FROM HOPE TO REALITY: A CASE OF A SYRIAN REFUGEE FAMILY RESETTLING IN CANADA

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Abstract

The increasing number of Syrian families seeking safety and security in Middle Eastern, European, and North American countries has given rise to conversations around resettlement and a timely and pertinent research theme. Through an arts-based lens reflecting on social integration post-arrival, trauma awareness, and resilience, this study follows one Syrian refugee family's experience immigrating to Canada after living in Jordan, also as refugees. The study explores social and educational occurrences of oppression, belonging, and resilience among five family members (e.g., two parents and three children). The researchers postulate that refugee families need to adapt to a new country and meet the social expectations that often fall short of refugees' new home's reputation as a stable and safe place. The study informs critical refugee educational research and advocates for more situated resettlement practices in the facilitation of social integration.

Keywords: Syrian refugees; Social integration; Resettlement; Systemic racism; Resilience.

DE ESPERANÇA À REALIDADE: UM CASO DE UMA FAMÍLIA DE REFUGIADOS SÍRIOS SE REESTABELECENDO NO CANADÁ

Resumo

O crescente número de famílias sírias em busca de segurança e proteção nos países do Oriente Médio, Europa e América do Norte deu origem a conversas sobre reassentamento e um tema de pesquisa oportuno e pertinente. Através de uma lente baseada em artes refletindo sobre integração social pós-chegada, consciência de trauma e resiliência, este estudo segue a experiência de uma família refugiada síria imigrando para o Canadá depois de viver na Jordânia, também como refugiada. O estudo explora ocorrências sociais e educacionais de opressão, pertencimento e resiliência entre cinco membros da família (por exemplo, dois pais e três filhos). Os pesquisadores postulam que as famílias refugiadas precisam se adaptar a um novo país e atender às expectativas sociais que muitas vezes ficam aquém da reputação do novo lar dos refugiados como um lugar estável e seguro. O estudo informa a pesquisa educacional crítica de

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refugiados e defende práticas de reassentamento mais situadas na facilitação da integração social.

Palavras-chave: Refugiados sírios; Integração social; Reestabelecimento; Racismo sistêmico; Resiliência.

1. Introduction

Since 2011, the Syrian refugee crisis has witnessed over 14 million people forced to leave their homes to seek safer spaces (Atar et al., 2022; Dionigi, 2023; Kalogeraki, 2022). According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (2023), over 70% of Syrians currently require humanitarian assistance and approximately 90% live below the poverty line. Canada is one of many countries offering support to refugees (Bose; 2020; Viczko; Matsumoto, 2022), and recent reports have drawn attention to the fact that the country has been racially distinguishing them (Pardy, 2023).

Checkley's (2021) assessment indicates refugees are coming from contexts of war, physical and emotional insecurity, or forceful resettlement. This information is vital to understanding this population's experience, and certainly demands critical analysis and consideration. Typically, refugees (re)settle in different cultural spaces anticipating a better quality of life and, despite the humanitarian assistance afforded to them, they still struggle to fit into new societal norms (Houle, 2019; McCluskey, 2022; Mohamed; Bastug, 2021; Nguyen; Phu, 2021). On the surface, the host country offers superior quality education, reliable access to assets (e.g., work, housing), and safe living conditions for newcomers. However, as Checkley (2021) proposed, "the conception that the struggle of refugees is over upon arrival in a first-world country is not only grossly inaccurate, but […] could be considered offensive" (Checkley, 2021, p. 47).

The current study was located within a broader study coming out of Calgary, Alberta, Canada entitled *Familial Experiences with School Integration.* This larger study employed an arts-based strategy that gave researchers the opportunity to explore participants' cultural identities and spaces through multiple means that helped them express themselves through their voices and narratives (Eastmond, 2007; Menezes, 2021). The study recruited six newcomer families through a partnership with the city of Calgary's Centre for Newcomers, a venue where refugees and newcomers can find various supports and services (e.g., employment, language classes, tax help, and childcare). An arts-based approach allowed researchers to explore participants' cultural identities and spaces in multiple ways that helped them express themselves through their voices and narratives (Eastmond, 2007; Menezes, 2021).

This paper examines the case of one of the Syrian refugee families resettling in Canada who had originally been recruited as part of the larger study. The scholarship seeks to outline the contrasts between what this family had been

promised upon entering the country with what they experienced. The following questions were used to guide the case:

1. What are the differences between the refugee family's perceived beliefs/experiences and the nation-state's characterization of resettlement?
2. How do challenges in schools and social marginalization implicate refugees' resettlement?
3. To what extent does the Syrian refugee family resettlement impact notions of identity, belonging, and resilience?

To expand on the experiences of refugees' resettlement, this study considered the implications of the Syrian refugee crisis from three different levels of social structure: the micro (the individual), the meso (organizations), and the macro (federal and provincial policies) (Magno, et al., 2022; Rodriguez, 2002; Rodriguez et al. 2020). Navigating the various perspectives of the members of one refugee family encourages further reflection, a critique of policy, and a plan for action.

To adequately answer the research questions, this study was framed around three conceptual theories: social integration after resettlement, refugee trauma and (re)settlement, and resilience among refugees. These themes informed researchers' analysis of the refugee family's shared stories of oppression, belonging, and resilience (Atar et al., 2022; Dionigi, 2023; Dryden-Peterson et al., 2017; Kalogeraki, 2022) in social and educational contexts, which play an essential role in examining the insufficient anti-racist approaches to supporting these populations (Pardy, 2023; Stewart; El Chaar, 2020).

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Social Integration of Refugees After (Re)Settlement

According to Ager and Strang (2008), "integration is a chaotic concept: a word used by many but understood differently by most" (p. 167). In effect, refugees' social integration relies on markers and means (e.g., employment, housing, education, health), social connections (e.g., social bridges, social bonds, social links), facilitators (e.g., language and cultural knowledge, safety, and stability), and the basic foundations for success in a new land (safety, rights, and citizenship). However, given the racial, social, and economic divergences in resettlement countries, and in keeping with most Syrian refugees' experiences, a layer of exclusionary laws and policies tends to inhibit their opportunities for successful integration (Atar et al., 2022; Bruhn; Gonzales, 2023; Dionigi, 2023; Viczko; Matsumoto, 2022).

Historically, exclusionary laws and policies made political use of the refugee plight to portray first-world countries as being generous, hospitable, and tolerant places where the individual was able to thrive (Nguyen; Phu, 2021; Stewart; El Chaar, 2020). Nevertheless, despite community efforts to sponsor refugee families, collect donations for basic needs (e.g., hygiene, utensils), and celebrate individual refugee success stories, a post-migration analysis by

Stewart; El Chaar (2020) underscored the ontological and epistemological barriers that continue to persist and reinforce social discrimination towards refugees (Kalogeraki, 2022; Oudshoorn et al., 2020). For example, studies reveal instances of bullying at schools, language barriers in schools and at work, restricted access to health care, and work limitations as being some of the many issues consistently encountered by refugees (Atar et al., 2022; Dionigi, 2023; Kalogeraki, 2022).

A further example highlights numerous instances of children missing classes to help their parents with translation when they need to attend an appointment. Other examples illustrate how refugee parents, not able to secure expeditious full-time employment to provide their families with life necessities, perceived support as not being strongly rooted in a grounded understanding of what refugee status entails (Ager; Strang, 2008; Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2020). This raises sociopolitical questions that foreground the difficulties faced by refugee families' post-arrival (Charles, 2021).

Stewart and El Chaar's (2020) scholarship also acknowledges the violent backstories that often impact refugees' experiences, and they reinforce the need for long-term strategies to address the resulting resettlement challenges. Given that Syrian refugees are fleeing their home countries as a direct result of violent acts that have impacted their safety and security, scholars suggest that realistic trauma-informed practices and policies need to be put in place (i.e., the reconceptualization of the role of resilience in refugee contexts) to support social integration (Drolet et al., 2020; Leanne, 2020; Walton-Roberts; Hamilton, 2020). In fact, Checkley (2022) further maintains that, to date, different organizations (e.g., schools, work environments, and governmental agencies) have fallen short of fully acknowledging refugees' struggles and the implications of trauma in their day-to-day lives.

2.2 Refugee Trauma and (Re)Settlement

Huguley, Delale-O'Connor, Wang, and Parr (2020) advocate the use of a trauma-informed lens as an effective means of exploring participants' contextual experiences and voices (Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies, 2017). Trauma typically results from refugees' lives being permeated with extremely stressful occasions that include religious and political persecution, war, and forced migration. Even the resettlement process itself has proven to be very taxing. (Leanne, 2020). Checkley (2021) defined refugee trauma as originating from three distinct and codependent levels: "[…] the experience of being displaced, the pre-resettlement experience, and finally the resettlement experiences" (p. 46).

Traditional trauma-informed practices and policies tend to argue that refugees will eventually overcome these traumatic experiences at each level soon after they arrive at their resettlement destination (Checkley, 2021). However, as Checkley (2021) maintained, "[…] trauma is pervasive in all three levels of the refugee experience" (p. 165). This implies that such individuals

have had to cope with stressors long before they arrive in their new homeland (e.g., loss of family, exposure to war, violence, sexual harassment and/or rape), and they continue to do so during their resettling experience (e.g., culture shock, loss of identity, isolation, racialization, discrimination, and other factors).

Such instances can evolve into social marginalization, worsen medical conditions, develop into communication issues, and escalate mental health complications (e.g., lowering self-esteem, and dysregulated behaviour). Furthermore, as Ager and Strang (2008) assert, refugees' experiences can become alienating and depressing, especially given that families tend to maintain close ties, something often attributed to the lack of cultural assimilation within their new place of residence. Several research findings also indicate there is an expectation that refugees will adapt and blend into the new host country (Ager; Strang, 2008; Charles, 2021). However, traumatic experiences, especially from those who hail from war zones, will still present challenges for many of them. Knowing that trauma plays a major role in most refugees' stories represents a key step in demystifying how we can help them experience a better quality of life and/or receive more effective mental health support during their resettlement trajectory.

Additionally, current immigration policies, especially in Canada, prioritize the working-class population, and very few succeed in matching refugees' skills and qualifications with their job prospects (Cheatham; Roy, 2023). Therefore, it is imperative for countries welcoming refugees to improve their policies of attending to refugees' needs, allocating proper funding to mitigate resettlement and trauma-related issues, and encouraging institutions, such as schools, to develop a greater awareness of the weight and relevance of refugee status for youth (Ghebrai; Ballucci, 2022; Mijić, 2022). As long as organizations continue to romanticize refugees' abilities to overcome trauma and resettlement issues, and remain oblivious to the social inequalities and power dynamics already in place, society will find it difficult to dismantle discrimination and oppression (Mapedzahama, 2019), affecting refugees' resilience in the process.

2.3 Resilience among Refugees

Resilience is the capability of a dynamic arrangement (individual, family, school, community, society) to endure or recover from substantial challenges that hover its stability, viability, or development. In Canada, refugees are currently provided with housing and employment, and their children are given opportunities to pursue their education. However, government "provisions are rather homogeneous, despite the explicit acknowledgement of differentiating factors" (Ghebrai; Ballucci, 2022, p. 1144). Countries such as Canada, for example, praise their own multicultural approach to receiving refugees, idealizing protective laws and rights, when, in fact, refugee's cultural backgrounds, past experiences, and capacity for resilience are not situated in the decision-making process of policymakers at all (Charles, 2021; Li; Sah, 2019).

Furthermore, within the context of resettlement, scholars maintain that refugees' resilience is misunderstood when it promotes the notion of being able to overcome difficulties (Checkley, 2021; Drolet et al., 2020; Leanne, 2020; Walton-Roberts; Hamilton, 2020). It is crucial to acknowledge that refugee families often arrive in their resettlement countries with "an excess of resilience" (Checkley, 2021, p. 167). In other words, their emotional and social survival strategies are so refined that, without proper nourishment, they may get overlooked by communities, organizations, and society. As such, rather than being perceived as synonymous with being applauded for how well one has achieved their goals, resilience can represent an indication that some systems are falling short in their ability to help, especially when it comes to the well-being of marginalized people.

Most researchers conclude it is important to encourage refugee families to call upon their resilience to face new challenges, but with a cautionary caveat (Drolet et al., 2020; Leanne, 2020; Walton-Roberts; Hamilton, 2020). Fostering resilience should not be perceived as a tool to overcome trauma as "it makes systemic issues faced by refugees acceptable. […] [Trauma] furthers a deficient approach to understanding the refugee experience" (Checkley, 2021, p. 168). Rather, researchers are encouraged to revisit their scholarship around marginalized people's resilience (Drolet et al., 2020; Leanne, 2020; Walton-Roberts; Hamilton, 2020), viewing it, instead, as a means to challenge systemic issues faced by refugee families.

Government institutions should focus on reducing the need for resilience (Checkley, 2021). Rather than romanticizing resilience, it needs to be problematized to a degree that refugees' stories become more than tokens of validation. In essence, validating successful refugees' efforts and strategies to combat and overcome discrimination and racism ought to become a starting point for addressing and combatting social injustice and oppression (Checkley, 2021; Drolet et al., 2020; Leanne, 2020).

Contemporary research discussions involving marginalization, racialization, and racism have held priority for many nations, particularly when the discussion involves refugees and their social integration (Rodriguez, 2022). Despite these honourable intentions, however, researchers have uncovered a level of discrimination that continues to be an impediment to refugees' access to school, health, higher education, and financial services (Bose, 2020; Dryden-Peterson et al., 2017; Kalogeraki, 2022; Viczko; Matsumoto, 2022). Additionally, according to Rodriguez (2022), educational institutions recognize multiculturality but "[…] perpetuate inequality either through ad hoc responses to supporting students or through no support at all" (p. 7). This further implies that refugees may avoid discussing their status, utilizing "silence" as a defence mechanism in response to socio-cultural ignorance of their lived experiences (Dionigi, 2023; Rodriguez, 2022).

By examining these three themes vis-à-vis their interconnecting characteristics, we can see, for example, that the trauma refugees bring to their new homeland does not stop the moment they begin the resettlement and social

integration process. How successful they are at integrating certainly depends on their resilience, however, we must be careful not to minimize the degree to which their resilience can help them resettle. These three themes individually have much to say, however acknowledging their interrelationship helped the researchers to better inform this study. Furthermore, establishing the education arena as a field in which to deepen empirical understandings of this interrelationship helped decipher the opportunities and resources that need to be made available to overcome any challenges and barriers.

3. Research Context and Methods

For the purposes of this paper, the researchers focused on one Syrian family from the original research group. It was the researchers' personal choice to work with this single Syrian family while delving into issues that less advantaged populations' (e.g., racialized refugees) can experience while resettling in Canada. Using the three themes of integration, trauma, and resilience as a foundation, researchers gathered family members' perceptions of racialization, oppression, and marginalization among community members that have struggled to thrive in what had been anticipated as being a safer place to start over.

The chosen family told of disconcerting social integration experiences that pointed to them being one of several newcomer families to Canada who had encountered, among other things, difficulties with language barriers and racial discrimination. The choice of having a single refugee family tell their stories in this manner, and focus on their experiences in this study, intertwines with the understanding of lived, experienced, and shared life stories (Eastmond, 2007). Following a three-step process (providing cultural probes, doing individual interviews, and having family group interviews), refugee family members were able to work with written, visual, and audio/video journals documenting their day-to-day lives in Calgary.

This approach integrated Rodriguez's (2022) suggestion that any discussions around refugee challenges can provoke debate within m*acro*-systems (e.g., policies and systems in place), *meso* ones (e.g., interactional relationships among individuals, and *micro*-processes (e.g., individuals' values and attitudes). Using this tri-level design facilitated the contextualization of this particular study, the understanding of social network analysis, and the interplay of factors that flow from individual to systemic levels (Ager; Strang, 2008; Rodriguez, 2022; Sutton, 2022).

3.1 The Syrian Family

The participants had refugee status both in Jordan and Canada. Fatma (mother) and Bashir (father) have five children. Three of them (Hafsa, Taim, and Ziad) were born in Syria, one (Saeed) in Jordan, and the youngest (a toddler) in Canada.

The family's first home in Canada was in Winnipeg, Manitoba and they later relocated to Calgary, Alberta where they found a more consolidated Muslim community. Fatma stayed at home to care for her youngest daughter, who had diabetes. Bashir worked part-time in the landscaping sector to keep his flexible working hours. The other four children, all school-aged, were enrolled in English language classes during their early years in Canada and attended regular classes in their designated schools.

3.2 Cultural Probes, Individual and Family Interview

The researchers used *cultural probes* to help extract the data. *Cultural probes* include the use of prompts, questions, and instructions as well as artifacts for recording thoughts and feelings. Artifacts can include something as simple as a diary or as elaborate as a camera (Interaction Design Foundation, 2022). For this family, the cultural probes took the form of suggestions, meant to facilitate the documentation of participants' voices throughout the data collection, and included documenting their day-to-day routine and interactions. Here, the participants were asked to describe how they felt about different aspects of their lives in Canada. To accomplish this, participants were given an iPad to register their experiences using drawings, photos, videos, and journaling as options to discover the most comfortable and feasible way to reflect on their narratives.

The researchers and participants engaged in individual interviews consisting of open-ended questions to understand their origins and memories of becoming/being a refugee. During the individual interviews, participants had the opportunity to review their probes and delve into deeper reflections about their experiences at school, work, and community. Participants' inspirations for drawing, photographing, or writing about their journeys provided supportive material for the researchers to draw upon and address the implications of their perspectives in the analysis.

The interviews were transcribed and coded following a thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2015; Williams; Moser, 2019). Follow-up questions were generated for the family interview based on the coding of the probes and individual itnerviews. During the family interview, other drawings and journal entries were collected, and researchers used them to guide discussions toward understanding cultural backgrounds and the significance of certain cultural prompts in refugees' social integration and identity renegotiation.

Researchers did several rounds of coding the collected data. The analysis followed a methodological approach where researchers considered participants' lives and narratives as they occurred (Eastmond, 2007; Menezes, 2021). The interpretations of refugees' own reality served to foster different stakeholders' awareness of individual and unique experiences, and the researchers encouraged a more contextualized rethinking of resettlement processes and inclusion.

Rigour in this study assiduously followed Thomas and Magilvy's (2011) four-component framework: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Given that a large group of researchers was involved in the data collection and analysis process, reflexivity occurred based on plural perspectives. The researchers' positionality in this study reflected the first-hand experiences of individuals who had undergone (im)migration in their own unique manner. As the authors of this paper, we acknowledge our backgrounds as immigrants to Canada and attest to using our diverse backgrounds to establish trust-worthy relationships with the participating family in our study (Chen et al., 2021). Being in academia, in no way did we distance ourselves from the privilege we carry, which allowed us to critically mitigate our biases throughout the analysis of this work. In addition, researchers spent an extended amount of time with participants from different backgrounds, whose voices, in the case of the Syrian family, are reflected in the sections below.

4. Results

4.1 Motivation for Resettlement and Resilience

Two of the most predominant reasons why this refugee family left Jordan were for the quest for safety and a chance for a better future (Ager; Strang, 2008). As stated by the mother, Fatma, safety was linked to having a secure place to live, an essential factor to starting to feel integrated: "We decided for the future of our children, it's better for them. Also, for my husband to find a better job. [...] In Syria, our house is gone. It's all the way down to the ground". In spite of experiencing oppressive stances, this refugee family still expressed gratitude for being able to relocate to Canada. Notwithstanding all displacement barriers, their motivation to resettle grounded any resilience strategies they developed, as seen below.

Despite the perceived challenges and barriers faced by refugee families, the possibility of having a life with financial stability, having assets, and receiving both community and government support, and eventually gaining citizenship, became a realistic and sustainable objective for this family. To them, the ultimate goal, and the anticipation, of having Canadian citizenship status meant freedom, which in turn would mean being able to visit family without the worry of not being able to return or being forced to remain in Jordan. In addition, government initiatives would grant these individuals the chance to acquire assets and pursue their ultimate goals based on who they were and where they were coming from:

> [Canada] gave us many things that no one gave to us before. Even Arabs did not do these things to us. [...] They gave us houses […] financial support. Kids have benefits. You can buy food and drinks using this money. You can live in a house. (Fatma)

The resettlement process (e.g., finding entry-level jobs, validating work skills, and learning a new language) was confirmed to be a natural expectation,

especially for the parents. The difficulty the family experienced in communicating with people within their community (e.g., neighbours) indicated that any lack of language proficiency worked as an impediment to social integration. As Fatma suggested, "[...] if they want to live a happy life, they need to learn English. So, they can take care of their paperwork, communicate with the government, and communicate with schools". However, as seen in the following section, Fatma suggested a resilient solution to the barrier, that of learning the language as quickly as possible to be able to have a meaningful connection to the society in which she then lived.

The difficulties of getting back into the job market or having to spend time acquiring the necessary language proficiency scores before being able to work, accompanied the belief that these early resettlement barriers were almost a necessary phase they had to endure, and their persistence and resilience would pay off once they became more accustomed to the system.

Although being visibly racialized and regularly experiencing instances of racism and discrimination this family's sense of resilience was principally demonstrated through discourses of gratitude and discussions about being and feeling safe. To date, the family members continue to feel verbally, and sometimes physically, abused, whether for religious beliefs or clothing and accessories. Their experiences nevertheless indicated that resilience, however impeded or encouraged, and time were two of the most prominent factors that could help or hinder refugee family members fit into their new context: "I am free. But not now with what I have in Canada. The first five years is not enough. Every refugee or immigrant, they need seven years, [that's] when they got good life in Canada" (Bashir).

For Hafsa, her identity as a Syrian Muslim refugee was an important tool to develop resilience and the inclusion of her culture in places such as classrooms (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. "It's my identity" (Hafsa).**
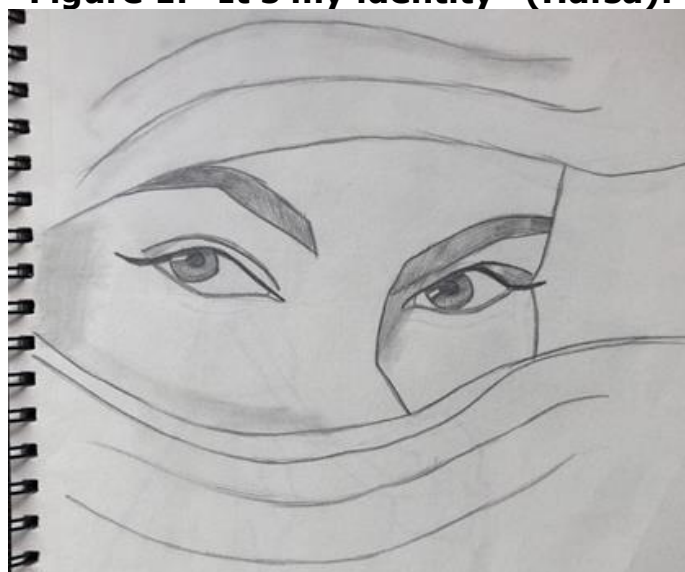
Source: prepared by the authors.

The decided change in the attitude of family members toward navigating the several tensions they encountered was an example of resilience. Hence, voicing their struggles and traumas challenged notions of identity, re-emphasized ongoing instances of marginalization, and urged the researchers to rethink the resettlement process through the lens of personal stories and creative participants' expression.

4.2 When Belonging is Impacted by Oppression

The Syrian refugee family members shared a common assumption that they were the ones who needed to fit in or put more effort into integrating (e.g., as Fatma said, "learning how to speak English as a native speaker"). Furthermore, their unfamiliarity with the new neighbourhood in which they now lived often led to the participating family choosing to remain at home as opposed to venturing outdoors. Figure 2, below, illustrates, from a personal perspective, the loss of feeling a sense of belonging (Wong, 2021) given the family members also missed their home country community.

Figure 2: *Bashir's and Fatma's feelings*
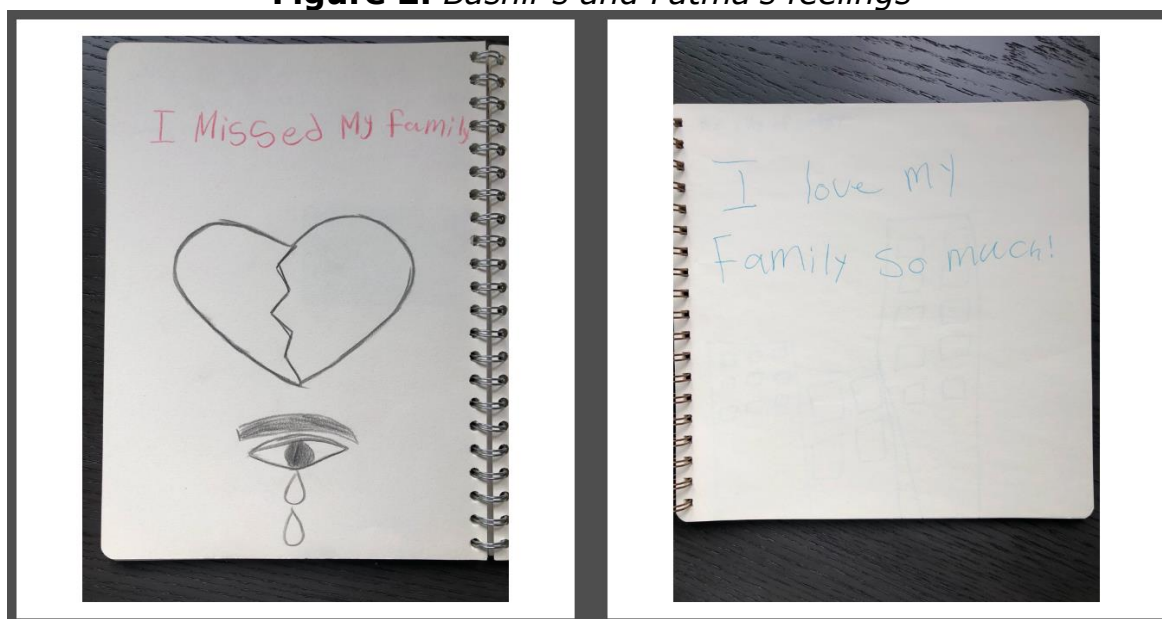
Source: prepared by the authors.

The trauma Fatma had experienced clearly influenced her sense of belonging. Living in places like Syria had become virtually unbearable as "[…] we experienced the war and we saw what our president did to us. He killed his people, and he killed little kids. We saw machine guns. We experienced the war and all of that [...] it impacted us because it is not safe. […] There's no food". The desire for deliverance from fear and the wish for freedom fueled this family's choices and actions. As Hafsa affirmed, this meant finding the strength from within her origins and feeling she belonged without the need for changing who she was:

"This is how my personality is. I like strong women. I want to be independent, and I want to be strong".

These narratives corroborate the experiences of several refugees trying to create "[...] a sense of belonging and home, [which] some, as research suggests, is a matter of constructing a coherent narrative about oneself and one's experiences" (Eastmond, 2007, p. 255). Additionally, once the family had started attending school (e.g., a regular school and English classes), the challenges increased as they worked toward developing their sense of community.

In theory, educators and administrative staff are tasked with providing educational support that ought to enhance refugees' participation in and understanding of society (Rodriguez et al., 2020). However, according to Fatma, her feelings of belongingness were impacted by a prevalence within the system that seemingly minimized refugees' concerns. As an example, she felt that the instructors and administrators were not responsive to queries about the reason for her receiving a lower-than-expected grade in her language class:

> "She [instructor] said, 'You didn't have enough assessment. It is not my problem. It's your problem' […]. I went to the manager, I talked with them, but she said, 'Oh, sorry about that. Maybe you need more assessment' […]".

Even though the school was aware that Fatma wanted a more accurate assessment of her work, she felt her teacher lacked a detailed explanation of the marks. In addition, the school administration simply distanced itself from the issue by indicating Fatma was the one responsible for her own grades.

Another example indicated that refugee children's voices were often not taken into consideration in classrooms. In this case, the children occasionally commented on a series of situations where any discord between them and other students never seemed to witness the teachers taking any decisive action: "I tell the teacher every time. Teachers don't do anything. […] he [classmate] was swearing, and he was pushing me". Moreover, these children are often the ones who become responsible for keeping up with their own educational progress, suggesting that both the teachers and the school tend to distance themselves from their roles of supporting their refugee students' success:

> Sometimes I don't get what they [teachers] are saying. I just ask them, like, 'Can you repeat that? I don't get it.' And then they just repeat it. They tell me, like, 'What do you want to be when you grow up in the future?' I tell them I want to be a soccer player or a doctor. They'll be like, 'You have to practice more than. You have to do a lot more work than some other people if you want to be like that." (Taim)

In this example, the teacher's perceived flippancy indicated that if the students themselves did not do the proper work to keep up with others, they would be left behind, and therefore would not be able to achieve the goals they

had. Whether arising from systemic or interpersonal issues, every member of this family experienced at least one type of oppression relating to their challenges with language proficiency and social integration. Further instances of oppression were characterized by physical violence, others by racial, cultural, or linguistic tensions, and still others reflected policies that were limited and/or inefficient in effectively protecting this demographic from having to experience such occurrences.

In some cases, interpersonal interactions with classmates and students from the school would escalate from verbal altercations to actual physical encounters. Saeed shared that he would be referenced on the bus as "the new (Arab) kid" and, on different occasions, he would be picked on at school by peers who would even strangle him in jest. Similarly, Saeed witnessed girls from similar backgrounds being disparaged because of their dietary preferences: "[...] There was a hijab girl that does not eat pork at all. And then they would add pork and stuff [...] some English guy came, he got the pork, and he was forcing her to put it in her mouth and eat it".

Hafsa also faced circumstances in which other girls would physically and verbally harass Muslim students. The attitudes of some of the students toward girls wearing hijabs would provoke fear and anxiety in Hafsa and her family, especially while commuting to/from school: "[…] The white girl was like, 'Why are you in our country? Just take that off, the thing on your head off.' And then she just smacks it off of her head. And the teachers are just filming, doing nothing. And it was like, why won't you do anything?"

The allegation that some of these children's teachers were unresponsive to instances of discrimination and racism came up in several different conversations with participants. As indicated before, some teachers would avoid positioning themselves and join the "joke" by filming the situations but hesitated to call out the wrongdoing. As a result, the refugee children, in this study, felt that educators were not fully understanding and, inevitably, the non-refugee students would not be held accountable.

Hafsa highlighted a further incident in which, after deciding to wear her hijab to school, there seemed to have been little to no willingness on the part of the other students to understand what the garment represented to her. As a Muslim student, she felt she constantly needed to explain herself, her religion, and her background. In these circumstances, such attitudes should be critically analyzed as an act of violence (Rodriguez, 2022), rather than mere curiosity about the unknown. The act of clarifying and/or justifying oneself, in this study, could be a reason that interfered with Hafsa's sense of belonging and categorized her as an outsider.

5. Discussion

Enfolding this family's experiences within the three themes of integration, trauma, and resilience helped the researchers to establish a clear path to how governments, education systems, and society in general can aid refugee

families' journey to independence and success in their new home. Barriers and challenges, however, remain and continue to plague the process. This only perpetuates the neoliberal way of thinking that imposes the belief that success is equated with hard work and lots of money (Kundnani, 2021). The idealization of safer first-world countries comes from a place of vulnerability. Even though Canada represents more secure environments to refugees, the idealism that better opportunities are interwoven with professional expectations for their children tends to elevate social anxiety in them even further.

Although there is a commitment in society toward diversity, the plurality of cultures, and racial harmony (King et al., 2022; Wong, 2021), refugees are still being erased, discriminated against, and put in disadvantaged positions. Hearing that children who cannot have their voices heard within spaces that are supposed to help them create skills that would make their social integration improve is a warning of the continual racialization of refugees (King et al., 2022).

A particularly salient aspect of resettlement observed by this family was their so-called capacity to "get used" to instances of discrimination (McCluskey, 2022). Becoming accustomed to circumstances of oppression cannot, nor should it be, a natural by-product of being a member of a refugee family, simply because they espouse a belief that their new homeland is a safe place (Ghebrai. Ballucci, 2022; Mijić, 2022). In fact, limiting "better quality of life" to the idea of providing a "war-free place" masks the day-to-day violence that refugees can go through, and further glosses over issues of systemic racism that are still in place and can harm the social integration of these populations.

As witnessed in this study, Canada welcomes refugees to maintain the country's multicultural status and meet political agendas (Houle, 2019; McCluskey, 2022; Mohamed; Bastug, 2021; Nguyen; Phu, 2021). Moreover, "Canada's international reputation has long been pegged to a narrative of beneficence towards refugees and migrants fleeing oppression, persecution, and unfreedom" (Nguye; Phu, 2021, p. 4). These political strategies are not unique to the Canadian government, and in many other places "refugees are included in the discourse of normality and order only by virtue of their exclusion from the normal identities and ordered spaces of the sovereign state" (Nguyen; Phu, 2021, p. 5).

Nevertheless, there is reason to hope. Despite the challenges experienced in Canada (e.g., marginalization, racism, and expectations), and based on their experiences as refugees in Jordan, the access to housing and financial support for their children led this family to believe that countries like Canada are just and fair (Levinson-King, 2022). For the most part, parents and children resettled in the belief they were choosing what is "best" for them as individuals (micro), based on the assumption that resettling countries are neither war conflict zones, nor physically violent locales. Stability would be gained through citizenship, a right defined by law (macro). However, government initiatives, as well as those taking place in schools, language centres, and workplaces also acknowledged that such stability is not entirely dependent on them (meso).

When educational institutions do not take definitive measures to help their refugee students, bigger issues can ensue. Within any given curriculum, for example, educators are not provided with the necessary tools to deal with and prevent systemic discrimination. For example, many school policies (meso) and attitudes toward refugee participants in the study revealed that staff members were often unprepared to incorporate inclusive strategies into their classrooms to support diverse family backgrounds. As a result, school administration (macro), teachers, and non-refugee students were often found to lack intercultural awareness, which inevitably led to additional (micro) stress for the educators, the students, and their families. Having better and more efficient systems in place for productive and positive professional development at both the meso and macro levels could help stakeholders understand refugee families' plight in a more positive and proactive light.

Oppression (Rodriguez, 2022; Rodriguez et al., 2020) was found to exist for this family with specific reference to broad laws, rights, and protection that generally do not take refugees' individual needs into account and assume a one-size-fits-all approach (macro). At an institutional level (meso), especially in schools, refugee children's voices and concerns often go unheard, further exacerbating what was perceived as a predominant factor in their marginalization. Nevertheless, despite discrimination and racism being quite prevalent in the school system, it tended to be overlooked by refugee parents (micro), which led the researchers to argue that this refugee family would naturalize oppression as part of the resettlement process.

From observing the experience of this refugee family, we can establish that a country's multiculturalism and celebratory stance on its diversity are insufficient to prevent oppression. According to Wong (2021), multiculturalism is a social construct made for people to believe that everyone is on equal footing. For countries like Canada, whose multiculturalism policy translates into resettling refugees and welcoming high numbers of newcomers every year, it is possible to convey that each culture is prized for its diversity (e.g., races, sexual and gender identities, religions, etc.). However, the policy of multiculturalism, as it stands, is challenging because, as seen in this study, the implementation of welcoming policies does not always align with the attitudes of many social agents who are part of the resettlement processes.

Racism, as it relates to social integration, continues to be an impediment to refugee families' overall sense of belonging (Mijić, 2022). In fact, the misguided belief that living in a racist society is better than being in war zones is the utmost sign of misunderstanding and disregard for human rights (Checkley, 2021). The shared experiences in this study should matter to researchers, institutions, and policy-making agents who aim at dismantling unjust systems and fostering refugee families' integration.

The data informed discussions around understanding refugee families' resilience and the challenge of social structures that continue to oppress and marginalize these populations. Through the lens of social integration (Sutton, 2022), our analysis demonstrated that this Syrian refugee family's sense of

resilience had become a predominant strength, even after the trauma they had experienced prior to and in their new homeland. At the same time, their sense of resilience was employed as a strategy to help them undertake certain levels of social integration.

Nonetheless, the whole concept of resilience needs to be further unpacked, along with the idealistic notion of Western countries being safer places (Stewart; El Chaar, 2020). The researchers also suggest advocacy plans for children's mental health be further developed, having observed that from an early age, refugee students feel pressure, mostly from parents, that they need to achieve goals in their lives to demonstrate an acceptable measure of success and that they are doing well in life. Finally, a critical overview of systemic racism is necessary to deconstruct notions of openness and welcoming cultures (Stewart; El Chaar, 2020).

6. Conclusion

This family provided an opportunity to better understand the situated experiences of refugee families as they relate to the themes of integration, trauma, and resilience. It gave us the means to realize how limited our understanding of the refugee narrative is, and how we need to become more politically, culturally, and socially informed (Nguyen; Phu, 2021; Stewart; El Chaar, 2020). Moreover, it is a call to deepen our concepts and reflect upon attitudes that still harm and marginalize refugees in all different social spheres (e.g., communities, schools, and workplaces) and at all levels of society. To improve the sense of social integration into these communities on the micro level, individuals need to become more aware of how to identify the real and individual needs of refugees to improve their sense of social integration in these communities.

On a meso level, institutions and organizations (e.g., schools) need to be better prepared to recognize where refugees are coming from, the types of knowledge they bring, and the challenges they may still face in a post-resettlement phase. Opening spaces for discussion and naturalizing the concept of refugee status in different social settings will be beneficial in helping to demystify this othering of refugees and developing more helpful policies (macro).

This study brought the notion of how refugees are offered the promise of quality life to the forefront, yet, in many cases, there remain insufficient supportive and adequate tools for them to thrive in their new homes. The researchers argue that, while many refugees retain hope for a brighter future, some are being taken advantage of and obligated to accept unjust social conditions (e.g., racism) for being offered a "non-violent or war-free" place to set up their new home.

At the same time, the scarcity of critical refugee studies that challenge notions of integration, trauma, and resilience, continues to be problematic. As Mijić (2022) iterated, when refugees come to a new country, the goal is not

necessarily to adapt or assimilate into "subordinated, normative units". Instead, integration needs to be examined as a core and fundamental process occurring within society, giving refugees human agency within their new social reality. Hence the importance of the discussions presented here continues to raise awareness and the necessity for all levels of government to work together in finding strategies to ease such instances of inequity and oppression.

There is still much to be considered when a country decides to provide refuge to people coming from conflict areas (Campbell; Brauer, 2020; Charles, 2021; Hussain; Jones, 2021). Social anxiety, fitting in, finding jobs, and being understood are proven to be enduring necessities and traumas in the lives of refugee families and permeate the notions of beliefs, identity education, oppression, belonging, and resilience. Moreover, there is a call to revisit our own discriminatory biases and social paradigms towards understanding which systemic structures foster barriers, and which break them down (Campbell; Brauer, 2020; Hussain; Jones, 2021).

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