and a reciprocal bond. She was uncomfortable with being a do-gooder, bestowing blessings upon the unfortunate. Yulya pointed at a different relationship dynamic that had developed between them through the years. She started visiting one group of orphans, because her friend had good relationships with the caregiver. The caregiver was welcoming, and allowed visitations[86]. She continued to visit, and take the orphans for outings through their school years.

At the high school graduation, Yulya gave them photo albums with all the photographs she gathered of them from their childhood. Naomi Angel (2014) talks about photographs as more than an object reflecting a particular moment in time. For Angel, in her reading of the role of photographs in Reconciliation in Canada, photographs are "far from static entities", because what is replicated in the image and what is imagined about the moment are entangled so that it changes what the photograph means for us and how we read it (2014, 60). Orphans do not have many (if any) personal photographs from their childhood. The photographs do not only represent moments like birthday parties, or New Year celebrations. As Angel cites Roland Barthes, orphans do not have to be looking at the photographs to remember certain things (60). But it is also Yulya's presence in their lives and the importance of the moment for Yulya to capture it, and to save it for years. Emotions entangle with memories in these photographs for both Yulya and her mentees. As mentioned earlier, Aigul, an orphanage graduate and an adoptive mother, lamented having very few photographs from her childhood. For Yulya it seems

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[85] "I remember that I went with a feeling that me going to help these children would be a blessing, a way to express love. (…) But in reality, it turned out to the other way around. Meaning, our roles changed completely. They became a blessing for me. (…) I didn't even realize that I needed their love. I'm glad that they love me, that they … express feelings towards me. Its other way around now. And I like it, because I do not want to be in a role of a Superman-savior, blessing everyone (laughs)"

[86] Even though a caregiver does not necessarily have legal rights to deny visitations, she certainly can make visitations more difficult by organizing the time of the group differently, or even badmouthing the people visiting, as mentioned by a number of research participants (orphanage graduates and others).

this became a way of anchoring their relationships and experiences in physical objects, granting permanence to the memories. At the same time, her response hinted at her need for connection as an unconscious reason for going to the orphanage in the first place. Acknowledging her initial goal – to be a blessing – she traced changes in these relationships to point of the reversal of their roles. This reversal undermines a common trope of power imbalance in mentor/mentee relationship. Specifically, in Yulya's case, she admitted to her vulnerability, as well as emotional dependence on the mentees in these relationships.

This sense of vulnerability and dependence manifested in Yulya's self-identification in relation to the orphans. When I asked her what she identified herself as in their relationship, Yulya had hard time coming up with a suitable title for herself. She contemplated my question for a bit, and said,

> Вообще это тяжело. Наверное, старшей сестрой, ну по крайней мере, меня этот вопрос не то что бы волновал, но я всегда думала кто я вообще для них. Я вообще себя ощущаю по отношению к ним как старшая сестра. Не знаю, насколько… но иногда такие, как бы и материнские чувства проявляются, *что блин, убью, если вы что-то сделаете с моим ребенком, если вы ему какое-то зло причините, я просто вас по стенке размажу.* Такое тоже бывает. Это, наверное, материнский инстинкт какой-то заложен, что я защищу.[87] (*italics mine*)

For the quiet pacifist Yulya I got to know, this sentiment was rather strong. She did not know how the orphans saw her, and she was hesitant in this self-identification as their sister. At the same time, the need to protect for Yulya equated with a motherly instinct, and could not be sufficiently explained though sibling relationships. She also saw motherly instinct as something innate. In a way, I think, she drew this distinction because she felt she could not claim to have motherly instincts since she did not have children. But by identifying it as an innate instinct i.e. something that all women possess deep down, she implied that one did not necessarily require a biological child to feel motherly.

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[87] "It is hard. Probably, it is an older sister, well, at least, it's not that I was worried about it, but I always thought of who I was for them. I feel like I am an older sister for them. I don't know how… but sometimes, maternal feelings surfaces, it's like, *I'll kill if you do something to my child, if you harm him, I will just smash you.* That kind of thing happens too. It is probably an innate motherly instinct, a need to protect" (*italics mine*)

At the same time, through the reference to motherly instincts she normalized her attachment to the orphans.

Yulya expressed her skepticism in regards to being a mentor (*nastavnitsa*). For Yulya the word carried certain negative undertones, and implies admonition. Here again, I'm reminded of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program that identified mentors as role models, implying that these individuals could teach, or reorient the mentee. But in essence, identification as a mentor reinforces the power imbalance, as it implies that the mentor has the authority to judge and educate (being the role model). Although, according to some of the research participants, this was exactly their experience with their mentors, Yulya took a difference stance, by putting emphasis on trust and communication. Yulya admitted that seeing the dividing line between admonition, and education, without judgement is sometimes difficult. The difference for Yulya was in exercising a level of acceptance of their actions, because continuous judgement and admonition would only drive them away. For instance, sexuality remained a complicated subject to broach, especially when coming from a religious background. Yulya says, "Я даже один раз приводила гинеколога (смеется). Ну им где-то 14 было. У некоторых это в одно ухо влетело, в другое вылетело. Некоторые заинтересовались" [88]. As discussed in the previous chapter, sex and menstruations were not discussed openly reinforcing shame and stigmatization. Approaching the subjects from a medical standpoint seemed to be less loaded with prejudice, but probably not ideal either. Yulya said she did not want them to learn about sex and menstruations from their peers, or older girls at the orphanage because of misinformation. When it came to relationships, Yulya worried for one of her mentees who had a boyfriend, but she chose to avoid commenting on it. For Yulya it was a balance of wanting to keep her mentees safe, but at the same time, maintaining a certain level of trust.

Despite the relationship Yulya has developed with her mentees, she remained conscious of her position as an outsider. She said there was some level of trust between them, but was doubtful that the trust was deep. Yulya added, "Как ни крути, наши жизни слишком отличаются. Может быть, поэтому нет вот этого глубокого чего-то. Плюс, разные жизненные позиции. Боятся мне рассказать что-то плохое о себе,

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[88] "I even once brought a gynecologist (laughs). They were around 14 years old then. For some it went in one ear and out the other. Others got interested"

боясь, что я их предам, или уйду" [89]. The distance present in their relationships ensured these relationships continue to exist. There seems to be a certain comfort in the distance and difference between them. At the same time Yulya thought the mentees presented a different self to her than to their fellow orphanage graduates. However, Yulya did not see this as deceit. She had different relationships with different mentees. There was one she has developed a stronger bond with. She says,

> Просто видишь, она говорит, я тебе просто не хочу рассказывать всего и боюсь рассказывать, потому что это тебя ранит. Но мне приятно что она так думает, что она не хочет меня ранить, что бы я не переживала. Но, с другой стороны, я тоже хочу знать. Я больше хочу, чтобы они рассказали сами [90].

So, it is not only the fear of abandonment or betrayal, Yulya mentioned earlier, but also protection of her feelings by the mentees. This distance in their relationship allowed the mentee to protect the mentor's feelings and sensibilities. The mentees were well aware of Yulya's religious background, and her work at her church. In a way, she saw them exercising respect of her sensibilities, not only protection of themselves by not telling her everything.

Not evangelizing: on religion

There is a general consensus in Kazakhstan that people helping orphans and orphanage graduates must have a reason [91], and in many cases a religious one. Kaell (2017) who writes specifically about child sponsorship, notes that programs aimed at helping vulnerable children are historically associated with "Protestant foreign missions" (95). However, there are a number of people involved with orphans on voluntary basis

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[89] "No matter which way you look at it, our lives are too different. That's probably the reason there is no depth to [our relationships]. In addition, we have different views on life. They are afraid to tell me anything bad about themselves, they are afraid I will betray them or leave."

[90] "You see, she says, I don't want to tell you everything, and I am afraid to tell you everything, because it will hurt you. But I'm glad she thinks this way, she does not want to hurt me, so that I do not worry about her. But on the other hand, I want to know. I want them to tell me more themselves"

[91] For instance, my mother and step-father who are fostering a family of four faced commentary from strangers regarding their choice to foster Russian children. Their experiences differ from one another. Specifically, my mother who is Kazakh is not expected to be involved with Russian children and is even criticized for fostering Russian children. Meanwhile, my step-father who is white American "passes" precisely because he is an American, and they are seen by Kazakhstanis as those who get involved in help of that sorts. This view stems from semi-antagonistic relationship among Kazakhs and Russian, and an influx of foreign non-profit and religious organizations to Kazakhstan after the fall of the Soviet Union.

who are not religious or at least do not actively practice any religion. In this section, I am looking at individuals who identified themselves as Christian and discussed their faith in relation to their mentoring of orphans and orphanage graduates. Protestant Christians make up a small portion of the population in the country. Most of the churches came about as a result of missionary work from Christian ministries from the USA and South Korea (Podoprigora, 2013). The *Dom Sveta* (Light House) residential program for orphanage graduates I mentioned earlier is a product of such missionary work in Kazakhstan. The religion of the mentors I interviewed affected them on many levels, but aside from the obvious moral and spiritual sensibilities, they faced public, and sometimes legal scrutiny. The limitations and mistrust mentors experienced in their relationships with the mentees, professionals working with orphans and orphanage graduates, and government officials affected the way they positioned themselves and talked about their religion and faith. In this section, I will discuss two different experiences of mentors who identified as Christian to explore the way they see religion and faith affecting their relationships with mentees.

Victoria came to Taraz in 2000 for the first time as part of a charity organization. She visited a local orphanage, conducted art and life skill classes, but ultimately felt this was not enough to make a significant difference. She returned to Taraz years later with Beth to open a safe space for orphanage graduates. At the moment, Caring Heart foundation[92] works in Taraz and helps orphans and single mothers, most of whom are orphans themselves. As American citizens, both Victoria and Beth, who were not part of an international charity organization anymore, faced numerous difficulties in regards to their visas and permanent residency applications. They were interrogated by the police and charged with visa violations. Victoria remembered,

> They asked, are you Christian. And I said, yes, because it's the truth. It's never been a secret, I'm not going to hide it. I'm not trying to *evangelize* anybody. I sure hope people see a difference in my actions. If they want to ask what's God done for me, I can tell them. But if not, *I still can just love them.* So, anyway, we got sued, paid the fine. (*italics mine*)

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[92] Caring Heart differs from Lighthouse in a sense that the organization is not founded through a Protestant Christian Church in the US. Legally, Caring Heart is organized as an NGO. At the same time, a portion of donations received by the Caring Heart comes from Christian families in the US.

Local authorities claimed they were evangelizing and hence required a special visa[93]. Despite difficulties Victoria and Beth continued to have with immigration authorities in Kazakhstan, they remained in the country and the foundation has grown along with J127 Ranch[94]. American citizens working in Kazakhstan with orphans are viewed ambivalently. There is a certain level of suspicion in regards to their motivation to help orphans and orphanage graduates. Religion complicates these views. Hence, there is Victoria's emphasis on not evangelizing. At the same time, the majority of funding and support comes from Christian families (some of them are adoptive families of former Kazakhstani children) in the US.

Being a US citizen certainly contributed to Victoria and Beth's sense of insecurity in Kazakhstan in their work. In Yulya's case, her faith did not necessarily create legal problems, but affected her relationships with mentees on the interpersonal level. As mentioned earlier, Yulya recognized the limitations it put on her relationships with mentees, especially in terms of trust. Yulya, too, stated that she did not aim to evangelize mentees. Despite the fact that Yulya emphasized the importance of faith in her life, her relationship with mentees lacks evangelizing undertones. In her case, faith was more of a personal matter, an aspect of her identity that helped to continue her relationship with mentees. She commented, "Для меня, я знаю что, если у них будет Бог, то они… в любом случае у них все будет нормально, они все смогут. (…) Это, наверное, что меня спасает, эта надежда, что все не напрасно, что действительно есть Бог и смысл какой-то есть.[95]" She talked about faith as a necessary core. She also referred to one's need to have hope, especially for orphanage graduates who experienced difficult and at times traumatic events in their early lives. She tried conducting Bible studies, but admitted they were not interested and she gave up. But although Yulya was not adamant on practicing her faith with the mentees, she set certain rules and expectations when they visited her apartment. In her own space, Yulya made

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[93] According to visa requirements, individuals visiting for the purposes of conducting missionary work require the C7 visa for missionary work. With a single-entry visa, an individual can remain in the country for up to 90 days. A multiple entry visa allows for up to 180 days. In contrast, a humanitarian visa C8 allows 90 days on single-entry and up to 1 year on multiple-entry visa. (eGov)

[94] Half of my fieldwork in Taraz took place at J127Ranch. I conducted some of the interviews and participant observations at J127Ranch.

[95] "For me, if I know that they have God in their lives, they… in any case, everything will be fine. (…) This hope that everything is not in vain, that there is God and some meaning is what probably saves me"

a rule of praying before meals. She added with a laugh, "А в последнее время, последний год, они сами, «а че, молиться не будем? » Они, давайте, помолимся. И все сидят ждут. Да, давайте за руки возьмемся, в последнее время, давайте за руки возьмёмся, как в фильмах[96]." The image of praying before meals in American films generally evokes a sense of family gathering at the table. For orphanage graduates gathering at the table at Yulya's house there seemed to be a similar sense of closeness. The prayers then had a different connotation lacking the religious component as they signify familial coming together, rather than a spiritual experience.

For some orphanage graduates, faith became vital in finding connections and belonging to a community. Ilya, who moved to *Dom Sveta* (Light House) after his graduation from the orphanage, talked about the sense of belonging he felt in the church. Similarly, Maya and Raushan mentioned finding a job through acquaintances at the church. Although in bigger cities like Almaty the sense of community or feeling of belonging does not extend beyond one's immediate family, people sometimes employ other techniques when looking for a job. For an orphanage graduate with no such support network, finding a job could prove to be a challenge. Graduates like Dina can be lucky to meet people willing to help by sheer chance. In Dina's case, it had nothing to do with her belonging to a church or a mosque. But it is these connections providing a reference of sorts that were useful in finding a job after graduating from university. In a church setting, such reference or guarantee are based on shared Christian sentiments, as well as charity towards graduates. Ilya added that Christian values were not foreign for him, and he welcomed a structured life with set limitations and expectations. According to Ilya, and other research participants who lived at *Dom Sveta* (Light House), not everyone agreed with the values and limitations the Church of Christ in Almaty imposed on an individual.

Mentorship as work: where the state fails

Approaching mentoring orphans as work, or the professionalization of mentorship, is emerging more and more in Kazakhstan in the recent years. In our interview, Sholpan Baibolova mentioned a mentoring initiative started by Gennadiy

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[96] "Recently, in the past year, they say, "aren't we going to pray?". They say, let's pray before the meal. And everyone sits waiting. Yeah, let's hold hands! Recently they started saying, let's hold hands like in the movies."

Frank, an orphanage graduate in Karaganda. Frank geared his works towards orphanage graduates interested in entrepreneurship. Through his social enterprise, Frank focused on educating and legally supporting orphanage graduates in their business endeavors. Baibolova referred to Frank's work when she talked about orphanage graduates learning about everyday things: from applying for documents, funding, or housing to cooking and doing groceries. In his interview with the *Vlast'* newspaper, Frank talked about a proposed program for assistance for orphans upon their graduation (Romashkina, 2017). He referred to a similar program in Tatarstan, where the program is created in conjunction with the state, and supports orphans for two-three years after graduation (Romashkina, 2017). Frank stressed the importance of worldly wisdom for orphanage graduates. He added,

> В детских домах этого нет, поэтому они выходят оттуда беззубые, в розовых очках, у них не выработан ни характер, ни навыки. Поэтому единицы могут состояться в жизни. Мы предлагали программу сопровождения выпускников детских домов, но ее не приняли. У нас много предложений, но их не принимают, потому что мы город маленький, а все принимается на республиканском уровне[97].

Frank touched on the importance of mentoring as a way of providing knowledge and experience for orphans that a child is supposed to get through her family. He also pointed at the bureaucratic difficulties they faced with their proposed programs. Specifically, Frank was rightfully critical of the disjuncture between state and regional governments. This disjuncture and lack of cooperation on behalf of the regional (or municipal) government, in Frank's experience, impeded social enterprises and assistance programs for orphans and orphanage graduates in smaller cities.

The difference in the level of accessibility to social and state-funded programs and entitlements is especially apparent in comparison of the experiences of orphanage graduates in Almaty and Taraz. In Almaty, a former capital, although facing certain bureaucratic issues and corruption, the graduates were better informed of the available programs and opportunities. In comparison, graduates in Taraz were less equipped and educated in regards to their rights and entitlements. As a result, many of the graduates

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[97] "In the orphanages, they do not have it, and that is why they get out of there toothless, wearing rose-colored glasses. They do not have a developed character or skills. That is why only few can succeed in life. We proposed a program of assistance to orphanage graduates, but it was not accepted. We have a lot of suggestions, but they are not accepted because we are a small town, and all these decisions are made on the state level."

fell victim to corruption and deceit. Victoria was acutely aware of these instances in Taraz. She said, her voice charged with palpable indignation,

> Caregivers that worked at the orphanages asked these kids when they were getting out of the orphanage to go take credit and give the money to the caregiver. And the caregiver promises, "oh I will do this and this". And then they don't pay on the credit. (...) They get an apartment from the government, but nobody is there to help them learn the budget. (...) They get their pension, or they get their lot of money once a month, 15000 tenge ($53 CAD), and there is nobody there to sit and help them – they should have been helping them when they were little – but especially when they have apartments...they spend all their money, they don't pay for a couple years for their apartments. *The government takes them, and they are back to the streets.* (*italics mine*)

Victoria too referred to what Frank called being "toothless" and "wearing rose-colored glasses". At the same time, in their critique, neither Victoria nor Frank were infantilizing orphanage graduates. Instead, they were pointing at the gap that made it hard to adapt in their everyday life outside the institution upon their graduation. In general, budgeting came up a lot during the interviews with orphanage graduates, where they referred to it as the most difficult things after graduation. Having conducted half of the planned interviews in Almaty before my visit to Taraz, I was confounded with this different reality that orphanage graduates in Taraz faced. In Taraz, Rauf and his wife Toma were involved in helping orphanage graduates with legal issues. They, too, talked about orphanage graduates who ended up on the streets with no money, and a hefty debt as a result of deceit or lack of life skills.

The lack of life skills, and general naiveté noted by some research participants (both orphanage graduates and others) feeds into other aspects of an orphan's life. For example, Sveta referred to her brother as naïve and lacking any interest in succeeding. She complained that her older brother in no way acted like an older brother. Sveta was concerned that she would have to take care of him financially one day. Familial responsibility and parenthood can be affected in many ways. As we sat on the floor of one the playrooms that doubled as a small library at the J127 Ranch, Victoria recalled the story of Akimzhan, whose mother was an orphanage graduate. As an orphanage graduate, she got an apartment from the government through the social program. With the help of Victoria and Beth, Akimzhan's mother got her new apartment furnished and ready to move in. But her son, however, did not live with her. Victoria said,

> She has no attachment, because at 4 months she put him in the orphanage. So, at 3.5 (years) she took him out. And for two days he was fun, she lived here (at the Ranch). Two days he was fun. But he is a kid, he is a three-year-old boy. And he had accidents, he did this and she started beating him, and yelling at him: "Why do I have to get up? Why do I have to do this?" Because you have a son. But she is still a baby. Emotionally she can't regulate that. (…) she got yelled at (…) That's what she grew up knowing, so, she just does it to him.

Her experience of motherhood although not universal to all orphanage graduates, is not unusual. For Akimzhan's mother, having a state provided apartment did not make a significant difference, as she could not continue to care for her son. Victoria recalled driving around Taraz, trying to find them on the streets. She found them walking on the street on a cold Fall day. Akimzhan trailed crying behind his mother in a t-shirt without a coat. Victoria remembered, "he was crying, and I was crying in the car coz [sic] there was nothing I could do". Victoria and Beth started getting calls from other orphanage graduates saying that they should bring Akimzhan back to the Ranch because he wasn't treated well by his mother and he was sick. He had pneumonia, and was not a in a good condition when they got him to the hospital. Once released from the hospital, his mother did not want to allow him to stay at the Ranch, and demanded to take him home. Victoria had to call the police, because she was threatening her,

> I'm crying, she is hysterical, thankfully it was a workday, and people were here (at the Ranch). And then the policeman was like, leave your son, he is sick! We have all these documents, we have all these medicines. (…) She left him. She recently, two month ago, took him overnight for two nights. I worried if he would come back ok. *Now she got an apartment, and I'm waiting for her to show up any day and say I want my son.*

For Akimzhan being left behind means growing up in a safe caring environment with educational opportunities, and other necessities, but also, a precarious limbo, where he waits for his mother to return for him. Victoria said, Akimzhan asked when his mother was coming back for him every day. Victoria pointed at a rocking chair in the corner of the room. This, she said, was where she rocked Akimzhan at night when he was agitated and crying uncontrollably right after he got out of the orphanage. His uncertain position was also affected by the fact that he couldn't be adopted by another family. For that, he needed to be put back to the orphanage after his mother agreed to sign the documents giving up her rights. As he sat next to me at the dinner table that evening, I was struck by his quiet demeanor, too old for his five years of age. As other kids were

getting rowdier by the minute, some having finished their meals, Akimzhan turned to me and asked for water, adding please in the end. The pitcher stood on the smaller table on my left. When we said our goodbyes on the day of our departure with Yulya from Taraz, he hugged my legs. This was probably a small gesture, considering everyone at the Ranch was used to having guests all the time. But it brought a lump of warmth into my stomach, so welcomed in the dead of February, and tickled dangerously somewhere behind my eyeballs. It is early March now, a little over a year since my visit, and his mother is back, but this time with a newborn baby girl, Akimzhan's half-sister. What this means to Akimzhan is unknown.

If for Victoria, Beth, Gennady Frank, Rauf, Toma, and many others, the work they did for orphans and orphanage graduates was more of an occupation (for some of them involving training), for Yulya this took a form of relations that was very much divorced from professionalized mentorship. Since the orphans have grown up, and started their own lives outside the orphanage, she was still hesitant to go back to the orphanage again to build relationships with other orphans. I mentioned the mentorship program from the Dara foundation to Yulya. She responded by saying that she thought she would become a mentor (through the program) once the kids in her group grew up. "And when *are* they growing up?" I asked laughing. Never, she admitted. She added, "У меня еще ощущение, что если я пойду общаться с другими детьми, то я их предаю.[98]" This very idea of betrayal differentiates Yulya's mentorship from professionalized mentorship. In her reluctance to help other children at the orphanage, Yulya emphasized the depth of her own involvement in their existing relationships. Mentorship for Yulya differed from providing help, or what she initially thought of as being a blessing, because she saw moving on as a transgression. At the same time, Yulya, too, infantilized her mentees. But, again, her infantilization differed from what Victoria and Frank talked about. For Yulya there was an emotional component that laid at the foundation of this infantilization. Almost all of her mentees started university, and were either living at the *DY* or in their own apartments. Some of them worked, and were building relationships outside their immediate orphanage circle. Yulya certainly had less to worry about when it came to her mentees adapting outside the orphanage. Yet, the sentiment remained as their mentor/mentee relationships bled into familial relationships.

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[98] "I also feel like if I go to hang out with other children, I will be betraying them"

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Mentees perspective on mentorship

In the beginning of my fieldwork, I did not have any questions related to mentors. In the course of the first few interviews I noticed that the topic of mentors came up often. The research participants talked about their mentors, albeit never calling them mentors per se. There were two main themes the research participants talked about the relationships with their mentors – emotional and practical. The emotional aspect of their relationship, among other things, involved the mentor acting as a moral compass, accepting an orphan in her individuality, and creating memories through involvement in various events and occasions in the orphan's life (e.g. birthdays, graduations). The practical aspect related to the mentor providing day-to-day support, sometimes involving material supports (e.g. buying clothes, a phone, gifts), giving advice (e.g. career advice, etc.), and taking the orphan to the doctor and/or buying medication that the orphanage could not afford. These two loosely separated themes are interconnected. For instance, in case of birthdays, it becomes both, as the mentor navigated through necessary practical preparations for the celebration, and evoked positive emotions and creates valuable memories for the orphan. This section of the chapter focuses on the ways orphanage graduates perceived their relationships with their mentors.

Harnessing emotions and making space for acceptance

I knew Maya as an active young woman who enjoyed sports, went on regular runs, was great with children, and warm and kind to others. Maya had a welcoming aura about her that made talking to her easy. She remembered her childhood self, and noted that she was hot headed and would not stand being bullied. She met Bakhytgul before she transferred to the Orphanage #8. Bakhytgul was a young Christian woman who visited her in the orphanage, and later started bringing Maya home for weekends. Maya remembered,

> Я считала, что она моя мама. потому что она нашла ко мне подход. (…) И она мне, когда мы уже повзрослели сказала, "я вот на тебя смотрела и мне тебя было жалко". И я такая, почему? "у тебя постоянно вид был такой, что ты чем-то недовольна" (смеется) "и

мне хотелось тебе чем-то помочь, не просто там про Бога тебе втюхать и убежать, нет, вот чисто по человеческий. (*italics mine*)[99]

According to Maya, Bakhytgul separated her Christian evangelical duty from helping her. It also seemed that Bakhytgul prioritized helping Maya in what she saw as "humanly ways" over evangelizing her. "Humanly ways", I think, refers to Bakhytgul's view of Maya beyond her Christian duty. Interestingly, this relationship that coincided with protestant Christian values, here was taken out of the religious context to emphasize a deeper personal involvement. In school, Maya said, boys were afraid of her because she beat them badly whenever they tried bullying her. When Maya told her about beating boys and fighting, Bakhytgul advised to think before acting. At the same time, Maya did not seem to be feeling criticized for her actions. She said,

> Она нашла ко мне подход что, можно себя защищать и нужно себя защищать. И не надо давать, чтобы тебя чморили, что бы ты была лохушка какой-то. Но при этом это можно делать мягко. Необязательно вот так вот сразу, кулаки. Можно словами объяснить.[100]

She urged Maya to be gentle and polite. Maya admitted that it was not just Bakhytgul's words that made her change for the better. She took Maya out, and she was able to see the way people interacted at the church and in general, outside the orphanage walls. I asked Maya about *dedovschina*, bullying that went on in the orphanage, where older children bullied younger ones. She responded by saying that when they got older they did not involve themselves in *dedovschina*, because they realized the cycle would never end otherwise. But I also think that Maya referred to her Kazakh group, which was the only Kazakh group in the orphanage of over 300 children. Maya sat across from me in the small room adjacent to the main building of the church. On the walls, Moses looked down at us from a colorful mural. (On the second though, it could have been Jesus). It was hard to imagine Maya beating boys as a child. She had a good-hearted laugh about

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[99] "I considered her my mother, because she was able to find the right approach to me. (…) When we got older, she told me, "I always looked at you and I felt sorry for you." And I was like, why is that? "You always had this unhappy expression on your face" (laughs) "and I wanted to help you, and not just force-feed you stuff about God, and just leave. No, I wanted to help in a humanly way"

[100] "She found the right approach to me, [she said] you can protect yourself, and you should protect yourself. You shouldn't let others bully you, and be some sort of klutz. But at the same time, you can do it gently. It's not necessary to use your fists right away. You can explain it in words."

her fight memories. But what clearly remained was a strong sense of right and wrong, a sensibility that fit well with her now Christian life.

Having a Christian mentor does not guarantee that the mentee will choose to become Christian herself. As Yulya lamented, in her group of mentees no one was interested in attending church. Yulya attributed their reluctance to people at church knowing who they were. She added, they do not like to be pitied. For some the reluctance to attend church had to do with more than pity. For Miki Maus[101], one of Yulya's mentees, her mentor's faith played an ambivalent role in their relationships. When asked about Yulya, she said, "Она была моей валерьянкой"[102]. In referring to Yulya's calming quality, Miki Maus also talked about her ability to listen. Her ability to listen allowed for space Miki Maus could use to share her personal struggles she could not share with anyone else. She said, "Мне понравилось в человеке, что она относиться к нам как к своим детям. Для нее мы все одинаковые. Каждого выслушать она может. Каждому совет дать, это к ней[103]." Miki Maus referred to Yulya treating them like her own children, which evoked a sense of unconditional acceptance one expects from her parents. Miki Maus did not seem to attribute Yulya's qualities to her faith. In fact, references to parental or familial sentiments undermined the importance of faith, as it put the emphasis on Yulya's innate disposition. She said, "Она каждому ребенку подарила фотоальбом, где мы с маленькие до 2008 года. И ты в шоке, ты смотришь эти фотографии и думаешь, блин, когда ты успевала это делать? Где это я? Это было неожиданно, это было очень приятно[104]." Photo albums too become an attribute of familial relationship. As mentioned earlier, these photographs became important artefacts of each of the mentee's childhood memories. As Miki Maus said, some of the photographs were surprising, because she did not remember these things taking place. While recognizing their relationship as familial, Miki Maus did not deny Yulya's faith. Her initial reluctance to talk about her sexuality

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[101] A pseudonym chosen by the research participant.

[102] "She was my *valeryanka*". Here Miki Maus is referring to a medication made out of valerian root that it thought to help calm down, and treat insomnia.

[103]"What I liked about her was that she treated us like her children. We are all equal in her eyes. She listens to everyone. She can give an advice to each, that's her."

[104] "She gave each child a photo album of us starting from when we were little up to 2008. And you are in shock, you look at the photographs and think, crap, when did you manage to do this? Where did this happen? It was unexpected, but it was also very touching."

stemmed from the fear that Yulya, being a Christian would judge her. Yulya herself was surprised when Miki Maus came out in their conversation one day. For both of them this became a turning point in their relationship. Miki Maus put more trust in Yulya than anyone else, as she took the plunge and came out to her. She mentioned being worried Yulya would not take it well being a Christian. Yulya too reflected on this conversation as the one that deepened their relationship. In this relationship, Miki Maus gained acceptance in an individual who cared about her, and Yulya felt closing the distance she felt they had.

Miki Maus did not have a similar positive experience with her other mentor Katya, whom she called sister throughout the interview. Katya was a neighbor who took Miki Maus and her other two sisters in when their mother abandoned them. The girls were later reported to the police by other neighbors, and taken to the diagnostic center to be put in three different orphanages. Miki Maus attributed the lack of any sisterly sentiments towards her sisters to the fact that they were separated and grew up in different institutions. After graduation, she moved in with Katya and her elderly mother. Miki Maus talked about her insecurity. She said,

> Я любила капюшон одевать, закрывать себя [усмехнулась]. Просто в один момент, Катя появилась, и она вот так [пальцем щелкнула] как фея, «посмотри на себя, ты взрослая, красивая девушка». Она меня накрасила, приодела, маникюр-педикюр. И я поняла, что я красивая. Когда я с Катей нахожусь, у меня уверенность в себе. Я становлюсь лучше, я становлюсь красивее, я становлюсь вообще волшебная. Как Катя исчезает из моей жизни, я становлюсь другая[105].

Miki Maus seemed to have gained sisterly acceptance and a sense of belonging with Katya. She attributed feeling of confidence to Katya's presence in her life. She also talked about becoming better when Katya was in her life. It seems, she wanted to live up to certain expectations Katya had of her. Miki Maus did not identify Katya as religious. After her conversation with Yulya, she decided to talk to Katya, "И реакция довольно ужасная была, много слов было сказано, которые я никогда не слышала от нее.

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[105] "I liked to put a hoodie on, close myself up [smirks. It's just someday, Katya showed up, and like a fairy [snaps her fingers] (said) "look at yourself, you are a grown-up beautiful girl. She put make-up on me, dressed me up, manicure-pedicure. And I realized that I was beautiful. When I'm with Katya I have confidence in myself. I become better, I become more beautiful, I become just magical. Once Katya disappears from my life I become someone else."

Мы не общались год. Она была готова все бросить из-за этого"[106]. Miki Maus did not find acceptance in Katya. Her coming out forced her back into hiding as she keeps her personal love life separate from Katya. Her emotional connection to Katya did not allow Miki Maus to give up on their relationship completely. Her experience with coming out became complicated by her dependence on Katya's approval, and persistent stigmatization of LGBTQ+ in Kazakhstan. Shame evoked by Katya's destabilized their relationships and her perception of the self, as Miki Maus continued to grapple with what she referred to as disjointed facets of her identity. She added that she did not like her given name, and chose a different name that she sometimes used. This name distinction allowed her space for an exploration of the stigmatized self while maintaining acceptable normalcy.

Some mentees seek acceptance from their mentors. This sentiment might grow stronger as they grow older, and the relationship develops. This did not mean that the relationship between a mentor and mentee reached new depth, but a sense of dependence took new forms with time. Deniza referred to her mentor as *Mama*. She was perceptive to the dependence she had on *Mama*, and seemed to resent it at times. According to Deniza, she met her mentor at an orphanage not far from Almaty. *Mama* was bringing diapers and things for children as a donation when she met an infant Deniza, and arranged to transfer to an orphanage in Almaty. For Deniza, having *Mama* was important, because it set her apart from the fellow orphans. Deniza talked about *Mama* arranging grand birthday parties for her, and making the day so very special. At the same time, Deniza was acutely aware of her difference from *Mama's* biological children. She said,

> она очень много для меня сделала, у нее даже есть двое сыновей, и сестренка у меня есть, (...) я их очень люблю. Но я всегда думала, что я не для этой семьи. (...) Я все равно чувствовала, что дети за счет мамы общаются (со мной). То есть у них нет собственного желания, то есть мама на них навязывала как будто бы.[107]

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[106] "And her reaction was pretty terrible. There were many words said that I had never heard from her. We did not communicate for one year. She was ready to give up everything."

[107] "She did a lot for me. She even has two sons, and a younger sister, I have… [she shifts] (…) I love them very much. But I've always thought I wasn't meant for their family (…) I felt that the children talked to me only coz of Mama. That is, they do not have a personal wish [to talk to me], it was imposed by their mother."

She alluded to not being meant for *Mama's* family. Her relationship with *Mama's* children contributed to the sense of precariousness she experienced. But it also seemed to build on her previous experience of not being accepted into the family on the same basis as the biological children. Deniza added that she asked *Mama* to adopt her, but she did not because her husband was against the adoption. When I asked her about calling someone mother, Deniza said orphans were aware that the women they called mothers[108] were not their mothers. Deniza said, "Она сказала ты понимаешь, что я тебе не [мама]? Я сказала, я все понимаю. Я тебя назвала, потому что мне не хватает своей мамы, я тебя назвала, потому что ну… я нуждаюсь в этом… слове, в этих отношениях.[109]" For Deniza a word mother – not a meaningless title, as some suggest - denoted a special kind of relationship. She admitted that for her this relationship is rooted in love manifested in physical affection, like hugs. She lamented not receiving said affection.

Deniza also alluded to a constant sense of her own inadequacy that she struggled to overcome as she tried to prove herself to *Mama*. She took pride in her ability to be able to talk like a *domashnik* (domestic child), and her academic successes. This, again, set her apart from her fellow orphans, who, according to Deniza, could only talk in slang, and cursed a lot. She also talked a lot about her good relationships with teachers at the specialized school she attended. But despite this seeming confidence and pride in her own abilities and difference from other orphans, Deniza admitted that *Mama* did not recognize it. Deniza remembered *Mama* saying that her mind was that of a five-year-old. She used to ask for forgiveness for her mistakes or inadequacy, but said, stopped doing that because she was an adult, and could not allow to be disrespected that way. She added, "она единственный человек, который мне не верит. И поэтому я поступила на эту профессию, участвую в конкурсах, именно из-за нее. Потому что я хочу ей доказать, извини ты ошибалась.[110]" Here, she was referring to changing

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[108] Sometimes, orphans might call their caregivers mother. In some smaller, privately operated orphanages like Kovcheg, children called the headmistress mother. In most cases, this is initiated by the adults, and not orphans. Ilya stated he could not bring himself to call his caregivers mother when he was a child.

[109] "She said, you do realize I am not [your mother]? I said, I understand. I call you that because I miss my mother, I call you that because… I just need this word, these relationships."

[110] "she is the only person that doesn't believe in me. And that is why I got in this profession [hairdresser], take part in competitions, it is all because of her. I want to prove to her, "I'm sorry, but you were wrong."

her concentration from economics (*Mama's* choice for Deniza) to hairstyling and make-up. Despite defying *Mama* in her career choice, and going for something that was not perceived as stable and respectable, Deniza could not completely withdraw from this relationship. She mentioned falling out with *Mama* over her education and choosing to live with her boyfriend before marriage. Having confidence in her career choice, and feeling like she belonged to the community of hair and make-up artists, she felt a need to prove her point to *Mama*.

Pragmatic side of relationship: everyday support

The other aspect of mentor/mentee relationship involves everyday support, including things like material support, advise, academic support, etc. Sveta, confident in her own abilities and entitlements, nonetheless alluded to Yulya and Mike as her support group. Sveta was clear on her wish to graduate from high school and apply for university, instead of transferring from grade 9 to a *kolledge* (community college) like many of her peers and other orphans. According to Sveta, most orphans were tempted by a relatively decent stipend they would get if they went to a community college instead of staying at their high schools till grade 11. In addition, caregivers and orphanage administration did not necessarily provide an adequate level of support or encourage orphans to apply for university. She added, "воспитателя говорят, да куда вы пойдете, да с вашими оценками" [111]. Sveta said she felt discouraged to apply for university. The caregivers and orphanage administration were supposed to help orphans with the application process. But in Sveta's case, she was told to do everything herself. Sveta needed to study for the *ENT* (*Edinoe Natsional'noe Testirovanie*, or unified national testing[112]) to get enough points to be accepted to a university of her choice. To study for the examination, Sveta was hired a tutor, a university student who volunteered at the orphanage. But she said she felt it was not enough, and she was not getting enough preparation done. The *Sabi* Fund used to pay for the ENT preparation courses for orphans who were interested in applying for university. The fund stopped paying

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[111] "The caregivers say, where will you go with your [bad] grades."

[112] High school graduates are required to take ENT before applying for university. The points they get in the examination affect the acceptance rate and available funding. The examination consists of four subjects, the fourth being the one that coincides with the student's chosen concentration at university. This means she has to decide what she wants to study at university before applying, because the fourth subject depends on her choice. ENT has been criticized from its inception, but no major changes have been introduced to the examination format.

because, according to Sveta, orphans were dropping out of these courses. But that did not deter Sveta from going to the fund to ask to pay for her ENT preparation. She remembered,

> Сказала воспитательнице, "можете со мной съездить потому что я не знаю этих людей, я не знаю куда именно ехать." (…) Директор, конечно же, отказала, сказала "они от нас отказались, они не будут нам помогать, можете не просить." (…) И получается сказала, что или мы едем, или я еду одна. И воспитательница не могла отпустить меня одну и поехала со мной. Мы зашли в здание, пришли к главному человеку, который отвечает за это все. Я выпрашивала, я умоляла, говорила мне нужны эти курсы. В общем они решили оплачивать.[113]

Sveta showed resolve, but also confidence in herself when she went to the fund to ask for money. At the same time, she was well aware of her status, and what this status allowed or could provide her with. This example points at the everyday realities orphans face, not having enough practical knowledge to tackle properly. For many, these situations are intimidating, since they do not know how things are done, and what they might be entitled to. Mentors can help significantly in these situations by either going with the orphan to inquiry about funding or an application process (among other things), or by giving practical advice on how these things can be accomplished. In many ways, Sveta attributed her acceptance to the Business School of her choice to her mentors Yulya and Mike, who encouraged her to persevere and apply to one of the most competitive universities in the city. Yulya lamented Sveta applying to the Business School instead of pursuing a career in Arts, since she was a talented artist. But Sveta displayed pragmatism in her career choice. In turn, Mike, who was working at that university provided Sveta with tips on the application process and information on available funding options. Sveta's mentors helped her navigate a tricky terrain of university application, but also were supportive of her decision, letting her know they believed in her abilities.

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[113] "I asked the caregiver, "could you go with me, because I don't know these people, I don't know where to go to." (…) The headmistress has obviously said no, she said, "they gave up on us, they will not help us, don't even ask." (…) So, I told [the caregiver] either we go together, or I go on my own. And the caregiver could not let me go on my own, so she went with me. We entered the building, came to see the head person, who is responsible for all of it. I was asking, I was begging, telling them that I needed these courses. In the end, they decided to pay [for my courses]"

In considering mentorship in relation to institutionalization, I am more inclined to view it not as an extension of an orphanage system. The view of mentorship existing outside the direct influence of the institution becomes clear when juxtaposing it with sponsorship. I discussed sponsorship above briefly. Here I suggest considering sponsorship as an extension of institutionalization that perpetuates victimization and criminalization of orphans and orphanage graduates. A comment made both by non-orphans and orphanage graduates illustrates this point well. Some interlocutors referred to sponsorship as enabling unhealthy dependence amongst orphans who received material gifts from sponsors. *Potrebitelskoe otnoshenie*, or consumer attitude cited by interlocutors carries a strong disapproving disposition. Sponsorship was seen as a culprit of fostering *potrebitelskoe otnoshenie* among orphans. In addition, this systemic form of sponsorship does not generally extend outside orphanage. By systemic I mean normalization of sponsorship, and its transition into an everyday parlance of the institutional life. In contrast, mentor and mentee relations exist in a real parallel to the orphanage. For one, not all orphans have a mentor. Those who do, like Sveta, benefit from additional knowledge offered by mentors. For Sveta, her mentors provide support that gives her opportunities to redefine her identity as a university student, and not only an orphan. In this sense, mentorship could contribute to individual distigmatization for some mentees. Although some mentors continue to operate under the victimizing and criminalizing perception of orphans, on the level of individual relationships with their mentees, they tend to move towards less stigmatizing outlook, taking into account personal particularities of the mentees.

Although mentorship as a program can be perceived as a part of the institutional realm, the development of these relationships generally takes place outside the orphanage. Yulya was required to gather documentation to apply for a permit to visit orphans at the orphanage. One of the documents required was a police information check. Sveta noted that the process was arduous and time consuming for Yulya. For mentors who are part of the mentorship program the relationship might be more regulated in Foucauldian sense of surveillance and control through registration and documentation. However, not all mentor relationships are involved a bureaucratic maze of record keeping. Some, like Yulya, slip through the cracks of the institutional surveillance and control, but continue to have considerate impact on the mentees. The level of control an institution exercises over mentors is at its height prior to graduation.

Nonetheless, these relationships once again are not as controlled as it would be expected of a total institution. In Yulya's case her unobstructed access to the orphanage depended on the interpersonal relationship with the caregiver in charge of the group she frequented. After graduation, these relationships take a different role, an orphanage graduate can rely on her mentor for practical support.

A university application is one of the examples of mentor's support. For some it can also be helping find a job or housing, in case a mentee can't live at *DY* anymore or is still waiting for her government-funded apartments. Since most mentors I interviewed were Christian[114], it is hard to compare their experiences to the mentors who do not actively practice any religion[115]. Among mentees who practice Christianity, the availability of everyday support was evident. Maya talked about small acts of kindness and thoughtfulness, like an elderly woman at the church bringing a jar of pickled food or jams to Raushan. Or, as mentioned earlier, there were other acts of support, like Maya, Raushan and Ilya finding jobs through the church. In the church environment, the relationships between a mentor and mentee take a different scope, as it involves a larger number of people, at times the whole church body. These orphanage graduates built reciprocal relationships with their fellow church members through the years. Other church members would also rely on the orphanage graduates in the time of need. Raushan mentioned picking up a son of a couple attending the church from kindergarten. I'm hesitant to claim that these orphanage graduates have transcended their orphan identities in their church communities. But their orphan identities were not at the forefront in these relationships.

Boundaries of mentorship: egotism

The recent quantitative research available on mentoring programs like Big Brothers Big Sisters (Herrera et al, 2011; DeWit et al, 2016; Park et al, 2017) suggest

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[114] I interviewed mostly mentors who identified as Christian because that was a network of mentors I had access to. It is difficult to gauge the general situation with mentors in Kazakhstan.

[115] In general, in Kazakhstan, most ethnic Kazakhs identify themselves as Muslim (Podoprigora, 2003). But this identification does not necessarily go beyond the title, i.e. they do not actively practice Islam in their everyday lives. So, it is possible, that the mentors that I did not identify as practicing any religion (they did not disclose any information in regards to their religious identification), would still identify themselves as Muslim, Christian, etc. But since the focus of the interviews was not on their religious identity, it is hard to make any implications.

that mentoring programs need to take a mentee-oriented approach. Park et al., (2017) writing about BBBS in the US propose considering each individual mentee to understand her needs better and match with an appropriate mentor. In addition, Park et al (2017), suggests, "mentoring agencies should not underestimate the need of providing frequent and ongoing training to mentors and professional support for relationship" to help mentors provide necessary assistance to each individual mentee (67). According to DeWit et al., 34% of the youth has the relationship close before the one-year commitment required by the program, which was "positively associated with youth gender (girls), behavioral difficulties, and match determination difficulties" (2016, 60). This in term, causes a number of negative effects on the youth (DeWit et al, 2016). Despite a relatively established infrastructure of support and available training, BBBS experiences suggest that youth find themselves in vulnerable situations. BBBS certainly differs from mentorship experience or orphans. However, BBBS research cited above argues for a mentee-oriented work, which is relevant in the cases of orphans, if not even more so.

During the interview with Zhanna Kim, I asked her about the project *Nastavniki*, where an adult could mentor an orphan. Kim was skeptical of people who want to adopt, or mentor. Her skepticism was salient in the approach she took with her clients, people coming to consultations in the hope to adopt. Kim first asked potential adoptive parents for their reasons for adoption. In many cases, if not all, Kim saw a *potrebitelskoe otnoshenie* in potential adoptive parents. This consumer attitude, for Kim, was rooted in one's desire to fulfill one's needs or wants through a child. She vehemently criticized women for saying they wanted to adopt to fill a void, or fulfill their maternal instinct. Kim said,

> Ребенок не должен вам ничего, даже рожденный, не рождается для того, чтобы реализовать ваш материнский инстинкт. Он рождается, потому что вы решили подарить кому-то жизнь, потому что вы можете. То же самое и здесь, вы берете его в семью, потому что вы можете подарить ему жизнь и любовь. Вы можете изменить его жизнь. Вы можете его спасти, вы можете ему помочь. Но, он вам ничего не должен.[116]

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[116] "The child does not owe you anything. Even a biological child is not born to realize your maternal instinct. He is born because you decided to give life, and because you can. It is the same for [orphans], you bring him into your family, because you can give him life and love. You can change his life. You can save him, you can help him. But, he owes you nothing."

She highlighted the importance of avoiding a faulty perception that an adoptive child owed anything to the adoptive family, because she saw it as one of the reasons for a rather large number of returns taking place in Kazakhstan. For Kim, the motivation behind the adoption was critical for a successful adoption and adaptation of both the child and parents. The motivation rooted in egotism was faulty for Kim. She extended this view to mentorship too, but with slight amendments. Both adoption and mentorship, according to Kim, were safe to the adult, but put the child in a very vulnerable position. In both cases, there were no legal repercussions for returning a child back to the orphanage or ceasing the mentor/mentee relationships. She said, "когда ты рожденного где-то оставляешь, то тут же вызывают полицию, тебя проверяет. Ты несешь последствия, штраф, вплоть до уголовной ответственности. Если ты приемного ребенка, спустя 8 лет вернешь в детский дом, вообще ничего.[117]" Along with egotistic motivation, the lack of legal responsibility[118] kept the child in precarious state.

In the mentorship program, according to Kim, a child and a mentor had an agreement that spelled out their relationship and boundaries of these relationship. Children were told they were friends, and these relationships were not about adoption. In comparison to BBBS, in the Kazakhstani program there was little to no mediation between a child and her mentor. In case of BBBS, the program was set up so as to offer a buffer to the mentors, through the involvement of the matching agencies, teachers and parents. In case of an orphan, there is no such buffer. Hence, Kim's critique is more salient. She drew a line between the child's understanding of the relationship with the mentor and the child's desire for a family. She gave a hypothetical example, that seemed to come from her professional experience,

> И, если ты приходишь к нему, и говоришь, "Вася, я хочу приходить к тебе, забирать тебя". И у тебя двое детей в семье, и он прихоть к тебе, и каждый раз видит, как ты общаешься с этими двумя детьми, как ты с ними играешь, как ты их обнимаешь, (...). И проходит месяц, этот Вася подходит, обнимает и говорит, "слушай, я знаю, что мы договорились, но забери меня пожалуйста. Я хочу, как они". А ты

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[117] "when you leave your biological child anywhere, [people] call the police, and you will be checked. You bear the consequence, a fine, up to criminal responsibility. If you bring an adoptive child back to the orphanage after 8 years, there is nothing."

[118] Kim is not the only one to point at the legal unprotectedness of orphans who are adopted. Nazym, a social worker and Sholpan Baibolova, an activist too referred to the lack of legal protection for adoptive children in case of returns or abuse.

говоришь, "мы ж договаривались с тобой, Вася. Я не готов, я не могу". А у него первый вопрос, " почему? Чем я хуже, чем они?[119]"

For Kim, mentorship (as a program) gave a guise of safety for the mentor, while leaving the child wanting to be adopted, but also afraid to let go of the relationship she had with the said mentor. In these relationships, an adult received more than she gave, as she filled the void, or made herself feel better about helping an orphan. Kim's critique pointed at the possible power imbalance in the mentor/mentee relationship. Deniza's case that I referred to earlier becomes a clear example of similar situation to the hypothetical Vasya. She asked her mentor *Mama* to adopt her, but was refused adoption, and kept at an arm's length. Deniza's relationship with *Mama* were complex, and emotionally taxing for her. Yet, she chose to remain in this relationship despite falling out with *Mama* on a few occasions. Kim concluded, "с детьми нужно быть честными[120]". Deniza's mentor said she could not adopt because her spouse was against it. But, I think, Kim would claim that it was the mentor's weakness and shame to admit her weakness that lead her to hide behind her husband's refusal to adopt.

Conclusion

Mentorship gains popularity in the wake of the closure of orphanages, and a growing awareness of the issue of orphans and orphanage graduates. Different individuals get involved in the mentorship program. For some it starts with random visitations to an orphanage, while others make a conscious decision to be involved with orphans for personal or altruistic reasons. In cases of mentors I interviewed during the fieldwork, the motivation was rooted in their faith. From the perspective of mentees, these relationships unfold in different ways too. The power dynamic is very much present, but it is not static. The relationship change over time, in turn, shifting the power dynamics. All in all, this short dive into mentorship allowed me to look at these

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[119] "And, so you come to [the child], and say, "Vasya, I want to visit you and take you home". You have two kids of your own, and he visits you, every time, he sees you communicating with your children, playing with them, hugging them (…). One month passes, and this Vasya boy, comes to you, hugs you and says, "Hey, I know we have an agreement, but please adopt me. I want [a family] like [your kids]. You say in response, "we had an agreement with you, Vasya. I'm not ready, I can't". His first questions is, "Why not? What makes me worse [or underserving]?."

[120] "[you] need to be honest with children"

relationships as living, and ever-changing inter-personal interactions between people who are not blood related, but have a possibility to grow meaningful and deep ties.

As we finished our interview with Sveta, she chatted away about other unrelated things. She sat in the same armchair at the espresso bar where weeks later, Gani would sit telling about his girlfriend in Prague, and plans to live in Germany. She looked up, and asked if she could ask me a question. She said she was always curious what a woman's belly looked like after giving birth. Does it go away once the baby is out, she asked. Sveta said, she asked the caregivers or other adults, but everyone told her it was too early for her to know. I laughed at her curios question, and told her it looked like a 6-month pregnant belly. I was not sure if she got the picture, but Sveta nodded satisfied with my answer. Weeks later, I sat across from Yulya in the swaying train. She talked about Sveta with affection, and worry. I mentioned the belly question, and Yulya laughed saying the girls at the orphanage were not well versed in these things. Yulya said Sveta was going off to Moscow to see her boyfriend who was a circus performer. She did not want to be judgmental of Sveta's life choices, but she did not want her making mistakes. The worry weighed heavily on her youthful features. A mother-hen indeed, I thought with a small laugh.

Conclusion

Thoughout this ethnography, I turned to the orphanage graduates first and foremost to discern how they made sense of their experiences of institutional childhood, and life after graduation from the orphanage. Ethnographic approach was critical for developing a less totalizing perception of the effects of an institutional childhood. In particular, feminist ethnographic approach informed the way in which I engaged with research participants obliging me to reflect on my positionality. Focusing on the personal stories told by orphanage graduates was critical, as I wanted to move away from criminalizing and victimizing narratives of orphanhood to consider ways of negotiating one's self and exercising agency in constraining circumstances. The aim here was to contribute to our understanding of the experiences of institutional childhood in Kazakhstan, and in the Post-Soviet context, as it was lived and navigated through by the orphanage graduates themselves.

In this thesis, I looked at the relationship of orphanage graduates and their casefiles. I discussed the role of the casefile beyond its utility, to point at the network of relationships and affects it became part of, and contributed to. I traced the ways orphanage graduates engaged with stigmatization and shame. In the second chapter, I focused on the productive potential of stigma and shame to think beyond finality of these forces. In the final chapter, building on the previous chapters, I discussed the relationship orphanage graduates had with their mentors. The final chapter suggested mentorship as a reciprocal and dynamic relationship affecting both the mentor and the mentee. Orphanage graduates were not on the receiving end of the relationships, but also contributed to mentors' self-identification and self-understanding. By focusing on the orphanage graduates, this ethnography presented a counter-narrative, where the research participants negotiated their identities beyond a stigmatized category and maintained complex relationships with other individuals.

In the introduction, I referred to challenges that emerged in researching and writing this work. Although most of these challenges were resolved, I want to briefly address the limitations of this ethnographic research. In considering a possible critique of qualitative research, I am aware that the sample size does not reflect the experiences of all orphanage graduates in Kazakhstan. At the same time, the fieldwork was both

limited in terms of time and geography. I acknowledge that this work reflects some of the experiences of orphanage graduates in Almaty and Taraz. This work does not include the experiences of orphanage graduates suffering from addictions, trauma, and remaining unemployed, or/and imprisoned. The research participants who agreed to take part in this research make up a small group of individuals who were able to create space for themselves outside the institutional walls.

On a personal level, I was limited by my positionality as an outsider who did not experience institutionalization. As a beginner researcher, my relatively young age affected the fieldwork and interviews as well. Some research participants who were not orphanage graduates questioned my qualifications, because I was not what they imagined a researcher to be like. For other research participants (orphanage graduates), my age was perceived differently, as they could relate to me at some level. For instance, Sergei, one of the research participants in Taraz said that he found it easier to talk to me because I did not act like women my age. More youthful, he clarified. Another research participant in Almaty admitted that on her way to the interview she planned to make things up, but after meeting me, and seeing that I was nervous but open to listen to her, she felt bad about wanting to lie. My inexperience and vulnerability as a beginner researcher created possibilities for a different kind of interviews, and my hope is that these were better kind of interviews at that.

This ethnographic research on the experiences of orphanage graduates in Kazakhstan was one of the steps towards our understanding of the changes in the institutional and social realities in the country. As a starting point into the inquiry of the effects of institutional childhood, this thesis raises more questions. Specifically, more research is required to understand the effects of the state interventions, and the ways these interventions influences real life circumstances of orphans and orphanage graduates. Orphanage on an institutional level continues both to resist and face challenges in ensuring complete transparency in childcare and implementing state policies locally. Orphanage graduates offer an immensely valuable outlook on these state interventions, as well as the mechanisms involved in the operation of orphanages through their lived experience. Finally, unpacking the stories shared by research participants through a critical ethnographic lens allowed to consider how individual experiences are affected by the interplay between institutions, policies, society and culture in Almaty and Taraz. With the move towards deinstitutionalization, and the

increasing public activism, Kazakhstan in general offers an intriguing ground for further ethnographic research of institutional life conceived during the Soviet Union, but shifting awkwardly towards a more neoliberal model.

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Appendix A. Interview Sample Questions

Interview questions in English

Interview questions for Orphanage graduates

1. Could you tell me about yourself? (Alternatively, I could specify: Could you tell me about yourself and your childhood?)

2. What were days in the orphanage like? What did you think of the routines? Were the routines limiting you?

3. Do you remember your caregivers? How would you describe your caregivers?

4. Do you remember your final year in the orphanage? What did you think about before graduating from the orphanage? What would you tell your younger self?

5. What was your life like after graduation? Was what you expected it to be?

6. How did you feel like when you received your case file?

7. Do you tell people that you are an orphan? Do you think there is a different attitude towards orphans? What in your opinion contributes to this attitude towards orphans?

8. Describe your first job search/ or university application?

9. Could you talk about your first year living outside the orphanage? What were the things that were different? Did you notice any difficulties?

10. Do you often think about your orphanage life now?

11. In your opinion, how did orphanage life affect you?

12. Do you have a family? Can you talk about your family? Do you think orphanage life has affected the way you perceive family life? Would you tell your children about your childhood?

13. What is the role of the state/government in helping orphans? In your opinion, does the state have a responsibility in taking care of the orphans? What was your experience of dealing with the state officials? Can you describe one of those experiences?

14. What is your opinion on the closure of a number of orphanages? What do you think of this move towards fostering?

Interview questions for Administration, NGOs and volunteers

1. Please describe your work? What is your connection to orphanages?

2. How did you decide to work with orphans? What motivates you to do your work?

3. Do you remember your first day at work? What was your first contact with orphans like? Do you remember your first impression?

4. Do you think your attitude is different now?

5. In your opinion, how do Kazakhstanis view orphans and orphanage graduates? What contributes to this point of view?

6. What do you think are challenges orphans face when they graduate?

7. What do you think of the idea of closing down all orphanages in favor of foster care? Do you think Kazakhstanis are ready for it? What would be the challenges for implementing foster care instead of institutional care?

8. Do you think orphanage graduates have the resources for their post-institutional life? What are the things that can be changed?

9. In your opinion how does orphanage affect individuals?

10. What is the most challenging thing in working with orphans/orphanage graduates?

Interview questions in Kazakh

Interview questions for orphanage graduates

1. Өзіңіз туралы айтып беріңіз? Балалық шақ туралы айтып беріңіз?

2. Балалар үйдего күнде не істедіңіздер? Сол бір күнді бейнелеп беріңізші? Сіздің ойыңызша, балалар үйдегі күнделікті кесте сіздің екіндігіңіщге шек қойып отырды ма?

3. Сізбен болған тәрбиешіні есіңізде барма? Он қандай адам еді?

4. Балалар уйіндего ең соңғы жыл есіңізде барма? Сол уақытта сіз не туралы ойладыңыз? Сол кездегі (Ат) не айтар едіңіз?

5. Балалар уйденгі өміріңіз қандай болды? Ойлағандай болдыма?

6. Жеке ісіңізді алғаннан кезде не олайдыңыз/не сездіңіз?

7. Жаңа адам кездестіргенде, өзіңіздің жетім болғанын айтасызба? Жетімге басқалап қарайды ма? Неге?

8. Бірінші жұмыс іздеу туралы айтып беріңізші? Немес, университетке құжар тапсыру туралы айтып беріңізші?

9. Балалар үйден шықаннан кейнгі, сол бірінші жыл қалай өтті? Несі өзгеше болды? Қандай қиындыктарға тап болдыңыз ?

10. Қазір балалар үйдегі уақыт туралы көп олайсызба?

11. Балалар уйде өмір сүру сізге қалай әсер етті?

12. Өзіңіздің отбасыңыз барма? Отбасыңыз туралы айтып беріңіз? Балалар уйде өмір сүру сіздің өз отбасыңыздың өмірене, немесе сіз отбасыға бар көзқарасыңызға қалай әсер етті? Өз балаларына балылық шақ туралы айтып бересізбе?

13. Жетім балаларды қолдауда мемлекеттің рөлі қандай? Мемлекет жетімдерді қолдап қорғауға жаупкершілігі барма? Мемлекеттік құрымдармен қандай жағдайға там болдыңыз? Сол бір кез туралы айтып беріңізші?

14. Балалар үйлерінің жабылуы туране не ойлайсыз? Патронатты система туралы не ойлайсыз?

Interview questions for Administration, NGOs and volunteers

1. Өзіңіздің жұмысыңызды сипаттап беріңіз? Жетім балалармен байланысы кандай?

2. Жетім балалармен жұмыс істеудге қалай келдіңіз? Неге бастадыңыз?

3. Өзіңіздің жұмыстағы ең бірінші күнді есіңізде барма? Жетім балалармен болған бірінші кездесу қалай өтті? Осы кездесу сізге қалай әсер етті?

4. Жетім балаларға деген көз-қарасыңыз өзгерді ме?

5. Басқа адамадар болса жетім балалар үйден шығатын жас азаматтарына қалай қарайды? Осы көз-қарасқа не әсер етеді?

6. Жетім балалар уйден шыққанан кейн, осы азаматтар қандай қыйншылыққа тап болады?

7. Балалар үйлерінің жабылуы туране не ойлайсыз? Патронатты система туралы не ойлайсыз? Қазақстандықтар осыған дайын ба? Қандай қыйншылықтар болады деп ойлайсыз?

8. Сіз ойыңыз бойынша, осы азаматтар қоғамда өмір сүру үшін ресурстары барма? Қандай нәрселерді өзгертуге болады?

9. Балалар уйіндегі өмір адамға қандай әсер етеді деп ойласыз?

Interview Sample Questions in Russian

Interview questions for Orphanage graduates

1. Расскажите о себе? (Расскажи о себе? или Расскажи о своем детстве?)

2. Как проходили дни в детдоме? Опишите (опиши) типичный день в детдоме? Думаете ли вы (думаешь ли ты) что расписание в детдоме ограничивало вашу (твою) свободу?

3. Помните ли вы (Помнишь ли ты) своих воспитателей? Как бы вы (ты) описали (описал/описала) своих воспитателей?

4. Опишите (опиши) свой последний год в детдоме. О чем вы (ты) думали (думал/думала) до выпуска из детдома? Что бы вы (ты) сказали (сказал/сказала) себе тогда?

5. Какой была жизнь после выпуска из детдома? Была ли она такой как вы (ты) ожидали (ожидал/ожидала)?

6. Помните ли вы свои ощущения, когда вы получили свое дело?

7. При встрече с людьми говорите ли вы (говоришь ли ты) о том, что вы (ты) сирота? Считаете ли вы (Думаешь ли ты) что люди относятся иначе к сиротам (выпускникам детдомов)? Почему они так думают?

8. Расскажи(те) о своем первом опыте поиске работы/подачи документов в университет?

9. Расскажи(те) о своем первом годе проживании за пределами детского дома? Что отличалось? Были ли какие-либо сложности?

10. Сейчас, ты (вы) часто вспоминаете о детском доме?

11. Как жизнь в детдоме повлияла на вас (тебя)?

12. У тебя (вас) есть семья? Расскажи(те) о своей семье? Думаешь (думаете) ли ты (вы) что жизнь в детском доме повлияла на то как ты (вы) видишь

(видите) свою семью/ семейную жизнь в целом? Расскажешь(те) ли ты (вы) своим детям о своем детстве в детском доме?

13. Какова роль государства в помощи/поддержке сирот? Ответственно ли государство за обеспечение поддержки и помощи сиротам? Расскажи(те) о своем опыте взаимодействия с представителями гос.структур? Опиши(те) один из таких примеров?

14. Что ты (вы) думаешь(те) о закрытии детских домом? Что ты (вы) думаешь(те) о системе патроната?

Interview questions for Administration, NGOs and volunteers

1. Опиши(те) свою работу? Как она связана с детдомами?

2. Как вы (ты) решили (решил/решила) работать с сиротами?

3. Помните ли вы (Помнишь ли ты) свой первый день? Какой была первая встреча с сиротами? Какое впечатление это произвело на вас (тебя)?

4. Считаете ли вы (Думаешь ли ты) что ваше (твое) отношение изменилось?

5. По-вашему, как Казахстанцы видят сирот и выпускников детдомов? Что влияет на это мнение? Почему оно так распространено?

6. По-вашему, (По-твоему) какие сложности сироты встречают на своем пути после выпуска из детдома?

7. Что вы думаете (ты думаешь) о закрытии детдомов? Что вы думаете (ты думаешь) о системе патроната? Готовы ли Казахстанцы к этому? Какие сложности могут возникнуть в этом случае?

8. По-вашему, (По-твоему) имеют ли выпускники детских домов ресурсы для жизни вне детского дома? Какие вещи можно изменить?

9. Как жизнь в детском доме влияет на человека в дальнейшем?