

***Maleeha Iqbal, Laila Omar, and Neda Maghbouleh*¹**

THE FRAGILE OBLIGATION: GRATITUDE, DISCONTENT,
AND DISSENT WITH SYRIAN REFUGEES IN CANADA

Abstract

This article analyzes the emotional lives of Syrian refugee mothers in the first year of their recent resettlement in Canada. Drawing on two waves of interviews with forty-one newcomer mothers, we find three main emotional themes in their resettlement narratives: *gratitude*, *discontent*, and *dissent*. Together, they capture an affective state we term the *fragile obligation*, which reflects coexisting conditions of migratory indebtedness, disappointment, and critique. Inspired by foundational work in critical refugee studies and Asian American/ethnic studies, centering refugee affect holds promise for revising dominant scholarly theories of immigrant integration, assimilation, and belonging from migrants' perspectives in an era of widespread backlash, especially against Syrian and MENA/Muslim immigrants and refugees. By identifying complex postmigration affective states like the *fragile obligation*, researchers can help build more effective policies and practices to support Syrians and other forced migrants.



INTRODUCTION

Yusra is a newcomer mother from Syria who lives in a tidy apartment within a tall, sprawling, and poorly maintained housing complex in Scarborough, in the East End of Toronto, Ontario. In 2012, during the earliest days of violence in Aleppo, an aerial bomb killed Yusra's husband as he stood in a long bakery line to buy his family bread. As

Maleeha Iqbal is an incoming PhD student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Toronto and a research assistant on RISE Team. Email: maleeha.iqbal@mail.utoronto.ca

Laila Omar is a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Toronto and a research assistant on RISE Team. Email: laila.omar@mail.utoronto.ca

Neda Maghbouleh is Associate Professor of Sociology and Canada Research Chair in Migration, Race, and Identity at the University of Toronto. She is principal investigator of RISE (Refugee Integration, Stress, & Equity) Team, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Province of Ontario Ministry of Research, Innovation and Science. Email: neda.maghbouleh@utoronto.ca

the Battle of Aleppo intensified, and her neighbors began to flee, Yusra and her three children found themselves in a Turkish refugee camp before they were privately sponsored by a Toronto group that included her own cousin, who had arrived in Canada twelve years earlier.

When our research team first interviewed Yusra, she and her children had only been in Toronto for a few months, and it was an emotional, difficult conversation that covered her first days of resettlement, and her previous experiences in Syria and Turkey. Just before the tape recorder was turned off, Yusra rushed to say one last thing:

I thank Canada. I was drowning and Canada raised me up, me and the children. I thank Canada so much. My entire life is for my children, and it has been about taking them from the world of war and my husband's death.

I thought that my life was over, that I was dead inside. But now I have a house and all my children are safe and there are people who help my children. And I want to thank my sponsors and [the cousin] who brought me. And I hope my kids will be a pride to Canada.²

At time of writing, Yusra is one of more than 63,000 Syrian refugee newcomers resettled across Canada since November 2015 as part of the federal government's "Rapid Impact Commitment and Plan," which is the largest, most comprehensive, and quickly expedited refugee resettlement project in the country to date.³ All early indications suggested that resettled Syrian families like Yusra's would be entering with fewer material and social resources and more severe challenges as compared to refugees from other conflict zones, or even as compared to those displaced by the Syrian war one year earlier. Since the start of the 2015 plan, Canada has permanently resettled more refugees than any other country in the world largely through expansion of its unique public-private sponsorship program, which currently accounts for nearly two-thirds of the nation's resettlement activity.⁴ By most accounts, Canada's private refugee sponsorship program, renamed the "Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative," is now its main policy export.⁵

Scholarship on migration has thus far taken up the complexities of refugee affect from a variety of perspectives in the field of resettlement. One emerging body of work elaborates upon the discourses that circulate among host states and citizen “sponsors,” who compel demonstrations of “deservingness” before extending humanitarian and welfare assistance to migrants.⁶ A smaller but theoretically impactful body of research has centered the perspectives of refugees and asylum seekers, who must compellingly prove their own persecution and perform gratitude or loyalty to a range of examiners including intergovernmental organizations, international NGOs, asylum officers, and border officials, as well as academic researchers, news media, and private citizens.⁷ Critical refugee studies has pushed this line of research further to center “refugee lifeworlds not as a problem to be solved by global elites but as a site of social, political, and historical critique.”⁸ This article makes linkages across the literature on refugee affect by focusing on the complex resettlement narratives of Syrian newcomer mothers in their first days in Canada. We identify three main emotional themes in mothers’ narratives about their families’ resettlement experiences: *gratitude*, *discontent*, and *dissent*. Together, these themes capture an affective state we term the *fragile obligation*, which reflects mothers’ coexisting conditions of indebtedness, disappointment, and critique. In other words, the *fragile obligation* describes the ambiguous affect possessed by refugees towards their countries of resettlement: a deeply felt thanks and commitment that is nonetheless unsettled, insecure, and uncertain. This state of being fundamentally structures the women’s earliest relations and interactions in their new homes; identifying and understanding its co-occurring presence is critical for building more rigorous scholarly theories around integration and belonging and more effective resettlement programs.

OBLIGATION AND OTHER CONDITIONS OF REFUGEE LIFE

Like other social scientists who have sought to bring humanistic insights from affect theory into their research, we build on expositions of the theory that connect affect to social and political critique and move beyond the realm of the solely psychological.⁹ By focusing on the complexity of refugees’ emotional lives following resettlement, we especially heed the call of critical refugee studies scholars like Yen Le Espiritu (herself following Viet Than Nguyen) to consider how “refugees, not as an object of investigation but as a site of social critique, ‘articulate the incomprehensible or heretofore unspeakable.’”¹⁰ We

propose, in the case of Syrian refugees in Canada, that the heretofore “unspeakable” includes “ugly feelings” like vexation and annoyance, particularly as evoked by resettlement.¹¹ Orienting our attention to the register of migrants’ minor, negative feelings is a potentially important counter to “curated narratives that move [refugees] from ‘tragedy’ to ‘success,’ ‘hell’ to ‘paradise.’”¹²

At the same time, we recognize that amidst the perpetual state of containment theorized by Sara Ahmed as part of today’s “global economies of fear,” mobility and migration may also be experienced by refugees as a site of relief, pleasure, and gratitude.¹³ It is in fact the co-occurrence of both positive and negative feelings within mothers’ resettlement narratives that compel our interest in using affect theory to understand the affective ambiguity of mixed emotions in the context of empirical, ethnographic research.

Although resettled mothers like Yusra readily shared with us their most urgent concerns about their families’ and their own wellbeing, our research team did not actually set out specifically to elicit stories of gratitude, discontent, or dissent from these interviews. In Yusra’s case, her statement of gratitude was shared at the last minute before the tape recorder was turned off. Like Yusra, some mothers narrated to us stories of their early integration in Canada as a “welcoming” and “saving” for which they were grateful. But other mothers’ earliest days were colored with disappointment; others yet offered sharp critiques and objections. Very often, a mother’s narrative would contain expressions of all three affective states.

In order to understand the delicate balance between gratitude, discontent, and dissent, we draw from the concept of refugee “obligation” as it appears in the scholarship of Lisa Cacho and Mimi Thi Nguyen.¹⁴ Both scholars use “obligation” to characterize US political and cultural systems that have commanded refugee fealty and indebtedness through empire, war, and resultant acts of “rescue.” By prefacing the concept of “obligation” with the adjective “fragile,” we add an additional dimension to this important concept to demonstrate that refugees’ affective commitment to “obligation” is complex. Our case study suggests that refugees’ early days of resettlement are characterized by oscillation between different, and sometimes contradictory, emotions about their new lives; attention to the fragile obligation felt by Syrians resettled in Canada—arguably the most prominently discussed refugee community at present, resettled in a country touted for its tolerant social environment—offers insights into the disappointments that still characterize multicultural and refugee

resettlement policies, increasing our theoretical purchase on resettlement outside the United States more generally.

Research on the emotional lives of present-day Syrian migrants is an emerging and nuanced area of scholarship. Scholars of Arab and Arab diaspora feminisms have long drawn attention to how migrant subjectivities destabilize Western liberal notions of time, space, body, and selfhood.¹⁵ New scholarship on the reception of Syrian war refugees resettled in Europe have elaborated upon refugees' own internalized and symbolic boundaries of "deservingness and dignity" and the public policy construction of Syrians as "legitimate targets for compassion" or, alternately, "terror suspects" in Brexit Britain.¹⁶ In some cases, Syrian women migrants' own subjectivities are shaped by their strategic navigation of gendered cultural norms and racialized and gendered "savior/victim" scripts, revealing how *emotions* – which are more strategic and more closely associated with action than affect – are an important part of refugee lifeworlds.¹⁷

We know less, however, about the ambiguous, diffuse, and less strategic *affects* this cohort of resettled Syrian refugees may feel, and in some cases, express aloud. There is important ethnographic research on how dissent shapes refugee activism and mobilization, particularly in camps and other "temporary" sites; there is also a wealth of critical art and humanistic work on refugee dissent.¹⁸ Less attention has been paid in social science, however, to resettled newcomers' complaints, especially following their early experiences in a global North country hailed as today's "champion" for refugees – Canada.¹⁹

SYRIAN RESETTLEMENT (2015–PRESENT) AND LIBERAL MULTICULTURALISM IN CANADA

While there are instructive commonalities with cases described in the literature above from Europe and the United States, there are nuances that distinguish Syrians resettled in Canada from their counterparts elsewhere. For example, notions of debt and obligation may look different for refugees due to resettlement in the Canadian context and may also intersect with some cultural specifics that are relevant in the case of Syrian newcomers. In Canada, the predominant ideology that guides statecraft is multiculturalism; it was the first Western nation to officially adopt a multicultural policy in 1971.²⁰ Although multiculturalism shares some common ground with other liberal democratic ideologies, it is also distinctly different for its communitarian and pro-immigration ethos, which can feed into a more

pluralistic national identity.²¹ Compared to other Western democracies, Canadian immigrants are more likely to become citizens and participate in the political process.²² This produces a material and symbolic environment in Canada that is relatively more receptive of refugees, including those racialized as nonwhite, than the United States or Europe. Nonetheless, scholars agree that even Canadian multiculturalism is rife with “contradictions” and can operate, in effect, as “banal nationalism.”²³ For example, while multiculturalism has produced increased political access for some minority group members, increased political or cultural recognition has failed to translate into social and economic gains for First Nations and racialized Canadians. Even at the level of symbolic attachment, evidence points to a weaker sense of “belonging” to Canada among racialized second-generation Muslim Canadians than first-generation immigrant parents.²⁴ In this way, if the goal of multiculturalism is to allow for groups to maintain their specific identities, then perhaps a sense of “non-belonging” among racialized immigrants is desirable; but if the goal of multiculturalism is to ensure equitable access to resources and power, then evidence of “non-belonging” is evidence of multiculturalism’s failure.²⁵

Canadian multiculturalism is also highly relational; citizenship and belonging rely upon the articulation of noncitizens, and newcomers specifically, as potentially worthy future Canadians in need of social and personal reform. “Canada the Redeemer” elides its own racist and sexist history and society by casting immigrant and refugee newcomers as unfamiliar with multicultural tolerance and gender equity until they emerge on the other side of the process of citizenship as reformed Canadians.²⁶ Canadian literature and art have long trafficked in stories that position the refugee as “pitiable and passive” and in need of assistance.²⁷ Seen in this light, Canada’s Syrian Refugee Resettlement Initiative extends Canada’s longstanding notion of its own “moral obligation” to refugee newcomers into its most visible geopolitical and media campaign yet, with widely broadcast images of Syrians received at airports by Canadian government personnel and prominent *New York Times* features on “adopted” Syrians and their Canadian private sponsors.²⁸

While there has been significant interest in the case of Syrians in Canada since day one of the Resettlement Initiative, research findings from academic work with this population is only beginning to emerge. Early findings have begun to unpack Syrian newcomers’ subjectivities as “persons of self-rescue in pursuit of a life beyond

refugee,” who “feel like we’re home” in rural Canadian towns and villages.²⁹ Despite Syrian newcomers’ presence across all of Canada, the Greater Toronto Area has nonetheless been the leading destination of Syrian refugee arrivals.³⁰ Toronto, known as “the most diverse city in the world” and the most prominent model for urban multiculturalism in the global North, is a particularly revealing setting to understand newcomers’ experiences and feelings about resettlement.³¹ In the following pages, we describe the research design and methodology behind our work with newly landed refugee mothers, and then turn to mothers’ narratives to better understand the complex emotions that structure their resettlement in Canada.

DATA AND METHODS

This paper is based on research conducted as part of a pilot study in 2016–2017 and led by three faculty from the Department of Sociology (Ito Peng, Melissa Milkie, and Neda Maghbooleh), with substantial research assistance by four graduate students at the University of Toronto. Funded by a joint grant from the Canadian Ministry of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship (IRCC) and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the study assessed the parenting strains experienced by Syrian refugee mothers in their earliest days of resettlement in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). All interviews were semi-structured, spanning between 20 and 140 minutes, and included general questions about participants’ backgrounds and migration process as well as more specific prompts about social relationships, parental self-concepts and esteem, and potential incidents of discrimination in Canada. Questions were arranged in an order that encouraged mothers to also discuss their lives and experiences prior to resettlement in Canada.

The research assistants, fluent in a variety of Arabic dialects, conducted two waves of interviews with forty-one Syrian newcomer mothers of school aged children (see Table 1). All participants were interviewed for Wave 1 of the study within their first five months of resettlement in Canada, and the majority of mothers agreed to be interviewed once more before the end of their first year of resettlement; in this article, we draw on the full suite of interviews ($n=69$) collected during both waves of research. Participants were recruited across two strategically selected regions in the GTA: half of the families were drawn from Peel region, which includes Mississauga, a city with a longstanding Arab Canadian community. We recruited in Peel region through partnership with a major local resettlement agency that offers

English classes, job skills, youth programming, and similar resources to newcomers. The other half of families enrolled in our study were drawn from the City of Toronto using snowball sampling through our research assistants' personal networks. The strong majority—approximately 80 percent—of our participants were government-assisted refugees resettled to Canada through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Other participants were either resettled via the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program or through the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program, a public-private partnership. On average, mothers were thirty-five years old, with a range of twenty-three to fifty-six years old. Thirty-eight mothers were married; the rest were widowed. The number of children in their households ranged from two to thirteen and five mothers were pregnant during the study.

Our research assistants were themselves newcomers to Canada as children or as adults from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Their support as research assistants was essential to our project for several reasons. As migrants with family histories in both MENA and Canada, they had linguistic and cultural expertise allowing them to not only build rapport with participants and sustain their trust through the interview process but to also understand and adequately translate what was being said.³² This is especially important to mention as interviews became increasingly complex sites of interaction: mothers mourned, cried, and shared their fears and grievances with our research assistants, who were in turn moved to tears during the conversations.

For the purpose of this paper, we focus mostly on the following four interview prompts, which elicited ambiguous affective discussions unanticipated at the start of the project: 1) mothers' first impressions of Canada; 2) differences mothers observed between Canada and Syria; 3) their emotional, physical, and mental health as well as school experiences; and 4) household financial challenges. Interviews were transcribed word-for-word and translated into English for coding and analysis by all members of the team, including ten research assistants who joined the project after the 2016–2017 pilot was expanded into a five-year longitudinal study (2018–2023).³³ The accuracy of our Arabic-to-English translations were verified by multiple Arabic-speaking members of the team: each Arabic audio file was reviewed, and each English transcript verified, by at least two different research assistants before appearing in this paper; with the

exception of two translations, which were reviewed by only one research assistant due to file transfer error.

Before analyzing the transcripts, we coded mothers’ narratives using the “focused coding” method; we were guided by specific themes (e.g., “gratitude”) that had been identified after reading a small sample of initial interviews. This allowed us not only to identify the recurrent patterns related to our main topic but also to distinguish the nuances and variations that exist in the participants’ answers; and to note any recursive patterns in how or when mothers’ emotions emerged, shifted, or erupted during the interview process.³⁴ In the remainder of the article, we draw on mothers’ words and narratives from within their earliest days of resettlement to describe an affective state we call the fragile obligation.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of study participants (N = 41).

Age	Type of Sponsorship	*Number of Children	Marital Status	Transition Country
23-29 = 10	Government =	2 = 6	Married = 38	Jordan = 15
30-39 = 19	34	3-5 = 21	Widowed = 3	Lebanon =
40-49 = 9	Private = 4	6-13 = 14		16
50-56 = 2	Blended = 3			Turkey = 7
Unknown				US = 1
= 1				Multiple =
				2

*Includes five children born a few months after our interviews with mothers.

GRATITUDE: “I SWEAR THIS IS HEAVEN”

Despite being uprooted and separated from their homeland and families, nearly all mothers expressed feelings of gratitude for the refuge they found in Canada, without solicitation from interviewers. We noted in particular two recurring moments when declarations of gratitude surfaced in mothers’ narratives: when describing Canada as an inclusive and multicultural safe haven and in describing their own families’ futures as “worthy” of resettlement.

Mothers normally began their interviews by painting Canadians as generous people. They described the hospitality of new neighbors who would send them greetings on Eid or the generosity of private sponsors who would buy clothing for their children. Many were also thankful for children's schools, which offered Arabic translators at parent-teacher meetings. Nearly all asserted at the start of their interviews that they had not experienced prejudice since landing in Canada. Rather, they described feeling comfortable expressing their culture and values openly in an inclusive society. For instance, when we asked Maryam, a thirty-six-year-old mother of seven, if she feels important to people in her new community, she agreed, describing an interaction that took place at her daughter's school:

When a [Canadian] sees you come here as a refugee, they don't call you a refugee. They don't care if you are a refugee. . . . I went to the school the day that we registered my daughter, Sana. The translator who went with us put on the form that my daughter was a "refugee from Syria." The second day, the Principal saw the word "refugee" and told [Sana] it was wrong. . . . [The principal said] "When you landed in Canada, you were no longer a refugee, you are Canadian – you are like me."³⁵

Maryam felt gratitude towards the principal, who verbally confirmed they saw Maryam's daughter as a member of Canada rather than as a temporary visitor. This distinction – especially voiced by a prominent school authority – held weight as mothers were sometimes sensitive about their refugee status, a label that was often a source of pity and shame. Across our interviews, we noted that mothers' gratitude was often expressed following their descriptions of small but affecting moments of inclusion, validation, and respect they perceived from other Canadians. By helping to mediate feelings of shame connected to their refugee status, such moments of inclusion informed mothers' expressions of gratitude for and obligation to Canada. Similarly, Yasmeen, a thirty-six-year-old mother of six and cancer survivor, said this when asked if she was worried for her children's resettlement in any way:

No. When we first came, I was worried about [my family]. We are alone here, as strangers. But to be honest, we were very wrong . . . about what we were thinking [of Canada]. . . . Now

when I talk to my family, I tell them “I swear this is heaven.” . . . *Wallāh* [I swear], here, the people are nice. They respect one another. . . . Two days ago, I had some meeting where there was a Toronto minister [elected member of the provincial parliament]. . . . All these [public] figures were there and *masha’Allāh* [used here to express amazement and joy] they are so nice and were working on family reunification plans and answering our questions.³⁶

Not only was Yasmeen impressed that Canadians valued one another regardless of social status, but she was grateful for the public figures in her community who were present, listening to the newcomer families’ concerns and showing willingness to help in the resettlement process. Moments of cooperation touched mothers and made them feel connected to their communities. Like Yasmeen, mothers were generally very emotional when sharing their gratitude for Canada and often used poetic language to describe Canada as a “heaven,” a country they owed their “life” to, that saved them from “drowning.”

As we continued our conversation with Yasmeen, she added: “And we are also hoping for the best from [Prime Minister] Justin Trudeau. . . . He was very generous with us, *wallāh*.”³⁷ Mothers directed significant gratitude and attention towards Trudeau, who they referenced by name in their narratives. For instance, Rania, a thirty-eight-year-old mother of two and cancer survivor, was grateful for Trudeau who, in her eyes, sheltered her family when other countries did not:

I wish to see him one day, or maybe kiss his hand for what he’s done for us. . . . That’s the least we could do. He protected our kids . . . opened the door to us, brought us here with dignity unlike other countries. They treat us in Canada in a completely different way than in some European countries. I have siblings in Europe; they are surprised by the way they treat us here.³⁸

In December 2015, the world watched Trudeau himself receive the first flight of landed refugees from Syria at Toronto Pearson International Airport. He was filmed and photographed shaking newcomers’ hands, helping them put on winter coats, and telling them “you are home,” confirming that they are “permanent residents of Canada, with social insurance numbers, with health cards, and with an opportunity to

become full Canadians.”³⁹ Thirteen months later, following Donald Trump’s executive order that indefinitely suspended Syrian refugee resettlement in the United States (and at the time of our pilot study), Trudeau welcomed refugees on Twitter with a #WelcomeToCanada hashtag, a post that was retweeted over 420,000 times.⁴⁰ It is likely that these images and messages became embedded in our participants’ minds (and made an impression on their families and friends abroad), inducing both relief and obligation within newcomers, while positioning Trudeau as a champion and rescuer.

Amidst expressions of gratitude, mothers specifically referenced Canada’s multicultural ideology and their local multiethnic landscape in the Toronto area, which they felt alleviated tensions and anxieties associated with transitioning from Syria to Canada. For them, living among others who shared their cultural, religious, and linguistic background allowed them to openly practice their values and traditions without interference or judgment. This was especially beneficial in terms of child-rearing or intergenerational cultural transmission. Salma, a forty-year-old mother of four, felt hopeful about her children’s future and was especially grateful for what she described as an inclusive culture in Canada that gave her family the “freedom” to practice their faith:

[Syria] had a somewhat conservative culture and so it was easier to raise your children [without worrying about their ethical or social development] in that environment. . . . Especially, as a Muslim . . . you have certain values, whether these are religious or social. But even here . . . *alhamdulillah*, we see people all around us who are Muslim and Canadian and wonderful. . . . Even me! I feel like I really can become or belong here as a Canadian Muslim, you know? It’s a really wonderful thing. And I really respect [Canada] and its values. Because as we said, this country has not tried to strip you of your values . . . to tell you “you have to do this or that.” . . . On the contrary, it gave you the freedom to be whatever you want, as long as you respect the laws, and you respect all other religions and cultures.⁴¹

Here, Salma suggests that Canada welcomes the coexistence of multiple cultures without resistance. Similar to other mothers, she was initially concerned that her children would neglect their former

teachings in Canada but was pleased to discover families of Arab and Muslim background, if not also Syrian, residing close by. They described taking some comfort in knowing their children could forge coethnic friendships; this was crucial in helping mothers feel confident in raising children in a new cultural environment.

Mothers also described gratitude for the presence of coethnic others for their own emotional wellbeing following resettlement. When we asked Yara, a twenty-three-year-old mother of two, if she had anyone she could talk to in Canada in times of hardship, she mentioned other newcomer women from Palestine, Yemen, and Syria with whom she connected at school:

We have become pretty close friends. . . . Last week members of my extended family in Aleppo passed away, so I was devastated. Of course, I always talk to my mother, but I also needed someone [physically] near me, and these are the friends who were near me. That's what helped to reduce the pain that I was feeling a little bit.⁴²

Yara describes the importance of coethnic networks for her psychological wellbeing. For her, being connected to people who may understand her loss or migration-related distress helps to manage feelings of pain and grief. In this way, coethnic networks were not only structural but offered emotional support and affection in an intense season of social and cultural isolation.

Finally, mothers' expressions of gratitude also emerged in their stated commitments to repay or give back to Canada. When we asked what she hopes for her children's futures, Yusra, introduced at the beginning of this article, replied: "To become doctors, lawyers . . . the most important thing is for them to study. And just like this country brought them and helped them, I want them to contribute and help the country that brought them."⁴³ Similarly, Rania mentioned: "I really want [my children] to succeed and to prove to Canada that we are the kind of people who were able to respect the hand that helped us and to achieve things; that we weren't a burden. We really have to prove to them that we're not a burden."⁴⁴ Both Yusra and Rania described feeling a moral obligation to prove their economic worth and symbolic belonging to Canada. They largely did this by encouraging their children to become exemplary citizens, which the mothers defined as educated professionals who would contribute to Canadian society

through their productive, economically generative vocations. In this way, from their early days of resettlement, mothers pledged fidelity to Canada through statements of gratitude and the promise of economic self-sufficiency. However, mothers' narratives also yielded contrary insights; they understood that the "gift" of refuge came with significant costs and as they sat longer with our interviewers, more space opened up for mothers to share their negatively charged, "ugly" feelings.

DISCONTENT: "THERE'S NO WAY WE COULD HAVE A HOUSE LIKE WE HAD IN SYRIA"

While they saw Canada as welcoming, saving, and freeing, mothers also felt unsettled. Following resettlement, an avalanche of new, unwanted challenges, negotiations, and compromises brought with them negative emotions. These were dredged up especially when mothers reflected upon their family's relational dynamics and highly precarious financial situations. Yet, mothers did not seem to internalize their dissatisfaction in these domains or explain them away as solely due to personal troubles. Rather, they situated their discontent as having emerged from broader shifts in power which were themselves spurred by the family's forced migration.

Resettlement in Canada fundamentally disrupted participants' family dynamics and created fissures within the household. A common type of disruption was the upending of "traditional" parent-child dynamics. Several mothers plainly stated their dissatisfaction with Canadian "individualism," described as affording children with excessive amounts of freedom and autonomy, which interfered with their preferred child-rearing practices, invited disrespect from children, and weakened family cohesion. Because of what they perceived as different norms around parent-child relations, mothers feared their children would abandon previous cultural teachings and even leave their families as teenagers and young adults. Saba, a forty-three-year-old mother of five, felt uneasy about her eldest son's newfound freedom:

I can't talk to [Yusuf] anymore. He now says, "I'm responsible for myself." Even his father tells him, "If I go to speak to your teacher and ask him how you're doing in school, he [the teacher] would tell me, 'That's not your business anymore. Your son is a man now; he is twenty and you aren't responsible for him, he is responsible for himself.'"⁴⁵

Here, Yusuf's school described that it was an invasion of privacy to share his school-related progress with his father; the school saw Yusuf as responsible for himself. According to mothers, such upended relational dynamics were not customary in Syria, where fathers were the primary decision-makers, respect for elders was a core value, and children commonly gained independence after marriage. This feeling of detachment from their children worried mothers who feared an attitudinal shift in her children would be impossible to avoid.

A second type of disruption was the overturning of marital relationships, which gave rise to feelings of bitterness between spouses. Back home, husbands were typically sole breadwinners; however, resettlement undermined husbands' patriarchal authority. For instance, we observed that difficult financial circumstances in Canada (discussed later) propelled mothers to seek paid work to help their families stay afloat. In turn, husbands gradually lost the identity and status they previously held, frequently finding themselves in part-time or low-waged employment, if working at all. Often, husbands felt crushed when they were unable to use credentials and work experience from back home to enter their chosen field of work in Canada. This was the case for Yara's husband who previously worked as a carpenter in Syria but was now forced to work part-time at a restaurant. Similarly, Aisha, a thirty-year-old mother of three, shared that her husband was previously the director of a company in the United Arab Emirates. She mentioned that now her husband was "just" working at an auto repair garage, and it "hurts him to have fallen back so far." Aisha further elaborated on her husband's transition to Canada:

We want to work together to improve our quality of life, but we are dealing with a completely new situation where we have to deal with paperwork and getting certified. . . . I think it has been harder for him than it has been for me. When we first came to Canada, I went to the center for [newcomers] . . . we stayed there looking for a house for so long we started thinking about leaving Canada altogether. . . . I mean, at least I know how to speak [English]. He doesn't know how to speak [English], so he would just sit outside on a chair and it made him feel like an ass—sorry for the language—but it's true, he was frustrated and angry at me for bringing him here where he couldn't do anything, and he wouldn't talk to me.⁴⁶

Here, Aisha describes how unequal proficiency in English introduced new marital tensions. Language barriers impeded her husband's ability to do things like find suitable housing for his family, leading him to become resentful towards his wife for "bringing him [to Canada]."

Although accessible to all resettled refugees at no cost, resettled unemployed mothers in our study attended English language classes with greater frequency than their husbands, who either held deskilled, low-paid jobs, sought good work, or simply refused to leave the house, contributing to mothers' higher levels of English language proficiency.⁴⁷ Although mothers were largely proud of themselves for sticking with challenging English courses, they acknowledged how the courses nonetheless disrupted their family's sense of normalcy; tensions arose within the household as all members attempted to relearn and negotiate family roles so as to adjust to new social norms that encouraged formal labor market participation by both women and men, granted children autonomy at eighteen-years-old, and intervened in parents' child-rearing practices.

Mothers' narratives of financial precarity in Canada were often coupled with sentimental descriptions of a more comfortable life in Syria. Back home, for some, meant hiring domestic workers; owning a "three-story house with a balcony"; renting stores for their businesses; and sending children to private schools. Their husbands worked, their children studied, and they looked after the home. However, following armed conflict in the region, mothers and their families were forced to abandon their homes, jobs, and belongings, and restart their lives as refugees and asylum seekers. As Rania described, "Financially, emotionally, psychologically, everything has been hard! Everything was at a zero for me! I've come into this life [in Canada] that is the opposite of my life [before]. Everything is the opposite."⁴⁸ In Canada, mothers were uncertain whether they would be able to replicate their previous standard of living; they felt Canada was far too expensive and their inability to speak the local language made it difficult for them to secure stable employment. For instance, Noura, a forty-eight-year-old mother of eight, doubted her life would ever resemble what it was like in Syria before the war:

[U]nless we have good work, there is no way that we would have a house like we had in Syria . . . it is really hard. Our house in Syria was ours, we never had to worry about it . . . but now,

renting, it's a big problem every month . . . and what if the manager decides to raise the rent?⁴⁹

Noura also reflected on her government sponsorship:

This year we have been paid for, but next year I don't know what is going to happen . . . where are we supposed to get the rent for the house? Everything is expensive here. . . . Syria was cheap. In Syria you could go and get a lot of stuff, bags of stuff, potatoes and vegetables and sugar and olive oil . . . here we can't get bags, we just get little bottles or sacks.⁵⁰

Noura's experience of financial insecurity was not isolated: all of our participants were plagued with uncertainty as their first year of government or private sponsorship neared completion. As mentioned earlier, their husbands were often unable to secure stable employment. When husbands or even wives did work, it was part-time and very low-wage work. Because of this, mothers felt they could not comfortably pay for groceries, rent, and clothing for their children. Some mothers shared that they were unable to afford housing that could accommodate their family; Maryam's family of nine—including children ranging in age from nine months to fifteen years—was confined to a three-bedroom apartment. Accordingly, a few mothers explained having to use their Canada Child Benefit, a subsidy meant to support children's specific needs, to pay for rent and telephone costs. Other mothers feared that they would need to immediately transition to social welfare following the end of Month Thirteen, the date after which Syrian refugee-specific supports would end. Managing family finances was especially difficult for widowed mothers like Haya, a forty-two-year-old mother of two, who was a social worker for thirteen years in Syria, helping victims of violence:

The system in this country is set up for two partners to work together in supporting their family and it is very hard economically for one person, particularly when that one person is new like me with language-related challenges and no Canadian experience. My diploma from outside hasn't been accepted . . . all of that affects the living situation that one will get.⁵¹

From their stories, it was clear that mothers' identities and trajectories were significantly unsettled following migration; their imagined futures were disrupted, and some were overwhelmed with uncertainty and dejection. Most simply wanted to carve out a dignified life for their family; yet the lingering pressure of gratitude often regulated the expression of their emotions. However, as further rapport grew between participants and our interviewing team, mothers' discontent about life in Canada became increasingly critical and negative in its valence, leading to what we could call *dissent*. That is to say, instead of quietly accepting things as they were, over time mothers' "ugly" feelings led them to actively resist their circumstances.

DISSENT: "YOU JUST CAN'T KEEP ON INSULTING US"

Among the stories shared by participants, there were rare but notable cases where newcomer mothers expressed strong, negative feelings. These were largely stories of mothers directly challenging authorities like private sponsors, schools, and the Canadian state in order to insist upon resources and appropriate treatment for their families. In these moments, participants communicated their resettlement narratives in affective registers of anger, resistance, and critique.

Some mothers felt underestimated by those around them, compelling them to challenge others' perceptions of them in order to restore their dignity. Take, for example, the case of Rania, the physiotherapist. In Syria, Rania was also the primary caregiver for her two children, since the death of her husband eleven years ago. Yet, she felt that the private citizens who sponsored her family's resettlement in Canada often underestimated her capabilities:

[T]hey thought of us as children they needed to train . . . [but] the people who have been brought here are not all at the same level [educational, economic, etc.]. The sponsors need to know who I am, how I think, and treat me relative to my level. . . . For example, you have a woman [describing another type of newcomer] who is illiterate, who stays at home with no work, who doesn't know anything . . . not Arabic, not English . . . who leads a very primitive life. . . . Then they treat me the same way they treat that woman. [By treating me this way,] you have destroyed my mental state!⁵²

Rania further shared:

I never thought that I would face the kind of problems that have cropped up here, that have pulled me back. . . . The sponsors told me once that I should clean houses, that there was no shame in it. . . . I *know* that there is no shame in that. But I have survived insane conditions, war, my children and myself have come through that and now they want me to serve in a house? That's not an easy thing to take . . . so I've taken the other track, I've committed to studying and working. . . . I need to be better than I am, I have to be better than I am.⁵³

In Rania's narrative, she describes two categories of women now in exile as refugees in Canada: those with formal education, who had full-fledged careers back in Syria versus those without education who lived "primitive" lives. In this binary formation, Rania saw herself as the former: she had worked for seventeen years "healing people" who needed physical therapy, and thus felt she had earned an elevated status compared to her refugee counterparts, as a highly trained, well-educated, and efficacious person who deserved to be treated as such. Rania particularly chafed at her sponsors' suggestion to clean others' houses as work. Though she did not directly belittle such work, she understood herself as having previously engaged in work of higher skill, value, and status. As a self-identified survivor of "insane" conditions, Rania simply refused her sponsors' assurance that there was "no shame" in cleaning houses, reiterating that she herself "knows" there is no shame. In fact, Rania's distressed reaction to sponsors who are "destroying her mental state" speaks to the inherently social nature of an emotion like shame.⁵⁴ As in Rania's narrative, shame emerges from a negative evaluation of one's self when the self is seen through the eyes of another (as in the social judgement of other people, or the moral judgment of God). Rania thus verbally commits in her interview to studying in order to recuperate at least some of her lost status. That said, mothers were not only critical of sponsors but also of social services and settlement workers for being unsympathetic towards their difficult and unique circumstances of forced migration. When our team revisited Rania for a second interview several months later, she had attended some English courses and shared a different criticism:

Every day she [English language teacher] would offend us. She would say, “You don’t understand! If you can’t write [in English], go back to level 1. You don’t study. You’re always absent. The government is offering you everything.” OK but . . . we are a special case. We migrated to this country. We need to adapt, we can’t speak [English]. . . . Children, single mom, shopping. I have to do all that. I told her, I come to class sometimes, but my mind is not there when you’re teaching me the language. . . . I told her, we told her, we’re not kids who only have school to focus on. OK, school is essential. But you just can’t keep on insulting us. We’re already coming with so much pressure, and school [language class] is the only place where we can breathe a little. We’re learning the language, and on top of that, you add to the stress?⁵⁵

Rania was critical of her English language teacher for accusing her of being unwilling to study. However, like Rania, most mothers felt overwhelmed and drained by the inordinate number of new responsibilities that emerged as a result of their new life in Canada, such as learning English and securing employment. Back in Syria, mothers often relied on extended family members, such as aunts or grandmothers, to collectively raise children, share resources, and complete chores. However, in Canada, they were left to juggle these responsibilities alone, in a language in which they lacked fluency. We noticed that English language classes were often a site of tension for mothers and a place where their discontent intensified and crystallized into critique. Salma, for instance, who had praised Canada for having an inclusive culture, nonetheless described that she and her friend – both of whom wear hijab – had been repeatedly made to feel “stupid” by their English language teacher. Salma felt her teacher saw her as someone “incapable of thinking,” which prompted her to complain about her teacher to the “director” of the school. As Salma articulated, “She [the English instructor] made me feel like wearing the hijab limited what I could think . . . like I couldn’t have a complex thought.”⁵⁶

Resistance was also prevalent in discussions of child-rearing. Bushra was furious when her children were questioned by school officials about being physically abused at home:

[I don’t want] them to keep asking our children if their mothers beat them . . . my son is mischievous. If he sees a pin, he can

easily hurt himself, so I just do this on his hand [shows how she taps on his hand to make him stop whatever will hurt him]. It doesn't mean we're beating our children!⁵⁷

According to some mothers, by questioning parents, schools were encouraging or even endorsing children to disrespect their parents. Bushra felt it was her responsibility and right to raise her children and demanded that schools stop interfering with her mothering:

We don't want anything! We just want to ask the Prime Minister of Canada, or whoever is responsible for us, to stop doing this to us in the schools, to stop asking our children about these things. . . . To let them be raised our way. We raised them in Syria, we raised them in Jordan [a common migration path to Canada], and we will also raise them the same way here. We're not that cruel! I am talking about this issue now on behalf of all Syrians.⁵⁸

In contrast to an emotion like discontent, dissent captures mothers' movement from acceptance to resistance, and finally, to refusal. As in the case of Rania and Salma, mothers' emotional shift into dissent also correlated with a movement into action, such as directly speaking out against wrongdoing, rejecting offensive advice, or filing formal complaints. But unlike dissent, mothers' modes of gratitude and discontent, at least in the early days of resettlement, translated far less often into direct action.

While many critiques were grounded in mothers' personal interactions with sponsors, teachers, and schools, others elaborated upon structural barriers found in Canada. For instance, after Haya described her disappointment with the "system" in Canada, she later shared her specific critique of the flaws inherent in government welfare programs, without prompting from our interviewer. In Haya's words, the "system" in Canada forced some people to remain on welfare:

[T]here is a gap . . . in the system . . . for social support in Canada. There is a very visible gap. . . . There is nothing in the system to encourage people to work, because as soon as one starts working and earning a minimum salary, they see that all of a sudden, the social support and social protection system

gives up on them. If one doesn't work, you see that they are able to get more support. In my opinion, this is an important issue because it makes people want to remain on welfare instead of working for a minimum salary . . . because maybe they would make more money on welfare than they would if they were working part-time or for a minimum salary. . . . What I see a priority in making changes . . . is that there is more social support for individuals who would like to start working.⁵⁹

Haya dissents with government welfare programs, pointing out two major flaws, as she sees them: first, the absence of aid once welfare recipients enter minimum wage or part-time employment. Second, and related to this point, the potential to earn more on welfare than in minimum wage employment. As expressed by Haya with frustration, these inconsistencies discourage welfare recipients from work. In this way, early on mothers understood that their new world, which they or others often idealized, was imperfect and sometimes unfair, frequently trapping people in difficult situations for years. In some interviews, mothers offered sharp recommendations they believed would contribute to creating more inclusive and fair programs for struggling newcomers. Aisha, whose husband was formerly the director of a company, was critical of Canada for providing newcomers with insufficient pathways to learn the local language and enter stable employment. She listed several necessary changes to the "system" in order for newcomers to better integrate:

They really need to . . . simplify the system for accrediting diplomas and certificates, and to help people learn the language more. . . . The ones who don't know the language at all, they can't get out, they can't leave their houses and talk to people! And on top of that to have lost their certifications and be unable to go out and find work. . . . If they can't get a certification in English, and renew their foreign certifications, they are only ever going to get [minimum wage] jobs. So, translators [are needed] so that people understand the system, and more English so that they can be confident in moving forwards, and then a system so that they do not lose everything they have worked for in the past because their diplomas and certificates mean something. Those are the most important things.⁶⁰

After only a few months in Canada, Aisha articulated a quite comprehensive analysis of the most problematic gaps in Canadian immigration and welfare policy that align with what researchers have identified. She describes two critical settlement needs: English language assistance and foreign credential recognition. For Aisha, these “are the most important things,” as without them newcomers struggle to advance from minimum wage employment, form social connections, understand their children’s school curriculum, and develop cultural competence. As this section demonstrates, when being asked to explain their contentious interactions with the state, mothers’ frustration and dissent rise to the fore. Their critiques, which lead them to go beyond feelings of gratitude or even a more moderate discontent, highlight some of the fluidity and ambiguity in the range of emotional states they express in our research project. As recipients of the “gift” of resettlement in Canada, mothers did not passively accept new identities and circumstances, but rather balanced a fragile obligation to advocate for the dignity of their families and themselves while also being a “pride” to their new home.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Despite these disappointments and frustrations, mothers also sometimes trivialized their concerns, buried their anger, and covered their feelings of doubt with gratitude in our conversations. Their “ugly” feelings of anger and annoyance, combined with initial feelings of gratitude, give rise to a complex affective state vis-à-vis the country of resettlement. As Noura shared before we left her home in Toronto, “*Alhamdulillah*, well, *alhamdulillah*. I feel sad sometimes and I try to give it up to God. Sometimes I have to remember to be grateful that we are here [in Canada] because Jordan [where her family lived before resettlement] was so hard.”⁶¹ Like Noura, many would positively reframe their narration of resettlement in Canada by comparing their experiences in other Western refugee-receiving countries like the US or transition countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. In other cases, mothers trusted their children would gain a better education in Canada, allowing them to have a brighter future. Whether in comparison to other resettlement contexts or by focusing on the promise of their children’s education, it was the act of circling back to gratitude, in spite of their complicated relationship with the Canadian state, that pointed to mothers’ fragile obligation to give thanks for their new life and accept the price of resettlement. In this way, despite the challenges, misfortunes, and pains they battled, mothers still retained

a sense of commitment to Canada. In fact, most conveyed that they did not wish to return to Syria – even if prewar conditions were restored – and would much rather put down their roots in Canada for their children, only visiting Syria for short periods to reunite with extended family and lifelong friends.

The narratives presented here reflect the most prominent patterns we observed in our research. Taken together, they convey how refugees are complex agents who give thanks but also practice or exert refusal and discontent. The fragile obligation is a constant tension between expressions of gratitude to sponsors, the Canadian government, or Canadian people writ large and expressions of concern, disappointment, or critique based in mothers' own experiences and observations of their new worlds. Mothers were indeed grateful for what they saw as a multicultural and inclusive society, which gave them the freedom to practice their religious and cultural values in a foreign environment. Yet, feelings of disappointment and discontent also mushroomed across mothers' resettlement narratives. According to mothers, traditional parent-child and husband-wife relational dynamics were upended, forcing all members of the household to relearn family roles. While children were afforded more independence from their parents, husbands were often detached from their patriarchal authority, weakening family cohesion. Mothers also felt dejected as their previous standard of living declined and some struggled to avoid welfare as their sponsorship period neared completion. Though at times they felt powerless in their new world, mothers had certainly not lost their voice or moral convictions. We draw attention to this as Arab and other racialized refugee and immigrant women are often depicted as culturally passive, stagnant, and helpless.⁶² Yet, as we have shown, this was not the case for these mothers. Throughout our conversations, mothers actively challenged sponsors, school systems, and the Canadian state, and even offered pragmatic solutions to systemic problems.

Such multiplex expressions, we argue, are shaped in part by Canada's unique position in the current field of refugee sponsorship. There is a sense among newcomer mothers that Canadian tolerance and multiculturalism stands in some contrast to illiberal xenophobia and nativism in other receiving countries around the world and even in newcomers' countries of origin. More broadly, Canada enjoys a unique position in the field of refugee sponsorship in great part due to the "success" of newcomer groups who are highly visible in coverage of Canadian politics and media like Syrian newcomers. But in turn, this

“tolerance” or welcoming appears to mediate refugee mothers’ expressions of gratitude and discontent for their new lives. At the same time, the ambiguity of this affective state is a site of social and political critique; although refugee newcomers are made to feel a constant obligation to deploy gratitude and pride, they do so in conjunction with disappointment, critique, anger, and disgust, revealing a fuller picture of the conditions and responsibilities of resettlement. In fact, the development of their identities as survivors of war and “grateful” targets of resettlement may actually imbue mothers with an “emotional legitimacy” that empowers them to share their critiques and ugly, negative feelings as time continues to pass.

The fragile obligation to demonstrate gratitude amidst observations and feelings of discontent and dissent is by no means exclusive to refugees. As with other asymmetrical social categories and relationships, unequal power relations—here, between the global North and South and between citizens and noncitizens—fundamentally shape the precarity and/or wellbeing of the marginalized. Thus, centering the emotional and affective states of refugees offers a sightline into the broader ways that macrolevel structures condition microlevel experiences. By focusing on the refugee case, we are also better able to identify how resettlement regimes elicit consent or mute dissent, in order to influence future research and policy. And finally, future research might take up the fragile obligation as a multidimensional concept that could be extended to understand the affective economies of refugee resettlement from the perspective of “hosts” (e.g., private sponsors, settlement counselors, and everyday citizens).

NOTES

¹ The authors wish to thank Rasha Elendari, Rula Kahil, and Jessica Radin for their important contributions as research assistants and Ito Peng (PI) and Melissa Milkie as faculty co-investigators of the 2017–2018 pilot study. The authors thank Ellen Berrey, Fidan Elcioglu, Luisa Schwartzman, and Tahseen Shams for helpful feedback on an early draft of this paper. The authors are also grateful to audiences at the 2018 MESA meeting in San Antonio, TX and 2019 Association for Asian American Studies meeting in Madison, WI for their engagement. The research described here was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Ministry of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship, and the Ontario Early Researcher Award.

² Yusra, interview by Jessica Radin, Toronto, 1 December 2016.

³ Liam Britten, "Canadians may Not be as 'Obsessed' over Immigration this Election, but It Remains a Key Issue for Parties," *CBC News*, 7 October 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/refugees-2019-election-1.5310154>.

⁴ UNHCR, "Amid Record High Global Displacement, UN Refugee Agency Calls for International Solidarity, Welcomes Canadian Generosity towards Refugees," UNHCR, 19 June 2019, <https://www.unhcr.ca/news/amid-record-high-global-displacement-unhcr-welcomes-canadian-generosity-towards-refugees/>.

⁵ Juanne Nancarrow Clarke and Taylor Marlow, "The Cracks in our Admired Private Refugee Sponsorship Program," *Policy Opinions*, 30 January 2020, <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/fr/magazines/january-2020/the-cracks-in-our-admired-private-refugee-sponsorship-program/>.

⁶ Anna Pratt and Mariana Valverde, "From Deserving Victims to 'Masters of Confusion': Redefining Refugees in the 1990s," *The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers Canadiens De Sociologie* 27, no. 2 (2002): 135–61; Rosemary Sales, "The Deserving and the Undeserving? Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Welfare in Britain," *Critical Social Policy* 22, no. 3 (August 2002): 456–78.

⁷ David A.B. Murray, *Real Queer? Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Refugees in the Canadian Refugee Apparatus* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

⁸ For more information, see "The Critical Refugee Studies Collective," accessed 26 June 2020, <https://criticalrefugeestudies.com>.

⁹ Three foundational texts that elaborate upon affect as site of social and political critique are Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 22 (2004): 117–39; and Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). For three exemplary works in social sciences that build upon this definition of affect theory, see Ulla D. Berg and Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, "Racializing Affect: A Theoretical Proposition," *Current Anthropology* 56, no. 5 (2015): 654–77; Martin F. Manalansan IV, "The 'Stuff' of Archives: Mess, Migration, and Queer Lives," *Radical History Review* 120 (2014): 94–107; and Danilyn Rutherford, "Affect Theory and the Empirical," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45 (2016): 285–300.

¹⁰ Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 3.

¹¹ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 26–27.

¹² Rifaie Tammam, "Refugee stories can do more harm than good," *OpenDemocracy*, 1 November 2019,

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/refugee-stories-could-do-more-harm-good/>. We thank an anonymous reviewer for introducing us to this work.

¹³ For more on “global economies of fear” see Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” 128.

¹⁴ Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

¹⁵ Katty Alhayek, “Double Marginalization: The Invisibility of Syrian Refugee Women’s Perspectives in Mainstream Online Activism and Global Media,” *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 4 (2014): 696–700; Nadine Christine Naber, *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Dina Taha, “Like a Tree Without Leaves’: Syrian Refugee Women and the Shifting Meaning of Marriage,” *Mashriq & Mahjar* 7, no. 1 (2020): 1–26.

¹⁶ Heidi Armbruster, “‘It was the Photograph of the Little Boy’: Reflections on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme in the UK,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 15 (2019): 2680–99; Madeline-Sophie Abbas, “Producing ‘Internal Suspect Bodies’: Divisive Effects of UK Counter-Terrorism Measures on Muslim Communities in Leeds and Bradford,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 70, no. 1 (2019): 261–82; Robin Vandevordt and Gert Verschraegen, “Demonstrating Deservingness and Dignity. Symbolic Boundary Work among Syrian Refugees,” *Poetics* 76 (2019): 101343.

¹⁷ Christopher Kyriakides, Lubna Bajjali, Arthur McLuhan, and Karen Anderson, “Beyond Refuge: Contested Orientalism and Persons of Self-Rescue,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 50, no. 2 (2018): 59–78; Taha, “Like a Tree Without Leaves,” 1–26.

¹⁸ Dina Nayeri, *The Ungrateful Refugee: What Immigrants Never Tell You* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2019); Elizabeth Holzer, *The Concerned Women of Buduburam: Refugee Activists and Humanitarian Dilemmas* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2015); Gelare Khoshgozaran, *UNdocumentary*, February 2017, text, <https://gelarekhoshgozaran.com/UNdocumentary>; Katrin Kremmel and Brunilda Pali, “Refugee Protests and Political Agency: Framing Dissensus through Precarity,” in *Green Harms and Crimes* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 256–72; Lisa Weems, *Staging Dissent: Young Women of Color and Transnational Activism* (London: Routledge, 2017); Miriam Cooke, *Dancing in Damascus: Creativity, Resilience, and the Syrian Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁹ For a thoughtful consideration of how the welfare state shapes refugee women’s exclusion from broader publics, in turn strengthening their coethnic social networks, see chapter two in Marianne Holm Pedersen, *Iraqi Women in Denmark: Ritual Performance and Belonging in Everyday Life* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014). We thank an anonymous reviewer for introducing us to this work.

- ²⁰ Will Kymlicka, *Multiculturalism Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Will Kymlicka, "Multicultural Odysseys," *Ethnopolitics* 6, no. 4 (2007): 585–97.
- ²¹ Irene Bloemraad, *Understanding "Canadian Exceptionalism" in Immigration and Pluralism Policy* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, July 2012).
- ²² Irene Bloemraad, "Becoming a Citizen in the United States and Canada: Structured Mobilization and Immigrant Political Incorporation," *Social Forces* 85, no. 2 (2006): 667–95.
- ²³ Amarnath Amarasingam, Gayathri Naganathan, and Jennifer Hyndman, "Canadian Multiculturalism as Banal Nationalism: Understanding Everyday Meanings Among Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 48, no. 2 (2016): 119–41; Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).
- ²⁴ Baljit Nagra and Ito Peng, "Has Multiculturalism Really Failed? A Canadian Muslim Perspective," *Religions* 4, no. 4 (2013): 603–20.
- ²⁵ Anne Korteweg, "The Failures of 'Immigrant Integration': The Gendered Racialized Production of Non-Belonging," *Migration Studies* 5, no. 3 (2017): 428–44.
- ²⁶ Trevor Gulliver, "Canada the Redeemer and Denials of Racism," *Critical Discourse Studies* 15, no. 1 (2018): 68–86.
- ²⁷ Carrie Dawson, "'Treaty to Tell the Truth': The Anti-Confessional Impulse in Canadian Refugee Writing," *Canadian Literature* 234 (2017): 14–182.
- ²⁸ Catrin Einhorn and Jodi Kantor, "Wonder and Worry, as a Syrian Child Transforms," *New York Times*, 18 December 2016, <https://static01.nyt.com/images/2016/12/18/nytfhomepage/scan.pdf>; Jodi Kantor and Catrin Einhorn, "Canadians Adopted Refugee Families for a Year. Then Came 'Month 13,'" *New York Times*, 25 March 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/25/world/canada/syrian-refugees.html?_r=0; Vappu Tyyskä, Jenna Blower, Samantha Deboer, Shunya Kawai, and Ashley Walcott, "Canadian Media Coverage of the Syrian Refugee Crisis: Representation, Response, and Resettlement," *Geopolitics, History and International Relations* 10, no. 1 (2018): 148–66.
- ²⁹ Kyriakides, Bajjali, McLuhan, and Anderson, "Beyond Refuge," 59–78; Stacey Haugen, "'We Feel Like We're Home': The Resettlement and Integration of Syrian Refugees in Smaller and Rural Canadian Communities," *Refuge: Canada's Journal of Refugees/Refuge: revue canadienne sur les réfugiés* 35, no. 2 (2019): 53–63.
- ³⁰ Rene Houle, "Results from the 2016 Census: Syrian Refugees Who Resettled in Canada in 2015 and 2016," *Statistics Canada*, 12 February 2019, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2019001/article/00001-eng.htm>.

- ³¹ Ed Davey and Charlotte McDonald, "More or Less: The World's Most Diverse City," 2016, last modified 2021, *BBC Radio 4*, produced by Laura Gray and Ed Davey, audio, 9:31, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03v1r1p>.
- ³² Neda Maghbouleh, Laila Omar, Melissa A. Milkie, and Ito Peng, "Listening in Arabic: Feminist Research with Syrian Refugee Mothers," *Meridians* 18, no. 2 (2019): 482–507.
- ³³ For more information on the project expansion, see www.riseteam.ca.
- ³⁴ Ping-Chun Hsiung, "Lives & Legacies: Focused Coding," *Lives and Legacies: A Guide to Qualitative Interviewing* (website), August 2010, <https://www.utoronto.ca/~pchsiung/LAL/analysis/focusedcoding>.
- ³⁵ Maryam, interview by Jessica Radin, Toronto, 4 January 2017.
- ³⁶ Yasmeen, interview by Rasha Elendari, Toronto, 16 November 2016.
- ³⁷ Yasmeen, interview by Rasha Elendari, Toronto, 16 November 2016.
- ³⁸ Rania, interview by Rasha Elendari, Toronto, 23 May 2017.
- ³⁹ Rebecca Joseph, "1st Planeload of Syrian Refugees Land on Canadian Soil," *Global News*, 10 December 2015, <https://globalnews.ca/news/2394286/live-blog-toronto-set-to-welcome-feds-first-syrian-refugees-to-canada/>.
- ⁴⁰ David Ljunggren and Anna Mehler Paperny Reuters, "Justin Trudeau Tweets Messages of Welcome to Refugees as Trump Travel Bans Sets In," *Global News*, 28 January 2017, <https://globalnews.ca/news/3212041/justin-trudeau-refugees-donald-trump-travel-ban/>.
- ⁴¹ Salma, interview by Jessica Radin, Toronto, 25 March 2017.
- ⁴² Yara, interview by Rasha Elendari, Toronto, 2 December 2016.
- ⁴³ Yusra, interview by Jessica Radin, Toronto, 1 December 2016.
- ⁴⁴ Rania, interview by Rasha Elendari, Toronto, 3 January 2017.
- ⁴⁵ Like other young adults in this population, Yusuf's high school education was disrupted due to the Syrian war and displacement in refugee camps; during this pilot study, he was enrolled in a local high school to finish his diploma; Saba, interview by Rasha Elendari, Toronto, 2 October 2017.
- ⁴⁶ Aisha, interview by Jessica Radin, Toronto, 1 December 2016.
- ⁴⁷ Heba Gowayed, "Diverging by Gender: Syrian Refugees' Divisions of Labor and Formation of Human Capital in the United States," *Gender & Society* 33, no. 2 (2019): 251–72. Our observations from Canada align with Gowayed's findings from the US. She writes that after resettlement, Syrian refugee families experience gender divergence in the development of human capital. Alongside a thin US social welfare system, Syrian men fulfilled cultural and social expectations by entering the labor market to financially sustain their family, while women were able to attend English language classes and improve their language proficiency.

- ⁴⁸ Rania, interview by Rasha Elendari, Toronto, 3 January 2017.
- ⁴⁹ Noura, interview by Rasha Elendari, Toronto, date unknown.
- ⁵⁰ Noura, interview by Rasha Elendari, Toronto, date unknown.
- ⁵¹ Haya, interview by Rasha Elendari, Toronto, 6 December 2016; Haya codeswitched from Arabic to English. The following words and phrases were said in English: "system," "partners," and "Canadian experience."
- ⁵² Rania, interview by Rasha Elendari, Toronto, 3 January 2017.
- ⁵³ Rania, interview by Rasha Elendari, Toronto, 3 January 2017.
- ⁵⁴ Thomas Sheff, "Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory," *Sociological Theory* 18, no 1 (2000): 84-99.
- ⁵⁵ Rania, interview by Rasha Elendari, Toronto, 23 May 2017.
- ⁵⁶ Salma, interview by Jessica Radin, Toronto, 25 March 2017.
- ⁵⁷ Bushra, interview by Jessica Radin, Toronto, 6 January 2017.
- ⁵⁸ Bushra, interview by Jessica Radin, Toronto, 6 January 2017.
- ⁵⁹ Haya, interview by Rasha Elendari, Toronto, 6 December 2016; Haya codeswitched from Arabic to English. The following words and phrases were said in English: "gap," "system," "encourage people to work," and "part-time."
- ⁶⁰ Aisha, interview by Jessica Radin, Toronto, 1 December 2016.
- ⁶¹ Noura, interview by Rasha Elendari, Toronto, date unknown.
- ⁶² Noura Erakat, "Arabiya Made Invisible: Between Marginalization of Agency and Silencing of Dissent," in *Arab and Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, and Belonging*, ed. Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine Naber (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 174-83.