Communication Practices in the Production of Syrian Refugee Belonging

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This study examines how belonging is negotiated and enacted once refugees have been resettled in new homelands. It does so by focusing on communication practices within the context of the refugee's interactions with members of the local community. Interviews were carried out with resettled refugees, volunteers, and nonprofit and governmental representatives in greater Vancouver, finding two key forms of belonging: emergent belonging, an incremental form of belonging that is nascent and incomplete; and scripted belonging, which consists of predetermined expectations for behavior.

Keywords: belonging, Canada, digital, media, newcomer, refugee, resettlement, volunteer

This study aims to understand the production of belonging in the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the aftermath of Canada's Operation Syrian Rescue, which airlifted tens of thousands of refugees from the Middle East to Canada, starting in late 2015. Within its initial three months, 25,000 Syrians (Syrian Outcomes Report, 2019) were flown from the Middle East, and upon landing in Canada were granted permanent residency. Despite their much-documented arrival at Toronto International Airport, where Prime Minister Justin Trudeau welcomed them to become "full Canadians," the next stage of the refugees' lives was only beginning. They were expected to make a rapid adjustment to life in a vastly different country from their own while leaving behind extended family and friends and frequently coping with physical and mental health issues exacerbated or caused by the civil war they were fleeing. Canada's accelerated intake required multiple agencies at the federal, provincial, and local levels to cooperate to carry out the resettlement effort, which some observers have suggested outpaced the country's designated resources (McMurdo, 2016). Resource shortfalls increased the importance of thousands of informal networks of additional help that sprang to life involving not only community groups of various sizes and foci but also individual Canadian citizens, often volunteering their time and even donating financial and other resources to play a role in helping the refugees come to and become a part of Canada.

The Syrians' arrival in Canada suggests that their troubles have ended; however, resettled refugees may struggle to adapt, occupying the edges of an unfamiliar society, existing in a sort of liminal state between their previous lives and their new ones. Although they have crossed physical borders to enter a new country, other symbolic forms of social and cultural bordering remain as refugees navigate belonging.

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This maneuvering is frequently shaped by their communication practices. Thus, this study examines the resettled Syrian refugees in the greater Vancouver area to generate greater understanding of the production of belonging and the roles of communication in that production. While refugees continue to maintain belonging to their families and friends in their former home communities and countries, the focus in this study is on belonging within the refugees' new local resettlement community. The overall question it seeks to answer is how refugees themselves, as well as other actors within the local community, produce and contest belonging through communication practices. Based on interviews with refugees, volunteers, and others in the resettlement sphere, this study identifies two key forms of belonging that refugees and locals produce in this particular resettlement context: emergent belonging, a form of belonging that is nascent and incomplete, created incrementally often through small, everyday actions; and scripted belonging, belonging that consists of predetermined expectations for refugee behavior.

Belonging

A term that can be used in everyday conversations, belonging is so multidimensional in its usage that Antonsich (2010) argues there is no common understanding of what it means exactly. This is due in part to a lack of agreement on what belonging is, how it is enacted, and who is involved in the process (Antonsich, 2010; Wessendorf, 2019; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Within migration research, belonging has been defined as a sense of attachment and feeling at home, and as Damásio, Henriques, and Costa (2012) argue, "an experience of social connectedness, of building and maintaining bonds to other people in the same group or community" (p. 128). Wood and Waite (2011) define belonging as "a dynamic emotional attachment that relates individuals to the material and social worlds that they inhabit and experience. It is about feeling 'at home' and 'secure,' but it is equally about being recognized and understood" (p. 3). Pfaff-Czarnecka (2013) argues that belonging is "a position in a social structure, experienced through identification, embeddedness, connectedness and attachments" (p. 13). In this study, belonging is defined as a feeling of emotional attachment and recognition occurring within a person's social world.

Belonging has been created by and with refugees in a myriad of ways, such as through participation in art collaborations, gardening, reflective photography projects, and other community initiatives (Gifford & Wilding, 2013; Sampson & Gifford, 2010; Strunk & Richardson, 2019). These sorts of exchanges can create a feeling for refugees and community members of "being together" (Askins, 2016, p. 472) rather than experiencing an asymmetrical relationship in which one side is dispensing charity to passive recipients. The focus in this study is particularly on what Marlowe (2017) describes as ordinary belonging, which occurs through the interactions and tasks of everyday life. Ordinary belonging can be initiated through a range of small, individual activities such as the sharing of a coffee, visiting someone's home, or taking a walk together in a park, any of which can help produce a sense of belonging to other people or places (Askins, 2016; Fenster, 2005). Such interactions are sometimes overlooked because of their simplicity, yet Huizinga and van Hoven (2018) suggest that "fleeting encounters" between refugees and locals can be "stepping stones" toward establishing more intense feelings of belonging to each other as well as to the host community (p. 316). These incremental interactions illustrate the ways belonging can be an emergent process of becoming at home rather than an "all or nothing state" (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p. 11).

At the same time, as existing members of a community respond to the arrival of newcomers, the politics of belonging create norms for inclusion and/or exclusion within existing groups, setting boundaries for who is perceived as part of the group and who is seen as out of place (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Often, such boundaries are kept invisible to outsiders; their maintenance and reproduction are carried out as expressions of power, sometimes producing "virtual checkpoints" (Migdal, 2004, p. 5) for belonging. This can also be manifested in a "normative script" (Murray, 2014, p. 25) for how outsiders such as refugees are expected to behave. While much research focuses on formal borders such as crossing from one country to the next, in this study, the emphasis is on the practices of belonging such as when it is "validated by the wider community or group to which one aspires to belong" (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p.11).

While boundaries may be established by those with the most power, even those with seemingly little power may participate in their creation and/or policing. For example, even in the case of volunteers offering assistance to refugees, their actions establish boundaries and hierarchies in which hospitality is often conditional and informed by formal and informal rules (Kyriakidou, 2020). Likewise, refugees themselves may internalize the scripts for belonging and then use them to police fellow newcomers or even themselves (Murray, 2014). However, it is important to note that these boundaries are rarely impenetrable and may be challenged, disrupted, or reworked (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, & Cassidy, 2018). They can be fluid and can change depending on relationships and the passage of time; they can be in a constant state of becoming as they are produced and coproduced (Frazer, 2020).

Media and Belonging

Historically, when it comes to mediated refugee belonging, the research focus has been disproportionately on news and other media depictions and the ways misrepresentations and stereotypes work to limit refugee belonging in new homelands, depicting them as threats or interlopers unable to adapt to local culture and norms (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2014; Wright, 2014). Much of that research focuses on mainstream news, where xenophobic characterizations may offer scripts to locals that suggest they should be fearful of and reject refugees. At the same time, this stream of misleading and demonizing news and even fictional content also affects refugees themselves who become discouraged and immobilized as they are led to believe they are not even allowed to try to belong (Philo, Briant, & Donald, 2013).

More recently, researchers have focused on the ways personal digital media tools have come to play important roles in mediating communications by, for, and about refugees in ways that some claim enable greater agency by refugees (Alencar, 2018; Dekker, Engbersen, Klaver, & Vonk, 2018). For example, social media play key roles in facilitating refugee journeys to new homes and providing them with navigational help, immediate access to information, and enabling them to keep distant family and friends updated on their progress (Gillespie, Osseiran, & Cheesman, 2018). Once in a new country, digital tools continue to play crucial roles in maintaining connections with home, but they also help refugees take steps toward settling in their new homes, assisting them in searching for employment, improving their understanding of the local languages, and facilitating a sense of safety and security among migrants, especially those who attempt to survive outside official systems (Harney, 2013; Udwan, Leurs, & Alencar, 2020). Beyond these practical uses, the affective dimensions of transnational communication have come to be viewed as an important area of consideration as digital tools can enable "psychological proximity" (Veikou

& Siapera, 2015, p. 122), when they facilitate long-distance emotional support from family and friends. This may, through enabling refugees to express their "hybrid identities" (Brinkerhoff, 2009, p. 2), make it easier to adapt to a new home.

Yet these lines of research also need to be considered critically to avoid reducing refugee communication experiences to a techno-optimistic narrative in which use of a mobile phone ensures automatic success in fleeing one's home as well as in resettling in a new country (Twigt, 2019). We must guard against separating the usage of digital tools from the context in which they are being used. For example, the mere ability to maintain transnational family connections across borders as one traverses these does not mean those interactions are all positive or helpful; likewise, for resettled refugees, preexisting tensions do not disappear once a family member is relocated to a new country (Mattelart, 2019; Witteborn, 2015). Thus, while the act of resettlement may lessen overall dangers as well as provide greater material comforts, this does not mean refugees no longer experience economic, social, and informational challenges or that axes of difference, such as class, gender, and age, are no longer factors in how and to what extent they experience those challenges (Lloyd, 2020; Lloyd, Pilerot, & Hultgren, 2017; Wall, Campbell, & Janbek, 2017).

Finally, focusing solely on the phone or other digital tools can also divert our attention from other means through which refugees can experience migration as some research suggests that digital connectedness may not substitute for in-person experiences, and some refugees report that face-to-face interactions in their new homelands are more meaningful than those taking place on their phones (Awad & Tossell, 2019). Thus, this study heeds the plea of researchers who have called for avoiding a strictly media-centric approach to pay attention to face-to-face communication as well as the relational context within which all communication occurs to create a more complex understanding of this phenomenon (Smets, 2018). In this case, that means considering and comparing a range of communication behaviors engaged in by refugees and other local actors.

Research Setting

This project focuses on Syrian refugees resettled in British Columbia, which was chosen because it is one of the main Canadian resettlement areas; it differs from the larger resettlement corridor of Quebec-Toronto in Ontario province because that region had an existing Syrian population before this wave of newcomers. In Ontario province, some newcomers were related to Canadian citizens who were part of the country's Middle Eastern diaspora. Those Syrians often came as privately sponsored refugees in which ordinary people could join together to pay the first year's expenses of resettlement for refugees. British Columbia has historically had fewer preexisting connections with Syrian immigrants and instead has extensive experiences absorbing refugees such as the Vietnamese "boat people" in the 1970s and East Asian immigrants from Hong Kong in the 1990s. In British Columbia, 84% of the first wave from 2015–2016 were fully or partly government sponsored with 14% privately sponsored (Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2016). Therefore, belonging would not be facilitated through existing kin relationships. Instead, local volunteers served as informal contacts and connections for the refugees, and in some cases officially as their sponsors. Thus, this study focuses primarily on the refugee-volunteer relationship and the ways this

impacts the production of belonging to the local community, represented here by the volunteers and local officials interacting with the refugees.

Method

Data Collection

Interviews

The main form of data collection was in-depth interviews. Twenty-four in-depth interviews took place with 12 refugees, (5 women, 7 men), 7 volunteers/sponsors (5 women, 2 men), 3 nonprofit institution representatives (3 men), and 2 elected officials (1 woman, 1 man). Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 3 hours and were audio recorded. All but one refugee interview took place in their homes; one occurred in a mosque. Volunteer interviews took place at coffee shops, while other informal exchanges took place at a workshop described below—or, in one case, a volunteer's home. Nonprofit and government interviews took place at their places of work with some informal exchanges taking place at the workshop. All interviews followed informed consent procedures, in which subjects were verbally informed of the purposes of the research, the procedures to be followed, and their right to opt out anytime during the process. Legally, the Syrians are no longer refugees but landed immigrants. Despite directing questions to females specifically, male family members spoke more often and at greater length than females, and this is reflected in the frequency of quotes below. Likewise, some refugees were more loquacious or reflective than others. Two people were interviewed twice, enabling me to have additional clarification: (1) a former UNHCR worker who had himself been a refugee and was now overseeing resettlement activities at a local mosque and was also an informal mediator between authorities and refugees when misunderstandings arose; and (2) a volunteer who was a key node in connecting the suburban Vancouver community with the refugees, inspired to do so based on her own immigrant grandparents' experiences. Her home was a well-known unofficial distribution center for local donations of material goods. All interview subjects are referred to throughout the findings by gender, role, and number as follows: (a) Refugees 1–12; (b) Volunteers/Sponsors 1–7; (c) Nonprofits 1–3; and (d) Local officials 1–2.

Observation

I also observed a workshop held in a suburban library outside of Vancouver that was hosted by a key nonprofit involved in refugee resettlement and aimed at citizens who were sponsoring refugees through the private resettlement program or were volunteering or working informally with refugees in some way. Much of the nonprofit staff consisted of former refugees, some of whom had been in the country for years. Also in attendance was a staffer from the office of the local member of parliament. Speakers included resettled refugees, volunteers, and nonprofit representatives. The workshop covered issues such as the resettlement process, an overview of the refugee population and where they had been placed, understanding cultural differences and similar challenges in resettlement, as well as understanding how to support the refugees without being paternalistic. During this event, I took written notes and informally talked with participants. In addition, I also read online news article comments that accompanied articles from local news outlets that volunteers and nonprofit personnel specifically referenced during interviews.

Data Analysis

I first followed common procedures used in qualitative data analysis in which the transcripts and notes from the workshops and online comments were read and reread to become familiar with the data, enabling me to, as Saldaña, (2014) notes, "notice significant details" as "[p]atterns, categories and their interrelationships become more evident" (p. 585). As I read, I highlighted "preliminary patterns, quotes that seem quite vivid, anomalies in the data and so forth" (Saldaña, 2014, p. 583) to reduce the texts to those "chunks" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 258) that were most salient. As the transcriptions and observation notes were marked, I also wrote in the margins of the transcripts a word or phrase or what Saldaña (2014) calls a "sticky note" (p. 583). For example, I wrote words such as "expressing affection" or "information exchange" next to specific quotes. These notes served as initial codes, which may consist of "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute" (Saldaña, 2014, p. 584) to the data.

Similar or interrelated codes were clustered into groups to form a tentative category. As Saldaña (2014) argues, "category construction is our best attempt to cluster the most seemingly alike things into the most seeming appropriate groups and sometimes a code will become a category" (p. 587). This can be an iterative process in which categories or groupings may be combined or broken apart upon additional, ongoing reflection by the researcher (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). For example, affection, fear, and similar codes written in the margins became grouped under a broader category of emotion. In some cases, the literature review helped inform broader themes that became categories. In this way, codes such as emotion, recognition, and information all came to be under a broader category of emergent belonging, so titled because it captured the ways belonging was partial and tentative as new patterns of interactions between refugees and locals began to unfold.

In addition to this process for analyzing transcripts and observation notes, I assessed online news article comments that accompanied articles from local news outlets that volunteers and nonprofit personnel specifically referenced during interviews.

Findings and Discussion

In the following section, I describe two key forms of belonging that emerged from the data and whose labels I created based on previous research discussed in the literature review. These were emergent belonging and scripted belonging.

Emergent Belonging

Emergent belonging is nascent and incomplete, created incrementally through small, everyday actions. It is distinct from ordinary belonging discussed above because it zeroes in the initial period of resettlement. Multiple "stepping stones" of nascent belonging are described here with the understanding that they may occur concurrently and are not mutually exclusive. These are: filling in information gaps; creating emotional attachments within the local community between refugees and locals; and recognizing oneself in others within the community. These actions can accumulate over time, increasing feelings of belonging.

Filling in Information Gaps

Refugees sought to understand and be understood by their new community through a fill-in-the-blanks process with which missing information could be supplied through personal, unofficial contacts. As many refugees spoke no English and volunteers spoke no Arabic, Google Translate played a crucial role when the refugees first arrived. It helped enable connections through one-on-one communication, albeit in a rudimentary way. Exchanges often consisted of practical requests, such as a volunteer asking if a refugee family needed assistance with some activity or a refugee asking for guidance on how to interact with some part of the Canadian government. While resettlement officials shared official documents of rules and procedures, such as enrolling in schools and signing up for health care, the everyday interactions provided additional details and personal information.

One local described many initial conversations via text using Google Translate. "He [the refugee] would type a line, and I would type a line" (Male local official 1), and this back-and-forth would continue until a conversation of sorts had taken place. A young adult refugee explained that with volunteers, "you write [a text] to them and they will [quickly] answer" (Male refugee 3). Without the automated translations, each party would have had to wait for someone to translate, or perhaps they would not have an interaction at all. On the other hand, social media's automated translation of posts might mangle messages and leave both sides confused.

Refugees also filled in the blanks independently of volunteers through digital tools such as the online marketplace Craigslist. For example, a refugee who had launched a nascent informal business of buying, repairing, and reselling used cars said that, "I search every day on Craigslist" (Male refugee 9), looking for local prices and details about other cars for sale in the area. Having that knowledge of the local market, he said, "gave me confidence to buy." In another small initiative to provide information, a mosque initiated a WhatsApp group to connect longtime Canadian residents who came from the Middle East with the newly arrived refugees.

Besides text, visual images on mobile phones were also used to overcome gaps in understanding. One refugee who did not speak much Arabic but did speak some Turkish used Facebook Messenger's video capability to visually pantomime what she wanted to a volunteer. The volunteer explained that, "She can walk around and point to things that she doesn't know how to communicate verbally. She can at least say 'This one, that one' because there is no text messaging going on" (Female volunteer/sponsor 2) as the woman was illiterate in all languages. In these ways, the refugee and volunteer experienced a utilitarian form of presence, one that focused less on sharing emotions and more on solving practical problems. Another volunteer described the ways the phone became part of the means of understanding a refugee she worked with, this way: "Sometimes when I am with him, he pulls out his phone and shows me pictures of Syria. Because this is how you communicate, by showing pictures" (Female volunteer, sponsor 1). With the photos, the refugee can tell her, "This was my life, this was my house." Another volunteer said of a refugee she was helping, "she pulls out Facebook and shows me pictures of her family; half the time I don't know how she is related. It's a sister, or maybe it's a cousin and it doesn't really matter . . . how exactly they are related is not so important at that moment" (Female volunteer/sponsor 2). In these ways, the refugees sought to overcome information gaps or precarity through multiple small-scale communication strategies.

These initial interactions connected refugees and volunteers in personal ways that could serve as "stepping stones" (Huizinga & van Hoven, 2018, p. 316) toward belonging. For instance, the sharing of photos from home helped fill in information about what a refugee's life had previously been like and what his or her family looked like, which could also begin to contribute to emotional attachments as described below, as these processes were interrelated.

Creating Emotional Attachments

As Wood and Waite (2011) argue, emotional attachments are a fundamental dimension of belonging, and both locals and refugees talked about the ways they felt emotional attachments for each other. Refugees described volunteers as their most important personal connections in Canada, calling them friends and even family. As one young male refugee said, "They are like our relatives here . . . a volunteer said to me [about herself and other volunteers], 'You have 20 moms' . . . Don't be shy. Whenever you want, I will come if I have time'" (Male refugee 3). Another refugee said that, after a fire at an apartment building housing a group of refugee families required them to rapidly relocate, a volunteer "stood with us in our difficulties after our building got that fire. We were sleeping and she was not sleeping" (Male refugee 10) as she looked for solutions and the refugees trusted her to help them. In another example, his wife said one of the locals she had gotten to know was the teacher at her two daughters' school who "became like a friend for us" (Female refugee 11). With two of her children in school and her husband working in a local healthcare agency, she said, "We now feel we are Canadian." Likewise, when locals talked about how they came to see refugees as part of their community, it often involved emotions. One local said, "They are in my heart now" (Female local official 2). Another said, "Everyone I get to know, they are such warm, lovely people. Everyone tells me, 'You are part of my family, you are part of my family'" (Female volunteer/sponsor 1).

Communication devices played other unexpected roles in the generation of emotional connections by locals as they observed refugees communicating with family back home during a period of intense bombing of Aleppo, where many had relatives and friends. A local described being with refugees when that city was being bombed, and "they were constantly on their phones, constantly watching these videos [of death and destruction] that the world wasn't seeing but they were being sent by their relatives" (Female local official 2). Another local described helplessly watching as the refugees experienced deep pain, saying when she visited during the violence, "they are all weeping" (Female volunteer/sponsor 1). The official said one refugee's brother was killed in the bombing and, as she explains, she draws a breath. "We were with her when she got notification" (Female local official 2) of his passing on her phone.

Describing how he made a personal connection with a local official, a refugee said he had seen the official at public events and approached him.

> I said, "Hi." After that, we started talking, talking, talking and after that we invited him and [Female local official 2] to our home. Actually, he came to our home and had dinner with us together. After that we started a friendship (Male refugee 3).

The refugee taking the initiative to issue the dinner invitation is important because as Askins (2016) argues, it reverses the roles of who is exercising decision making in the relationship, and refugees are

frequently the subjects of others' decisions. The young man compared these interactions with his father's, which were transnational and took place on his phone that the father used to make rounds of calls every day to family and friends in Syria and other countries, an activity that filled hours of each day. In Syria, his father had "millions of friends, in Canada, zero." The constant contact the mobile phone afforded his father did not aid him in establishing local connections but seems to have given him reasons to focus solely on distant relations. After describing his own relationships in Canada, the younger man said, "I feel like I belong here."

Emotional attachments also formed not just with locals but within the refugee community itself. One refugee woman described how she met other Syrian women refugees at the initial "Welcome House" where refugees were placed upon arrival in British Columbia. When they moved out of that housing, she stayed in touch via WhatsApp and would visit the others' homes, explaining that, "Sometimes I go [to another refugee's home] if there is another lady who needs me to help" (Female refugee 8). Sometimes other refugees came for tea at her home. For many refugees, initial contacts led to other interactions that could, as Huizinga and van Hoven, (2018) predict, "accumulate" over time slowly generating greater feelings of belonging (p. 311).

Negative Emotions

Despite the legal acceptance provided by permanent residency, social and cultural belonging could sometimes still feel fragile. One refugee father thought his children might not be safe in the area where they lived because "Sometimes I see drugs and smoking in the road. I worry about this" (Male refugee 9). A recent attack on a mosque in Quebec by a domestic terrorist that killed six Muslims led another refugee to say that he found the presence of such violence against members of his religion "scary" (Male refugee 7), while his wife thought the attack was inspired by "Islamophobia" (Female refugee 6). After saying this, though, the wife pulled up a photo on her phone of a volunteer friend who was Mennonite, whom she understood to be a religious minority too and said how welcoming her friend was to Muslims. Her comments revealed a nuanced understanding of the ways exclusion and inclusion can be experienced simultaneously by resettled refugees and that the experience of having a positive connection with a Canadian might offset other negative feelings about being a newcomer, perhaps inoculating a refugee against feelings of not belonging (Fozdar & Hartley, 2014).

Volunteers, too, experienced negative emotions in relation to the resettlement of the Syrians, sometimes over their frustration with their fellow Canadians. One of the most active volunteers said the refugees "need that connection—that sense of family—someone to attach with" (Female volunteer/sponsor 1), which she thought meant spending time with them. But when she asked locals to engage in activities such as taking a family to a park, the response often was, "Oh, I thought I could give them a couch" (Female volunteer/sponsor 1). By limiting their interactions to giving material goods, some locals maintained a psychological distance from the refugees, engaging in charity rather than a relationship.

Experiencing Recognition

Being recognized could mean a refugee felt not just seen and heard, but as Wood and Waite (2011) write, "understood" by other community members (p. 3). Recognizing oneself as being able to become part

of the local community occurred in increments such as by seeing immigrant-run businesses in a walk through a neighborhood or overhearing a word in Arabic at a public swimming pool. When refugees described their initial contacts with volunteers at a temporary shelter for newly arrived refugees or at events held at mosques, they were particularly reassured when meeting Canadian citizens with a Middle Eastern heritage who had made successful lives for themselves in the community. A refugee explained the immediate sense of recognition upon meeting such volunteers: "Because he is from my [home region] he is the same [as me]" (Male refugee 9).

Some locals held no shared heritage or language with the Syrian refugees, yet they too experienced feelings of recognition. Citing their own histories as Jews who had not been initially welcomed in much of North America during World War II, members of a Vancouver synagogue immediately identified with the refugees who were being brought to Canada. The synagogue members described efforts to sponsor two gay male refugees who had escaped to Lebanon. While the refugees were still in Lebanon awaiting their paperwork to come to Canada, the synagogue members began Skyping with the gay couple. Initially this was to collect basic information about the men and what they would need on arrival, but the exchanges became more personal and emotional as they found out about the men's precarious situation as a gay couple. A synagogue member explained that, with the Skype calls, "Once we made the . . . personal connection it's like 'Oh my gosh, we know those guys'" (Female volunteer/sponsor 3). Each call found the situation for the two men becoming more unstable. "Things were getting worse and worse, and they had been visited by unsavory people who threatened [them]." As the synagogue members began to feel a sense of responsibility for the couple, they became emotionally connected to them. Although the men were initially strangers, the synagogue members experienced a form of psychological proximity through these exchanges, similar to what previous research associates with communication between distant relatives (Veikou & Siapera, 2015).

Scripted Belonging

Scripted belonging consisted of predetermined expectations for refugee behaviors that could be generated by organizations such as news media, the government, or nonprofits, as well as by individuals such as volunteers and even refugees themselves. Based on informal rules, scripted belonging contained elements of exclusion that could otherize refugees; it rendered judgments that produced boundaries to manage or control who was in and who was outside the community. However, in some cases, scripted belonging served as a guide, providing direction for refugees and locals to produce a less-exclusionary belonging. Scripted belonging tended to be more collective and more publicly produced than emergent belonging.

News Media and Scripts

One key way scripts for belonging are widely disseminated is through the news media, which could publicly draw the boundaries of belonging to the community. Refugee interactions with the news media were often facilitated by the organizations and individuals helping them resettle. The refugees were expected to participate in media interviews to show themselves behaving in ways worthy of their having been admitted to Canada, to demonstrate what Kyriakidou (2020) calls their "deservingness" (p. 133). News story scripts might include topics such as participating in local public events or refugees supporting themselves through the

opening of small businesses. In this way, boundaries were drawn, and roles delineated such that good refugees acted in these specific ways, which could be rewarded with positive news coverage. This recognition can be important for establishing the legitimacy of refugees as members of the community because, in many cases, that "membership must be validated by the wider community or group to which one aspires to belong" (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p. 11). Among the widest means of producing validation is via the news media. Garnering positive media coverage can be considered a key checkpoint in gaining acceptance by the local community.

For instance, the mosque representative thought that coverage of refugees acting within the boundaries of valued behaviors created positive outcomes, saying that the local "news media has been very helpful" by producing refugee success stories (Male nonprofit 2) by producing refugee success stories. One example he gave was when Syrian newcomers were invited to be part of a national holiday event, and news outlets provided what he thought was positive coverage of their participation that "generated goodwill" by showing Syrians as part of the community. He found that when such news stories appeared, the mosque would receive an increase in calls from those who had seen or heard the coverage and wanted to help the refugees in some way. In other words, instead of emphasizing difference and conflict that often characterizes news coverage of refugees, the stories had legitimized the newcomers.

Other locals described how news coverage contributed to positive actions such as when a group of apartments occupied by refugees caught on fire and made some units uninhabitable. Stories prompted sympathy and donations, leading refugees to initially believe the news media in Canada could be a place to air problems and get help. Yet locals drew boundaries for the refugees about the appropriate times to ask the news media for publicity. A local official described what he called "managing communication realities" (Male local official 1) of the refugees' interactions with the news media. As a result of the fire, a refugee had hurried out of his apartment, leaving food on the kitchen counter and, when he was finally allowed to return to his home, discovered that mice had found the food and proceeded to infest the place. The official said, "He was going to make a big deal and wanted to go to the media" about the presence of rodents in his living space. Because of his role in the community, the local official had a highly tuned understanding of public opinion about the refugees and community perceptions of their deservingness. The refugee was advised that complaining publicly might result in negative attention to him rather than a solution, as he might be perceived as an ungrateful outsider. In fact, in a similar incident in Edmonton, a refugee who complained to the news media about bedbugs infecting their housing was heavily criticized by locals for being ungrateful in ways that left him distraught (Mouallem, 2018). Thus, refugees might be seen as belonging to the community that could step in to help, but only if they stayed within boundaries that were drawn by others and were sometimes invisible to them. In that light, the official sharing a script with the refugee might have been protecting him from negative judgements from the community. Thus, some scripts may help guide newcomers in directions that lead to belonging.

Even when local news articles were believed to be sympathetic, other elements of these public narratives, such as a news story's comment section, offered harsh criticisms, suggesting that refugees were not welcome and created a narrative of un-belonging. In *The Vancouver Sun* newspaper, an article about the refugees, titled, "Refugee family of nine struggles to find home" was a sympathetic reading of how difficult it could be for large families to find affordable large homes as these were not the norm in Canada. However, commenters offered a hostile reception with one writing in response to the article:

Poor freeloaders on welfare can't find a free place to live off taxpayers . . . send them to the Yukon. If things are so bad why don't you go home you free loaders . . . go get welfare in your own country.

Another commenter responded:

[W]hy should we build subsidized housing in the Lower Mainland for over-sized families? They chose to have seven. Even in their camp in Jordan, they chose to have a seventh child. If they want a huge family, fine, but immigration needs to accept that they will live in crowded quarters due to their personal life choices. It isn't up to the Canadian taxpayer to subsidize these sorts of choices.

Refugees read these comments and saw them as representing locals saying that they did not understand or accept the refugees and their culture and that they did not belong in Canada. One refugee said about the negative posts,

Some people don't like us. I never have a problem with them because they don't know us. They just [get] the idea from the media. People get an idea and don't research for themselves. Maybe it's Islamophobia from people, but actually he doesn't know you. (Male refugee 3)

A volunteer suggested refugees needed to be taught some form of news literacy to understand the difference between the news and the comments or perhaps simply be advised not to read the comments.

Volunteers and Scripts

Although we expect news media and other institutions to police borders, there was also interpersonal "everyday bordering" (Yuval-Davis et al., 2018, p. 229), which often remains invisible because of its ordinariness. In these instances, scripts drew borders erected by volunteers purporting to help the refugees, reinforcing how belonging can be limited even by those claiming to be the most hospitable and welcoming. One such script was specifically about the ownership and usage of communication devices. In an example of this script, a volunteer described a refugee mother from a very poor, rural area of Syria who was struggling to adjust. She did not understand how to use an ATM, so she gave her oldest son the debit card to manage. He and the three other youth in the family "went to the mall and bought an iPad, two cell phones and a laptop with that bank card" (Female volunteer/sponsor 2). Although they didn't ask the mother for approval, she said she didn't mind, thinking the children had found communication tools that could help them adapt. "She thinks it's good for them if they are on the Internet. They are learning how to use these devices." However, at a volunteer meeting, there was a "big outcry," and the volunteer was advised to tell the mother "that is not what is done in Canada" as the purchases made the family seem indulgent and lacking self-control. Access to tools that help them communicate were not seen as necessities but luxuries, even though most Canadians would never give up the same devices themselves. In these ways, some volunteers articulated a virtual checkpoint of self-abnegation that showed their lack of understanding about

the importance of digital devices in refugees' access to information and other resources, especially during their initial resettlement.

The volunteer said that this attitude was not uncommon among some Canadians, including those who were supposedly trying to help: "I found a lot of people were big on the should. 'They should do this, they should do that. They are in Canada now—they should do things the Canadian way.' Should, should, should. . . It's very paternalistic" (Female volunteer/sponsor 1). Similarly, some volunteers criticized the refugees for buying satellite dishes, which again, were viewed as extravagant and showed a lack of self-control. The critics did not bother to find out that the refugees saved money on Internet access with the dishes and that they helped fill many lonely hours. Thus, some Canadians saw hospitality as a form of policing community boundaries that they defined for the newcomers. Just as with the news coverage, refugees were expected to exhibit high levels of self-control, regulating their emotions and desires to pass a virtual checkpoint into the community.

Counter Scripts

Yet these scripts were sometimes challenged, as was seen at the workshop for volunteers and sponsors, which focused on the roles locals can play in fostering belonging. For example, the nonprofit personnel who ran the workshop urged attendees to be more thoughtful when sharing images of refugees on social media. They described a situation in which a volunteer's social media posts of a resettled refugee family receiving help from a local church were seen by extended family and friends back in Syria and wrongly assumed to show that the resettled refugees were converting to Christianity. The workshop conveners emphasized such a narrative could put relatives at risk of reprisals in Syria. Workshop conveners further admonished locals to treat refugees as deserving of respect and not as simply backdrops for social media posts, such as when locals posted images of themselves with Syrian families with captions calling them "my refugees" (Male nonprofit 1). In these ways, locals were shown how certain hospitality scripts could be disrespectful and even potentially dangerous for refugees. The workshop offered a counter script to the common view that those offering hospitality had the power and the right to bestow belonging on the Syrians, whose role in turn was to be grateful. Deploying former refugees as some of their main speakers, they showed how those who had been resettled were capable, competent members of the community. In this context, a counter script showed a path toward overcoming the cultural and social gaps between locals and refugees.

Conclusion

This study makes clear that rather than an all-or-nothing state—that is, one belongs or one does not—belonging begins incrementally from an initial stage in which newcomers and locals fill in the blanks of missing information as well as begin to develop affective connections and experience recognition. In this emergent stepping-stone process, fleeting contacts may blossom into small connections that can potentially grow into trusted bonds, leading refugees to feel at home in a new environment. In some cases, this is a liminal period of freedom in which refugees can make choices as to how they interact with their new neighbors and communities to create belonging.

Just as the efficiencies of digital communications may contribute to emergent belonging, they may also strengthen scripted belonging, with users seeking to prescribe "correct" practices for membership in the local community. Arguably, much of the refugee resettlement experience can be experienced as a series of scripts in which actors—both locals and refugees—are expected to play predictable parts. In this way, scripts can lessen agency for refugees and locals alike; however, scripts may not always be harmful. Just as Craigslist has clear scripts for participation that apply to everyone, and following these enables one to successfully take part in the online marketplace, so locally produced scripts may provide helpful road maps for newcomers. In such cases, checkpoints may also be entry points, fostering understanding in how to navigate relationships to successfully participate in the local community. On the other side of this relationship, scripts may guide locals in their interactions with resettled refugees as well as.

In sum, although communication plays a key role in the production and negotiation of refugee belonging, these processes cannot be reduced to the mere presence and usage of a digital device. The ways newcomers come to "feel at home" in a new country must be considered relationally within specific local contexts generated by refugees and community members.

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