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Perceptions and Portrayals of “the Refugee”: Public Attitudes and Engagement in Canadian Resettlement

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Declaration

I, Chiara Maria Magboo, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

Date.....

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Any errors in this thesis are mine alone.

Abstract

This thesis explores the dynamics between public attitudes and perceptions concerning refugees, and volunteer engagement in Canadian resettlement programming. Considered a leader in global refugee resettlement due partly to its private sponsorship model, Canada appears to differ from many other resettlement states in terms of its consistently positive public attitudes toward refugees. Based on interviews with key informants and analyses of political and media discourses concerning refugees, this study provides insight into the perspectives of volunteers and other stakeholders with regards to refugee resettlement. The findings suggest that public engagement in Canadian resettlement is strongly driven by attitudes based on a combination of humanitarianism and pragmatism, and supported by particular perceptions of refugees and their role in Canadian society.

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List of Acronyms

AURA	Anglican United Refugee Alliance
BVOR	Blended Visa Office-Referred
CG	Constituent Group
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
CS	Community Sponsor
G5	Group of Five
GAR	Government-Assisted Refugees
GCR	Global Compact for Refugees
GRSI	Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative
GTA	Greater Toronto Area
HDI	Human Development Index
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRCC	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
ORAT	Office of Refugees for the Archdiocese of Toronto
PSR(P)	Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program
SAH	Sponsorship Agreement Holder
UCC	United Church of Canada
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Preface

“The condition of the refugee, unlike the situation of the exile, does not lend itself to easy aestheticization.”

- Bishupal Limbu, “Illegible Humanity: The Refugee, Human Rights, and the Question of Representation” (2009:267)

*

“Who is a true refugee? It makes me chuckle, this notion that “refugee” is a sacred category, a people hallowed by evading hell. Thus, they can’t acknowledge a shred of joy left behind or they risk becoming migrants again.

[...]

Now, thirty years have passed; I have so much to say. The world no longer speaks of refugees as it did in my time. The talk has grown hostile, even unhinged, and I have a hard time spotting, amid the angry hordes, the kind souls we knew, [...] who helped us, who held our hands. I know they’re still out there.”

- Dina Nayeri, “The Ungrateful Refugee: What Immigrants Never Tell You” (2019:10,12)

1. Background

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that of the 79.5 million forcibly displaced people in the world today, 26.0 million are refugees (UNHCR, 2020a). Displacement is defined by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as the forced movement of people from their homes due to armed conflict, human rights violations, or disasters (natural or human-made) (IOM, 2020). This forced migration creates different categories of displaced populations, including refugees. The UNHCR advocates for three “durable solutions” to end the cycle of displacement for refugees: voluntary repatriation in the country of origin; local integration in a country of asylum; or resettlement in a third country (UNHCR, 2020b).

Resettlement entails the selection and transfer of refugees from an asylum country to a third country where they are expected to eventually receive permanent residence status (UNHCR, 2020c). Under the international legal principle of *non-refoulement*, resettled refugees are protected from forced return to their country of origin (UNHCR, 2017). Resettlement is proposed in cases where neither repatriation nor local integration is feasible, i.e. for the most vulnerable refugees who are unable to safely return home or remain in their country of first asylum (UNHCR, 2020d). It is also supposed to enable countries to share responsibility for protecting refugees (UNHCR, 2013). The UNHCR is calling on countries to expand global resettlement efforts as the number of refugees needing resettlement continues to grow (UNHCR, 2019a).

Resettlement is increasingly being promoted as central to the international community’s response to refugee crises moving forward. The 2016 Declaration for Refugees and Migrants introduced a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) emphasizing the importance of durable solutions (UNHCR, 2016). The 2018 Global Compact for Refugees (GCR) went a step further, listing the expansion of refugee access to third-country solutions as one of its four key objectives (UNHCR, 2018). This has led to the launch of the UNHCR’s Three-Year Strategy (2019-2021) on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, which aims to increase the number of resettlement spaces and states, improve refugee access to other third-

country pathways besides resettlement, and support “welcoming and inclusive communities” in receiving societies (UNHCR, 2019a).

Like the United Nations’ (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Three-Year Strategy advocates for a multi-stakeholder and “whole-of-society” approach to achieve its resettlement targets (UN, 2015; UNHCR, 2019a). A whole-of-society approach acknowledges the roles played by all relevant stakeholders, including: governments, citizens, communities, civil society and non-governmental organizations, academia, media, the private sector, religious institutions, and voluntary associations (WHO, 2016; APC, 2020). Engaged stakeholders can then support the Strategy in different ways.

One example of diverse stakeholder engagement in refugee resettlement can be found in Canada. Canada is the second largest resettlement state in the world (UNHCR, 2019b). Over the last decade, it has accepted 20 percent of all resettled refugees globally, including 74,000 refugees from Syria in the past five years (IRCC, 2020a; UNHCR, 2020a). The Canadian government’s Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program consists of multiple resettlement streams: government-assisted, private sponsorship, and blended visa (IRCC, 2020b, 2020c). In 2018 Canada led the world in resettling the highest number of refugees (Pew Research Center, 2019). Between 2015 and June 2020, the country accepted 155,000 refugees for resettlement, the majority through private sponsorship (IRCC, 2020a).

The UNHCR cites Canada’s Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP) as one model for resettlement, referencing it in both the GCR and in the Three-Year Strategy (UNHCR 2018; 2019a). Introduced in 1976, the program lets private groups and organizations in Canada sponsor eligible refugees from abroad (IRCC, 2020c). The groups provide refugees with financial, emotional and social support for the sponsorship period typically lasting one year. Although refugee protection is considered to be primarily the responsibility of states (with the assistance of the UNHCR), the PSRP is an example of various stakeholders taking a prominent role in resettlement (UNHCR, 2011). It is a government program driven by public engagement in the civil society sphere (*civil society* in this study referring to “the space for collective action around shared interests, purposes and values”) (WHO, 2020). Supported by the UNHCR, the

private sponsorship resettlement model is being adapted in other countries through the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI) launched in 2016 (GRSI, 2020).

1.1 Problem Statement

Today's all-time high of 79.5 million forcibly displaced persons is a near doubling of the 41 million displaced people in 2010 (UNHCR, 2020a). The UNHCR attributes this to more people becoming displaced with fewer persons able to return to their countries of origin (Ibid.). With millions unable to go home due to protracted conflicts, and situations in many asylum countries becoming more precarious due to overburdening of local systems and politicization of migration issues, there is growing need for increased third-country resettlement for refugees.

Despite this, there is a persistent gap between resettlement needs and government-allocated resettlement spaces around the world. Less than one percent of all refugees are resettled each year (UNHCR, 2020c). In 2019, an estimated 1.44 million persons were identified as being in urgent need of resettlement (UNHCR, 2020e). Yet only 4.5 percent of global needs were met, with 82,000 refugees submitted by the UNHCR for resettlement consideration to 29 countries (Ibid.). Responsibility-sharing between developed and developing countries is also highly inequitable, with 85 percent of the world's refugees hosted by lower and middle-income countries (UNHCR, 2019a; 2020f).

The private sponsorship model can significantly grow resettlement opportunities worldwide. However, it relies on a high level of public engagement in resettlement states; and unlike states that are signatories to the Geneva Convention and other international level statutes, non-state actors have few formal obligations compelling them to participate in refugee protection. Furthermore, scholars posit that resettlement's success as a durable solution requires "relatively favourable attitudes by members of host societies" (Esses et al., 2017:78). Yet public attitudes toward refugees are complex, with recent polls displaying a global trend of mixed attitudes largely influenced by negative perceptions of refugees and other forced migrants (Ibid.). The drivers and dynamics of public perceptions, attitudes and engagement should be studied, particularly if Canada's private sponsorship of refugee resettlement model is to be successfully shared.

1.2 Research Objectives

The overall purpose of this study is to contribute to a deeper understanding of dynamics influencing public engagement in refugee resettlement. It aims to provide insight into the perspectives of volunteers and other stakeholders; assess to what extent certain attitudes and perceptions appear to be commonly reflected across society; and discuss how these factors ultimately drive engagement. The study is guided by the following research questions:

- ➔ What are the relationships between perceptions and attitudes concerning refugees, and volunteer engagement in Canadian resettlement? Do other factors play a role?
- ➔ How are public perceptions and attitudes concerning refugees shaped and remade in the Canadian resettlement context?
- ➔ In the Canadian public consciousness: Who or what is “the refugee”? And what is a resettlement society’s relationship to them?

1.3 Thesis Structure

This thesis is organized as follows:

The first section introduces the background, problem statement and research objectives of the study. The second section introduces Canada as the study area. It provides context relevant to the analysis with emphasis on immigration and multiculturalism in the country. This is followed by an overview of Canada’s refugee resettlement history and current resettlement system. The third section presents the theoretical framework of the study, divided into sub-sections according to theme. This includes migration-related theories and concepts (the impact of migration on receiving societies; categories of migration, conceptualizations of forced migrants, understanding of the term “refugee”); and discussion of key themes in the study (public perceptions and attitudes concerning refugees, political discourse and labeling, media discourse and representation, and volunteer/sponsor engagement). The fourth section discusses the research design and methodology of the study. It presents the research approach, data collection, sampling and analysis methods, and limitations and ethical considerations. The fifth section presents the findings and discussion. This is divided into three main sub-sections for each perspective being discussed: volunteers (the primary perspective being analyzed based on data collected from key informant interviews), political stakeholders/discourse and media stakeholders/discourse. Every

section is divided further according to theme, with a summary of key findings for each section. The sixth section presents concluding remarks, including a summary of the findings in response to the study's research questions.

2. Research Context

This section introduces Canada as the study area of the thesis. It is divided into three sub-sections: The first sub-section provides an overview of characteristics relevant to this analysis. These include geography, population demographics, economy, and system of government. The second sub-section highlights Canada's contemporary identity as a country built on immigration and multiculturalism. The third sub-section presents the Canadian refugee resettlement context. It outlines Canada's history of refugee protection and resettlement, the structure of the current resettlement system (comprised of the GAR, PSRP and BVOR pathways), and the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis.

2.1 Canada: An Introduction

Canada is the second largest country in the world, with a total area of 9,984,670 km² (Statistics Canada, 2018a). It is the northernmost country in the North America continent, sharing its only international land border with the United States to the south. To the east, west and north it is bordered by ocean (Atlantic, Pacific, Arctic). The country is divided into ten provinces and three territories. The most populous province is Ontario, which includes the country's largest city, Toronto.

For its geographical size, Canada has a small population (approximately 38 million) and a low population density (4/km²) (Statistics Canada, 2020; World Bank, 2018). An estimated 80% of the population lives in urban areas, with growth in major cities driven by migration from rural areas of the country as well as immigration from abroad (Statistics Canada, 2018b). Population data from the most recent government census conducted in 2016 shows demographic shifts trending towards longer life expectancies alongside lower fertility rates (Maclean's, 2017).

Canada is a highly developed country and is among the world's wealthiest nations. It has the tenth-largest economy in the world, with a GDP of \$1.731 trillion USD in 2019 (CEBR, 2019). National employment growth in recent years continues to be largely driven by immigration (Statistics Canada, 2018c). The country is a member of the G8 nations and was a founding member of the OECD. It currently ranks 13th in the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 2019).

Canada is a parliamentary democracy and a constitutional monarchy. Among its five political parties, the federal government has historically been led by either the centre-right leaning Conservative Party or the centre-left leaning Liberal Party, which has been in power since 2015. The Liberal Party leader is the current Prime Minister and head of the government.

2.2 Canada, Immigration and Multiculturalism

Canada is one of the most ethno-culturally diverse nations in the world, with large-scale immigration a defining feature of the country's history. Over 250 ethnic origins were noted in the 2016 national census (Statistics Canada, 2017). According to statistics, over one-fifth of the current population (21.9%) was born outside of Canada, identifying either as a landed immigrant or permanent resident at one point in time (Ibid.). This includes over 1.2 million people who arrived in Canada between 2011 and 2016 (60.3% admitted under the economic category; 26.8% admitted under the family class; and 11.6% admitted as refugees) (Ibid.).

Multiculturalism is considered to be a core component of Canada's national identity. It is also an official policy of the Canadian government, adopted in 1971 and later enshrined in the 1988 Canadian Multiculturalism Act (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2020). The Multiculturalism Policy of Canada aims "to recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society [...]" and "to recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that it provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada's future" (Government of Canada, 2020a).

National surveys indicate that public attitudes concerning immigration remain largely and consistently positive: 50% of surveyed Canadians agree that immigration is "making Canada a better place" while 84% agree that immigration has a positive economic impact (Environics

Institute, 2020). According to Hiebert (2016:1), the positive outlook of immigration in Canadian society can be attributed at least partly to the country's specific history of immigration and a narrative accompanying it. Furthermore, government policies on immigration have in recent decades been closely tied to demographic and economic considerations. Broadly supported by all major political parties (Ibid.), immigration is viewed as a significant social and economic pillar of Canadian society.

2.3 Canada and Refugee Resettlement

2.3.1 A History of Resettlement

Canada's long history of immigration has, in some ways, helped shape the history of refugee resettlement in the country. In reviewing the history of refugees in Canada, Epp (2015:2) points out that the term "refugee" has been broadly used in both Canadian immigration history and in public practice, including well before the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees which established the legal and internationally recognized definition of the term.

Bearing that in mind, Canada's history of refugee arrivals can be traced back to the end of the 18th century (Epp 2015:4). Its early history was marked by specific waves of arriving groups. This included the arrival of 7,000 Quakers and 50,000 British Loyalists during the American Revolution in the 1770s; the arrival of 33,000 Black Loyalists and former slaves, also following the American Revolution; and the 1847 arrival of 100,000 "famine refugees" from Ireland. Public responses to these arrivals varied widely from group to group, ranging from welcoming and sympathetic to containing elements of xenophobia and racism (Epp 2015:5).

From the late 19th century until the end of the Second World War, Canada had a mixed record in its acceptance and refusal of different groups of migrants seeking to enter the country. Epp (2015:6) points out that in some cases (e.g., religious sectarians fleeing Russia in the late 19th century), Canada's acceptance of migrants was based more on economic self-interest rather than humanitarianism. Prior to and during the Second World War, Canada also had a poor record in its response to Jewish refugees fleeing Europe (Epp 2015:8).

Canada's general approach towards resettlement began to shift in the post-war period, when it accepted almost 250,000 refugees and displaced persons, along with nearly two million

immigrants. Refugee numbers remained relatively low during the 1960s and early 1970s in comparison to post-war levels, although resettlement of certain groups did continue to take place (Epp 2015:15).

The 1976 Immigration Act was a watershed moment in Canada's history of resettlement. The law made refugees a distinct category of immigrants who had legal recognition and status as per the 1951 Convention (Epp 2015:16). The Immigration Act also introduced the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP), which formally began operating in 1979.

This was followed almost immediately by one of the most well-known resettlement movements in Canadian history: the large-scale arrival of refugees fleeing Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Between 1978 and 1981, there were 77,000 Southeast Asian refugees resettled in Canada – 21,000 of which were resettled through private sponsorship (Epp 2015:18).

Over the following four decades, Canada's contemporary reputation as a leader in resettlement was established. The Syrian refugee crisis sparked one of the largest waves of resettlement in the country's history, beginning in 2015. The large-scale arrival of Syrian refugees was widely discussed, drawing national attention and debate among media, government and the public at large.

2.3.2 The Resettlement System: GAR, PSR and BVOR

Canada's Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program falls under the purview of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

The country's resettlement system consists of three programs: the Government-Assisted Refugees Program (GAR), the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSR), and the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program (BVOR). All refugees must be referred by either the UNHCR, another designated referral organization, or a private sponsorship group. They must also belong to one of two classes: Convention refugee abroad class or Country of asylum class.

Under the GAR Program, the UNHCR or another referral organization refers refugees to Canada. GARs are financially supported by the Government of Canada (with services provided by non-governmental agencies) for a period of up to one year.

Under the PSR program, refugees are supported by private groups or organizations that sponsor them for the one year resettlement period. Groups can refer the refugees they would like to sponsor. Sponsorship groups are organized into the following formal categories: Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs), Constituent Groups (CGs), Groups of Five (G5s), and Community Sponsors (CSs). SAHs are the largest category and comprise around 85% of all sponsors in Canada. Most SAHs are religious, ethno-cultural, or humanitarian organizations. Though differing in composition and organizational structure, all are contractually obligated to have a strong volunteer base to assist with resettlement activities (RSTP, 2018). Most SAHs rely on volunteers to carry out the ground level work of sponsorship and resettlement.

Under the BVOR program, refugees are supported during the one year resettlement period by both the government and private sponsors. Refugees are identified for resettlement by referral organizations such as the UNHCR. After screening, they are connected with private sponsors through the BVOR program.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Migration and Receiving Societies

Migration is a complex, dynamic phenomenon consisting of various processes with far-reaching impacts. One way to look at migration is from the perspective of recipient countries and their respective societies and populations. Colson (2003:11) has written about displacement from an anthropological perspective, and the need for much more research concerning the impacts of migration on, as she puts it, “those who willingly or unwillingly become hosts, whose lives are changed by the arrival of the uprooted.” Colson argues that recipient communities should be more included in studies of the range of populations affected by displacement and the arrival of new groups, as there is a relative lack of research concerning this.

Castles et al. (2014:55) have written about the general social dynamics of migration in receiving societies, albeit mainly focusing on economic/labour migration or immigration. They discuss immigrants and migrants as often being met with ambiguity: welcomed for their positive

impacts on local labour, population, business and trade; but just as often facing discrimination and blame in times of economic crisis or conflict. With regards to refugees and asylum-seekers, Castles et al. (2014:57) state that the outcomes may be similar to those of other types of migrants although the dynamics surrounding their initial migration do differ. Outcomes depend on the traits and actions of migrants as well as the society and state that are receiving them. According to Castles et al. (Ibid.), it is often only once migrants have permanently settled that the long-term effects of migration or immigration become very evident in a receiving state.

3.2 The “Forced-Voluntary” Binary: Categorizing Migration

Erdal & Oeppen (2017:981) point out a tendency in migration studies to categorize migrant groups and experiences according to binaries. This includes: temporary-permanent migration; skilled-unskilled migration; and forced-voluntary migration. In the case of the forced-voluntary dichotomy, Erdal & Oeppen theorize that it is not possible to clearly distinguish between the two categories, which form opposite ends of a spectrum. While there are situations that can be identified as belonging to one end of the spectrum, the nature of most migratory experiences is mixed. Additionally, they argue that the forced-voluntary binary originating in academia, when translated into bureaucratic policy, distinctly impacts the ‘reality’ of migrants’ experiences. The use of ‘forced’ and ‘voluntary’ as labels has real, analytical and discursive power whose effects should be further examined.

For the purposes of this study, following are descriptions of the “forced migrant” and “voluntary migrant” categories as summarized by Wickramasinghe and Wimalaratana (2016:17):

People who move from one country to another as asylum seekers, refugees and internally displaced persons are considered as forced migrants, while others who move for different purposes, including those who supply labour are considered as voluntary migrants. The former group has no other option than migrating to a different country due to the struggles they face in their home country, but the latter voluntarily migrate in search of personal gains.

As Stein (1981:321-322) writes, “In the language of migration theory, it is common to think of the immigrant as pulled to his new land—attracted by opportunity and a new life. The refugee is not pulled out; he is pushed out. Given the choice, he would stay.”

3.3 “Purposive Actors” vs. “Speechless Emissaries”: Conceptualizing Forced Migrants

Turton (2003:7-8) writes that there are three ways of conceptualizing forced migration: The first approach is to focus on forced migrants as having common experiences and needs; the second approach is to focus on forced migration as a product of wider social and economic processes and changes; and the third approach (which Turton argues in favor of) is to focus “not on ‘them’ but on ‘us’”, i.e. our own perceptions and relationships to forced migrants.

Like Erdal & Oeppen (2017), Turton argues against the strict categorization of migrants. He is specifically concerned with the categorization of migrants along a “continuum of choice” (Turton 2003:9), where migrants are considered either entirely free at one end or entirely not free at the other end. According to Turton, this view takes away the agency of migrants. It is an example of how the language of forced migration often dehumanizes forced migrants and suggests that they are passive victims with little to no agency or capacity for decision-making. Turton states that different forced migrants have different choices and alternatives that must be recognized. Thus, they must be seen as persons with agency, regardless of how little or how much they may have. It is necessary to understand their perspectives and experiences as well as their place in their particular context.

For practical and moral reasons, Turton argues, forced migrants should be viewed as ‘purposive actors’ – ordinary people. Practically speaking, migratory processes are a product of decision-making, involving choices about whether, when and where to move. From a moral standpoint, Turton argues that it is necessary to approach forced migrants as purposive actors because it allows us to identify with them; it becomes more difficult for us to ignore their plight.

Turton (2003:10) also discusses how the effects of the language of forced migration carry over into the practice of states and organizations, translating into attempts to control forced migration. Turton identifies this as an example of Foucault’s “discursive formation”, where a discourse is created through a combination of language and practice. This particular discourse enables societies of developed countries to respond to forced migration in ways that do not acknowledge forced migrants as human beings, but rather, anonymous masses subject to policy.

Turton’s view challenges a conceptualization of refugees as “speechless emissaries” – a term coined by Malkki (1996:377-378), who critiques what she perceives is a social construction

of a refugee as “an ahistorical, universal humanitarian subject.” Malkki argues against the effects of bureaucratized humanitarian interventions that remove history, politics and agency from refugees and other displaced peoples. She states that this prevents refugees from being viewed as specific individual actors, instead turning them into dehistoricized and anonymous figures. The result of this is that refugees are then perceived and approached as helpless and passive victims unable to speak for themselves in a credible way, and who need humanitarian actors to do this for them. As Malkki (1996:384) writes, “So the ideal construct, the “real refugee,” was imagined as a particular kind of person: a victim whose judgment and reason had been compromised by his or her experiences. This was a [...] figure who could be deciphered and healed only by professionals.” Malkki further connects this construct with conventionalized representations of refugees in the media and elsewhere, characterizing them as anonymous masses of helpless, speechless figures in need of protection. In turn, she argues, this has the effect of creating a distance between refugees and those viewing them in this manner.

3.4 Defining “the Refugee”

Refugees are one type of displaced population created by forced migration, alongside other categories such as asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and stateless persons. However, there is a distinction between a refugee and other types of forced migrants.

Refugees are a clearly defined category of displaced persons under international law. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol define a refugee as “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (UNHCR, 2011). Under Canadian law (and elsewhere internationally), a person who meets the criteria in this definition is known as a “Convention refugee” (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2010). Convention refugees have the right to protection within the international system, and states have agreed on specific legal obligations towards them.

It should be mentioned that there are slightly varying definitions of “refugee” in other refugee protection instruments, particularly at a regional level. Furthermore, there is ongoing debate surrounding the Convention definition, and whether it should be expanded to include

persons in other certain refugee-like situations. In everyday usage, the word “refugee” is normally used to refer to someone who is forced to flee from persecution and is outside of their home country (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2010). However, it is the specific Convention definition that continues to hold weight on an international, legal and policy-making basis and which remains the most widely accepted understanding of the term.

3.5 Public Attitudes and Perceptions of Refugees

Attitudes towards refugees and perceptions of refugees can significantly shape motivation and engagement levels among the general public. On a conceptual level, they are also closely intertwined. This thesis will use the following definitions: *attitude* is defined as “a relatively enduring and general evaluation of an object, person, group, issue or concept on a dimension ranging from negative to positive” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2020); while *perception* is defined as “a belief or opinion, often held by many people and based on how things seem” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020).

In Canada, national surveys indicate that public attitudes concerning refugees have remained consistently positive over the past several years (Environics Institute, 2020). At a global scale, however, public attitudes concerning refugees are far from uniform. On World Refugee Day 2019, an online survey conducted in 26 countries showed that the majority of respondents supported the principle of people seeking refuge in other countries to escape war or persecution (Ipsos, 2019). Simultaneously, respondents expressed concerns about integration and doubts about refugees being “genuine” (Ibid.). The results of this survey show the range of attitudes which can vary widely across regions and within countries.

Numerous research studies around the world have been conducted on the subject of public attitudes towards refugees and—on a wider scale—migrants in general. However, Dempster and Hargrave (2017:13) point out that there is still significant debate in the literature on the question of what drives these attitudes: in addition to “real world” economic, cultural and security concerns, evidence suggests that attitudes are propelled by “a wide range of emotions and values that interact with, and colour, individuals’ interpretation of real world impacts.” Public attitudes are also shaped by other key “influencers” – such as politicians, government policy, and media reporting – with the relationships and causality between them often difficult to

assess (Dempster and Hargrave 2017:16). Overall they conclude that public attitudes towards refugees and migrants are complex; rooted in national and local contexts; and likely to be more persuaded by “emotive and value-driven arguments” rather than facts and evidence (2017:7).

Public attitudes can be understood as one driver of engagement in refugee protection. One useful lens to explain this may come from the field of social psychology, where research has long hypothesized about the connections between attitude and behaviour. Batson (1987, 2002, 2009) has written extensively on questions of pro-social motivation and altruism, in particular studying the link between empathy, attitudes and action regarding “stigmatized groups”. Batson et al.’s (2002:1657) empathy-attitude-action model tested the idea that “inducing empathy for a member of a stigmatized group not only improves attitudes toward but also increases helping of the group”. Their research builds upon the empathy-altruism hypothesis (Batson 2009:1) which argues that *empathy* (defined as “an other-oriented emotional response elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of someone else”) produces *altruistic motivation* (i.e., “motivation with the ultimate goal of increasing another’s welfare”).

Batson’s (2009:4) theory considers empathy a product of perceiving another person in need and adopting that person’s perspective (i.e., imagining how they are feeling). Perceiving someone who is in need provokes feelings of empathy, which generates motivation to relieve that need. Meanwhile, empathy for a person belonging to a marginalized group (e.g., refugees) can lead to improved attitudes towards the group as a whole – and which, Batson (2002:1666) argues, can carry over into action to help that group. This line of research (Batson 2009:1) also proposes additional forms of pro-social motivation, including *collectivism* (“motivation with the ultimate goal of benefiting some group or collective as a whole”) and *principlism* (“motivation with the ultimate goal of upholding some moral principle”). Batson et al.’s (2002) empathy-attitude-action theory can be used to assess attitude as one determinant of engagement in refugee sponsorship and resettlement.

Esses et al. (2017:80) have written on the complexity of public attitudes among citizens of Western countries: “...Despite their formal commitment to the protection of refugees, as outlined in the Geneva Convention, [...] at times they greet refugees with intolerance, distrust and contempt, to some extent based on the perception that there is a trade-off between the well-being of refugees and the well-being of established members of potential host countries.” This

statement aligns with an extensive body of research suggesting that perceptions of refugees (and migrants/immigrants generally) can create a perception or feeling of threat among members of host societies, influencing attitudes and leading to prejudice towards those groups (Esses et al. 2017:82).

According to this theory, the feeling of being threatened can stem from both real and imagined factors, such as “the size of the refugee group, perceived competition for scarce resources such as jobs and health care, zero-sum beliefs about cultural values, perceived threat of disease and violence, perceived threat to the status quo, and perceived threat from terrorists (Esses et al. 2017:86).” The perception of threat may be especially heightened among individuals who identify with certain political ideologies and/or who associate refugees and migrants with a perceived loss of control. It not only generates negative attitudes toward refugees, but can also influence levels of support or opposition regarding refugee and migration policies.

Perceptions of refugees can heavily inform public attitudes and engagement. Esses et al. (2017:81) point out how polling data in recent years indicates that public attitudes are driven by strong, often negative perceptions of refugees: “These perceptions include the association of refugees with terrorists, the belief that many refugee claimants are bogus, and the concern that refugees may pose economic and cultural threats.” Public discourse has been dominated by an increasing dehumanization of refugees and asylum-seekers – perceptions often promoted by political leaders and media, Esses et al. (2017) note – which in turn can incite anxiety and fear among populations.

In academic literature, scholars discuss a sense of confusion that seems to surround the concept of “refugee” outside of its 1951 Geneva Convention definition (and 1967 Protocol amendment). Black (2001:63) implies that this definition is strictly limited in its analytical usefulness: “...At best, the term simply reflects the designation of refugee enshrined in a particular Convention at a particular time, within a particular international political and economic context. As such, it could be argued to be devoid of any deeper academic meaning or explanatory power...” Despite the clear categorization of refugees under international law, it may be argued that this legal definition exists largely for the use of states and policymakers. Meanwhile, amongst the general public (and still often at the state level as well), stereotypes and labels associated with the term ‘refugee’ abound.

3.6 Political Discourse and Labelling

In discussing the bureaucratic practice of refugee labelling, Zetter (1991:40) writes: “Despite a widely recognized universal condition it remains the case that there is great difficulty in agreeing an acceptable definition of the label refugee. [...] Far from clarifying an identity, the label conveys, instead, an extremely complex set of values, and judgments which are more than just definitional.” Labels take on meanings that are often conflicting for both the labelled and the labelers (Zetter 1991:39). According to Zetter (2007:173), labels are created “not only to describe the world but also to construct it in convenient images”. However, ‘refugee’ is a powerful label that does not simplify but, rather, evokes complicated reactions. Citing Wood (1985), Zetter (1988:1) states: “The label ‘refugee’ both stereotypes and institutionalizes a status. It is benevolent and apolitical, yet it also establishes, through legal and policy making practices, highly politicized interpretations.” ‘Refugee’ is a malleable label difficult to ascribe a normative meaning to (Zetter 1991:40).

Wood (1985:347) describes the concept of labelling as follows: A feature of all communication or social interaction, labelling is a process that affects the categories in which we act and think. It helps to create social structure by designating parameters for our thoughts and behaviour. Labelling is thus a universal process. At the same time, this process is based on relationships of power. As Wood (1985:347-349) states, “The labels of some are more easily imposed on people and situations than those of others. [...] Labelling is in part a scientific (taxonomic) act, but it is also an act of valuation and judgement involving prejudices and stereotyping. [...] Labelling is used in the ranking of people according to moral proximities.” A label, Wood theorizes, is formed by abstracting an aspect from the individual and relating to them on that dimension. The process of labelling leads to the construction of ideologies and confers levels of status and worth on who/what is labelled.

In their respective work, both Wood (1985) and Zetter (1988, 1991, 2007) are concerned with the implications of labelling. Wood examines its presence in public policy discourse, focusing particularly on the politics of labelling within development policy. Meanwhile, Zetter argues that the label of ‘refugee’ has been formed, transformed and politicized over time in order to suit institutional, bureaucratic and humanitarian needs – a process that can also have serious (if unintended) consequences upon refugee identity formation.

Labels and categorization play a particularly important role in refugee resettlement. Van Selm (2014:397) points out some issues central to thinking about resettlement: (1) the question of who to resettle; and (2) the challenges of the ‘good refugee/bad asylum seeker’ binary, and the ‘easy to resettle/difficult’ syndrome. Each of these issues is rooted in perceptions of refugees. The question of who to admit for resettlement depends on the eligibility and selection criteria of the resettlement state’s program(s). In the case of Canada’s PSR program, private sponsors have the ability to refer the refugee they would like to support (IRCC, 2020c). Personal perceptions of refugees can therefore be highly influential in this decision.

On a wider conceptual level, public perceptions of refugees are frequently shaped by oversimplifications in the discourse surrounding refugees and forced migrants in general. This type of framing can result in stereotyping and reinforces problematic connotations associated with refugees (e.g., refugees are often labeled as ‘illegal migrants’, as noted by Scheel & Squire (2014:163); and/or they are conflated with other types of forced migrants such as asylum-seekers), whether in particular categories or as a monolith. Perceptions can have repercussions that not only influence public attitudes and engagement in refugee protection, but could also have life-altering impacts on refugee claimants being considered for resettlement. Despite its legal definition, it is apparent that the term “refugee” can also be a socially constructed concept.

3.7 Media Discourse and Representation

Portrayals of forced migrants in news coverage and reporting can significantly influence public perceptions, attitudes and engagement in resettlement countries. Media is one prism through which we view the world, acting as a mediator that helps shape our perspectives and behaviours. At the same time, media is not without its own weaknesses and biases which can alter the framing of its content. As Wright (2014:366) remarks, “Media reports, which do not always reflect the reality of the situation, have a strong effect on public opinions, but people’s perceptions can determine the reality.”

There is considerable academic scholarship on the subject of representations of refugees, with increasing attention in recent years concerning how these are conveyed through media. For example, Limbu (2009:268) cites two conventional representations (identified by Said and Daniel) that have become standard in news media: refugees as “objects of humanitarian

intervention and refugees as undesirable elements disruptive to the national order of things”. Refugees are subjected to a range of common representations, often as simple “Other”-like figures without nuance or individual context. Citing Malkki (1996), Wright (2014:362) also makes the point that audiences’ regard for refugees may be influenced by “cultural distance or racial difference”. How forced migrants are portrayed has consequences in resettlement societies.

3.8 Volunteer Engagement and Social Capital

Volunteer engagement (and public participation in general) in refugee sponsorship and/or resettlement can be a result of various factors. One possibility is that it stems from interpersonal relationships and networks. This study uses the concept of social capital to examine if and how interpersonal relationships influence individual volunteer engagement, in addition to perceptions and attitudes concerning refugees.

Many variations of social capital theory exist. This study will refer to the interpretations of political scientists Fukuyama (2000) and Putnam (1993, 2000). Fukuyama (2000:3) defines social capital as “an informal norm that promotes cooperation between two or more individuals”. Putnam (1993:2) defines it as “features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit”. Siisiainen (2003:1) summarizes Putnam’s theory as consisting of “moral obligations and norms, social values (especially trust) and social networks (especially voluntary associations)”. Fukuyama and Putnam agree that social capital is an essential element of civil society. Fukuyama (2000:15) writes that states do not create it, but that it is “a byproduct of religion, tradition, shared historical experience, and other factors that lie outside the control of government.”

Putnam (2000) theorizes that there is a strong connection between social capital and altruism, especially through membership in a religious group or faith community. This may be relevant in this study, given the high prevalence of SAHs that are religious organizations which influenced the sample criteria for key informants. According to Putnam (2000:69), involvement in a religious group is closely associated with civic engagement. This is because in addition to serving as an incubator for civic skills/norms and community interests, religious institutions support a range of social activities extending beyond conventional worship” (Putnam 2000:68). This in turn enables recruitment for other forms of community activity. Though admitting that

studies cannot conclusively show causality between churchgoing and social connectivity, Putnam (2000:70) writes “it is clear that religious people are unusually active social capitalists”.

Putnam contends that religious involvement is a strong predictor of altruism, volunteering and philanthropy, which are indicators of social capital. This is tied partly to a notion of “the power of religious values” which can be sources of commitment and motivation (Putnam 2000:69). Religion provides a particular social context where helping the less fortunate is perceived as part of one’s duty. Furthermore, it is not one or the other but the combination of connectedness and faith that is crucial.

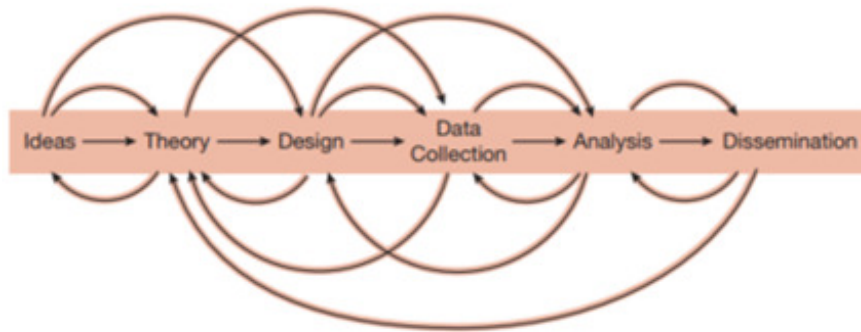
4. Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Qualitative Approaches: Grounded Theory and the Spiraling Research Approach

This thesis used a qualitative research approach to address the study’s objectives and questions. According to Bryman (2012:380), qualitative research seeks to understand the social world through examining its participants’ interpretations of that world, as they can attribute meaning to their environment and events within it. Bryman (2012:380) describes it as “broadly inductivist, constructionist, and interpretivist” – features which are well-suited to this study’s subject matter, themes and multi-layered analysis of perspectives, attitudes and perceptions.

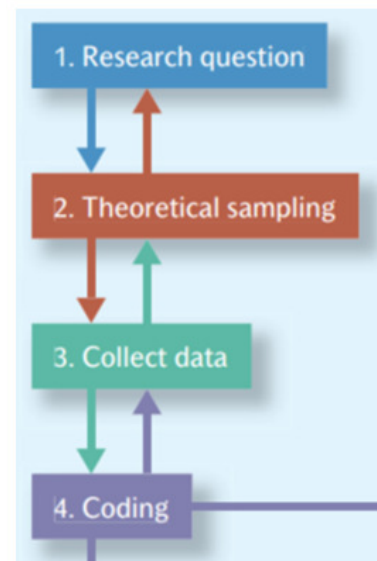
A combination of two specific approaches characterized the overall research process. One approach is introduced by Berg and Lune (2017:25), which conceives of the research process as having a non-linear progression. The elements of this model (referred to as the “Spiraling Research Approach”) are outlined in Figure 3.0 below. According to Berg and Lune (2017:25), researchers often adopt an approach that does not strictly adhere to “theory-before-research” or “research-before-theory” models. Rather, researchers move back and forth between the stages in the research process, re-examining and refining their ideas, theoretical assumptions and research design. The spiraling approach is inherently fluid, leaving room open for the research questions to potentially shift and change throughout the research process. This characteristic accurately describes this study’s research process, during which the study design and research questions were continuously reconsidered and reformulated.

Figure 1.0 The Spiraling Research Approach (Berg and Lune, 2017)



Grounded theory was the second approach utilized: specifically, the first four steps of its process, as outlined by Bryman (2012:571) and seen in Figure 4.0 to the right: research questions, theoretical sampling, data collection and coding. Similar to the Spiraling Research Approach, the relationship between these four steps is iterative or recursive (Bryman, 2012: 387): proceeding in tandem, the steps move back and forth between themselves repeatedly. Grounded theory’s iterative nature influenced this study’s research process, as data collection and analysis occurred in parallel and led to the reframing of the study a number of times. Lastly, use of this approach entailed the analytical tool of coding, which will be discussed in the analysis section.

Figure 2.0 Grounded Theory Processes 1-4 (Bryman, 2012)



4.2 Data Collection, Sampling and Analysis

4.2.1 Study Area

The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in the province of Ontario was selected as the study area. This is because at a provincial level, Ontario has received the largest share of resettled refugees in the past five years (IRCC, 2020d). At a municipal level, Toronto is the largest city in Canada and generally receives a high number of refugee, asylum claimant, and immigrant arrivals who settle across the GTA (City of Toronto, 2018). The GTA consists of Toronto and its

surrounding metropolitan area including four regional municipalities (Durham, Halton, Peel, and York).

4.2.2 Sampling Methodology

The study used the purposive, non-probability methods of convenience sampling and snowball sampling to select informants for interviews. Key informants were active volunteers, former volunteers or other individuals associated mainly at the community/ground level with one of three Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) located in the GTA: the Office of Refugees for the Archdiocese of Toronto (ORAT); the Anglican United Refugee Alliance (AURA); and the United Church of Canada (UCC).

Before proceeding, it is important to highlight here that the findings of the study cannot be generalized to a larger population due to its qualitative nature as well as its purposive sampling-based criteria of key informants (individuals with religious affiliations).

Volunteers with Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) were initially targeted because, unlike the other categories of sponsors under the PSRP, the names of SAHs are publicly accessible online (Government of Canada, 2020b). SAHs are also contractually obligated to have a base of volunteers that carry out the resettlement work, which reinforced the decision to focus on this category of sponsors (RSTP, 2018).

Several SAHs were initially considered, and contacted, for interviews. However, due to external circumstances (see section: Limitations) the study ended up focusing on three SAHs: ORAT, AURA and UCC. The three organizations have a number of similarities. Firstly, they are among the country's oldest and largest organizations carrying out private sponsorship and resettlement of refugees. Secondly, they are all faith-based organizations which lent an added analytical dimension to the study (see section: Theoretical Framework). Thirdly, resettlement work for all SAHs is carried out at the community/ground level by their participating churches, which establish volunteer committees that take on the work of resettling sponsored refugees.

While the names of SAHs are publicly available, the names of their participating churches are not. Hence, after each SAH was selected, online research had to be conducted in order to identify churches that appeared to be currently active in sponsorship and resettlement.

The first SAH selected was ORAT. Initial contact was established with a former volunteer of the resettlement committee of one church, which led to contact with others in their

network. This also led to contact with the director of the organization, who was among the informants and helped provide an organization-level perspective of the study themes.

The second SAH selected was AURA. Online research led to the identification of a church currently active in refugee sponsorship, and contact was established with the co-chairs of its volunteer resettlement committee. This led to contacts with others in their network.

The third SAH selected was UCC. Online research led to the identification of a church currently active in refugee sponsorship, and contact was established with members of its volunteer refugee support committee.

4.2.3 Triangulation

Triangulation was employed in this study. Carter et al. (2014:545), define triangulation as “the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena”. Triangulation is also considered to be a means of testing validity, through the merging of data collected from different sources. This thesis used three of the four types of triangulation: method triangulation; theory triangulation; and data source triangulation. Following are their definitions as provided by Carter et al. (2014:545): Method triangulation uses multiple methods to collect data about the same phenomenon; theory triangulation analyzes and interprets data using different theories; and data source triangulation collects data from different types of people to gain multiple perspectives and validate data.

The study harnessed multiple data sources: key informant interviews provided data on the perspectives of volunteers involved in refugee sponsorship and resettlement; and news articles/ editorials and government statements provided data on the perspectives of political and media stakeholders.

4.2.4 Key Informant Interviews

Semi-structured and unstructured interviews were conducted with thirteen key informants (See: Appendix A). This included three group interviews. Four informants were interviewed in person; eight people were interviewed virtually using online video conferencing platforms (Zoom and GoToMeeting); and one person was interviewed over the telephone. To maximize richness of data (Bryman, 2012:470), five informants were interviewed more than once. Research approval for the interview data collection was applied for and received from the NSD during the summer of 2020.

Interviews lasted between forty minutes and, in one case, two hours and forty-five minutes. While a general interview guide was prepared beforehand (See: Appendix B), the structure of all of the interviews was very flexible – as Bryman (2012:470) puts it, “responding to the direction in which interviewees take the interview and perhaps adjusting the emphases in the research as a result of significant issues that emerge in the course of interviews.”

4.2.5 Thematic Analysis and Coding

The interviews were recorded with the consent of key informants. Audio recordings were transcribed following the interviews. Data collected from the interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis and the grounded theory tool of coding. Thematic analysis allowed for the extraction of key themes in the data (Bryman, 2012:717). Coding was used to label, separate, compile and organize data according to relevant themes (Bryman, 2012:568). This was done using a coding frame that lists the codes used relating to how the data would be analyzed (See: Appendix C).

4.2.6 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis relates to the social construction of events and meanings (Bryman 2012:618). Bryman (2012:711) defines it as an approach to analyzing talk, texts and other forms of discourse that “emphasizes the ways in which versions of reality are accomplished through language”. This draws upon Foucault’s conceptualization of the term, where discourse refers to the ways in which language and depiction of an object frames how we comprehend that object (Bryman 2012:528). Thus, it is constructionist. According to Bryman (2012:529), discourse analysis asks what a discourse is doing and how it is constructed in order to make this happen.

This study used discourse analysis to assess political and media discourse concerning refugees and other forced migrants. The timeframe examined was 2010-2020. Political discourse was assessed using statements made by government officials from the Conservative and Liberal parties. Media discourse was assessed using editorials/articles from three mainstream news/media outlets across the political spectrum: CBC News, Globe and Mail, Toronto Star.

4.3 Limitations

External circumstances presented practical limitations in terms of planned data collection. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its various impacts (e.g. extended government-mandated

social distancing restrictions, etc) influenced how and what type of data could be collected. This in turn shaped the direction and scope of the study. For example, many SAH offices were temporarily closed, with employees presumably working from home and not immediately responsive to email communications. Other offices may have been engaged in responding to the needs of their clients during the pandemic. Several SAHs contacted did not respond to inquiries.

The study adapted to the circumstances as needed. Focusing on key informants from two sponsorship groups at the community level, interviews were conducted virtually or over the telephone when it was not possible to meet in person. As the sample size of research participants was small and concentrated on a particular subset of people, the study's results also cannot be considered generalizable. Overcoming these challenges made for an interesting learning process.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were a priority throughout the study, including when collecting and processing data from research participants (key informants for the interviews). Prior to each interview, participants were asked either verbally or in writing (i.e., email) for their consent to participate in a recorded interview. Information letters and consent forms were prepared and distributed to confirmed participants beforehand for their review and signature (See: Appendix D). The document informed participants of the study's purpose, what their participation would entail, and how their information would be stored and used. Participants were informed that they have the right to withdraw their consent at any time during the study. All data was kept anonymous and securely stored, with any personal information stored in encrypted form and separated from other data.

Ethical considerations were also present during the data analysis and writing processes. As a Canadian citizen writing about Canada, I was very conscious of the possibility that I might have potential biases in terms of how I approached the study and analyzed the collected data. Remaining objective was essential for the study's credibility and trustworthiness. I attempted to maintain a certain distance from the data to prevent any personal opinions or views from influencing the analysis.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Volunteer Perceptions, Attitudes and Engagement

The study's primary and most detailed level of analysis focuses on the perspectives of individual volunteers and sponsorship groups in Canadian resettlement. Under the PSR program, volunteers provide social, emotional and all other non-financial supports to sponsored refugees, while their respective SAHs/sponsorship groups are contractually responsible for providing financial assistance for the one-year sponsorship period. In-depth interviews with thirteen key informants revealed a range of findings concerning public attitudes, perceptions and engagement in refugee protection.

5.1.1 Initial Motivations for Engagement

Informants cited a few reasons for their decision to first become involved in supporting refugee sponsorship and resettlement. Seven of the thirteen informants stated that they had learned about it and/or were invited to participate by someone else in their personal network. Most often, this was through their respective faith or religious communities (i.e., church/synagogue/etc.) that they belonged to. While this supports Putnam's (1993) theory of social capital's connection to religious involvement, it is perhaps not very surprising as all of the informants were affiliated in some way with faith-based SAHs/sponsorship groups. Informants described their reactions as ranging from immediate interest to – in the case of one informant – initial hesitation:

Yes, the priest came to me and asked me. I said no, I don't want to do it. And then I said to him, okay, I will do it. After a bit. I didn't want to get involved. I don't know why. [...] But then, at the end – and I was an asset to them. Because I spoke the language. At the time, the refugees came from overseas in the Middle East. I speak Arabic.

– Key Informant #4 (Personal Interview, 2020/11/11)

Ultimately, this informant remained an active volunteer for the entire ten-year period that their church sponsored and resettled refugees. The long-term nature of their involvement reflects other volunteers' experiences, which all lasted between three years to ten years and encompassed multiple sponsorships of refugees from various countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Key to the longevity of volunteers' engagement was the existence of a motivated set of fellow volunteers at the ground level. Four of the informants stressed how important it was not only to receive the invitation to participate from someone they personally knew, but to also learn from the experiences of other volunteers. The work of preparing for the refugees' arrival was especially demanding, with volunteers tasked in a short amount of time with finding suitable housing that also had to be adequately furnished. Some informants mentioned the importance of trustworthiness and cooperation among the volunteers, again reflecting elements of social capital theory (Fukuyama (2000); Putnam (1993)). Nearly every informant from all three sponsorship groups emphasized the importance of having a committed and supportive group of volunteers for the sponsorships to be successful during and prior to the one-year period.

The desire to provide assistance to those in need was another common factor in informants' decision to engage in refugee sponsorship and resettlement. Awareness of current refugee crises happening around the world played an underlying role. The majority of informants had started volunteering prior to the Syrian refugee crisis, which thus did not appear to be a key driver of their initial engagement.

However, one informant's decision to become involved was directly driven by the media coverage surrounding the death of Alan Kurdi, a young Syrian child who drowned during his family's attempted crossing of the Mediterranean Sea in September 2015. The story of Kurdi and his family, who were later revealed as having applied for asylum in Canada where they had relatives, was widely publicized throughout the country. Upon seeing photographs of Kurdi, the informant felt compelled to act:

He's a little boy. What, three or four years old – washed up on the shore. Brought me to tears. Little children shouldn't die like that. This is not like, a World War One veteran signed up for war and gets washed ashore. Or, we see that on TV a lot and we get desensitized to war movies, and – it's okay to kill aliens, but, uh, from planets that you don't know, but, um, little children hurt me. That, that bothered me big-time. [...] So I said, "We gotta do something about this. What can we do to help?"

- Key Informant #3 (Personal Interview #2, 2020/11/11)

This informant sought out a local church that was actively sponsoring refugees at the

time, and became a volunteer, eventually helping to resettle two sponsored families from West Africa. In this case, learning about and seeing the tragic outcome of one individual refugee's story – that of Alan Kurdi – elicited empathy for refugees and motivated the informant to try to provide assistance in some way. It can be viewed as one example of Batson et al.'s Empathy-Altruism (1999, 2009) and Empathy-Attitude-Action (2002) hypotheses, wherein empathy produces altruistic motivation and influences attitudes concerning a marginalized or vulnerable group of people, resulting in efforts to help them.

Other informants directly linked the notion of helping others to personal values. This was present at both an individual and organizational level. One informant, the director of one of the SAHs, discussed how religious beliefs informed the resettlement work of the sponsorship group. At a conceptual level, it also informed their perception of who a refugee is and what society's relationship to them should be:

It's deeply rooted in our theology, [...] "I was a stranger and you welcomed me", you know, the words of Jesus. I mean, that's the heart of the mission of the Church, is love of God and love of neighbor, and so this is a clear manifestation of that understanding.

- Key Informant #2 (Personal Interview, 2020/10/21)

This notion again is reminiscent of Putnam (1993), who theorizes that religious values provide a particularly strong context for altruism and volunteering, with helping others – particularly the less fortunate – perceived to be one's moral responsibility. It also supports Siisiainen's (2003) assessment of Putnam's theory: specifically, moral obligations and norms as a feature of social capital. In this case, refugees are viewed as the stranger needing assistance and it is society's duty to welcome them.

It is important to also mention that although all of the informants were affiliated with a faith-based SAH/sponsorship group, most emphasized that religion had no influence on their personal views or on their group's respective selection process concerning which refugees should be recommended for sponsorship and resettlement. One of the groups, while based at a particular church, consisted of volunteers from different faiths who had come together in support of refugee sponsorship and resettlement. For these key informants, the most important factor was need:

I gained from them. I gained a lot. [...] People from all walks of life. I mean, we sponsored, the first family was a Muslim family, at the time, and they were – they were in danger. And the priest said, “What do you think?” I said, “You know what? It doesn’t matter whether they are Muslim, Christian or any other religion. If they need help, you will help them. And that’s- that’s how we went by. We were helping people.”

– Key Informant #4 (Personal Interview, 2020/11/11)

5.1.2 Influence of Informants’ Lived Experiences

Attitudes and perceptions concerning refugees appeared to be influenced at least partly by key informants’ personal backgrounds. Three of the thirteen informants identified as being born outside of Canada. Two informants had immigrated to Canada as adults: one from Trinidad and Tobago, and one from the Netherlands. Another informant was a former refugee themselves, who was born in Palestine and spent their childhood moving across the Middle East before migrating to Canada in their adulthood. These backgrounds gave informants certain vantage points that in some cases helped them relate slightly better to the experience of a newly arrived refugee in the country. Following is a statement from a volunteer who had come to Canada as an immigrant:

When this was discussed [...] at the synagogue, I raised my hand and said, ‘well, I can do that’ because I was helped myself.”

[...]

I came here, I had a choice, it was a whole different thing, but still – when you’re here, you think ‘Oh my God, what have I done?’, you know? And then it really depends how you’re being welcomed. And I had some pleasant and very unpleasant experiences too.

- Key Informant #8 (Personal Interviews #1 & #2, 2020/11/27 & 2020/11/28)

Empathy, as it is conceptualized by Batson (2009), once again drove individual volunteer engagement: as a former immigrant, this informant was able to adopt the perspective of resettled refugees as newcomers to Canadian society. Adopting the perspective of the “other” is a central component of Batson’s (2009) theory of pro-social motivation. The informant felt as though they understood this aspect of resettling refugees’ experience and felt motivated to help improve their experience. Informants born and raised in Canada also cited the universal human experience of

being placed in a situation where they felt like an outsider. Like the previous informant, this both motivated and allowed them to empathize – at least to a certain extent – with the feelings of refugees adapting to new cultural and social environs:

“I was thrown into a situation where I was not comfortable at all, sort of culturally and socially, and I always remembered that, what that felt like, you know, [...] and I think that’s part of my motivation to do this kind of work, to greet people and make people feel more comfortable.”

- Key Informant #6 (Personal Interview, 2020/11/23)

Another informant discussed how their personal upbringing in Canada had fostered a certain sense of ignorance concerning the specific plight of refugees. Prior to becoming a volunteer, they had little to no framework with which to conceive of refugees as anything beyond a generalized group of people who were characterized by a need for assistance. In this case, contextual factors played a role in their (lack of) awareness: Canada’s fairly remote geographic location in relation to the rest of the world acted as a form of insulation between the informant and news of refugee movements that impacted other countries more directly:

Being that I live in an isolated country away from trauma and stress, and – I had no idea. All I knew was that the word “refugees” is something representing people in need. They were—that’s it, just needy people. And that’s what we do when we do volunteer work. We help the needy, right? [...] It’s about helping the less fortunate, bringing up the bottom, right? And these people were in danger...

- Key Informant #3 (Personal Interview #2, 2020/11/11)

This informant’s comment supports Dempster and Hargrave’s (2017) assertion that public attitudes concerning refugees are strongly tied to national and local contexts. This could manifest in a number of ways. For some informants coming from a society not subjected to the situations of conflict and persecution that lead to the displacement of forced migrants, the perception of refugees as a group of people in need became a motivator for engagement.

At the same time, this could also result in a certain disconnect that occasionally filtered

through into the volunteers' work. Some informants reflected on how at times, in the lead-up to the sponsored refugees' arrival, they had focused on furnishing the accommodations with technological appliances that did not end up being used, particularly if the sponsored refugees had come from rural areas or refugee camps where they had been living for years. Eager to help, they had sometimes not stopped to consider differences between refugees' previous living situations and their own. One informant who was a former refugee remarked:

I was a refugee. When they talk about refugees, [...] Um, part of the group that we were, they wanted higher things for them – and I said, look, I was a refugee. You have to take it into consideration about these refugees. They're not coming from a very rich place. They're coming from a poor place. They don't have all the stuff that we have in here. You have to just let them be, whatever – you don't have to inundate them with all kinds of things. Just introduce them gradually and they will learn on their own.

– Key Informant #4 (Personal Interview, 2020/11/11)

Like the other informants mentioned, this volunteer's perspective concerning refugees was rooted in their personal background; their identity as a former refugee gave them a particular framework for understanding the experience of refugees being resettled. In both subtle and obvious ways, key informants' experiences – which themselves were partly shaped by contextual factors – influenced not only their attitudes and engagement, but also their individual perspectives and approaches to the volunteer work of sponsorship and resettlement.

5.1.3 Perceptions of Refugees: From Flight to Asylum

Some key informants shared similar experiences that heavily informed their perceptions of refugees. For example, three of the informants had previously visited refugee camps and interacted with their residents. One informant had personally visited a camp in Ghana prior to supporting refugees in Canada. The other two informants had visited camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Ghana and Ivory Coast as volunteers assisting with the interview and referral process for their SAH and the IRCC; they had both signed up for this role some years after starting as volunteers helping with resettlement in Canada. When asked to provide their own definition of a refugee, one informant said the following:

What comes to mind to me is somebody that's, um, that's had to flee. Uh, somebody that, um, had to flee for their life. Somebody that just took off and wasn't thinking about what they had to do in front of them, because what was behind them was so horrendous. And that's the stories that I heard.

[...]

People, they're standing in your way, they want to talk to you, they know that their opportunity is right there. And you can't blame them, right?

- *Key Informant #1 (Personal Interviews #2 & #1, 2020/11/12 & 2020/09/29)*

In recounting their experiences visiting the camps, a few of the informants described how they empathized with various refugees they had encountered, upon meeting them and learning of their individual stories:

You know, you cry with them. You hurt with them. How can you not?

- *Key Informant #11 (Personal Interview, 2020/12/05)*

Some of the refugees shared the details of the circumstances of their displacement; while others shared the details of their lives since arriving in the camps months or years before. One informant recalled seeing and interacting with displaced families, whom they described feeling a sense of personal connection to, as a fellow parent with children. This was tied to a sense of shock the informant had felt during their first visit to a refugee camp:

'Oh my gosh. This is how people are living?' [...] They had been there for over twenty-two years. Can you imagine? Being a refugee in a camp like that for over twenty-two years – they had grandchildren in the camp – they had had children and grandchildren in the camp – like, you know, they had no hope.

- *Key Informant #1 (Personal Interview #1, 2020/09/29)*

The three informants spoke of particular difficulties that they understood refugees faced during this stage of forced migration. For instance, in addition to poor living conditions in the camps, refugees were often socially and culturally alienated from the societies of the asylum

countries. This was the case even for people who had been born and raised in the camps, if the host country did not provide a pathway to naturalize them as citizens. The informants discussed how refugees remained in a complex situation with few options available to them:

So they kind of find themselves almost in no-man's land; they don't belong to the place where they are living and they can't return home either because they have grown up in a strange country. So how do they negotiate, you know, what kind of jumps can they get, where can they fit in?

- Key Informant #5 (Personal Interview, 2020/11/17)

The informants perceived the refugees in the camps to be actors striving to manifest or at least maintain some measure of agency in the face of great challenges. This aligns with Turton's (2003:12) argument that forced migrants should always be perceived as having agency. However limited that agency may appear to be, forced migrants still have the capacity to make decisions within their given circumstances. The informants appeared to acknowledge this agency during the interviews, as they recalled refugees' attempts to navigate the challenges of life in the camps.

One example related to the issue of employment. Many refugees living in the camps had sought to find some form of work in townships or settlements nearby. In order to communicate, they sometimes learned basic English or the national language. However, the difficulties they faced were often exacerbated if they were unable to speak the local dialect. This continually put refugees at a hiring disadvantage if they tried to secure jobs in competition with citizens of the asylum country, especially during times of local economic hardship. As one informant reflected:

[The] unemployment rate among young people is probably over fifty percent, so guess who's going to get the first jobs? Not these refugees, they're going to give them to their [local] people first.

- Key Informant #5 (Personal Interview, 2020/11/17)

Another informant spoke of the negative label that was attached to refugees living in the camps, and of the social stigma they had faced in society as a result. If refugees were able to find some work – usually in the form of menial jobs or manual labour – they were immediately at risk

of losing it if they were discovered to be a refugee. Equally often, they would not be paid fairly (if at all) for work they did do. If they attempted to complain, those who had hired them would threaten to expose their legal status as a refugee to local authorities in the asylum countries. The informant discussed how these issues of identity and status shaped their personal understanding of refugees and their experiences:

And when I think of a refugee, it's a displaced person who really has a new identity as a refugee, and that's not nice. Because usually, the place that they have gone to does not welcome them, you know? They're— they're shunned, and I've heard so many stories...

[...]

'When they know that I'm a refugee,' she said, 'they're not even giving me a chance, because they're taking the people that are [local].' You know what I mean, like, so, you always are that displaced person, you always are that refugee that doesn't have a work permit, that is taken advantage of.

- Key Informant #1 (Personal Interview #2, 2020/11/12)

These informants' attitudes and perceptions concerning refugees were influenced and broadened by their various personal interactions with people they had met in the camps. At the same time, their perceptions in turn shaped those interactions and had consequences of their own. In the case of the two volunteers whose role was to interview prospective refugees for resettlement in Canada, this informed their decisions on who to recommend for moving forward to the next stage of the selection process:

We were looking for people that had nobody. The neediest people, but also the people, um, that we knew, um, were gonna make it, you know what I mean?

- Key Informant #1 (Personal Interview #1, 2020/09/29)

The agency of refugees was once again alluded to by the informants. However, this time it was not only acknowledged, but considered necessary in order for eligible refugees to meet the resettlement selection criteria of both the SAH and the Canadian government. Although need remained a primary factor in the referral process, equally important to these key informants was

determining whether the refugees under consideration seemed likely and capable of successfully adapting to life in the resettlement country.

5.1.4 Perceptions of Refugees: From Refugee Camps to Resettlement

The majority of key informants' interactions with refugees took place in Canada, beginning immediately upon their arrival in the country and lasting throughout the one-year sponsorship period. During this timeframe, volunteers considered the sponsored families and individuals to be in a transitory stage of sorts, needing assistance while adjusting to being resettled. At the same time, the refugees – like those encountered by the informants visiting asylum countries – were perceived as persons with agency, capable of adapting and overcoming the challenges of resettlement. This once again aligned with the views of Turton (2003), arguing in support of an inherent agency possessed by all forced migrants regardless of their situation.

Informants certainly recognized the wide range of potential challenges faced by the newly arrived refugees. While all newcomers to Canada can expect to face challenges, refugees might be expected to experience particularly acute difficulties depending on their individual backgrounds and the circumstances of their displacement. As stated by one informant:

There was a lot, a lot of work with them. Trying to get them jobs. Especially if they don't speak the language. How can you get them a job? It's not easy. And luckily some of them are smart, they were able to get their jobs and make it.

- Key Informant #4 (Personal Interview, 2020/11/11)

During the interviews, volunteers described different challenges that had come up for the refugees their groups had sponsored. Learning the local language (Canada has two official languages – English and French – with English most widely spoken in Ontario) was considered to be among the most important objectives because this was deemed essential to refugees finding employment once the sponsorship period ended. However, this was only one area of focus. Other challenges ranged from learning everyday tasks (e.g., using local public transit systems; understanding prices at the grocery store; completing school assignments); to life-long skills (e.g., creating budgets; managing finances; setting up bank accounts; applying for jobs); to adapting to new cultural and social norms (e.g., gender roles in the household; racial dynamics in

a multicultural society with a non-homogenous population; interacting with local authorities in public); to addressing traumas the refugees may have faced prior to resettlement (e.g., leading to arrangements for mental health and/or disability support for those requiring it).

Informants' perceptions of refugees differed greatly from the conceptualization of them as "speechless emissaries" critiqued by Malkki (1996). Far from being anonymous figures lacking history and agency, the sponsored refugees were perceived as individual persons with specific backgrounds, which in turn determined their ability to exercise their agency – agency which informants perceived did exist, regardless of exact situation or circumstance. After having helped with the sponsorship and resettlement of various groups, most informants agreed that every sponsored refugee's situation was unique: their backgrounds, the circumstances of their displacement – and in the resettlement country, the challenges they encountered and their individual capacity to respond to them.

One informant recalled stark differences even among two sets of sponsored families who had come from opposite ends of the same country, with one family seeming to adjust to life in the resettlement country far more quickly and easily than the other. The informant attributed this to the various differences in the families' backgrounds. Simply put, some refugees faced more difficulties than others. To cite one example, adaptation was greatly slowed by illiteracy among individuals who had spent all or most of their lives in a refugee camp and had never had the opportunity to receive a formal education. Another informant commented on how witnessing this particular situation became a learning experience for the volunteers themselves:

It really opens your eyes to the world and you have to be very open and flexible. [...] I can't begin to tell you how the experience was for me... I learned about how literacy affects every aspect of your life. [...] A big eye opener for us... You just don't know what to expect and how to handle it... Cultural differences, the expectations we bring...

- Key Informant #8 (Personal Interview #1, 2020/11/27)

At the same time, informants also brought up a number of examples of how sponsored refugees in some cases demonstrated a very high capacity to adapt in a short timeframe. Once again, they highlighted that no two situations were alike. However, several informants did appear

to share a common perception of younger refugees seeming particularly adaptable during the resettlement period, appearing to adjust more easily and quickly in their new circumstances compared to older refugees (e.g., their parents). Informants considered this a positive indication of refugees' agency and a reinforcement of attitudes that the sponsored individuals and families would be capable of successful adaptation and integration in Canadian society. As one informant commented:

But to me they pick it up very quickly, they learn how to do things online, they learn how to get information, they learn how the system works, and um, and by and large, I think they do quite well. So I'm certainly not afraid in that area at all for them, yeah.

- *Key Informant #5 (Personal Interview, 2020/11/17)*

During the interviews, informants remarked that their groups' sponsored refugees were "just regular people". The informants perceived and considered refugees to be "just like anybody else": regular individuals and families just looking to move forward with their lives in their new homes in the resettlement country. This attitude again is a reminder of Turton's (2003) suggested conceptualization of refugees as ordinary people. Turton's theory that considering forced migrants in this light allows one to better identify with them seems to hold weight in this case.

Informants recognized the negative connotations often associated with the word or label of "refugee". As such, they did not think the label of refugee should remain attached to the sponsored individuals and families once they had arrived for resettlement in Canada. Instead, informants thought of the refugees as (again) taking on new identities: "newcomers", "permanent residents", "potential citizens" and "new Canadians" were more preferable terms:

When they come in here, they are refugees. After they arrive, we don't call them refugees. You're not supposed to call them refugees. It's not a nice word, to call them refugees. So we would say "our sponsored family". Which is nice.

[...]

Refugee- when you see them in camps, these people call them all the time "refugees". But refugees, when they come to a country, they are established in a home. They are doing

well and they get jobs. The children go to school. Like a regular family. They are no longer refugees. They are permanent residents. That's what they are.

– Key Informant #4 (Personal Interview, 2020/11/11)

I would probably call them “new Canadians”. At this point I wouldn't want to think of them as refugees but as Canadians, whether they have this citizenship or not. [...] Labels fall away when you get to know anyone in all their individuality. [...] The kids were excited to have their Canadian flags.

- Key Informant #6 (Personal Interview, 2020/11/23)

And so when they come here, they're no longer a refugee, they have an identity, they're a newcomer. And a potential citizen, you know? Yeah.

- Key Informant #1 (Personal Interview #2, 2020/11/12)

To these informants, once the refugees were in Canada, they should no longer be referred to or considered as “refugees”. That label had fallen away from them. They had assumed new identities to match the new stage of their lives in this new country.

At the same time, labelling aside, informants shared stories of instances when refugees they had sponsored unexpectedly shifted the volunteers' preconceived notions of a “refugee”. One informant recounted the story of waiting to greet their very first sponsored family upon their arrival at the Canadian airport nearly a decade ago. They had been expecting to see what they now readily acknowledged was just a stereotypical image of a refugee or other forced migrant:

I thought, these would be people who would come with maybe a sack on their back and, you know, maybe looking depressed, but instead, it was this [...] family who arrived with fifteen suitcases...

- Key Informant #9 (Personal Interview #1, 2020/11/27)

Beyond its impact on reshaping this particular informant's early perceptions of refugees, this anecdote is also one example of conventional representations or stereotypes of refugees being defied. Specifically, it lends support to Castles et al.'s (2014:221-222) remark that many

forced migrants do have a certain measure of agency, and possess resources without which they would not have been able to leave their homes in the first place. Refugees can come from all levels of socioeconomic backgrounds; in fact, those of higher economic classes may be even more likely to migrate than those of lower economic classes because they would presumably have the financial resources to do so.

All throughout and beyond the formal sponsorship period, key informants' perceptions of refugees – while embedded within particular attitudes – continued to broaden and shift as a result of their experiences as volunteers.

5.1.5 The Refugee-Volunteer Relationship

Eleven of the thirteen key informants were volunteers or former volunteers who had helped to resettle their respective group's sponsored refugees. As volunteers, they considered their overall role as providing assistance and guidance to the newly arrived refugees. Their job was to help the sponsored families and individuals navigate and adapt to life in their new home country. The role of the volunteer was to prepare refugees for “month thirteen” when they were expected to take on full responsibility for their transition into resettlement:

We see our role as empowering and facilitating the transition of the refugee family for the first year, but setting them up for success on their own...

- Key Informant #9 (Personal Interview #1, 2020/11/27)

Volunteers recognized the autonomy and agency of sponsored refugees, who ideally would have already reached a certain threshold of independence before the end of the twelve month period. Informants highlighted the objective of empowering the sponsored families and individuals as much as possible. Volunteers were there to provide support and guidance for the entire period, but the sponsored refugees had the freedom to make their own decisions. Opposing the notions of passivity and helplessness associated with the theoretical and social construct of “the ideal refugee” critiqued by Malkki (1996), the informants placed value on the judgment and reasoning of the resettling refugees:

You're dealing with adults. There's a fine line between telling someone what to do and suggesting [...] But you have to kind of show the way and hope that they go that way, check in every once in awhile, make suggestions, but [...] they will make their own choices about things. At some point it's their decision...that's not our role.

- Key Informant #6 (Personal Interview, 2020/11/23)

Existing alongside this general attitude was, once again, acknowledgment of the reality and diversity of refugees' experiences. Some informants discussed how, on rare occasions, sponsored refugees who faced specific challenges (e.g., medical issues) would require extra assistance beyond the sponsorship period. In this situation, one volunteer stated, the refugee's case would be referred to settlement agencies which could provide the necessary support.

Under the PSR program, SAHs/sponsorship groups are contractually obligated to support refugees for a one-year period. However, a number of informants described how the relationships between volunteers and refugees often continued informally after the sponsorship period. These interactions could range anywhere from occasional updates about what the (formerly) sponsored individuals were now up to, to requests for the volunteers' advice or (non-financial) assistance in certain areas. Several informants acknowledged this apparent extension of their role:

But when you're responsible for somebody financially for a year, it doesn't stop after that year, because [...] – you're involved, kind of forever, you know? Like I still get, Whatsapp from Africa, and I get Whatsapp from the ones that are here...

- Key Informant #1 (Personal Interview #1, 2020/09/29)

The level of contact maintained between volunteers and refugees after the sponsorship period varied. Neither refugees nor volunteers are obligated to remain in contact with each other. Sponsored refugees sometimes relocate to another city or province after the first twelve months, and there is no expectation on the part of volunteers that the refugees will maintain contact. However, nearly every volunteer interviewed could recall at least one occasion when a former refugee they had helped to resettle had gotten back in touch with them at some point after the sponsorship had ended. This was especially the case if the refugees remained in the GTA, where the presence of ethnic communities and networks was also mentioned by some informants as

playing a role in the post-sponsorship integration and resettlement of some refugees:

I think it's like all human relationships, that some people stay in touch. I suspect that people will be in and out of people's lives forever, especially if staying in Toronto.

- Key Informant #6 (Personal Interview, 2020/11/23)

While some informants mentioned only remaining in occasional contact with formerly sponsored refugees, other informants described having developed strong personal relationships with certain individuals or families. Keeping in touch for years afterwards with some of the people they had helped to resettle, a few former volunteers now referred to the refugees they had gotten to know as “family”. They considered their previous experiences to be further motivation for their continued volunteer engagement in refugee sponsorship and resettlement. As one informant reflected:

So the relationship I have with this family that came over is absolutely a godsend, it's a blessing. They're just such wonderful people, and they've enriched my life. I expected it to be an expense. And it's not. I'm better for it now because of them. And any effort I put in is overwhelmed by what I get back from it. That alone is enough to sustain you.

- Key Informant #3 (Personal Interview #2, 2020/11/11)

In addition to encouraging the agency of sponsored refugees, key informants seemed to also be very aware of their own identities as citizens of the resettlement country. Most volunteers mentioned a sense of deep gratitude that both former and current sponsored refugees would often communicate towards them. For some informants, it served as a source of motivation for engagement, to witness the refugees express joy and relief at finding safety in Canada. For other informants, it was a reminder of their own privileged position in the face of global inequalities:

...How grateful they were. Almost shocking. We're just doing something because we can. We are exceptionally privileged. We're not heroes, we're just people doing what we can.

- Key Informant #7 (Personal Interview, 2020/11/23)

5.1.6 Refugees in Canadian Society

Key informants shared some similar views in terms of the role of refugees in Canadian society. Firstly, they expressed that during the sponsorship period, there were few “expectations” the groups had of the refugees beyond their attempting to meet the various challenges involved in resettlement and (ideally) achieving independence by the end of the twelfth month.

Secondly, a number of informants felt that younger refugees were especially capable of making contributions to Canadian society in the future. One informant cited the example of a refugee family they had helped to resettle: the parents had faced various struggles throughout the sponsorship period, and had relied heavily on their oldest child, a daughter who ended up taking on the responsibility for many of the day-to-day practicalities. The informant commented on the differences they had perceived between this “first generation” and “the next generation”, concluding that it was very important to welcome younger refugees to the country:

The older generation needs a lot of ongoing support but the younger generation will contribute a lot to Canadian society – they start businesses, become highly trained and educated, very positive contributors.

- Key Informant #8 (Personal Interview #2, 2020/11/28)

Similarly, another informant had framed the situation in terms of human capital. They considered the extended displacement of so many refugees and other forced migrants to be a significant economic loss for the world and its societies. The loss is viewed as especially profound when it comes to children and youth who are born and raised in refugee camps, and who do not have an opportunity to receive a formal education. While all refugees have contributions to make to Canadian society, this informant perceived younger refugees as representing an especially valuable potential resource for the country and its economic future:

When I think about those kids staying in the refugee camp, I think what a crime, what a waste. If they hadn't gotten out of that camp, what would their choices have been? [...] They got the choice to go back to school. And they are the future, for the workforce of Canada and for themselves.

- Key Informant #6 (Personal Interview, 2020/11/23)

These informants' comments seem to indicate a few things. Firstly, they are a recognition that resettlement has long-term effects with outcomes that may not be realized until well after the initial resettlement process. Newly arrived refugees who are focused on rebuilding their lives in a new country may not have necessarily have an immediate impact upon the local economy. However, over time their children very likely will; and those children's children certainly will.

Thinking about the future positive impacts of resettled refugees (specifically, the younger generation of newcomers) brings to mind the observations of Castles et al. (2014), who wrote about the effects of migration on receiving societies. Specifically, societies tend to welcome migrants for their positive benefits, especially in economic ways such as strengthening labour, business and trade. These informants' comments suggest that resettlement is viewed as beneficial not just for refugees themselves (who are fleeing persecution and conflict), but for Canada (and Canadians) as well (who will reap the benefits of value generated by their future economic activities). While the initial circumstances of refugees' arrival in Canada may differ from those of immigrants or economic migrants, the long-term outcomes of their presence in society are likely to be very similar.

This perspective appears to be an interesting reflection of public attitudes concerning the socio-economic impacts of immigrants in Canada. Canada's continued economic and population growth is recognized as heavily dependent on the contributions made by its immigrant population (EnviroNics Institute, 2020). Despite making up an average of only around ten percent of the total number of immigrants accepted into Canada every year (Epp, 2015:1), resettled refugees might be perceived by the Canadian public as also having a potentially significant role to play with respect to the country's growth. Informants also cited examples of refugees they had helped to resettle – particularly members of the “motivated younger generation” – who had gone on to pursue higher education and/or find work in their chosen fields. Considering Canada's current population demographics consisting of an aging population and labour force (Statistics Canada, 2016), younger refugees may also be perceived as providing valuable contributions in terms of innovation and economic development. From a long-term socio-economic perspective, there would appear to be little that distinguishes forced migrants from voluntary ones; refugees from immigrants.

In addition to discussing what they considered to be the importance of refugees' future

and present contributions to the Canadian workforce and economy, another informant referenced what they perceived to be the country's actual, physical capacity to continue absorbing refugees through increased resettlement figures. This perspective was based on contextual factors: namely, Canada's large area size and wealth, alongside its relatively small population and density levels (Statistics Canada, 2020). In this key informant's view, there were multiple reasons to increase resettlement totals, and multiple benefits that can be derived from it:

I really wish to God that we could [...] bring more refugees here and save lives. Because these people come here, and they're ready to work. They're ready to be part of the – well, look at – some of them have become politicians and doctors and lawyers, you know what I'm saying? Like, Canada is so big... we've got the room for them.

- Key Informant #11 (Personal Interview, 2020/12/05)

This statement seems to capture a number of different dimensions that make up volunteer attitudes concerning resettlement: while refugees should certainly be helped for humanitarian reasons, they are capable of giving back to a country that is more than capable of accepting them.

5.1.7 Opposing Viewpoints

During the interviews, several key informants spoke of individuals in their own personal social networks who held mixed to negative views concerning the notion of refugees receiving assistance in Canada. Informants mentioned various comments that had been directed at them over the course of their time as volunteers and sponsors. People had expressed surprise at their decision to help resettle sponsored refugees; and, often, questioned the reason for providing assistance to them, when others (e.g., their own family members from previous generations) had not received any assistance when they first arrived in Canada. One informant said the following:

So I'm thinking that everybody is thinking like me. But they're not. Um, we live in a country that's prejudiced. We live in a country that is, um, very, um, you have everything you could want. And some of these people didn't want to give up some of that.

They weren't the ones that were signing on to take these people. They were the ones that would say, um... 'Why are you doing this?' 'Well, they need help.' 'Well, you know, my parents came over from Italy, they didn't get any help. My parents did this, my parents did

that. They came over; they got no assistance. Why should we give them assistance?’

- Key Informant #3 (Personal Interview #2, 2020/11/11)

The informants’ recollections of these opposing views expressed by other people in their networks provided an interesting contrast to their own perspectives. Some informants considered these attitudes to be outlets for undercurrents of nativism and racism. These informants stated that these views would most often come from ‘white Canadians’ who were of European descent, and who questioned why refugees should get assistance when their own ancestors had not received any. Whether their family members had come to Canada as refugees, or as immigrants, is unknown and beyond the scope of this study. However, if negative opinions concerning refugee sponsorship or resettlement were based on a comparison between forced migrants and voluntary migrants, it would suggest a lack of clarity concerning the differences between the two categories, as well as the (legal) definition of a refugee as per the Geneva Convention and the ensuing obligations of state signatories to offer them protection.

Equally interestingly, however, is that some informants had also had questions directed at them from non-white Canadians who had come to Canada: either as immigrants or even as refugees themselves, but who had not arrived through the private sponsorship program. All of these views appear to align with poll findings and academic literature recognizing the feelings of threat that the arrival of refugees (and/or immigrants) can invoke among some members of a resettlement society. In this scenario, these feelings seem to revolve around a perception that refugees were unfairly receiving access to resources that other groups had not been given. Esses et al. (2017:82) have commented on this, outlining how these feelings of threat may stem from a variety of sources. In this case, the negative comments referenced by the informants seem to imply resentment about refugees receiving assistance in the form of financial support and/or other resources (e.g., affordable housing, jobs, and healthcare access, all of which are also cited as examples by Esses et al.).

One informant, the director of one of the SAHs/sponsorship groups, stated during the interview that decreasing volunteer engagement could be partly attributed to people hearing about negative stories or “abuse” of the private sponsorship program: for example, stories of refugees receiving inordinate levels of financial or other support compared to Canadian citizens. The informant attributed negative responses to private sponsorship or resettlement to this, rather

than (outright) xenophobia or racism as other informants had suggested:

Um, you know, it has been argued that Canadians are increasingly xenophobic; and I find that term is very – um, I disagree with that assessment. I think Canadians are among the most generous people in the world, and the fact that, the PSR program, sponsoring 325,000 refugees through the generosity of Canadians – that does not speak of a selfish Canadian society, but a very generous one. But what Canadians do bristle at [...] is when their generosity is being taken advantage of.

This informant also made a comparison between these negative stories and positive stories about the waves of refugees who had arrived in Canada following the Second World War. The informant described those groups as being perceived by the Canadian public as hard-working contributors to their communities who had not received any assistance (as the private sponsorship program did not yet exist, having been introduced decades later in the 1970s):

They were told where to work for six months, and that was their welcome to Canada. “We got you a job, now make your way.” But that whole generation, um, prospered. They put their nose down, they worked hard, and just – they helped build this beautiful country. That’s a beautiful refugee story. That’s a refugee story that I want to have told from the mountaintops, when refugees stand on their own two feet, they contribute, and they make a life of their own and build society,

- Key Informant #2 (Personal Interview, 2020/10/21)

This key informant’s comments convey the influence of perceptions upon public attitudes concerning refugees and Canada’s provision of assistance through sponsorship and resettlement. In addition to this, it is interesting to note how these observations imply that refugees who demonstrate agency (e.g., “they worked hard”; “when refugees stand on their own feet”) are viewed by Canadian society in a far more positive light in comparison to stories of those who would be perceived as “taking advantage of” (or at the very least, seeming to be dependent on) assistance. The conceptualization of refugees as Turton’s (2003) “purposive actors” once again appears to foster greater empathy and regard from the general public.

5.1.8 Summary of Key Findings

The findings produced by key informant interviews indicate that volunteer engagement in refugee sponsorship and resettlement is shaped by multiple factors. A combination of perceptions and attitudes concerning refugees serve as a consistent driver of involvement, while supported by social capital which provides an especially strong motivator for initial participation. Informants' attitudes were shaped by a range of factors, including empathy which was generated in various ways. These attitudes then centered largely on three distinct perceptions of refugees: as people who needed assistance for an initial time period; as people who possessed varying amounts of agency across situations; and as people who would someday be capable of fully realizing this agency and potentially make significant contributions to Canada's society and economy.

Interpersonal relationships and social capital were strong drivers of initial volunteer engagement. Although there was some variation in this, the majority of key informants attributed their initial awareness of, and involvement in, private sponsorship and resettlement through their personal, primarily faith-based networks. This finding supports Putnam's (2000) theory of social capital where religious involvement provides a strong context for volunteering and altruism. The elements of moral obligations and norms – as mentioned by Siisiainen (2003) in reference to Putnam's theory – were also present, with the act of assisting refugees viewed by some volunteers as a manifestation of their personal beliefs and values. Additionally, trustworthiness and cooperation within volunteer groups were cited as important factors in sustaining group motivation and engagement, supporting Fukuyama's (2000) theory which highlights the role of trust and group solidarity as facilitating collaboration.

Empathy often played a central role in shaping informants' attitudes concerning refugees and, consequently, driving their decision to actively support sponsorship and resettlement. This happened in various ways. For instance, some volunteers empathized with the particular story of an individual refugee and felt moved to respond through action; perceiving the need of refugees incited a motivation in the volunteer to relieve that need. Meanwhile, others empathized with the collective experience of refugees as newcomers to Canada, with some being able to personally identify or relate to this because of their own lived experiences or backgrounds (e.g., as former immigrants or refugees themselves). In both situations, the volunteers did not need to actually have a personal connection with the refugee(s) in order to empathize with them. However, other informants did speak of various personal interactions they had with refugees which in their cases

also generated a sense of empathy that led to action. These examples support Batson's (1987, 2002, 2009) theories concerning empathy, attitudes and engagement in support of the welfare of marginalized groups, where empathy produces altruistic motivations that lead to action.

Volunteers were strongly motivated by a desire to help refugees, whom they perceived as people in need of assistance. At the same time, informants perceived refugees as autonomous actors in possession of agency. Malkki (1996) speaks of the refugee as often being viewed as an object, perceived by humanitarian and other actors to be "speechless", rendered helpless in the face of their circumstances. Yet this conceptualization of refugees as passive victims – as it is critiqued by Malkki – did not correspond with the key informants' overall perceptions of refugees. Rather, their views aligned far more with Turton's (2003) suggested conceptualization: that refugees should be perceived as purposive actors – ordinary individuals with agency. Turton argues that viewing forced migrants in this manner allows members of developed societies to identify with them and not ignore their plight. Similar to Batson's model, Turton's theory centers on empathy generating action. This often appeared to be the case for key informants.

Despite refugees' need for initial support, informants perceived them to have some measure of agency regardless of their circumstances: from fleeing their origin countries to waiting for asylum in refugee camps, to resettlement in Canada. During this stage informants not only recognized refugees' agency, but considered it critical to their success throughout the resettlement process and after the sponsorship period. Informants consistently alluded to refugees' agency while recognizing the challenges they faced, which differed across situations. In refugee camps, they often spent many years raising families while waiting for asylum claims to be processed. In asylum countries they were treated with hostility, ostracized and 'Othered', at a severe disadvantage socially and economically in comparison to citizens. Once resettled in Canada, refugees faced hurdles as they sought to build a new life in a new country.

The label of "refugee" was not something that informants felt should continue to be attached to sponsored families and individuals once in the resettlement country. Instead, terms such as "newcomers" or "new Canadians" were preferred. Informants who had experience interacting with refugees overseas described the negative connotations that were attached to this label in asylum countries.

Key informants empathized with sponsored refugees while working towards the objective of helping them become independent by the end of the year. The provision of emotional, social

and financial support was viewed as integral to help sponsored refugees meet this goal. While emphasizing that no two situations were alike, informants highlighted the capacity of refugees to meet the range of challenges they faced. Informants cited the adaptability of younger refugees, whom they felt were especially capable of significantly contributing to the country's economy and society in the future. Resettlement was thus perceived as having multiple long-term benefits.

Notably, these attitudes contrasted with views of others in informants' personal networks who opposed the provision of financial assistance to refugees. These negative attitudes appeared to be centered on public perceptions of refugees as threats according to the analysis of Esses et al. (2017).

5.2 Refugees in Political Discourse

The secondary level of analysis in this study concerns the (public-facing) attitudes and perceptions of government and political actors/stakeholders concerning refugees and other forced migrants in Canada. Providing a brief examination of how refugees are portrayed and discussed in contemporary Canadian political discourse, it aims to uncover what concepts of the refugee are constructed in this discourse (and for what purposes), and to identify if there are any shared commonalities with the other perspectives assessed in this study.

The study reviewed discursive constructions of refugees using a comparison of political rhetoric during two distinct timeframes: 2010-2015 with the federal government led by the Conservative Party under former Prime Minister Stephen Harper; and 2015-2020 with the federal government led by the Liberal Party under current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. At the midpoint of these two periods was the October 2015 federal election, which resulted in the transfer of power between the two political parties. The months leading up to the election were marked by widespread public debate concerning Canada's response to the Syrian refugee crisis.

5.2.1 “Bogus Refugees” and “Terrorists”: Conservative Labelling of Forced Migrants

“But for too many years, our generous asylum system has been abused by too many people making bogus refugee claims. Canadians take great pride in the generosity and compassion of our immigration and refugee programs. But they have no tolerance for those who abuse our generosity or take advantage of our country.”

- Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, February 6, 2012 (Government of Canada, 2012)

During a February 2012 news conference, the then-Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism used the phrase “bogus refugees” eight times in reference to refugee claimants (Canadian legal terminology for asylum-seekers (Canadian Council for Refugees (2010)) and their asylum claims. The conference took place following the House of Commons tabling of Bill C-31, also known as the *Protecting Canada’s Immigration System Act*. The proposed legislation had been (and continues to be) criticized by various advocacy groups as introducing harmful reforms to Canada’s refugee and immigration system (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2012).

Bill C-31, which eventually passed in both houses of Parliament and was enacted into Canadian law in June 2012, was a response to the 2009 and 2010 arrival on Canada’s west coast of two ships carrying Tamil migrants and asylum-seekers (CBC News, 2012). The federal government’s reaction to the two incidents had also sparked considerable controversy, with passengers subjected to interrogation and prolonged detention (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2015). Prior to the second ship’s arrival in Canadian waters, the government had stated that it believed some of the migrants were members of Tamil Ealam, or the Tamil Tigers, designated a terrorist group in Canada since 2006. The then-minister of Public Safety had labeled the passengers as consisting of “suspected human smugglers and terrorists”, with Canada’s refugee system at risk of being “hijacked by criminals and terrorists” (CBC News, 2010). Later on, after passengers’ asylum claims had been heard, the majority – including families with young children – were confirmed to be refugees in need of protection (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2015).

In the lead-up to the 2015 election, during a debate with other party leaders, former Prime Minister Stephen Harper made the following comments:

“... We have not taken away health care from immigrants and refugees. On the contrary, the only time we’ve removed it if we had clearly bogus refugees [...] We do not offer them a better health care plan than the ordinary Canadian can receive. That is not something that new and existing and old stock Canadians agree with. On the issue of refugees this remains one of the largest countries in the world in terms of refugee resettlement... I have said we will bring in more, but

what I have said we will not do, these guys would have had in the last two weeks us throwing open our borders and literally hundreds of thousands of people coming without any kind of security check or documentation as some other countries have done.”

- Prime Minister Stephen Harper, September 17, 2015, “Globe and Mail Leaders Debate”
(Maclean’s, 2015)

Grouped together, these three examples demonstrate a pattern of bureaucratic labelling, as described by Wood (1985) and Zetter (1991). Politicians and government officials belonging to the ruling Conservative Party characterized forced migrants – mainly asylum-seekers, but also refugees – in a particular manner in order to establish a policy agenda. Forced migrants were stereotyped and categorized according to convenient labels: “terrorists”, “bogus refugees” and “criminals”. This type of discourse dehumanizes refugees and asylum-seekers, constructing a negative image of them in the Canadian public consciousness. Crucially, the process of labeling places judgments on forced migrants who do not have the power to refute the labels imposed on them. It is, as Zetter (1991:45) theorizes, non-participatory. Refugees and asylum-seekers are preemptively judged simply for being forced migrants. An already marginalized group, they are made even more vulnerable by resulting policies (such as Bill C-31) and other consequences of this political rhetoric and discourse.

This type of discourse can have various consequences. Among them is a reinforcement of the ‘good refugee/bad asylum seeker’ binary. As described by Van Selm (2014:401), this discourse implies that refugees who ‘wait’ for resettlement are ‘good’ and that asylum-seekers who make their own way to another country in search of protection are ‘bad’. The same political rhetoric that labels asylum-seekers as “bogus refugees” (a conflation of the two categories that does harm to refugees as well as asylum-seekers) constructs an image of asylum-seekers as unfairly ‘jumping the queue’ to the detriment of refugees. In this case, the rhetoric used by politicians and government officials expands this notion to imply that Canadian citizens (referred to here as “old stock Canadians”, another problematic term) are also put at risk by the arrival of asylum seekers, who are portrayed as a threat to public resources (e.g., health care) and public safety (e.g., “terrorists”; “literally hundreds of thousands of people coming without any kind of security check or documentation”).

Such rhetoric can appeal to any existing negative sentiments among the general public

and reinforce feelings of threat concerning forced migrants in Canadian society. As discussed in this study's analysis of volunteer perspectives (See: Section 5.1.7), there are segments of the population who exhibit mixed to negative attitudes concerning the notion of refugees receiving financial or other forms of assistance. Esses et al. (2017:82) have discussed different sources for these feelings of threat, which in this case can be amplified by the effects of bureaucratic labeling and the general rhetoric and discourse surrounding them.

It is important to highlight now that in terms of negative public attitudes, the main point of contention seems to relate to the "unfair" provision of assistance to forced migrants, and not necessarily with the actual right of refugees to seek protection in Canada. This also appears to be the stance of the government and public officials quoted in this section, who largely frame their position as opposing "abuse" of Canada's resettlement system rather than the humanitarian act of accepting people fleeing persecution. The resettlement of refugees in Canada is not questioned.

However, specific constructions of forced migrants such as those created in the political discourse during this timeframe have the capacity to negatively influence public attitudes and perceptions concerning refugees, asylum-seekers and all other forced migrants. In turn, this can lead to decreased public support for resettlement policies and programming – such as the PSR program. As stated by one key informant in this study (See: Section 5.1.7), decreased volunteer engagement in private sponsorship and resettlement can be partly traced back to perceptions of refugees receiving disproportionate levels of assistance and access to resources in comparison to the rest of the Canadian population. Negative labelling, rhetoric and discourse can thus directly shape public attitudes, perceptions and engagement concerning refugee resettlement in Canada.

5.2.2 "Contributing to Continued Growth": Liberals and the Economic Incentive

Existing academic literature (Wood, 1985; Zetter, 1988, 1991, 2007) discusses labeling as a practice carried out by institutional actors, both bureaucratic and humanitarian. Labeling is framed mainly in terms of the various negative implications it can have. However, less explored are the potential positive implications of labeling as a practice, embedded within a particular rhetoric and discourse.

In December 2015, two months after winning the federal election, new Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made the following statement at Toronto's Pearson International Airport. He was awaiting the arrival of one of the first groups of Syrian refugees to be resettled since the election:

"But it's not just about receiving them tonight. It's about the hard work we're all going to do [...] to ensure that everyone who passes through here tonight and in the weeks and months to come are able to build a life for themselves, for their family and also contribute fully to the continued growth of this extraordinary country. [...] Tonight they step off the plane as refugees. But they walk out of this terminal as permanent residents of Canada, with social insurance numbers, with health cards, and with an opportunity to become full Canadians."

- Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, December 11, 2015
(CBC News, 2015a)

The Syrian refugee crisis was a major campaign issue during the fall election, and the Liberal Party had won on a pledge to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada by the end of 2015 (The Guardian, 2016). While this timeframe was later extended by another two months due to logistical concerns, the country did end up meeting the target of resettling 25,000 refugees by the end of February 2016 (The Globe and Mail, 2016). Over the next five years, a total of 74,000 Syrian refugees was resettled in the country (IRCC, 2020a).

The Liberal political discourse surrounding forced migrants was markedly different from the previous Conservative one. Refugees were framed as contributors to Canada, rather than as threats. This has particular resonance when considered from an economic perspective. Instead of being portrayed as outsiders who are unfairly taking away or draining resources, refugees were now envisioned as future permanent residents and citizens who will add value to the country's economic and labour prospects. This sentiment was clearly evident in the following statement made by the first Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship under the new Liberal government administration, who coincidentally was a former refugee himself:

"Instead of thinking of refugees as people who just want resettlement and people who are passive recipients of aid, how about re-imagining refugees as people who have assets to contribute, who have talents and skills that we need in Canada? [...] Everywhere you go in Canada here's a severe labour market shortage in all kinds of industries -- low-skilled, intermediate-skilled and high-skilled -- despite the increase in immigration levels that we have put in place [...] How can we include refugees in that conversation?"

- Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, June 20 2019

(CTV News, 2019)

This discursive construction of refugees as economic contributors to Canada highlights the potential socioeconomic benefits of increased resettlement. This relates directly to both local and national contextual factors – in particular, Canada’s population demographics indicating an ageing labour force. Refugees are framed as part of the solution to this problem, along with Canada’s sizeable immigrant population. This political discourse is especially interesting in that it can be viewed as appealing to positive public attitudes concerning immigrants. Refugees, who are categorized as forced migrants, would ideally be perceived as providing the same benefits to Canada as persons who are categorized as voluntary or economic migrants.

This discussion can be viewed in connection with Castles et al.’s (2014:55) observations on the relationship between migration and receiving societies. Societies can respond in varying ways to the arrival of migrants. Castles et al. (2014:55) note that “settler societies” – such as Canada – tend to welcome immigrants as they “fill labour shortages, boost population growth, and stimulate businesses and trade”. While this is a very broad generalization, it does seem to accurately describe public attitudes concerning immigration for much of Canada’s history.

The Liberal discourse also appears to reflect elements of volunteer attitudes concerning refugees and their perceived role in Canadian society. Several key informants in this study (See: Section 5.1.6) expressed positive expectations in terms of the future role of refugees, particularly younger ones who become educated and join Canada’s workforce. In addition to enhancing the socio-cultural diversity of the country, the presence of refugees would support continued economic growth by starting businesses and taking on different roles in their communities and throughout society. On World Refugee Day 2020, current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made the following statement:

“When refugees and forcibly displaced people rebuild their lives in our communities, they also contribute to building a better Canada. As business owners, community volunteers, Members of Parliament, or Governors General, refugees have played a key role in making Canada the strong, prosperous, and compassionate country it is today.”

- Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, June 20, 2020

(Government of Canada, 2020)

In contrast to Conservative rhetoric that portrayed asylum-seekers and forced migrants as anonymous masses seeking to make their way into the country, the Liberal rhetoric emphasizes specific, individual roles taken on by resettled refugees who are already in Canada. This calls to mind Turton's (2003:12) conceptualization of refugees as "purposive actors". Refugees are portrayed as ordinary individuals imbued with agency, who have made the decision to start new lives as part of this country. They are humanized, and – Turton would likely argue – are thus made easier to empathize and engage with. Similar to the views of this study's key informants (See: Section 5.1.4), refugees are no longer thought of as nameless forced migrants, but are given new labels that identify them as contributing members of Canadian society.

5.2.3 Summary of Key Findings

Over the past decade, Canadian political discourse surrounding refugees and other forced migrants can be categorized into two starkly contrasting views. This binary is especially evident when considering a marked shift in tone that took place in 2015 with the change of political leadership from the Conservative Party to the Liberal Party. Refugees went from being presented as economic and security threats, to valuable contributors to Canadian society and economy; and from anonymous masses, to everyday members of Canadian communities. While the differences in these discursive constructions of refugees can have varying effects, they are all clearly capable of shaping public attitudes and perceptions, which in turn can drive or lessen public engagement in refugee sponsorship and resettlement.

5.3 Refugees in Media Discourse

The third, and final, level of analysis in this study takes a look at public attitudes and perceptions concerning refugees as they are reflected in mainstream news media. Similar to the previous section's assessment of refugees in Canadian political discourse, this section provides a brief examination of how refugees are portrayed and discussed in contemporary Canadian media discourse. By observing how refugees (and Canadian society's relationship to them) are presented in news media, it aims to identify if there are any shared commonalities with the other perspectives assessed in this study. An analysis of editorials and articles from three mainstream newspapers and media outlets (The Globe and Mail, Toronto Star, CBC News) between 2010 and

2020 revealed some common themes:

5.3.1 “Reaching out to the world”: The Humanitarian Instinct

One attitude that appeared to be shared by the news and media actors studied was support for refugee protection and resettlement. While this sentiment was present throughout the decade, this was especially evident in coverage during 2015, in the months before and after the Canadian federal election. Following is an excerpt from an editorial from one Toronto-based newspaper:

“Whoever takes the reins of Canada’s foreign policy after Oct. 19 should step up the effort and use what moral leverage we have to urge other more powerful, more affluent actors [...] to push for a political settlement to Syria’s destabilizing civil war, heed the United Nation’s call for more financial resources, and open the gates to more refugees.”

- Toronto Star, August 24, 2015 “Global refugee crisis shames us all: Editorial” (Toronto Star, 2015)

News and media outlets across the political spectrum expressed similar views at the time. While the newspaper cited above is considered center-left in its political leanings, following is an excerpt from an editorial belonging to one of its competitors, a newspaper considered center-right in its political stance:

“The world cannot easily reach Canada. But we can reach out to the world. Canada is a geographic outlier, and distance has given us a choice. Canada long ago chose to be a relatively high-immigration country.”

- The Globe and Mail, September 4 2015, “Canada needs to do more for Syrian refugees, and do it quickly” (Editorial) (The Globe and Mail, 2015)

These two examples cited contextual factors in their arguments for an increased Canadian role in responding to the Syrian refugee crisis. Both editorials alluded to characteristics specific to the country: Canada’s remote geographic location, giving it the choice to either distance itself further or play a greater role in international refugee protection; its immigration-based population composition, implying that Canada can and should accept more refugees; and the country’s

financial resources and wealth, implying a capacity and responsibility to do so. The influence of contextual factors aligns with the assessment of Dempster and Hargrave (2017:9), who theorized that public attitudes concerning refugees and migrants are formed and understood best according to their local contexts.

Both excerpts also reflect some elements of the volunteer attitudes examined in this study (See: Sections 5.1.5 and 5.1.6) – for example, key informants’ references to Canada’s relative privilege and size, implying an ability to resettle more refugees. Ultimately, the two perspectives (media and volunteers) appeared to share in the attitude that Canada has a strong humanitarian-based obligation to provide assistance to refugees through resettlement.

5.3.2 “He might have become a Canadian”: Removing Cultural Distance

“Some claim Syria isn't our problem. [...] But then we behold little Alan Kurdi on the indifferent shore of a country that despised him because of who he is. And then we learn he might have one day lived in British Columbia, thanks to the generosity of a group of ordinary Canadians willing to privately sponsor his family.”

- CBC News, September 3, 2015, “Little Alan Kurdi, washed ashore, suddenly refocuses Syrian tragedy” (CBC News, 2015b)

Previous sections in this study have already mentioned the story of Syrian refugee Alan Kurdi, whose family had applied for asylum to Canada prior to their attempted crossing of the Mediterranean Sea which Kurdi did not survive. One key informant (See: Section 5.1.1) had cited the media coverage surrounding Kurdi’s death as the initial reason for their decision to become a volunteer. As already discussed, coverage of Kurdi’s story generated empathy in the informant for Syrian refugees and led to their involvement in sponsorship and resettlement.

The language used in the article cited above exemplifies how news and media portrayals of refugees have the ability to shape public attitudes and perceptions of them. This particular article had also included the sentence “He might have become Canadian.” While this was undoubtedly a reference to the Kurdi family’s personal connections to Canada, where they had relatives, it also has an additional effect of lessening what Wright (2014:362) – citing Malkki (1996) – refers to as the “cultural distance or racial difference” between refugees and resettlement societies. Such language fosters a greater sense of kinship between forced migrants

and the Western audiences consuming news media coverage about them. This generates empathy for refugees and can lead to action in support of their welfare, as per the pro-social motivation theories of Batson (1987, 2002, 2009).

A second example of the humanization of individual refugees through the lessening of cultural distance can be seen in the below excerpt, in a more recent article from the same news media outlet (considered centrist in its political stance):

“I see the pride she takes in her learning, adamant to become fluent in the language of her new home, in order to secure a better future for herself and her son Majed. I watched her go to job interviews, nervous and worried, only to come out feeling more confident in herself and her abilities. I see her dedication as she prepares for her upcoming citizenship test, and in the process gain more knowledge about Canadian history than many Canadian-born citizens I know. Canada is lucky to have her.”

- CBC Docs, July 13 2020, “Fatma, a Syrian refugee finds freedom and new family in Canada” (CBC Docs, 2020)

This article profiles the story of another refugee – this time, one who has already been resettled in Canada. The language in this excerpt has multiple effects. Like the previous article, it identifies them as a specific individual and not the anonymous figure critiqued by Malkki (1996). The article not only gives this refugee a name – Fatma – but presents her as an actor with considerable agency, conveyed through the article’s descriptions of her various activities. This representation aligns with Turton’s (2003) proposed conceptualization of forced migrants as purposive actors. The focus on her particular activities as a future Canadian citizen – learning the language, studying for the citizenship test – removes almost all cultural distance between her and the Canadian audience reading the article. Last but not least, the mention of her attending job interviews portrays her as a future contributor to Canada’s economy, rather than a passive victim solely dependent on Canadian assistance. Instead, the portrayal of this refugee closely aligns with the idealized version promoted by Liberal political discourse (See: Section 5.2.2) and the future expectations of volunteers and other key informants (See: Section 5.1.6).

5.3.3 “The New Canadian Immigrant”

A third attitude reflected in mainstream media that appears to be shared with the other perspectives analyzed concerns the future role of refugees in Canadian society. Ideally, resettled refugees will one day make contributions to the country in various ways: economically, socially, culturally and otherwise. While they are not necessarily expected to do this, it is implicitly encouraged in both political and media discourse. Following is an excerpt from an article discussing Canada’s economic policies with regards to immigrants and refugees:

“Skilled worker and economic immigration policies are not designed with refugees in mind and requirements such as recent work experience and a ready amount of cash make it impossible for many to qualify. It limits their migration options to humanitarian consideration only.”

- Toronto Star, March 23 2019, “‘Canada is a dreamland’: Syrian refugee thrilled to start job at Kitchener high-tech firm”

While not shown here, the full text of this article conveys support for policy reform in favor of allowing refugees to enter the country as economic migrants. It reflects one of the statements made by the Liberal political discourse (See: Section 5.2.2), arguing that refugees be perceived in terms of their skills and assets that they can contribute to Canada’s economic growth. Rather than passive recipients of assistance, they should be viewed as active contributors – similar to how immigrants and their role in society are often framed in Canadian media and political discourse.

5.3.4 Summary of Key Findings

Canadian media discourse over the past decade reflects a range of attitudes concerning refugees. Some of the common themes identified here (e.g., Canadian identity and inclinations towards humanitarianism) are evident in their crossing of political lines, implying that these views might be widely shared among the public. Meanwhile, specific language used in some excerpts has the ability to subtly influence the perceptions of the reader (e.g., the humanizing of individual refugees and the lessening of cultural distance). These methods are harnessed by both news editorials as well as regular media coverage. Similar to the analysis of political discourse conducted in the previous section, media discourse has the ability to affect attitudes, shaping new ones or reflecting those already in existence.

6. Concluding Remarks

The findings of this study suggest that there is a close relationship between attitudes and perceptions concerning refugees, and public engagement in Canadian resettlement. While other factors (notably, interpersonal relationships and social capital) played a strong role in stimulating initial involvement of volunteers in the country's private sponsorship of refugees program, specific perceptions concerning forced migrants and their place in Canadian society have an overarching and enduring influence over attitudes and engagement. Across the three perspectives analyzed in the study, stakeholders appeared to view refugees with an interesting combination of empathy and pragmatism. A perception of refugees as persons in dire and immediate need fuels a humanitarian attitude that strongly justifies resettlement and private sponsorship. However, this is tempered by a practical approach that accepts sponsored refugees based on need and perceived capacity of refugees to adapt and, ideally, contribute to Canadian society and economy in the long-term. Volunteer engagement is predicated on the dual objectives of welcoming resettled refugees to Canada while preparing them for independence at the end of the sponsorship period.

The findings indicate that public perceptions and attitudes are shaped by a wide range of variables, including contextual factors and individual experiences. Empathy, generated in several ways, was revealed to be particularly powerful in shaping attitudes and driving engagement. For key informants (i.e., volunteers), personal interactions with refugees across various contexts seemed influential in cementing general attitudes while slightly shifting any preconceived notions that might have been held. Meanwhile, political discourse and media discourse over the past decade have promoted both positive and negative perceptions of refugees that may influence the attitudes of the general public. Currently, political and media discourse appear to share and promote a broadly positive image of refugees as contributing members of Canadian society.

The findings strongly indicate that in the Canadian public consciousness, "the refugee" inhabits various roles. While in one sense refugees are viewed as people in need of humanitarian assistance, they are also perceived as individuals with agency, and who as resettled refugees are expected to play a role in supporting future economic growth and Canadian society as a whole.

Upon closer reflection, these findings seem to suggest that in Canada, public attitudes concerning refugee resettlement are shaped by two frameworks: existing beneath a humanitarian discourse is a secondary discourse where the figure of the refugee is juxtaposed with that of the immigrant. The relationship of the refugee to Canadian society is unconsciously compared to that

of the immigrant. Immigration is considered to be a central pillar of contemporary Canadian society, economy and history. Resettlement, while promoted and unquestioned as a humanitarian initiative, has in the past been framed both negatively and positively in terms of its economic impact. Refugees can be perceived as future contributors, particularly in light of Canadian demographic trends showing an aging population in an already relatively small population. Meanwhile, public anxiety concerning refugees revolves around perceptions of forced migrants unfairly receiving assistance in comparison to the rest of the population.

More research would be needed to determine the plausibility of this theory, which would require an extensive analysis of public attitudes and perceptions concerning both refugees and immigrants. The findings of such a study could suggest interesting implications for Canadian economic policies with regards to both migrant categories.

The findings of this thesis would recommend a continued emphasis of government actors (ideally supported by other public-facing stakeholders across society, such as media) on the positive contributions (economic, social, cultural, etc.) made by refugees to Canadian society. While overall public attitudes concerning refugees in Canada have remained consistently positive in recent years, they are still subject to a range of variables and should thus be closely monitored if strong public engagement in refugee resettlement and sponsorship is to continue.

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8. Appendices

Appendix A: List of Key Informant Interviews

Participant No.	Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) Affiliation	Interview Date(s)	Interview Format
1	Office of Refugees for the Archdiocese of Toronto (ORAT)	2020/09/29, 2020/11/12	In-Person
2	Office of Refugees for the Archdiocese of Toronto (ORAT)	2020/10/21	Online/Virtual
3	Office of Refugees for the Archdiocese of Toronto (ORAT)	2020/09/19, 2020/11/11	In-Person
4	Office of Refugees for the Archdiocese of Toronto (ORAT)	2020/11/11	In-Person
5	Office of Refugees for the Archdiocese of Toronto (ORAT)	2020/11/17	In-Person
6	Anglican United Refugee Alliance (AURA)	2020/11/23	Online/Virtual
7	Anglican United Refugee Alliance (AURA)	2020/11/23	Online/Virtual
8	Anglican United Refugee Alliance (AURA)	2020/11/27, 2020/11/28	Online/Virtual
9	Anglican United Refugee Alliance (AURA)	2020/11/27, 2020/11/28	Online/Virtual
10	Anglican United Refugee Alliance (AURA)	2020/11/27, 2020/11/28	Online/Virtual
11	Office of Refugees for the Archdiocese of Toronto (ORAT)	2020/12/04	Telephone
12	United Church of Canada (UCC)	2020/12/14	Online/Virtual
13	United Church of Canada (UCC)	2020/12/14	Online/Virtual

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Key Informant Name:

Affiliated Church:

Affiliated Sponsorship Group:

- (01) How long has your church been involved in refugee sponsorship and resettlement?
- (02) How long have you personally been involved as a volunteer?
- (03) Why did you initially decide to become a volunteer?
- (04) What has sustained your motivation throughout your time as a volunteer?

- (05) How many people belong to your church's volunteer refugee committee? How does it function?
- (06) How would you describe your role as a volunteer? What is your purpose/objective/job?
- (07) As volunteers/sponsors, did you have any specific expectations of the refugees?
- (08) How would you describe your relationship with the sponsored refugees? Have you kept in touch with any of them following the sponsorship period?

- (09) When you hear the word "refugee" what comes to mind?
- (10) Is this different from how you pictured refugees before your experience as a volunteer?
- (11) Did you ever have any previous interactions with refugees before becoming a volunteer?
- (12) Has your experience as a volunteer in any way shifted how you think of the word "refugee"?
- (13) What role do you think refugees can/should play in Canadian society?

- (14) Overall, what has your experience as a volunteer been like?
- (15) What are your biggest take-aways / lessons learned so far from your time as a volunteer?

- (16) Do you ever get questions/comments from people asking why you became a volunteer and/or why refugees should be helped (in Canada)? How do you respond?
- (17) (Why) do you think it is important to become involved in this process?
- (18) Do you feel a (personal) sense of responsibility to help refugees?

- (19) As a wealthy/developed country, do you think that Canada has a particular responsibility to resettle refugees?
- (20) What are your hopes or expectations for the future of private sponsorship and refugee resettlement (in Canada)?

Appendix C: Coding Frame

Analysis 1: Volunteers (Key Informant Interviews)

- Theme 1-1: Initial motivations for engagement
- Theme 1-2: Influence of lived experiences
- Theme 1-3: Perceptions of refugees: flight-asylum
- Theme 1-4: Perceptions of refugees: camps-resettlement
- Theme 1-5: Refugee-volunteer relationship
- Theme 1-6: Refugees in Canadian society
- Theme 1-7: Opposing views
- Theme 1-8: Other/Miscellaneous

Analysis 2: Political Discourse

- Theme 2-1: Conservative labelling
- Theme 2-2: Liberal labelling

Analysis 3: Media Discourse

- Theme 3-1: Humanitarianism
- Theme 3-2: Removing cultural distance
- Theme 3-3: Refugees/Immigrants
- Theme 3-4: Concerns/anxieties

Appendix D: Participation Information and Consent Form

Would you like to participate in the research study
"Civil Society and Refugee Resettlement in Canada"?

This is a request for you to participate in a research study whose purpose is to examine the role of civil society in Canada's refugee resettlement system. In this paper, we provide you with information about the goals of the project and what participation will mean for you.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to discuss the role of civil society within Canada's refugee resettlement system. The study will explore the perspectives and experiences of individuals, groups or organizations that have participated in the resettlement process, especially relating to Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program.

The study is part of a master's thesis project in the field of Global Development Studies.

Who is responsible for the research project?

The Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU) is responsible for the project.

Why were you asked to participate?

The study is interested in the perspectives/experiences/roles of persons/groups/organizations who have been involved in refugee resettlement, particularly through Canada's PSR program. The initial sample of Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH) organizations was drawn from the Government of Canada's publicly accessible online database. It will focus on SAHs which are based in the province of Ontario.

What does it mean for you to participate?

If you choose to participate in the project, it means participating in an interview (either in person or online). The interview will be semi-structured, and will take between 45 to 60 minutes approximately. The interview will be recorded (in audio if the interview is in person; in audio or video if the interview is conducted online), to be transcribed by myself (Chiara Magboo, the researcher) afterwards.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw your consent at any time without giving any reason. All of your personal information will then be deleted. It will not have any negative consequences for you if you do not want to participate or later choose to withdraw.

Your Privacy - How We Store and Use Your Information

We will only use your information for the purposes we have stated in this writing. We treat the information confidentially and in accordance with the privacy policy.

No unauthorized person will have access to personal information. All personal information will be stored in encrypted form and stored separately from other data.

Participants will not be identifiable by name in the master thesis.

What happens to your information when we finish the research project?

The information is anonymized when the project is completed, which according to plan, will be in December 2020. Any personal data and any recordings will be securely stored at the end of the project.

Your rights

As long as you can be identified in the data material, you have the right to:

- have access to what personal data is registered about you and to have a copy of the information provided,
- to have your personal data corrected,
- to have your personal data deleted. , and
- to submit a complaint to the Data Inspectorate regarding the processing of your personal data.

What gives us the right to process personal information about you?

We process information about you based on your consent.

On behalf of the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU), NSD - Norsk senter for Forskningsdata AS has considered that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with the privacy regulations.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the study, or wish to exercise your rights, please contact:

- Chiara Magboo (Researcher/Student) and/or Ruth Haug (Supervisor) at cmagboo@nmbu.no and ruth.haug@nmbu.no, respectively.

If you have questions related to NSD's assessment of the project, please contact:

- NSD - Norwegian Center for Research Data AS by e-mail (personvernt-services@nsd.no) or by phone: 55 58 21 17.

Sincerely,

Project Responsible (Chiara Magboo / Ruth Haug)

Consent Declaration

I have received and understood information about the project "**Civil Society and Refugee Resettlement in Canada**", and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I agree to:

- participate in an interview(s) (with the possibility of follow-up questions if needed);
- that my SAH organization can provide information about me for the project if needed;
- that information I provide is published in the study.

I agree that my information will be processed until the project is completed.

(Signed by project participant, date)



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