Access denied: The challenges and barriers young adult refugees experience in attaining
postsecondary education in Canada

by

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Abstract

This study investigates the barriers faced by young adult refugees (YARs) in accessing higher education in Canada. Despite Canada's reputation as a refuge and its support for immigrants, YARs experience significant challenges due to interrupted schooling, financial constraints, language barriers, and difficulties in having their foreign academic credentials recognized. These refugees, a small segment of Canada's immigrant intake, face the lowest rates of postsecondary education access and higher dropout rates compared to other immigrants and Canadian-born students. Grounded in Critical Race Theory and Fanon's phenomenology, the study addresses two main questions: 1) What pathways to postsecondary education are available to YARs aged 18 to 35 in Canada? 2) How do YARs perceive and make sense of their experiences in the face of these barriers? To answer the research questions, this study draws on semi-structured qualitative data collected from interviews with fifteen YARs from Ontario and Alberta. Data was analyzed using the hermeneutic circle and Fanon's phenomenology to allow for a better understanding of how the phenomenon was experienced by individual participants. The findings reveal three main themes: constraints within the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program and neoliberal policies, systemic and individual racism, and gender-based limitations. The study argues that these barriers are deliberately embedded in Canada's immigration and educational systems, which prioritize economic immigrants and neglect the specific needs of refugees, thus impeding their access to higher education and career opportunities. This study calls for more inclusive immigration policies and enhanced support for adult refugee education by fostering better collaboration between educational institutions and the settlement sector, addressing systemic discrimination, and prioritizing the needs of refugees in policy and program planning.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Zahro Hassan. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "ACCESS DENIED: THE CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS YOUNG ADULT REFUGEES EXPERIENCE IN ACCESSING POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IN CANADA", No. Pro00104506, January 2, 2020.

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I would especially like to thank my research participants—thank you for entrusting me with your stories, aspirations, and providing me a glimpse into your reality. Your resilience and insights have been the heart of this dissertation, and I hope I have done justice to your experiences. Finally, to all those who have contributed to this dissertation and walked with me on this path, I offer my deepest thanks. This work is dedicated to those fighting for access to education and to everyone striving for equity and belonging.

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Land Acknowledgment

I am located on Treaty 6 territory, the traditional and ancestral territory of the Nêhiyaw (Cree), Dené, Anishinaabe (Saulteaux), Nakota Isga (Nakota Sioux), and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) nations. I acknowledge that this territory is home to the Métis Settlements and the Métis Nation of Alberta, Regions 2, 3, and 4, within the historical Northwest Métis Homeland. I acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit who have lived in and cared for these lands for generations and are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders who are still with us today and those who have gone before us. This acknowledgement is made as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on. As a refugee who has experienced displacement due to the legacy of colonization, I express gratitude for the opportunity to live, study, and work in these lands, marked by the footsteps of the First Peoples for centuries.

Labour Acknowledgment

I acknowledge the invaluable contributions of Black Canadians who have confronted the enduring legacy of transatlantic slavery and persistently faced challenges posed by systemic racism. Additionally, I recognize the hardships endured by new immigrants, particularly refugees, as they face the devaluation of their labour through processes of deskilling. Moreover, I acknowledge both past and present racialized workers whose labour has been and continues to be unjustly taken through exploitative practices. I also extend recognition to those whose labour remains hidden, yet significantly contributes to the well-being of our collective community.

Chapter 1: Introduction

My decision to embark on this research project was deeply influenced by the experiences of my family members and fellow members of the Somali community in Toronto. From an early age, I recognized the advantages of arriving in this country as a young refugee. Having come here at a young age, I had a well-outlined educational path—from elementary school to high school and eventually to postsecondary education. Following the conventional trajectory of traditional students, coupled with hard work and dedication, allowed me to achieve the level of desired success in my education.

Regrettably, the same structured path was not available to other family and community members who arrived as young adults. Their journey was riddled with obstacles. Some had prior postsecondary education, while others faced years of interruptions due to war and displacement. Regardless of their educational background, the limited options available to them in the early to mid-1990s in Toronto involved starting over from high school after completing numerous language courses. Many eventually abandoned the entire process and entered the workforce. Witnessing their experiences, filled with numerous challenges and disappointments, had a profound impact on me. It prompted me to question the system and the lack of programs and support available to them.

The disparity between their experiences and mine raised concerns about inequities in the higher education system. It seemed unjust that these young individuals, aged between their late teens and early thirties, were essentially compelled to exit the education system prematurely, being pushed towards a life of low-wage labour that could not adequately support themselves and their families. As I progressed in my studies over the years, these persistent questions became the driving force behind this research project.

Embarking on this research journey reveals that the challenges faced by people close to me and other young adult refugees persist nearly three decades later. As I engage with various immigrants today, it is very apparent the influence their migration classification has on their opportunities, or lack thereof. I have observed progress in integrating skilled workers into the workforce, witnessing my friends who are international students successfully completing their education and entering the workforce or the numerous foreign-trained newcomer professionals that I worked with in my various jobs. I have also observed limited progress in the case of young adult refugees. Many find themselves in the gig economy, undertaking roles such as Uber drivers or food delivery personnel. In Alberta, some are employed in the oil sector, with women often working as housekeepers and men in low-skilled manual positions. Despite their aspirations to return to school, conversations with these young adult refugees reveal significant challenges. Their demanding work schedules, financial responsibilities, and the extensive time required to fulfill postsecondary prerequisites create formidable barriers, making the prospect of returning to education appear exceedingly slim.

Context of the Study

> In 2016, less than 1% of refugee youth globally had access to higher education. A myriad of challenges account for this low rate, including learning gaps due to interrupted schooling, issues with academic credentials, financial constraints and limited fluency in the language of instruction. (Ferede, 2018, p. 6)

> Canada has historically served as a refuge for immigrants worldwide, attracting

individuals seeking education, employment, and an enhanced quality of life. Despite this, young adult refugees face challenges in securing employment and navigating pathways to postsecondary education. A significant proportion of them experience unemployment or

underemployment, encountering barriers to accessing higher education. This is typically attributed to a lack of recognition for their education and work experiences (Houle & Yssaad, 2010). Furthermore, while both economic immigrants and refugees may confront challenges related to credentialism, refugees encounter distinct difficulties as they report struggling to access "educational and identification documents from their countries of origin, which are required for post-secondary education applications" (Bajwa et al., 2017, p. 57). Even for those with appropriate documentation, their credentials are frequently deemed inadequate according to Canadian standards. The recognition rate for education and employment among refugees is below 15%, representing the lowest among all immigrant classes[1] (Houle & Yssaad, 2010). Additionally, immigrants in Canada are typically well-educated because the country's immigration system emphasizes education as a key selection criterion (Statistics Canada, 2023). While Statistics Canada does not clarify the specific immigrant classes included, it's evident that refugees are not part of this group, as they are not selected based on these criteria. Second-generation individuals also generally attain higher-than-average educational levels, shaped by their parents' significant educational achievements and the high expectations set by both their parents and themselves (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Refugees form the smallest segment within the annual intake of immigrants admitted to Canada, accounting for less than 12% of the total (Statistics Canada, 2017). According to Picot & Lu (2017), when contrasted with other immigrant classes, refugees encounter the lowest rates of access to postsecondary education in Canada. Further, YARs are also more prone to dropping out from both secondary and postsecondary institutions in comparison to refugees who arrived in Canada at a younger age or Canadian-born students. Given their exclusion from institutional

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[1] More recent data has not yet been released by Statistics Canada.

records, this challenge is further compounded by the absence of data and research on the extent of YARs' access to postsecondary education.

The actual figures for participation rates for YARs remain unknown, given the K-12 school system's absence of data collection on refugee designation across Canada (Ferede, 2010). Compounding this challenge is the lack of data on this group, particularly as most refugees arriving in Canada today have their refugee status replaced with permanent status upon arrival (Statistics Canada, 2017). Access to accurate data on refugees and higher education is crucial for comprehending how to enhance participation rates and reduce barriers. Increasing the participation rate in postsecondary education for refugees should stand as a pivotal element in Canada's efforts to support them. Therefore, "understanding and increasing refugees' participation in higher education is a natural extension of Canada's acclaimed humanitarian refugee resettlement efforts" (Ferede, 2010, p. 80).

A significant portion of the literature and policy discussions surrounding immigrants and their access to postsecondary education emphasize the recognition of their foreign credentials (Foster, 2006; Guo, 2015; Magro, 2009; Shan, 2009). In Canada, the majority of immigrants and refugees originate from developing nations and are people of colour who encounter structural barriers in gaining recognition for their education and work qualifications (Statistics Canada, 2019a; 2023). This challenge arises from the current credentialism process, which is criticized for devaluing non-Western countries' education systems (Foster, 2006). The obstacles to recognizing foreign credentials in Canada create a social problem, as immigrants and refugees, particularly from the 'global south,' struggle to secure employment in occupations that match their qualifications, unlike their counterparts with Canadian credentials (Elgersma, 2012; Foster, 2006; Guo, 2015; Houle & Yssaad, 2010; Magro, 2009; Shakya, et al, 2012; Shan, 2009,

Statistics Canada, 2023). Furthermore, the concept of "credentialism," which exclusively acknowledges formal qualifications, poses an additional disadvantage for refugees who have spent considerable time in transition countries, acquiring knowledge and skills in non-formal settings before resettlement. Credentialism is described as being present in educational requirements that strictly consider qualifications from "recognized" institutions or fail to acknowledge knowledge and skills obtained through non-formal education (Foster, 2006). Consequently, this practice unjustly excludes refugees who bring a wealth of experiences not recognized within the Canadian context (Guo, 2015; Magro, 2009; Shan, 2009). This research project aims to extend beyond the scope of credentialism by delving into the obstacles that YARs face in accessing postsecondary education. The objective is to illustrate these barriers from the perspective of YARs, offering a narrative that captures their unique experiences and challenges in accessing higher education.

Rationale for the Study

The rationale behind conducting this study lies in the exclusion of YARs from existing policy strategies, coupled with a notable lack of comprehensive knowledge about this demographic. Additionally, advocating for and facilitating their access to postsecondary education aligns with the responsibilities of the Canadian state. This section aims to articulate why research on postsecondary access for YARs is essential and delineate the specific gaps in knowledge that the study attempts to address.

Missing from policy discussions

The primary rationale underpinning this research lies in the notable absence of discussions on higher education for refugees within current policy discourse. Given Canada's dependence on immigrants for both population and economic growth, addressing this gap

becomes important. The demographic landscape poses challenges with a diminishing working-age population, coupled with a projected increase in the population over 65 from 16% in 2015 to 23% in 2030, aligning with trends observed in various OECD countries (Advisory Council on Economic Growth, 2017). Compounding this issue is the decline in the Canadian birth rate, prompting the Canadian government to adopt a strategic approach aimed at attracting young foreign talent. This strategy aims to counteract the impact of an aging population on the economy. To implement this strategy, the federal government has been actively devising plans to recruit immigrants, primarily within the economic class, encompassing both permanent residents and temporary foreign workers. In 2016, recognizing the importance of addressing economic growth, the federal Minister of Finance established the Advisory Council on Economic Growth. Despite the emphasis on attracting and integrating immigrants, particularly within the economic class, this research underscores the conspicuous absence of considerations for higher education for refugees in these policy discussions.

The most relevant report to this research project is '*Attracting the talent Canada needs through immigration*' (Advisory Council on Economic Growth, 2017). Within this document, the Advisory Council on Economic Growth has outlined four recommendations to recruit "talented" immigrants and "create conditions for successful economic integration" (p. 2). The recommendations include gradually increasing permanent immigration to 450 thousand per year over the next five years, facilitating entry for top talent, qualifying more international students for permanent residency, and improving national accreditation standards. These suggestions concentrate on extending permanent residency to economic immigrants and international students studying in Canada. However, refugees find little mention in this discourse, being referred to only twice in the report. Firstly, refugees are mentioned to assure that an increase in

economic immigrants will not be offset by a decrease in other immigrant classes, including refugees, emphasizing that it "would be a net addition to existing flows" (p. 5). Secondly, the report cites the example of the immigration intake growing from 271,000 in 2015 to an estimated 300,000 in 2016 due to Canada accepting 25,000 Syrian refugees. This example is used to argue that the current immigration system can accommodate a large increase in annual immigration levels. Even in the Advisory Council on Economic Growth (2017)'s latest report, titled '*The path to prosperity: Resetting Canada's growth trajectory'*, there is an absence of any mention of refugees. There is no exploration of how refugees can contribute to Canada's economic growth or how to support them in making such contributions. While the 2017 report alludes to immigrants and their potential economic contributions, the primary focus remains on attracting and integrating economic immigrants into the Canadian economy.

Refugees are also conspicuously absent from policy discussions relating to education and work experience recognition. In Canada, the recognition of education credentials and work experience is a decentralized process involving numerous stakeholders, which introduces great complexity. As per the Canadian Constitution, education responsibilities, including licensing trades and professions, lie within the purview of the provinces (Elgersma, 2012). However, the federal government and various stakeholders play a role in qualification recognition. The landscape involves around "500 regulatory bodies governing 55 professions, and 13 provincial and territorial apprenticeship authorities governing approximately 50 trades" (Elgersma, 2012, p. 3). Notably, regulated trades constitute less than 20% of Canada's labour market, with the remaining 80% of occupations evaluated by employers (Advisory Council on Economic Growth, 2017; Houle & Yssaad, 2010).

Credential and work experience recognition programs often target individuals arriving in Canada through the Federal Skilled Worker (FSW) program, which includes economic immigrants. A recent study indicates that the recognition rate for individuals under the FSW program was 38% for credentials and 51% for work experience (Houle & Yssaad, 2010). In stark contrast, the recognition rate for refugees was less than 15%.

Furthermore, immigrants and refugees seeking employment in unregulated occupations are at the discretion of employers who determine whether to recognize foreign qualifications. This poses potential challenges, as employers may lean towards hiring Canadian-born candidates over immigrants or refugees for various reasons. Factors contributing to this preference include concerns that immigrant skills may not be directly applicable in Canada, perceptions of certain foreign credentials, particularly from the 'global south,' as inferior to domestic qualifications, a preference for candidates with Canadian work experience, potential language barriers, discrimination, and a lack of information among Canadian employers regarding the education and experience of today's immigrants (Elgersma, 2012). Given the significance of employment in newcomers' integration and livelihoods, leaving this process in the hands of employers who may not fully comprehend or value their education, culture, and experiences is a potential concern.

Canada has more than 200 accredited post-secondary institutions responsible for evaluating immigrant and refugee education or credentials to facilitate their access to various programs (Elgersma, 2012). Acknowledging the challenges, both federal and provincial governments have expressed commitment to resolving these issues in collaboration with key stakeholders (Alberta Advanced Education, 2005; Elgersma, 2012). Despite these efforts, government initiatives have predominantly concentrated on aiding immigrants under the

economic class, sidelining refugees who represent a particularly vulnerable and needy group (Advisory Council on Economic Growth, 2017). This selective focus is problematic because the most substantial educational support provided by both federal and provincial governments to newcomers lies in the realm of credential recognition. Credential recognition stands as one of the most significant access points for newcomers seeking to pursue or advance their postsecondary education. The exclusion of refugees from this critical process implies a lack of substantial support for their postsecondary access. Combined with their exclusion from immigration and economic growth policy discussions, refugees find themselves marginalized in conversations regarding educational and employment access. Consequently, there is a pressing need for further research to explore how YARs construct meaning and navigate this realization, examining the pathways they create for themselves in pursuit of postsecondary education access.

Limited information on YARs

The second rationale underscores the insufficient knowledge regarding YARs and their engagement in postsecondary education. Existing literature on refugees and postsecondary access is notably scarce (Ferede, 2010). The closest available data pertains to refugees who arrived in Canada during childhood or youth and underwent the K-12 education system (Finnie et al, 2015; Hira-Friesen et al, 2013; Murdoch et al, 2016; Robson et al, 2018; Schroeter & James, 2015; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Wilkinson, 2008). However, even within this group, data is constrained due to the absence of statistics collected by schools based on citizenship status (Ferede, 2010). Furthermore, the majority of refugees resettled in Canada attain permanent residency status upon arrival (Statistics Canada, 2017). This status, however, does not effectively distinguish refugees, as immigrants in other categories similarly acquire permanent residency before obtaining Canadian citizenship (Statistics Canada, 2020c). The next available data source

offering a glimpse into the intersection of refugees and higher education revolves around statistics on second-generation Canadians. However, this data also falls short of providing comprehensive insights into YARs, as it predominantly addresses individuals who are children of immigrant parents or those who arrived in Canada as young children (Murdoch et al, 2016).

There is limited information on the educational attainment of young adult refugees. Statistics Canada, which collects, analyzes, and disseminates data on Canada's population, has provided some insights into refugees' experiences upon resettlement. For instance, it has conducted studies on the Black population in Canada, including an overview of population makeup (2019), the socioeconomic status of the Black population (2020), and experiences of discrimination (2022). However, these reports generally do not differentiate between various immigration categories.

The report on the socioeconomic situation of the Black population from 2001 to 2006 briefly notes that a significant portion of this group consists of refugees. According to the 2016 Census, about 40% of Black African immigrants admitted to Canada at age 25 or older since 1980, and who were aged 25 to 59 in 2016, came as refugees (Statistics Canada, 2020c). It also highlights disparities in educational attainment based on country of origin, with only 40% or fewer of immigrants from Somalia or Eritrea having a postsecondary diploma, compared to over 80% among immigrants from countries like Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, and Nigeria (Statistics Canada, 2020c, p. 13). The report suggests that the immigration category, such as being admitted as a refugee versus as an international student, may contribute to these differences. However, beyond this, the report provides limited insights into refugees' access to postsecondary education, as it does not break down data by specific immigrant categories.

Statistics Canada has also provided demographic information on Syrian refugees resettled in 2015 and 2016, the two years that saw the largest admission of Syrian refugees. This report gives a glimpse of their educational levels upon arrival, stating that "the educational profile of Syrian refugees was similar to that of refugees from other countries; in both cases, approximately one-half did not have a certificate, diploma or degree" (Statistics Canada, 2019c, p. 6). It further notes that privately sponsored Syrian refugees were more likely to have a university degree than other refugee groups, including those that are privately sponsored. While these profiles of the Black and Syrian populations provide a snapshot of the educational levels refugees arrive with, they offer little insight into how refugees can further their education after resettlement.

A more recent report from 2021 examining educational attainment and occupational outcomes among racialized populations found that Southeast Asian people had lower education levels, with 21.7% lacking both a high school diploma and postsecondary credential—more than any other racialized group (Statistics Canada, 2023). This lower attainment is attributed to many Southeast Asians arriving as refugees in 1979 and the 1980s. The report highlights significant educational progress between refugee parents and their second-generation children, particularly among Southeast Asian and South Asian populations in Canada, including those born in Sri Lanka (Statistics Canada, 2023). Despite the low educational attainment of the first generation, many of whom were refugees, their children achieved much higher levels of education, suggesting the second generation builds upon the foundations laid by their parents and overcomes initial disadvantages. However, the report does not indicate whether young adult refugees or these refugee parents were able to pursue further education upon resettlement, only that their children were able to do so.

The absence of data on refugees and their access to postsecondary education poses a challenge for both researchers and policymakers. This gap is particularly pronounced for YARs who are not included in any institutional data. Unlike children and youth attending K-12 schooling, institutions catering to YARs do not systematically collect specific immigration-related data, and if they do, there is a lack of coordination across various institutions. Importantly, there is no government mandate compelling such data collection. Furthermore, even within the K-12 system, there is no data specifically focused on refugee students. Dr. James, who works extensively with Black youth in Toronto, highlights this issue by noting that despite the distinct experiences of refugees, these differences are often overlooked. He states, "since for the most part unless students are from known refugee-producing countries like Somalia, Sudan, and Ethiopia, educators and others tend to treat them as immigrants" (James, 2012, p. 486). This tendency to group refugees with other immigrant categories obscures their unique experiences and challenges.

The situation is further complicated by the absence of clear government policies and strategies at both the federal and provincial levels regarding adult refugees' access to postsecondary education. Without a government mandate for collecting and maintaining data on this population, institutions have little incentive to do so. This research is crucial in shedding light on this neglected area, addressing a significant gap in understanding, and highlighting the need for more comprehensive data collection and policy development.

Canada's Ethical Obligation

The final rationale for this research lies in the ethical responsibility of the Canadian state to aid refugees in their integration into both society and the economy. Canada's historical commitment to addressing the needs of various vulnerable groups on humanitarian grounds is

evident. However, the nation also bears the burden of a dark history of exclusion and rejection, as exemplified by the reluctance to admit Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution in the 1940s, epitomized by the chilling statement, "none is too many" (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2009). In contemporary times, Canada has evolved into a global leader in refugee resettlement, extending its humanitarian efforts beyond the opening of doors to encompass a level of integration and resettlement programs. Given that immigration falls under federal jurisdiction, the federal government plays a pivotal role in the resettlement of refugees. The Resettlement Assistance Program reflects this commitment by offering "welcome at ports of entry to the country, housing assistance, and a basic orientation to Canada that focuses primarily on employment guidance and language instruction for adults" (Ferede, 2010, p. 17). However, a critical gap exists in the form of an official policy or mandate to assist refugees in higher educational access or participation. Since 1996, the policy focus has skewed towards attracting already educated immigrants and facilitating foreign-credential recognition, neglecting active engagement with newcomers to pursue Canadian higher education. The federal stance on this issue presents a paradox—whether it views facilitating postsecondary access as beyond its mandate, regards refugees as not requiring education, or deems the influx of highly educated immigrants as satisfactory. This ambiguity contradicts Canada's portrayal as a humanitarian nation, raising questions about its commitment to supporting refugees in accessing higher education.

Additionally, Canada recognizes refugee access to education as a fundamental right. While primary and secondary education are commonly associated with this right, it's important to note that postsecondary education is also affirmed as a right in several international declarations. For instance, Article 26 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts

that "technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit" (Rights to Education Project, 2014, p. 1). Moreover, various international treaties such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and other UN declarations emphasize the accessibility of higher or postsecondary education to all individuals (refer to Appendix A for a list of declarations). Canada, as a signatory to these declarations, bears the responsibility to ensure their implementation. Additionally, Canada is also a signatory to several Organisation of American States declarations, including the Charter of the Organisation of American States, which explicitly states that "higher education shall be available to all" (Rights to Education Project, 2014, p. 30). Therefore, by endorsing these declarations, the Canadian government is obligated to develop and implement strategies that fulfill the mandates of these international frameworks.

In Canada's knowledge-based economy, YARs face limited employment opportunities without education beyond high school (Clifton, 2010; Berger et al, 2009). The correlation between postsecondary education and employability is robust (Berger et al, 2009). As Canada continues to welcome and resettle more refugees, a comprehensive plan is essential to guide their integration into the labour market. The lack of a clear strategy for postsecondary education and training leaves refugees vulnerable to being relegated to low-wage jobs.

Research Question

This research aims to explore the barriers and challenges faced by young adult refugees as they strive to pursue further education and access postsecondary opportunities post-migration. The research questions are as follows:

1) What avenues for postsecondary education are accessible to YARs, between 18 and 35

years old, in Canada?

2) How do YARs make meaning of their present circumstances in light of the barriers

they confront?

The study will centre on the experiences of YARs aged 18-35 from various countries who have

witnessed significant population displacement due to civil wars. The rationale for selecting this

specific demographic will be expounded upon in the methodology in chapter four.

Significance of the Study

In Canada, evidence on educational pathways for refugees is particularly thin because

the education sector does not collect or consider data about pre-migration experiences or

arrival immigration status. Instead, sector level data on educational experiences tend to

lump refugees into a single category of "foreign-born" or "immigrants. (Shakya, et al,

2012, p. 66)

The study holds both methodological and substantive significance. In terms of content,

there is a notable gap in knowledge regarding the experiences of YARs in higher education, as

they are often overlooked in policy discussions and existing literature. The predominant focus in

current research centres around issues such as trauma, service access, language barriers, and

settlement challenges, leaving a significant void in understanding the higher education

aspirations and obstacles faced by this population (Edge & Newbold, 2013; Francis & Yan,

2016; Gibb, 2008; Salehi, 2010; Sheikh-Mohammed et al, 2006). Limited literature, such as

Shakya et al. (2012) and Magro (2009), begins to touch upon challenges faced by older teens and

young adult refugees, but comprehensive exploration within the context of postsecondary

education access is lacking.

Methodologically, the study addresses this gap by focusing exclusively on the narratives of YARs as they articulate their challenges in accessing postsecondary education. While other studies, such as Magro (2009), offer insights into settlement challenges, the scope of her research is broad and covers various aspects of refugees' experiences. This project, however, narrows its focus to provide detailed documentation of the challenges faced by YARs specifically in the realm of postsecondary education. By doing so, it aims to contribute substantially to the existing literature, offering a nuanced understanding of the barriers this demographic encounters. The ultimate goal is to inform policy solutions at multiple levels, including ministerial, both federal and provincial, and institutional, thereby addressing the gaps in existing policies and practices related to YARs and higher education.

Outline of Thesis

In chapter two, the literature review situates refugees within the framework of Canadian immigration policy, offering insights into the evolving landscape of refugee resettlement including how refugees are often overlooked in both immigration and education policy, despite their unique challenges and needs. Chapter three establishes the theoretical foundation of the study by introducing Critical Race Theory and its relevance to understanding the exclusion of young adult refugees from educational opportunities in Canada. It explores the critical lens provided by CRT in unpacking the systemic issues at play. The methodology discussion in chapter four delves into the research approach adopted, focusing on Phenomenology as the chosen methodology. It provides an examination of Phenomenological research and its suitability for exploring the experiences of young adult refugees in accessing education. Chapters five, six, and seven discuss the research findings, structured around three primary themes: financial pressures, insufficient pathways and support, and the intersecting experiences of women. Each

chapter provides a thorough examination of these themes, delving deeply into their respective

complexities, and drawing insights from participant narratives. The concluding chapter

summarizes the key findings of the study, theoretical and methodological approach, discusses

their implications for policy and practice, and suggests directions for future research to address

the challenges faced by young adult refugees in accessing education in Canada.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review aims to untangle the intricate web affecting YARs' entry into higher education in Canada by exploring interconnected themes evident in scholarly discourse. At the heart of this complex landscape is the confluence of policies, societal perspectives, and systemic hurdles shaping access to postsecondary education for YARs. To grasp the nuanced dynamics of this intersection, an extensive investigation of several critical themes is required. These include examining the placement of refugees within Canada's immigration framework, tracing the historical trajectory of refugee policies, analysing challenges within this system, and identifying systemic barriers impacting educational opportunities. First, this review delves into the burgeoning realm of refugee private sponsorship programs, propelled by recent policies and the reconfiguration of Canada's humanitarian responsibilities. It aims to dissect how these policy shifts have altered refugee resettlement and subsequently affected refugee educational pathways. Second, it explores the bifurcated depiction of immigrants, distinguishing between highly-skilled, highly-educated economic immigrants and refugees who are often portrayed as low-skilled and low-educated. This exploration aims to underscore the repercussions of such categorization, revealing how it excludes refugees from inclusion in educational and employment policies intended for newcomers. Third, the review scrutinizes the landscape of postsecondary education for adult learners in Canada, providing essential context to understand the challenges and opportunities within the educational system. By analysing these themes, this literature review endeavours to offer an in-depth understanding of the complex interplay between immigration policies, societal perceptions, and systemic barriers influencing YAR's access to higher education in Canada. Through synthesizing existing literature, it aims to highlight crucial areas necessitating attention and set the groundwork for this research project.

Situating Refugees in the Canadian Immigration System

Canada's history of welcoming refugees and demonstrating commitment to humanitarian causes has undergone significant changes, particularly with the implementation of the point system, which has profoundly shaped the country's immigration landscape (George & Chaze, 2012; Shan, 2009; White et al., 2015). This evolution has resulted in a decrease in the admission of refugee immigrants, while emphasizing the importance of economic class immigrants for population growth and economic development (Green & Green, 1999). The Canadian immigration system includes various classifications, such as permanent and temporary statuses, categorizing immigrants based on their migration applications. Notably, immigrants are admitted under categories such as family reunification, economic migrants (including students and workers), or due to human rights violations in their home country, which encompasses refugees. Refugees, as defined by the UN and Canada, are individuals unable to return to their home country due to human rights abuses, including persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, political opinion, or personal impact from civil war, armed conflict, or widespread human rights violations (Statistics Canada, 2018).

Distinguishing between economic immigrants and refugees is crucial due to the fundamentally different reasons for their migration and the distinct support they require. Economic immigrants are selected based on their potential to contribute to Canada's economy, often meeting labour market needs or investing in businesses (Statistics Canada, 2023). They typically arrive with the resources, skills, and intent to integrate into the workforce promptly. In contrast, refugees are granted permanent residency due to a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm in their home country. They often arrive with limited resources, disrupted education, or traumatic experiences (Statistics Canada, 2023). This distinction highlights the

need for tailored support systems, as refugees face unique challenges in accessing education, employment, and integration, which differ significantly from those of economic immigrants.

Presently, the world faces unprecedented levels of forced displacement, with over 65 million people experiencing it in 2016, surging to 70.8 million in 2018, a figure that doubled over the past 20 years (Edwards, 2019). Despite these distressing numbers, only 92,000 refugees were resettled in Canada in 2018, a decline from 103,000 in 2017 and a record high of 189,000 in 2016 (Radford & Connor, 2019). As global crises intensify—political, economic, environmental, and human rights—the leading refugee resettlement countries are increasingly closing their borders. Nonetheless, Canada, while following a similar trajectory as other nations, has maintained a consistent annual resettlement of refugees, surpassing the United States for the first time in 2018.

Canada has long been a sanctuary for immigrants, particularly refugees who, amongst safety and security, are seeking opportunities in education, employment, and a better life. However, upon resettlement in Canada, many refugees face significant challenges regarding education and employment (Anisef et al., 2008; Bajwa et al., 2017; Elzinga & Morrow, 2004; Kirby, 2007; Koehler & Schneider, 2019; Lippert, 2006; Stevenson & Baker, 2018). These challenges are largely attributed to Canada's immigration policy, which actively prioritizes the recruitment of skilled immigrants under the economic class and utilizing the Comprehensive Ranking System (or points system), favouring individuals who are already educated and possess financial resources to contribute to the economy (Advisory Council on Economic Growth, 2016, 2017; Akbari & Aydede, 2013; Chen et al., 2010; Guo, 2015).

Canada historically favoured immigration based on ethnic preferences, recruiting European immigrants for settlement (Li, 2000; Shan, 2009; Triadafilopoulos, 2022). However,

with a declining number of immigrants from Western countries, Canadian immigration policy shifted its focus to attract skilled immigrants from non-Western regions such as Asia, Africa, South, and Central America (Chen et al., 2010; Shan, 2009). The adoption of the 'point system' in 1967 revolutionized immigrant selection, introducing stringent standards based on education, language proficiency, skills, and pre-arranged employment (George & Chaze, 2012; Shan, 2009; White et al., 2015). Immigrants received points in each category, determining their eligibility to immigrate and adapt to Canadian society.

The Immigration Act of 1976 and its accompanying 1978 regulations laid the foundation for Canada's modern immigration system. Incorporating various immigration categories such as family reunification, humanitarian protection, and economic self-interest, the Act mandated the federal government's annual consultations with provinces and relevant stakeholders to determine immigrant admission numbers. These reforms were a response to historical fluctuations in immigration levels, influenced by economic and global migration patterns. The restructuring aimed to create a more responsive relationship between immigration and the economic landscape, recognizing the elevated priority of the economic class over other categories (Esses & Abelson, 2017).

The recalibration was essential due to the pivotal role of the economic class, particularly under the Federal skilled program, in bolstering Canada's economic prosperity. These reforms sought to establish a hierarchy acknowledging the importance of economic immigrants, aligning with the nation's shift from a resource-based economy towards a modern manufacturing economy (Green & Green, 1999). However, challenges arose from the initial point system, mainly its short-term focus when projecting targeted immigration numbers, and its failure to

account for family reunification desires among economic immigrants admitted under the Federal Skilled Workers program.

During this period, the government expressed a commitment to resettling a substantial number of refugees annually, moving away from an emergency-focused approach (Green & Green, 1999). Yet, the pronounced focus on family reunification, alongside a lesser emphasis on the humanitarian class, posed challenges in balancing these priorities against labour needs and economic requirements. This initially led to significant delays in the arrival of sponsored family-class immigrants, allowing successive expansions in economic immigration over multiple years.

The immigration system encountered further complexities as family-class immigration numbers eventually caught up, reinstating a consistent ratio between immigration categories (Green & Green, 1999). However, this surge in the family class also resulted in considerable processing backlogs, seen as a destabilizing factor in immigration policy, eventually prompting a freeze on economic immigrants in 1982, except for those securing employment. The conflicting priorities of family reunification and labour market needs demanded careful policy considerations.

Amid dissatisfaction voiced by provinces and economic sectors regarding the immigration system's failure to obtain targeted, skilled labour, new initiatives emerged, such as the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) and the Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW) programs, alongside international student inclusion. These programs gained traction, allowing provinces and employers to select immigrants based on specific market needs, ultimately accounting for about 50% of all economic immigrants admitted to Canada by 2012 (Esses & Abelson, 2017).

The evolution of Canada's immigration system, prioritizing economic immigration and labour market needs over humanitarian concerns, spurred a significant shift in the country's

approach to refugee resettlement. As the economic class gained precedence, correlating with a

decline in refugee admissions, a pivotal shift occurred in the country's approach to refugee

resettlement. However, this shift also heralded the rise of private sponsorship programs for

refugees, catalyzed by liberal policies and a recalibration of Canada's humanitarian ethos. These

initiatives have significantly reshaped the landscape of refugee resettlement within the country.

Private Sponsorship Program: An Overview

Canada's history of refugee resettlement has been significantly shaped by the private

sponsorship program, which gained particular prominence during the influx of Mainland

Southeast Asia refugees in the late 1970s and early 1980s and involved 7,000 sponsoring groups

(Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2020). In recent times, the private sponsorship

program has once again taken centre stage, notably with the substantial resettlement of Syrian

refugees after the federal government pledged to bring 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of

2015 (Hyndman et al., 2017). Since 2015, private citizens have stepped forward to sponsor an

impressive total of 62,000 Syrian refugees, with the involvement of 117 incorporated

organizations and 2 million Canadians personally engaged in the resettlement efforts

(Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2020).

From the government's viewpoint, the success of Canada's private sponsorship program is

evident in the statistics, with over 327,000 refugees embraced by private sponsors since 1979.

(Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2020). This is in addition to those resettled with

government funding. The program has received praise from various sources, including being the

only country to be awarded the Nansen Medal, the highest award given by the United Nations for

aiding refugees (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2020) and providing private

citizens and civil society the opportunity to contribute to refugee protection (Agrawal, 2018; Elcioglu, 2021; Hyndman et al., 2017)

Private refugee sponsorship in Canada encompasses several types, each with its unique characteristics and requirements. The largest group falls under the Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH) who are incorporated organizations that entered into a formal sponsorship agreement with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (Chapman, 2014; Government of Canada, 2018). These organizations are often religious, ethnocultural, community, or service-based groups. A SAH can authorize Constituent Groups to sponsor refugees and they bear overall responsibility for managing sponsorships under their agreement (Government of Canada, 2018).

The two other categories are Community Sponsors and Groups of Five (Government of Canada, 2018; Hyndman, 2016). Community Sponsors refer to any local organization, association, or corporation situated in the community where the refugees are anticipated to reside. They assume financial liability for the sponsored refugees and also are expected to have a settlement plan in place. The Group of Five consists of five or more Canadian citizens or permanent residents aged 18 and above who collectively take on complete responsibility for resettling refugees. Like Community Sponsors, they must demonstrate their readiness and capability to provide financial and social support to the refugees they are sponsoring (Agrawal, 2018; Government of Canada, 2018; Hyndman, 2016; Kaida et al., 2020).

The private sponsorship program in Canada relies on private funding, where Canadian citizens and permanent residents voluntarily take on the responsibility of financially and logistically supporting refugees in their settlement process. During the initial year of refugee resettlement, sponsors have a wide range of responsibilities. These include offering financial

support for living expenses, supplying necessary clothing and household items, arranging interpreters, helping with healthcare coverage, facilitating the enrolment of children in schools and adults in language training courses, and assisting with community integration efforts (Government of Canada, nd).

This program can allow for increased engagement between Canadian citizens and newly arrived refugees, fostering positive relationships between the two groups (Hynie et al., 2019). Furthermore, private sponsorship has the potential to yield improved outcomes for refugees during their settlement; for example, they gain access to greater social capital through their interactions with sponsors (Hyndman et al., 2017). The success of Canada's private sponsorship program has garnered interest from other countries, such as Germany, France, and the UK, who are implementing or testing similar initiatives (Kaida et al., 2020). The European Union is also exploring strategies to promote private sponsorship across its member countries (Hyndman et al., 2017; Kaida et al., 2020)

However, Ritchie (2018) argues that private resettlement should be viewed as a project influenced by social class, utilizing humanitarian narratives to promote neoliberal ideals that advocate for a reduced role of the government in social reproduction. Neoliberalism is a contested term with countless definitions but is often associated with limited government intervention and free-market ideology. Wendy Brown (2015) describes neoliberalism as a "loose and shifting signifier" (p. 20). She argues that neoliberal rationality spreads the model and mindset of the market to all domains and activities, regardless of whether money is directly involved. This means that even in areas where monetary transactions are not the primary concern, neoliberalism still shapes human behaviour and interactions by framing individuals as market actors, consistently and comprehensively, leading to the pervasive presence of the

economic model and the depiction of human beings as homo economicus, or economic beings, in all facets of life. At its core, neoliberalism embodies an 'economizing rationality' through which individuals, institutions, and even non-economic spheres are interpreted and managed according to market dynamics.

Canada's private refugee sponsorship program and policies are structured around a neoliberal framework, advocating for reduced state involvement in refugee resettlement and encouraging citizens to assume greater responsibility. This approach not only shifts the burden onto individuals and communities but also raises concerns about the delegation of responsibilities typically associated with the state's domain in addressing complex social issues. Ritchie (2018) contends that transferring the responsibility and commitment of refugee resettlement to private citizens can undermine Canada's humanitarian obligations. Initially, the government committed to resettling one refugee for each privately sponsored individual (Hyndman et al., 2017). However, since 2017, the number of refugees settled through private sponsorship has exceeded those assisted by the government (Hyndman et al., 2017).

In 2013, amendments were made to the private sponsorship legislation, leading to the establishment of the Blended-Visa Office Referred (BVOR) program, which aimed to fulfill the government's commitment to refugee resettlement. This initiative involves matching private sponsors with refugees referred by the UNHCR. The federal government provides up to 6 months of income support while private sponsors are responsible for offering an additional 6 months of financial assistance, startup expenses, and up to a year of social and emotional support (Government of Canada, 2018). Sponsors do not have the freedom to select refugees and are encouraged to review each refugee's profile to determine compatibility (Hyndman et al., 2017). While the program has been successful, it has received criticism for not raising the annual limit

of admitted refugees. Additionally, some argue that the BVOR program allows the government to shift the burden of responsibility for refugees onto private individuals, as these refugees would have otherwise been resettled by the government (Chapman, 2014).

PSRs versus GARs

The effectiveness of the Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) compared to the Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) program in promoting short and long-term adaptation and integration has been a topic of discussion and study. Researchers have found that the PSR program is more effective in helping the initial resettlement of refugees (Agrawal, 2018; Hyndman, 2016; Hynie et al., 2019; Kaida et al., 2020; Prokopenko, 2018). There are three main factors that are attributed to the initial success of PSRs vs GARs.

First, PSRs bring with them higher human capital. PSRs reported knowing at least one official language compared to GARs and BVOR (Hyndman, 2016; Prokopenko, 2018). PSRs also had higher education qualifications upon arrival than GARs, with one study documenting as much as nine more years of formal education (Hyndman, 2016). Being more fluent in one of the official languages and having higher education/training allows PSRs to find employment quicker than GARs. Hyndman (2016) also found that 79% of GARs did not find employment prior to the end of their first year, compared to 34% of PSRs. It is important to note one of the primary reasons why GARs have lower employment rates in their initial years is that they are focusing on language training as they are less likely to know one of the official languages.

The second reason can be attributed to the demographic makeup of PSRs. PSRs are more likely to be single adults, 57% vs. 47% of GARs, thus allowing them mobility to pursue economic opportunities (Hynie et al., 2019). GARs are selected by their vulnerability criteria set out by the UNHCR and have higher needs (Hyndman, 2016; Hynie et al., 2019).

The final factor is that PSRs have access to more social capital when they arrive in Canada. Their sponsors, either through communities/organizations or private individuals, give them access to social networks. Their private sponsors are also more likely to prioritize finding employment and self-sufficiency (Kaida et al., 2020). GARs, on the other hand, are encouraged to enrol in language or educational training programs while receiving resettlement assistance from the government (Hyndman, 2016). Although both PSRs and GARs receive employment and language training services, GARs are less likely to be referred to employment services. During the initial years, PSRs surpassed GARs in terms of their higher levels of human and social capital, resulting in better outcomes. However, over time, the disparity diminishes, and there is little divergence in employment and earning rates between the two groups (Hyndman, 2016; Hynie et al., 2019; Kaida et al., 2020). The effectiveness of the Private Sponsorship Program stems from leveraging the social networks of private citizens, facilitating expedited employment opportunities. However, there are ongoing debates about the government's reduced role in resettlement, potentially shifting the responsibility entirely to private citizens, which could strain Canada's humanitarian commitments made through upholding the UN refugee convention and promising to resettle a certain number of refugees per year.

However, ongoing debates persist regarding the government's reduced involvement in refugee resettlement, potentially transferring the responsibility entirely to private citizens. This transition could strain Canada's humanitarian obligations, established through its commitment to uphold the UN Refugee Convention and its promise to annually resettle and support a designated number of refugees.

Moreover, Canada, while resettling a significant number of refugees in comparison to other Western countries, predominantly admits the economic class as the largest group of

immigrants, with refugees constituting just under 14.5% (Statistics Canada, 2019a). The nation openly welcomes and focuses on economic migrants, favouring skilled immigrants who bring perceived value and human capital. This approach prioritizes recognizing education and work credentials over supporting newcomers with education gaps or without prior education, a consequence of Canada's system actively recruiting highly skilled immigrants. Consequently, this creates a divided perception of immigrants, where economic immigrants are viewed as highly skilled and educated, while refugees are seen as less skilled and less educated.

A Bifurcated Conceptualization of Immigrants

The research literature surrounding immigrants and their access to higher education mainly centres on validating their overseas qualifications (Akbari & Aydede, 2013; Chen et al., 2010; Elgersma, 2012; Foster, 2006; George & Chaze, 2012; Guo, 2015; Shan, 2009; Somerville & Walsworth, 2009; White et al., 2015). Immigrants encounter substantial hurdles in having their educational and professional competencies acknowledged, resulting in a demeaning process for non-Western nations that lack accreditation (Foster, 2006). These obstacles in credential recognition contribute to challenges in labour market integration when immigrants struggle to secure roles matching their qualifications compared to those with Canadian credentials.

Refugees, facing abrupt displacement, experience amplified challenges. They often lack the necessary documents from their home countries to validate their education credentials (Bajwa et al., 2017). Even with appropriate documentation, their credentials frequently fail to meet Canadian standards, leading to a recognition rate for education and employment of less than 15%, the lowest among immigrant classes (Houle & Yssaad, 2010). Young adult refugees, arriving with disrupted education and limited networks, are particularly disadvantaged (Houle & Yssaad, 2010; Neupane, 2012; Shakya et al., 2010, 2012; Tossutti, 2011). Additionally, the

emphasis on credentialism, which exclusively acknowledges academic or formal qualifications, further disadvantages refugees who spent extensive time in a transitional country, engaging in non-formal learning or work before resettlement. According to Foster (2006), credentialism is delineated as "found in educational requirements that are constrained by a practice of considering only 'recognized' educational institutions, or that do not recognize knowledge, and skills acquired through means other than formal education" (pp. 284-85). As Canadian immigration policy heavily leans towards economic immigrants, credentialism is employed as a mechanism to appraise immigrants, consequently solidifying certain ideologies and perpetuating the division. It's important to acknowledge that institutions have the ability to pause requirements for credentials or modify their credentialing procedures as needed, such as in the case of visa waivers, etc.

Economic Immigrants as Highly Skilled, Highly Educated

In Canada, the economic immigrant category encompasses various groups, including skilled workers such as startup entrepreneurs, individuals with Canadian work experience, federal skilled workers, investors, entrepreneurs, and provincial nominees. Additionally, this class incorporates Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) who often lack pathways to citizenship and are often susceptible to exploitation (Choudry & Smith; 2016; Clifton, 2010; Thobani, 2007). These workers are typically permitted to stay in the country for up to two years, except in cases such as domestic work (Clifton, 2010), contributing to the manifestation of fragmented citizenship where economic and social rights are variably distributed. While the above research mainly focuses on skilled workers within the economic class, it acknowledges that TFWs have unique challenges that extend beyond the scope of the research.

There is substantial evidence illustrating the struggles faced by immigrants of colour in having their education recognized and securing employment within their field. Despite being better educated than native-born Canadians, a significant portion of immigrants encounter difficulties finding appropriate employment, leading to a widening income gap (Foster, 2006). Many skilled immigrants possess postsecondary education, with reports suggesting as high as 97.5% hold degrees from their home countries (Guo, 2015). However, the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada in 2005 revealed that approximately half of these newcomers experienced challenges in securing suitable jobs (Elgersma, 2012). Specific obstacles mentioned by these immigrants include insufficient Canadian work experience, rejection of foreign experience, and non-recognition of foreign qualifications (Elgersma, 2012).

Merely possessing postsecondary education credentials doesn't guarantee entry into the labour market for immigrants. Employers and professional organizations often demand country-specific skills, including language proficiency, institutional and legal knowledge, and soft skills not typically acquired through foreign university education (Akbari & Aydede, 2013). Moreover, subjective evaluation criteria such as Canadian values and accents serve as indirect discriminatory practices, marginalizing immigrants of colour within labour hierarchies (Guo, 2015). These practices maintain a bias that favours individuals conforming to 'Canadian' behaviours while penalizing those who do not.

Refugees encounter similar challenges to economic immigrants, such as linguistic and cultural adaptation, compounded by the displacement they have faced. Despite these parallels, literature and immigration policy primarily focused on skilled immigrants often overlook the unique experiences of refugees, failing to fully capture their distinct challenges and devaluation of their education and experiences. This neglect in recognition narratives concerning refugees

will be further addressed in the subsequent section, outlining how the refugee experience

intertwines with their educational and work-related encounters.

Refugees as Low-skilled, Low Educated

Economic Immigrants and refugees often encounter similar challenges when integrating

into Canadian society, although their circumstances of arrival markedly differ. Economic

immigrants make a conscious decision to leave their homeland and relocate to another nation

based on perceived opportunities. This choice affords them the ability to conduct research about

their prospective new country and plan for their relocation. Conversely, a refugee is compelled to

hastily escape their home country without prior notice or preparation. They typically reside

outside their country of origin before being accepted into a country like Canada, often with

limited resources (Shakya et al., 2012; Stevenson & Baker, 2018). Unlike immigrants, refugees

lack the agency to select their new home country; they migrate to whichever country offers them

acceptance and resettlement.

The specific needs of economic immigrants and refugees departing from their home

countries are shaped by unique circumstances for each group. For instance, refugees, as

elucidated in studies (Bajwa et al., 2017; Ferede, 2018; Koehler & Schneider, 2019; Neupane,

2012; Stevenson & Baker, 2018; Tossutti, 2011; Wilkinson, 2008), are notably less likely to

possess fluency in English or French before arriving. This linguistic deficiency poses an extra

obstacle for refugees to overcome before gaining access to tertiary education or entering the

workforce. Moreover, refugees frequently contend with disruptions in their educational trajectory

due to the upheaval in their native lands. Research conducted by Sheikh-Mohammed et al.

(2006) revealed that refugees typically spend an average of seven years in refugee camps before

they are resettled in a new country. This prolonged stay often entails a substantial portion of

crucial developmental years during childhood or young adulthood spent within these camps, resulting in missed educational opportunities. Consequently, this circumstance contributes to low literacy levels and diminishes the potential for these young adult refugees to actively contribute to society. Upon arriving in Canada, these young adults necessitate tailored support services and resources to bridge these educational gaps and ensure their ability to meet the demands of postsecondary education.

At present, the availability of institutions and programs designed to cater to these needs is limited. While certain initiatives like postsecondary bridging and upgrading programs do exist, they often come at a cost, and many refugees identify financial constraints as a significant barrier hindering their educational pursuits (Deller & Oldford, 2011). Prior investigations regarding the transition to postsecondary education predominantly focus on refugee students within the K-12 system, resulting in a lack of comprehensive knowledge about refugees' integration into Canada's higher education system (Finnie et al., 2015; Hira-Friesen et al., 2013; Murdoch et al., 2016; Robson et al., 2018; Schroeter & James, 2015; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Wilkinson, 2008). This knowledge gap persists because "relatively little is known about refugees' entry into Canada's higher education system" (Ferede, 2010, p. 79). When refugees come to Canada as adults, their educational experience is not captured in any data because, by the age of 18, they are already 'aged out' of traditional secondary education (Shakya et al., 2012; Stevenson & Baker, 2018).

Recent studies have examined the resettlement experiences of young adult refugees aged 15-30, particularly within educational settings, whether secondary or postsecondary. One study examined Syrian YARs aged 18-24 in Quebec's adult education system, noting that "although there is an appreciation of the difficulties YARs face, little literature exists that focuses on this

population and their academic integration in resettlement context" (Maraj et al., 2024, p. 2). The findings highlight systemic issues in supporting refugee students, revealing that language courses often fail to adequately prepare them for academic studies. Furthermore, independent modular courses increase the risk of failure, and scheduling challenges further impede their progress. The adult education system, which places the burden of advancement entirely on the student, does not adequately meet the needs of these students, who require more guidance and support.

Another study investigated effective educational strategies for older refugee youth, aged 15-21, with interrupted schooling in Winnipeg (Jowett et al., 2020). This research emphasizes the need for programs that facilitate students' transitions into mainstream education or support graduation. Most local schools offer sheltered language programs, and key recommendations include enhancing current programs by fostering a sense of belonging, providing targeted extended learning, and offering comprehensive support. The study stresses the importance of collaboration among school divisions and community-based approaches to help these youth overcome barriers and achieve successful settlement.

A separate study examined the resettlement experiences of war-affected YARs aged 15-30 in Quebec, including individuals from countries such as Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Togo, and Zimbabwe (Buccitelli & Denov, 2019). Participants reported that educational institutions, similar to health and social services, acted as sites of surveillance and interrogation, where intersecting prejudices related to age, race, and status devalued their desires and erased their personhood. Despite resisting these oppressive structures, such experiences significantly impacted their psychological well-being and trust in Quebec's education, health, and social service systems.

The intersection of education and employment emerges as pivotal in impeding refugees' effective integration into Canadian society. Existing literature demonstrates that refugees encounter the lowest acknowledgment rates for their educational background and prior experiences (Houle & Yssaad, 2010; Lamba, 2003; Neupane, 2012; Shakya et al., 2012). For instance, a study analysing the resettlement experiences of 525 adults and 91 youth refugees in Alberta revealed their lack of stable employment, with an unemployment rate double the national average (Lamba, 2003). Additionally, Lamba found that a refugee's socioeconomic capacity relies significantly on various factors such as gender, age, origin region, duration of residence in Canada, recognition of foreign credentials, and experiences of discrimination. The resettlement process of refugees is shaped by a complex interplay of structural constraints, individual agency, and power dynamics. Structural barriers both enable and limit the quality of employment opportunities available to refugees. To facilitate the integration of refugees into the Canadian workforce and address their genuine needs, policymakers must focus on understanding "the kind of support refugees rely on upon their initial arrival in Canada" (p. 61).

Refugees possessing professional expertise and backgrounds, who may or may not have their documentation, encounter formidable challenges when navigating non-regulated occupations. In Canada, approximately 20% of jobs, encompassing fields such as medicine, engineering, education, and others, fall under the classification of "regulated occupations" (Elgersma, 2012). In these spheres, the validation of academic credentials and professional qualifications is determined by provincial or territorial regulatory authorities. The rest of the occupations, about 80% of the jobs, are non-regulated occupations. The recognition of credentials and professional experience in these occupations are at the discretion of the employer, professional association, or apprenticeship organization.

Although all immigrants deal with some challenges with credentialism, a significant divergence between economic immigrants and refugees is evident in the credential verification process preceding immigration. Economic immigrants undergo a rigorous evaluation where their credentials, including education, are scrutinized and verified in advance. On the other hand, refugees do not undergo such an assessment process, as their evaluation focuses not on appraising assets or qualifications through a point-based system. Unlike economic migrants, they are assessed on 'points' of vulnerability, not assets (UNHCR, 1979). Refugees, therefore, encounter uncertainty concerning the acknowledgment of their professional qualifications, resulting in adverse initial experiences within their new country's job market. This uncertainty potentially contributes to higher unemployment rates and exclusion from employment opportunities among refugee adults compared to native-born Canadians and economic immigrants. Engagement in the labour market is pivotal, serving as the primary defence against poverty and social isolation (Fang & Morley, 2015). Fang and Morley underscore that labour market participation is not merely an income source but also integral to one's self-worth, given the societal stigma attached to exclusion (pp. 824-825). Their argument emphasizes that despite refugees' aspirations for further education, employment remains a critical concern, particularly due to the prevalent poverty among refugees in Canada.

Postsecondary Education and Adult Learners

Access and barriers are understood differently across popular, policy, and research perspectives. For this research, I will focus on access as defined and responded to by both the federal and provincial governments. The justification for this is that facilitating postsecondary access falls under the responsibility of both levels of government. This is even more so for refugees because the federal government has the responsibility of resettling them once they are

accepted for residency in Canada. I will focus on Alberta and Ontario to explore how federal resettlement policies and provincial educational frameworks shape access and barriers. These provinces are also the sites of my research, as outlined in chapter 4.

The federal government's definition of, and efforts on, postsecondary access predominantly focus on three areas: creating more student space, increasing the number of postsecondary institutions, and increasing financial assistance (Shanahan & Jones, 2007). Financial aid has been a major strategy for the federal government in increasing access to postsecondary education for underrepresented groups. The underrepresented groups identified include "Aboriginal students, adult learners, students with disabilities, first-generation students, women in certain occupational areas, and residents of rural communities" (Kirby, 2011, p. 274). The changes in financial assistance to these groups include increasing the student loan borrowing limits to reflect rising educational costs, providing needs-based grants to reduce the repayment amount, and offering student loan repayment assistance after graduation in the form of the Repayment Assistance Plan (RAP) program, which was introduced in the 2009–2010 academic year. The RAP program increases the interest-free grace period after graduation and ties the monthly repayment amount to income and family size.

These financial assistance strategies are the result of the increased burden on students to fund postsecondary education in Canada. Since the 1990s, student tuition fees have been contributing more to postsecondary institutions' operating costs while the federal government's contributions have decreased over the same time period (Kirby, 2011). The Canadian government's expenditure on postsecondary education is one of the lowest in the OECD countries accounting for 55.1% in 2005 which is "well below that of the 73.1% average for the OECD and the 82.5% average for European Union countries" (Kirby, 2011, p. 272). Tuition fees

in Canada have been increasing every year for the past two decades. For example, from 2006 to 2019, undergraduate domestic tuition has increased from $4,400 to $6,838 and graduate tuition from $5,387 to $7,086 which is the average across all provinces (Statistics Canada, 2020a). That is almost a 36% and 24% increase respectively. Therefore, the problem of access in the form of financial barriers, which the federal government is trying to address, is one of its own making. Reduction in federal spending is one contributing factor to the rising tuition rates, which shifts the burden of payment to students.

Financial assistance has been a major discussion and policy strategy for both the federal and provincial governments however it does not address how to get students who are underrepresented into these spaces and programs in the first place (Rivard & Raymond, n.d.). Multi-level approaches and strategies need to be adopted along with financial assistance in order to address the barriers to postsecondary access. Since education in Canada is a provincial responsibility, much of the burden is left to the provinces. One of the ways the provinces address the concerns over access is by providing targeted funding to colleges and universities (Industry Canada, 2012; Kirby, 2011). Since the 1990s, much of the funding went to programs that addressed skills shortages in "apprenticeship and skilled trades, health-related disciplines such as medicine and nursing, science and technology, as well as post-graduate degree programs" (Kirby, 2011, p. 271). The funding was to increase student spaces and make public funding more available. Some provinces, including Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta have also changed their legislation to allow public community colleges and technical institutions to offer degree-granting programs, which were monopolized by universities through legislative authority (Industry Canada, 2012; Kirby, 2011). The increased option in 'access' to postsecondary education, particularly degree-granting programs, has increased student spaces and avenues of

entrance, however, they do not address how individuals who have not obtained a high school diploma in Canada can access these programs. Unlike many other countries, Canada does not have standardized tests for postsecondary education admission and therefore, high school grades and diploma exams continue to be the main criteria for entrance (Ferede, 2010). This creates another barrier to access for refugees and other immigrants who have some secondary or postsecondary education outside of Canada. Providing targeted funding or more student spaces does not address this barrier to access, caused by the devaluation of their credentials, for these individuals. In addition, studies have shown that academic preparation is more critical to determining postsecondary participation rather than high tuition fees (Deller & Oldford, 2011; Finnie et al., 2015; Rivard & Raymond, n.d.).

In Alberta, the provincial government acknowledges that barriers to postsecondary education participation are multi-dimensional and complex. They identify a large group of adult learners as under-represented groups in postsecondary education spaces. These groups include First Nations, families with low income and education, culturally isolated groups, rural Albertans, persons with disabilities, working poor, single parents, individuals with low literacy skills, females in trades, males in some academic programs, and immigrants (Alberta Advanced Education, 2005). Any policy initiative that seeks to increase access for these groups of adult learners requires "taking into account different ages/life stages and academic background/skills of potential learners" (p. 5). These groups of learners are very diverse and their level of education is equally as diverse. The academic skills of these groups range from limited literacy to high school completion. They also include individuals who completed high school but did not go on to postsecondary studies and immigrants with postsecondary education from outside of

Canada. As a result, the Alberta government has attempted to identify the barriers that these diverse groups face in accessing postsecondary education.

The Alberta Ministry of Advanced Education (2005), which is responsible for higher education in the province, has identified eight barriers to participation or access in their report titled *Increasing Accessibility to Advanced Education for Under-Represented Albertans*. The barriers, which speak directly to the under-represented groups listed above, are lack of educational planning and awareness, socio-cultural barriers, physical barriers, geographic availability, gaps in the system and support, cost, institutional admission criteria, and availability. Out of all these barriers acknowledged, only in the institutional admission criteria are immigrants specifically mentioned. The ministry stated that "lack of recognition of prior learning gained through life and work experiences" is a major barrier to accessing postsecondary education for immigrants (Alberta Advanced Education, 2005, p. 3). Of course, immigrants also experience the other barriers to access or participation mentioned in the report, but lack of recognition of prior learning and experience is a major hindrance to accessing postsecondary education.

The report by the ministry goes beyond just identifying barriers and seeks to present opportunities where pathways to accessing postsecondary education for newcomers can be made. This includes developing "incentives and protocols that support prior learning assessment and recognition, portability, credit transfer arrangements, and articulation agreements so that adults can "ladder' and build on existing skills and do not have to redo learning they have already acquired" (Alberta Advanced Education, 2005, p. 19). This strategy, if implemented successfully, addresses a key challenge that this research seeks to investigate. However, the report is 15 years old, and the government has not acted on these recommendations. This is

unfortunate because one of the biggest challenges facing YARs with prior education and other immigrant groups is the devaluation of credentials and prior learning (Akbari & Aydede, 2013; Chen et al., 2010; Foster, 2006; George & Chaze, 2012; Guo, 2015; Shan, 2009). Having a concrete strategy in addressing prior learning of refugees, whether it is assessing their credentials if they have postsecondary education or supporting them in filling the gaps in their education, would have been a great way to expand access and opportunities for participation.

In Ontario, the definition of adult learners aligns with the underrepresented groups observed by the Government of Alberta. However, Ontario distinguishes itself by offering a suite of services and programs aimed at supporting newcomers, including refugees, in obtaining their high school diplomas and accessing postsecondary education[2]. One such initiative is the academic upgrading program designed for residents aged 18 or older, focusing on improving literacy, writing, and math skills required for further education, apprenticeships, and job opportunities (Government of Ontario, 2019a). This program is provided free of charge and is personalized based on individual assessments, aiding individuals in achieving their educational goals. Additionally, the Academic Career Entrance (ACE) program, operated by various institutions across the province, offers an equivalent high school diploma certificate for admission to college programs. Similar to the academic upgrading program, ACE is also funded by the provincial government and is free for residents who are at least 19 years old.

Ontario further supports newcomers through Bridge training programs specifically tailored for professionals educated abroad. These initiatives assist individuals with prior postsecondary education and work experience in expediting the attainment of licenses or

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[2]It is important to note that the population and, consequently, the size of the post-secondary education sector in Ontario is much larger than in Alberta. Additionally, there are more immigrants residing in Ontario. For example, between 2016 and 2021, Ontario welcomed a total of 544,050 immigrants, including 113,520 refugees, while Alberta welcomed 180,690 immigrants, including 24,795 refugees (Statistics Canada, 2022b).

certifications in their respective fields (Government of Ontario, 2019b). Various institutions, including colleges, universities, and non-profit organizations, participate in these programs. While there is a nominal fee associated with the Bridge training programs, subsidies are available to reduce expenses. It is important to note that these programs cater well to individuals possessing the requisite education, work experience, and language proficiency. However, those lacking the necessary credentials might find these initiatives less suitable. Nevertheless, for certain refugees who meet the qualifications, these programs present viable opportunities, considering the diverse educational and employment backgrounds within the adult refugee population.

Policies and strategies aimed at enhancing postsecondary education accessibility for underrepresented groups, formulated at both federal and provincial levels, generally overlook the specific challenges encountered by refugees. Even when these initiatives address the obstacles faced by adult immigrants in accessing education, they often target the economic class (Alberta Advanced Education, 2005; Advisory Council on Economic Growth, 2016, 2017; Government of Ontario, 2019a, b). Consequently, refugees remain underrepresented within the underrepresented groups seeking access to postsecondary education.

Refugees constitute a vulnerable demographic with diverse and complex needs, ranging from individuals possessing partial or complete postsecondary education credentials to those with limited formal education (Lamba, 2003). Notably, unlike other immigrant groups, refugees often carry the added burden of trauma and the loss of their homes and livelihoods. Therefore, tailored policies and strategies specifically addressing the needs of adult refugees are essential. The current discourse and policies surrounding immigrant access to postsecondary education inadequately address the concerns of this distinct group, often disproportionately focusing on

economic immigrants. However, Ontario's programs designed for adult learners exhibit a more responsive approach toward refugees, offering diverse pathways to obtain high school diplomas and access higher education. Furthermore, Ontario provides numerous free upgrading and language classes beyond Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), benefiting refugee adults who face financial barriers hindering their educational pursuits.

Summary

This chapter underscores the study's significance by investigating challenges regarding YARs' access to postsecondary education in Canada. It explores the evolution of refugees in Canada's immigration system, originally emphasizing humanitarian concerns but gradually prioritizing economic factors due to the point system. It examines the debates surrounding the Private Sponsorship Program and how neoliberal policies influence Canada's humanitarian commitments. The chapter further contrasts how economic immigrants are often depicted as highly skilled, whereas refugees are portrayed as having lower skills and education levels. This comparison serves to underscore the challenges refugees face when trying to access education and employment opportunities. Moreover, it discusses federal and provincial initiatives in postsecondary education for adult learners, seeking insights into how these policies accommodate refugees.

In essence, this review outlines the shifting landscape of refugee resettlement and sheds light on the challenges refugees encounter in education and qualifications recognition within Canada's immigration and education frameworks. The literature reviews reveal the absence of refugees in both immigration and education policies, emphasizing the necessity for addressing the research question. It underscores the importance of obtaining firsthand accounts to understand how YARs are navigating this challenging landscape. In the following chapter, I will

outline my theoretical framework and explore how Critical Race Theory can illuminate the root

causes of the challenges YARs face in accessing postsecondary education.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I present my theoretical approach to the research, with a particular focus on the application of Critical Race Theory (CRT). My primary goal is to establish CRT as the fundamental framework for understanding the underlying factors that lead to the exclusion of young adult refugees from educational opportunities. The core of my analysis will revolve around Canada's immigration system. I have chosen to focus on this aspect because the policies governing immigration and the strategies for resettling refugees directly affect the educational possibilities accessible to YARs and contribute to the conditions that create the barriers they encounter. A meaningful discourse about refugees and their access to education also necessitates an examination of Canada's immigration history and the evolution of immigration policies that have influenced the nation's racial composition. Furthermore, it's important to acknowledge the intricate relationship between the immigration system and settler colonialism, as they have all significantly influenced the development of these policies.

Critical Race Theory

CRT is a theoretical framework that employs critical theory to examine the intricate relationship between race, racism, and power (Bracey, 2015; Closson, 2010; Delgado & Stefancis, 2017; Gillborn, 2014; Given, 2008). It originated in the 1970s within the legal profession when activists, lawyers, and legal scholars in America observed that the gains achieved during the civil rights era were slowing down and, in some instances, regressing (Delgado & Stefancis, 2017). Early proponents of the theory, including Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado, among others, recognized the need for a new theory and strategies to confront subtle forms of racism. CRT draws on critical legal studies and radical feminism, incorporating ideas from European philosophers like Gramsci, Foucault, and Derrida,

along with the influence of Black American radical traditions exemplified by such figures as Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Power and Chicano movements of the 1960s and early 1970s (Delgado & Stefancis, 2017). CRT seeks a fundamental transformation of social structures. In contrast to other civil rights discourses, CRT doesn't aim for incremental progress but, instead, "questions the very foundation of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law" (Delgado & Stefancis, 2017, p. 3) Today, CRT has been adopted by non-Black scholars and activists worldwide, including those from the Latinx community (LatCrit), LGBTQ+ groups, Indigenous peoples, Arabs, and South Asians, to address oppression and discrimination against their communities.

CRT is a framework of analysis built upon American legal systems and history. Although to some extent it is an abstraction to utilize it in a Canadian context, CRT can 'cross borders' and be used to understand postsecondary access. It can help us to understand the roots of the problem as unaddressed systemic issues that disproportionately affect already marginalized and racialized groups in society. CRT does this by highlighting how "racism is a normalized and ingrained feature of the social order which appears often in nuanced and covert ways" (Modiri, 2012, p. 406). It is through the lenses of CRT we can see the production and reproduction of racism and their roots in colonization and racialized social order based on white supremacy. It is also through this lens we begin to uncover how the notions of multiculturalism and humanitarianism are deployed to mask the endemic racism inherent in the Canadian state and the structures it protects.

Canada's immigration policy significantly shapes the experiences and challenges encountered by YARs. The application of CRT to Canada's immigration policy provides a

valuable framework for examining how systemic biases and exclusions might disproportionately affect specific groups. In the immigration context, as already discussed in the previous chapter, Canada frequently tailors its policies to meet specific economic or demographic objectives. This targeted approach can lead to the prioritization of particular categories of immigrants, potentially leaving other groups, such as young adult refugees, in a disadvantaged position. Utilizing the CRT lens allows for a nuanced exploration of how these policies may contribute to systemic inequalities, particularly in the exclusion of refugees from immigration, educational, and employment policies outlined in chapter two.

This critical examination reveals the intricate ways in which Canada's immigration system may inadvertently marginalize young adult refugees. By employing CRT, one can uncover the underlying power dynamics and systemic structures that influence immigration policies, shedding light on the potential barriers young adult refugees face in accessing education, employment, and other social integration opportunities. This perspective contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how race, immigration status, and systemic biases intersect, shaping the experiences of refugees within the broader framework of Canada's immigration landscape.

To guide my exploration of these interrelated issues, I will utilize two key tenets of CRT: 1) the permanence of racism and 2) interest convergence. These two tenets will provide valuable insights into how Canada's history of colonization and the racialized social structures influenced by Whiteness, often concealed under the banner of multiculturalism, shape the societal environment in which YARs are situated. In the upcoming sections, I aim to provide a more in-depth analysis of these two key pillars inherent to CRT shedding light on their significance within the context of Canada's immigration policy.

Firstly, the notion of the enduring nature of racism is a cornerstone of CRT. This principle contends that racism is not a mere historical artifact but rather a persistent force deeply embedded in societal structures and institutions (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancis, 2017). As we examine Canada's immigration policy through this lens, we will scrutinize how historical and systemic patterns contribute to the perpetuation of racial disparities. Secondly, the concept of interest convergence posits that progress toward racial equality often aligns with the interests of those in power (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancis, 2017). In the context of Canada's immigration policy, we will explore how decisions and reforms may coincide with broader political or economic motivations, potentially influencing the trajectory of racial justice initiatives.

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) identify several additional tenets of Critical Race Theory, including the social construction of race, differential racialization, intersectionality and anti-essentialism, and the unique voice of colour or counter-storytelling. The social construction of race asserts that race is a product of social thought rather than a biological fact. Society creates and manipulates racial categories based on convenience, which undermines pseudoscientific claims of racial superiority or inferiority. This tenet reveals how historical context and power dynamics shape racial classifications. Differential racialization refers to the varying ways different racial groups are racialized according to the needs and interests of the dominant group at different times. For instance, Delgado and Stefancic (2017) discuss how Muslims were once viewed as exotic neighbours attending mosques but later became perceived as security threats. Intersectionality and anti-essentialism recognize that each racial group has its own origins and evolving history. This concept emphasizes that different social identities intersect and interact to shape individuals' experiences of oppression and privilege, highlighting the complexity and fluidity of social identities. Finally, voice-of-color or counter-storytelling underscores the

importance of considering the unique perspectives and lived experiences of people of colour. This tenet emphasizes the diversity within racial identities and challenges dominant narratives by presenting alternative viewpoints. However, for the purpose of this exploration, their detailed examination will not be explicitly undertaken, allowing a more focused analysis of the aforementioned CRT principles in the specific context of Canada's immigration policy.

Permanence of Racism: Colonialism and Exclusion in Canada

In the intricate tapestry of Canadian history, the enduring imprints of colonization and exclusion have left a profound influence, shaping the dynamics of society as a whole. An illustrative instance of such historical influence is found in the Canadian immigration policy, which not only dictates who is permitted entry into the country but also determines the opportunities available to them. Employing CRT's tenet of the permanent nature of racism, this exploration seeks to unveil the enduring effects of colonial legacies and exclusionary practices. From the displacement of Indigenous lands to the transformative shifts observed in immigration policies, this narrative aims to illuminate how CRT provides a nuanced perspective for understanding the interconnected strands of racism intricately interwoven into the very fabric of Canada's historical and contemporary landscape. CRT emerges as a guiding light, offering insights into structural inequalities, racial hierarchies, and the ongoing challenges faced by marginalized communities including refugees.

Derrick Bell (1992), who is one of the fathers of CRT, argues that racism is a permanent component of American society. For him, the permanence of racism is the reason why Black people (and other people of colour) will not gain full equality in society. Racism is understood as deeply embedded in the nation's institutions and legal structures. Bell recognizes this is a difficult fact to accept but urges us to acknowledge it, "not as a sign of submission, but as an act

of ultimate defiance" (p. 12). Therefore, the starting point for CRT is a focus on racism and how it is an ordinary and endemic feature of our society (Bell, 1992; Bracey, 2015; Closson, 2010; Delgado & Stefancis, 2017; Gillborn, 2006; Given, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Modiri, 2012).

The focus on race is pivotal because racism is embedded in society and therefore racism is deeply ingrained in all of our institutions including the immigration system (Guo, 2015; Schroeter, & James, 2015). While Bell's argument regarding the permanency of racism primarily addresses the experiences of Black individuals in the United States, it provides a valuable direction to investigate how settler colonialism, driven by Whiteness, has not only influenced the formation of Canada but also its immigration policies.

The historical narrative of Canada is woven with the colonization and marginalization of Indigenous Peoples, and this narrative extends far beyond the past; it persists as an ongoing and systemic process that continues to shape Canadian society. Former Prime Minister Stephen Harper's statement during the 2009 G20 summit, asserting that Canada had "no history of colonialism," reflects a troubling disregard for the historical struggles of Indigenous Peoples and perpetuates a misleading narrative about Canada as a humanitarian and multicultural nation (Ljunggren, 2009).

In reality, Canada is a settler colonial state, with its interactions with various groups marked by unequal social and political power dynamics (Bannerji, 2000; Day, 2000; Thobani, 2007). The colonization of Indigenous lands, imposition of settler governance, genocide and forced assimilation policies have left an enduring legacy of inequality and injustice, profoundly influencing present-day social structures. This historical colonization and the deliberate eradication of Indigenous communities form the foundation for the existence of structural racism

and systematic discrimination within Canadian society (Bannerji, 2000; Day, 2000; Hurwitz, & Bourque, 2014; Thobani, 2007).

The global ramifications of colonization deeply impact individuals of colour seeking refuge in countries like Canada, often escaping the shadows of their nations' historical legacies. Refugees, in their pursuit of resettlement, frequently hail from countries marked by the enduring legacy of colonization (Statistics Canada, 2020b). This historical backdrop serves as a motivating factor for refugees seeking resettlement, as they endeavour to break free from conflicts perpetuated by the remnants of colonialism in their home countries. However, upon their arrival in settler-colonial contexts, such as Canada, individuals of colour find themselves assuming the role of settlers, broadly defined as anyone non-Indigenous residing in a settler-colonial context (Hurwitz & Bourque, 2014). Nevertheless, this binary definition of a settler introduces complexities, particularly when examining what Barker (2009) describes as hybrid identities, "such as the descendants of African peoples brought to the Americas against their will, many refugees, or Settler Muslims who are increasingly targeted by the state and other racist Settlers" (pp. 328-328). For the purposes of this exploration, the term settler will be defined as anyone who is non-Indigenous, regardless of their pathway to these lands. However, it is crucial to note that not all settlers derive equal benefits from settler colonialism (Hurwitz & Bourque, 2014; Lawrence & Dua, 2005).

Settler colonialism is recognized as a distinct concept from colonialism. Unlike colonialism, which often involves the exploitation of resources and governance without necessarily aiming to replace the Indigenous population, settler colonialism seeks to gradually replace Indigenous communities or depopulation (Barker, 2009). This process includes people of colour as participants in the settler colonial project, even if they may not perceive themselves as

benefiting equally from it (Lawrence & Dua, 2005). A significant number arrive in these new lands in pursuit of better lives and opportunities, but they enter a country where Indigenous lands are considered personal property for those willing to cultivate them, under the belief that 'the land belongs to those who work it' (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 30). Nonetheless, it's essential to acknowledge that this land has been appropriated, subjected to disputes, and essentially taken away, with people of colour historically brought here to cultivate it (Lawrence & Dua, 2005; Tuck, & Yang, 2012). The Canadian economy is also heavily dependent on land and resources, both of which "rightly belong to Indigenous people" as Canada remains a "hybrid: a cross between old imperial conquest of land and resources and new imperial conquest of social reality" (Barker, 2009, p. 336). This constitutes one of the methods through which the settler project is sustained and marketed to prospective immigrants, presenting it as something they can possess and develop. It is also how settlers contribute to the settler project "because public consent and active participation are required for many aspects of this ongoing colonization" (Barker, 2009, p. 339).

Settler colonialism shapes the racial dynamics in Canada, creating distinctions between White, Indigenous, and people of colour. This identity makeup is guided by Whiteness and with support from the notion of multiculturalism, to be discussed further in the next section, which undermines Indigenous sovereignty. Fanon (1952) describes Whiteness as an ideological and identity construct that maintains its dominance by objectifying and marginalizing Black people. He critiques the colonial power structures that use Whiteness to dissect and distort black reality, arguing that Whiteness is built on an underlying anxiety projected onto the black Other. Fanon emphasizes that Whiteness is shaped by specific social and historical contexts and is not an absolute concept. Whiteness assumes a pivotal role in the construction and perpetuation of racial

hierarchies, and its association with the enduring nature of racism is intricate and profound. Whiteness is an intricate ideological and institutional framework that encompasses "a complex network of discourses and processes that sustain racial domination" (Hikido & Murray, 2016, p. 391). It embodies the dominant racial power that grants privileges to White groups while subjugating racialized "others." It also groups Indigenous Peoples together with people of colour, eroding their sovereignty, distinct identity, and nationhood, while reinforcing a binary division between White and non-White identities. Settler colonialism, steered by the prevailing norm of Whiteness, actively contributes to concealing these historical origins and continuous reproduction of the racial hierarchy (Rotz, 2017). The influence of Whiteness within the context of settler colonialism plays a significant role in shaping and perpetuating social structures, making it essential to critically examine how these dynamics intersect and contribute to the obscured narrative of historical and ongoing racial hierarchies.

Whiteness functions as a vantage point that confers racial advantages and encompasses a set of cultural customs that often go unquestioned (Rotz, 2017). Grounded in the Anglo-Saxon, Judeo-Christian narrative, Whiteness sustains an atmosphere wherein people of colour are persistently marginalized, seen as inferior, perceived as less Canadian, and possibly regarded as incompatible with and unable to adopt Western values (Bannerji, 2000; Thobani, 2007). Additionally, there is an assumption that 'Western values' are inherently associated with the Western cultural context. The impact of Whiteness on Canadian immigration policy has been profound, leaving a lasting imprint on both historical and contemporary approaches (Rotz, 2017).

Historically, Canadian immigration policies exhibited a discernible preference for European immigrants, evident in various measures and regulations that favoured their admission and integration (Dua, 2007; Thobani, 2007; Roy, 2008). This preference was rooted in a complex

interplay of racial, cultural, and economic considerations, significantly shaping Canada's

population dynamics during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Anderson, 2008; Bannerji,

2008; Roy, 2008; Thobani, 2007).Canada's immigration history reveals a consistent pattern of

keeping the nation's status as a "white man's country" (Triadafilopoulos, 2022, p. 161) and the

exclusionary treatment of non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants. Prominent instances include policies

like the Chinese head tax and systemic discrimination against many Asian communities, efforts

to discourage Black individuals from immigrating, and the rejection of Jewish immigrants

escaping the Holocaust, along with various other exclusionary measures (Dua, 2007; Thobani,

2007; Triadafilopoulos, 2012). A pivotal turning point emerged in 1967 when Canada became

the world's first nation to introduce a "points" system for selecting immigrants (Li, 2000). This

innovative system marked a departure from preferential treatment for immigrants from majority-

white countries, introducing objective, non-discriminatory criteria such as language skills,

education, job skills, and family connections to evaluate prospective immigrants. The state

celebrated this transformation as the effective eradication of racial discrimination from the

immigration process, marking a transition towards an objective, skill-oriented method for

immigrant selection. This shift is evidenced by how the introduction of the point system resulted

in a more diverse pool of immigrants. Prior to this change, the majority of immigrants,

amounting to 96%, were from Europe in the post-war years from 1946 to 1953 (Li, 2000).

However, between 1968 and 1971, this proportion reduced to slightly over 50%, further

dwindling to approximately 22% by 1988-1992 (Li, 2000). Today, immigrants born in Europe

make up just about 10% of Canada's total immigrant population, signalling a significant

departure from the era of European-dominated immigration (Li, 2000; Statistics Canada, 2022a).

This shift underscores that people are not migrating from Europe in large numbers anymore,

highlighting Canada's increasing reliance on a diverse range of immigration sources, primarily from the global south.

Canada's colonial history and immigration system provide valuable insights into the nation's foundation, revealing a structure rooted in racist and exclusionary practices. Although immigrants are allowed into the country, they experience conditional inclusion, while Indigenous Peoples face dispossession and extermination (Rotz, 2017; Thobani, 2007). It is important for us to understand this history because it has created the racial hierarchy and discrimination that Indigenous people and other people of colour continue to confront. It is this system that refugees are coming into contact with thus placing them somewhere in that hierarchy based on their social locations. This system is shaped by colonization and therefore "if we want to understand the relationship between visible minorities and the state of Canada/English Canada/ COQ [Canada outside of Quebec], colonialism is the context or entry point that allows us to begin exploring the social relations and cultural forms which characterize these relations" (Bannerji, 2008, p. 93)

To comprehend the present immigration system and the specific gaps and encounters faced by refugees, it is necessary to delve into the reasons behind the changes made to the immigration system. These changes in the immigration system were not done to be more inclusive and make the process of immigration fair but rather, Canada needed specific types of immigrants and was running out of supply of European immigrants. And as we will see in the next section, these changes did not result in these racialized people being openly welcomed as other Europeans have been but rather these racialized immigrants had to prove their value to the state beyond population growth. Understanding the motivations and intentions behind these changes provides insight into the factors influencing the experiences of refugees within the current system.

Interest Convergence: Differential Treatment and the Ideal Immigrant

> *The policy of the government is to foster the growth of the population of Canada by the encouragement of immigration. The government will seek by legislation, regulation, and vigorous administration, to ensure the careful selection and permanent settlement of such numbers of immigrants as can advantageously be absorbed in our national economy… There will, I am sure, be general agreement with the view that the people of Canada do not wish, as a result of mass immigration, to make a fundamental alteration in the character of our population. Large-scale immigration from the orient would change the fundamental composition of the Canadian population. (Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, 1947, 20th Parliament, 3rd Session)*

Interest convergence was developed by legal scholar Derrick Bell (1980), who argued that throughout history significant racial advancements, such as civil rights legislation, often occurred when they were seen as beneficial or at least non-threatening to white interests. Developed by Bell through his analysis of the Brown vs. Board of Education decision, interest convergence suggests that racial advancements or improvements for marginalized groups, particularly people of colour, are more likely to occur when they align with the interests of the dominant or white majority. In other words, racial progress is more likely to be achieved when it serves the interests of those in power or the majority group.

Changes in Canada's immigration system can be noted to be influenced by interest convergence. In the periods following World War II, the pool of preferred immigrants from European countries, particularly Western Canada dwindled, coinciding with Canada's increasing urbanization and the demand for skilled labour. In response to the shortage of skilled workers, modifications in the immigration system became crucial, leading Canada to broaden its

acceptance of a more diverse range of immigrants. The nation's need for an expanded pool of skilled workers resulted in the recognition of the "Third Force" as coined in the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism report in the 1960s, which refers to those immigrants who are not of British or French Origin (Li, 2000). During this time, European immigrants made up over 96% of the total population and the "Third Force" referenced by the commission was written "from the vantage point of a multicultural Canada made up of mostly those of British, French and other European origin" (Li, 2000, p. 3). This acknowledgment, in turn, served as the foundation for the enactment of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act.

Introduced in 1971 during Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's tenure, Canada's Multicultural Policy officially became law in 1988, positioning Canada as a trailblazer in the implementation of a national multiculturalism policy. This policy has ingrained itself as a defining feature of Canada's identity, projecting an image of an inclusive and diverse nation that champions tolerance. However, beneath this veneer lies a disconcerting reality—the policy falls short in grappling with the enduring legacy of colonization and Canada's contemporary status as a settler-colonial state. The rebranding of Canada as a multicultural society not only misrepresents the experiences of people of colour but also implicates the nation in an ongoing colonial project.

The promotion and advancement of multiculturalism and diversity in Canada are heavily influenced by the activities of various levels of government. The Canadian state views the nation's ethnocultural diversity as a societal issue that requires a bureaucratic solution, as indicated by Day (2000). By offering a bureaucratic solution, exemplified by the Multiculturalism Act, the Canadian state conveys the impression that it has addressed the problem from a policy perspective, leaving it to Canadians to do their part. In popular culture, government-funded and nonprofit surveys suggest that multiculturalism is functioning

effectively (Angus Reid Institute, 2016). Similarly, in academic and social science circles, Canadian multiculturalism is often portrayed as an already-achieved ideal (Day, 2000). However, these portrayals are misleading and create myths about Canadian nationhood.

Despite the perceived success of multiculturalism, findings from the Angus Reid Institute (2016) reveal that a prevalent Canadian sentiment persists, suggesting that immigrants should take further steps to assimilate into Canadian society. Furthermore, there's been a notable increase in violence targeting immigrants and Islamophobia in Quebec, Ontario, and Alberta, particularly in Edmonton, where hijab-wearing Black Muslim women have been singled out (Senate of Canada, 2022). These incidents highlight the shortcomings of bureaucratic efforts, which, while well-meaning, cannot effectively combat the racism and exclusion faced by people of colour. It's imperative to understand that merely having policies in place is insufficient without substantial efforts to address Canada's historical circumstances and dismantle institutions that reinforce Whiteness.

While the introduction of the point system and the multiculturalism policy might convey a semblance of a more inclusive approach in Canada, the reality is nuanced. Despite creating an impression of welcoming individuals from diverse countries and racial backgrounds, these changes in immigration and national identity policies did not automatically extend entry to all. Unlike Europeans who were admitted without stringent financial or educational requirements before the war, non-European immigrants had to prove their economic value for admission to Canada. Although criticisms of multiculturalism might be viewed as pessimistic or nitpicking within the Canadian lexicon, it is essential to highlight these inconsistencies. Multiculturalism, while ostensibly positive, poses challenges in addressing racism effectively and inadvertently diminishes the unique status of Indigenous Peoples by categorizing them as just another equity-

seeking group. Moreover, it abstracts settler colonialism as a historical event rather than recognizing its ongoing presence.

Multiculturalism as a national identity in Canada introduced two significant challenges that undermine the efforts required to dismantle systemic racism ingrained in the system. Firstly, this emerged during a critical global period characterized by the rise of anti-colonial and anti-racism movements, marked by a notable emphasis on global solidarity and the pursuit of self-determination (Thobani, 2007). During this era, there was a growing movement dedicated to achieving socioeconomic inclusion and self-determination for people of colour. Thobani argues that:

> As a response, emerging as oppositional to these efforts for self-determination, the efficacy of multiculturalism depended upon the expulsion of anti-racist and anti-colonial discourses from the horizon. Its effectiveness as a counter-response in Canada was much bolstered by its adoption by the state as an official policy. (p. 155)

Rather than addressing the structural racism and barriers faced by people of colour, the state chose to emphasize cultural parity. Consequently, multiculturalism became a state policy that positioned English and French languages and cultures as the overarching national identity, relegating other cultures to the background (Bannerji, 2000; Thobani, 2007). Multiculturalism, as implemented, perpetuated racial segregation and marginalized Indigenous Peoples and people of colour in response to the Anglo-Francophone dynamic. It failed to dismantle systemic issues and instead maintained practices that hindered progress toward genuine equality and inclusivity. CRT argues that multiculturalism often adopts a colourblind approach, downplaying structural racism while emphasizing cultural diversity.

Furthermore, CRT highlights how multiculturalism acts as a significant barrier to Indigenous sovereignty. Indigenous communities oppose multiculturalism because, as St. Denis (2011) asserts, "multiculturalism helps to erase, diminish, trivialize, and deflect from acknowledging Aboriginal sovereignty and the need to redress Aboriginal rights" (p. 309). Multiculturalism is viewed as a mechanism of colonization aimed at reshaping Canadian national identity and portraying Canada as tolerant and blameless. Furthermore, it portrays racialized individuals, some of whom have been involved in land theft and colonial endeavours, as innocent (St. Denis, 2011).

The second challenge lies in the utilization of multiculturalism as a tool to showcase progress while concealing systemic inequalities. This is prominently achieved by presenting multiculturalism as effective through comparisons of race relations and immigrant integration with other Western countries that lack such a policy, notably the United States. Ryan (2014) emphasizes that making a fair comparison between the immigration systems of the United States and Canada is not straightforward:

> Although it is common to observe that immigration is a far more divisive issue in the United States than in Canada and that immigrants in the US are less integrated and have lower incomes, on average, than those in Canada, this is influenced by the fact that the many immigrants to the US from Mexico have, on average, quite low levels of education. Canada does not have a comparable immigration stream, largely due to its geographic isolation from relatively poor countries such as Mexico. When "fair" comparisons are made between Canada and the US – i.e., focusing on similar groups of immigrants, such as highly educated immigrants from China, India, or the Caribbean – any differences that

result from Canadian multiculturalism are quite small. My own study of this question, co-

authored with Raymond Breton, concluded that. (p. 113)

Ryan's (2014) study highlights the inaccuracy of attributing variations in immigration between

the United States and Canada solely to multiculturalism. The research emphasizes the

importance of Canada's distinctive immigration policy, particularly the point system, which

primarily admits highly skilled immigrants, departing from the commonly associated

multiculturalism policy in the country. The focus is on the unique approach of selecting

immigrants based on skills, contributing significantly to the observed differences. Additionally,

Canada's geographic isolation "limits flows of asylum seekers and other unwanted immigrants"

(Triadafilopoulos, 2022, p. 162). This geographical aspect provides Canada with better control

over migration flow, allowing for a selective process in determining which immigrants are

granted entry.

Canada's immigration system advances the discourse that multiculturalism is working

and racism and racial biases are eliminated. However, this isn't true. Despite the highly skilled

and educated economic immigrants who contribute to the state's interests, racial discrimination

persists within the application process. A recent report by the House of Commons has shed light

on the discriminatory immigration practices that immigrants of colour, particularly those from

Sub-Saharan Africa, have been voicing. The report states, "The Committee learned that these

outcomes can differ along racial or other lines based on the design of the program or on the

different interpretation and application of legal and program rules" (Zahid, 2022, p. 13).

The report emphasizes the approval and refusal rate of international students by visa

officers *after* they have been approved by academic institutions. According to the report, African

international students faced disproportionately high refusal rates. To be more specific, 72% of

students from African countries with significant French populations and 68% of students from African countries with significant English populations were rejected (Zahid, 2022). This stands in stark contrast to the global refusal rate for applicants from outside African countries, which was significantly lower at just 34% (Zahid, 2022).

What's even more distressing is the refusal rate for African student applicants with children. These students are compelled to leave their families behind to increase their chances of approval (Zahid, 2022). This practice highlights a deeply troubling aspect of the immigration system, where African students and their families are disproportionately affected by high refusal rates, making it incredibly challenging for them to pursue their educational and career aspirations in Canada.

The issue of longer processing times and higher rejection rates for Black and Brown immigrants isn't limited to just international students; it can also be observed across other immigration categories. While financial requirements are often cited as the primary reason for these higher rejection rates, the report underscores a more troubling aspect: the presence of inherent racism and racial bias among immigration staff, whether it is conscious or unconscious (Zahid, 2022). This bias and discrimination affects immigrants of colour throughout various stages of the immigration process, making their journey to Canada more challenging and less equitable compared to their white counterparts.

In addition, through the discourse of multiculturalism, immigrants are presented as having better integration and earning better income on average compared to other countries such as the United States (Ryan, 2014). However, this isn't the case for all immigrants. Economic immigrants, who can overcome the selection process, do experience favourable economic outcomes. But this is because they were selected based on their ability to be absorbed into the

labour market. On the other hand, refugees who are not selected on the basis of vulnerability, are left out of this process. Because they are selected on the basis of humanitarian compassion you would think there would be efforts made to assist them in gaining the necessary skills and education to have similar outcomes as economic immigrants and Canadian-born counterparts but as demonstrated in Chapter Two, that isn't the case.

The modifications to the immigration system, coinciding with the introduction of multiculturalism, expose an enduring undercurrent of racism and differential treatment of immigrants based on race. These alterations were not intended to confront the systemic racism ingrained in the system; rather, they were geared towards attracting specific highly skilled immigrants while downplaying concerns about racism. In the past, European immigrants merely needed to be white, whereas the current system mandates immigrants, who are predominantly non-European or White, to amass points and showcase their value. The fact that a majority of immigrants to Canada are now non-White prompts questions, from various stakeholders, including policymakers, political commentators, and segments of the public, about the need for rigorous vetting and demonstrating their value to the nation.

By applying CRT and employing the concept of interest convergence, we can discern the enduring nature of racism and the differential treatment of individuals based on racial classification. For example, a recent House of Commons report highlights that outcomes in Canadian immigration decisions and the broader Canadian immigration system may systematically and unjustifiably disadvantage specific populations based on characteristics like race and country of origin, reinforcing the notion of the permanency of racism (Zahid, 2022). A glaring example that highlights the contradictions and exposes how the system is still rooted in racism and white supremacist racial hierarchy is Canada's response to refugees from Ukraine.

Canada's Response to the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

In late February 2022, Ukraine faced a Russian invasion, resulting in the largest displacement of Europeans since World War II. In response, the Canadian government swiftly introduced the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET), providing Ukrainian nationals and their family members of any nationality with the opportunity to reside in Canada temporarily for up to three years (Zahid, 2022). However, under CUAET, only Ukrainian citizens and their families are granted this privilege. Others, particularly racialized individuals from South Asia and Africa, who are permanent residents in Ukraine or studying there, were explicitly excluded from the program. When questioned about the differential treatment of the different nationality groups fleeing Ukraine, the response from the Associate Deputy Minister at IRCC was noteworthy. She stated, "...in some cases, some of those who are fleeing may find refuge within the neighbouring countries more directly, or they may return to the country of origin" (Zahid, 2022, pp. 15-16). This response raises concerns, particularly because many of these neighbouring countries were not permitting Black and Brown refugees to enter their territories. It's important to note that the sole requirement for eligibility under the CUAET program was Ukrainian citizenship. This contrasts with refugees, primarily individuals of colour, who undergo lengthy evaluations based on vulnerability, and economic immigrants, also predominantly people of colour, who must demonstrate their value to the nation through a point system.

During the Ukrainian crisis, Canada was concurrently addressing another refugee crisis by providing support to Afghans, especially those facing immediate danger due to their associations and work with the Canadian military. As of August 2021, Canada has resettled 47,010 Afghans across all streams (Government of Canada, 2023b). In contrast, within the

timeframe of March 2021 to November 2023, Canada has resettled 210,178 Ukrainian refugees under the CUAET program (Government of Canada, 2023a). Several reasons were cited to explain Canada's swift response and the higher number of admissions for the Ukrainian crisis. The primary reasons included the perception that Ukrainians were in Canada temporarily and were expected to return and the availability of safe passage for Ukrainians to countries where biometric screening and application processing could occur. However, these reasons do not fully capture the complexity of the situation. Firstly, while under the CUAET program Ukrainians are not classified as refugees, their stay is valid for up to three years. Nevertheless, they can still apply for permanent residency after this initial period. Secondly, the expedited biometric screening and application processing for Ukrainians were facilitated by Canada's deployment of personnel to these countries and the eligibility of Ukrainians in specific regions for counterfoil-less visas, eliminating the need to surrender passports once applications are approved (Zahid, 2022).

The response to the Ukrainian war underscores the necessity of conducting an intersectional analysis of immigration policy and the experiences of immigrants. Coined by Black scholar and activist Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s, intersectionality explains how the convergence of various identities influences the lived realities of individuals. While attributed to Crenshaw, the concept has deep roots in Black feminist thought, methodology, and practice. Intersectionality acknowledges that various forms of discrimination and oppression, including racism, sexism, and classism, can intersect and overlap, giving rise to unique modes of discrimination experienced by individuals belonging to multiple marginalized groups (Crenshaw, 1991). This underscores the importance of considering the interconnected nature of social identities and the mechanisms by which they can generate both privilege and oppression.

Refugees are frequently lumped together with immigrants and newcomers, contributing to a misleading narrative. This classification poses two significant issues: firstly, government policies predominantly centre around economic immigrants and their societal reintegration. Secondly, educational policies for newcomer adults, influenced by immigration strategies, often prioritize the needs of highly skilled economic immigrants while neglecting the unique requirements of refugees. Adult refugees aspiring to further their education find themselves grappling with a system that was not tailored to address their specific needs.

Refugees are often left out of government discussions on economic growth, as highlighted by reports from Immigration, Refugee, and Citizenship Canada (2022). Official immigration reports tend to portray refugees as individuals requiring protection, emphasizing Canada's humanitarian commitment to their well-being. Conversely, immigrants in economic streams, particularly those contributing to economic and labour growth, are presented as valuable contributors. This disparity in portrayal significantly influences the public discourse on refugees, shaping societal perceptions. Notably, the case of Ukrainian refugees further exemplifies this pattern, as they were not admitted into Canada under refugee status. The decision was influenced by the assumption that they would eventually return to their home country and that they could make meaningful contributions to Canada. Therefore, Ukrainian refugees were granted work and study permits, facilitating their participation in postsecondary education or direct entry into the workforce (Zahid, 2022).

Taking an intersectional approach to immigrants and the policies that influence their integration and settlement reveals how certain demographics can become marginalized or entirely disregarded, perpetuating existing disparities. The strong focus on actively recruiting highly skilled immigrants with postsecondary education tends to marginalize refugees in

discussions regarding their economic contributions and societal value. Consequently, this orientation moulds education policies and research, prioritizing credential recognition and the swift integration of skilled immigrants into the labour force (Guo, 2015; Houle & Yssaad, 2010; Picot & Lu, 2017; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012).

The problem doesn't solely revolve around the recruitment of economic immigrants; it also lies in our perception and discussion of who refugees are. We often view refugees solely as individuals in need of protection and assistance, which is undeniably accurate. However, this narrow perspective limits our understanding of refugees. While they do require protection and assistance, refugees are also individuals with valuable contributions and aspirations, including pursuing postsecondary education. Approaching them solely from a deficit perspective hinders their opportunities for higher education and economic advancement, further perpetuating their marginalization and exclusion.

Summary

This chapter lays the groundwork by exploring how colonization and exclusionary practices continue to shape Canadian society. It highlights that immigration policies, driven by economic imperatives, have failed to eradicate systemic racism rooted in colonial history. Despite shifts towards a more diverse immigrant population after World War II, these changes primarily served economic interests rather than tackling structural inequalities. Critically, Canada's multiculturalism policy is scrutinized for prioritizing cultural diversity over confronting racial hierarchies and colonial legacies, thereby perpetuating systemic racism instead of addressing it. This exploration is essential for understanding the complex issues surrounding the exclusion of young adult refugees from educational opportunities in Canada. In the next chapter, I will detail my methodology, outlining the research design, analysis, and presentation approach.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Research Design

The aim of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of young adult refugees' pathways to postsecondary education after resettlement in Canada. The central question guiding my study is: How do young adult refugees articulate and derive meaning from their experiences of accessing postsecondary education in Canada? This question pertains to understanding the lived experiences of the research participants and would warrant a qualitative research design.

In this chapter, I provide a detailed account of the study and the methodology employed. It begins with an introduction to phenomenology, explaining why it is the most suitable qualitative research methodology for this study, including the application of Fanon's work. I then outline the research design, including data collection and analysis. Additionally, I address limitations and ethical considerations, emphasizing the importance of protecting the well-being of the research participants. Finally, I conclude with a reflection on positionality. This chapter serves as a guide to understanding the research approach and organization.

Philosophy and Methodology of Phenomenology

Phenomenology encompasses various schools and traditions, including transcendental, existential, hermeneutic, linguistic, and ethical phenomenology (Adams & van Manen, 2008; Carbajal et al., 2018; Mertens, 2018; Porter & Cohen, 2013; Smith, 2013). These diverse strands trace their origins to the work of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). Husserl established phenomenology as a distinct philosophical method in the early 20th century, focusing on exploring and describing phenomena based on individual experiences. Although Merleau-Ponty (1962) notes that "phenomenology can be practiced and identified as a manner or style of thinking, that it existed as a movement before arriving at complete awareness of itself as a philosophy" (p. viii), it was Husserl who fully articulated phenomenology as a philosophical

discipline. Husserl emphasized the importance of describing and understanding phenomena as they appear to us. He argued that to make rational or scientific judgments, one must align with the intrinsic nature of "the things themselves" and return to them beyond mere words and opinions (Husserl, 1980, p. 35). This requires engaging directly with the phenomena as they are presented, free from external biases or prejudices. Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, expanded phenomenology into existential and ontological dimensions. In his influential work, B*eing and Time* (1962), Heidegger introduced a complex analysis of human existence, shifting the focus from abstract essences to the nature of Being itself. He explored concepts such as "being-in-the-world," "being-with," and "being-toward-death" to examine the nature of human existence and its interactions with the world (Heidegger, 1962). Subsequent philosophers, including Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Scheler, Ricoeur, and Marion, have further refined and adapted phenomenology, reshaping its methodology, methods, and objectives.

Since the 1990s, phenomenology has found application in practical, professional disciplines such as health sciences, education, clinical psychology, and more (Adams & van Manen, 2008). This is due to phenomenological inquiries offering "an alternative to managerial, instrumental, and technological ways of understanding knowledge, and they lead to more ethically and experientially sensitive epistemologies and ontologies of practice" (p. 3).

Phenomenology is a philosophy as well as a research methodology. Across different fields and among various researchers, phenomenological research has been approached with diverse research designs. Herbert Spiegelberg (1971), a significant figure in advancing phenomenology in the United States, highlights the absence of a singular, universally accepted definition for phenomenology in his two-volume work, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction*. He contends that there is no universally agreed-upon definition, and

phenomenology has evolved into an adaptable framework. This fluidity is due to the fact that

"even after it had established itself as a movement conscious of its own identity, it kept

reinterpreting its meaning to an extent that makes it impossible to rely on a standard definition

for the purpose of historical inclusion or exclusion" (Spiegelberg, 1965, p. 1).

However, regardless of the definition or application of phenomenology in research, a

common thread in all phenomenological research is the exploration of the phenomenon through

the lived experiences of research participants (Adams & van Manen, 2008; Benner, 1994;

Campbell & Bunting, 1991; Carbajal et al., 2018; Cohen et al., 2000; Mertens, 2018; Munhall,

2007; Porter, & Cohen, 2013; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Smith, 2013). It differs from discourse

analysis, which involves examining language materials such as spoken conversations or written

texts, and sometimes other forms of communication, to understand phenomena that extend

beyond the individual (Taylor, 2013). Unlike phenomenology, which focuses on capturing the

essence of lived experiences from the individual's subjective perspective, discourse analysis aims

to uncover the deeper social and cultural implications embedded in language use, rather than just

understanding what individuals say or write.

In the context of this research, I will be employing interpretive or hermeneutic

phenomenology to comprehend and articulate the lived experiences of my research participants.

Hermeneutic phenomenology falls under the umbrella of interpretive phenomenological

methodologies. The term "hermeneutic" is derived from the Greek word "hermenuin," which

means to interpret (Adams & van Manen, 2008; Moules, 2002). Hermeneutic phenomenology

places its focus on:

> Understanding the meaning of experience by searching for themes, and engaging with the
>
> data interpretively, with less emphasis on the essences that are important to descriptive

phenomenology. Also, hermeneutic phenomenology prefers not to formalize an analytical

method so that the context of the phenomenon itself can dictate how the data are

analyzed. (Sloan, & Bowe, 2014. p. 9)

Hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology was first introduced by Martin Heidegger.

Unlike Husserl, Heidegger believed you could not separate yourself from being within the world

and "that there was no way we could bracket our experiences because we are always in the world

with others in the circumstances of existence" (Peoples, 2021, p. 32). Whereas Husserl and

Dilthey were interested in understanding the lived experiences of people as they experienced the

phenomenon, Heidegger was also interested in the interpretation of that experience. Heidegger

expanded the definition of hermeneutics to include these three different ideas:

- the attempt to understand the phenomena of the world as they are presented to us (this is

  very close to the definition used by Husserl and Dilthey),

- the attempt to understand how it is we go about understanding the world as it is presented

  to us, and

- the attempt to understand being itself (p. 4).

In this context, the interest goes beyond merely describing the phenomenon as experienced by

individuals; it also delves into how they construct meaning from those experiences (Adams &

van Manen, 2008; Benner, 1994; Campbell & Bunting, 1991; Carbajal et al., 2018; Cohen et al.,

2000; Mertens, 2018; Munhall, 2007; Porter & Cohen, 2013; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Smith, 2013).

Gadamer further extended this perspective by highlighting the significance of studying texts or,

more broadly, language (Cohen et al., 2000; Odman & Kerdeman, 1997; Peoples, 2021). For

Gadamer, language played a pivotal role in comprehending how individuals interpret and give

meaning to their lived experiences. Language, in this context, encompasses not only what people

write but, more crucially, what they express and how they express it. Analysing the language employed is a fundamental aspect of hermeneutic phenomenology because, as Cohen et al. (2000) state, "meaning takes place when a particular tradition—that is, the language of a group of people—is interpreted by a speaker" (p. 4).

To provide a deeper understanding of the racialized experiences of young adult refugees, I will employ an interpretative lens through my theoretical framework and Fanon's phenomenological approach presented in *Black Skin, White Mask*. While Heidegger's phenomenology is adept at capturing lived experiences, it falls short of comprehending the intricacies of the racialized experiences of YARs. It does not account for how social relations shape the experiences of refugees or connect these experiences to broader social structures.

In contrast to other branches of phenomenology, particularly descriptive phenomenology, interpretive phenomenology allows for the incorporation of a theoretical framework. Fanon's phenomenological approach and critical race theory both emphasize the importance of storytelling and counter-storytelling. This makes them well-suited for qualitative methodologies, as they stress "the importance of narrative in general and of storytelling in particular" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 5) while allowing for the contextualization of the phenomenon without compromising the narrative aspect of participants' experiences. A common critique of phenomenological research is that it comprehends the lived experiences of participants without explaining the underlying factors shaping these experiences (Tuffour, 2017). Through utilizing CRT and Fanon's approach, this research endeavours to illuminate both the lived experiences of participants and the conditions that give rise to these experiences.

In chapter five of *Black Skin, White Mask*, Fanon (1952) offers a phenomenological account of his own life experiences as a Black man. He goes beyond personal descriptions and

contextualizes these experiences by exploring the process of racialization and the historico-racial schema. Fanon contends that the image and identity of Black people, or individuals of colour, are constructs rooted in European colonization. He argues that "a normal Negro child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world" (p. 122) and attributes feelings of inferiority or alienation in non-white individuals to "the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories" (p. 91). Fanon illustrates this process of racialization through his own life as a Black man residing in Europe and Northern Africa. This phenomenological approach not only presents lived experiences but also links these experiences to the broader social structures that give rise to them.

The application of such a theoretical framework is not just suitable but necessary for a study involving refugees. As previously outlined in Chapter Two, the majority of refugees arriving in Canada belong to racialized groups from Africa and the Middle East. Their experiences are profoundly impacted by racism, aggravated by the additional layer of being identified as refugees, often stigmatized as individuals with low skills and education. Therefore, I will interpret and discuss their experiences through the lenses of CRT and Fanon's phenomenological approach. This choice aligns with the premise that critical research inherently acknowledges that "all thought is influenced by power dynamics that are shaped by historical and social factors," and any inquiry labelled as 'critical' should be intrinsically linked to an endeavour aimed at addressing injustices within a specific society (Merriam, 2016, p. 10). Heidegger's approach serves as an initial step, providing a methodological foundation for presenting narratives. The subsequent application of CRT and Fanon enriches the analysis by uncovering deeper layers of racialized experiences. One effective method employed in this process is counter-storytelling.

Counter-storytelling represents a central tenet of CRT, providing a powerful means of challenging dominant narratives, contesting established discourses, and countering the perpetuation of racial hierarchies and stereotypes (Delgado, & Stefancis, 2017; Gillborn, 2006; Hiraldo, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It offers an alternative perspective, primarily from the vantage point of marginalized racial groups. By sharing personal narratives, counter-storytelling sheds light on lived experiences often misrepresented within or omitted from the mainstream perspective. More importantly counter-storytelling validates the experiences of racialized individuals, confirming the authenticity of their stories and lived realities. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) underscore the affirmation and centrality of experiential knowledge as a pivotal aspect of CRT and its methodology.

Critical race theory recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of colour is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analysing, and teaching about racial subordination. In fact, critical race theorists view this knowledge as a strength and draw explicitly on the lived experiences of people of colour by including such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, testimonios, chronicles, and narratives. Critical race methodology in education challenges traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of colour. It exposes deficit-informed research and methods that silence and distort the experiences of people of colour and instead focuses on their racialized, gendered, and classed experiences as sources of strength. It also underscores the authenticity and value of their personal narratives, laying the groundwork for developing a holistic perspective on the phenomenon through the lens of people's lived experiences. It also aids in constructing a more holistic portrayal of the individual, rather than solely relying on external portrayals.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1952) delved into the psychological and societal impacts of colonization and racism on Black individuals. His phenomenological perspective, which is rooted in Black anti-colonial theoretical perspectives, explores how people shape their identities within the context of racial and colonial oppression. His portrayal of being both the subject and the object of the white gaze aligns with CRT's counter-storytelling approach, facilitating a more profound comprehension of how these individuals make meaning and navigate racial and social frameworks. This integrated framework facilitates a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Fanon's phenomenological approach underscores the significance of individuals' lived experiences, and counter-storytelling becomes a powerful tool to bring these experiences to the forefront. It facilitates a deeper investigation into how racialization profoundly influences the subjective realities of refugees, serving as a means to discuss the data.

By integrating Fanon, this framework is well-suited to address my research questions, which aim to explore how YARs articulate and derive meaning from their experiences in accessing postsecondary education. Phenomenological research, particularly interpretive phenomenology, is centred on the sense-making of the phenomena and the significance of the experiences to the participants (Adams & van Manen, 2008; Benner, 1994; Campbell & Bunting, Carbajal et al., 2018; Cohen et al., 2000; Mertens, 2018; Munhall, 2007; Porter & Cohen, 2013; Smith, 2013). It excels at addressing questions related to meaning. This methodology is particularly valuable when the objective is to grasp the experience as it is comprehended by those who are directly involved in it. Phenomenological research serves as a "significant approach to use when investigating a new subject or one that requires a fresh perspective" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 3). Additionally, hermeneutic phenomenology endeavours to fathom how

individuals, as unique beings, interpret their lived experiences (Husen, 1997). This, in particular, is the key strength of phenomenology as a research methodology, especially within the realm of hermeneutics. Therefore, it is the most fitting methodology for this research, which seeks to grasp and narrate the lived experiences of the research participants.

Phenomenology, particularly Fanon's phenomenology, and CRT are both crucial for researching young adult refugees and their access to postsecondary education because they offer complementary frameworks for understanding and contextualizing the lived experiences of racialized individuals. Fanon's phenomenology focuses on how these individuals experience and internalize social realities, while CRT emphasizes the structural forces of racism and power that shape these experiences. Together, these approaches provide a comprehensive lens through which to explore how systemic inequalities are experienced on both personal and institutional levels (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Fanon, 1952).

Both frameworks centre the lived experiences of marginalized groups as a means of understanding their everyday realities, which is vital for investigating YARs' access to education. By focusing on how YARs navigate complex racial, social, and legal structures, researchers can better grasp how their bodies and identities are racialized in their new environments. Fanon's phenomenology illuminates how YARs' experiences of exclusion and prejudice in daily encounters are tied to broader institutional and social forces. CRT, similarly, places the experiences of racialized individuals at the forefront to reveal how systemic racism shapes access to education and other opportunities. For YARs, this perspective sheds light on the specific challenges they face, such as interrupted education, language barriers, and the racialized 'othering' that impedes their integration into Canadian society.

Fanon's phenomenology further deepens our understanding by connecting individual experiences of marginalization to larger colonial and postcolonial power structures (Fanon, 1952). This connection is crucial for studying how YARs make sense of their disempowerment within systems that prioritize economic immigrants over refugees. Through Fanon's lens, researchers can explore how YARs internalize structural inequalities and how these experiences manifest in their pursuit of education. CRT complements this by analysing the role of systemic racism in shaping these structures, particularly in how education, immigration, and the labour market perpetuate inequalities. By combining these perspectives, researchers can reveal that YARs' struggles are not isolated or individual but deeply intertwined with broader social injustices.

Both Fanon's phenomenology and CRT also emphasize the power of storytelling as a method of resistance and reclamation. For YARs, this means countering dominant narratives that depict them as helpless or burdensome by highlighting their resilience, agency, and aspirations. Fanon's focus on the lived body illustrates how racialized individuals experience oppression but also how they resist it through reclaiming their humanity. Similarly, CRT uses storytelling to challenge the narratives that uphold systemic racism, allowing marginalized individuals to assert their agency by sharing their truths. In the context of YARs, storytelling becomes a tool for asserting their right to education, countering institutional barriers, and reshaping how they are perceived within society.

Lastly, both frameworks are crucial for understanding the intersectionality of social identities, such as race, gender, class, and legal status (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Fanon, 1952). Fanon's analysis of the Black body is essential for understanding how YARs may feel alienated not only because of their refugee status but also due to other intersecting factors like

racialization, language, and gender. CRT's concept of intersectionality is fundamental for fully grasping how YARs experience systemic marginalization. It recognizes that YARs may hold multiple marginalized identities—such as being Black, Muslim, or female—that compound their experiences of exclusion. By applying an intersectional lens, researchers can better uncover the unique and layered forms of oppression that YARs face, which would be overlooked if only one aspect of their identity were considered.

Fanon's phenomenology and CRT are essential for research on YARs and postsecondary education access. Together, these frameworks offer a comprehensive methodological and theoretical approach to grasp how YARs manoeuvre through intricate social systems. By cantering lived experiences, linking personal sensemaking to structural inequalities, using storytelling to challenge oppressive narratives, and analysing intersecting social identities, these approaches illuminate the significant barriers YARs face in accessing higher education and fully participating in Canadian society.

Research Design

Phenomenological research methodology distinguishes itself by its unique approach to collecting, processing, analysing and presenting data. It emphasizes understanding individuals' lived experiences, particularly through counter-storytelling narratives. In the subsequent section, I will offer a detailed exploration of the research design including recruitment, data collection and analysis procedures. This will involve a detailed discussion of the techniques used to collect data, as well as the systematic processes employed to transform this raw data into meaningful insights. By exploring these methodological aspects, we can better understand how this research functions and how it preserves and presents the richness of participants' experiences. This is

achieved through the lens of phenomenology, enriched by CRT and informed by Fanon's insights into racism and colonialism.

Participant Recruitment

My research question centres around understanding the nature of postsecondary access for YARs. The central question guiding my study is: how do YARs articulate and make meaning of their experience of accessing postsecondary education in Canada? This project concentrates on the experiences of YARs aged 20-30 hailing from countries that have undergone significant population displacement due to civil conflict.

To be considered suitable for participation, individuals had to the following four inclusion criteria:

1. They must have immigrated to Canada as refugees.

2. They must have experienced displacement due to war.

3. They must have been between the ages of 20 and 30 at the time of resettlement in Canada.

4. They must express an interest in pursuing further education or have made efforts to do so since their arrival in Canada.

These four criteria are pivotal to the participant selection process, as they underpin my research objective to shed light on the experiences of individuals who meet these specific conditions. The research project seeks to delve into the lived experiences of YARs, either as PSRs or GARs, who have endured significant displacement and demonstrate a desire to pursue further education. All four of these criteria must be met for individuals to participate in this study. In contrast, the exclusion criteria for participant eligibility include the following

1. Individuals who fall below the age of 20 or exceed 30 years at the time of resettlement in Canada.

2. Individuals who are asylum seekers or did not arrive in Canada as refugees.

3. Individuals who do not possess fluency in English or Somali.

4. Individuals who do not have a stated intention to further their education upon arriving in Canada.

5. Refugees who have not experienced displacement due to war.

During the research design phase, I was initially confident that recruiting participants would be a straightforward process. My confidence stemmed from my prior experience working with young adult refugees and my established connections with individuals involved in assisting newcomers, including refugees. However, the recruitment process presented several challenges.

I conducted my first interview on February 14, 2021, with an individual I was familiar with, and who had willingly agreed to participate in the study. To my surprise, he initially hesitated to take part because he interpreted the fourth criterion on the recruitment poster as being exclusively related to postsecondary institutions like colleges or universities. Since he hadn't attended a postsecondary institution, he felt he didn't meet the requirements, and the only reason he eventually agreed to participate was due to my personal connection with him.

This interpretation of the criterion was unexpected, and it raised concerns that others might be deterred from responding to my poster due to a similar misinterpretation. I wanted to ensure that individuals who had attended other educational programs typically pursued by refugees before gaining admission to post-secondary institutions were not excluded. To promptly address this issue, I made minor modifications to the poster by including additional educational

programs in brackets, (LINC, ACADEMIC UPGRADING, DIPLOMA, DEGREE, ETC.). These adjustments led to an increase in the number of responses I received.

The second, and arguably more significant, recruitment challenge revolved around the impossibility of conducting in-person recruitment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. By the time my research ethics received approval, the pandemic had already forced the closure of all programs that supported refugees, including those with a focus on education. Consequently, I was unable to visit the physical locations where young adult refugees typically congregated.

My initial recruitment plan entailed going to these educational spaces, distributing flyers, and engaging in face-to-face conversations with potential participants. This approach was essential for building trust and addressing any concerns that prospective participants might have had. Based on my prior experience, I knew that this particular population was not likely to respond to a poster alone. Building a personal relationship by introducing myself, explaining the aim of my research, and answering any questions was the most effective way to secure their participation. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, this method was no longer feasible.

In response to this challenge, I adapted my recruitment approach by sending personalized emails to settlement agencies that I had established previous connections with or had worked with in the past. I also reached out via email to individuals I knew were actively involved in these spaces. Unfortunately, my efforts resulted in limited responses. Among those who did respond, mainly managers to whom my emails had been forwarded, they conveyed that their programs had been halted, and they had no means of connecting with potential participants. This was surprising, as pandemic restrictions were gradually easing, and many services were transitioning to an online format.

Upon further inquiry, it was clarified to me that they were unable to offer programs in a virtual format for several reasons. First and foremost, many of the refugee newcomers they were assisting did not have access to laptops, and the agencies or educational institutions did not possess an adequate number of computers to supply the participants. Second, some of the participants lacked reliable internet access at their homes. Third, the absence of childcare support, which had been available in person, prevented some parents from participating. Lastly, the process of teaching language virtually or instructing individuals who were not fluent English speakers presented significant challenges. This was because it required two-way communication and substantial feedback, both of which were challenging to accomplish in a virtual environment.

In addition to the challenges related to in-person programs and participant access, I encountered another hurdle: limited responses from both potential participants and staff. Despite my efforts to send numerous personalized emails to settlement agencies, language programs, colleges, and various other organizations, the responses were minimal. It seemed that the pandemic had taken a toll on people, and many were reluctant to respond to unsolicited emails. Moreover, the uncertain job situations and program offerings created further complications in terms of timing.

To add further complexity, some agencies remained closed, and even as pandemic restrictions started to loosen, those that did reopen were reluctant to conduct in-person appointments due to the necessity of maintaining social distancing and safety measures. Despite providing proof of vaccination, commitment to adhering to all safety guidelines, and securing an appointment, I was informed that they couldn't help because the timing was not right.

Feeling like I had exhausted my contacts in Edmonton and received insufficient responses, I made the decision to expand my research sites to encompass Ontario and the rest of

Alberta. After consulting with my supervisor, we both agreed that broadening the research site and altering the interview format were necessary steps. Initially, the research design involved conducting multiple interviews with a relatively small number of research participants. However, after conducting about three interviews, I encountered the challenge that these participants were not willing to engage in a second or third interview. It's unclear whether the pandemic had an impact on this, but people seemed uninterested in participating in multiple interviews.

To attract new research participants, I needed to reduce the number of interviews to one but extend the duration of each interview. Additionally, I planned to increase the number of participants until I reached data saturation. In the end, I conducted a total of 15 interviews, spanning from February 2021 to March 2023. I had the opportunity to interview participants from four different cities: Edmonton (7) and Fort McMurry (2) in Alberta, and Toronto (4) and Ottawa (2) in Ontario. The data collection process extended over slightly more than two years, primarily due to the challenges brought about by the pandemic.

Interview Protocol and Data Collection

The primary data sources for this research involve interviews conducted with research participants, utilizing the hermeneutic interviewing approach. Upon receiving responses to my poster or obtaining their contact information, I reached out to potential participants to arrange an interview session. In our initial correspondence, I introduced myself, provided an overview of the research and also asked the four inclusion questions to determine if they met the specified criteria. Additionally, I engaged them in a brief discussion about some of the questions that would be explored during the interview. The primary goal was to allow participants ample time to reflect on their experiences, as suggested by Vandermause and Fleming (2011). Additionally, I shared the consent form and a demographic questionnaire with them.

Prior to conducting the interviews, I reviewed the demographic questionnaire that participants completed before their interviews (see Appendix C). I carefully examined the questions to identify any specific areas within their demographics that could become a focal point of the interview. These questions offered valuable insights into the lives of the participants. For instance, they provided information about the number of years they had spent in Canada, whether they were privately sponsored or government-assisted refugees, their educational level, details about their family composition, etc.

The demographic questions were designed to capture a sense of the participants' life circumstances and any demographic factors that might have influenced their migration and resettlement experiences. Furthermore, they served as an additional source of data for subsequent analysis. For participants who had not completed the questionnaire, which constituted the majority, I manually gathered this information at the outset of the interview.

I started each interview by thoroughly reviewing the consent form (Appendix E) with the participant. During this review, I reiterated the purpose of the interview, discussed the consent process, emphasized confidentiality, and addressed any questions or concerns. Ensuring that participants comprehended how their shared information would be utilized was a paramount concern for me. During all interviews, we allocated time to address this matter, as many participants had reservations regarding confidentiality. I anticipated these questions, as they mirrored my own concerns as a researcher, involving the delicate balance between preserving anonymity and the necessity to disseminate findings, as highlighted by Cohen (2000):

> A common aspect of the ethical agreement between researchers and participants is the
> commitment to publish or present data in a manner that safeguards the anonymity and
> confidentiality of participants. This can become challenging when the demands of

confidentiality must be balanced with the imperative to provide comprehensive

information about the participants. (p. 4)

Upon securing consent and ensuring participant comfort, the interview process commenced. I

initiated the interview with an opening question (see Appendix D). This question was carefully

crafted to reflect the essence of the phenomenon under study and employed a reflective

approach, as outlined by Vandermause and Fleming (2011). It is also intended to "activate

narrative construction" and indicate the researcher's willingness to orient the interview in a

narrative focus (Cohen, 2000). Additionally, I engaged in an evolving dialogue with the research

participants, guiding them in the process and allowing them to co-lead the conversation as we

delved into their lived experiences. According to Cohen (2000):

In this kind of interview, information is exchanged between the informant and

interviewer in both directions, the format is relatively unstructured, and the emphasis of

the interviewer is on listening to whatever the informant says as opposed to guiding and

controlling the conversation. (p. 4)

The interview questions were organized into three specific categories. The first section

inquired about Life History and Background, the second section delved into detailed experiences

related to education in Canada, and the third segment centred on the participants' meaning-

making processes. These interview questions were crafted to investigate the viewpoints of the

participants and were firmly grounded in the phenomenological method, following the guidance

of Porter & Cohen (2013). This approach aligned with the overarching objective of interpretive

phenomenological research, which aims to grasp the significance of the experience and its

contextual nuances.

Throughout the interviews, I carefully followed the narrative of the participants' experiences, whether they were recounting ongoing or past events. Since participants were recounting their responses based on both current and previous experiences, it was essential for me as a researcher to track these without disrupting the conversational flow. This approach did not prevent me from seeking clarifications when necessary, but it acknowledged that in all the interviews, participants were navigating between different points in time. As pointed out by Cohen (2000), this is indeed the role of the researcher:

> The difference is based on where the informant is in relation to the experience that you will talk about—either the experience is primarily in the past … or the experience is ongoing...This distinction is not completely clear-cut but should be reflected in the stance informants take and in the way they talk about the experience, that is, mostly in the past or in the present tense. (p. 4)

The interviews varied in duration, ranging from 35 minutes to 70 minutes each, with all but one lasting over 60 minutes. Among the seven interviews conducted in Edmonton, three took place in person at the request of the participants, allowing for face-to-face interactions. The remaining four interviews in Edmonton as well as the other eight out-of-town interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom. This combination of in-person and virtual interviews provided a diverse range of interview settings, each with its unique advantages and considerations.

During my interviews, I maintained field notes to document various observations, including aspects like vocal intonations and physical gestures, which might not be fully captured by audio recordings. I recorded descriptive information related to elements such as tone, body language, the physical setting, or any other details that could shed light on the research problem.

Additionally, I made note of specific words or phrases that I wanted to explore further. This practice aligns with the perspective of Vandermause & Fleming (2011):

> Field notes often encompass events that are observed, such as vocal intonations and physical gestures, which might not be evident in audio recordings…These nuances can enhance understanding, even if they are not essential for establishing an objective factual representation. They simply facilitate a deeper exploration of the meaning associated with the expressed narrative. (p. 370)

Reading the body language of participants was notably easier during in-person interviews in contrast to virtual ones. In virtual interviews conducted over Zoom, only the upper body of the participant is visible, making it challenging to discern emotions expressed through body language. However, the virtual environment offered a unique insight into the participants' private lives. Through Zoom, I had the opportunity to glimpse into the personal spaces of the participants, occasionally meeting their spouses, children, and other family members, which, in some instances, led to engaging conversations about their families and surroundings.

I discovered that these field notes were valuable not only during the interviews but also in the post-interview phase. While transcribing the data, I could revisit my notes to recall what I had observed in relation to the narratives shared by the participants.

In addition, following the interviews, I made notes about certain emerging themes that became apparent to me, drawing from the existing literature. These initial themes were broad in nature, encompassing areas such as family obligations, financial challenges, the scarcity of accurate information, language barriers, and more. These notes served as a practical means for me to monitor the preliminary findings of the research. Also, according to Cohen et al. (2019), "analysis actually begins during interviews, when researchers are actively listening and thinking

about the meaning of what is being said" (p. 4). Additionally, I compiled a concise summary of the information provided by the participants and documented any specific points or quotations that resonated with the research problem.

Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings

Within a span of two weeks, I began the transcription process for the interviews. I opted to transcribe the audio manually without external assistance, driven by several reasons. Firstly, I aimed to deeply engage with the phenomenon and preserve the interview's essence without losing its authenticity. I prioritized transcribing the interviews promptly to keep the details fresh in my memory. Secondly, my objective was to guarantee precision and kickstart the hermeneutic circle. Finally, my decision to manually transcribe the interviews was driven by a commitment to safeguard the privacy of the research participants, a pledge I had made to them prior to the interviews.

After completing the interview transcriptions, I began the analysis phase, using the frameworks outlined in Cohen et al. (2019) and Merriam's (2016) *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation.* Fanon's phenomenology was also a key part of the process, as I engaged deeply with the data, paying particular attention to how YARs described their experiences of racialization and navigating Canadian social systems. I started by carefully reading and re-reading the transcripts, a method referred to as "immersing oneself in the data" (Cohen et al., 2019). This was followed by a detailed analysis of specific sections within the broader context of the full text. This approach facilitated a dialectical, or hermeneutic, analysis of the data, which Cohen describes as follows:

> The hermeneutic circle is a metaphor that guides the process of inquiry on several levels. The analysis begins as parts of the text are understood in relation to the whole text and

vice versa. Then, the individual texts are understood in relation to all the texts and vice versa. The researcher begins with a vague and tentative notion of the meaning of the whole of the data and with the reflexive awareness that this notion is an anticipation of meaning. This awareness causes a dialectical examination of parts of the data to understand better the whole. With a better understanding of the whole, examination of different data or the same parts of the data at a deeper level drives the analysis ahead. (p. 2)

This dialectic analysis is crucial as a thorough understanding relies on the interconnectedness of both the entire text and its individual components. Following the analysis of the data, I proceed with the process of data reduction. This step in data analysis involves some decision-making on the part of the researcher concerning what is relevant and what is not. The process is similar to editing. Transcriptions of the interviews typically include digressions, abrupt changes in topics, and verbal ticks. The researcher can reorganize the interviews to place together discussions of the same topic, eliminate digressions that are clearly off-topic, and simplify the spoken language of the informants (eliminate "you know" for instance) without changing the unique character (Cohen et al., 2019, Peoples, 2021). This procedure enabled me to recognize meaningful patterns and gain a better understanding of how individual participants experience the phenomenon.

After finishing the data reduction phase, I started the process of breaking them down into 'meaning units,' or a 'unit of data'. This can be "as small as a word a participant used to describe a feeling or phenomenon, or as large as several pages of field notes describing a particular incident" (Merriam, 2016, p. 203). These 'meaning units' play a pivotal role in facilitating the practical organization and analysis of the data. Following this organization, I proceed to group

them into clusters based on their similar meanings. Subsequently, I revisit the transcripts to ascertain whether there have been any alterations in the understanding of the phenomenon and to validate that the 'meaning units' have been appropriately assigned to clusters of similar meaning (Charman, 2017; Merriam, 2016; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). This process also ensures the researcher's bias or lived experiences do not become central to the process.

The clusters of similar meanings are then grouped together into themes and sub-themes. This process is done separately for each individual interview. Once all individual interviews are analyzed and organized into themes and sub-themes, the researcher seeks to uncover commonalities between participants' experiences.

Figure 1: List of Themes

The last stage involved conducting a thematic analysis. In this step, I grouped clusters of similar meanings into overarching themes and sub-themes (see Appendix F for full list). This procedure was carried out independently for each individual interview. Once all individual interviews had been analyzed and organized into these themes and sub-themes, I aimed to uncover commonalities between participants' experiences.

Throughout the thematic analysis, I integrated both Fanon's phenomenology and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Fanon's insights guided the examination of how YARs internalized their marginalization, while CRT helped connect these individual experiences to broader patterns of racial discrimination and policy-driven exclusion. As I categorized meaning units into themes and sub-themes, such as systemic racism and educational barriers, Fanon's focus on the embodied experience and CRT's emphasis on narrative allowed for a nuanced presentation of not only the challenges participants faced but also their acts of resistance and agency in contesting imposed narratives.

The overall process of data analysis proved to be a time-consuming and labour-intensive process, which aligns with the expectations of interpretative phenomenology (Charman, 2017; Cohen et al., 2000; Maxwell, 2013; Porter & Cohen, 2013; van Manen, 1990). A positive outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic within the scope of my research was that, given challenges in recruiting research participants and extended gaps between interviews, I had the advantage and opportunity to dedicate substantial time to immerse myself in the data. As Merriam (2016) states:

> To wait until all data are collected is to lose the opportunity to gather more reliable and
> valid data; to wit until the end is also to court disaster, as many qualitative researchers

have been overwhelmed and rendered helpless by the sheer amount of data in a qualitative study. (p. 236)

The results were presented in a manner accessible to a wide audience, enriched with relevant quotations. Themes were grouped to summarize the phenomenon, highlighting commonalities across participants while also addressing differences (Peoples, 2021). In presenting the data, Fanon's phenomenology was applied to capture the embodied experiences of YARs, particularly how their racialized identities shaped their interactions with social systems. Simultaneously, CRT was used to situate these personal narratives within broader patterns of systemic racism and policy exclusion. This dual approach allowed for a nuanced presentation of both individual and shared experiences.

The research findings were presented in three separate chapters, each beginning with the participants' narratives and followed by a discussion that connected these lived experiences to existing literature and broader social structures. This discussion utilized Fanon's phenomenology and CRT to analyse how YARs navigated educational and social barriers and made sense of their experiences. The findings will be communicated in a reader-friendly manner, supported by relevant quotations. Themes will be organized to offer a summary of the phenomenon, emphasizing commonalities across participants and highlighting differences (Peoples, 2021). Subsequently, the discussion chapter will bridge the research findings with existing literature using the theoretical framework. Like any qualitative study, this phenomenological research inquiry has limitations, detailed further in the following sections, encompassing aspects of methodology and research design.

Limitations

Limitation of Methodology

A major methodological limitation of phenomenology is around the subjectivity of the researcher, particularly in the analysis phase. Some phenomenologists view phenomenology as an epistemology (McKenna, 1982; Shi, 2011). They make the argument that consciousness is the fundamental source of knowledge and you could get to it by engaging in a systematic analysis of the phenomena (Shi, 2011). This thinking is more in line with Husserl's descriptive phenomenology where it is thought that the researcher can 'bracket' his/her biases and represent the true essence of the phenomenon. In interpretive phenomenology, it is acknowledged that the researcher's subjectivity is reflected in the process of inquiry (Adams & van Manen, 2008; Shi, 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Unlike descriptive phenomenology research, interpretive phenomenology does not require the researcher to engage in the use of bracketing. Even with bracketing, the researcher's biases and perceptions cannot be fully mitigated. The researcher's subjectivity is evident in the entire process of the research design, from the type of questions asked to how the data is presented. However, this can present a limitation to credibility, particularly in the analysis phase. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the researcher to communicate the validity of the research and demonstrate how it is based on a critical investigation (Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

Limitation of Research Design

Similar to many phenomenological research studies, this research faces limitations, including small sample size and potential bias in participant selection (Peoples, 2021). The recruitment process introduces additional challenges. Firstly, there isn't a single institution or setting where YARs congregate, unlike school-aged children. Consequently, recruitment relies

on personal networks and immigrant-serving agencies. Secondly, language barriers pose a hurdle, especially for newcomer refugees who may not have achieved fluency in English. This limitation may exclude individuals with limited English proficiency unless they speak Somali, a language in which I am fluent and can provide translation/transcription services. Moreover, the research focuses specifically on individuals who arrived in Canada as refugees, excluding those currently seeking asylum or with 'irregular status.' The exclusion of these groups, who face unique barriers due to their status, is a strategic decision to manage the scope of the research. Consequently, the challenges and experiences of asylum seekers and individuals with 'irregular status' will not be captured in this study.

Ethical Considerations

As is the case with any research involving human participants, ethical considerations play a vital role in this study. The primary objective of this research is to ensure the well-being and protection of the participants while mitigating any potential harm. It's worth noting that phenomenological studies are generally regarded as low-risk to participants because they involve data obtained from interviews where participants voluntarily share their experiences (Cohen et al., 2000). Nevertheless, I have taken proactive measures to minimize any potential harm by adhering to the ethical guidelines established by the university's Research and Ethics Boards and following the Tri-Council Policy on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. The most prominent ethical concerns in this study revolve around issues of consent, confidentiality, the use of incentives, and addressing any potential distress that may arise from participants sharing their lived experiences.

The research involves a vulnerable population, necessitating heightened sensitivity when it comes to comprehending consent and confidentiality. I spent a lot of time during both our

initial conversation and the interview itself to ensure participants understood the research's objectives, their rights, and the potential consequences of their involvement. This approach included explaining that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point before data analysis. Additionally, I provided participants with the study's information letter before the interview, allowing ample time for them to review and discuss each section in detail during the interview.

I also made efforts to provide strong reassurance to the research participants that the information they disclosed during the interviews would be reported in an anonymous manner, with no personal identifiers linked to the discussion outcomes. Explaining this delicate balance was challenging because I needed to both ensure confidentiality and clarify the utilization of the data collected, which encompassed their lived experiences. Additionally, I implemented measures to safeguard participants' privacy and anonymity through the secure storage and management of data, with data access limited exclusively to the researcher. To protect the anonymity of the research participants, pseudonyms are used throughout the study.

Another ethical concern revolved around the use of incentives and rewards. I grappled with the decision of whether to offer financial incentives, as I was concerned about it potentially influencing participants' motivation to take part. However, I recognized the importance of providing an incentive as a token of appreciation for participants' time and their willingness to share their lived experiences. I opted to offer $25 to each participant, and to my surprise, it was not a significant factor influencing participation. Ideally, I had considered offering a higher incentive, but after consulting the literature and considering the ethical implications, I determined that $25 was an appropriate and reasonable amount.

The final ethical concern pertains to the potential negative emotions and feelings that might emerge during our conversations. It's reasonable to anticipate that newcomer refugees could experience frustration when their expectations for opportunities and acceptance in Canada clash with the realities of their current situation. Responding to interview questions might indeed evoke some frustration and emotional distress.

In recognition of this concern, I took care to be exceptionally attentive and attuned to the emotional well-being of the participants, closely observing their body language, tone of voice, and other non-verbal cues. Anticipating such possible outcomes, I shared with the participants what others have found helpful in similar situations. Additionally, I compiled a list of resources and organizations that offer support to newcomers in areas such as language, education, settlement, and counselling services before conducting the interviews. I offered this list of organizations and services to participants whom I believed might benefit from it or had requested it. Several participants inquired about additional information regarding services that were not initially included in the list. In response to their requests, I conducted further research and provided them with additional information to the best of my ability. This approach was designed to offer participants additional support and guidance, while also serving as a means for me to express my appreciation for their valuable contribution to the research. They were doing me a great favour by taking part, and this was a way to reciprocate their assistance.

I received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office in January 2021 (Pro00104506). Following ethical guidelines, I refrained from reaching out to potential participants until I had obtained official approval from the ethics committee. Additionally, in light of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the difficulty in

securing research participants, I applied for an extension to accommodate these unforeseen circumstances.

Self-Location and Positionality

> *Actual research cannot take place without the trust of the community, and one way to gain trust is to locate yourself. (Absolon & Willett, 2005, p. 107)*

I was born in Mogadishu, Somalia, into an upper-middle-class family that valued education deeply in all its forms: formal, traditional, and spiritual. Education represented a crucial pathway to personal and communal liberation, and within our family, it was considered an essential journey. Both of my parents attended school in a language that was not our native tongue. My siblings and I were the first generation in our family to receive education in Somali, which followed a curriculum aimed at decolonization. However, my education in Somalia was abruptly halted by the outbreak of civil war, leading to the loss of our home. Amidst these challenges, my father sought asylum in Canada, while the rest of our family became refugees in Egypt. We reunited in Canada three years later.

My research centres on exploring the various avenues to postsecondary education accessible to young refugees in Canada. I once came across the notion that being a refugee is not an identity but rather an experience. This particular research topic holds personal significance for me, as it draws from both my family's experiences and my own journey in Canada. My epistemological perspective is deeply influenced by my intersectionality as a Black, Muslim, and former refugee woman. This unique intersectionality provides me with a multifaceted lens through which I can examine and assess the creation and perpetuation of knowledge. This research holds a deeply personal significance to me.

Throughout this research, I actively engage with young adult refugees, fostering a collaborative approach to collectively identify the barriers they face based on their lived experiences. My aim is to empower both the participants and myself, encouraging us all to recognize the knowledge that resides within us (Hall, 2005). I do not claim to possess an exhaustive understanding of the struggles young adults face on their journeys toward postsecondary education. Throughout the course of this research, my approach is one of openness, dedicated to listening, and faithfully documenting their experiences and narratives as defined and recounted by them. However, it is important to note that my role in this research extends beyond that of a detached observer; I am a committed participant and a continual learner in the research process, embodying a stance of active engagement rather than detached observation (Hall, 2005, p. 12).

My status as an "insider," driven by my lived experiences and expertise in the field, proved advantageous in the recruitment and interviewing process. This insider perspective facilitated the establishment of trust with my research participants. Their comfort in participating in the research was heightened by the knowledge that I possessed a certain level of understanding regarding the topic and their experiences. This, in turn, created an environment where they felt at ease sharing their lived experiences openly. In some instances, the interviews took on the form of conversations, particularly with participants from East Africa.

Given my close proximity to the research topic, I made a concerted effort to avoid inadvertently influencing the participants and the research process. To achieve this, I actively engaged in reflexivity exercises and diligently maintained field notes in which I documented my thoughts, emotions, and any preconceived assumptions that might impact the research. I also took steps to ensure that I didn't rely solely on my own interpretation. First, I asked research

participants to elaborate on specific areas to gain a more in-depth understanding and to avoid relying solely on my own analysis. Additionally, I conducted member checking on the emerging themes and subthemes to validate that my interpretation accurately reflected their experiences. This approach enhanced the credibility and validity of the research findings.

Participants

The individuals listed below comprise the 15 participants, six Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR) and nine Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR), whose narratives will be explored throughout the upcoming three chapters. Their life stories will be examined in greater detail as we learn about their perspectives.

Table 1: List of Participants

#	Pseudonym	Gender	Age at Arrival	Year of Arrival	Country of Origin	City /Province	Immigration Pathway
1	Ahmed	M	21	2016	Somalia	Edmonton, AB	PSR
2	Sagal	F	20	2018	Somalia	Edmonton, AB	PSR
3	Aliyah	F	21	2018	Syrian	Edmonton, AB	GAR
4	Yonas	M	23	2017	Eritrea	Edmonton, AB	PSR
5	Anok	F	23	2017	Sudan	Calgary, AB	PSR
6	Jamila	F	18	2019	Syrian	Toronto, ON	GAR
7	Samaan	M	18	2016	Syrian	Ottawa, ON	GAR
8	Hana	F	19	2018	Yemen	Fort McMurray, AB	GAR
9	Ali	M	27	2020	Somalia	Ottawa, ON	PSR
10	Yodit	F	26	2017	Ethiopia	Edmonton, AB	PSR
11	Mira	F	22	2018	Syrian	Toronto, ON	GAR
12	Ibrahim	M	29	2018	Syrian	Toronto, ON	GAR

13	Abel	M	21	2018	Ethiopia	Toronto, ON	PSR
14	Joseph	M	19	2019	Congo	Edmonton, AB	PSR
15	Aster	F	20	2019	Sudan	Fort McMurray, AB	PSR

Summary

In this chapter, I have explored phenomenological research as a methodological framework, drawing insights from Fanon and CRT to underscore its relevance to this study. I have outlined the research design, including participant recruitment, data collection methods, and analysis procedures. Moreover, I have addressed the inherent limitations of the methodology and ethical considerations involved in conducting this research. The primary objective of this study is to deeply investigate the lived experiences of YARs regarding their access to postsecondary education. Phenomenological research, particularly influenced by Fanon's approach, emerges as the most suitable methodology for capturing these nuanced experiences. It allows for the collection of rich narratives and integrates CRT's counter storytelling to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This approach also provides flexibility to apply an interpretive lens, such as CRT, to contextualize and illuminate the underlying reasons behind these experiences. In the next chapter, I will present the findings derived from the phenomenological approach outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Financial Pressures and Limitations of the Private Sponsorship Program

A prominent recurring theme that emerged during the interview process was the significant financial pressure that acted as a barrier to individuals pursuing further education. Privately sponsored refugees voiced their most pressing concerns, which included the need to gain independence from their sponsors and achieve financial self-sufficiency. In contrast, government-sponsored refugees were primarily preoccupied with their ability to support themselves once their initial year of financial assistance ended. Additional themes that surfaced encompassed the substantial costs associated with post-secondary education, sending remittances to support family members in their home countries, a lack of financial literacy and inadequate information from those responsible for providing it. In the following chapter, I will provide a more in-depth exploration of these specific subthemes.

Gratitude and pressure to relieve sponsor burden

The need for financial independence among young adult refugees emerged as a key finding. Despite feeling grateful for the support of their sponsors and for the opportunity to be in Canada, many young adult refugees expressed a desire to become financially independent and self-sufficient. This is particularly true for those who are privately sponsored either by family members, private citizens, community groups or church groups, as they may feel a sense of obligation or burden to their sponsors. Yonas, a male from Eritrea who was privately sponsored by a church group with the assistance of his brother and presently lives in Edmonton, encapsulates this sentiment when he remarks:

> *But church people were nice and helpful. They brought me here. You can't expect more than that. They got you here and you shouldn't rely on them more because they did their job. When I was coming here, I did not expect anyone to help me. I told myself if I get*

here that would be enough. It is now up to me to look after myself and my family. I want to look after myself and I want to be responsible for myself.

Yonas's statement highlights the complex relationship between young adult refugees and their sponsors. While he acknowledges his gratitude towards the church members who facilitated his arrival in Canada, he also implies that their sponsorship duties have been fulfilled by bringing him here. This sentiment aligns with other studies (Agrawal, 2018; Lenard, 2016) and echoes the feelings of participants in this study, illustrating how gratitude and a sense of responsibility are intertwined with the desire for self-sufficiency to avoid burdening those who have given them a fresh start in a new country.

When asked further about the financial responsibility his sponsors took to support his living expenses for a year, Yonas stated:

Maybe that is what they said but I don't know. These people, you know, are so nice. They got me here. I don't know anything about, you know, what they said or want to do but I feel they want me to work. Like I was taking LINC classes when I came here. They told me to take these classes because my English was not very good. It was OK but not very good. After maybe three or four months, they ask about my plans. I said to them I want to get an education so I can get a good job. One of the people said 'What about work and how will I look after myself?'. I have been thinking about that question too but I did not think he would ask me but why not? It is a good question, you have to look after yourself and these people are not going to support me forever.

Yonas's expression of not wishing to be a burden on his sponsors was a sentiment I encountered with other participants as well. During these interviews, it didn't seem that the sponsors had explicitly told them to achieve independence. Therefore, I delved deeper and inquired about Yonas's thoughts regarding one of his sponsors asking, "*What about work and how will I look after myself?"*

I mean, to me if you ask me, what he meant was clear, don't you think? I told him I want to go to school and he replied what about work? That is a clear question that is telling me I need to look for a job. This is not the only time I heard this. Another time when I was meeting a few people from the church, they told me to look for a job. [pause]. Actually, they ask if I am looking for a job. Also, my brother, who is also sponsored by the church and he is the one who help me get sponsored here too. He said I need to look for a job because these people are bringing a lot of people from Africa and other places and they can't financially support me long. I don't want to see like I am complaining, I am really not. These people are very, very nice. They helped me and my brother and we are lucky they bring us here you know. I am very happy with them and yes, I need to look after myself. You know, there is nothing wrong with the question.

The intricate relationship between gratitude, responsibility, and independence indicates that young adult refugees have a strong inclination not to overly depend on their sponsors, believing that it is their duty to take care of themselves. The aspiration to avoid becoming a financial burden on their sponsors extended beyond community groups and churches; it was even more pronounced among refugees sponsored by their own family members. Ahmed, a Somali male who was privately sponsored with the help of his siblings and currently resides in Edmonton, shared a similar perspective regarding his reliance on his sister.

I didn't want to rely on my sister who sponsored me because she had children, and I didn't want to be a financial burden even when she assured me it is her job as the sponsor and my sister. And as a young man, I felt I had to work and take care of myself...Your sponsors are responsible for helping you do things like registering you for language classes which they did. However, I encountered financial challenges and I did not want to burden them. I came here in my mid-20s and that is not an age where I can rely on people to financially sponsor me.

Sagal, a Somali woman who resides in Edmonton, and was privately sponsored by her cousin, echoed a comparable sentiment about not wanting to impose a burden on her relative.

She expressed, *"I had my cousin who sponsored me, and he was willing to help me, but I did not want to burden him. I am an adult, and I should be able to look after myself."*

Yonas, Ahmed, and Sagal all share a common sense of gratitude towards their sponsors. They perceive their sponsors as having fulfilled their obligations by facilitating their arrival in the new country. There is a prevailing sentiment that the challenging part was reaching their current location, and now that they are here, the responsibility to look after themselves falls on their shoulders.

They all see themselves as capable working adults and are uncomfortable with the idea of relying on their sponsors for financial support. While not explicitly stated, there is an underlying sense that requesting financial support while attending school without working is seen as excessive and not in line with a spirit of gratitude. They consider it too much to ask, given all that their sponsors have done to bring them to this new opportunity. Furthermore, not only these three participants but also others in the study had spent years before being resettled in Canada. Their sponsors played a pivotal role in getting them to this point, and now, in their view, the sponsors' task is complete. Now, it falls upon them to assume responsibility and actively pursue self-sufficiency.

The pressure to achieve financial independence and avoid being a burden carries consequences. In all interviews where participants mentioned experiencing this pressure, they ultimately opted to work and discontinued their educational pursuits. This occurred because, upon securing employment, they assumed financial responsibility for their living expenses. For instance, Ahmed's experience highlights this pattern.

> *… And for many newcomers, the biggest issue is trying to do school while at the same time paying for their living expenses and being financially independent. It is really difficult to just go to school. You don't have enough money to support yourself but if you*

work and don't go to school then you're not going to develop the language skills needed to actually work and more important to further education. So I made a tough decision to stop my English classes and work and end up working in a meat packaging company.

For Ahmed, the choice to discontinue his schooling was a *'difficult decision.'* He tried to juggle his language classes alongside his newfound financial obligations. Ahmed was eligible for Alberta Income Supports, which provided him with $786 in financial assistance while he was enrolled in an educational program. However, the Income Support program mandated that recipients work less than 20 hours a week. Assuming the newfound responsibility of meeting all his financial obligations, Ahmed found it challenging to cover his necessary expenses with the $786 assistance he received.

> *So for my first year, I was sponsored by my family. This meant I wouldn't receive any assistance from the government. I tried to find a job so I could be financially independent and not rely on my family. Right away I realized this was not going to be easy because I did not speak good English. I also started to go to language classes so I could be at a level where I can go to college. When I first applied to the language classes and I was told I'm eligible for $786 [Income support] as long as I am enrolled in the program. I was happy to be receiving this money until I found a job but right away they told me they need to deduct $280 for books alone. This left me with about $500 to live on. So what am I supposed to do with this $500? Am I supposed to use it to buy a bus pass? Pay rent? Buy groceries? Cell Phone bills? Clothing? After I did initial calculations, I realized right away that I had to work on top of taking these language classes.*

At first, Ahmed persisted with the language program for a couple of months while living with his sponsor. However, a crucial aspect of achieving financial independence was to eventually move out and be on his own. During the period he was receiving Income Support, he allocated the remaining $502, after covering expenses like books and supplies, to pay for various costs, including transportation, his cell phone bill, and personal items such as clothing, and saved any surplus for future apartment rent.

While he was on Income Support and still a student, Ahmed embarked on a job search but immediately confronted a significant hurdle. The available job opportunities demanded full-time commitments, while the few part-time positions he came across often involved shift work that would disrupt his studies. For Ahmed, it became evident that continuing his education and achieving financial independence simultaneously would not be feasible. Faced with a difficult decision, he opted to leave school due to the pressure, whether real or perceived, not to be a 'burden' to his sponsor.

This harsh reality is one that my participants encountered and embraced as an integral part of their new life in the country. For instance, Yonas also confronted a similar dilemma, acknowledging, "*Yes, it's a part of life here. You just have to make decisions, like whether you're going to school or going to work. It's just what you have to do when you are new to this country.*"

Responsibilities to the Family: sending remittances back home and household

The concern regarding not only striving for financial independence but also the necessity of supporting their families has recurred frequently in the discussions. This took two forms. First, for young adults who come here without their families, there was an expectation to send money back home, whether in refugee camps, internally displaced or in a safer part of the country. All nine privately sponsored participants arrived individually, in contrast to all six government-assisted refugees who came with their families. Participants who came as individuals left their parents and most of their family members behind. Some, like Ahmed and Yonas, had siblings in the country who facilitated their sponsorship.

For privately sponsored refugees who arrived in the country as individuals, the desire to send money back to their families was another compelling reason for seeking financial

independence from their sponsors. This was because they wished to support their families abroad but were hesitant to request additional financial assistance from their sponsors. Furthermore, they indicated that their sponsors were unwilling to allow them to allocate any of their received funds for their families. This sentiment aligns with the findings of Elcioglu & Shams (2023), who conducted 25 in-depth interviews with refugee sponsors in the Greater Toronto Area. Their research revealed that sponsors discouraged remittances and instead encouraged refugees to concentrate on their resettlement process and achieving financial independence. However, all the refugees interviewed in this study were resolute in their belief that they needed to fulfill both objectives. For instance, Yonas articulates his need to be financially self-reliant while also sending money to his family back home:

> *Well, I was working part-time but it was not enough to support myself and my family. My older brother and I send money back home to our family. We sent money to our parents in Eritrea and our younger brother in Ethiopia. My older brother has a wife and children so he cannot help as much. I need to start working full-time so I can take care of myself and send money to our family. I had to quit school because I was attending school full time and I couldn't do that and work full time.*

Yonas's experience highlights the difficult choices that many young adult refugees must make when trying to balance their education with their financial obligations to their families. In Yonas's case, he felt a sense of responsibility to financially support his family because his older brother, who was also sponsored by the church, had financial obligations as a married man with children. As a result, Yonas had to make the difficult decision to quit school so that he could work full-time and provide for his family.

A similar situation is shared by Anok, who was privately sponsored by a church group with the assistance of her aunt. Anok's aunt had been financially supporting the family while they were internally displaced in South Sudan and continued to do so when they became

refugees in Uganda. She was determined to bring Anok, along with her five younger siblings and their mother, to Canada for a better life. Anok's aunt made efforts for almost two years to persuade a local church group involved in private refugee sponsorship to support the entire family. However, the church group declined the family's application because of their large size, which would require substantial financial support to sponsor all seven members. Eventually, Anok's aunt presented only Anok for sponsorship, and she was accepted by the group.

> *I was happy to hear I was coming to Canada. It has been a big dream of mine to come to North America. Since coming to Uganda, something told me I would come to America, I cannot explain it but it was something inside of me that knew. When we got the call from my aunt my siblings and I were all very happy, so so happy. But my mother was not, that is when I knew something was not right. I mean we waited for over three years for this moment and that is not the reaction I expected from my mother, not at all.*

Anok's demeanour during the interview underwent a noticeable shift when she began discussing the moment she received the news. Her tone revealed her deep disappointment. She went on to explain that her mother had informed her and her siblings that only she would be leaving. Initially, Anok was reluctant to go, as she was 20 years old and had never been separated from her family. However, her mother emphasized that Anok would have a better life and that it would be easier to reunite in Canada if they had a blood relative already resettled there.

Anok spoke about how her mother consistently stressed the importance of obtaining an education. Anok had always excelled in school, and her dream was to become a nurse. She planned to continue her education and then sponsor her family once she achieved financial stability. However, her aunt had a different plan in mind for her.

> *During the first few months here [Canada], I went to LINC program. I was put at level five because my English was really good [she spent two years taking English classes*

while waiting to be resettled in Canada]. I just needed few more classes to get to a level where I can apply for college. I was also trying to register for Math class because that was the prerequisite for the Health Aid program. While I was taking my classes, my aunt told me I should look for a job and my English was good enough for me to work. She told me I should think about my family and help her with supporting them. Like finally sending money to them.

It became evident to Anok that her aunt intended to shift the financial burden of supporting her family onto her. One of the reasons her aunt had sponsored her was with the expectation that Anok would assist her family. Anok recounted her aunt saying, *"I invested all this time and money for you to come here so you can help your mother."*

Anok's situation is common amongst the participants and not only limited to privately sponsored refugees. The government assisted refugees, although they came as a family unit also felt pressure to contribute to the family finances. Because their parents were either too old to work or were working in low-wage jobs after the initial year of government assistance was over, they had to help out the family.

Hana, a young woman from Yemen, expresses her frustration with financially supporting her family while also aspiring to continue her education. Her frustration stems from the prolonged duration it takes to complete all the prerequisites, including LINC, ESL, and upgrading courses, in order to qualify for a college program. As the eldest member of her family, they are facing financial challenges after their initial government assistance has expired. Hana conveys her frustration:

Only my father is working and my mother, she is looking after the children. I am working part-time at Tim Hortons and I give all my money to my parents, I only keep small amount for my bus tickets and cell phone but it is not enough. Rent is very expensive and my father's money from Uber is ok but like not enough for all the bills. I am talking these classes and programs for almost two years and I still don't have a professional certificate

to work. I need to work full-time job soon and I am worried I might have to stop my education, at least until my brother finishes high school. I don't know.

Aliyah, a young woman from Syria who was government-sponsored with her family, found herself in a similar situation. She was the eldest in her family, and her mother faced challenges with employment due to language barriers and a lack of childcare for her four younger children. After the initial year of government assistance ended, they began receiving social assistance while her mother attended language classes to improve her English.

Aliyah had to make the tough decision to withdraw from her education program. She wasn't achieving the desired progress in her educational pursuits, but, most importantly, she had to take on the responsibility of supporting her family. Their case worker was also pressuring the family to find employment and discontinue their reliance on income support. Aliyah shares her experience of discontinuing her program:

Well, it was a really hard time for me. By the time I decided to not continue with the process, I was already 24 years old. I have younger siblings and a mother who's looking to me to financially provide for them. I was trying to be a provider for my family while continuing my dream of furthering my education. However, I realized I couldn't do both. I had to choose and I chose the path that seemed more practical.

In addition to consistently providing financial assistance to their families, both abroad and within their Canadian households, there is also an expectation to assist individuals beyond their immediate family circle. This might encompass extended family members or members of the broader community. These requests for support are typically sporadic or occur less frequently. For many of the participants, this aid aligns with the customary practices of their culture. As Joseph aptly expresses: "*You know, coming from Africa, because of how privileged we are or how few things we have, we were raised in a way of sharing things and were raised in a way of giving.*"

The pressure to provide for both themselves and their families can create a significant

hurdle for young adult refugees in their pursuit of educational objectives, even though they

recognize the importance of education for their long-term success. This predicament presents a

complex dilemma that many young adults must grapple with. On one hand, pursuing education

and training can empower them with valuable skills and knowledge that can open doors to

higher-paying employment opportunities and long-term financial security. However, on the other

hand, these young adults often contend with immediate financial demands, which compel them

to prioritize earning income to cover their essential needs and provide support to their families.

Cost of education

The financial burden of education serves as another obstacle to pursuing further studies.

The participants discussed two aspects of the cost of education. First, many were reluctant to pay

for language classes or academic upgrading at the postsecondary level, whether through private

or public institutions. This necessity to cover language course expenses stemmed from their

dissatisfaction with the LINC program, which is offered for free in community and college

settings. As previously described in Chapter Two, all the participants who mentioned the LINC

program expressed their disappointment, as they believed it was not sufficiently accelerating

their language skills to meet their needs. Consequently, some began exploring paid alternatives.

Ahmed, who had to withdraw from the LINC program in order to work, conveyed his

dissatisfaction with the progress he was making in the program. After working for about a year,

he intended to return to school to pursue language courses that would enable him to qualify for a

diploma program. However, he was hesitant about rejoining the LINC program and considered

enrolling in a language program at the local community college. Nevertheless, he was conflicted

about paying for the language program, as completing it alone would not suffice to meet the

requirements for entry into postsecondary education. He still needed to complete English and

math courses before becoming eligible for the diploma program he aspired to pursue.

> *I thought about taking a loan but it didn't make sense for me to take a loan for just*
> *language classes. That is something you do for college or university. I couldn't justify*
> *taking a loan and being in debt while doing these courses but at the same time, I needed*
> *to work.*

Ahmed is grappling with the dilemma of justifying the cost of a language course that he

had previously received for free. Enrolling in this program would not only require him to take

out a loan but would also prevent him from working full-time, which is essential for covering his

living expenses. Hana echoed a similar sentiment, but for her, the concern revolved more around

qualifying for a student loan. The program she intended to pursue was an intensive language

course, but because it was offered by a private institution, she had heard that she might not

qualify for a student loan.

> *ESL is free for permanent residents and LINC is free. And then upgrading sometimes is*
> *free and sometimes they say you have to take a loan. After that, I'm not sure whether you*
> *need a loan or free. I'm not sure because I didn't reach there but I'm talking based on*
> *what I hear from somebody. We came here without money there was zero money so how*
> *can we pay for school if it is not free? Even getting a loan would be nice but you don't*
> *qualify. If the government's not giving us loan for school how can we pay for school?.*

Hana believed that the government should make it easier for newcomers to access student loans.

If a particular program did not meet the criteria for such loans, she suggested that there should be

information available about alternative programs that did. She also expressed her reservations

about potentially going into debt for a language program that may not ultimately affect her

eligibility for the business administration program she aimed for. *"Sometimes I think why take*

this program like it might help with language but it might not get me into the program I want. I

don't know."

The second concern revolves around the apprehension of incurring debt when pursuing traditional postsecondary programs. Participants hailing from Somalia, Ethiopia, and Syria expressed that education is either free or affordable at publicly funded post-secondary institutions in their country. Samaan, a male from Ottawa, and Jamila, a female from Toronto, both originating from Syria, shared similar concerns about the high costs associated with postsecondary education in Canada. Samaan is presently enrolled in medical school in Ottawa. Similar to Jamila, he was fortunate to possess his high school diploma from Syria, which was recognized as a Canadian high school diploma after an assessment. Following a language proficiency test, he gained direct entry to a university and obtained a bachelor's degree in science. While the cost of tuition was a shock to him, he viewed postsecondary education as a worthwhile investment.

In contrast, Jamila had completed a nursing degree shortly before she and her family were displaced. Upon arriving in Canada, she possessed her high school diploma but not her degree. She made efforts to obtain a copy of her degree; however, the institution had closed down due to the conflict, and the sole copy of her diploma was lost when her house was destroyed. As a result, she enrolled in the Practical Nurse program, which led to her accumulating nearly $20,000 in student loan debt. She got married and pregnant while still in school. She was not expecting to get pregnant so soon and is now thinking about her decision to take on such a 'huge' amount of student loans.

> *I am now not working because I have to look after my children. But, the government keeps calling me and sending me letters asking to pay back the loan. How can I do that when I am not working? Where do they think the money will come from?*

Jamila's hesitation in committing to postsecondary education arises from her frustration with the high cost of education and a lack of comprehension regarding loans and credit. This

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sentiment was consistently voiced by all the participants. The recurring theme of financial literacy and the complexities of student loans emerged in discussions about the expenses associated with post-secondary education. Joseph, for instance, spent over $15,000 on a program that was marketed as a pathway to university admission. It's worth noting that the diploma program was conducted at a private college.

> *So it [enrolling in the program] was good at that time, but it's super expensive for eight months because it costs $15,000. And because you don't know, you are not used to how this country works, you literally don't know the value of the money. You're just excited to go back to school. I came to realize them after I've been in the country for almost like one to two years. But when you're new, you're just excited to go back to school. You get a loan and you think I am good now, I can go to school. This was a private college where all the credits I received, I could not use them anyway. They told me, despite having that college diploma, I could not use. That I have to go back to upgrading if I want to go to college or university.*

Upon witnessing limited progress in the LINC program, someone from Joseph's community suggested that he enrol in a diploma program at a private for-profit college[3]. At that time, he was unaware of the distinction between private and public institutions. Although he had reservations about the high cost, the same community member assured him that he could secure a government loan to cover the expenses. Joseph mistakenly believed this loan was a grant that would not require repayment. Upon completing the program, armed with his diploma, he attempted to apply to university, only to be informed that the institution did not recognize his diploma. Subsequent attempts at various community colleges yielded similar results—his diploma was not acknowledged. Joseph found himself with a diploma he described as 'completely useless' and $15,000 in student loan debt.

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[3]Alberta hosts 190 private career colleges, with 1,300 such institutions across Canada (Edwardson, 2022).

Beyond the issue of the high cost of education, what is becoming apparent is the urgent need for financial literacy and understanding how post-secondary credential systems work. This becomes especially crucial when individuals are confronted with decisions about financing programs that promise accelerated language proficiency or provide a pathway to postsecondary education—something participants are actively seeking. Some of these programs turn out to be predatory, failing to deliver on their advertised promises, as demonstrated in Joseph's case. Others simply come with an excessive price tag. When individuals resort to taking loans for their education or to offset living expenses, there exists a gap in their understanding of the implications. The participants consistently voiced a demand for financial literacy and orientation to comprehend the intricacies of the loans they are acquiring and the expectations for repayment. Joseph emphasizes this point by stating:

> *When we come to Canada, there's a certain orientation we get from the organizations. But they don't do two things. They don't give you an orientation on money, financial wise. And they don't give you education wise. The only orientation they give you is the culture shock orientation. They're like social stuff and few basic things.*

Inadequate information from settlement agencies and sponsors

The findings revealed that many refugees expressed frustration with their sponsors' limited knowledge base, particularly concerning education. Participants reported that their sponsors lacked familiarity with the educational landscape in their respective provinces and were unable to provide guidance on where to seek aid. This lack of knowledge and support left refugees feeling uncertain and unsure about how to further their education. It is understandable that refugees would look to their sponsors for guidance in navigating their new surroundings, as they are often the first point of contact and the ones who help them settle into their new communities.

Sagal, a participant from Somalia, voiced her frustration about the limited orientation provided by her sponsors and mentioned:

> *They are a regular five people, and they only know so much about settlement challenges. They helped me get my documents such as my health and SIN cards…But their support was limited because their knowledge and like being a refugee is limited. I do not want to come across as ungrateful, they got me to this country, and like they did what they could. I am grateful for that, you know. I am just saying it is not the same as getting that support from professionals who do this for a living. And working with someone like me, understanding how to help with stuff.*

Sagal's experience mirrors that of numerous refugees when dealing with their sponsors. As mentioned in earlier, there is a profound sense of gratitude for the sponsors for bringing them to Canada and assisting with their essential settlement requirements. However, there is also a prevailing frustration concerning the insufficiency of information and support pertaining to educational pursuits. Many of the participants had anticipated that professionals or their sponsors would play a guiding role in their educational journey. For instance, Ahmed, who was highly enthusiastic about resuming his education upon resettlement, had assumed that someone would facilitate his enrolment in an educational program immediately upon his arrival. He expressed that "before coming here when I initially learned I was accepted as a refugee, I thought a government official would register me for school right after arrival, maybe around the third day."

Ahmed's expectations align with what I've heard from other participants. He had discussions with his sister, who was his sponsor, about finding employment soon after arriving and working towards financial self-sufficiency. However, he also expressed his eagerness to pursue further education. Ahmed was disappointed to discover that his sponsor had not conducted sufficient research on the available pathways for him to advance his education. She

informed him that the only program she had come across was the LINC program, which is typically the program that most newcomers enrol in upon their arrival.

The responsibilities of private sponsors and resettlement programs in assisting refugees with their educational pursuits are not clearly outlined. Existing guidelines and recommended settlement services primarily emphasize language training and employment assistance, with little mention of education (Ritchie, 2018). The absence of education-related resources and information may contribute to sponsors' lack of knowledge or priority in this area. This sentiment is also shared by Joseph, another privately sponsored refugee:

> *When I came here I was hoping my sponsors would provide orientation around education, financial and other settlement stuff but I did not get that. They gave me information about English language classes and the Catholic Social services but that was it. They didn't say anything about school even when I asked because they didn't have this problem. They don't know this information and I had to find other people to help me with that.*

Joseph's sponsors referred him to a settlement agency because they lacked knowledge about educational opportunities available to refugees and were unaware of the requirements for non-traditional adult learners in postsecondary education. However, when Joseph turned to the settlement agency for help, he was disappointed to find that they could only offer information about the LINC program. Similarly, Yodit, an Ethiopian woman in Edmonton, faced similar challenges when seeking assistance from her sponsors and various entities, including settlement agencies and educational institutions.

> *When I came there the person who sponsored me told me to go to NorQuest [a local college in Edmonton] and ask them about going to school. So he dropped me there. So I went there and I got some information. So they told me to go to the Catholic Social Service and bring my exams and certificates. When I went there they put me, instead of giving me how to continue and some sort of information about what I need to go to*

college, they like just put me in English classes. When I told my sponsor this information
and how it didn't make sense because I took LINC classes already and have reached a
good level, they just said to do what they told me to do.

Yodit is recounting her journey of seeking assistance and guidance from various individuals and institutions designed to provide support. She sheds light on the difficulties and confusion she experienced throughout this process. Her frustration is evident due to the absence of clear and valuable guidance, along with her sponsors' counsel to adhere to instructions even when they appeared inconsistent. Her story underscores the challenges that newcomers face when navigating the educational system and obtaining pertinent information and support. She reached a point where she could not depend on her sponsors for assistance in this process.

Research has shown that education is a key priority for most refugees as it is viewed as a pathway to enhancing their quality of life, achieving self-sufficiency, and enhancing their employability (Fonseca & Hinojosa, 2016; Crul et al., 2019). In alignment with this, many of the refugees I interviewed expressed a strong aspiration to advance their education to enhance their economic prospects and access higher-paying employment opportunities. However, the inability of their sponsors to help guide them through the process and the lack of information and priority is a major hindrance to that goal. For instance, Yonas emphasized how having clear information would be immensely beneficial in pursuing further education:

Having clear information on how to go to school if you are a refugee would be helpful.
Maybe a person who can look at your education from your home country and your
English skills and tell you how to continue would be helpful. Right now, it is confusing
and no one knows this information. Maybe the government can provide this information
to everyone including sponsors.

The lack of information and the insufficient emphasis on education are not exclusive to privately sponsored refugees. Even government-assisted refugees encountered difficulties when

seeking guidance on continuing their education. Aliyah, for instance, discussed the time she lost

due to a lack of accurate information about advancing her education. As a government-assisted

refugee, she found her settlement worker unhelpful and lacking fundamental knowledge about

the available educational pathways. She expressed:

> *I wish I knew that I'll be doing all this by myself. Don't get me wrong I did not expect to*
> *have everything handed to me just because I'm a refugee in this country. I knew that I had*
> *to work hard but I had no idea that I would have no support, nowhere to go for*
> *information. I think that's one of the biggest issues here. There isn't a good information*
> *system. That's something I wish I had known.*

For Aliyah, she felt that she was alone in navigating the educational system. Although

she had a settlement worker she felt she had no one to turn to for support and information.

Aliyah speaks to the disconnect between different groups be it settlement agencies, language

programs, and postsecondary institutions, and she advocates for more of a coordinated effort so

that refugees are not being bounced around from one place to another. She details her experience

navigating different spaces:

> *Well there's no one place that you can go to get all the information you need. There are*
> *lots of services but they are all disconnected and the settlement worker doesn't know all*
> *this information. They're really good at helping you find housing, a doctor, a place where*
> *you could work on your resume and apply for a job but they have no clue when it comes*
> *to furthering your education. When you go to your settlement worker and you tell them*
> *what you need to do to continue your education, they just send you to a LINC program.*
> *They have no idea what you can do after that. The people in the LINC program have no*
> *idea how you can get to postsecondary. They just tell you to take all the LINC level*
> *courses and I feel that they just want to keep you in their program. It is like they don't*
> *want you to graduate from their program and continue with your life. If you go to the*
> *colleges or the universities they ask you for your high school transcripts and when you*
> *tell them you didn't do high school here they don't seem to know how you can apply.*

Nobody knows what's going on and because I have an accent people don't take me very
seriously. That's just what I think.

Aliyah's concerns encompass several important issues, with a central focus on the
absence of a centralized and comprehensive source of information and the disconnect between
settlement services and educational opportunities. She underscores the challenges in obtaining
the necessary guidance to advance her education and the lack of clarity regarding how to
navigate the educational system, especially for those who did not complete high school in the
host country.

Even among participants who have achieved remarkable success in realizing their
educational objectives, the recurring theme is the insufficiency of coordinated information and
effective settlement services related to education. Newcomers are frequently presented with an
extensive volume of information upon their arrival. The materials supplied can prove to be
difficult to comprehend, especially for individuals who are still adapting to a new language and
culture. For instance, Samaan remembers the large number of pamphlets he received from his
settlement worker.

> *When we arrive in Canada they give us so many booklets, papers and flyers. We did not*
> *open most of them because it was like 1000 pages of things and so many images. We*
> *started reading a few welcome booklets but you read half the letter and you'll be like I am*
> *tired and just close them and go do my grocery shopping…maybe there was something*
> *about education in these booklets but like you know we were alone and we had other*
> *priorities like renting and paying for things…reading so many pages was challenging*
> *especially when no one told you important information is in them.*

Many government-sponsored participants commonly received such materials as part of their
orientation. However, a significant portion of them admitted to not reading the materials because
of the cultural shock they experienced, having other pressing matters to attend to, and a lack of

comprehension regarding the contents of these documents. When I inquired about what would have been more helpful than booklets, Samaan expressed:

> *I wish there was someone like a social worker, someone who can just go visit the family for an hour or maybe a little more and check if we will need guidance. So just to check that they know what's happening and everyone is doing well and has the information needed for education.*

In comparison to other participants, Samaan was fortunate in several ways. He was already fluent in the language, which set him apart. He didn't have to navigate the intricate process of obtaining qualifications for postsecondary education because he was granted the equivalency of a high school diploma in Canada. Moreover, he successfully completed his degree and gained admission to a medical program. However, he expressed a strong desire for improved information and guidance regarding access to university education and even the choice of a major. He had expected his settlement worker to fulfill a more active role, akin to that of a school counsellor, in guiding him through this journey. Unfortunately, she did not provide the support he had hoped for, leaving him to navigate the complexities on his own and learn from the challenges he encountered along the way.

The issue of inadequate information from settlement agencies and sponsors stands out as a common challenge for refugees seeking to pursue further education. Refugees, whether privately sponsored or government-assisted, encounter difficulties in obtaining clear and comprehensive guidance on educational pathways. This lack of information and prioritization of education often leaves refugees feeling isolated and ill-prepared to navigate the complex educational system. Even for those who have achieved educational success, the recurring theme is the insufficiency of coordinated information and effective settlement services in the realm of education. Often they are forced to rely on informal networks for information, which may not

always be accurate or reliable. This deficiency in support and information can be a significant barrier to refugees who aspire to improve their education and enhance their economic prospects.

Discussion

This discussion delves into the firsthand experiences of refugees navigating Canada's resettlement system, underpinned by CRT and a phenomenological lens influenced by Fanon's theoretical framework. It emphasizes the subjective perspectives of racial minority participants and highlights the financial challenges they face, including living expenses, educational costs, and obligations to support families back home. The chapter delves into the concept of "neoliberal fatigue" within the private sponsorship program, revealing inherent constraints exacerbated by neoliberal policies. Moreover, it discusses the impact of reduced social services on refugees' integration and critiques immigration policies for their inadequate consideration of refugees' educational aspirations.

A key finding of this chapter is the inherent constraints within the private sponsorship program, amplified by the prevailing neoliberal paradigm. Previous studies (Agrawal, 2018; Elcioglu, 2021; Haugen et al., 2020; Hyndman et al., 2021; Hynie et al., 2019; Lenard, 2016) have identified the complex limitations of the private refugee sponsorship program, which this research supports. While much of the existing literature focuses on sponsors' perspectives, including their motivations, relationships with refugees, perceptions of their roles, and encountered challenges, this study highlights how these constraints impact refugees as they adapt to new environments, articulating challenges from the refugees' perspectives. Financial difficulties are not exclusive to PSRs; GARs also report similar challenges, indicating inadequate support from both government entities and settlement agencies.

Refugees face numerous challenges stemming from policies shaped by neoliberal ideologies in Canadian institutions. Neoliberalism prioritizes market-driven approaches and minimal government involvement, leading to the privatization of refugee resettlement efforts and reductions in essential social services upon resettlement. While organizations, citizens, and community groups have the potential to support refugees, overreliance on them can result in exhaustion and gaps in services.

The limitations of the refugee private sponsorship program can be understood through what Elcioglu (2021) terms "neoliberal fatigue" as experienced by sponsors during refugee resettlement. Sponsors are heavily involved in meeting refugees' immediate needs, which impedes their ability to address the larger structural barriers that affect refugees during their resettlement. As a result, sponsors struggle to provide adequate support, specifically in facilitating refugees' educational aspirations. Despite recognizing systemic barriers, the constant demands of volunteer work lead sponsors to perceive these challenges as personal, logistical hurdles they must overcome alone. Elcioglu distinguishes between neoliberal fatigue and compassion fatigue:

> But neoliberal fatigue is not a form of indifference to others' misfortune. Rather, it is a political lassitude stemming from a particular policy environment. Neoliberal fatigue develops during the hustle to help others find individual and makeshift solutions to systemic social service gaps. The program of private refugee resettlement does not just responsibilize citizens with integrating refugees; it also gives citizens the Sisyphean task of helping newcomers adapt to life without adequate social provision. In the process, sponsors did not become numb to newcomers' struggles. However, in the rush to mitigate

these hardships, sponsors were left with neither the time nor the mental bandwidth to reflect on the structural causes of the difficulties they encountered. (p. 13)

The findings reveal sponsors' lack of readiness to address the structural obstacles encountered by refugees. Sponsors are tasked with the daunting responsibility of not only fulfilling fundamental needs in refugee resettlement, like food, clothing, and housing but also aiding refugees in rebuilding their lives through education and employment support.

A significant concern within the private sponsorship program is the lack of state oversight. Many privately sponsored refugees expressed frustration with discrepancies between their expectations of sponsor support and the actual assistance provided. This primarily revolves around the one-year financial commitment sponsors made as part of the agreement with the federal government. Participants expected support for the entire year or until they secured employment to sustain themselves financially. However, they did not anticipate feeling pressured to find employment, especially those aiming to pursue further education. This discrepancy became evident when sponsors prioritized job placement over educational pursuits, contrary to the expectations of the sponsored individuals. For instance, when Yonas expressed his desire for further education, his sponsor responded, "What about work and how will I look after myself?" This suggests discomfort with Yonas wanting to continue his education while the sponsor covered his living expenses. Similarly, Anok's aunt urged her to work instead of going to school to help alleviate the financial burden and send money back home to her family.

All privately sponsored participants reported feeling pressured by sponsors to achieve financial independence, though many hesitated to voice this concern for fear of speaking negatively about their sponsors. Yonas's experience exemplifies this pressure, as his sponsor emphasized self-reliance, prompting him to prioritize work over further education. Similarly,

Ahmed and Sagal, sponsored by family members, felt the implicit expectation to contribute financially to their living expenses. Despite the agreed-upon one-year financial support period, sponsors anticipated refugees achieving independence sooner.

An important aspect highlighted by the research is the lack of knowledge of the settlement plan among the participants. The settlement plan is a crucial document that sponsors are required to complete before undertaking sponsorship (Hyndman, 2016; Lenard, 2016). Surprisingly, none of the participants, regardless of whether they were sponsored by church groups, community groups, or family members, reported having seen their settlement plan or any other sponsorship documents. This lack of access to critical sponsorship-related documents raises concerns about transparency and refugees' involvement in decisions affecting their resettlement process. It adds to the concerns about the lack of oversight for privately sponsored refugees after resettlement, an issue highlighted by other researchers (Haugen et al., 2020; Agrawal, 2018; Elcioglu, 2021). Within the context of the private sponsorship program and the framework of neoliberalism, there is a strong emphasis on financial independence for young adult refugees. Privately sponsored refugees, in particular, may feel pressure to be financially independent and are often pushed into the labour market more rapidly than GARs (Agrawal, 2018; Hyndman, 2011; Hyndman, J., Payne, W., & Jimenez, S., 2017).

This discussion point is not to demonize the private refugee sponsorship program, as it is the only pathway for many young adult refugees to come to Canada since the government sponsorship program prioritizes families and those in the most vulnerable positions (UNHCR, 1979). The point is to illustrate how this program, which is largely unmonitored post-resettlement, is falling short of meeting the needs of refugees, particularly around needs that are outside the basic needs (i.e., food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, etc.). Recognizing the impact of

"neoliberal fatigue" on the distinctive hurdles faced by young adult refugees, particularly those under private sponsorship, is important to understanding higher education access amongst YARs. These challenges extend beyond sponsors and reflect systemic issues within the refugee private sponsorship program. It's unrealistic to expect sponsors alone to handle the extensive responsibilities of refugee resettlement. Therefore, there's a need for more active involvement from the federal government and settlement agencies, including thorough monitoring of each sponsorship application. Past evaluations have identified shortcomings in monitoring the PSR program, emphasizing the necessity for improved oversight (Hyndman, 2016). Currently, such oversight is lacking due to the influence of neoliberal policies driving the privatization of refugee resettlement. The findings around the theme of finances highlight the impact of these shortcomings and the difficult decisions refugees face in planning their new lives.

Neoliberal policies in Canada are affecting both the country's humanitarian refugee commitments and the resettlement services that refugees heavily rely on. Participants reported inadequate support from settlement and non-profit agencies. Beyond offering only basic services, these agencies are unable to provide further assistance to refugees. Settlement agencies serve as a crucial support system for refugees during their early resettlement journey, offering essential assistance and information to help them understand their new home. However, these organizations are failing to meet the needs of refugees, both GARs and PSRs.

Many privately sponsored refugees explained how their sponsors often directed them to settlement organizations for additional support, particularly concerning language training and educational opportunities. Similarly, GAR participants were assigned case workers to assist them in navigating systems and providing information. However, both GARs and PSRs expressed dissatisfaction with the information they received. For instance, Aliyah, a GAR, recounted her

experience of disconnected services. Despite having a caseworker, Aliyah's efforts to obtain information about furthering her education were unsuccessful. She explains, "*There are lots of services but they are all disconnected, and the settlement worker doesn't know all this information.*" Similar to Aliyah, other participants found themselves being referred back and forth between settlement agencies and educational institutions.

This lack of coordination and reduction in programs are the result of funding cuts and inadequate resources to accommodate the influx of refugees and the growing newcomer population (Bushell, & Shields, 2018). In Canada, settlement is viewed as a collaborative process where both the government and the social sector work together to facilitate the integration of newcomers (Bushell & Shields, 2018; Lowe, 2017). These organizations do not just serve refugees but all newcomers regardless of their immigration category. These agencies are there to provide broad services and also serve the long-term integration goals of immigrants (Bushell, & Shields, 2018; Lowe, et al., 2017). The cuts to the settlement sector as well as the services sector are well documented however what has been seen recently is a major reduction in resettlement support. This aligns with changing immigration policy, where Canada is admitting more members of the economic class who are perceived to need less resettlement support. According to Lowe, et al. (2017), the most recent changes made under the Harper Government were intended to "Make immigrants and their families more responsible for their own settlement and immigration, thus reducing the state's commitment to settlement supports" (p. 22).

This situation parallels the LINC program. Despite the prevalent perception among participants regarding the program's ineffectiveness, many individuals must endure prolonged waiting lists to gain enrolment. Given that numerous refugees do not speak either of the official languages (Hyndman, 2016; Prokopenko, 2018), the LINC program represents their initial

opportunity for language acquisition. For many YARs who have experienced interruptions in their education due to displacement, it also constitutes their first encounter with a classroom setting since the outbreak of conflict in their home country. The extended wait times for enrolment are a consequence of funding for the LINC program failing to keep pace with rising immigration levels. This exemplifies the broader impacts of funding cuts and neoliberal austerity measures on the settlement sector, manifesting particularly in the challenges faced by refugees (Bushell, & Shields, 2018).

The reduction in services for newcomers follows the same logic as the offloading of resettlement efforts to private citizens and groups. CRT exposes how neoliberal policies blame individuals for systemic issues instead of addressing their root causes, which are deeply embedded in historical and ongoing systems of power and oppression. Neoliberal policies, focusing on market solutions and personal responsibility, often overlook or minimize these systemic factors, leaving marginalized groups like YARs to tackle challenges on their own without sufficient support or recognition of broader structural issues. This perspective can obscure the need for systemic reform and perpetuate inequality by maintaining existing power structures. Furthermore, Canada's immigration policies increasingly favour the admission of economic-class immigrants who possess higher human capital, which in turn shapes the services available to newcomers. If Canada admits individuals who are highly educated and skilled, and do not require language, education, and skills upgrading, there is a diminished perceived need to continue funding the settlement and social services sectors.

In addition to reduced services from the settlement and social sectors, YARs are not able to receive support around their educational aspirations because education is not a service that settlement agencies are providing. Settlement agencies typically focus on providing basic

necessities such as housing, legal assistance, and employment services. Education often falls

outside their primary mandate (Bushell, & Shields, 2018), leading to insufficient support for

refugees navigating the educational system. When education services are provided, they are

usually aimed at employment preparation rather than further academic advancement.

The lack of emphasis on education support in the settlement sector is due to educational

policies that do not centre on the needs of refugees. The settlement sector is publicly funded,

predominantly by the federal government and since federal and provincial educational policies

for newcomers often prioritize credential recognition to facilitate quick entry into the labour

market (Bushell, & Shields, 2018), it benefits economic immigrants with foreign educational

credentials. However, this approach overlooks the unique needs of refugees, who often require

different types of support. Many YARs experience significant interruptions in their education

due to conflict and displacement, leading to incomplete or non-linear educational histories.

Additionally, ongoing conflicts and displacement can make it impossible for refugees to obtain

necessary documentation, such as transcripts or certificates, for traditional credential assessment

(Bajwa et al., 2017). Current policies are inadequate as they primarily focus on credential

recognition, neglecting the foundational support refugees need, such as language training and

upgrading services (Bushell, & Shields, 2018). This results in a mismatch of support, as the

policies do not address the distinct educational trajectories and requirements of refugees

compared to economic immigrants.

Even when YARs seek help in non-traditional or adult access spaces, they still can not

find the right information. This is mainly because even in non-traditional or underrepresented

programs, YARs are missing from these policies. The federal government supports

underrepresented students' access to PSE by providing targeted financial support in the form of

loans, bursaries, and repayment assistance plans (Kirby, 2011). Although tuition is an access barrier for YARs, the bigger limitation is the academic preparations and prerequisites required to gain admission in the first place (Deller & Oldford, 2011; Finnie et al., 2015; Rivard & Raymond, n.d.). Even in access programs that target non-traditional adult students, the admission criteria are based on some high school credits although do not require a completed diploma or strong written assessments. Both of these criteria, which are made to facilitate the re-entry of education for adult students, do not account for YARs who do not have either requirement.

The challenges faced by YARs highlight contradictions in Canada's national identity as a humanitarian country that offers equal opportunities to all. The systemic barriers, financial obstacles, and inadequate support YARs face undermine Canada's image as an inclusive and supportive nation for refugees. The disparity between the ideal of equal opportunity and the reality of YARs' experiences exposes gaps in Canada's immigration and resettlement policies. This discrepancy suggests that while Canada presents itself as a welcoming haven, the structural challenges refugees encounter indicate it is only welcoming those with perceived value.

Refugees are accepted based on points of vulnerability (UNHCR, 1979) and are not necessarily seen as adding immediate economic value. This might explain the lack of coordinated efforts YARs are experiencing. However, the coordinated resettlement plan for Ukrainian refugees shows that different levels of government and institutions can come together effectively. This raises questions about why similar efforts are not made for YARs, who are predominantly Black and Brown. It confirms racial disparities inherent in the system and exposes how mismatched policies and systemic failures are blamed on individuals, framing structural issues as personal problems that require individual solutions.

Summary

The findings in this chapter highlight the challenges YARs face navigating numerous structural barriers. Although the primary focus is on financial obstacles, the experiences of YARs reveal broader systemic issues and mismatched policies that fail to address their needs. Whether brought into the system by private sponsors or government programs, YARs are given one year to establish themselves, much of which is spent understanding and manoeuvring through the prerequisites for post-secondary education. This task is further complicated by inadequate support from those meant to assist them, who are themselves hindered by convoluted policies across federal, provincial, and municipal levels, as well as within educational institutions and school boards. These entities often fail to communicate effectively and do not prioritize YARs in their policy making processes. This underscores systemic issues within Canada's immigration and resettlement policies, highlighting the need for improved oversight, support, and policy adjustments to better accommodate refugees' circumstances and aspirations. In the next chapter, we will delve deeper into the specific challenges YARs encounter due to the lack of clear educational pathways and the numerous hurdles they face in obtaining the necessary prerequisites for post-secondary education.

Chapter 6: Structural Constraints and Devaluation of Education, Skills and Experiences

In their pursuit of education, young adult refugees face numerous distressing challenges due to systemic barriers and a complex educational landscape where their lived experiences and needs are not reflected. This chapter illuminates four pivotal themes encapsulating the hurdles these individuals encounter in their educational journeys. Firstly, they struggle with complex and confusing pathways to post-secondary education and a lack of support to navigate them. Secondly, the non-recognition of their prior education and diverse experiences creates substantial barriers, limiting their access to higher education and professional opportunities. Thirdly, the perpetuation of low expectations from educational institutions serves as a disheartening roadblock, impeding their academic progress and personal development. Lastly, experiences of racial discrimination exacerbate their struggles, imposing formidable challenges to their successful integration into educational spaces. This chapter delves into the intricate layers of devaluation that hinder the educational pursuits of young adult refugees, emphasizing the urgent need for inclusive and equitable educational spaces that value and embrace diversity.

Complex pathways and inadequate support for education goals

Another significant challenge highlighted by the participants is the lack of a clearly defined and direct route to pursue higher education. For many young adult refugees, the process of advancing their education is complex and lacks a straightforward progression. This complexity is especially evident among all nine participants in Alberta. Typically, the process involves starting with language classes to achieve proficiency in the language of instruction, followed by engaging in an academic upgrading program to meet the prerequisites for postsecondary education. Subsequently, they can enrol in a certificate or diploma program at the postsecondary level. Despite the apparent straightforwardness of the process I just described, it

has not been the actual experience of the participants. The journey is frequently non-linear and prolonged, leading many YARs to either abandon or delay their educational aspirations.

Figure 2: Educational pathways

Note: This process is not straightforward; however, policymakers often envision the pathway as being linear.

All research participants unanimously conveyed the difficulties they faced in navigating both the process and life in Canada. While they expected challenges in advancing their education due to gaps in their educational history, lack of documentation, and language barriers, they were taken aback by the level of what one participant described as 'chaotic' circumstances. Ahmed, for instance, provides a detailed account of his experience:

> *I knew it would take some time to adjust but I did not think it will be this hard. I thought some professionals will be here to support me through the process of my education. I was expecting people to help me lay out a plan for furthering my education. For example, here is what prior education you have, and this is what you need to do next to get to some sort of postsecondary. But I did not encounter such help. My first year was very challenging.*

Ahmed anticipated challenges in his first year due to resettlement adjustments and adapting to a new system. However, he did not expect the process of advancing his education to be as prolonged or intricate. What caught him off guard was the apparent absence of structure for nontraditional students like himself. He believed the process would be more straightforward,

given his perception of Canada as a country that 'values education.' This was echoed by Sagal who was experiencing similar challenges.

> *There needs to be an easier path for refugees to further their education. Right now, there are so many roadblocks, and the process is too long and challenging. You have first had to take these LINC language classes, then ESL classes, and then you need to do academic upgrading before you could even think about postsecondary. The path is also not linear and there it is not clear. There is no structure to it. For example, in America, I have heard the path is much more organized and straightforward. You do everything in one shot, one place, from language classes to the upgrading. Here your LINC programs will take you at least two years to do it full-time and even longer if you do not know any English. ELS classes are another year and a half. The academic upgrading can take you another year or two. The process can easily take you six years to do it before you get to postsecondary. For an adult who wants to be financially independent and make something out of themselves, this is too much. It is too long and, in the end, getting to postsecondary isn't guaranteed even after all of that time and energy you put into being 'prepared' to attend postsecondary.*

Sagal's emphasis lies in highlighting the extensive nature of the process. Participants have expressed having numerous objectives to achieve now that they are in this new environment. Many express a sense of time and opportunity lost due to displacement or the inability to work or pursue education while awaiting sponsorship, whether by private sponsors or the government. Some of them took over three years to arrive in Canada post-approval, and there is a pressing need to compensate for this lost time. Spending four years completing prerequisites for postsecondary entry isn't feasible for most of the participants. They feel compelled to achieve independence within a year or as soon as possible. Additionally, they grapple with the responsibility of supporting their families, either in their home country or in Canada, if not both. Considering they are adults with various competing priorities, dedicating several years to schooling isn't financially or practically viable for them.

The program's duration is a significant concern for many individuals due to various competing priorities and their age. These individuals are not typical "school-aged" students but rather adults with responsibilities to manage. Furthermore, even after completing prerequisites like language proficiency and academic upgrading, there's no assurance of acceptance into the desired postsecondary program. This uncertainty arises from each program having its specific grade and course prerequisites, which may not always be readily accessible to individuals seeking this information. Speaking to this issue, Aliyah states:

> However, I realize I couldn't do both. I had to choose and I chose the path that seemed more practical. If I continue with the LINC program it would have taken me maybe another two years to get to a level where I can think about post-secondary. Even after that I still had to do some sort of academic upgrading before I could apply to college. For me to apply for a bachelor's degree, I'm looking at maybe five to six years of schooling prior to that. If I'm going to spend four to five years continuing education just to get the language and the upgrading requirements, I will be 30 before I could start a bachelor's degree. That's a long time and I don't have a lot of time. Like I said my family is relying on me to financially support them. As a woman, I also had to think about getting married and having my own family at some point. How am I supposed to do all of that if just getting to university was going to take me six years? It's very crazy and the process does not make sense to me. My cousin who's a similar age as me went to America and she just took a language and academic test and she was able to go to college within a year and half. Here in Canada, I'm looking at six years. Like what is going on? If you go to the college to see how you can apply, the staff there do not even know how they can help you. And when you talk to the instructors at the LINC program they don't even know how you can get to postsecondary either. Nobody knows what they're doing and nobody is communicating. There is no clear path to postsecondary if you come to this country over the age of 18. That's how I'm able to make sense of it. The system is broken. Actually, there is no system and there is no structure. It is very frustrating.

Aliyah's apprehension is amplified by societal norms and gender expectations regarding

the appropriate age for marriage. She estimates that she would reach the age of 30 before commencing any undergraduate program. This prospect implies dedicating a significant portion of her 20s and 30s to pursuing education instead of conforming to societal expectations, which prioritize marriage, supporting one's family, and engaging in the labour force.

In the excerpt provided, Aliyah amplifies additional concerns mentioned in Chapter Five, which further contribute to the prevailing challenges. Similar to other participants in Alberta, she believes that if she were in a different country with accessible routes, adequate information, and support systems, she wouldn't have to spend so much time fulfilling the basic requirements for entry into postsecondary education. Participants from Alberta consistently highlighted the absence of academic pathways for non-traditional adults. Whether in Fort Mac, Edmonton, or Calgary, those in Alberta expressed that compared to America and Ontario, these regions have more established and superior pathways to access postsecondary education. Ahmed also shared his perspective on educational pathways in Ontario:

> *I also think if I was in Ontario I would be in a much better situation than I am now when it comes to my education. In Ontario, they allow you to go to school and work full-time. They also have a better support system and networks that can assist you and help you create a path towards your schooling. They also have more schools and options when it comes to language classes and many postsecondary programs for adults. I know this because I have a friend in a similar situation as me but he is now completing a certificate in some health field and he can work with that certificate once he is done with his program.*

Participants' preference for America or Ontario is based on anecdotes they've heard or encountered. For instance, Sagal received information from a family friend, Aliyah mentioned her cousin of similar age who was admitted as a refugee in America, and as stated in the above narrative, Ahmed cited a friend who experienced greater success in Ontario.

Participants from Ontario didn't exhibit the same level of frustration regarding pathways for advancing their education. None of them indicated a lack of pathways. Through our discussions, it became apparent that they all received comprehensive guidance on furthering their education. Ontario participants didn't face several of the pathway challenges experienced by those in Alberta. First, they had a plethora of resources available, citing numerous settlement and employment agencies that provided substantial assistance and support. This extensive social assistance network provided them access to valuable information. Second, they highlighted access to adult high schools, enabling them to undertake English language courses and academic upgrading, effectively offering a convenient solution to fulfill prerequisites. In addition, unlike Alberta, many prerequisites such as upgrading and English language courses were provided free of charge, sponsored by the provincial government. This marked a significant advantage for Ontario participants since the expenses associated with upgrading and language courses, outside the LINC program, posed major barriers for those in Alberta. Third, they mentioned the availability of bridging programs tailored for individuals with foreign education, allowing them to meet the requirements in their field. Many of these programs also opened up employment opportunities upon completion. Finally, participants from Toronto also discussed University and college programs that offered 'pathways to postsecondary education,' taking alternative considerations for those lacking Canadian high school diplomas.

The diverse pathways available in Ontario have enabled research participants to achieve a considerable level of success. Ibrahim and Abel serve as prime examples, having navigated their educational pursuits without encountering some of the challenges expressed by participants from Alberta. Ibrahim, a GAR from Syria residing in Toronto, holds a master's degree in public health and prior experience as an epidemiologist. Upon his arrival in Canada, he dedicated several

months to improving his English language proficiency, reaching level 7. Despite his city being heavily affected by the war, Ibrahim was fortunate that his diploma remained safe in his grandparents' house in Damascus, which was unaffected by the conflict. With the assistance of his settlement case worker, Ibrahim gained admission to a healthcare bridging program. This program not only provided academic support but also included personalized employment coaching and assistance in job search. Ibrahim elaborates on his experience below:

> *I was worried I wouldn't find a job when I came here. Some people from my country told me I have to start again and maybe go into a different field. But Alhamduallah, I was so so lucky. This program was a miracle because it gave me Canadian experience and made me understand the healthcare system. Back in Syria, I worked as a Public Health specialist with the government and I thought maybe I wouldn't get to that here because the system might be very different but I am glad I found this program.*

The bridging program proved to be a lifeline for Ibrahim, sparing him the stress of starting his education from scratch. Additionally, this opportunity enabled him to work as a health promoter in a community setting. His fortune lay in having his degree, a proficient command of English before resettling in Canada, and prior work experience, all of which rendered him eligible for the bridging program. While not employed as an epidemiologist, he finds contentment in being able to work in a related field and provide for his family. Ibrahim's circumstances differ somewhat from those of most participants in Alberta, as he is an experienced professional with postsecondary education. Conversely, Abel's situation aligns more closely with that of the majority of participants in Alberta.

Abel, a PSR from Ethiopia living in Toronto, arrived with a grade 10 education and limited language proficiency. He enrolled in an adult high school that offered comprehensive language training, allowing him to obtain his high school diploma within a span of under two years. Presently, he is enrolled in a college program, pursuing studies in IT. Initially, Abel

experienced pressure from his sponsors who recommended that he relocate to Alberta and seek employment in the oil fields. Concerned about his financial stability after the one-year support period, his sponsors advocated for this option. However, Abel remained steadfast in his desire to pursue education, which created strain in their relationship. One of his five sponsors extended an offer for him to reside with their family until he completed high school. Upon successfully securing admission to college, Abel applied for student loans and transitioned to living in campus residence.

> *I wanted to go to school, that was important to me. I made a promise to myself and my father that I would go to school if I came to Canada. You can not reach anywhere in this country without education. Every job, even McDonald's or janitor, will ask you if you have a high school diploma. I was 21 when I came here and I didn't go to school since I was 14 or 15. I was scared but I also knew how important it was to finish at least high school.*

Both Abel and Ibrahim achieved notable success in advancing their education despite possessing different qualifications and taking distinct immigration pathways. Ontario, especially Toronto, has played a pivotal role in facilitating their success by offering diverse pathways for nontraditional students. However, this doesn't necessarily imply a devaluation of prior education and experience. Instead, it underscores that this province offers avenues for individuals to pursue further education without starting anew, in a cost-effective manner, and without requiring a substantial time investment. This stands in contrast to the main complaint voiced by participants in Alberta regarding the extensive time, cost, etc, needed to pursue educational goals.

Non-recognition of Prior Education and Experiences

An often-discussed issue among participants centred on the necessity for acknowledgment of their former education and experiences. This applied universally across participants with diverse educational backgrounds, ranging from high school diplomas to post-

secondary degrees. The level of recognition varied significantly depending on the country. Syrian participants experienced comparatively higher success in having some of their education acknowledged, whereas individuals from African countries encountered minimal recognition of their qualifications and experiences.

Ali is a PSR from Somalia, who at the time of our interview lived in Ottawa with his brother who sponsored him. He earned a bachelor's degree in accounting and worked as an accountant for the local government until conflict arose in his town between rebels and the government. Concerned for his safety, Ali fled to Kenya, living as an undocumented refugee for a year. Ali did not want to live in a refugee camp because he had some family members who lived in refugee camps for three generations since the first civil war in 1991. Instead, with the help of his brother, Ali went to Uganda while he awaited to be sponsored.

During his stay in Uganda, Ali took English language classes to further enhance his language proficiency, despite already being proficient and having pursued his postsecondary education in English. Additionally, he enrolled in a private institution to pursue accounting courses, driven by his aspiration to resume working as an accountant upon resettlement in Canada. Ali wanted to position himself in a manner that would enable him to pursue his desired career path upon resettlement. However, upon resettlement, none of Ali's credentials were recognized.

> *In Kampala, I spent all the three years I was there studying. Uganda is a good place for refugees because they allow you to do things like move around and even work. I don't know about work exactly but I know some refugees who worked and supported themselves. But for me, I was focused on my studies. I am a accountant, I study accounting in Mogadishu University. This is not a joke, it is the top university in Somalia. I love being an accountant and my goal was to work as an accountant always. This is why I studied for three years after working as an accountant for some time.*

Ali underwent evaluations for both his degree from Somalia and his certification from Uganda, resulting in all his credentials being deemed equivalent to a high school diploma. Ali was taken aback and surprised by this unexpected outcome, as he had not anticipated such a result.

> *I was hoping for at least two years of university degree and I can do maybe one or two more years which will give me a Canadian degree. But a high school diploma? That is crazy. I felt so low, like my education and experience had no value.*

The considerable devaluation of Ali's credentials and life experiences left him with a deep sense of worthlessness regarding the value of his past accomplishments. Adding to the complexity, when Ali tried to enrol in a university accounting degree program, he found out that he required a grade 12 math qualification, necessitating him to undertake an upgrading program. Eventually, he secured enrolment in a college diploma program specializing in business accounting, where he is currently pursuing his studies. This devaluation of his qualifications notably affected Ali's mental health which he describes as 'improving' since he is now close to the completion of his program and anticipates stepping into a career as an accountant.

Ibrahim and Sagal faced similar devaluation challenges. Ibrahim, fortunate to enrol in a bridging program that provided career counselling, managed to secure a position as a community health promoter. Despite obtaining this job and educational assistance, his qualifications were still undervalued. Formerly an epidemiologist with a master's degree in public health and more than five years of field experience, Ibrahim's current role doesn't require any postsecondary education. While it does provide certain advantages, it doesn't align with the expertise and extensive experience embodied by a master's degree and half a decade of professional practice. It's important to highlight that despite Ibrahim experiencing devaluation of his credentials and expertise, he expresses gratitude for the bridging program as it prevented him from having to

'start over' entirely.

Sagal's educational journey, on the other hand, presents a diverse set of experiences. Originally from Somalia, she relocated to Kenya at the age of 13 due to civil conflict. In Kenya, she learned English and completed her high school education following the British system. However, lacking proper documentation in Kenya and seeking a better future, her parents made the decision to send her to Syria, where a family member resided. Syria was chosen because it allowed Somali refugees to work and attend school. Sagal enrolled in Arabic language classes in order to qualify for postsecondary programs which were offered in Arabic. However, as she was preparing to begin a postsecondary program, the outbreak of the Syrian civil war forced Sagal into refugee status once again. After enduring two years of displacement in Lebanon, she was eventually sponsored by her cousin in Winnipeg.

Once in Canada, Sagal attempted to further her education. She was told she needed to upgrade her high school credentials to qualify for postsecondary education. This took Sagal by surprise because she assumed since she did her high school education in the British system, which was similar to the Canadian system, she wouldn't have to do any upgrading. The road map presented to Sagal by her settlement worker meant that she would have to do 3-4 years of language classes and upgrading before she is able to qualify for a post-secondary program. Because Sagal did not want to burden her cousin who sponsored her financially, she decided against going to school and moved to Edmonton to work as the city had better job opportunities. While working in Edmonton, Sagal got married and shortly after, she also got injured at work. After recovering and because her husband had a good job, Sagal decided to go back to school.

Upon arriving in Canada, Sagal aimed to pursue further education but encountered unexpected hurdles. Despite completing her high school education in the British system, she was

informed that she needed to upgrade her high school credentials to meet the requirements for postsecondary education. This came as a surprise to Sagal since she assumed the similarity between the British and Canadian systems would exempt her from further upgrading.

Her settlement worker outlined a challenging road map, indicating that Sagal would need to undergo 3 to 4 years of language classes and upgrading before qualifying for a postsecondary program. Wary of financially burdening her cousin, who had sponsored her, Sagal decided against pursuing immediate education and instead relocated to Edmonton due to better job prospects in the city. While working in Edmonton, Sagal enrolled in LINC classes and she also got married. She worked in a manual labour job and unfortunately, she injured her shoulder. Sagal saw this injury as an opportunity to stop working and return to school. Below, she recounts her journey:

> *When I was working, I used to go to LINC classes. I also spoke good English prior to coming to Canada. After I quit my job and decided to go back to school, I started taking the CLB [Canadian Language Benchmarks] level 5 course. I took one semester of the CLB course which is the minimum language requirement. After completing level 5 of CLB, I started taking the ESL program. I was in the ESL program for one year and a half. From there I took upgrading courses so I could attend postsecondary. While I was taking the upgrading courses, I applied for a two-year diploma program in social work and got accepted. I completed the two-year social work diploma program and now I wanted to further my education and start a bachelor's program.*

Sagal's narrative offers a poignant understanding of the hurdles she confronted upon arriving in Canada and throughout her subsequent educational journey. Despite having a certain level of proficiency in English and holding a high school diploma from the Kenyan British system, she was told she needed to start all over again. Sagal's story vividly portrays how the devaluation of education among newcomers yields substantial consequences that ripple through different facets of their lives. The devaluation of their qualifications impedes their ability to

make use of their skills and credentials, often resulting in underemployment and a prolonged educational path before being eligible for a postsecondary program.

Low Expectations from Educational Institutions

Apart from the devaluation of their credentials, research participants emphasized another notable concern— the devaluation of their potential. Individuals from diverse backgrounds and at various points in their educational paths expressed distress over the diminished expectations educational institutions held for them, primarily because of their status as refugees. Some participants speculated that this treatment wasn't solely due to their refugee status but could also be attributed to factors like their accent, country of origin, and similar attributes.

Aster, originally from South Sudan and presently residing in Fort McMurray, is one participant who associated the lowered expectations she faced during her educational journey with her refugee status and African heritage. Initially sponsored by a church group facilitated by a family member, Aster's first year in Canada was centred around her participation in the LINC program to improve her English skills. Despite her proficiency in spoken English, largely acquired from television exposure and previous language courses, Aster recognized the need for substantial improvement in her reading and writing capabilities.

After initially attending the LINC program for a few months, Aster noticed limited progress in her language skills. Expressing her frustration over the lack of improvement to her sponsors, she was advised to persist with the program. However, Aster became aware of an ESL intensive program through a friend who spoke highly of its effectiveness in reaching the necessary proficiency level for school enrolment. Desiring to enrol in this ESL program, she approached her sponsors with the request. Unfortunately, her sponsors declined, citing the program's fee. The sponsors did not allocate any funds specifically for her education and instead

anticipated that she would persist with the no-cost LINC program. Faced with the financial

barrier hindering her access to the preferred program, Aster continued with the LINC program.

> *My sponsors told me it would take a while for me to be fluent in English and I should just*
> *stick with LINC. I understand what they are saying but they don't understand this*
> *program is not designed to help you learn the language quickly. Most of the people*
> *taking the class are older and they just want to learn a little bit of the language, it is not*
> *meant to prepare you for school. At least that is what I think. Maybe other places it is*
> *different but here that is all you will get and you can take it for many years and still not*
> *be enough to get into school.*

Aster's encounter with the LINC program is not an isolated case. Among all the

participants who underwent the LINC program, there was a unanimous discontent with the

experience. Their main concern revolved around their perception that the program primarily

focused on teaching conversational English rather than adequately preparing individuals for

enrolment in postsecondary education. In a bid to advance her studies and access the ESL

program, Aster took on a part-time job at Wendy's, diligently saving up for the fees. After

accumulating enough funds, Aster enrolled in the ESL program. Following two semesters of

ESL courses, she underwent a language proficiency test and successfully attained a level that

allowed her to enrol in school. Aster then pursued academic upgrading for core courses with the

hope of obtaining her GED diploma. The entire process of completing language courses and

acquiring her GED diploma took Aster just over two and a half years.

After obtaining her GED, Aster was prepared to enrol in a postsecondary Early Learning

and Child Care program. However, upon attempting to apply for the program, the school's

guidance counsellor recommended Aster consider taking a free online Child Care Orientation

Course provided by the Government of Alberta. The guidance counsellor advised Aster that a

college diploma program, if pursued full-time, would demand at least two years for completion,

with an annual tuition cost of approximately $6,000. In contrast, the Child Care Orientation

Course would swiftly qualify Aster for work in a daycare setting. The counsellor highlighted the

potential benefit, especially if Aster planned to have children soon, as it would allow her to work

while simultaneously caring for her child in the daycare environment. Aster hesitated as she

wasn't certain if completing this one course would provide her with the necessary credentials to

pursue employment in the field. However, she decided to trust the counsellor and enrol in the

course.

> *I never heard of this program and was not sure what it was about. I Googled it and found*
> *some information about it. The woman at the school told me I could work at daycare if I*
> *completed the course.   I figured this might be a good option since it would only take a*
> *few weeks and would not cost me anything. I still had doubts about it because it seemed*
> *too good to be true. I did not understand why one course will give me the same*
> *opportunity as a two years of studying but I decided to trust her because she this is her*
> *job and she knows what she is talking about.*

After completing the course within a few weeks, Aster discovered that the information

provided by the counsellor was inaccurate. Contrary to the counsellor's assertion, the course

merely served as an orientation and did not give her the necessary educational qualifications

required to work at a daycare. Reflecting on this experience, Aster realized the disparity between

the counsellor's guidance and the actual outcome of the course, leading to a sense of

disappointment and a valuable lesson learned. Reflecting on this experience, Aster shares the

following:

> *I was beyond upset. I knew what that lady was telling me was not true but I wanted to*
> *believe her because it would have saved me so much time and money. She just wasted my*
> *time. I did not like her energy at all and felt she did not believe in could do it [college]. I*
> *am mad at myself for believing her. She knows she intentionally did this to me.*

When I asked Aster to elaborate on what she thought the counsellor 'intentionally' did to her.

She shares the following:

> *Well, she never believed in me. She was talking about having kids and how I need to think about that. Why mention that? I am single, not married and I was not planning on having children right away. She also talked about how hard the program [college] would be and how a lot of students in my position drop out. Who says that to someone who wants to do this? It made me believe that maybe I couldn't do it. Maybe because I am working and supporting myself and I am here alone that maybe I can't do it and I might be the dropout person she is talking about.*

Aster expressed her belief that the counsellor held low expectations of her, attributing it to her identity as a 'black, poor, African woman'. When asked about her reasoning behind this belief, Aster replied, *"I do not think she would make all those assumptions if I was not any of those. She would not."* She also mentioned having a 'sense' or 'feeling' about those experiences that she finds difficult to articulate or fully describe.

Samaan is another participant who felt that there were lowered expectations regarding him due to his identity as a Syrian refugee. His aspiration to become a medical doctor had been a lifelong goal since he was young. In his third year as a Science major, Samaan approached his program advisor to assess if he was on track to meet all the prerequisites required for medical school. Despite describing the program advisor as a 'kind white lady,' Samaan felt that she did not show support for his ambition to pursue medical school.

> *She kept asking me weird questions like 'Do you know how much medical school costs'? Or making comments like 'medical school is very hard to get into in Canada'. I thought those questions and comments were inappropriate because they did not seem like they were educating me but rather it felt condescending. I did not like her tone and it felt like she did not think I should be attending medical school. I understand medical school is hard to get into but I have the grades to get in. At least support me in applying and if I don't get it, then I don't get in.*

Samaan believed that the advisors doubted him due to his status as a Syrian refugee. He

acknowledged a potential 'sensitivity' surrounding this issue, as the few individuals he confided

in about his goal expressed that it was a 'challenging goal to achieve.' When asked if he was

sensitive to his advisor's responses, he adamantly replied with a 'nope' and further stated that she

treated him in such a manner because he is a *'Syrian refugee. That is the only reason.'*

Ali, similar to Samaan, wrestled with a persistent feeling of lowered expectations due to

his social location. This sentiment was further exacerbated by the initial devaluation of his

education, work experience, and language skills. While pursuing a diploma program, Ali sought

guidance from his advisor on the pathway to becoming a certified accountant. However, his

aspirations were swiftly dismissed by the advisor, who conveyed that such an ambition was not

attainable and he should focus on his current program first. According to Ali, the advisor did not

offer any alternative options or guidance, leaving him disheartened and feeling as though his

aspirations were being disregarded without consideration or opportunity for exploration.

> *You almost feel bad for having goals for yourself. That is what these people do to you.*
> *That is what these schools do to you. They do not say no directly to you but they are*
> *basically telling you to not bother because you will not make it.*

Ali, Samaan, and Aster all shared a common sentiment of encountering lowered

expectations when discussing their aspirations within educational settings. They collectively

perceived this to be a result of their refugee status along with various intersecting aspects of their

identities. Notably, while attributing the sense of lowered expectations to their social

circumstances, they also acknowledged the potential for alternative explanations or additional

factors contributing to this experience. Despite identifying their refugee status as a significant

factor, they left open the possibility that other elements might have played a role in the

imposition of these lowered expectations upon them within educational environments.

Racial Discrimination: Exclusion from Institutions.

The participants frequently recounted experiences of racial discrimination and a sense of exclusion from various institutions. However, a notable distinction among them was that only a few explicitly attributed these encounters to racial or other intersecting identities. Despite recurring instances of feeling marginalized or discriminated against, many participants refrained from explicitly labelling these experiences as solely rooted in racial or discriminatory biases.

For instance, Ali recalls an encounter with one of his teachers that left him feeling uncomfortable. This incident took place amid the pandemic when restrictions were easing and educational institutions were reopening. The school adhered to COVID-19 safety measures, including mandatory mask-wearing. Following one of his classes, the teacher approached Ali after the session had concluded, inquiring about his living arrangements. Ali describes the incident in the following quotation:

> At first I did not understand what he was saying. You know it is very hard to hear people through a mask. I thought he was speaking about the course but he wanted to know about my life. He asked who I lived with and how many people were in my household. At first, I was going to just answer him but something about it made me uncomfortable so I asked why he wanted to know. He said something about COVID and safety which I did not hear well but what I remember was him ending with 'Your community has large families and you visit each other a lot', something like that. It was weird, I did not understand why he only spoke to me. This was something he could have said during class, to everyone so we can all be safe.

Ali could not explain what about the incident made him feel uncomfortable and said that it is a feeling he gets around these 'situations'. When asked what these situations are, he struggled to articulate them. He did however state that he did not believe it had to do with his race.

Ali struggled to define the exact source of discomfort from the incident, mentioning that it's a sentiment he encounters in similar 'situations'. When prompted to elaborate on these

'situations', he found it challenging to express them clearly. Despite this difficulty, he clarified that he didn't think the discomfort stemmed from racial reasons:

> *I can't say that [racism] because it is not, you know. But it was weird. He did not have to ask me. And I did think maybe it was [racism] because I am the only African guy in the class. Most students are from Asia, lots of Chinese and lots of Indians. A lot of these cultures, especially Indians, live together. You have parents, grandparents, children, uncles and aunties, everyone in the whole family living in one house. I only live with my brother and we both go to school or work. This was something we could have talked about as a whole class and how we can all protect each other including the teacher. He might not be following the rules and spreading COVID to all of us.*

Ali acknowledged that although the questions were not explicitly based on his race, the teacher's inquiry could have been perceived as such. Despite his reluctance to explicitly label the incident, Ali admitted feeling uncomfortable, citing the tendency in Ottawa and Canada to hold immigrants responsible for high infection rates and disregarding COVID-19 guidelines. He further pointed out that any disproportion in COVID-19 cases among racialized individuals versus White individuals might be more attributable to economic circumstances than to non-compliance with rules. According to Ali, people live with extended families due to cultural norms but also because *'Ottawa is an expensive city and people can not afford to live alone'*.

Participants frequently expressed a sense of discomfort, opting not to explicitly label incidents of racism, sexism, or Islamophobia as discriminatory. They commonly associated such situations with their intersecting identities but refrained from directly naming them as such. Even in situations directly connected to race, the majority of my participants struggled to openly acknowledge it. For instance, Sagal, when discussing the limitations imposed on newcomers in pursuing specific educational paths due to their race or immigration status, hesitated to explicitly term it as racism. When asked directly if she had encountered obstacles in education due to her

identity, she responded:

> *Yes, of course. I was told that before. But you think about that even if it is not said to you directly. For example, when you do not get a job or your teacher speaks to you in a way that makes you uncomfortable, you think to yourself is it because of my race, my gender, or religion? I cannot say I experienced direct racism, but I did feel uncomfortable on more than one occasion. It becomes part of your daily lived experience.*

In this scenario, Sagal recognizes that her identity has led to certain limitations, although she refrains from explicitly labelling these experiences as direct racism. Despite this, she admits to feeling uncomfortable in multiple situations related to her identity, which has become a routine part of her everyday life. This hesitancy to label such experiences is a shared sentiment among many participants, irrespective of their diverse social backgrounds. This hesitancy might stem from the fact that racism in Canada often operates in subtle ways, leaving some uncertain if what they experience qualifies as racism. Sagal articulates this sentiment: "Canadians are very polite, so they don't use harsh language, but the discrimination is there. We all feel it, everyone who is not white feels it."

Unlike Ali and Sagal, Yodit acknowledges encountering racism that impeded her education progress. She re-enrolled in the LINC program when classes resumed virtually. The program provided Chromebooks to students without personal computers, including her. Yodit and her husband, dealing with the recent arrival of twins and her job loss, couldn't afford home internet. Yodit resorted to using her cell phone data to complete her schoolwork. The structure of her online class involved teaching sessions for the initial hour, followed by small group activities for the remainder of the time. Due to limited phone data and childcare duties, Yodit sometimes had to log off during the small group activities to attend to her children and save some data.

Her teacher contacted her via email to arrange a meeting. During their discussion, the teacher reprimanded Yodit for her absences, which she acknowledged, understanding she hadn't

met the class expectations. Yet, Yodit was taken aback when her teacher suggested using some of her social assistance funds to secure reliable internet. This suggestion surprised her, and she expressed her feelings about it, stating:

> *She was totally wrong. I told her she is wrong and I am not on a social assistance that my husband worked and until recently I also worked. She just said 'oh' and did not apologize. She just said a lot of people in the class are on welfare. Just like that, she just said it. I tried to tell her what she said was offensive but she would not listen. She just kept saying I need to have internet access if I want to be in this class. Like what are we doing here? I am on online [Google Meet] with her, how did I get here? I need internet to speak to her. She knows she is wrong but does not want to say she is wrong. So what if people are on welfare? They are taking assistance because they don't have any choice. She is so wrong and I did not like that comment.*

Yodit was offended by her teacher's presumption that she depended on social assistance. She explained that although she doesn't oppose the use of social welfare and would consider it herself if her husband were not employed, her main issue was with the assumptions her teacher made about her. She believes this assumption by her teacher is racially motivated.

> *It was 100% racist. That is what I think. The class is all Black people, Black and Brown people. She is the only person who is White. She thinks we all come here to take the government's money. Someone like her does not and will never understand how hard we work. It does not seem like we work hard because we do not have much but the little we have, we work very hard for it. My husband works 12 hours a day, six days a week. I used to work at McDonalds and Tim Hortons. You can not say things like that. It is racist and not true.*

As Yodit revisits the incident, her demeanour and tone shift noticeably, indicating that the incident still deeply affects her. She articulates her belief that others, especially White Canadians, might share the same perceptions as her teacher did. She perceives these views as unjust, considering the significant effort she and her husband put into their work for the little

resources they possess. Sagal also conveys that encountering such racial biases and assumptions is a recurring occurrence for individuals similar to her. Furthermore, she notes that overt acts of racism are rare, with most instances manifesting in subtler forms because Canadians are 'polite'. This association between politeness and Canadians was a sentiment echoed by numerous participants.

Discussion

The findings in this chapter highlight some of the barriers that refugees face in pursuing further education successfully. While it is widely acknowledged that newcomers, including refugees, encounter racism, the research sheds light on the multifaceted ways and the extent to which both institutional and individual racism curtail the educational progress of YARs. The study identifies systemic barriers and omissions that refugees encounter, significantly hindering their educational pursuits and even leading some to abandon their educational aspirations altogether. Firstly, the complex pathways and inadequate support for their educational goals create significant obstacles. Secondly, there is a prevalent lack of recognition for their prior education and experiences, undermining their ability to have their qualifications acknowledged and valued within educational institutions. Thirdly, YARs often face low expectations imposed upon them, discouraging their efforts and impeding their aspirations to complete their education. Lastly, these individuals frequently feel excluded within institutional spaces, creating barriers that impede their full participation and engagement in educational opportunities. The research underscores the detrimental effects of systemic structures and racism on refugee young adults, impacting not only their academic achievements but also their sense of belonging within educational environments, even for those who manage to reach that stage.

The lack of acknowledgment of refugees' previous education and experiences presents a significant barrier to their assimilation into the Canadian education system, restricting their potential contributions and impeding their career advancement. Refugees, in particular, face considerable challenges in getting their qualifications recognized and aligned with Canadian standards due to systemic hurdles. The absence of opportunities for higher education further limits their social and economic mobility, leading many refugees to experience unemployment, underemployment, and reduced incomes compared to other newly arrived individuals (Bajwa et al., 2017). Consequently, their skills and experiences often go unrecognized, forcing them to restart their education or accept positions that do not correspond with their educational background or expertise.

Existing literature highlights that immigrants often face devaluation of their qualifications upon resettlement in Canada. However, refugees experience the lowest rates of acknowledgement for their educational backgrounds and prior experiences (Houle & Yssaad, 2010; Lamba, 2003; Neupane, 2012; Shakya et al., 2012). While some governmental and regulatory efforts have been observed to improve the recognition of foreign credentials, there is a notable lack of initiatives addressing the unique challenges faced by refugees. Refugees represent a vulnerable demographic with diverse and intricate needs, spanning individuals possessing either partial or complete postsecondary education credentials to those with limited formal education (Lamba, 2003). Hence, it comes as no surprise that the research participants encounter difficulties navigating the system, with only a scant few managing to accomplish their educational objectives despite making numerous attempts.

Table 2: Highest educational attainment vs highest recognized

Participant	Country of origin	Age *at the time of resettlement	Highest education pre-migration	Highest education recognized
Ahmed	Somalia	21	High School	None
Saga	Somalia	20	Some Postsecondary	None
Aliyah	Syria	21	Post Secondary	Some Postsecondary
Yonas	Eritrean	23	High School	None
Anok	South Sudan	23	High School	None
Jamila	Syria	18	Post Secondary	High School *Couldn't produce postsecondary transcripts
Samaan	Syria	18	High School	High School
Hana	Yemen	19	Some high school	None
Ali	Somalia	21	Post Secondary	High School
Yodit	Ethiopia	26	High School	None
Mira	Syria	22	Post Secondary	Some Postsecondary
Ibrahim	Syria	26	Post Secondary	Some Postsecondary
Abel	Ethiopia	19	Some high school	None
Joseph	Congo	19	Some high school	None
Aster	South Sudan	20	High School	None

An intriguing revelation from the research involves the varied recognition of credentials based on participants' geographic origins or regions. The research findings reveal a stark contrast in the recognition of educational credentials among the participants. Specifically, individuals from Syria were comparatively more successful in having their high school diplomas and some postsecondary education recognized. However, the majority of participants hailing from various African countries such as Somalia (3), Ethiopia (2), South Sudan (2), Eritrea (1), and Congo (1) encountered significant hurdles in having their education acknowledged as outlined in Table 2. Among these nine participants from Africa, two possessed postsecondary education, five had completed high school, and two had some high school education. However, eight of them

encountered obstacles as none of their credentials were recognized, compelling them to attend high school classes alongside language courses if they aimed to advance their education. Notably, only Ali, equipped with an accounting degree and professional experience in accounting, had his degree equated to a high school diploma. In contrast, all participants from Syria who held high school diplomas experienced the recognition of their credentials without the necessity to repeat high school in order to pursue higher education. This disparity in credential recognition highlights the varying challenges faced by participants from different regions, particularly underscoring the more favourable recognition of credentials for Syrian participants compared to their African counterparts.

The varying encounters with credential devaluation and systemic obstacles underscore the necessity for disaggregated data concerning the post-migration journeys of refugees. Current literature tends to group refugees together with other immigrants, inadequately capturing the nuanced experiences unique to refugees (Shakya et al., 2012). This extends to the education sector, which overlooks data related to pre-migration experiences or arrival immigration status. Instead, educational sector data commonly consolidates refugees under broad classifications such as "foreign-born" or "immigrants" (Shakya et al., 2012). The research findings also emphasize the importance of not solely collecting data on refugees but also comprehending the diverse experiences within the refugee category. This necessitates adopting an intersectional approach to analyse refugee experiences, acknowledging their multifaceted diversity not only concerning race, ethnicity, gender, class and other social locations but also their varied levels of education and credentials. These intersecting factors play a pivotal role in how refugees interact with and navigate the Canadian education system.

Numerous participants shared instances where their sponsors, educators, and/or administrators displayed diminished expectations toward them. Instead of providing encouragement and support, these individuals exhibited scepticism and underestimated the capabilities of the participants solely based on their class and refugee status, perpetuating discriminatory treatment. Low expectations and the lengthy pathways to getting the necessary prerequisites are why refugees arriving in Canada often lean towards trade professions or aim for a maximum of a college diploma while pursuing further education. Data from the 2016 Canadian Census illustrates that 22% of adult refugees upgrade their educational qualifications (Ferede, 2018). However, a significant majority, over 71% of these adult refugees, end up completing trade or college diplomas rather than pursuing a bachelor's degree or higher (Ferede, 2018). It is therefore not surprising that even individuals who had successfully attained a bachelor's degree also encountered instances of low expectations. Samaan, who achieved the highest level of education among the participants, encountered discouragement when considering medical school during the last year of his bachelor's degree. During his discussion with his program advisor, he felt uneasy as she posed what he considered 'weird questions' about the expenses of medical school and the considerable challenges of gaining admission. Samaan perceived his advisor's approach as disheartening due to her condescending tone, emphasizing the hurdles rather than providing encouragement. He believed that despite possessing the necessary grades for medical school, he should, at the very least, make an attempt. Samaan anticipated his advisor's backing in his application attempts and reasoned that if he didn't secure admission, he would have at least given it a try.

The diminished expectations placed on refugees mirror a larger societal view that perceives them as having low skills and low education, thereby restricting their potential and

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abilities. They are often anticipated to express gratitude solely for being resettled and receiving basic services in a new country. There exists an unspoken societal expectation that refugees should not aspire to attain higher education; instead, they are implicitly encouraged to suppress ambitions and be content with avoiding displacement. This societal mindset tends to limit the perceived possibilities and ambitions of refugees, discouraging them from aspiring for educational excellence or aiming for higher accomplishments. This mindset leads to dehumanizing or paternalistic treatment of refugees, perceiving them solely as "victims" or "powerless individuals" needing only the essentials for survival, ignoring their capacity for choice and broader human qualities (Shakya, et al, 2012).

The participants, diverse in gender, race, age, country of origin, and educational background, share a common thread in their experiences as refugees. Despite their varied backgrounds, they articulate similar challenges and obstacles resulting from their status as refugees within their location. These obstacles include discouragement from aiming higher, encountering biases or limitations rooted in societal perceptions, and experiencing a reduced sense of control over decision-making despite personal progress. These narratives underscore the pervasive categorization of refugees as low-skilled, low-educated immigrants, anticipated to express gratitude solely for humanitarian admission, rather than being acknowledged for their true value. This prevailing discourse significantly impacts their lived experiences. Such discriminatory attitudes perpetuate a cycle of devaluation, leading to the underutilization and underappreciation of refugees' potential talents and contributions. This undermines the primary objectives of most refugees, as noted by Elzinga and Morrow (2004), which is to "regain status and become contributing members of society once more" (p. 2). However, as highlighted by

Elzinga and Morrow (2004), the current public discourse in Canada and globally impedes many refugees from achieving this objective:

Upon arriving in Canada, not only do refugees face the challenges of starting their life over in a different country with unfamiliar customs and norms, but they must also contend with a number of preconceived notions about the refugee and migrant experience. Common myths include the idea that refugees are uneducated and unskilled and therefore do not contribute meaningfully to the Canadian economy. Instead, there is a belief that refugees become a drain on the economy by continuing to depend on social assistance for prolonged periods. Another commonly-held misconception is that refugees do not attempt to integrate into Canadian society or attempt to learn Canada's official languages, which is seen as threatening to Canadian values. Too often, these myths cloud the more accurate representation of refugees as a pool of talented individuals who, if given the opportunity and support, are willing and able to positively impact their communities and make beneficial contributions to society, both in Canada and globally (p. 2).

The findings also reveal that the system and institutions are operating in alignment with their intended design, as informed by historical precedents. The stories shared bring attention to the difficulties refugees encounter when trying to access higher education and job prospects post migration. These accounts vividly illustrate the systemic challenges entrenched within immigration and educational bodies, forming persistent obstacles that hinder refugees' advancement toward better opportunities. The research findings underscore a significant disparity in the treatment between economic immigrants and refugees. Economic immigrants confront obstacles related to credential recognition and job placement due to the limited acknowledgment of their foreign qualifications, contributing to a widening income gap. On the

flip side, refugees encounter these challenges in addition to unique hurdles arising from displacement, linguistic barriers, and disruptions in education. These factors further complicate their journey toward higher education and integration into the workforce.

The participants' experiences serve as evidence of the constrained access to education and upward mobility for refugees. Their educational hurdles do not arise from a system oversight but rather reveal a purposeful strategy in managing distinct immigrant classes. I argue that the challenges young adult refugees face—such as the privatization of refugee resettlement and fragmented settlement planning—reflect the system functioning as designed. This mirrors historical migrant management schemes aimed at excluding certain groups, such as rejecting most Black immigrants (Triadafilopoulos, 2012), excluding Asian immigrants (Dua, 2007; Thobani, 2017), and turning away Jewish refugees escaping the Holocaust (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2009). This pattern is evident in the exclusion of refugees from both provincial and federal immigration and education policies, as detailed in Chapter 2. The intentional exclusion of refugees from crucial newcomer strategies and immigration management is directly contributing to their inability to access education and the anticipated opportunities in their new country. This deliberate omission is causing them to face significant barriers in pursuing education and securing the opportunities they expected upon arriving in their new homeland.

One noteworthy discovery from the research is the varying degrees of support provided to refugees in different provinces when it comes to overcoming barriers to education. Overall, participants in Ontario, whether in Ottawa or Toronto, appear to have better access to resources than those in Alberta. Ontario's government, unlike Alberta, offers free upgrading and adult high school classes, language programs beyond LINC, and bridging programs. Moreover, Ontario demonstrates a more inclusive approach toward refugees in immigration and adult education

strategies compared to Alberta. These inclusive measures and the availability of multiple pathways to obtain a Canadian high school diploma, leading to access to post-secondary education, facilitate an easier navigation of the system for refugees. For instance, Ibrahim, an experienced public health worker with a university degree, expressed his concerns about job prospects upon arriving in Canada. However, the free bridging program offered by the government of Ontario provided him with an opportunity to enter the labour market and have some of his experience recognized, albeit at a lower level. He referred to the program as a "miracle" as it assisted him in gaining Canadian experience and understanding the healthcare system in the country.

Participants from Alberta also expressed concerns about the province lagging behind other regions in terms of educational opportunities. For instance, Ahmed highlighted Ontario's advantages, noting how it allows individuals to pursue education while holding full-time jobs due to diverse available options and minimal associated costs. Sagal and Aliyah also noted the accessibility of post-secondary education in the United States for those in similar circumstances. However, it is important to note that despite provinces like Ontario offering more options for non-traditional adult learners compared to Alberta, persistent gaps remain in addressing the specific challenges encountered by refugees navigating educational paths. Refugees continue to grapple with a complex system that does not prioritize or cater to their needs. These experiences point out the disjointed nature of the adult education policy landscape in Canada. Policies are made at different levels of government as well as within institutions. For instance, in comparison to Alberta, many colleges and universities in Toronto have bridging programs for adult students without a high school diploma, each with its own requirements.

The participants' experiences demonstrate that the system functions as intended by the government and institution, serving as a means of population and labour market control. Historically, immigrants from non-OECD countries, particularly the global South, have faced devaluation of their education, skills, and experiences. The 2006 census data illustrates a disparity, with over 50.5% of immigrants from non-OECD countries living with low income compared to 29.8% from OECD countries (Crossman, 2013). However, over time, economic immigrants, regardless of their country of origin, tend to fare better (Ryan, 2014) than other immigrant classes. This group has gained significance for the Canadian state due to their importance in addressing skilled labour shortages and population growth in Canada. Consequently, the state has concentrated its efforts on admitting highly educated, skilled, and rigorously vetted immigrants, reshaping immigration policies around their needs. Various initiatives have been introduced to facilitate their successful integration into the labour market. These measures include enhancing the recognition of their credentials and eliminating barriers that prevent them from working in their respective fields.

The implementation of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) in 2002 marked a pivotal change in Canada's immigration policies. This Act aimed to balance economic interests, humanitarian obligations, and national security concerns while addressing the diverse needs of immigrants including refugees. Initially setting out 12 objectives guiding immigration policies, the emphasis gradually shifted over time, with economic considerations becoming the dominant focus (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). This shift led to a significant increase in the proportion of economic immigrants admitted into Canada. In the 1980s, economic immigrants comprised 30% of admissions, compared to 18% for refugees. However, today, economic immigrants represent roughly 60% of admitted immigrants, with refugees accounting

for only about 10%. This transformation underscores the increasing priority placed on economic rationality within Canada's immigration framework.

The IRPA was introduced to respond to the evolving dynamics of the contemporary knowledge-based economy by improving the economic success rates of skilled immigrants and maintaining a steady influx of skilled workers (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). Among the changes introduced, there was a notable shift from the previous skilled worker policy, which heavily considered an applicant's intended occupation. The IRPA introduced a more adaptable approach, emphasizing an applicant's flexibility and adaptability to evolving job markets, rather than focusing solely on specific occupations (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). The implementation of the IRPA notably benefited the **economic immigrant** class. Under IRPA, the evaluation of skilled worker applications revealed that those reporting employment or self-employed income increased from 84% one year after arrival to 89% three years after arrival (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). Furthermore, individuals in this category reported incomes 65% higher in their first year compared to those who applied under the previous system (Crossman, 2013).

Several adaptations were made in response to the shifting requirements of the labour market including the implementation of the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) in the late 1990s which was devised primarily to encourage the settlement of economic immigrants outside major cities, aligning with specific workforce needs perceived by each region (Picot, et al., 2023). Over time, the PNP expanded substantially and, by 2019, became the primary avenue for selecting economic immigrants, representing 35% of all new economic immigrants in Canada, a significant rise from its 1% representation in 2000 (Picot, et al., 2023). Evaluations of the PNP revealed that the majority of Provincial Nominees achieved economic stability, consistently

reporting employment or self-employment earnings in subsequent years post-arrival (Crossman, 2013).

In addition to the PNP, various supplementary programs were introduced to address distinct regional labour market needs including the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program (2022), the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (2019), the Municipal Nominee Program (2019) which were meant to empowered local communities, chambers of commerce, and local labour councils to directly sponsor permanent immigrants (Picot, et al., 2023). There have also been initiatives to establish a pathway to permanent residency for temporary residents, particularly international students, by recognizing their Canadian work experience. Currently, the Ontario government is proposing legislation aimed at removing the requirement for Canadian work experience in job postings. This legislative move holds significance as the lack of Canadian work experience has acted as a barrier to workforce entry and has frequently devalued the experiences of immigrants (Elgersma, 2012; Guo, 2015).

The aforementioned strategies primarily target economic immigrants, aiming to eliminate entry barriers into the workforce and facilitate the economic success of skilled immigrants in their new homeland. However, when considering refugees, there appears to be a lack of measures in place to address the challenges they encounter. Regrettably, minimal action has been taken. The introduction of the IRPA in 2011 shifted the focus more toward safeguarding refugees rather than enabling their establishment in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). Consequently, this change resulted in heightened resettlement requirements for Government-assisted refugees, prompting CIC to pilot the Life Skills Pilot Project across six Ontario communities in 2004. Additionally, CIC augmented income support to assist with rental expenses and other living costs (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). Despite these

efforts, there remains a notable lack of initiatives aimed at addressing the educational,

employment, and necessary support systems crucial for overcoming barriers faced by refugees.

The increasing discrepancy in treatment between different immigrant categories in

Canada stems from the nation's heightened need for economic immigrants. This differential

treatment, analyzed through the lens of CRT's interest convergence, reveals the underlying

motivations and incentives behind these disparities. The concept of interest convergence suggests

that policies benefiting marginalized groups are often enacted only when they also benefit the

dominant group. In this context, Canada's preference for economic immigrants aligns with the

broader goal of immediate economic contribution, rather than addressing the needs of other

immigrants class who require additional support to meet labour market demands. Thus, Canada's

immigration policy appears to prioritize those who can offer immediate economic benefits over

those who need assistance to integrate into the labour market, highlighting a strategic focus on

immediate economic gains. This is why refugees are absent from the policies, and, as

demonstrated by the lived experiences of research participants, they encounter challenges in

accessing opportunities to further their education.

Summary

This chapter explores the profound challenges faced by participants in their pursuit of

education and the numerous systemic barriers they encounter. It examines four main themes that

encapsulate their educational challenges: complex and insufficient pathways that are difficult to

navigate, lack of recognition for their prior education and diverse experiences, low expectations,

and instances of racial discrimination within educational institutions. These themes shed light on

the complexities and hardships experienced by these individuals. Together, these experiences

underscore the multifaceted barriers that hinder young adult refugees' access to education. It

reveals adult education and immigration policies that fail to consider the experiences and

requirements of refugees. Immigration policies prioritize economic immigrants who are assumed

not to need post-secondary education support, whereas adult education policies focus on non-

traditional individuals who have experience within the Canadian K-12 system to some extent.

Chapter 7: Interwoven Intersectionality: Navigating the Complexities of Race, Gender, and Religious Visibility

In their pursuit of postsecondary education, refugee women encounter a myriad of challenges shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, race, immigration status, class, and religion. This chapter explores how these overlapping issues create significant barriers in their educational journeys. Firstly, financial constraints, especially related to the high costs of childcare, restrict their ability to engage in academic pursuits. Secondly, traditional gender roles further impose societal expectations that often prioritize family responsibilities over personal educational aspirations. Thirdly, religious visibility can lead to discrimination, impacting their experiences within educational environments. These interconnected obstacles highlight the need for intersectional approaches in educational policy and practice that both recognize and address the diverse and systemic challenges faced by refugee women.

Double burden Cost of Childcare

The role of women and the challenge of children and childcare emerged in discussions with all eight women interviewees. Among them, five were mothers with young children. For the women without children, the conversation revolved around the societal expectations of motherhood and the financial contribution to the household. On the other hand, for those with children, a recurring theme centred on the role and financial burden of childcare. None of these women had their children in daycare. They all would have liked to work or dedicate full time to their education if they had affordable childcare.

Yodit, a woman from Ethiopia residing in Edmonton, was privately sponsored by her cousin in 2018. Initially enrolled in the LINC program, she dropped out to work as her cousin had conveyed that he would only provide support for a few months. After this period, she left

school and began working full-time at McDonald's. Shortly thereafter, she got married and continued working. In 2020, during the pandemic, she was laid off from her job, and around the same time, she became pregnant. During her pregnancy, Yodit resumed her studies, completing the LINC program and qualifying for an upgrading program that would make her eligible for the college program she aspired to enrol in. Upon the birth of her twins, she temporarily paused attending school to give birth and spend the first few months with her newborns.

> *After giving birth, I stayed home with my kids. But, I needed to go back to school. However, I can not do that now because there is no one to look after my children. So I'm staying home, staying home mom right now. I am thinking of going back to school this year and finish upgrading but I don't know if it will happen. Going to daycare, for two kids, is a lot of money. I have to stay home with them. I can not also work because the money I would make is the same as the money for daycare. It does not make sense to me. I don't know. Now it's very difficult, really very difficult. And I'm not going to school or working right now. I'm just staying home full-time with my children.*

Yodit, much like the other women participants with children, expresses significant apprehension about the cost of childcare which she described as 'ridiculously high'. Six months after giving birth, Yodit attempted to return to school, enrolling in the upgrading program online. However, she encountered challenges concentrating on her studies as she needed to attend to her children. Struggling to keep up with the class, her teacher raised concerns about her inability to fully engage. Unfortunately, the program was only available during the day when her husband was at work. Unable to find an evening online program that allowed virtual attendance, enabling her to breastfeed her children while her husband cared for them, Yodit ultimately decided to drop out. With no alternative available, Yodit is presently in the process of sponsoring her mother, intending for her to provide assistance with childcare while she resumes her pursuit of education and work.

I'm thinking of bringing my mom so that she can take care of the babies so I can go back to school and work part-time. I need to work because my mother would be living with us and that will increase the family budget. It would be nice to have my mother here because she can look after the children and it would be free for me. The children are also young and there is COVID so I feel better if they are looked after at the house. Daycare would be nice too but it is expensive. I have a plan to bring my mom so that she can help raise them and then I will go to school and work again. We started the process with our church but it will take more time. Maybe in one more year, she will come. For now, I don't go to school or work, I just stay home with my children.

Since arriving in Canada, Yodit has been working with her church group to sponsor her mother. Initially, her mother had no intention of relocating to Canada, believing she was too old to adapt to life there. However, upon learning about Yodit's struggles in completing school and working due to the unavailability of affordable childcare, she agreed to be sponsored. Yodit is hopeful that her mother will be in Canada within the next year, as her immigration application under the Family Reunification class has been approved.

Yodit's story, alongside those of the other participants, underscores the additional financial burden women face due to the costs of childcare. While participants acknowledged the availability of childcare subsidies for women returning to school or employment, Yodit encountered an inconsistency. Despite others in similar programs receiving subsidies, she was told that the upgrading program did not meet the criteria. The caseworker overseeing her application informed her that she would need to secure a full-time job or enrol in a full-time program to be eligible for the childcare subsidy.

Education for women is not prioritized by sponsors, institutions and family

Another prominent theme regarding pathways to education revolved not only around the scarcity of available routes but also illuminated the discouragement faced by certain women when striving to advance their education. This discouragement stemmed not only from family

members but also from individuals within educational institutions and settlement agencies. Mira and Jamila provided extensive accounts detailing this lack of support, which was influenced by their gender.

Mira, a Government-Assisted Refugee (GAR) residing in Toronto, arrived in Canada with her husband and three children. Both Mira and her husband hold engineering degrees from Syria. Upon their arrival, they underwent a language placement test, and both performed well enough to qualify for a bridging program. However, their settlement worker gave priority to Mira's husband to pursue further education. His engineering degree received partial recognition, granting him acceptance into a bridging program. In contrast, Mira aspired for similar educational opportunities, yet her husband and settlement worker emphasized his education as he was perceived as the primary provider. Consequently, Mira felt perplexed, with her case worker predominantly focused on her husband's advancement.

> *I did not like the caseworker helping us with our education and employment. I do not know what his problem is but he only focused on my husband. My husband has more years working as an engineer because he is older but we both have the same degree. We both worked as engineers before the war. But why is this guy only focusing on my husband?.*

Mira shared her concerns about the case worker with her husband, but she felt he didn't take her complaints seriously. He stressed the immediate need to prioritize his job search first, highlighting the limited timeframe before their government assistance ended. Moreover, he expressed reluctance to jeopardize his relationship with the case worker, as the worker was exerting significant effort to secure his admission into a bridging program, allowing him to work as an engineer in Canada. Although this program wouldn't grant him the same credentials he held in Syria, it would enable him to financially support the family. He also explained that the

bridging program had a high level of competition with an extensive waiting list, suggesting that increasing their chances of acceptance necessitated at least one of them securing admission.

Mira also faced a predicament due to their three young children. The engineering bridging program demanded considerable dedication and was intensive, leaving no one available to care for the children or manage household responsibilities if both she and her husband attended simultaneously. Despite her frustration with this situation, Mira felt she had little choice but to accept her role as a homemaker for the time being. She planned to wait until her husband was employed, and the children had adequately adjusted to their new country and routine—then, she would pursue her education again. She described her struggle in adapting to this new role and reality:

> *My whole life, except during the period of war, I was a student or working. I am used to a working role in Syria. Almost all the women in my family are working. We have women who are doctors, lawyers, teachers and engineers. Every job out there, there is a woman in my family who is doing it. This is different for me but it is ok. I am ok looking after my children but I do not like not going to school because I am a woman. This is not the way of my family or the way I was raised. It is so backward and we have moved away from such thinking.*

For Mira, work holds significant importance in defining her identity as an individual. She expresses how diligently she worked as a student, striving to become a working professional. Despite facing challenges, there was always an expectation within herself that she would be an active part of the workforce regardless of her circumstances. Her determination was evident when she had her first child during her final year as an engineering student, yet this didn't hinder her from completing her studies. Even after entering the labour force, she continued having more children. As Mira highlighted, she comes from a lineage of women who prioritized working both within and outside the house, underscoring the strong value placed on employment within her

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family history.

When asked to reflect on her interactions with the case worker, Mira expressed surprise at not being prioritized and feeling almost invisible. This came as an unexpected revelation to her because she perceived Canada as a "very open society." Reflecting on the situation, Mira speculated that perhaps her choice to wear the hijab might have played a role in her treatment or the lack of attention given to her.

> *My husband dressed like everyone else in this country but for me, I look different. I see how people look at me because I am wearing the hijab. Maybe sometimes I think people think I belong in the house. Like I want to be in the house and be a homemaker and not work. I don't know if he [caseworker] thinks that but maybe, I don't know. Maybe my husband is right and it is because the program is competitive and only one of us can do it. Maybe.*

The hijabi Muslim women participants raised concerns regarding perceptions tied to wearing the hijab. Words like "homemaker," "invisible," "hidden," "oppressed," and "unseen" were used by participants to illustrate how society viewed them. Mira also contemplated whether the perception of her, wearing the hijab, might have been a reason why her education wasn't prioritized, although she acknowledged uncertainty about this being the definitive reason. She expressed a desire to believe that the lack of attention was due to the competitive nature of the program rather than any assumptions or attributions tied to her hijab and its perceived implications by others.

Jamila, like Mira, faces hurdles in pursuing her education due to gender-based challenges. Being unable to obtain her nursing degree or transcripts due to ongoing conflict in Syria, she had to return to school in Canada to obtain the necessary qualifications. However, her decision is met with disapproval, particularly from her mother, who believes it unnecessary for Jamila to dedicate years to further education. Her family situation—married with children and

her husband as the primary breadwinner—leads her mother to discourage Jamila, suggesting that she focus on homemaking and supporting the family's adjustment to a new country. Jamila also faced an additional setback when her initially supportive husband changed his mind, aligning with her mother's perspective. This shift in support deeply affected Jamila, leading her to second-guess her decision to further her education since two of the most important individuals in her life were no longer in support of her decision.

> *It was disappointing, yes for sure it was disappointing. My mother was always supportive of my education back home but now that I am married I don't know what changed. I need to go to school and work, that is how she raised me but now she changed her mind. Having a husband or children does not mean you give up on your goals. Now I have a mother who is not happy I went back to school. I am not working and I have so much student debt. It is hard because she reminds me I wouldn't be in this situation if I didn't go to school. But I don't regret it, I am happy I did it and I will work soon.*

Jamila echoes the sentiments expressed by other participants regarding the challenge of balancing personal aspirations with societal expectations. Even unmarried young women consider marriage as a factor when contemplating further education, as the extended duration of schooling might lead them to complete their studies around the age of 30. They express concern that this might be deemed "too late" for marriage, as societal norms might perceive them as too old to get married by that age.

Muslim Women: Intersection of gender, race and religion

Another form of discrimination was highlighted by Muslim women who chose to wear the hijab. Sagal, Hana, Jamila, and Mira all shared experiences of differential treatment due to being visibly Muslim women. They all pointed out two key issues: 1) assumptions made about their lack of interest in pursuing education or a career, and 2) a sense of being unwelcome in educational institutions.

Sagal discussed her encounters while wearing the hijab and navigating various institutions. She believes that the discrimination she faces as a Black woman is exacerbated by wearing the hijab and society's perceptions of women who choose to wear it. Speaking broadly on the matter, she articulates:

> *People look at you as less than and because I wear the hijab, they see me as someone who has no agency. As if I am oppressed and they make me feel I don't need to further my education. I don't understand why a piece of cloth makes people so uncomfortable. I am not bothering you so why are you uncomfortable? Up until Canada, I lived in predominantly Muslim countries, so the hijab was never an issue. But here, it makes people, particularly white people, uncomfortable.*

For Sagal who has lived in Muslim-majority countries, she never thought about the hijab and how people would perceive her for wearing it. She believes that wearing the Hijab is not a big deal as it is just another article of clothing. However, she is now hyper-aware of the sentiments it evokes in people and how that might impact her in the spaces she occupies. Sagal, who has always been a 'strong independent woman' feels frustrated by the limitations that are placed on her because she chooses to practice an aspect of her faith. Being able to achieve her educational goals is important to her and she is fighting to overcome any limitations placed on her whether because of her gender, race or religion.

Similar to Sagal, Jamila also articulates the restrictions imposed on her and feeling unwelcome in specific spaces due to her Hijab. During the practicum phase of her nursing program, Jamila recalls receiving 'strange' remarks from her clinical instructor. These remarks were troubling enough that Jamila lodged a complaint with her program coordinator. Below, Jamila recounts the details:

> *At first, I did not think much about it. She would say things like 'Make sure your hijab is tied in the back so it doesn't fall on the patient or equipment' or something like that. After*

a while, I realized this woman had a problem with me wearing the hijab. The comment that made me very upset was when she said something like the patients might not trust me because my hijab makes them feel uncomfortable. I was upset by this because what does it has to do with me doing my job? I spent several days thinking about that comment, it bothered me so much. It was not the only comment she made but that is when I realized there is a bigger problem here. I did not have anyone to talk to about it and I did not want to make a big issue over it because this woman controlled the mark I received. If I complained, she could fail me so I kept it to myself. I did not even tell my husband.

Jamila's quote highlights a distressing experience she faced during her nursing practicum, revealing discriminatory comments from her clinical instructor regarding her Hijab. Over time, she began to sense a bias against her Hijab from the instructor's remarks, particularly when she insinuated that patients might feel uncomfortable due to Jamila's Hijab, which deeply upset her.

The comment not only disturbed Jamila but also led her to realize the underlying issue of discrimination against her choice to wear the hijab. Despite feeling upset and troubled, she faced a dilemma in addressing the problem because the instructor had control over her evaluation and feared potential repercussions if she raised a complaint. This situation left her feeling isolated and without a safe avenue to express her concerns, even choosing not to confide in her husband or mother about the ordeal. Jamila's account demonstrates the complex challenges faced by individuals experiencing discrimination in professional settings and the difficulties in addressing such issues due to power imbalances and fear of retaliation.

Jamila was apprehensive about attending the practicum due to her belief that her instructor held anti-hijab and anti-Muslim sentiments. Despite feeling stressed and noticing a toll on her mental health from the experience, she felt compelled to continue attending the clinic and disregarding the instructor's unsettling comments. However, her decision to remain non-confrontational shifted when she received her evaluation from the instructor:

I can not describe how it [evaluation] made it feel, I was upset. I was more than upset, more like angry. For weeks and weeks, I did not say anything. I came to the clinic and did my job. I know how to do my job, I was a nurse back in Syria. I did everything she asked me to do, without any complaint and always smiling. I did not deserve the evaluation she gave me. What is crazy to me is that she scored me high on my skills, knowledge of what I am doing, and teamwork but she gave me a very low score when it comes to patients. She wrote I was not professional and I made the patient and family feel uncomfortable. After all she said to me, this is the evaluation she gives me. I knew I had to speak up and I couldn't keep quiet anymore.

Jamila's narrative about her clinical experience reflects a profound sense of frustration, disappointment, and injustice due to the evaluation she received. This evaluation she received became a turning point for her, compelling her to break her silence and address the unfair treatment she endured. Initially eager about the practicum to apply her nursing skills and explore the differences between nursing in Syria and Canada, Jamila faced what she described as a 'nightmare' under her instructor's guidance. Following the disheartening evaluation, Jamila took action by filing a complaint with the program director at her institution. She admitted feeling reluctant at first, not wanting to create conflict or disrupt potential professional relationships. However, after contemplation, she felt compelled to act, aiming to prevent similar experiences for other Muslim women. She also emphasized that she was willing to sacrifice any professional rapport to avoid working with the instructor in the future.

What is evident is that both Sagal's and Jamila's encounters were directly linked to their visibility as Muslim women. Similar sentiments were echoed by Hana and Mira. Unlike instances of discrimination based on race, gender, and so forth, which were shared by most participants and often more implicit, the narratives involving the hijab were more explicit. In these cases, individuals perpetuating discrimination would explicitly reference the hijab and make direct comments about it. This might explain why Muslim women were more forthright in

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labelling the discrimination they faced as Islamophobia or anti-hijab. This stands in contrast to experiences of racism, where some participants were hesitant to explicitly name it as such.

Discussion

In previous chapters of this dissertation, I have broadly examined the challenges that young adult refugees face in accessing post-secondary education in Canada. In this chapter, however, I adopt an intersectional lens to explore how refugee status intersects with gender, race, and religion to intensify these struggles for women participants. This intersectional approach reveals the multidimensional nature of young adult refugees' experiences, highlighting the diverse and complex factors that shape their perspectives. The narratives of women participants underscore the barriers they encounter in pursuing post-secondary education, including societal expectations related to traditional gender roles, the difficulties of managing childcare costs and responsibilities, and the discrimination faced by Muslim women who wear the hijab, which is often heightened by their visible religious identity.

The experiences of individuals like Mira and Jamila highlight the gender-based challenges affecting their educational aspirations, showcasing the impact of various factors on their pursuit of education. Mira's story illustrates the gender disparity prevalent in educational opportunities. Despite possessing qualifications similar to her husband, her educational pursuits took a backseat to her husband's career advancement. This disparity reflects a societal bias favouring the husband as the primary financial provider, disregarding Mira's aspirations and capabilities. Her struggle to balance childcare responsibilities while seeking educational opportunities underlines the challenges faced by women in achieving their academic goals amid family and societal expectations.

The findings also illustrate the influence of traditional gender roles and familial pressures on women's educational choices. Jamila's experience highlights the conflict between personal aspirations and societal expectations. Despite her initial determination to pursue further education, the lack of support from her mother and husband led her to reconsider. Her story exemplifies societal pressure on women to prioritize family duties over personal and professional growth, adding complexity to the challenges faced by women aspiring for education and career progress. Gender role expectations, along with the absence of accessible routes and the extended duration required to fulfill all the prerequisites for entry into postsecondary education pose obstacles for numerous women, including those without prior postsecondary education and those seeking to enhance their credentials through upgrades (Bajwa, et al, 2018). As highlighted by Ratković and Piętka-Nykaza (2016), some refugee women opt to entirely forgo their educational aspirations. This decision is influenced by the conflicting responsibilities of motherhood, coupled with societal expectations to marry and establish a family (Bajwa, et al, 2018; Ratković and Piętka-Nykaza (2016). Alternatively, some women find themselves compelled to enter the workforce at lower-skilled positions to provide financial support to their families.

The stories of these women underscore the complex interplay between gender expectations, societal norms, family dynamics, and individual ambitions. These narratives shed light on the challenges women face when trying to pursue both educational and professional growth amid societal expectations. They highlight a pervasive issue where women are often expected to prioritize motherhood and marriage over their education.

In Mira's case, there's a distinct emphasis on the man as the primary provider, while the woman's income is viewed merely as supplementary. Similarly, Jamila had to stay home to care for her children due to the high cost of childcare. Despite her eagerness to resume work, her

mother and husband believe it's unnecessary, considering the husband's income covers their expenses. Adding to her distress, Jamila carries student debt that she currently cannot manage to repay due to not working. Her mother's reminders about her student loan and the time invested in schooling further reinforce traditional gender roles, implying that a woman's primary role is to find a husband who can financially support her while she dedicates herself to childcare. These narratives shed light on the persistence of gendered expectations, where societal and familial pressures often discourage women from pursuing their career aspirations or education, reinforcing the idea that their primary responsibility lies in finding a provider husband rather than prioritizing personal and professional growth. A study on refugee women teachers' journey to regaining their profession in Canada and the UK also discover similar results (Ratković & Piętka-Nykaza, 2016). The findings from that study suggest refugee women may receive less support from their families in pursuing their professional aspirations. This mirrors Aster's experience in the previous chapter, where her counsellor failed to provide the necessary information for advancing her education. The counsellor believed that the demands of college would be too challenging for her. This judgment was based on seeing Aster as a "Black, poor, African woman" rather than recognizing her as an individual with her own aspirations and abilities.

The recurring challenge of balancing motherhood and the financial limitations linked to childcare expenses remains prominent. Yodit's story represents the struggle shared by many women due to the steep costs of childcare. Despite her wish to pursue both education and employment, the financial demands outweigh the potential earnings, forcing her and others in similar circumstances to take on the role of full-time caregivers. Yodit's unsuccessful attempts to resume her education online due to the lack of programs that accommodate her childcare

schedule highlight the rigidity within the current educational systems, exacerbating the issue. Additionally, her difficulties in accessing childcare subsidies expose inconsistencies in policy implementation, obstructing women's return to education or the workforce. Mira and Jamila are also navigating similar situations, both waiting for their children to reach school age before considering re-entering the workforce.

In the situations of Yodit, Mira, and Jamila, there's a distinct pattern where women are expected to sacrifice their education and career prospects instead of the man. Mira, despite having the same engineering education as her husband, is overlooked for an engineering program while she's expected to take care of the children. Similarly, Jamila, who has the potential to work as a nurse and earn more than her husband, is the one putting her career on hold to care for the children. Yodit finds herself in a position where she needs to pause her education and work until her twins reach an age where they can attend school full-time, a period estimated to be around five to six years. This reality has led her to initiate the process of sponsoring her mother to come to Canada to assist with childcare. The experiences of women and the 'double burden' of unpaid work at home and in the labour market are well documented, with childcare responsibilities frequently falling on women (Bassel, 2012). The findings show that the 'double burden' of managing both household and professional responsibilities, compounded by race, class, gender, and refugee status, creates a situation where family obligations take precedence, often leading to the abandonment of employment and education pursuits. Such findings have also been reported in previous studies on refugee women (Bassel, 2012; Bajwa, et al, 2018; Ratković, & Piętka-Nykaza, 2016).

In addition to navigating gender norms and motherhood hijab-wearing Muslim women also have to deal with discrimination associated with their religious visibility (Karakaşoğlu and

Doğmuş, 2016). The experiences of Sagal, Jamila, and others reveal societal perceptions

questioning their agency and explicit instances of discrimination or discomfort in educational

and professional settings based on their visibility as Muslim women. Sagal's encounters

showcase the discomfort and presumptions directed at her regarding her presumed lack of

interest in education or professional advancement, solely based on her decision to wear the hijab.

She expresses frustration over societal constraints imposed on her, perceiving herself as a

determined, self-sufficient woman whose ambitions shouldn't be restricted due to her religious

clothing. Sagal's irritation is rooted in the unease some in predominantly non-Muslim societies

feel towards the hijab, particularly individuals who might harbour biases or stereotypes about the

capabilities of Muslim women.

Similarly, Mira also contemplates whether her appearance affects how she's perceived

and treated within educational environments. As an educated and motivated woman, she ponders

whether her outward attire might influence prejudices held against Muslim women: "*My husband

dressed like everyone else in this country but for me, I look different. I see how people look at me

because I am wearing the hijab. Maybe sometimes I think people think I belong in the house.*"

This self-reflection highlights the impact of societal perceptions on Muslim women who wear

the hijab, revealing the prejudices and limitations they may face in various settings due to their

attire. Bassel's (2012) research on the experiences of Somali refugee women in Canada and

France echoes a similar sentiment. The study participants shared their encounters with an added

layer of discrimination and feelings of being 'othered' due to their choice to wear the hijab. They

detailed how this choice restricted their access to employment and various opportunities, a

disparity not faced by the men in their community because "A man does not show all culture, he

wears pants [trousers] and a shirt" (p. 126). It is this display of her religious culture and the

accompanying societal perceptions that leads Mira to believe she is not receiving the same support from institutions to advance her education and career as her husband.

We gained deeper insight into the repercussions of discrimination linked to the visibility of religious culture through Jamila's unsettling experience during her nursing practicum. The direct discriminatory comments from her clinical instructor, insinuating patient discomfort due to her hijab, had a profound impact on her, influencing her professional assessment and leaving her feeling isolated and uncertain about addressing the situation, fearing negative consequences for her evaluation and future career prospects. However, driven by an unfair and conflicting evaluation, Jamila felt compelled to speak out, lodging a complaint to prevent similar incidents from affecting other Muslim women. Expressing the encounters with Islamophobia that hijab-wearing Muslim women undergo can be difficult, given prevalent societal assumptions that perceive the hijab as oppressive, outdated, and indicative of a lack of self-determination. These attitudes are embedded in our social discourse. A study by Karakaşoğlu and Doğmuş (2016) illuminates the difficulty of reporting such experiences in an educational setting, as supervisors and those in charge often share similar biased views. For example, the school administration's response to a Muslim woman's discrimination complaint suggests a dismissive attitude, asserting that such experiences are not unique, and she "would encounter this kind of prejudice everywhere," leading to the belief that the school could do nothing about it (p. 97). This aligns with the research findings where participants' experiences of discrimination left them feeling a sense of helplessness, believing nothing could be done. It's crucial to note, as expressed by participants like Ahmed, that reporting incidents of discrimination is challenging due to the difficulty in identifying its root cause—whether based on race, religion, accent, education level, immigration status, gender, etc.

The experiences shared by Sagal, Mira, Jamila, and others highlight a distinct form of Islamophobia directly connected to wearing the hijab, setting it apart from other forms of discrimination encountered by male Muslim participants and non-hijab-wearing Muslim women. Notably, Muslim male participants did not report experiences of Islamophobia or discrimination based on their religion, possibly linked to the perception that "A man does not show all culture" and can blend in more by wearing pants and a shirt like any other man. This doesn't negate the possibility that Muslim men and Muslim women not wearing the hijab may still face discrimination rooted in Islamophobia, but they may not encounter the full range of discourses associated with the hijab and the accompanying emotions it provokes. The discrimination tied to the hijab was often explicit and overt, involving direct comments or remarks targeting their religious visibility. This clarity might explain why these women were more explicit in labelling their experiences as Islamophobia or anti-hijab discrimination compared to instances of other forms of discrimination, where participants might have been more reserved in explicitly naming their encounters.

Summary

The chapter expands on the intricate challenges faced by refugee women in pursuing education, emphasizing the intersectional dynamics of gender alongside factors such as race, immigration status, class, and religion. Through narratives of women like Mira, Jamila, Yodit, and Sagal, the chapter illuminates the diverse barriers encountered, including societal expectations reinforcing traditional gender roles, financial constraints exacerbated by childcare responsibilities, and discrimination faced by hijab-wearing Muslim women. These stories reveal how systemic biases and cultural norms intersect to hinder educational opportunities and career advancement for refugee women, reflecting broader disparities in access and support within

educational systems. The chapter underscores the urgent need for intersectional approaches that recognize and address these complex challenges, advocating for inclusive policies and practices that empower refugee women to pursue their educational aspirations and achieve greater socio-economic independence.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Navigating the post-migration educational landscape poses unique challenges for young adult refugees in Canada. This research delves into their firsthand experiences, focusing on uncovering the pathways available for post-secondary education and understanding how these individuals contextualize their circumstances amid encountered barriers. The findings underscore that the Canadian system and its institutions are functioning as designed, resulting in persistent challenges for refugees as they try to access higher education that would lead to meaningful employment opportunities. Participants' narratives highlight systemic issues within immigration and educational structures, creating obstacles that impede refugees' advancement.

Summary of Findings

This research is centred on exploring the firsthand experiences of young adult refugees as they navigate the post-migration educational landscape. The research questions guiding this exploration are twofold: first, to uncover the various pathways accessible to young adult refugees seeking post-secondary education in Canada, and second, to understand how these individuals interpret and contextualize their current circumstances in light of encountered barriers. The answers to these questions converge around three central themes: struggles related to financial independence, the limited and convoluted educational pathways, and the additional challenges faced by refugee women due to their gender and religious visibility.

The financial obstacles encountered by the research participants were intricate and manifested through various pressures. Firstly, the delicate balance between gratitude and the imperative for financial self-sufficiency, particularly pronounced in privately sponsored scenarios, significantly influences refugees' educational choices. Secondly, family responsibilities, including remittance obligations and contributions to household finances,

emerge as influential factors diverting refugees from educational pursuits toward employment. Thirdly, the escalating cost of education, spanning language courses to post-secondary programs, is thoroughly examined, shedding light on participants' challenges within financial constraints. This discussion also emphasizes the necessity of financial literacy, especially in navigating student loans amid educational expenses, a point highlighted by participants to gain a clearer understanding of borrowing intricacies and repayment expectations. Lastly, there is frustration with the inadequate information provided by settlement agencies and sponsors, leaving them grappling with uncertainties and lacking a clear roadmap for educational opportunities.

The second significant finding pertains to the hurdles participants face in their educational journeys, outlining four key areas of concern. First and most pressing, the research sheds light on the intricate and convoluted pathways participants navigate while striving to achieve their educational goals, particularly emphasizing the scarcity of tailored pathways for nontraditional students in Alberta. They highlight the lack of accessible routes for individuals deviating from the conventional educational trajectory. Secondly, the systematic undervaluation of their previous education, skills, and life experiences exacerbates this lack of pathways. Thirdly, low expectations from educational institutions make it challenging for them to believe they can achieve their educational goals. Finally, encounters with racial discrimination, especially as all participants were Black or Brown, further hinder their progress. Together, these four overarching challenges underscore the pervasive issue of a lack of pathways and support for education, presenting a barrier to participants' aspirations and ambitions for educational advancement.

The final theme delves into the experiences of women participants as they deal with additional burdens brought on by their gender. It elucidates three key aspects encapsulating their educational challenges. First, women face significant obstacles due to the high costs of childcare,

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impacting their ability to engage in education or employment. Secondly, women participants draw attention to the disheartening reality that their educational pursuits often rank low in priority within both their families and institutions, mainly due to deeply ingrained societal gender role expectations. These expectations tend to overshadow their educational ambitions, depriving them of essential support and encouragement crucial for academic success. Finally, experiences of racial discrimination and exclusion from institutions, particularly for Muslim women wearing the hijab, further compound these challenges.

Theoretical and Methodological Approach

The research design is grounded in a phenomenological approach, seeking to explore the essence of participants' experiences and comprehend the research problem from their unique perspectives. Maintaining the centrality of participants' viewpoints in the analysis was paramount throughout the research. However, due to the impact of the COVID pandemic and the participants' hectic lives, there were slight modifications in the data collection process during the collection phase. Nevertheless, these adjustments stayed true to the fundamental principles of phenomenological research (Cohen, et al., 2000, Peoples, 2021, Porter, & Cohen, 2013).

The phenomenological research approach proved instrumental in collecting nuanced data that centred on participants' experiences and the meaning they attributed to those experiences. Despite its effectiveness, there were inherent challenges associated with this approach, including language barriers, trauma triggers, and limited resources. The need for in-depth interviews, integral to this research, occasionally posed challenges due to language barriers. While the participants were proficient in English, expressing certain thoughts became challenging due to limited vocabulary, hindering a full articulation of their experiences, emotions, or cultural nuances. Trauma triggers emerged as another significant challenge, particularly related to post-

migration experiences in Canada. Some participants found it emotionally taxing to discuss how difficult their post-migration realities have been, including instances of racism, sexism, and Islamophobia. These experiences added an extra layer of complexity to the research. Moreover, limited resources posed a third challenge, with participants seeking assistance in navigating educational institutions. Built trust prompted them to turn to me for help, leading to a share of resources and personal involvement in researching certain information for them. Despite these challenges, the methodological approach proved effective in addressing the research questions.

The phenomenological research approach captured the lived experiences of participants, emphasizing the stories of each individual and forming themes by clustering similar codes. However, when examining the lived experiences of racialized and highly marginalized groups, an additional theoretical framing becomes necessary. This led to the incorporation of CRT analysis, which unveiled a substantial disparity in the treatment of economic immigrants and refugees. Through CRT analysis, deliberate exclusion of refugees from essential newcomer strategies and immigration management emerged, intensifying their difficulties in accessing education and anticipated opportunities. Navigating the Canadian postsecondary education system presented challenges for refugees, marked by inadequate orientation and a lack of specialized assistance, as they were not the primary target population for state recruitment. Applying the tenets of interest convergence and the permanency of racism, it becomes apparent that the increasing emphasis on economic rationality aligns with policymakers' interests, resulting in differential treatment between economic immigrants and refugees. Additionally, the intersectionality tenet of CRT is crucial, as it uncovers how overlapping identities—such as race, immigration status, and socioeconomic background—intensify the challenges faced by refugee women.

The research findings, supported by the literature review, lead to the conclusion that the system operates as intended, serving as a mechanism for population and labour market control. Economic immigrants receive more attention and support, benefiting from policies tailored to address their educational and employment needs. The research findings highlight systemic flaws within the system, evident in refugees' challenges in pursuing education and securing opportunities in their new country. Furthermore, adopting an intersectional approach exposes differences not only in the post-migration experiences among various immigrant groups but also within the refugee population, particularly at the intersection of gender and religion.

Implications and Recommendations

The research outcomes hold practical significance, particularly in the realm of immigrant and refugee education. The subsequent sections address policy implications, educational considerations, and community and social supports, shedding light on specific challenges warranting attention and potential reform. Despite the study's reliance on a small sample size, the narratives and challenges shared by research participants are not entirely unexplored and have been documented in various forms (Agrawal, 2018; Bajwa, et al, 2017; Bassel, 2012; Elgersma, 2012; Elzinga and Morrow, 2004; Ferede, 2018; Houle & Yssaad, 2010; Hyndman, 2011; Koehler & Schneider, 2019; Lamba, 2003; Neupane, 2012; Ritchie, 2018; Shakya et al., 2012; Sheikh-Mohammed et al., 2006; Tossutti, 2011; & Wilkinson, 2008). Consequently, these findings can contribute to informing decision-making for policymakers, educational institutions, and settlement sectors. These stakeholders are encouraged to consider the practical insights and recommendations provided in response to the identified barriers faced by refugees in their journey through education and integration.

Policy Implications

This research holds practical insights for policymakers, especially within the realm of immigrant and refugee education. Policymakers engaged in immigration and support for newcomers' integration must confront the systemic barriers that refugees, community workers, and researchers have identified and further elaborated upon in this study. There is a pressing need for a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to immigration policies to address the specific challenges faced by refugees in accessing higher education. This may entail tailoring existing policies or introducing new initiatives to bridge existing gaps. Strategic considerations should be made for individuals with gaps in their education and employment, along with addressing challenges related to obtaining necessary paperwork from countries experiencing war and institutional breakdowns. The distinctive experiences of refugees and the valuable contributions they can make to their new country should be explicitly acknowledged in immigration policy documents and reports.

Regarding the privately sponsored refugee program, there is a necessity for better support provided to sponsors. This support should encompass a deeper understanding of the challenges refugees face both before and after arrival. Sponsors should collaborate with the settlement sector, familiarizing themselves with the available support for refugees. It is also crucial for sponsors to adhere to the settlement plan they have outlined, actively involving refugees in the process and making adjustments as necessary. While this demands significant effort on the part of sponsors, it is essential for the successful resettlement of individuals who have undergone traumatic experiences and are now rebuilding their lives. This is no easy task, and the government cannot delegate its humanitarian obligation to private citizens without implementing proper checks and balances. Evaluating the success of refugee resettlement should go beyond

mere admission numbers and financial support; it should be grounded in principles of equity and social justice within our refugee immigration policies (Shakya et al., 2012). The government should allocate additional resources to ensure that privately sponsored refugees receive proper care and that sponsors fulfill their responsibilities effectively post-migration.

Educational Implications

A comprehensive approach to adult education is essential for supporting YARs facing challenges like interrupted schooling, language barriers, and limited access to education. This policy recommendation calls for flexible, accessible, and responsive programs tailored to refugee learners, with a focus on expanding bridging programs and reevaluating the LINC program to improve their transition into higher education and careers.

Bridging Programs and Adult Education

Policy recommendations for adult education and bridging programs must prioritize creating accessible, flexible, and responsive pathways for refugees as marginalized adult learners. The research highlights significant gaps in support services and educational guidance, revealing that existing programs often fail to meet the complex needs of refugees. To address these challenges, a comprehensive adult education policy approach is needed—one that includes enhanced language instruction, more flexible adult education opportunities, and tailored bridging programs to help young adult refugees transition into higher education. These bridging programs, whether offered at the secondary or post-secondary levels, should be expanded to support refugees with interrupted educational backgrounds, ensuring they are prepared for higher education. The programs must centre on the lived experiences of refugees, incorporating language acquisition, academic upgrading, and skills recognition to equip learners with the credentials needed to pursue post-secondary education.

In addition, adult education providers must recognize the unique challenges faced by refugee students and work collaboratively to develop educational pathways tailored to their specific needs. This research emphasizes the necessity for improved support services, language assistance, and culturally sensitive programs to facilitate smoother transitions into education. One of the key barriers identified is the lack of reliable information and guidance, which often results in refugees wasting valuable time and resources. To mitigate this, adult education institutions should strengthen collaboration efforts by offering comprehensive information packages on available educational pathways for refugees. Furthermore, institutions should deepen their understanding of their students' needs by collecting disaggregated demographic data that reflects migration pathways, such as refugee status, and using this data to promote positive equity outcomes (Shakya et al., 2012).

Finally, adult education providers should be encouraged to collaborate with community organizations, post-secondary institutions, and government agencies to deliver wrap-around services, including career counseling, mental health support, and academic advising. By prioritizing the development and funding of such comprehensive programs, policymakers can bridge the gap between marginalized adults and meaningful educational and employment opportunities, fostering greater social and economic inclusion.

LINC Program

Regarding the LINC program, participants expressed concerns about its effectiveness in meeting the language needs of individuals aiming to further their education and achieve language proficiency for postsecondary or prerequisite programs. Additional concerns include wait times for enrolment in the LINC program and the lack of flexible in-person classes for those who work during the day. Moreover, LINC program staff should include advisors knowledgeable about

educational pathways available to students after completing the program. The province of Alberta, specifically, should offer targeted and intensive language classes that are provided free of charge for adults seeking to advance their education.

To improve the effectiveness of the LINC program in supporting young adult refugees, a thorough assessment is needed to evaluate how well it addresses their educational and language needs. This involves examining whether the program equips YARs with the skills required to pursue further education or career opportunities. Additionally, it is crucial to study the educational pathways that LINC participants take after completing the program, to identify gaps in their progression toward higher education or vocational training. Establishing a centralized site or hub that consolidates information on educational opportunities and available supports for YARs could further enhance the program's relevance by providing refugees with the guidance and resources they need to transition smoothly into higher education or the workforce.

Community and Social Supports

The findings exposed a settlement sector that falls short in addressing the educational aspirations of those seeking to pursue postsecondary education. While the social sector excels in assisting newcomers with basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing, it lacks robust support for education. The research participants highlighted instances of inaccurate information provided by some staff in this sector. There is a pressing need for improved collaboration between the settlement sector and educational institutions at both secondary and postsecondary levels. This collaboration should focus on understanding the educational supports and pathways available and effectively conveying this information to refugee clients.

The study highlights how racism, sexism, and Islamophobia affect the post-migration experiences of refugees within educational institutions and the social service sector. The concept

of the permanency of racism emphasizes that racism is not a fleeting issue but a deeply ingrained component of societal structures and practices. To combat these entrenched discriminatory practices, educational institutions and social services must conduct thorough reviews of their policies and procedures to uncover and eliminate systemic racism. This process should include updating curricula, refining training programs, and revising institutional policies to address the persistent nature of discrimination. Furthermore, policies should be developed that specifically address the intersectionality of discrimination, recognizing how racism, sexism, and Islamophobia intersect to create compounded challenges for refugee women. Public awareness campaigns are also essential for challenging and dismantling stereotypes and prejudices against refugees, fostering a more inclusive society and addressing the systemic nature of racism that perpetuates these biases.

Future Research Directions

Exploring the educational journeys of young adult refugees remains an area that warrants further investigation by researchers. An avenue for potential future research involves conducting longitudinal studies to track the extended educational and career paths of refugees, encompassing both GARs and PSRs. Longitudinal studies are instrumental in gaining a thorough understanding of the intricate and evolving dynamics inherent in refugees' educational and career trajectories. By embarking on longitudinal research initiatives, investigators can delve into the lasting effects and experiences that shape the lives of refugees over an extended timeframe. This approach allows for the monitoring of significant outcomes based on different resettlement pathways. The longitudinal design of such studies enables the examination of pivotal moments and support in refugees' lives, providing insights into the factors influencing their educational and career journeys. Researchers can trace the initial challenges faced during resettlement, such as language

barriers and access to educational resources, and observe the evolution of these challenges over the years. Furthermore, longitudinal studies offer an avenue to assess the enduring impact of policy adjustments, identifying areas requiring improvement or recognizing instances where successful interventions have resulted in positive outcomes.

Another area of study pertains to the LINC program and the subsequent educational paths chosen by its participants. The LINC program typically serves as the initial educational avenue for newcomer refugees. Nearly all the research participants had engaged in the LINC program before progressing to other educational pursuits or entering the workforce. However, participants generally expressed dissatisfaction with the LINC program, deeming it unproductive and unresponsive to their particular needs. Investigating the trajectories of LINC participants and their choices for furthering education could offer valuable insights into the experiences of young adults within the education system. This exploration could shed light on the effectiveness of the LINC program, the challenges faced by participants, and potential improvements needed in supporting the educational aspirations of young adult refugees.

An additional area for future research could involve conducting a comparative analysis among various provinces or regions. While this study focused on two provinces, it unintentionally revealed significant differences in the level of support and the trajectory of refugees. Although not originally designed as a comparative research endeavour, it underscored the potential importance of such a comparative study. This is particularly relevant in the Canadian context, given that education falls under provincial jurisdiction. The findings of such research could illuminate diverse provincial/territorial models and potentially identify best practices.

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Appendix A: International Frameworks on the Right to Education,

Canada as a Signatory (Rights to Education Project, 2014).

United Nations	
Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 **Article 26**	1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966 **Article 13**	2. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognise that, with a view to achieving the full realisation of this right: (c) Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education;
Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 *Article 28*	1. States Parties recognise the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: (c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979 *Article 10*	States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women: (a) The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1966 **Article 5**	In compliance with the fundamental obligations laid down in article 2 of this Convention, States Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment of the following rights: (v) The right to education and training
Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951 **Article 22**	2. The Contracting States shall accord to refugees treatment as favourable as possible, and, in any event, not less favourable than that accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances, with respect to education other than elementary education and, in particular, as regards access to studies, the recognition of foreign school certificates, diplomas and degrees, the remission of fees and charges and the award of scholarships.

UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, 1960
Article 1
	1. For the purposes of this Convention, the term `discrimination' includes any distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference which, being based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic condition or birth, has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing equality of treatment in education and in particular:
	    (a) of depriving any person or group of persons of access to education of any type or at any level;
	    (b) of limiting any person or group of persons to education of an inferior standard

Article 4	The States Parties to this Convention undertake furthermore to formulate, develop and apply a national policy which, by methods appropriate to the circumstances and to national usage, will tend to promote equality of opportunity and of treatment in the matter of education and in particular: (a) To make primary education free and compulsory; make secondary education in its different forms generally available and accessible to all; make higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of individual capacity; assure compliance by all with the obligation to attend school prescribed by law
United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011) *Article 3*	1. Human rights education and training is a lifelong process that concerns all ages. 2. Human rights education and training concerns all parts of society, at all levels, including preschool, primary, secondary and higher education, taking into account academic freedom where applicable, and all forms of education, training and learning, whether in a public or private, formal, informal or non-formal setting. It includes, inter alia, vocational training, particularly the training of trainers, teachers and State officials, continuing education, popular education, and public information and awareness activities.
Organisation of American States	
Charter of the Organisation of American States, 1967 *Article 49*	The Member States will exert the greatest efforts, in accordance with their constitutional processes, to ensure the effective exercise of the right to education, on the following bases: c) Higher education shall be available to all, provided that, in order to maintain its high level, the corresponding regulatory or academic standards are met.

Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights, Protocol of San Salvador, 1988 *Article 13*	1. Everyone has the right to education. 3. The States Parties to this Protocol recognize that in order to achieve the full exercise of the right to education: c. Higher education should be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of individual capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular, by the progressive introduction of free education
Inter-American Democratic Charter, 2001 *Article 16*	Education is key to strengthening democratic institutions, promoting the development of human potential, and alleviating poverty and fostering greater understanding among our peoples. To achieve these ends, it is essential that a quality education be available to all, including girls and women, rural inhabitants, and minorities.

Appendix B: Canada - Resettled Refugees 2015-2024

By Country of Citizenship and Immigration Category: January 2015 - May 2024 (Statistics Canada, 2020b)

Country of Citizenship	Blended Sponsorship Refugee	Government-Assisted Refugee	Privately Sponsored Refugee	Total
1. Syria *	5,650	50,055	42,430	98,135
2. Afghanistan *	75	29,270	27,575	56,925
3. Eritrea *	590	4,245	37,765	42,600
4. Iraq *	435	6,495	16,540	23,470
5. Somalia *	170	5,875	9,445	15,495
6. Congo, Democratic Republic of the	555	10,855	1,940	13,350
7. Ethiopia **	145	1,405	6,925	8,475
8. Sudan*	225	3,045	665	3,930
9. Pakistan *	25	890	2,985	3,900
10. Iran *	115	1,435	1,650	3,200

* Muslim-majority country
** Large Muslim-minority country

Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

Gender
- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Other _____
- Prefer not to answer

Age
- _____

Marital Status
- Single
- Single with children
- Married with no children
- Married with children
- Divorced
- Other: _____

Country of Origin
- Syria
- Somalia
- Eretria
- Ethiopia
- Iraq
- Sudan
- Other: _____

Number of years in Canada
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Other: _____

Level of education
- Primary
- Secondary
- Trade/technical/vocational training
- Some postsecondary
- Completed postsecondary
- Other: _____

Have you attended school in a country other than your country of origin or Canada?
- Yes
- No

Are you currently enrolled in an education program?
- Yes
- No

If yes, what type of program are you pursuing?
- _____

How well do you speak English?
- Very well
- Well
- Not well
- Not at all

Immigration Status
- Permanent Resident
- Canadian Citizen
- Other: _____

What was your path to immigration?
- Government Sponsored Refugee
- Family Sponsorship
- Private Sponsorship (Group of 5)
- Other: _____

What is your current employment status?
- Working full-time
- Working part-time
- Working seasonal
- Unemployed
- Other: _____

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Opening Question:

I am interested in the experiences of young adult refugees who experienced mass displacement and are interested in furthering their education in Canada. The lived experiences of young adult refugees in relation to postsecondary education is the focus of the study. To begin with, what comes to mind when you think about furthering your education?

Interview Questions/Guide:

1. What has been your experience in pursuing further education in Canada?
2. What are some of the challenges you are experiencing in pursuing further education in Canada?
3. How are you overcoming some of these challenges?
4. Did you expect these challenges prior to coming to Canada?

Appendix E: Information Letter and Consent Form

Study Title: Access Denied: The challenges and barriers young adult refugees experience in accessing postsecondary education in Canada

Research Investigator:	**Supervisor:**
Zahro Hassan	Dr. Sara Carpenter
7-104 Education North	7-133M Education North
Edmonton, Alberta, T6G2G5	Edmonton, Alberta, T6G2G5
zahro@ualberta.ca	sara3@ualberta.ca
780-236-xxxx	780-492-4441

Background
You are being asked to participate in a research study entitled *Access Denied: The challenges and barriers young adult refugees experience in accessing postsecondary education in Canada*. This study is conducted by Zahro Hassan and supervised by Dr. Sara Carpenter from the Faculty of Education (Educational Policy Studies) at the University of Alberta. The results of this study will be used in support of my doctoral research.

You are invited to participate in this research because you have personal experience in accessing postsecondary education in Canada as a young adult refugee.

Your contact information may have been obtained by immigrant serving agency staff or through a referrer from a peer/friend.

Before you make a decision, I will go over this form with you. You are encouraged to ask questions if you feel anything needs to be made clearer. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Purpose
In this study, I am investigating the experiences of young adult refugees in accessing higher education in Canada. I am interested in documenting how young adult refugees navigate and access postsecondary spaces and some of the challenges they encounter. My hope is that by documenting the experiences of young adult refugees in relation to postsecondary education access, we may be better able to inform policy solutions at ministerial and institutional levels.

Study Procedures
I am requesting your participation in this interview to provide insight into the experiences of adult refugees and higher education.This study will take place in two Provinces: Alberta and Ontario.

Interviews will be done one-on-one at a time and public place convenient for the both of us. You might be asked to participate in a follow-up interview based on the outcome of the first interview. The length of time of each interview will depend on the information shared.

I will invite you to take photos of the important places or people in your life, or to bring an item which has a special meaning for you to our conversations. These photos and items will help me better understand your experiences. All the photos and items shared will be returned to you.

As a participant, you are welcome to talk freely about your past and current life experiences. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. You will be sent a transcript of the interview for checking following your interview along with an invitation to change, redact, or add information.

With your consent, allow storage of study information in a secure data repository to facilitate future research.

Benefits
There is no direct personal benefit to participating in this study. However, by sharing your experiences, you would be helping to better understand the challenges young adult refugees face in accessing postsecondary education in Canada. Your participation could also help inform future research priorities and policies.

Risk
Participation in this research has a low level of risk, similar to that of everyday life.

The study will be conducted via one-on-one interviews and your conversations will be recorded privately.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You can decline participation, and should you change your mind after you have begun or have completed the interview, you can withdraw at any time before the researchers have begun the analysis of the research data which is 2 weeks after you are sent the interview transcript. I will send you a transcript of the interview for checking following your interview along with an invitation to change, redact, or add information.

Confidentiality & Anonymity
All of the information that you will provide in the interview will be reported anonymously, and your name or any identifier will not appear on nor will it be tied to the discussion outcomes.

The audio recordings and transcripts will be kept on a password protected and encrypted computer. When appropriate (minimum of five years after the completion of the study), the data and electronic files will be destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality.

The dissertation will be available in the University of Alberta libraries and research databases. Should you wish to receive a copy of the dissertation, you can contact me at (780) 236-1267 or zahro@ualberta.ca.

Contact Information
If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at (780) 236-xxxx or zahro@ualberta.ca.

The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can call (780) 492-2615. This office is independent of the researchers."

Consent Statement

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form. I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

_____   _____

Participant's Name (printed) and Signature   Date

_____   _____

Name (printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

Appendix F: Themes and Subthemes

Finances	One-Year Time Limit: The one-year deadline for both GARs and PSRs to establish financial stability.
	Remittances: Sending money back to family in their home country.
	Independence from Sponsors: Pressure on refugees to achieve financial independence from their sponsors.
	Education Costs: High expenses for language courses, academic upgrading, and post-secondary education including student loans.
	Employment Needs: The necessity for part-time or full-time jobs to support themselves.
	Childcare Expenses: High cost of childcare services.
	Relocation for Employment: Ontario participants considering moving to Alberta or Manitoba for better job opportunities.
	Sponsor Commitment Issues: PSRs dealing with sponsors not fulfilling their one-year financial support responsibilities.
	Sponsor Financial Management: Sponsors struggling to effectively manage their own finances while supporting refugees.
Lack of Information	From Sponsors: Insufficient information and guidance provided by sponsors.
	From Settlement Agencies: Inadequate information and support from settlement agencies.
	Reliance on Informal Networks: Dependence on classmates, friends, family, and community members for information and support.
GAR vs PSR	Perceived Advantages for PSRs: GARs feel PSRs benefit more due to better access to sponsors' networks and assistance with employment.
	Perceived Advantages for GARs: PSRs believe GARs have it easier with financial support, fewer pressures, prioritization of education, and comprehensive settlement support.
	Language Class Pressure for GARs: GARs face pressure to take government-supported language classes without guaranteed job prospects after one year.
	Church Affiliation Pressure for PSRs: PSRs feel pressured to join the sponsoring church.

Lack of Educational Pathways	Lengthy Process: The process for establishing stability and success is too long.
	Academic Landscape Confusion: Difficulty in understanding the academic system and requirements.
	Insufficient Language Training: LINC courses do not provide adequate language proficiency levels.
	Complex and Unsupported Educational Pathways: Navigating educational goals is complicated and lacks sufficient support.
	Low Priority on Education: Education is not prioritized by sponsors, institutions, and family.
Home sickness	Missing Family: Longing for family members left behind.
	Missing Community: Yearning for the community and social connections from their home country.
	Mental Health Concerns: Experiencing mental health issues due to feelings of isolation.
Settlement and Integration	Adjusting to Cold Weather: Coping with and adapting to the colder climate.
	Navigating Public Transportation: Learning how to use and navigate public transportation systems.
	Understanding Society: Gaining knowledge of societal norms, laws, and regulations.
	Affordable Housing: Finding housing that is both affordable and suitable.
	Language and Communication Barriers: Overcoming language barriers and dealing with discrimination and dismissal when seeking help.
Discrimination/ Racism	Non-Recognition of Prior Education and Experiences: Previous education and professional experiences are not acknowledged or valued.
	Low Expectations from Educational Institutions: Educational institutions hold low expectations for refugee students.
	Racial Discrimination: Experiencing exclusion from various institutions based on race.
	Targeting of Visibly Muslim Women: Visibly Muslim women face targeted discrimination and prejudice.

Other	Public Library as a Learning Hub: Utilizing public libraries for language practice and fostering a sense of community.
	Mental Health Challenges: Experiencing poor mental health due to various challenges and unmet goals.
	Employment Exploitation: Facing workplace exploitation, including injuries, lack of awareness about rights, and rights violations.
	Worries About Family Back Home: Concerns and anxiety about the well-being and safety of family members left behind.