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Structures and Strategies for Social Integration: Privately Sponsored and Government Assisted Refugees

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ABSTRACT

This study identified structures and strategies that assisted social integration of privately sponsored and government assisted Syrian refugees in Canada. Data were collected through interviews and focus group discussions. Sustained, personalized commitment of private sponsors to a single refugee family created respectful relationships, opportunities to cross social boundaries, and potential access to greater social capital. Short-term, large group settlement services given to government sponsored refugees did not offer any of these. Both groups subsequently forged social relations with people like themselves but only some refugees could cross linguistic, cultural, and religious boundaries based on commitments made by well-established Canadians.

Introduction

Late in 2015, a set of convergent factors led to the arrival of a large number of refugees from Syria to Canada. The United Nations had recently issued an international appeal for the resettlement of Syrian refugees, three years after the civil war began in Syria. Soon after, a photograph of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi's body found on a Turkish beach was widely circulated by international media, galvanizing a world-wide response to the Syrian refugee crisis. In Canada, the newly elected Liberal government, keen to demonstrate its humanitarian global engagement, announced Operation Syrian Refugees to bring 25,000 Syrian refugees to settle in Canada within one hundred days.

As a member of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) since 1949, Canada had regularly received Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) from troubled parts of the world. In the aftermath of the war in Vietnam, however, civil society groups lobbied the government to admit more refugees than Canada's assigned quota. This led to the creation of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program in 1979. Since then both pathways have been used by refugees to legally enter Canada (Macklin et al., 2020).

A third category, the Blended Visa-Office Referred (BVOR) program, was created in 2013 for periods of high refugee influx (Labman & Pearlman, 2018). Refugees in this category –the smallest in numbers so far – are pre-selected by IRCC and matched with sponsorship groups (GRSI Guidebook, n.d; IRCC, 2019). The financial cost of their sponsorships is shared by the government and the sponsors but their settlement is the sponsors' responsibility.

Among refugees from Syria, GARs were selected by UNHCR and Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship, Canada (IRCC) for their relatively greater vulnerability. They were brought to

Canada by the federal government and sent to provinces and municipalities that demonstrated the desire and capacity to support the newcomers. The federal government met the refugees' financial needs for a year (after which they qualified for social welfare) and contracted non-governmental settlement agencies to provide settlement services (IRCC, 2019).

GARs are generally considered to require more settlement assistance than PSRs due to their larger family size, unfamiliarity with English or French, lower levels of education (IRCC, 2019), and longer stays in transition countries (Alfred, 2018). However, some scholars argue that despite PSRs' relatively higher levels of education and language proficiency, there are no major differences in the two categories (Agrawal, 2019; Hyndman et al., 2017). Based on their comprehensive study at six sites in three provinces, Hynie et al. (2019) claim that a comparison of the two groups is "a fraught exercise, given the incommensurate profiles of each category" (p. 47) based on differences in their education levels, language proficiency, presence of relatives in Canada, and religious identifications.

While economic outcomes of PSRs and GARs have been compared in several studies (Agrawal, 2019; Foley et al., 2018; IRCC, 2016; Kaida et al., 2020; Wilkinson, 2017) less attention has been paid to social aspects of their settlement (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018; Hanley et al., 2018). The study reported below offers some insights into how pathways through which Syrian PSRs and GARs arrived have shaped their social integration trajectories. In the following sections we describe our theoretical orientation and methodological approach, followed by key findings, their discussion, and a conclusion.

Theoretical underpinnings and relevant literature

The term "integration" is often used in public and academic discourses as if its meaning was self-evident. Yet it continues to be a fluid, multilayered, complex, and contested concept, which according to Jedwab (2006) "means various things to various people in various situations" (p. 97).

Some scholars (e.g., Esser, 2006; Favell, 2015; Schinkel, 2017) suggest that the concept of integration is based on the belief that nation-state-society is a congruent and homogenous whole into which newcomers must fit. Bommes (2012) writes that newcomers have no choice but to integrate because they have to follow already established social norms in order to access goods and services. Other scholars, however, challenge the notion of a unified society based on the "super-diversity" (Vertovec, 2007) of large cities, which most newcomers head to. Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore (2018) claim that the significance of cultural systems and institution that maintain social order and cohesion have diminished in such places.

Many scholars conceptualize integration as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Ager and Strang (2008) created a conceptual framework defining core domains of integration, which they refer to as both markers and means (employment, housing, education, and health), which can be used as indicators of integration but also as means toward greater integration; social connections (social bonds, social bridges, and social links) that help to access the means and achieve the markers; other supportive factors that facilitate integration (language and cultural knowledge; safety and stability); and foundations (rights and citizenship) that allow newcomers to integrate. Hynie et al. (2019) adapted the Ager and Strang (2008) model for their recent study and called it the Holistic Integration Model (HIM). The HIM emphasizes interrelationships among the various elements of integration; the moderating and mediating effects of refugees' prior social locations and experiences; and the crucial role of the social, political/ideological and economic environments they encounter upon arrival. They claim that socio-cultural and structural contexts in which refugees negotiate their roles and relationships play a critical role in shaping their daily lives and integration trajectories (Hynie et al., 2019).

Some dimensions of integration are easier to measure because there is greater consensus about their indicators and measures (Mestheneos & Ioannidi, 2002; Phillimore & Goodson, 2008). Several scholars consider psycho-social, cultural, and emotional factors as integral to newcomers'

integration (Ager & Strang, 2008; Cheung & Phillimore, 2017; Erdal & Oeppen, 2013; Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2016; Hynie et al., 2019) but there is far less agreement about how to identify and assess them. Furthermore, while scholars have noted the intertwining of structural and socio-cultural aspects of integration (e.g. Ager & Strang, 2008; Hynie et al., 2019), they have not yet examined how much they influence each other, especially with reference to refugees.

Integration is sometimes understood as a process rather than a normative goal with fixed markers of success. For example, Heckman (2006) suggests that integration is a "generations lasting process of inclusion and acceptance of migration in the core institutions, relations and statuses of the receiving society" (p.18) and Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016) consider it "the process of becoming an accepted part of society" (p.14). Both definitions acknowledge that the social integration is a complicated process in which historical, socio-economic, and political factors must be taken into account. Although these scholars emphasize the process of integration, their notion of becoming "accepted" still implies an end state, albeit with varied interpretations.

Social integration requires social networks. White (2002) suggests that "Social network could be defined as a web of social relations or resources that surround individuals, groups, or organizations and the characteristics of those ties" (p. 261). Grzymala-Kazlowska (2017) proposes the metaphor of social "anchoring" to study the process of developing social contacts to navigate structural constraints in a new country. Social network theorists have examined antecedents, evolutions, and consequences of social networks, as well as attributes of those within such networks, and how they constrain or provide opportunities for its members. Their unit of analysis has often been the network itself, rather than individuals and their processes of entry into or construction of new networks (Borgatti & Ofem, 2010). Much of this work has focused on doing social network analysis as a proxy measure of social capital, rather than on the process of using, generating, and sustaining networks (White, 2002).

Social capital, a critical element in integration, refers to actual or potential access to resources, such as information, personal connections, and appropriate and timely advice that helps to meet one's goals (Coleman, 1988). Putnam (1995) and others who built on his work identify three types of social capital: bonding with people similar to oneself; bridging with people who are dissimilar; and linking with organizations. Some scholars also use the term "social support" proposed by Stewart and Langille, (2000) to refer to interactions that do not necessarily enhance social capital (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018; Hanley et al., 2018).

Hanley et al. (2018) and Wessendorf and Phillimore (2019) emphasize the need for refugees to build their social networks, not just for meeting their social needs but also for enhancing their social, economic and political capital, and call upon receiving societies to assist refugees develop a sense of belonging to their new communities. Wessendorf and Phillimore (2019) point out that refugees may be socially well-integrated within a refugee community, or a community with whom they share lived experiences, but not necessarily within the dominant group in the receiving society.

We acknowledge the complexity of the phenomenon of integration but focus on only one of its aspects i.e., social integration. A detailed examination of this will nuance our understanding of this dimension and also point to ways in which we could explore other dimensions. This study investigates how structures and strategies can facilitate or impede social integration. Our purpose is to compare the processes of GARs' and PSRs' social integration trajectories rather than their outcomes because indicators and measures of social integration remain ambiguous, and preexisting demographic features may well account for differences between the two groups (see Hynie et al., 2019). Nevertheless, knowledge about structures and strategies that facilitate or hinder social integration can guide future programs.

Methodology

We took a qualitative, phenomenological approach (Creswell & Poth, 2016) in this project. Data were collected through focus group discussions and interviews with private sponsors and

settlement workers, in addition to in-depth interviews with refugee pairs, followed by gender and category segregated focus group discussions with the same respondents. Our Syrian respondents were twenty individuals, equally divided among GARs and PSRs, who had been living in Toronto, Ontario, between 18–24 months. This paper only draws upon data collected from them as a starting point, giving primacy to their perspectives.

Of the twenty refugees, nine were married couples and two were a mother-daughter pair. Their ages ranged from twenty-two to forty-nine years; they had between six to fourteen years of formal schooling; and many of the men had worked in small family-owned businesses, manual labor or trades. One woman had an accounting diploma and briefly worked as a receptionist but gave up the job upon her marriage. None of the PSRs had been sponsored by an already known person. One person reported part-time paid employment and two reported occasional voluntary work. Although we did not specifically ask this question their names and the women's dress codes indicated that all of them were Muslim.

We first asked the couples/pair to list individuals living in Canada in three columns: people they were close to, people they knew well, and people they had met but did not know well, on a gradient. This served as a starting point for the Research Assistants (RAs) to ask who was in their social network(s), how they had met, and what was the nature of their relationships. The RAs asked the participants to select a few people in each column and respond to questions such as: Who are they? How did you meet? How often do you meet? What do you do/talk about together? What else can you say about your relationship with this person? A month after all interviews had been completed, four focus group discussions were organized, segregated by gender and by category as PSRs or GARs. The primary focus of these discussions was the refugees' contact with organizations such a mosque or church, settlement agency, community center or library etc.

Two students of Syrian origin, one female and one male, both fluent in English and Syrian Arabic were hired as RAs. Their origins and fluency in Arabic greatly facilitated participant recruitment through snowball sampling (Noy, 2008) and their gender was important in leading gender segregated focus group discussions. They translated recruitment materials and consent forms into Arabic; conducted interviews and focus group discussions; audio-recorded, translated and transcribed all the data into English.

Data analysis was guided by the nexus of our theoretical orientation with the research questions and the data sets (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Grbich, 2012). Data were read multiple times and organized into open, axial and selective codes (Neuman, 2014). Going back and forth between emergent codes, refined questions, and the relevant literature, we created several web diagrams and analytical memos (Maxwell, 2012). We then organized our ideas in hierarchical categories and finally into a linear sequence to write this and other papers.

Findings

We begin this section by identifying the participants' social networks and how they were created; characterize their relationships; and end by describing who they wanted in their social network and what helped or impeded their efforts.

Who was in the social network and how were they created?

While GARs and PSRs had similar numbers of people on their network lists, PSRs had many more in their "close to" column. We also noticed different ethnic names in the two sets of lists. While a name by itself is not a reliable indicator of an ethno-racial background, especially as some newcomers take on Western names when they move to Canada, further questions about the listed individual revealed some consistent patterns. One PSR couple only had Western names in

Table 1. Lists of people known.

	Close to	Know well	Have met
PSR couple	Andrew	Sonia	Sonera
	Julian	Susan	Alex
	Ashley	Ali	Hakim
	Caroline	Jalil	Kabir
	Mary	Robin	John
	Chris	Layla	Soo Mee
	Lori	Khadija	
	Norman	Amy	
	Alison		
GAR couple	Close to	Know well	Have met
	Ayman	Juliana	Jan
	Abu Bakr	Anna	Lina
	Walid	Maryam	Wei wei
	Asmaa	Khadija	Thomas
	Hamad	Peter	Susan
		Roula	Shalini

Names in this list are ethnically matched pseudonyms.

their first column. All others had a mix of Western, Arabic, Asian and some ethnically ambiguous names in this column. In sharp contrast, names listed by GARs in the first column were almost exclusively Arabic. When probed further, our respondents pointed out those who were "White Canadian," distinguishing them from individuals born in Canada to nonwhite parents, or immigrants who had become Canadian citizens. For example, Rula explained:

> Neelam is Indian but has Canadian citizenship. And Jo's parents are from Barbados. But Jo was born in Canada.

Similarly, speaking of one of her sponsors, Nour said,

> She is American or Canadian. But her husband is not. He looks different from her. Maybe he is Spanish.

PSRs told us that those included in their first column were all members of their sponsorship team. In contrast GARs' first columns consisted almost entirely of those with whom they shared a language, culture, religion, or country of origin. Both groups, however, reflected Toronto's ethno-racial diversity in their second and third columns. An example of this difference is given in the Table 1.

Names listed in similar tables, along with descriptions of the listed individuals, showed that PSRs' close relationships including many "White Canadians," while GARs' close relationships were primarily with other Syrians/Arabs/Muslims. PSRs' social networks were "anchored" (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2017) in their sponsorship group. Some had initially housed them; others visited them regularly; yet others took them out for recreational purposes, or accompanied them to dentists, schools and banks. These networks expanded to include people affiliated to their sponsors, and Syrians, Arabs or Muslims who had arrived in Canada earlier. In the following example a PSR woman explained how her network had grown:

> [Our sponsor] randomly met Samia in the elevator [of the family's apartment building]

> … when we first arrived - when we were here for two days - and she speaks Arabic. So [the sponsor] said to her that there is a family that speaks Arabic that lives here now. So, Sadaf came over to visit us … Then she introduced us to Rima. After a month she introduced me to Maryam, and they really help me, they go with me to the mall and show me how [credit] cards are made, and we buy things for me and the children. They introduced me to the area that I live in, they tell me where something is on sale, where I can get something for a cheaper price, they tell me about all that, they send it to me via text. Sometimes they come with me, if I do not know the way … I do not know how to go to places on my own, so they come with me. They tell me which bus to take in order to go to a specific location. She really helped me, Samia, both Samia and Rima helped me. Samia helps me by translating for me, since she speaks both English and Arabic.

As the PSR families began to settle in they expanded their contacts within their apartment buildings and neighborhoods, through their children's schools, local mosques and community centers, and also through settlement agencies where they took ESL classes or used other services.

GAR families' initial stay in hotels and participation in orientation sessions organized by a settlement agency – along with many other Syrian refugee families – facilitated the development of social relationships with people from a similar background. Hamid said,

> Generally, us Syrians we usually help each other out. Because there is a lot of stuff that [the resettlement agency] is supposed to do but they didn't. So, we started telling each other what to do and how to do it … We have a WhatsApp group chat. We have approximately 140 Syrians in that group chat, and we always exchange information …

After moving out of the hotels GARs continued to expand their networks with other Syrians, Arabs and Muslims in ways similar to the PSRs. For example, Bashir said:

> Radwan [an Iraqi who lives in his apartment building] has a car so he calls me when he is about to go grocery shopping asking if I want to go with him. Then after we finish shopping I invite him for a cup of coffee. He comes, sits a bit with me then leaves to go home.

His wife added,

> I like doing things with my friends and family. For example, we [referring to other Syrian women] gather in the house, the kids play, color and listen to YouTube English videos to learn and strengthen their English.

It was noticeable that neither the PSRs nor the GARs mentioned any social relations they had developed on their own with people who were not Syrian, Arab or Muslims.

Nature of relationships

PSR couples noted that they did not know their sponsors when they arrived and didn't know what to expect from them (see Kyriakides et al., 2018, 2019). Sawson said, "We arrived in Canada not knowing who was bringing us here […] then we stayed in Lori's home for 25 days." Sharing the home of a sponsors set the tone for their relationship, which was both intimate and responsive in multiple ways. Sahar said, "They made us feel we have family here. We have people/relatives here, we are not alone." Using the metaphor of "families" (see Kyriakides, 2018; Macklin et al., 2020) many PSR respondents noted how their sponsors met their socio-emotional needs. Mohammad said, "[Our primary sponsor] would encourage us, and make us strong so we would not feel that we are not in our country." He expressed gratitude to his primary sponsor thus: "Without [her] I would be nothing." His wife expressed a common sentiment when she said, "So, it is only the sponsorship time is going to end, but the relationship will not end."

Some PSRs noted that although their sponsors practiced a different culture and religion, they deeply respected the refugees' beliefs and practices. As a Muslim woman, Sawsan did not want to shake hands with men. She said,

> Imagine this, the men in the group do not put their hands out to shake my hand, and they make light of these situations … And the men see that I am wearing a *hijab* so they just say "Hi, how are you?" That is it. They respect us. Even the women, they really respect Mohammad. There is a lot of respect between us.

Her husband went on to explain that the respect shown by his sponsors for his traditions almost erased their differences. He mentioned that drinking alcohol was forbidden in his religion but his sponsors sometimes drank it in their homes in his presence. He described one such occasion:

Mohammad: One time they asked me, "Do you mind"? And I said "I do not have a problem, it is normal, if you want to drink, go ahead and drink." But they asked for my opinion before they started to drink.

Researcher: What did you feel when they asked for your opinion?

Mohammad: Respected. They respect us. And they know that it is forbidden for us … They brought me a Quran and the prayer garb, prayer beads, and prayer rug. They respect my religion a lot, just like I respect their religion.

The PSRs acknowledged that the flow of resources was primarily from their sponsors to them but they also made reciprocal gestures, for example, by sharing Syrian food with them. Some PSRs believed that members of their sponsorship team welcomed being treated as a family-member. Sahar said:

> [A sponsor] puts in a lot of effort to make sure that (my son) is happy, and we in return try to do the same thing, and we make him feel that he is part of the family, and that he is not an outsider.

Despite their gratitude, some PSRs also expressed differences with their sponsors. For example, a young woman in her early twenties said,

> When someone tells me to work, I get really annoyed, to be honest with you. They used to tell my brother to find work all the time, or go out and find work, and he tried, but we told him to learn the language first.

Her mother added:

> I think they should leave the Syrian person alone, when they first arrive here, or anybody that has arrived newly to this country, to just go to school. After this first year they can go on and do what they want to do.

She explained that in Lebanon both her adult children received welfare payments but not in Canada. She said:

> And now that the sponsors have the responsibility to take care of us, my son who is 23 years old will spend six months without any income. They give us $800/month, which does not include the rent payment. How can $800 be enough for six people? And that includes a lot of things like transportation and so on. [My son's] income [from welfare] was stopped. So, he has to go and find a job, and he became distressed. Now he is on welfare, and he has his income, so he is feeling better.

The relationship between PSRs and their sponsors was also affected by ambiguous and evolving expectations (Kyriakides et al., 2019). In a focus group discussion a male PSR respondent said that another PSR family was given a used car by their sponsor but he was not, and a woman complained that the apartment rented by their sponsors was too small for their large family. Some PSRs also told us that the frequency of their interactions with most members of their sponsorship team tapered off over time but the relationship with key members developed into a deeper friendship.

GARs' relationships with settlement workers and volunteers they met shortly after their arrival were different. A woman explained,

> [The settlement workers] usually came and took care of the things that we needed help with, and then they would leave […] they just came in, checked out the paperwork, and then they left, there wasn't really a lot of communication between us […] Generally speaking, she was nice to us but we didn't really benefit from her. But the communication was kind and nice […] It was not their job to introduce us to new people, all they had to do was to translate.

GARs were offered informational sessions about educational and vocational opportunities; programs such as welfare and child tax benefits; as well as a general orientation toward Canadian culture. However, not all of the information offered by the settlement agency was well-received. For example, Basma stated:

> They used to scare us and tell us that we can't wear clothes that are in line with the Sharia law, and that the sun does not come out here, and other things, but when we came here we realized that the situation is better than the situation that we were in.

They were also introduced to other organizations such as the Al Jannah Mosque, the Islamic Institute of Toronto Mosque and the Arab Community Center of Toronto. Ahmad explained:

There wasn't only one organization that helped us with everything. Each organization helped in different areas, and the missing information, we get it from a friend.

GARs' self-initiated networks, such as the WhatsApp group they created, continued to support each other. Bashir said:

[Two Arabic names], we just see each other at school. […]We talk that we are grateful to be in Canada and that we need to look for jobs and start working. We talk about what each one of us used to work in and what would they like to work or do here.

Social interactions among men were more frequent but the women also developed social relationships with women they met through each other's husbands. Nouha explained:

All of [the people I am less close to, pointing to the second column] I go with them on walks, to go do grocery shopping or go to the bank. Or sometimes we go to the community center together.

Who did they want in their networks, and what helped/hindered them?

Both men and women appreciated the social contacts they already had but also expressed their desire to expand their networks to people similar to as well as different from themselves. Asmaa said:

We want to be introduced to new people and new places, maybe introduce the newcomers to people from their own culture, right away. This will help the new people feel more comfortable, just so they can feel that someone is close to them and speaks the same language as them. When I first got here, I did not know anyone and when I met Bahar, she spoke Arabic, and that made me feel very comfortable.

Meeting people from other background gave them a welcome opportunity to speak about their cultural practices and personal preferences. Sawson said:

But most of the people around me are Canadian, and they do not know anything about Syria, so they ask us a lot about how we lived, and how we live here, and how we were brought up, and how we think, how we study, and so on. They have a lot of curiosity to know about us, it is like taking this cup and examining it closely. They like to know everything so they will know your boundaries and not to bother you in any way. For example, if I say to them "if this person does this thing, I get really annoyed." They ask about traditions and costumes, not just so they would know out of curiosity, but so they can respect you. Just so they can know when something is wrong for you, and when it isn't.

Both men and women repeatedly said that they did not want to limit social contacts to Arabs only. Some feared they would not learn English if they did so. Basma explained, "Of course, if you have a lot of Arabs with you in school, you are going to keep on speaking Arabic with them, so you are not going to learn the language." Nour added,

That is right. You will not learn the language. Where I live there are a lot of Arabs, and if there was a place where it is all foreigners that would be better, you would learn more because you would be put in a situation where you would have to talk.

One of the young women actively avoided other Arabs. Ayesha said:

One of the main things that we focused on, and we demanded from our sponsors is that we did not want to live near Arabs. When they first started looking to find a home for us, they would take us to places where a lot of Arabs live. […] But we did not want to be near the Syrians because we wanted to learn the language, and they were really surprised when we told them this, we said, "If we live amongst Syrians, we would never be able to learn the [English] language." But when we live far away and everyone around us speaks English, we then are almost forced to learn the language. And truly, our ability to understand and speak the language is so much better than many Syrians that we meet who have been here for a year.

Another reason for their wanting to get to know other Canadians was the respect they received. Basma said:

Although the country is really cold, but you feel like the people are really warm. They treat you like a human being, which is the most important thing that they treat you like a human being.

To reciprocate the respect he received from his sponsors, Hamad crossed some religious boundaries for the first time. He said:

So, the father of one of our sponsors died, and they are Christian. So, when they had a funeral for him, we went to the church for the service to give our condolences. We did that because it is our duty to do that, and I do not doubt that whatever happens with us, they will stand beside us. […] They are Christian and we are Muslim, but that should not be an issue that will cause us to be far from one another.

Nevertheless, Ayesha who claimed that she did not want to speak with other Arabs or live near them, said,

Last month I really felt like I was alone, and I this was the only time that I regretted not having Arabs or other people that I know around me. This was when I went to the hospital and my son's heart started to suddenly beat really fast, and I did not know what was happening with him, and the doctor said that my son needed emergency care, and I started to cry and wonder what will I do. […] I called my husband, but my husband could not join me because he was at work, and he could not leave, and when he got back from work, he had to stay with my daughter. The sponsor called me, just to check on things, then I told her, that I am at the hospital and my son is not feeling well. So, she came and stood by me at the hospital. She told me "You do not have family here, and we are your family here, and whatever you need just call us, and do not consider me as you sponsor, I am here like you sister, or your mother, and you have family here." That was the only day that I really wished I had family here, or someone that is really close to me, just so I can leave my daughter with them. I left my daughter at people's house, and my mind was wandering between my daughter and my sick son, especially since you do not know who these neighbors are, so you may not feel safe leaving your kid there. I only know [my sponsors] for two months, and I do not know what they are like. If I lived near Arabs, I know from the first that I meet an Arab person everything about them.

Nour related a similar incident:

My daughter was sick, and I called my Egyptian neighbor and she told me to take my daughter to the hospital. So, I took my eldest son with me so he can translate, and my other children stayed at home and she was looking after them. I trust her, and I was at the hospital for a couple of hours, but I am at the hospital feeling good that my children are looked after, and I do the same thing when I have other appointments, maybe my children are at school, and my husband may be at work, so she picks up the children and takes care of them and bring them to me.

Some GARs claimed that the lack of a common language was the primary impediment in their ability to establish social relations with non-Arabs. Rabia said:

If I had the language I would meet everyone, but I don't know English. I can't understand what they are saying, nor I can get my thoughts to them.

And some PSRs also agreed that despite their close relationship with their sponsors it was difficult to cross linguistic barriers for more profound communication. Youssef explained it thus:

Our conversations are very basic, they are about what we did, what we do, and they play with the kids. Sometimes they come to give us a cheque, and things related to the bank, a lot of things that are new to us, they helped us with it. Even if we want to talk to them about deep and meaningful things, we really can't, because of the language barriers, it is hard to get the point across.

He said he did not know how to read socio-cultural norms to enter new social groups, saying:

I see people hangout at a café or a public place. Where we were from, you go to people's houses and you meet with them and you have coffee and food. Here I get the sense that people meet out in public, so I would like to know how I can meet with people. I would like someone to tell me how these things happen here, […] like when I meet someone on the street I say hello to them, and they say hello back, but how do we move past that? I don't think people are just sitting alone at home with the door locked behind them. That is what we want to know about the place that we want to live in.

Youssef realized that in addition to learning a new language he also needed to decipher implicit rules of social engagement the in the unfamiliar social context.

Discussion

The above data show how structural factors intertwined with socio-cultural factors (Ager & Strang, 2008; Hynie et al., 2019) to shape our respondents' social integration. As several scholars (e.g., Drolet and Moorti, 2018; Hanley et al., 2018; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019) have suggested, refugees need social networks for enhancing their social, political, and economic capital. The difference between the PSRs' and GARs' initial anchors (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2017) was one factor in their social integration trajectories. PSRs' initial anchors were Canadians with sufficient funds to sponsor a family, time to volunteer, information about sponsorship procedures, and skills to navigate them. They are typically nonimmigrant, older, middle or upper middle class white women with high levels of education (Haugen et al., 2020; Macklin et al., 2020). GARs' initial anchors were staff of settlement agencies, who are largely ethnic minority recently migrated women (Türegün, 2013). These women are likely to have limited social capital themselves, or access to it through their social networks. PSRs initial anchors offered a stronger start to the refugees because of their personal and network resources.

Structurally determined roles of private sponsors and settlement agency staff in settling the refugees were also different. The range, intensity, and duration of private sponsors' engagement were based on their own capacity and perceptions about their sponsored family's wants or needs. They welcomed PSRs into their homes, included them in social events, and exchanged personal, social, and cultural information with them. Staff of settlement agencies are not autonomous actors (Senthanar et al., 2020) and their engagement with GARs was constrained by their employers' mandates, regulations, and targets (Praznik & Shields, 2018). Settlement workers offered generic information and advice through group sessions and scheduled visits but could not tailor their responses to the refugees' specific or unanticipated needs.

Another key difference was that private sponsors focused on a single family. The kind of socio-emotional support they could offer is only possible in a stable relationship with a few people. This was in contrast to settlement workers' need to service a large number of families. Although "case-work" is not uncommon in Social Work and related fields, settlement agencies tend to use a "one-size-fits all" service delivery model (Senthanar et al., 2020). Their staff also have heavy workloads because settlement agencies have to compete for government contracts every few years (Praznik & Shields, 2018).

Our data show that both PSRs and GARs subsequently built social networks with other Syrians, Arabs, and Muslims *on their own* for social support (Stewart & Langille, 2000) but not with White Canadians. The lack of shared socio-linguistic norms – noted by other scholars (e.g. Agrawal, 2019; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2017) – partially explains this social distance. However, given that private sponsors, committed to supporting their sponsored families, were able to express care, concern, and respect across linguistic, cultural, racial, and religious differences, we need to consider other factors, too. Citing recent Environics polls, Haugen et al. (2020) highlight the contradiction between Canadians' commitment to humanitarian action but also their devaluation of newcomers through racialization, especially of Muslims, Arabs, and Africans. Private sponsors' attitudes toward Syrians, most of whom are Arab Muslims, helped them navigate the above differences. A shift in other Canadians' attitudes toward refugees (as well as other newcomers) can help them cross similar boundaries. Otherwise the latter will remain socially excluded from "mainstream" society in the long-term.

The roles of those who supported the refugees also shaped their relationships. Settlement workers were friendly with the GARs but they were not their friends. PSRs labeled their relationship with their sponsors like that of a "family," which other scholars (e.g., Kyriakides et al., 2019; Macklin et al., 2020) have also noted. However, as Macklin et al. (2020) suggest, this label could denote a sustained relationship of intimacy, affection, and multi-faceted support but may also signal hierarchy, dependence and inequality. PSRs in our sample valued the care they received from their sponsors but also noted their paternalist attitudes (see Haugen et al., 2020). Ayesha and

Nour, despite their fulsome acknowledgement of their sponsors' generosity, missed social support from people like themselves, especially in situations that called for a high level of trust (see also Lenard, 2016). Dependency and hierarchy were evident in this "family-like" relationship but the rules of engagement were not fully known to the refugees. In times of crises they relied on the bonds of a common culture rather than their newly formed relationships. Trust is obviously built over time, through multiple engagements and ongoing communication.

The data show that acceptance of difference and mutual adaptation to it, rather than efforts to assimilate newcomers facilitates social integration. Some GAR women believed they were asked during a workshop to abandon their traditional Islamic garb because of inadequate exposure to sunshine in Canada. They interpreted this to mean a rejection of their culture and religion. In contrast, PSRs women and men thought that their sponsors acknowledged and respected their cultural and religious practices, and in turn they did so as well, which in diverse societies is as good an indicator of social integration as any.

Conclusion

Social integration of refugees from Syria was facilitated by social capital of private sponsors, focus on a single family, and flexible responses tailored to the family's perceived needs. Acceptance of racial, ethnic, religious and class differences rather than efforts to assimilate the newcomers facilitated their mutual respect. Building trust, however, takes longer: especially when one party has the power to set the terms of engagement, which are not fully known to the other. The refugees were able to establish social connections with those with whom they shared a language and culture but not with members of dominant groups, other than their sponsors. Despite differences in socio-linguistic practices, key messages of care, concern and respect were communicated and understood.

We do not yet know if the refugees' social relationships will help with economic and political integration. But we do know that a deliberate effort by well-established Canadians to socially engage with refugees, and other newcomers as well, can help create mutual understanding and respect. Structures and strategies that promote such engagement should be institutionalized in public service agencies, civil society organizations, and corporations.

Funding

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