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# Under the Neoliberal Blanket: Maternal Strategies in the Resettlement of Yazidi Refugees in Calgary

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Under the Neoliberal Blanket: Maternal Strategies in the Resettlement of Yazidi Refugees in  
Calgary

by

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A THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

The Islamic State or Daesh led genocide against the Yazidi people - a religious cultural minority population in Northern Iraq- left thousands of Yazidis fleeing and in need of refuge. The majority of those forcefully displaced vanished in-between borders far from the “developed world”. About 1200 of the displaced refugees were initially selected to be resettled in Canada under the Survivors of Daesh program, out of whom about 265 were settled in Calgary, Canada. As they arrived in a cold foreign land, they found themselves wrapped around by services that although warming, surfaced a structure that pushed them to quickly become “economic” and “independent”. The scarcity of services provided and the expiration date on Yazidi refugee families’ federal income assistance, and most importantly the unfulfilled promise of family reunification put mental burdens on the already traumatized Yazidi community in Calgary. My thesis is based on qualitative analysis of in-depth interview data with 66 adult Yazidi women and 7 key resettlement agency women staff, and observational and indirect data on women as Family Host volunteers (83% of all Family Hosts) who closely work with the Yazidi families.

My analysis shows that what fills the gaps created due to insufficient budgets, delayed child support benefits, unfamiliar “mental support,” and confusing Canadian laws are what I call *maternal strategies* that Yazidi mothers, the service provider staff, and Family Host volunteers utilize to enable resettlement. The pressures from the Canadian neoliberal approach towards social services have been absorbed by Yazidi refugee women/mothers who have regularly been trying to smoothen the resettlement process for their families. The resettlement agency’s staff as well as the Family Host volunteers who are by majority women, also employ their own set of *maternal strategies*. By going above and beyond their duty descriptions and forming personal relationships that resemble familial connections and caregiving, these actors have played a

significant role in moving the resettlement wheel for the Yazidi refugee families. *Maternal strategies* get woven into the larger Canadian institutional resettlement practice and discourse and are often overlooked. Nonetheless, these efforts are what have made the resettlement of Yazidi refugees possible in Calgary, Canada.

## PREFACE

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Negin Saheb Javaher. The majority of the findings reported in Chapters 3 are part of Dr. Pallavi Banerjee's (author's graduate supervisor) larger research project and were covered by the Ethics Certificate number REB17-1987, issued by the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) for the project "Reception of Syrian and Yazidi Refugee Families in Calgary: An Intersectional Approach" on November 27, 2018. The ethics certificate was granted to Dr. Pallavi Banerjee as the principal investigator and the author is recognized as the student co-investigator on the project. This research has been funded by Dr. Banerjee's 2018 Insight Development Grant from Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada and a Seed Grant from the University of Calgary.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

There are many I like to thank for being able to reach the completion of this thesis. I would like to start by acknowledging the land on which I formulated my ideas and conducted this research as well as the role that all the generous and welcoming Yazidi families played in the completion of this thesis by accepting me, along with our research team, in their houses and by sharing their stories with us.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), as well as the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III. I would also like to note that the University of Calgary is situated on land adjacent to where the Bow River meets the Elbow River and that the traditional Blackfoot name of this place is “Moh'kins'tsis”, which we now call the City of Calgary.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge that without the assistance and openness of the Yazidi families who trusted our team this research would not have been possible. From the things I had read and learned about the traumatic experiences of the community, I wondered if conducting interviews would be even possible as this was my first real fieldwork experience. However, once we started the fieldwork, I realized all the positive contributions that the Yazidi families made throughout the process which made this research experience possible and indeed one of the most diverse learning experiences of my education. The Yazidi families' resilience goes way beyond their trauma; they welcomed us even as they were hurting. They are so skillful to care for others that despite the sometimes-unbearable truth that we learned about bit by bit, we

always felt good about being at their houses and grew confident in the purpose of the research day by day. I consider myself greatly lucky to have had the chance to get to know the Yazidi community in person—they will never leave my memory and their kindness will never leave my soul. They collaborated with our team by being present and open and contributed to the research project by providing us with their insights and stories. The Yazidi community expressed interest in the research and identified its importance and therefore, motivated our team to go further. To me, the trust that the families gave our team and the stories they shared with us is the most valuable fruit of my graduate studies and I will continue to feel the weight of the shared words and feelings on my shoulders.

I would like to thank my amazing supervisor, Dr. Pallavi Banerjee, who provided me with not only the greatest opportunity to learn about being a Sociologist, but also, truly trained the researcher in me. This research experience has been unique, and I am confident that it was my luck that I was able to be part of this project. Dr. Banerjee has provided me with every support I could ask for and has been there every time I needed her. Her trust in me with our research team and also the project which I know is deeply precious to her will always be among the greatest achievements of my academic career. The supportive, friendly, and empathic vibe that Dr. Banerjee encouraged within our research team set the foundation of our friendships which continued to support me throughout the process. This leads me to take this opportunity to also thank my wonderful teammates who supported me emotionally and intellectually and enabled me to progress on the path that we took. A special thank you goes to the person who interpreted the interviews for our team and accompanied me in every interview I was part of and truly supported me in every minute of each interview; her presence and persona made the process wonderfully easier.

I would also like to specially thank and to extend my gratitude to my committee members, Dr. Ariel Ducey and Dr. Neda Maghbouleh. I am greatly appreciative of your support throughout my journey and for inspiring me and for making my defense day a very memorable one with your presence. I would also like to thank Dr. Naomi Lightman who supported me and encouraged me every way she could during the first semester of my master's program and who acted as the Neutral Chair on my oral defense. The highlight of my defense memory will always be that I have been heard and passed by some of the most inspiring, intelligent, and critical feminists I have met and learned from.

I would like to thank CCIS, the resettlement agency, their CEO, and CCIS' staff who collaborated with this project and who received me with open arms as a junior researcher. In specific, I like to thank Bindu Narula, the Resettlement and Integration Manager of the Margaret Chisholm Resettlement Centre, who trusted my dedication to the project and inspired me with her very supportive and empathic attitude.

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## DEDICATION

For all the women who feel they are in the shadows; that their voices aren't heard, and their efforts aren't seen.

I often remember the day when I and Dr. Banerjee had the conversation that led to me choosing to be part of this research under her supervision. That day we were talking about the issues of the women who become refugees and originate from the Middle East and that they and their issues are often silenced. The conversation with Dr. Banerjee about how some Yazidi refugees are in Calgary and what doors research could open for a better future for them in Canada sparked the greatest motivation in me to want to be a small part of the light that needs to be shed on the challenges and rights of the women from that part of the world—one that I care for deeply and personally. I instantly took this opportunity to be an active part, although small, of a larger movement that is aimed to disrupt the skewed attention that often ignores certain bodies by making their issues secondary and viewing their lives as flexible enough to just survive. Women from the Middle East, those who are within their political borders, and those who become refugees outside, are among bodies whose issues and challenges are often overlooked. However, what is foremost ignored, is their resilience, their knowledge and skill set, and their innovative ways of fighting institutional and political barriers every single day.

Therefore, my thesis is dedicated to documenting that there will always be someone who wants to hear and who cares to look and who loves to walk alongside the ones whose stories may get overlooked. I dedicate my thesis to that because it has been a significant lesson for myself as a woman who has often felt alone in her fight in this world. A lesson that I have learned in every stage of this project and from all the strong women that surrounded me as teachers, mentors,

supervisor, fellow graduate students and friends, resettlement service providers, my mother, and foremost Yazidi women and girls. I dedicate my thesis as a token of appreciation to the Yazidi women's trust and will for a better future.

The title of my thesis is inspired by the first event that many refugees and asylum seekers who travel on boats and across seas experience as they reach the "safe" lands; being wrapped around by blankets by rescue teams on sight to regain bodily warmth. Nonetheless, as the events that follow that initial stage unfold, refugees face the reality of their new lives in foreign lands. I was reading a CNN article<sup>1</sup> about the use of blankets for the reception of refugees that particularly inspired me to visualize the existing Canadian initial resettlement response as the saving blanket and the following stages of refugees' new lives in Canada equating the challenging stages that follow that first comfort. The initial response of the resettlement service providers is in many ways comforting, for example, temporary accommodation and setting up for the new life. As refugees move away from the shock of displacement and adjust to the normal conditions and enter their new society, many barriers and challenges pop up that do not resemble that first comforting stage. Specifically, for my thesis, I realized that what truly and consistently keeps the resettlement of the Yazidi refugee community flowing is the warmth of the personal relationships and the maternal care that contextualizes those relationships. Therefore, my findings chapter is called "Warmed by Maternity."

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<sup>1</sup> (Basu 2016)

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCIS	Calgary Catholic Immigration Society
CCNC	Community Connections for Newcomers [Family Host]
GAR	Government Assisted Refugee
IRCC	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
MCRC	Margaret Chisholm Resettlement Center
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

## INTRODUCTION

In August 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (Daesh in Arabic) unexpectedly attacked a group of rural settlers in Sinjar, Iraq. Over the next few days, thousands of Yazidis, a religious and cultural minority group who primarily lived in Sinjar, were subjected to a horrific genocide. ISIS forcefully took over the Yazidi villages and states in Iraq, brutally killing, torturing, raping, and enslaving the people. The story of the Yazidi genocide, as recognized by the UN, began appearing in the global media because the Yazidi women and girls, some of the most oppressed, were taken captive by ISIS as sex slaves and then sold, raped, tortured and imprisoned by the militant members (Kizilhan, 2017; Dunmore and Mawad 2019). Following the ISIS attack in 2014, an increasing number of Yazidis have fled from the region and have found asylum in refugee camps in safer areas. Some of these families were selected by international humanitarian organizations like the UNCHR to resettle in places like Germany and Canada under the protected refugee status.

In 2016, the federal government of Canada “committed to welcoming 1200<sup>2</sup> survivors of ISIS and their family members” — most of whom are Yazidi (Hakim 2017; Underwood, 2018). Many of those who came to Canada were single mothers with children. These families were resettled in four cities in Canada including Calgary, the site for our research. The Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS), a local NGO that specializes in resettlement and integration services, was charged with resettling the Yazidi refugees in Calgary under the Survivors of Daesh program. Many of the Yazidi families who arrived in Calgary are mothers

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<sup>2</sup> In more recent sources this number is cited as about 1300 or 1400 Yazidi refugees (who have been resettled in Canada) (MacLean 2019)—this can be due to several reasons including a small number of successful reunification cases that has increased the population number however, I have no record of such fluctuations.

with multiple children who may live with their partners or as single mothers in a separate household or with other Yazidi families.

My thesis is part of a larger qualitative research led by my supervisor, Dr. Pallavi Banerjee, at the University of Calgary which is aimed at the resettlement needs and the integration processes of Yazidi families who have been resettled in Calgary as government assisted refugees under the Survivors of Daesh Program. Based on in-depth interviews with 66 adult women in 45 Yazidi refugee families (134 participants), and one-on-one interviews with 7 CCIS staff, my thesis is focused on the ways in which Yazidi mothers and women, as well as women in key roles at CCIS and as Family Host volunteers, navigate through the challenges of the resettlement of Yazidi refugees in Calgary. The Yazidi mothers' unique challenges add to the common issues that previous studies show that refugees face during resettlement in Canada (Abu-Laban et al. 1999; Danso 2002; Beiser 2006; Stewart et al. 2008; McKeary and Newbold 2010; Simich et al. 2010; Agrawal and Zeitouny 2017). Severe trauma, lack of formal education and no prior knowledge of written or spoken English, lack of trust in people outside of the co-ethnic community, multiple children with a variety of physical and mental needs, newness to urban living, lack of "professional" experience, and having a language (Kurmanji) that only a handful of service providers can speak, are among the challenges that put additional burdens on Yazidi refugee families, specifically the single mothers in Calgary. Nonetheless, the Yazidi families have managed to cope with these challenges through the resettlement process and have survived.

Though the future for the Yazidi community remains unpredictable and worrisome due to the limitations that the community is still facing, in my thesis I show that it is the *maternal strategies* that women as actors of care provision (primarily mothers, and CCIS staff and Family



Host volunteers) have been implementing that has enabled the resettlement process to progress. Whether it is finding new ways to put a good meal on the table (mothers), or working well past business hours to interpret for a Yazidi client (CCIS staff), or spending time with a family one has no way of communicating with (Canadian Family Hosts), what has filled the holes in the Canadian resettlement structure has been what I refer to as *maternal strategies*.

The neoliberal approach towards immigration and newcomers in Canada has laid a culture in which refugees are pushed towards becoming independent and active in the labour market while adequate resources for their adaptability do not exist (Vandenbeld Giles 2014; McKenna 2015). Moreover, the resettlement structure seems unequipped for the unique needs of particular refugee groups, which in this case, is the Yazidi refugee community. The particular challenges that both the Yazidi community and the service providers who have been working with them have been dealing with have been recognized prior to this study (House of Commons 2018; Wilkinson et al. 2019). Nonetheless, there are no other studies that have looked into the resettlement experiences of the Yazidi community closely. For my thesis, I am focusing on one aspect of the resettlement experiences of the Yazidi community: the role that women play in managing the pressures that are passed on to them as mothers, staff, and volunteers due to the Canadian neoliberal structure.

Chapter One, “Where Are We?” consists of background information on refugeehood in Canada, the neoliberal context of Canadian policies, and introduces the Canadian initiative to bringing in Yazidi refugees. I also introduce the main resettlement agency that has been the sole service provider to the Yazidi refugees in Calgary. In addition, I introduce Yazidis and the recent genocide that they have been through. In Chapter Two, “Welcome to Canada,” I review the resettlement experiences of other refugee groups from previous studies. I take a specific focus on

the role and importance of social and personal resources (support networks) within the resettlement process of refugees in Calgary—these networks include both professional as well as personal connections. From there I go on to looking at the literature that reflects the role that refugee women take in the resettlement of their families and the necessity of their efforts as a response to the circumstances that the Canadian neoliberal structure imposes on refugee women and their families. As such, I set the ground for highlighting the active role that refugee women take in making resettlement possible for their families which I discuss as maternal strategies. After presenting my Methodology, I move to Chapter Three, “Warmed by Maternity,” in which I present my findings under two main headings: Maternal Strategies by Mothers at Home, and, Maternal Strategies by Mothers and Caregiving Figures Outside of Home. I define and discuss maternal strategies and provide a concluding discussion at the end.

My thesis extends the discussions on the invisibility of women’s work by shining light on the particular *maternal strategies* that women as Yazidi mothers, key resettlement staff, and Family Host volunteers utilize, which have been making the resettlement of Yazidi refugees in Calgary possible. In my analysis, I situate *maternal strategies* as everyday acts of caregiving that have become an indispensable part of the neoliberal service structure that shapes Canadian resettlement practice and policy. My discussion of *maternal strategies* also de-essentializes what is understood as mothers’ work by bringing attention to the work that non-biological mothers do, especially within the refugee resettlement process where maternal work is often overlooked. Further, my thesis brings the active role of Yazidi refugee mothers and the maternal care work of professional and volunteer staff together as strategic parts of refugee resettlement in Canada.

## CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

### *1.1 Refugeehood & Canada's Refugee Policy*

*“Our families are staying in camps in Winters and Summers which is very hard for them. After fleeing [Iraq] ISIS destroyed all the houses. Our family was trying to go back to their house but because it's destroyed, they couldn't.”*

*[from a 39-years-old Yazidi mother].*

The status of who a refugee is has historically suffered from an overshadowing that lumped refugees into other migrant groups, by depicting refugees as people who choose to leave their home country (FitzGerald and Arar 2018: 388). Among studies in the US and Australia, Canadian immigration studies do “address” the “post-World War II refugee administrations but they easily conflate all people who moved to host countries as immigrants, regardless of why they came” (FitzGerald and Arar 2018). It was only in 2004 that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) aligned with scholars in stating that “refugees are not migrants” and, thus advised against confusing the two categories (Feller 2005; FitzGerald and Arar 2018: 388). Loosely grouping refugees with migrants, or any other group risks the ability to gain a thorough understanding of population movements and the politics that control mobility between borders (Feller 2005; FitzGerald and Arar 2018: 388). Most significantly, refugees are distinct from migrants who move across borders to have a better life or to improve their economic status because they are forcefully displaced (Feller 2005; FitzGerald and Arar 2018: 388). This research is committed to a definition that acknowledges the difference between migrants and refugees. Following a line of scholars, I define refugees as people who have had to leave their home not only due to the risk of being “persecuted” but also due to a range of violations and dangers that inhibits them from accessing their basic needs in their place of origin

and are “unprotected” in multiple ways (Shacknove 1985; FitzGerald and Arar 2018). Being a refugee is a continuous state for those who leave their home; one that includes not being able to go back, fearing for the well-being of family members back home, and struggling every day from survivor’s guilt.

The generalization embedded in categorizing a diverse group of people also applies to the term refugee, a group which in fact is not homogenous, and has been challenged and criticized by scholars (Shacknove 1985; Olsen et al. 2016; FitzGerald and Arar 2018). The refugee status—or better termed by Zetter (2007: 188 ) “the refugee label” – imposes a “negotiated identity” that is tied to notions of protection and safety (Zetter 2007: 189); this label is primarily assigned to people who are perceived by governments to be in need of protection. The UNHCR technically “defines” “who the refugees are, where they are coming from, where they are going, and how they are treated” (FirtzGerald and Arar 2018). However, since for UNHCR purposes this process is a rather temporary one, once the refugees move to a destination or host country their definition no longer matters because it becomes the responsibility of the hosting state to define who the refugees are within their social and political status (FirtzGerald and Arar 2018; 391- 397). The focus on the protection of the deservedly vulnerable embedded in the definition of refugee persons works outside of humanitarian service as it “constructs” the refugee as “pitiful” and “vulnerable” populations-- rendering their “families, histories, identities,” trajectories, and skills invisible (Olsen et al. 2016: 60-62; Banerjee and Saheb Javaher forthcoming 2020). The term/label refugee in this thesis is used and referred to while acknowledging the diversity of personhoods, histories, and identities in the so-called refugee category as well as the strength and knowledges that each individual brings with their self across many miles of longing, unbearable separations, forced decisions, and aching memories.

In Canada, there are three avenues for refugee resettlement. First, as Government Assisted Refugees (GARs), refugees are referred to the Canadian government through UNHCR and then qualified to receive one year of Federal Government's financial assistance (UNHCR 2019). Second, through Private Sponsorship in which a refugee is referred by a private sponsor and financially assisted by the same sponsor for a year. Lastly, refugees can be accepted to Canada through a Blended Visa program which refers refugees through UNHCR with one-year of financial assistance divided equally between the Canadian government and private sponsors. According to UNHCR's Refugee Resettlement Facts, as of July 2019, Canada's refugee resettlement consist of 67% Private Sponsored, 29% GARs, and 4% Blended Visas—this report clarifies that “only the most vulnerable refugees are referred for resettlement” from UNHCR's Vulnerability Category to Canada (UNHCR 2019)<sup>3</sup>. All Yazidi refugees who have been resettled into Canada under the Survivors of Daesh program are GARs.

The already “lengthy and complicated” refugee determination process in Canada became stricter after September 11, 2001, when an intensified focus was placed on national security (Lacroix 2004: 152). Determination systems for selecting refugees have not changed since then. Even after Trudeau's government changed the name of the Immigration Department to “Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada” in order to show their “concern” for the war-led displacement of the Syrian refugees by including the term refugee in their title, the selective processes for admitting refugees maintained (Todd 2018). In Canada, fewer refugees are admitted under the refugee category in comparison to other immigration categories – economic immigrants and family classes are (generally) perceived to be more independent subjects and are

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<sup>3</sup> The categories of vulnerability, in order of larger to lowest numbers as of July 2019, include: Survivors of Torture/Violence, Legal/Physical Protection, Women at Risk, Lack of Alternative Solutions, Other, and Medical Needs (UNHCR Canada 2019).

therefore favoured by the Canadian immigration department (Arat-Koc 1999: 36-38).

In Canada, Yazidi refugees are set apart from other refugee groups because of their extreme traumatic experiences pre-settlement, in addition to existing safety concerns for themselves and their relatives who are still in Iraq (Buck 2017; Todd, 2018), and the complexity of their needs (at least as documented in the few reports made available by and to the Canadian government) (House of Commons 2018; Wilkinson et al. 2019). According to Canada's immigration minister, the Yazidi refugees who have been accommodated in Canada since 2016, mostly women and children, suffer from "unimaginable trauma, both physical and emotional" (as cited in Porter 2019). Their unique condition and needs have imposed great constraints on the hosting non-governmental organizations (NGOs), who are the primary and sole service providers to the refugee groups (Porter 2019), leading experts to question the success of the Canadian initiative to resettle this group of refugees at the peak of their arrival in Canada (Buck, 2017; Harris 2017).

### *1.2 The Context of Canadian Refugee/Immigration Policy*

On the Canadian United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) website, there is a document available under the subsection "Other Key Information" that is named "Are Refugees Good for Canada? (Economic Integration Explainer)" (UNHCR 2019). The document is a visual report of how refugees are beneficial to the Canadian economic system (see Appendix A).<sup>4</sup> It starts by stating such facts as refugees "make contributions to the Canadian economy," and then, further down the document, there is a visual figure showing blue persons under the Arrivals' sign. To the side of that image is the statement: "Canada has an aging population and

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<sup>4</sup> The attachment in Appendix A is a two-page document and the parts I have described here are identified with red box borders and arrows in both pages.

needs more young people. Refugees often come to Canada early in their lives with many years to contribute” (UNHCR 2019). The last thing on the two-page report is that almost 50% of refugees in Canada reside in “smaller cities and towns”—this statement stands in bold to the side of a map of Canada with dispersed tiny houses across it, implying that refugees are *not* concentrated in any of the metropolitan cities (UNHCR 2019). Investigating the motivations behind such statements and whether they reflect the Canadian society’s attitude towards refugees in Canada is beyond this thesis. However, I suggest that the statements and their targets well illustrate the neoliberal mentality of the Canadian refugee policy structure.

Any discussion about the resettlement of newcomers in Canada needs to start with an obvious acknowledgment: that Canada is a country shaped by newcomers. The Canadian refugee policy is tied to its immigration policy (Lacroix 2004: 150). The management of “unwanted migrants” has a long history in Canada—one that shows the selectiveness of Canada’s determination systems in admitting refugees into the country (Lacroix 2004: 150-152). The history and practices of immigration and resettlement in Canada reflect that the country’s immigration policy has been “driven by [its] labor market” (Lauster and Zhao 2017:499-500). However, some scholars argue that labour market demands are only part of favoring skilled immigrants and that Canadian policy has also sought “nation building” (Reitz 2010: 12). Nonetheless, the fact that Canada has been interested in attracting more “human capital” to fill the needs of the Canadian labor market (Bhuyan et al. 2017: 48) is more prominently spoken of. Scholars argue that the ideal of Canadian “national unity” is a “myth” encouraged by the Canadian government and is hidden within the policies that are administratively correct but are aimed at selecting the “right immigrant”— one who can enter the economy and the nationalistic culture (Bhuyan et al. 2017: 59). Therefore, Canada’s multicultural identity has been challenged

and questioned (Reitz 2010: 13; Bhuyan et al. 2017). The integration of new identities into the Canadian society and the labor market is shaped by the neoliberal ideologies present in the Canadian society; the “commodification of immigrants,” the redirection of immigration policies based on “private interests” of the few, and the exploitation of the precarious immigrant workers and students in order to keep wages low (Bhuyan et al. 2017). Hence, refugeehood in Canada is situated within a structure that tends to define citizenship based on merit and economic profitability.

In Canada, the influence of neoliberal ideologies began to emerge in the economic structure and the practices of the state during the 1980s (Arat-Koc 1999: 33). The neoliberal discourse is mainly based on a “cost and benefit” logic and is primarily involved with “self-help and individual responsibility” (Karim 2018:14). Although it has been argued that the term is often used “inconsistent[ly]” (Thorsen 2010: 197-203), neoliberalism generally refers to a “set of political beliefs” that favour the “minimal” involvement of the state in economic affairs and therefore result in the downsizing of the state (Mukhtar et al. 2016: 805). As Mukhtar (2016) points out, “neoliberal economic models are based on the unfettered global mobility of capital and the relative immobility of racialized labour” (812). The production of a refugee population who can later make up the cheap labor force and an invisible mass of bodies is part of how global capitalism will continue to persist (Klein 2007). War is one of the many ways through which populations are dispossessed of their resources for livelihood and thus become further dependent on the capitalist system. The prioritization of economic pursuits in Canadian immigration and family reunification programs which are formed by neoliberal ideologies show the adaption of a cost and benefit analysis in Canada’s current refugee policy. The integration processes can thus be looked at as processes aimed at utilizing this population within the system.



The changes brought by the neoliberalization of Canadian immigration policy has created more “exaggerated” terms of definition for those who count as “deserving” immigrants versus the “non-deserving” immigrants (Arat-Koc 1999: 40). Moreover, the new terms of Canadian immigration policy centers on the “economic benefits” of immigration for the country and therefore defines the ideal immigrant as someone who is “highly skilled” (Arat-Koc 1999: 46; Root et al. 2014). The centrality of values such as “self-sufficiency” and “self-reliance” in the neoliberal discourse means that the ideal immigrant is someone who is able to enter and “navigate” the Canadian labour market as soon as possible (Root et al. 2014: 18). This notion is only concerned with economic contributions made through “labour market participation” and disregards the activities done at home or in the community which are the type of activities that mainly women engage in (Arat-Koc 1999: 38).

As the State becomes less involved in the “welfare of its citizens” with the progression of neoliberal ideologies in state making, NGOs and other institutions engage in the provision of social services and gain prominence and control as they step in and fulfill the role of a “shadow state” (Karim 2018: 8). Therefore, under neoliberal governance there emerges a new relationship between the subjects of a society and NGOs as they have become the active agents of social welfare (Karim 2018: 9). Under the neoliberal transformations, non-profit organizations become institutions responsible for the delivery of welfare services to the communities and therefore an “independent force closely cooperating with the government to sustain social provision” (Evans, Richmond, and Shields 2005: 78). NGOs can readily adopt notions of competitiveness and can operate as “instruments” of “governmental control” (Nawyn, 2010: 150). As Evans and Shields have pointed out, the non-profit sector is considered as the “third force,” alternatively called the “third sector,” in governance (2000: 2). The importance of this division of responsibility in the

Canadian context becomes clear when Evans and Shields phrase their status in society as follows: “nonprofit organizations play a strategic role in helping Canadians help Canadians” (*ibid.*).

The process of decentralizing state responsibility involves the simultaneous “depoliticization” of human needs and the “off-loading” of state social responsibility on to the “nonprofit sector” (Evans and Shields 2000: 11; Evans, Richmond, and Shields 2005: 79). Nevertheless, the division of State responsibility does not mean that the non-profit sector receives adequate funding to operate (Evans, Richmond, and Shields, 2005: 80). In fact, as some authors have illustrated, evidence of “financial stress” experienced by non-profit organizations can be found in many different areas of research (Evans and Shields 2000: 9; Evans, Richmond, and Shields 2005: 80). This is while research has shown that “settlement services and welfare-state support” are integral to the easier integration of the new immigrants and refugees (Root et al. 2014: 11-12). Further, the recent “market-based regulation” that is embedded in and favoured by neoliberalism has pushed the non-profit sector away from the previously held “community oriented focus” and towards adapting a “business model” (Evans, Richmond, and Shields 2005: 74). The non-profit organizations are directed towards acting in a more “entrepreneurial fashion” and to “rely more heavily on fees for service” (Evans and Shields 2000: 9-10). This shift in practice has raised concerns about the nature of work that non-profit organizations engage in and whether or not they have moved away from philanthropy to become “mere merchants of care” (Evans and Shields 2000: 9). Therefore, in the neoliberal era, the non-profit sector is being “used” rather than being “supported” even though it is taking the responsibility for the welfare of the citizens off the hands of the State (Evans and Shields 2000: 10).

Understanding the context of Canadian immigration and refugee policy and the embedded

neoliberal ideology are important considerations before discussing the resettlement circumstances of the Yazidi refugee group. On one hand, in the eyes of a neoliberal state, the Yazidi survivors of ISIS who have entered Canada as refugees may not fit the so-called ideal immigrant typology (Arat-Koc 1999: 46; Root et al. 2014: 13). Yazidi refugees' need for extra care - both physical and mental, their low English levels, and their lack of "professional" and "Canadian" job experience due to a primarily rural-agrarian life may place them as not ideal subjects for a neoliberal economy. On the other hand, Canada has maintained a humanitarian character and has demonstrated responsibility towards the recent global refugee crisis that was significantly fostered by the violent events in Syria and Iraq.

### *1.3 Canada's Initiative for Bringing Yazidis*

#### *1.3.1 Background: Yazidi refugees in Canada.*

In October of 2016, the Canadian House of Commons voted unanimously in support of a motion for the Government of Canada to provide protection to Yazidi women and girls who are fleeing genocide (Dawn Edlund- Citizenship and Immigration Committee 2017). By 2017, the media was covering that the Canadian government had committed to accepting 1200<sup>5</sup> Yazidi refugees under the Survivors of Daesh program (Citizenship and Immigration Committee 2017; Underwood 2017). Initially, the program was aimed at providing "asylum to Yazidi women and girls" however the incoming group also included male family members (Harris 2017). In October of 2017, the Canadian government announced that it was "on track" with settling the 1200 survivors (Harris 2018). The early House of Commons' briefing on the issue reflects that 1,383

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<sup>5</sup> In more recent sources this number is cited as about 1300 or 1400 Yazidi refugees (who have been resettled in Canada)—this can be due to several reasons including a small number of successful reunification cases that has increased the population number however, I have no record of such fluctuations.

cases had been referred for resettlement into Canada (Dawn Edlund- Citizenship and Immigration Committee 2017). However, according to CBC News, not all those who were part of the 1200 visas issued arrived before the year ended (Harris 2017). The Canadian government's decision for settling the ISIS survivors was sudden and "anonymous" mainly to protect the identities of Yazidi refugees and their relatives in Iraq (Boesveld 2017; Buck 2017; Harris 2017). There is very limited and unclear information available about the Yazidi refugees who were accepted and later brought into Canada. This makes an inquiry into the process and evaluation of the services harder. In 2017, a CBC news report indicated that Calgary would be receiving 200 Yazidi refugees by the end of the year (Underwood 2017). A news article published in February 2017 mentioned that "300 people from the northern Iraqi minority group [had] already arrived [in Canada]" (Boesveld 2017), while a CBC article declared that 400 Yazidis and other ISIS survivors had arrived. Still another article, published by Global News on October 5, 2017, states that "nearly 800 Yazidi women and girls and others who survived the cruelties of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant have now arrived in Canada as refugees" (Rabson 2017).

A more recent news article states that the federal government of Canada "has taken in roughly 1,400 victims of ISIS"—most of whom are Yazidi (MacLean 2019). The only report on the Yazidi refugees in Canada – other than the research project that encompasses this study – cites an IRCC document that estimates the number of Yazidis in Canada in 2015 as approximately 1500 (Wilkinson et al. 2019). Thus, the exact number of Yazidi refugees in Canada is not quite clear. However, having "flaws" in how "refugee numbers" and statistics are reported is not restricted to Canadian institutions. UNHCR, the largest institutional body that deals with refugee statistics, has a history in "fail[ing] to apprehend the scale and global

distribution of refugee movements” (FitzGerald and Arar 2018; 391). The “numbers” of refugee populations “can serve political purposes,” either to “advocate for increased aid” (FitzGerald and Arar 2018: 391) or to maintain an internationally recognized humanitarian image (Bhuyan et al. 2017: 51). For the purpose of this thesis, I will stick with using 1200 as the initial number of Yazidi refugees resettled in Canada because this number is the most officially cited number. The number of Yazidi refugees has since grown and, based on unofficial conversations with service providers, I approximate that there are 1400 Yazidis in Canada.

The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees does not oblige the signee countries to resettle refugees (Olsen et al. 2016: 62). When resettlement is offered by a country, the act of providing protection is tied to power dynamics within international politics—though the majority of resettlements take place in countries neighbouring the place of departure, which are often not wealthy-developed countries. When a country like Canada provides protective resettlement, it becomes an act of mercy, “charity,” and “humanitarianism” (Olsen et al. 2016: 60-62). The “charitable” and “humanitarian” image maintains the “pitiful” and “vulnerable” characteristics attached to refugee populations (Olsen et al. 2016: 62). Canada maintains its “humanitarian” “national-image” by reaching for “the most vulnerable, beleaguered individuals who are ‘refugees’ (Olsen et al. 2016: 60-62).

Previous studies show that maintaining a humanitarian and “welcoming” image gives Canada a competitive edge within the international community (Bhuyan et al. 2017: 51). Canada has been working towards creating a humanitarian “self-image” and gaining international recognition as a “leader” in accepting refugees for many years (Olsen et al. 2016: 58; The Canadian Press 2019). In a report titled Refugee Resettlement Facts of Canada dated July 2019, UNHCR commends Canada on its “exceptional history of welcoming refugees” and indicates (?)

that it is “the second largest resettlement country in the world,” resettling “over 700,000 refugees” since 1959 (UNHCR Canada 2019). Though noteworthy, this number loses its significance in comparison to the 68.5 million forcibly displaced people as of 2019 (19.9 million declared just as refugees under UNHCR’s mandate alone) declared by the UNHCR (UNHCR Canada 2019). Further, at least since 2015 when globally there has been a sudden rise in forcibly displaced population numbers, Canada has not been recognized among the top ten resettling countries by UNHCR (UNHCR Canada 2019)—this is while some scholars among others point out that UNHCR numbers are not inclusive of all persons displaced and in need of asylum (FitzGerland and Arar 2018). Nonetheless, the number of Syrian refugees Canada has taken in since the conflicts started is nearly 50,000, and, since 2003, Canada has resettled about 37,000 Iraqi refugees (Government of Canada 2008; Statistics Canada 2019). Again, Canada’s contribution needs to be situated in the global context where, as of today, the number of *registered* refugees from Iraq and Syria is 5.6 million Syrian refugees (UNHCR 2019) and over 280,000 Iraqi refugees (UNHCR 2019b). Turkey’s number of refugees hosted moved from 2.9 million in 2018 to 3.7 in 2019 alone and Germany admitted “one million people seeking protection” between 2015 and 2016 (UNHCR Canada 2019; UNHCR 2018). With 1.1 million hosted refugees, it stands as the only *developed country* among the UNHCR’s top refugee-hosting countries, ranked fifth (UNHCR Canada 2019; UNHCR 2018)<sup>6</sup>.

The acceptance of Yazidi refugees, within the pool of the Survivors of Daesh program (initially about 1200), came in the international context where Germany provided asylum to more than 40,000 Yazidis from just Iraq between 2014- 2018 (Kizilhan 2017: 337; Petersmann

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<sup>6</sup> As of 2019, top five refugee hosting countries declared by UNHCR and in order are: Turkey, Pakistan, Uganda, Sudan, and Germany.

2018) and Australia resettled about 2800 Yazidis (Shields, Morris, and Jambor 2019). Canada's decision to take in Yazidi refugees deserves to be praised, especially when put in the context of Canada's acceptance of the 44,580 Syrian refugees<sup>7</sup> since the start of the civil war in Syria (IRCC 2019). However, the role that such humanitarian initiatives play in constructing a positive international image for Canada cannot be disregarded (Beiser 2006).

Canada has been called numerous times from different stakeholders including community members, activists, organizations and more to increase its intake of Yazidi refugees due to the number of people displaced and due to the inhumane conditions, they are experiencing (House of Commons 2018: 11) to this date. Among other possible factors, one that can explain why Canada has selected a limited number of Yazidi refugees is the fact that instead of selecting applicants for protection on the basis of "genocide," which should suffice according to the 1984 Geneva Convention of the UN, Canada "offers protection to displaced individuals on the basis of vulnerability, rather than particular religious or ethnic background" (Citizenship and Immigration Committee 2017; House of Commons 2018: 10). According to Dawn Edlund, the Associate Assistant Deputy Minister of Operations from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, UNHCR helped Canada "to identify vulnerable Yazidi women and children and other Survivors of Daesh and their family members, both inside and outside of Iraq" (Citizenship and Immigration Committee 2017). The practical outcome of such an approach, for the Yazidi community, in particular, is that the government of Canada's initiative has strived to handpick the "most vulnerable" going through UNHCR processes and that there are considerable time-consuming processes which according to Dalal Abdallah, a Yazidi Human Rights activist at

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<sup>7</sup> 21,730 as Government Assisted Refugees and 18,890 as privately sponsored. A total of 2,170 were settled in Calgary.

Yazda, means “that Yazidis are lost in the UN at times” (House of Commons 2018: 10-11).

The majority of Yazidi refugees who have been resettled in Canada came as government-assisted refugees (GARs) with permanent residency. The Yazidis have been located in four Canadian cities including Calgary. Their resettlement package includes services in housing, employment, language, and mental health which are mediated through resettlement agencies in each of the receiving cities. In Calgary, the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS) is the host institution for the Yazidi refugees (Underwood 2017). CCIS provides the Yazidi refugees with trauma support and other services and is one of the “Canada’s largest refugee [resettlement] agencies” (Porter 2018). In general, Canada’s ability in accommodating the Yazidi refugees has been challenging and slow as they entered Canada in large groups. More specifically, however, are Canada’s ability to address the level of trauma and violence that the Yazidi women have experienced (Buck 2017; Harris 2017; Rauhala et al. 2019). For example, since resettling the Yazidi refugees in 2017, the organization has been struggling to host traumatized, Yazidi women (Porter 2018; Rauhala et al. 2019). News websites and related articles have reported Yazidi women experiencing shock, agony, flashbacks, nightmares (Buck 2017; Harris 2017; Rauhala et al. 2019). In addition, this trauma has impeded the Yazidi community in acquiring language skills (Willkinson et al. 2019) – an impediment that is reflected in the interviews of the participants of this study. Another big challenge for the Yazidi community is its financial state, with reports indicating that the community would need multi-year income assistance (House of Commons 2018; Wilkinson et al. 2019).

One program which has not only been successful in resettling Yazidi refugees in Calgary but also worked to ease their challenges has been the Community Connections for Newcomers Program (CCNP). CCNP was previously called the Family Host Program and is established by



Immigration, Refugees, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (IRCC). Throughout this thesis, I refer to this program as the Family Host program and to volunteers connected through this program to Yazidi families as Family Host(s). It is a volunteer-based program where each newcomer family is “matched” with a Canadian family, to enhance the newcomers’ resettlement and integration experience (Wang and Truelove 2003: 578; Government of Canada 2010; Meinhard, Lo, and Hyman 2016: 282; Lutaba 2017). Most of the Family Hosts assigned to the Yazidi families were women and the Family Hosts helped the Yazidi families make appointments, took them to grocery stores and their medical appointments, and practiced English with the family members, among other things. The Yazidi community found the contributions of the Family Hosts significantly helpful and often refer to their relationship with the Family Host volunteers in familial terms.

For the Yazidi community in Canada, the most important components of immigration were to first situate their children and themselves in safety (which they have achieved) and, second, family reunification (House of Commons 2018), which the majority did not achieve (Wilkinson et al. 2019). While the Canadian Survivors of Daesh initiative has practically saved a number of Yazidi (and other) refugee families from harsh physical conditions and absolute poverty, it is both evident from this research and previous research that there still exists a great need for Canada to increase its number of intake of Yazidi refugees and proceed with family reunification (House of Commons 2018; Wilkinson et al. 2019). Family reunification was promised to the migrating Yazidi families prior to their departure and, as previous reports on Yazidi refugees in Canada identify (Wilkinson et al. 2019), the promise of rejoining with their families was a significant, if not the sole, motivation for fleeing to Canada. Many stated that if they had known that reuniting with family members would not occur, then they would have stayed in Iraq and

camps that lack electricity, water, safety, and are too cold in winters and above 45 degrees in summer.

The inability to reunite with family has, in part, been due to the time limitation of the One Year Window of Opportunity program which is part of Canada's refugee resettlement process and allows each GAR to apply for their minor-aged immediate family members to reunite with them (Government of Canada 2008; Wilkinson et al. 2019; 4). For the Yazidi community, in particular, this was not an effective reunification strategy as most of the families had family members who were still missing or captive in Iraq and were found or released after the one-year period had ended. In addition, some members who were left behind and who were not immediate family members and/or minors were the only members left of their families, but the structure of the One Year Window excluded them as qualified. A large number of the participants in this study have stated that while they were promised to be able to bring their families after six months of being in Canada, their family members have not been reunited with them. These families expressed notions of feeling betrayed - many of them expressed that if they knew their families were not coming, they wouldn't have moved to Canada. Many of the Yazidi families had to make very hard choices to leave their parents, kids, and siblings in the hostile conditions of the refugee camps while they moved to a better, safer location. These narratives often entailed a sense of guilt or regret. Despite these facts, multiple public requests and the demonstration of the existing need for expediting reunification processes and/or supporting more Yazidis (House of Commons 2018; Wilkinson et al. 2019), the Canadian government has announced that it will not increase the number of its intake of Yazidi refugees after the initial waves were settled in Canada (Harris 2017; Underwood 2017).

### *1.3.2 Background: The Genocide.*

At the beginning of August 2014, over 7000 Yazidi were killed and over 6000 Yazidis, mainly women, and girls were “kidnapped and sold as slaves, and held in captivity for months or even “abducted, raped and sold in Arab markets, enslaved and killed” (Kizilhan 2017: 336; Dunmore and Mawad 2019). In just three to four days, ISIS coordinated an unexpected attack on “Sinjar city and the surrounding towns and villages” which forced Yazidis to flee to Mount Sinjar—a holy place for the community. However, ISIS militants soon “circled the mountain” leaving “thousands of Yazidis trapped without water, food, or shelter in temperatures rising above 50°” (Human Rights Council 2016: 5-13; Cetorelli et al. 2017:3). There exists no exact report on the number of people affected by the genocide. However, one study estimates the total number of Yazidis killed or kidnapped during these few days to be 9900, with an estimate of 3,100 “killed with nearly half of them executed.” An article among other news reports indicates that the majority of those affected, killed, or kidnapped were children (Cetorelli et al. 2017: 3). These numbers grew over the course of the two years until ISIS was pushed back from the area by domestic and foreign forces. As the result of the violent situation in 2014, of the “500,000 Yazidis in Iraq” approximately 350,000 fled to other regions of Iraq, while “120,000 fled to Syria” and about “30,000 emigrated to Turkey” to find safety. Turkey mainly served as a temporary relocation spot for the Yazidis who sought to flee to Europe and other countries (Basci 2016: 342). Out of a large number of Yazidis who fled the area, many still remain “displaced” with serious psychological needs (UN News 2016).

The ISIS’ attack at Sinjar in August 2014 was unexpected and extreme in every measure. When ISIS entered the hundreds of villages in the Sinjar area the Yazidi people were taken off guard as no one, not even the “Peshmarga” (the Kurdish military force of autonomous Kurdistan)

who were supposed to guard their borders, notified the people of ISIS' intrusion into the area (Human Rights Council 2016: 6-8; Murad 2017). ISIS attack was systematic and organized; the militants "executed the men and older boys who refused to convert to Islam" all at once with many of their families witnessing and kidnapped the rest of the community (Human Rights Council 2016: 6). The number of families who had managed to flee and were either on their way or had reached Mount Sinjar were eventually captured or killed by ISIS, that is if they were not killed by the extreme heat and lack of subsistence (Human Rights Council 2016: 6-8; Murad 2017). Those in hostage were separated into different age groups of women and children. Younger boys were to remain with their mothers, however, after reaching the age of seven were forcefully taken away to ISIS schools where they were indoctrinated and then sent to battlefields as child soldiers (Human Rights Council 2016: 17). The young women were grouped and sent to various ISIS' premises, where the traumatic sexual exploitation and torture against Yazidi women began. What the Yazidi women and their children faced is hard to capture in a few sentences. Nonetheless, for the sake of attempting to conceptualize the trauma that Yazidi women who survived have to deal with on an everyday basis, it is necessary to take note that the Yazidi women and girls (above and including age 9) were not only raped in horrific conditions, sometimes in front of their children/mothers, but also sold multiple times (Human Rights Council 2016: 8; Murad 2017). Starvation, physical torture, gang rape as punishment, forced separation from children/mother, forced pregnancies, and religious conversion are among the experiences of Yazidi women and girls (Human Rights Council 2016: 6- 16; Murad 2017; Mikhail 2018). Today the fate of "more than 1400 Yazidi women remains unknown" (Dunmore and Mawad 2019) and about 3000 Yazidis remain missing (Aljazeera 2019). That is while some of the Yazidi who were able to flee ISIS' premises had spent up to five years as ISIS captives.

Even after ISIS had been pushed back from the area and the Iraqi government declared “victory” over the so-called Islamic State in 2017, the risk of repeated violence against the Yazidi community exists because “the conditions that led to the rise of ISIS remain strong” in the region (Kelly 2018). There have been official reports of possible future ISIS-led operations (McLaughlin 2019) which could possibly target the Yazidi community again. In addition, while in 2018 it was indicated that about “360,000 Yazidis remain as internally displaced people living in refugee camps,” which according to numerous accounts from the participants of the current study have extremely hostile conditions. Many Yazidis who do want to move back to their homeland are caught in-between refugee regulations that discourage them from re-entering Iraq, many are also simply caught in-between borders due to the destruction and insecurity of their homeland (Kelly 2018; Petersmann 2018).

The horrific events that started from August 2014 resulted in what Del Re (2015: 269) rightly identifies as the “discover[y]” of this minority group. What is significant about the recent “genocide” is the magnitude and the form of attacks against the Yazidi people of Sinjar by ISIS and the media coverage that initiated international support (Del Re 2015: 270; Kizilhan 2017: 336-337; UN News 2017). In 2017, the crimes committed against the Yazidis were recognized as genocide by the UN (OHCHR 2017). As stated by the UN Commission of Inquiry: “ISIL committed the crime of genocide by seeking to destroy the Yazidis through killings, sexual slavery, enslavement, torture, forcible displacement, the transfer of children and measures intended to prohibit the birth of Yazidi children” (UN News 2017). UN’s statement in recognizing ISIS’ atrocities as genocide came after several statements by other national and international associations in 2016 which include the Canadian House of Commons’ (June 2016) and the European Parliament’s statements (Feb 2016) (Yazda n.d.).

#### *1.4 The Yazidi and Yazidism*

The Yazidis are an ethnic and religious minority group who have lived primarily in Northern Iraq in Sinjar and in Syria, as well as in Turkey, Iran, Armenia, and some in European countries (mainly in Germany) (Allison 2004; Basci 2016: 34; Cetorelli et al. 2017; Rosario 2019). According to a study in 2016 based on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are about 550,000 to 800,000 Yazidis in the world-- other studies have stated the total number of Yazidis worldwide as “less than 1.5 million” (Cetorelli et al. 2017: 2). The largest Yazidi community is concentrated in Northern Iraq (Mount Sinjar and the surrounding areas) which has long been home to “one of the most vulnerable and impoverished communities” of Yazidis (Basci 2016: 341; Cetorelli et al. 2017: 2-3). The Yazidi speak Kurmanji—a Kurdish dialect—and their cultural tradition dates back to 6000 years ago (Basci 2016: 341; Underwood 2017) however, there are debates about the true roots of their ancient religion. Yazidis have a strictly endogamous society and an oral cultural heritage (Allison 2004). The lack of an accessible secondary and post-secondary education in their primary areas of residence dates back to colonial intervention in the systematic removal of such education in Northern Iraq (Mojab 1999). Before the ISIS attacks, the Yazidis were primarily a farming community (Kizilhan 2017: 334-338; Murad 2017). Now the area is destroyed and there are no accounts available of whether or not farming would remain as one of the main sources of livelihood in Sinjar post-ISIS attacks. What we do know about the lands where Yazidis resided before ISIS is that since last year, they are being exhumed by “the Iraqi government and United Nations team to collect evidence of crimes committed” by ISIS (France 24 2019). According to reports by Yazda, the largest international organization dedicated to the lives and issues of Yazidis after the 2014 genocide, there are about 38 mass graves found within Iraq, each of which consists of large accounts of

Yazidi bodies (Yazda 2018).

Yezidism is unrelated to Islam however it is not against or contradictory to Islamic practices— it is a monotheistic ancient religion in which the people follow a religious/spiritual figure named Sheikh Adi bin Musafir (Basci 2016). The culture is strongly invested in notions of community and social acceptability is directly influenced by adherence to the religious doctrine (Otten 2017; Kizilhan 2017: 335-336; Underwood 2017). The holiest place to the Yazidi community is Lalish, a small mountain that hosts the holy temple which is close to the Sinjar area and to which every Yazidi must pay a visit at least once in their lifetime as pilgrimage (Allison 2004).

While a discussion about the history that predates the ISIS attack is beyond this paper, it is important to note the significance of the Yazidi religion as it is the most important identifying and structuring social factor about the community (Allison 2004). I have therefore briefly summarized three aspects of their religion relevant to the discussion which follows.

The religious identity of the Yazidis is significant on a few levels: first, Yazidis have historically been attacked and oppressed because of their religion mainly by different religious groups. Over the past “800 years” 74 genocides have been carried against the Yazidis by the “Islamist groups and states,” including the more recent “increasing persecution by Sunni extremists” which came after the community had suffered hard from Saddam Hussein’s discriminatory regime (Basci 2016: 34; Cetorelli et al. 2017; 2-3; Kizilhan, 2017: 336). The previous massacre against the Yazidi people happened in 2007 when Al-Qaida—another extremist Islamist group—murdered hundreds of Yazidis (Kizilhan 2017: 336). These violent oppressions were all aimed to eradicate the Yazidi faith and identities and were the main reason why the Yazidi people in Iraq had moved close to the Sinjar Mountain where they lived in

isolation (Kizilhan 2017). The long history of resistance and oppression had left the Yazidi community believing that they might be experienced in dealing with systematic oppression (Basci 2016: 345). Nonetheless, they were by no means equipped for taking in the war crimes that ISIS committed against them.

Tied to the religiously motivated violence against the Yazidis is the politicization of their ethnic identity-- throughout their history, specifically in the 20th century, the ethnic and religious identity of Yazidis has been subject to different political agendas and has most safely found itself tied to the Kurdish people (Allison 2004). Yazidis who lived in Syria or Lebanon could not easily express their religion and experienced day to day discrimination (Allison 2004) and therefore protected themselves by hiding their identities. This disguising of identity wasn't limited to the neighboring countries of Iraq; even when abroad, for example in Canada, the first waves of a small number of Yazidi refugees were not sure whether or not to express their religion. In fact, during our study, I learned that some of the Yazidi members who already lived in Calgary, Canada, both as refugees and as permanent residents, had only revealed their identities as Yazidis when other Yazidi members had entered the country as Yazidis under Canada's Survivors of Daesh program in 2017, which will be addressed later in this paper. These identity revelations came as a shock to the resettlement staff who had worked day to day with the families. The significance of being able to practice Yazidism in Canada was expressed in a number of our interviews with the recently resettled Yazidis in Calgary. These positive expressions stood in contrast to the experiences many of the members had in Syria, Lebanon, and/or Turkey where both adults and their children, regardless of their sex, were openly discriminated against and were socially disregarded. For this reason, one of the popular comments about Canada by the Yazidi community was repeatedly about the sense of respect and



acceptability that Canadians have been providing them.

Second, Yazidi religion is significant as the community is highly committed to its religious/spiritual beliefs, and therefore to the community, especially the older adults, ISIS' attack against their religion stands boldly horrifying. The attack of ISIS in August 2014 was particularly brutal towards the Yazidis as ISIS considered Yazidis as “devil worshippers” (Allison 2004; Cetorelli et al. 2017: 3) —a concept unacceptable in Islam. To ISIS militants, and these included foreign members (American, Canadian, Russian among others), the justification for their criminal acts came from their version of Islam which allowed them to kill and use anyone who did not follow their stream of Islam. The same mentality was enforced on young boy child soldiers who were forcefully indoctrinated—many of these children then turned against their own mothers (Mikhail 2018). Religious conversion was continuously used as an abusive weapon by ISIS against the Yazidis (Cetorelli et al. 2017: 2). Women who were kidnapped and were made to convert to Islam either to marry ISIS militants or in the promise of receiving some mercy (Murad 2017; Mikhail 2018). Islamic religious attire was used as a controlling measure to ensure Yazidi women are unable to flee; the Yazidi women didn't have access to the Islamic attire, “abayas”, that women above age 10 were obliged to wear and therefore if captive women stepped outside the ISIS premises they were easily spotted (Human Rights Council 2016: 18). The same controlling strategy, however, was ultimately used by Yazidi women to make themselves invisible when they fled; eventually, a number of women accessed the attire through different means and used it to blend in the society as they ran away from ISIS and found refuge (Mikhail 2018).

In addition to that, ISIS used other abusive methods that continue to affect the Yazidi community even when abroad and in safety which is particularly related to Yazidi's faith. An

example of this is the memory of how ISIS militants degraded and devalued Yazidi religious artifacts and rituals. Although the majority of Yazidis had no opportunity to bring their personal belongings, religious wear and a religious handicraft item which they call the “Boughchaka” appeared in many of the homes of the participants of this study<sup>8</sup>. A 53-year-old mother who was wearing traditional religious clothes reflected with pain that “when Daesh [ISIS] came to our village, they intentionally threw our *Boughchaka* [religious text/handicraft] on the ground and smashed in with their feet”. She, a woman who was suffering from a medical condition and was dealing with emotional/mental struggles, who didn’t find in herself the energy nor the will to attend English classes, told us with pride, that “this is the only thing I brought from home”. These brutal acts were all part of ISIS’s horrifying campaign to not only annihilate Yazidism but to attempt to extinct the Yazidis. Although the major militarized events of the genocide have ended, the memories continue to affect the Yazidi community.

Third, the Yazidi religion entails an endogamous society where social status and credibility is taken away from one when he/she marries outside of their society. As Yazidi women started escaping ISIS’s premises through different means, the highest spiritual person of Yazidi religion, Baba Sheikh, announced a call to accept these women who were captured and raped and, in many cases, forced to convert to Islam, back to the society and encouraged social support (George 2015). This has been a historical move for Yazidis and has played a significant role in the healing process of Yazidi women and their families (George 2015). However, women who had children from ISIS members had to choose between staying with their children or returning to their society and were not allowed to bring their children with them back to the

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<sup>8</sup> It could also be that they made the item in Calgary because it was made out of fabrics and the words were sewed on it.

Yazidi community (Aljazeera 2019; Rosario 2019).

### *1.5 Population Information: The Yazidi in Calgary*

The Yazidi families in Calgary consist of a small group who came to Canada since late 2016 (these were families who were from Syria and came from one of the transition countries from 26-10-2016 to 28-09-2017) and Yazidi families who came from refugee camps in Iraq straight to Canada under the Survivors of Daesh Program that was launched in 2017. The incoming cohorts of Yazidi families who came from Iraq were separated into three incoming phases who landed in Calgary between 22-02-2017 to 20-08-2018. A very small number of Yazidi family members have come to Canada since that day and these have been the very few cases of family reunification. In total, there are 52 Yazidi identified families in Calgary (approximately 265 members).

The transition of the Yazidi refugees who came from Iraq to Canada under the Survivors of Daesh program involves a transition from a predominately rural-religious-traditional society in which family life was significantly collectivist. Parenting often relied on the presence of kin members and community members who used to live very nearby. The male figures in the family, both immediate and extended, held authority and decision-making power, and women and children relied on male figures for managing life. A small number of the Yazidi refugees lived in Syria and after the ISIS invasion had moved to camps and/or asylum homes in Lebanon or Turkey where they spent from one year to about 5 years before coming to Canada. These families experienced hostile discrimination and lived in poverty and poor housing conditions. Though for most of the Yazidi who immigrated from Syria, the resettlement process in Canada was experienced more easily as they had experience in transitioning to a new country/society.

The majority of the families came straight from the refugee camps in Iraq, where they were rejoined with some of the family and relatives who managed to flee from ISIS-controlled areas, to Canada without prior exposure to life in a Western country.

Given the particular background of Yazidis and the recent genocide they have faced, and the Canadian policy and approach towards refugees, I go on to Chapter 2 to review the literature on the resettlement experiences of previous refugee groups. I shift my focus to looking at social and personal resources within the resettlement experiences of various refugee groups in Canada because my findings, which will come later in Chapter 3, reveal that social and personal resources are particularly valuable to Yazidi refugees. Further, to lead into the focus of my thesis on the role of women as various agents within the resettlement of Yazidi refugees in Calgary, I look at how resettlement experiences of refugee women have been shaped by neoliberalism. I finish chapter 2 with my Methodology section after having discussed some general trends of refugee experiences within the Yazidi community in Calgary.

## CHAPTER 2: WELCOME TO CANADA: YAZIDI RESETTLEMENT IN CANADA

### *2.1 Experiences of Refugees in Canada*

The study of refugees in Canada has relied on case studies of various refugee groups in different parts of Canada in order to set the ground for a more nuanced understanding of refugee resettlement, best practices, and future advancements (Miraftab 2000; Young 2001). The existing literature agrees that refugees are a particularly vulnerable group in Canada—more so than other groups of newcomers as they have unique needs and experience multiple barriers for integration into the new society (Miraftab 2000; Danso 2002; McKeary and Newbold 2010). Additionally, these studies highlight the fact that not all group of refugees have the same circumstances and experiences, as refugees are not a homogenous group; a variety of factors can influence the experiences of a particular group of refugees—such as the presence of established ethnic community in Canada and educational background (Danso 2002).

The resettlement experiences of refugees in Canada, however, have been similar in terms of the general challenges such as expensive housing rates and insensitive housing policies (Miraftab 2000; Danso 2002; Simich 2003), unemployment and economic hardship (Abu-Laban et al. 1999; Danso 2002; Stewart et al. 2008; Simich et al. 2010; Agrawal and Zeitouny 2017), lack of adequate mental support and neglected mental/emotional needs (Beiser 2006; McKeary and Newbold 2010), challenges with language acquisition (Abu-Laban et al. 1999; Stewart et al. 2008; Agrawal and Zeitouny 2017), unavailability of and inaccessibility to relevant and necessary information (Abu-Laban et al. 1999; Danso 2002; Stewart et al. 2008), barriers in reunification with family members (Danso 2002; Simich et al. 2010), social exclusion and lack of a social network (Danso 2002), and in some cases, racism and discrimination (Young 2001; Danso 2002; Stewart et al. 2008). Regardless of the generality of these trends, for newcomers,

their challenges are “interconnected” and are enhanced by “limited personal resources” and “depleted social networks” (Stewart et al. 2008: 150).

A study on Canadian immigration and housing that captured the housing problems of refugees, including 13 Kurd refugees, who were resettled less than three years ago in Vancouver (Miraftab 2000). A study on Canadian immigration and housing that analyzed housing challenges faced by 13 Kurd refugees, resettled in Vancouver, found evidence that the main issues faced by refugees include: cost of rent, which is above refugee’s budget; limitation of public housing selection; inadequate living space (Miraftab 2000). An additional challenge faced by Kurd refugees was familiarity with tenancy laws in Canada which caused issues between refugees and landlords (Miraftab 2000). The findings of the proposed study generally adhere to the problems that refugees identified in Miraftab’s (2000) research.

Miraftab (2000) briefly touches on the social and economic integration of Kurd refugees into Vancouver which as she reports, was not achieved at the time of her study. Kurds also had not established a strong support network in British Columbia within the three years of their resettlement. Miraftab (2000) reports that among the refugee Kurds in her study “all respondent households were missing some of their immediate members” (46). This resonates with the household composition of the Yazidi refugee population in Calgary, who are culturally and ethnically very close to the Kurds—in fact, Yazidis are often seen as part of the Kurdish groups. Miraftab (2000) states that Kurdish households, which were usually larger in size, were “fragmented” in the sense that some members lived in Canada while others were not accepted into the country. Miraftab (2000) explains that the “fragmentation of refugees’ immediate households results in [the] household extension” (56). What Miraftab (2000) means is that members outside of the immediate family frame are “brought into the household as a strategy for

facilitating emotional and economic adaptation to the new environment” (56). As the author further explains, the increase in household size and adopting a “non-nuclear form” is a “transitional phase” which often occurs when the household is facing economic and/or emotional hardship (Miraftab 2000).

Although living with extended family is also part of the collectivist culture of Kurds as well as Yazidis, Miraftab’s (2000) analysis illustrates two things: 1) the Canadian housing policies have been systematically insufficient for the needs of the refugee groups, specifically groups that were resettled as the result of displacement due to war and terror, and 2) the shortcomings of policies and the gaps in resettlement services have been filled with refugees’ own initiatives, which are often innovative. Given that refugees are usually a resource-starved and economically disadvantaged group, the ways in which Kurdish refugees managed the gaps in service provision took place through strategies such as living with or close to family members in order to share livelihood expenses and enable a stronger emotional support system (Miraftab 2000: 55). Therefore, often in the literature refugees are known to be “proactive” and “resourceful” agents in their own resettlement process and “far from passive dependents in their new home”—the social support networks that the refugees build and utilize are the prime outcome of their activeness (Lamba and Krahn 2003: 336-337; Agrawal and Zeitouny 2017).

Alongside these findings, inadequate and/or insufficient services for the resettlement of refugees in Canada are reported, as Agrawal and Zeitouny’s (2017) present in their study, mainly with regards to the quality of the available English training programs (called LINC classes) and “lack of vocational training programs” (27). Agrawal and Zeitouny (2017) show that the “occupational skills” of Syrian refugees were undermined and devalued in both Edmonton and Lethbridge which, combined with the challenges they faced in learning English, created

significant barriers to accessing economic advancements for Syrian refugees in Alberta (29). With regards to the one-year financial assistance that the Canadian government offers GAR refugees, Abu-Laban et al. (1999) reported that in Alberta, the program was considered short and insufficient mainly by Middle Eastern refugees (46% of the study's participants were Middle Eastern). Nonetheless, refugees' origin may be irrelevant in an analysis of the type of challenges that refugees face within their resettlement into Canada because the shortcomings of the programs and policies in Canada have been reported and confirmed by studies on other groups of refugees (Danso 2002; Miraftab 2000; Simich 2003).

In addition to the limits of the one-year financial assistance program which has been addressed among other challenges that Syrian refugees have faced in Albertan cities, "long waits in the Canadian health system" was identified by refugees as a shortcoming of health provisions in Canada (Agrawal and Zeitouny 2017: 27). McKeary and Newbold (2010) studied barriers to accessing health care services and the complexities that refugees experience in Canada, which as they report is more complicated compared to the general new-comer categories that enter Canada. They show that it's not just mental health needs that are left unresolved but that other health needs are also not attended because of the particular facets that accompany the refugee status in Canada (Agrawal and Zeitouny 2017).

In dealing with the common challenges that refugees have been facing during their resettlement into Canada, the existing literature agrees on the importance of social and personal support systems as one of the primary resources for coping with and managing barriers and difficulties. Therefore, the way that refugee households support each other, both emotionally and economically, along with other personal connections that informally assist refugees through the



resettlement process by providing them with the relevant resources and information, is a significant part of the refugee resettlement in Canada.

## *2.2 Social/Personal Resources in the Resettlement of Refugees in Canada*

Several studies touch on the importance of resources and needs that are beyond refugees' basic needs—housing, employment, health services, language – and that is social, personal, and emotional in nature. Generally, existing studies refer to such resources as social/personal support and/or as social resources. For newcomers, the definition of social support generally revolves around the receiving of some form of help or assistance that gets them through their resettlement process, however, it can differ based on one's understanding of what is considered social and what is considered support (Stewart et al. 2008: 140). These include support or help received from professional and unprofessional contacts that help and/or are involved with communication of information, providing guidance and advice, emotional support, advocacy, and more (Simich et al. 2005; Bergeron and Potter 2006: 76). Nonetheless, some studies show that for both immigrants and refugees, social support was “primarily” sought for the “satisfaction of basic needs” (Stewart et al. 2008: 140).

Danso (2002) for example, categorizes the resources refugees utilize into 1) government and, 2) family and friends, and argues that these two sources need to be combined in practice for the benefit of the refugee groups. Danso (2002) conducted a study on Ethiopian and Somali refugees who fled persecution and violence— two of the largest African communities resettled in Toronto. Danso's study shows that even though many Ethiopian and Somali refugees had backgrounds in English literacy and/or professional backgrounds, they experienced a great amount of financial hardship and issues finding employment. Other challenges Danso's study

highlights are social exclusion experienced by the Ethiopian and Somali refugees; lack of access to useful and timely information; and racism and discrimination. Similar to the Yazidi refugees who participated in this study, the Ethiopian and Somali refugees in Toronto expressed concern and need for feeling welcomed by the Canadian society and government. They also expressed the need for affordable housing, proper orientation services, adequate counseling and employment, and identified language as the main barrier. As the participants in Danso's (2002) study identified, English acquisition required more time to adapt to than what the resettlement system had defined as the learning period. The number of respondents who expressed concern about reunification with their family members who were not in Canada in Danso's (2002) study is considerably smaller in comparison to the number of Yazidi refugees in the present study who identified family reunification as one of the major challenges in their resettlement. However, the significance of family reunification and the influence of concern for family members back home is elaborately discussed in Danso's (2002) study which resembles the findings of the present research. It is clear that for the Ethiopian and Somali refugees who are greater in number in Canada, not being with family and worrying about their wellbeing was also an obstacle in their resettlement into Canadian society (Danso 2002).

Beiser (2006) delivered a decade long longitudinal study of the resettlement of 1300 South Asian refugees in Canada, mainly exploring "the impact of like-ethnic community on mental health and well-being of refugees" during their resettlement (59). Beiser (2006) shows that mental health is a "neglected area" within Canadian resettlement research and practice and that the policies regarding mental health and social programs are neglectful (57). Beiser's (2006) study reports that at least in the early years of resettlement, access and proximity to the ethnic community is a significant factor in the mental well-being of refugees— considering their pre-

migration trauma (68). In his analysis, Beiser (2006) categorizes family, ethnic community, and the larger Canadian society as “social resources” and then puts “time perspective” and language skills/fluency as “personal resources” that interplay with the refugees’ mental wellbeing which directly influence the level of refugees’ mental health (depression, PTSD, alcohol abuse, and overall well-being) (59).

A mixed-methods study on Sudanese refugees and their families in Ontario and Alberta reveals that “family adaptation” and economic hardship were the two major challenges the Sudanese refugees experienced during their resettlement into Canada (Simich et al. 2010). Simich et al.’s (2010) study places social care at the locus of resettlement experiences of refugee families as they explore the meanings of home and its connection to refugees’ mental health and overall wellbeing. What the authors mean by “social care”—a term they use interchangeably with social support—is the type of care received from extended family members (Simich et al. 2010: 207-210). Social care/social support is a type of care that if absent, leads to family members experiencing loss of a sense of home and shared experiences (Simich et al. 2010: 207-210). Similar to the Yazidi refugees in the present study, the Sudanese refugees expressed ongoing emotional distress from family separation and unsuccessful family reunification processes. Sudanese refugees in Simich et al.’s (2010) study didn’t refer to Canada as their home, they experienced parent-child conflict, and expressed concerns for the loss of their culture (204- 207).

Simich (2003 and Simich 2005) illustrated how social support plays a significant part in refugees’ resettlement into Canada, as it enables resettlement despite the systematic challenges that refugees face in the country. In the 2003 study of refugees who underwent “secondary migration”, Simich illustrates the significance of social ties to the lives of recently resettled

refugees. Simich (2003) explores repeated migration trends which refers to refugees deciding to move to another and/or secondary destination within Canada. Simich (2003) explains that despite all of its challenges, repeated migration is a strategy that refugee families employ to “re-establish” social ties by placing themselves closer to their social/familial networks within Canada (Simich 2003: 576). In another study, Simich (2005) shows how refugee families need both “formal” and “informal” support (262) and discusses the two as:

Service providers and policymakers described a continuum of formal and informal social supports. Formal supports most frequently accessed by newcomers were mainstream agencies, resettlement agencies, gender- and ethno-specific organizations, and language schools. Common informal sources of support for all newcomers included friends, relatives, and neighbours from the same ethnic groups. Other sources were independent sponsors, religious organizations, and ethno-cultural associations (262).

According to Simich (2005), the most important divider between social support needed and the services provided is the different perspective and definition service providers and refugees have of social support and the type of care needed (262). That is, service providers and refugees have different understandings of resettlement needs and that such varying perceptions often leave refugees’ needs unattended.

Agrawal and Zeitouny (2017) did a qualitative study on the resettlement experiences of recently arrived Syrian refugees in Albertan cities. Agrawal and Zeitouny (2017) report that refugees are usually “significantly more dependent on public housing and non-governmental housing” than immigrants (6). Refugees often live in “poor or crowded residential conditions” and face significant challenges primarily in language acquisition and finding employment, nevertheless, because they have a harder time trusting the authorities, they “rely more heavily on

informal services” they receive primarily from their friends and relatives who are the most “exhaustive and important source of information and orientation” for them (Agrawal and Zeitouny 2017: 6). Nonetheless, Agrawal and Zeitouny (2017) point out that for GAR refugees, settlement workers are also the primary point of contact for navigating the Canadian System (27).

Bergeron and Potter (2006) discuss social support and its significance in the initial settlement and longer-term integration of newcomers into Canadian society. They focus on the social network aspect of social support which revolves around the various kinds of help that newcomers receive from people in their social network (76). One major role that social networks play in the lives of newcomers is that all individual newcomers are connected, ranging from immediate family to staff and neighbors, and become a significant source of information and in that sense, are considered a source of social support (Bergeron and Potter 2006: 76). Factors such as the strength of the connections and the size of the social network may influence the extent of the social support newcomers can receive, nonetheless, “newcomers use the resources at their disposal” throughout their integration process and “social networks are an essential part” (Bergeron and Potter 2006: 79). Further, their research shows that in comparison to other groups of newcomers (family class, skilled workers, etc.), refugees are in higher need of finding services for health care and education/training in the first six months of their arrival, and comparing to the family class immigrants, are in significantly higher need of finding housing services (78). In terms of employment services, on average, refugees rely less on findings services during the first six months after arrival (Bergeron and Potter 2006: 78). This may be explained by the income assistance program that the Canadian government offers government assisted refugees in the first year of their resettlement and the sponsorship income assistance that privately sponsored

refugees receive from their sponsor families during the same period. Regardless of these differences, Bergeron and Potter (2006) state that for all groups of newcomers, “family and friends dominate as the top two sources of help being used” (79).

The portrayed reliance of refugees in Canada on social and personal support during their resettlement process highlights the significance of caregiving and care provision in the success of refugee resettlement in the country. For refugees, building and maintaining social and personal networks are necessary acts of livelihood that enable them to navigate through financial challenges as well as emotional and mental ones. Therefore, a closer look into the nuances of social and personal caregiving within the refugee resettlement process would allow for a better understanding of the role that refugees, and their social networks, play in moving the wheel of resettlement in Canada.

For the purpose of my thesis, I focus on the care that is provided and received by Yazidi refugee women, women as key CCIS resettlement staff, and women as Family Host volunteers. I refer to the efforts that these women have been making to maneuver through the resettlement of Yazidi refugees in Calgary as *maternal strategies* which I will further unpack in Chapter three. They are *maternal* because first, women are overrepresented as actors who provide such efforts and also because the relationships they have created with the Yazidi refugee community have been described as motherly/sisterly. Second, the type of care that is involved in filling the gaps of the resettlement structure for Yazidi refugees closely overlaps with what has been identified as the “invisible work” of mothers (Daniels 1987) and what is often perceived as gendered expressions of care.

## *2.3 Neoliberalism, Women as Caregivers, and Refugee Resettlement in Canada*

### *2.3.1 Strategies used by refugees in their resettlement.*

The use of the word strategies in describing how refugees have coped with their and their families' resettlement process has been previously addressed in this thesis, however, not as a distinct concept that captures the significance of these strategic acts that are an inevitable part of refugees' resettlement process. For example, the ways that Somali refugee women in Canada resist marginalization, comfort their children for not being able to immediately attend Canadian schools, cope with the lack of extended care support from kin and relatives and often without the presence of male figures, engage in microeconomic enterprises and community activities, and counter the consequences and "adverse effects of isolation and stress on their mental health and well-being," have been identified as "strategies" that Somali refugee women have used to facilitate resettlement and integration into Canada (Spitzer 2006: 49- 51). As Spitzer (2006) puts it, through these activities and strategies, the Somali refugee women "create community and redress the impact of the policies" that restrict their lives in Canada (52).

Lamba and Krahn (2003) emphasize the active role that refugees take in their resettlement into Alberta between 1992 and 1997 and focus on the skills refugees have used to maintain and reconstruct an "extensive social capital base" in the form of social networks which is "essential for successful resettlement" (337). Lamba and Krahn (2003) point out that migrants use family and kin networks as "structural links to the new society" and use actions such as moving in together as a "strategy" for coping with "economic instabilities" (338). However, Lamba and Krahn (2003) point out that while migrants can benefit from such networking and social ties, such "strategies" are not available to refugees because they often migrate as a complete family unit—most of the time at least one member or more is missing, sometimes

permanently (339). For refugee families, such strategies to rely on family and kin resources to make up for the lack of or scarcity of resources is not always present and in fact, “preoccupation with family reunification” holds refugee families back from making progress on “economic and social integration” (Lamba and Krahn 2003: 339). This is while Lamba and Krahn (2003) found refugee women are “more likely to rely on in-group ties (spouse, immediate family, and friends) than on broader extra-familial ties comparing to men” (350). However, this gendered distinction in Lamba’s analysis is based on the higher participation of men in their study in the labour market comparing to women. In the case of Yazidi refugees, this distinction may not apply since almost the entire Yazidi community, regardless of gender, are currently unemployed<sup>9</sup>.

Nonetheless, in addition to family and kin networks, ethnic group networks and other support systems outside of the immediate family ties are valuable resources for refugee families (Lamba and Krahn 2003: 350; Banerjee, Chacko, and Piya forthcoming 2020). In their explanation of “social infrastructure” and its importance in the settlement process of refugees in the neoliberal cities, specifically Calgary, in Canada, Wood et al. (2012) talk about the coping mechanisms that refugees develop and use to navigate through housing and income challenges (23-27). The social infrastructure then refers to the “social and emotional networks” that refugees create to move through the resettlement process and is part of their “resilience” and a significant resource (Wood et al. 2012: 27). Refugees rely on their social network of friends and family to access information and manage expenses (Wood et al. 2012: 27). Refugee families also “establish [and maintain] contact with sponsor families or Host volunteers [Family Hosts],” if available, because such social networks may be the only useful resource that is available to

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<sup>9</sup> Some of the Yazidi refugees do have an on-call job but Lamba’s analysis distinct men who work at “formal settings” like from workplaces which enables them to form maybe professional and/or formal ties (Lamba 2003:350).



refugee families upon their arrival and through their resettlement journey (Lamba and Krahn 2003: 339, 355). For example, Family Host volunteers and sponsors can bring refugees into the “mainstream public spaces such as workplaces or schools” and help them familiarize themselves with “daily routines and cultural values” (Lamba and Krahn 2003: 339). Therefore, establishing “formal and informal social networks” and maintaining relationships with familial ties, volunteers and other extra-familial networks are strategies that refugees use to overcome their lack of financial and human capital (Lamba and Krahn 2003: 340).

### *2.3.2 Strategies by low-income mothers and women’s “invisible work” as responses to the neoliberal economic structure and policies.*

Economic resources have always had a profound effect on mothering and caregiving; being able to provide monetarily for children – housing, food, education, and safety— is a prominent part of good parenting, specifically for low-income mothers across different spectrums (Walks and McPherson 2011; Bowen, Elliott, and Brenton 2014; Vandenbeld Giles 2014: 385; McKenna 2015). The specificity of this statement regarding low-income mothers in Canada comes from the pressures of the Canadian neoliberal system on low-income women. On one hand, the economic market undermines women’s skills and underpays their labour which for parents and specifically single mothers means that they have to constantly worry about surviving financially and feeding their children. On the other hand, neoliberal ideology situates labour market participation, income, and affordability at the center of “good mothering” as if being a good mother requires Canadian credentials, English skills, and “Canadian Experience”—which to most low- income mothers may be unavailable/inaccessible (Vandenbeld Giles 2014: 385; McKenna 2015: 45).

Furthermore, the neoliberal system imposes a contradiction on low-income women and in particular, low-income mothers, in that it provides little to no structural support to back the idealized image of mothering (Vandenbeld Giles 2014: 420). For “good mothers,” the contradictions include placing ideals such as providing home-cooked and nutritious meals and providing childcare by staying at home (Bowen, Elliott, and Brenton 2014; McKenna 2015). Low income women/mothers on the other hand are often unable to afford healthy and nutritious food options and may not have the time that cooking, and planning requires (Walks and McPherson 2011; Bowen, Elliott, and Brenton 2014). In addition to other barriers such as ability for frequent commute/transportation, low income mothers often have to work to increase household income even if they are not the sole breadwinner (Bowen, Elliott, and Brenton 2014; McKenna 2015).

The “macroeconomic shocks” from cuts on social spending/welfare budget have been absorbed by women who manage their motherhood through low income and lack of social support (Vandenbeld Giles 2014: 385). Previous research shows that “neoliberal economic restructuring has significantly differentiated effects on men and women” (Vandenbeld Giles 2014: 386). With some variations across cultures, gendered expectations require women to “take care of family needs and reproductive tasks” (Vandenbeld Giles 2014: 387) which under scarce financial resources, becomes harder to manage. The responsibility of maintaining the family falls on the shoulders of women who have to orchestrate meeting the needs of their family especially when circumstances such as forced displacement have deprived their male counterparts of the opportunity to act as breadwinners (Vandenbeld Giles 2014: 386). In the case of refugee families, these circumstances often include unemployment, lack of language, trauma, and/or absence of the male counterpart. In contexts like the one in Nigeria, where economic cuts also

resulted in the unemployment of the youth, mothers had to care even for their adult children and grandchildren—a situation which would have been unlikely to occur if it was not for the neoliberal changes in Nigeria’s economy (Vandenbeld Giles 2014). The point is that in a new situation, and in the case of this research, the forceful displacement and subsequent residence in a country that is run by neoliberal economic ideology, women’s roles as mothers and caregivers get extended without being recognized as such.

Lavee (2015) specifically touches on the ability of low-income mothers to “maneuver” between the personal responsibility that neoliberal ideologies impose on them and their motherhood as they are put in a position to choose between labor market participation and wages and the well-being of their children at home who are in danger of maternal neglect (12). Protecting children from material deprivation is the personal responsibility of mothers and an inevitable part of their maternal breadwinning role (Lavee 2015: 7). Lavee (2015) addresses that women may have different interpretations and “modes of negotiations” to navigate their maternal and breadwinner identities. For example for some mothers, the tension between being a responsible- wage earning- individual worthy of citizenship, and being a “good mother” who is investing in her children’s social life as well as their emotional and physical health may lead to the mothers exiting from the labor market (Lavee 2015: 10-14).

Even though Lavee’s (2015) study is not specifically on refugee mothers in Canada nor resettlement, Lavee’s point speaks to the present research in various ways. First, Lavee’s (2015) work is proof of the much acknowledged flexibility of neoliberal ideologies to adapt to various social and political contexts—that is, it doesn’t matter where the neoliberal ideologies are being implemented, they find their way to internalize neoliberal values and produce the same outcome: persons unattached to the welfare system and consciously responsible trying to manage the

absence of care by the state. Second, it addresses the significance of “individuals’ daily struggles” and identifies them as “strategies that simultaneously adapt to and resist the realities of poverty and exclusion”. As such, Lavee (2015) aims to bring attention to women’s/mother’s agency and empower them by showing them how they make decisions in their everyday lives to make it work. Third, Lavee (2015) shows that even though these strategies and negotiations are an inevitable part of the survival of low-income mothers both as mothers and as citizens/persons, women’s “actions provide partial, temporary protection solely on the micro-level” from the oppressive systematic barriers that deprive low-income mothers of equal chances in the labour market and the ability to move up the social ladder.

Looking at the literature outside of the resettlement and refugee studies and what has been termed as “emotion work” within larger feminist literature on the making of family and mothers’ efforts within the paid and unpaid spheres of work sheds light on the significance of the “invisible work” that women do to maintain family and community life (Daniels 1987; Devault 1999). By “invisible work”, Daniels (1987) is referring not only to the unpaid or underpaid labour of women but more specifically to the work that includes the coordination of public and purchased services (paid cleaning services, arrangements, planning, etc.) and interpersonal aspects of paid labour and volunteer work ( 404- 405). Specifically, within the family, these tasks include women having to supervise the tasks even if they delegate (Daniels 1987: 407). As Daniels (1987) defines, “invisible work” is the type of work that takes place by women within the private sphere and/or in the margins of the public sphere and is not paid, is not regarded as valuable, and is not acknowledged as it is not observed as part of a common conception of work. Invisible work is not recognized as it is assumed to be a “natural” outcome of women’s inherent

interpersonal skills and an expected aspect of women's participation in activities (Daniels 1987: 409).

#### *2.4 What Kind of Refugees Are the Yazidis in Calgary, Canada?*

The majority of Yazidi refugees in Canada are women and children who do not possess skills that would easily translate into value in the Canadian job market—at least not yet. The Yazidi community is made up primarily of agriculturists who lived and worked with ideals different than those of the market-based and individualistic neoliberal discourse; Yazidis worked as family units and produced on a need's basis (Buck 2017). Such a lifestyle contrasts neoliberal practice as there is no emphasis on profit-making through the market nor is there an emphasis on efficiency. Further, this incompatibility between the Yazidis and the Canadian job market can potentially place Yazidi refugee women at the bottom of the job market where they can access jobs that require little English and less professional skills.

While the Yazidi refugees in Calgary have not yet entered the Canadian workforce, evidence from this research shows that their conception of jobs and the job opportunities that are available to them makes it likely that like the preceding refugee groups (Wood, McGrath, and Young 2012; Vandebeld Giles 2014; Agrawal and Zeitouny 2017), adult and senior Yazidi refugees will end up in minimum waged and low status jobs. A number of Yazidi refugees in Calgary who have secured an on-call weekend-only position at a factory, one that in fact requires them to leave their house at five in the morning, have already gained a sense of the type of jobs they can access. This is consistent with the findings of previous studies on the resettlement experiences of Syrian refugees in the province of Alberta where refugees experienced downward mobility and were “more likely than other Canadians to find only temporary or part-time jobs”

(Agrawal and Zeitouny 2017: 5). There are no exceptions in the sample of this research. One participant, a 24-year-old father of a newborn, who has very good English skills, shared that he wants to enter college to get into a health related profession but that he won't be able to afford school because he needs to provide for his family. He had planned to work as a bus driver until he is able to attend college, however, he found out that getting the license for driving a bus in Calgary entails costs that he could not afford. He is one of the employees of the factory for which he has to wait all week to hear if he is working on the weekend or not and a prime example of the system that pushes refugees to the margins of the Canadian market economy.

Previous research on refugee groups who found asylum in Canada has revealed that refugeehood imposes significant existentialist concerns even after they have been settled in their new society (Lacroix 2004: 157; Buck 2017). With regards to Kurd refugees in Vancouver, Canada, Miraftab (2000) states that there is a “psychological dimension of relocation and or displacement” that only refugees experience and which separates the experiences of refugees and immigrants in settlement distinctly (55). As Porter (2018) reports in an article on the New York Times, the lead physician in Calgary who has been working very closely with the community describes the common symptoms of Yazidi refugees’ post-traumatic stress disorder as “flashbacks, night terrors, anxiety, surges of anger” which in a number of Yazidi refugee women cause “seizure-like attacks”. In order to accommodate this group of Yazidis in Canada, some of the NGOs, including CCIS in Calgary, have had to rearrange their programs, in addition to providing mental support to their staff who work with Yazidis and were overwhelmed (Porter 2018). Trauma counselling has been identified as a necessity for the Yazidi refugees by Yazidis themselves as well as previous research on the group (Kizilhan 2017; Wilkinson et al. 2019). Nonetheless, an absence of adequate and accessible psychological/mental support programs is

felt by Yazidi refugees in Canada (Buck 2017; Porter 2018).

As the New York Times article titled “Canada Struggles as It Opens Its Arms to Victims of ISIS” quotes, a Yazidi refugee single mother asks, “where is the Canadian government?” when she is talking about her psychological distress after settlement in Canada. The Yazidi mother uses the above phrase to show her frustration with not receiving the psychological/mental support that she was promised. The existing literature also shows that an absence of culturally competent programs to address the mental and emotional needs of refugees is felt and identified by other refugee groups in Canada as well (Beiser 2006; McKeary and Newbold 2010). Even with health services in general, lack of culturally competent programs is considered a systematic barrier that imposes challenges onto refugees in accessing health care (Abu-Laban et al. 1999; McKeary and Newbold 2010). Buck (2017) has also covered a detailed story of the experiences of a Yazidi female-headed family in Canada and shows the significance of trauma therapy in the settlement and integration of the Yazidi refugees like her. As Buck (2017) cites, Jan Kizilhan, a prominent psychologist and academic who has been working on saving and the recovery of the current Yazidi refugees. He has advised the Canadian government to provide adequate trauma therapy to the minority group. The reason, according to Kizilhan, is that without effective trauma therapy the Yazidi refugee group would have no chance for their integration into the society because without therapy, it is like Yazidis have not really been saved from the terror that ISIS caused (as cited in Buck 2017). Many of the Yazidi refugees have also been experiencing loss of identity and “subjectivity” which coincides with the general experiences of refugees who, as previous research shows, experienced those feelings as the result of not finding “meaningful” employment and loss of academic credentials to systematic barriers (Lacroix 2004: 159).

The current available mental support programs offered by the Canadian immigration and

refugee initiative for the settlement of the Yazidi refugees seem to fall short as the programs are not culturally competent, accessible, nor customizable for improving the psychological health of the Yazidi refugees in Calgary. The two available reports on the Yazidi refugees in Canada reflect that the case of absence of an adequate and competent program applies to Yazidi refugees in other parts of Canada too (House of Commons 2018; Wilkinson et al. 2019). The findings of this study show that for the majority of Yazidi refugees in Calgary (by the time of this study at least), the available mental support sessions offered through CCIS and other resources were overwhelming rather than helpful and for that reason, the majority have withdrawn from the programs.

The responsibility to work with the traumatized newcomers falls on the shoulders of the few NGOs that are active on the ground. However, as the story told by Buck (2017) illustrates, even within NGOs, volunteers are the ones that take over a big chunk of the responsibility to care for the needs of the Yazidi refugees. This is evidently reported in the current study as a great number of Yazidi refugees in Calgary have expressed gratitude for the support they have received from their Family Host volunteers and also, with families that didn't have such support, the lack of support was materially felt. Without the volunteers, the Yazidi survivors of ISIS will have a much harder time navigating the Canadian society as they are severely affected by their horrific experiences and have trust issues in addition to the language barrier they face (Buck 2017). The list of issues that the refugees have been facing since entering Canada goes on to include their isolation within their small communities.

Building on this literature, my master's thesis explores the following question: What are the gaps in resettlement service provisions in Canada and how do they get filled? Is resettlement work gendered? What role do Yazidi women play within the resettlement of Yazidi refugee



families? How does maternal work and care work play into the resettlement process of Yazidi refugee families?

### *2.5 Methodology*

This study started in the Fall of 2018 as a master's research project and is part of a larger SSHRC-funded research project facilitated by Dr. Pallavi Banerjee who is my graduate supervisor at the Department of Sociology (University of Calgary). The ethics approval for the larger project is granted to Dr. Pallavi Banerjee who is the principal investigator of the project. I am part of the same ethics approval as the master's student on the project. The ethics approval letter is attached in Appendix B as the data used for this thesis has come out of that certification.

The analysis of data is based on interviews with 134 Yazidi members above the age of 12 who were present at the time of the interview and who participated in the discussion with special attention to the narratives of 66 adult Yazidi women (out of the 72 adult Yazidi women who were approached in this study), eleven interviews with CCIS' staff who were primarily involved with Yazidi refugee clients, and observational notes from interviews and some group events. The present study has approached and covered the entire Yazidi refugee population in Calgary, Alberta (100%) and it includes 45 families (241 members out of whom 72 are adult women, 52 are adult men, and 117 are children aged 18 and below). Seven families (approximately 24 people) refused to participate in the study and one family was deemed better not to be approached due to their sensitive emotional state. Out of the 134 interviews with Yazidi members (45 families in the study), there are 66 adult women, 42 adult males, and 26 children/dependents between the ages 12 and 18 out of whom 18 were girls and 8 were boys. Out of the 134 participants, 47 are mothers and out of the 47, 20 are single mothers. Out of the 20

Yazidi single mothers, 10 are sole heads of their households (the other 10 single mothers are not solo heads of their families as they live with other families who are headed by men). This stands in comparison to the 30 families where both parents were present and the one family where alternative guardianship existed. There were no single fathers, and girls 18 and below were almost double the number of boys of the same age range<sup>10</sup>— eight of the children were born in Canada and about three women were pregnant at the time of the interviews.

For my analysis, I focus specifically on data from actors who are women because, on one hand, women are overrepresented in the data: Yazidi refugee family population in Calgary by majority consists of women and girls—for the gender and age composition of the Yazidi refugee families in Calgary who participated in this study please see Appendix C. In the entire Yazidi refugee population in Calgary and in this study, there are 72 adult Yazidi women compared to 52 adult male, and 91 girls below the age of 18 compared to 60 male counterparts. Women are also overrepresented in CCIS' staff who work closely with the Yazidi refugee families (out of the 11 conducted interviewees, 7 are women including the resettlement center's manager and 4 are male staff—at least an additional 5 women in CCIS staff roles have been identified as key agents in the resettlement of Yazidi refugees but weren't interviewed ). The same overrepresentation of women within Yazidi families' Family Host<sup>11</sup> volunteers applies-- 83 percent of Family Hosts are women (64.58% are women-only and 18.75% are women who volunteer with their male partner and/or friend- for the visual representation please see Appendix D). On the other hand, I utilize data from women because my analysis is focused on the type of care that is gendered and

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<sup>10</sup> In the entire population of Yazidi refugees in Calgary and included in this study, there are 19 girls between the ages of 14- 18 compared to eight boys in the same range, and, 53 girls below the age of 14 compared to the 36 boys of the same age range.

<sup>11</sup> The number of Family Hosts stated in this sentence is based on data from the present research study however it matches the same information from CCIS' sources (Lutaba 2017).

associated with being a woman/mother; the role of Yazidi mothers in the resettlement of their families in Calgary and the family-like (maternal/sisterly) relationships that women in roles of CCIS staff and volunteers have created with the Yazidi refugee women which play a significant part in their resettlement.

Therefore, my analysis is specifically based on in-depth interviews with 66 adult Yazidi women (out of the total of 72) and 7 key CCIS women staff (out of the total of 11 interviews) who worked closely with the Yazidi community and were close to Yazidi refugee women. I have also used observational and indirect data on women as Family Host volunteers who worked with the Yazidi refugee families—we did not directly interview Family Hosts, however, we gathered data on them from what Yazidi families and CCIS staff shared with us about them, as well as information from our observations. All interviews were transcribed manually by the research team including myself. I used NVIVO to compile, organize, and code the data pertaining to my research questions and then analyzed them using open and thematic coding.

The research team consisted of myself as the lead graduate student researcher on the project, my supervisor, Dr. Pallavi Banerjee, along with three student research assistants who mainly acted as note-takers, and a bilingual interpreter who spoke both Kurmanji/Arabic and English and was present in every interview. One research assistant accompanied the designated interviewer, who was either me and/or Dr. Banerjee, and who acted as the note taker. The environment of the interviews was collaborative. Some of the interviewees did not agree to voice recording and in such cases, transcription was made based on field notes. The transcription of unrecorded interviews with Yazidi refugee families was a collaborative effort where we cross-checked and compiled our notes within our team. In addition, I acknowledge that the same sort of collaboration existed for many of the observation notes made throughout the interviews with

Yazidi refugee families. Further, since we often debriefed and discussed our insights after each interview, our ideas often fed each other's way of thought. The research team was intentionally made up of an all-women group by the principal investigator because most of the participants were women who were only comfortable with speaking with women. The data for this thesis is part of the data that was collected by me alongside Dr. Pallavi Banerjee and our research team. Therefore, I use the term "we" throughout my thesis to refer to the collective data collection process—specifically with regards to interviews and encounters with the Yazidi refugee community.

#### *2.5.1 Interviews with Yazidi refugee families.*

The way that we, Dr. Banerjee and I, made contact with the Yazidi refugee community in Calgary was through our collaboration with Calgary Catholic Immigration Services (CCIS) which is the sole and main resettlement agency responsible for the resettlement of Yazidi refugee families in Calgary<sup>12</sup>. Our collaboration was on what CCIS called the Home Assessment (HA) tool which was a general interview guide aimed at evaluating resettlement services that Yazidi refugee families had received during the two years of their settlement in Calgary as well as assessing how each Yazidi refugee family was doing during this period of resettlement. The Home Assessment tool (the revised and finalized version of document is attached in Appendix E) was initially a two-page document with short and general questions regarding the standard sphere of resettlement including health services, housing, financial situation, transportation and

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<sup>12</sup> Upon arrival, CCIS hosts refugee families at its Margaret Chisholm Resettlement Center (MCRC)- for the Yazidi refugees they were hosted to up to 20 days. During this time CCIS offers a range of care packages and helps the families with registrations and medical examination upon other things. CCIS staff also help with housing and help the families with the next phase which is to move out- these services range from help with using transportation to English classes and grocery shopping.

education. Dr. Banerjee and I agreed to conduct the HA interviews with every Yazidi family in Calgary, except for the ones who would refuse and/or would be not in a suitable emotional state to be approached. We then changed the HA tool a few times to make the questions more relevant and sensitive and we continued to change the questions over the first few interviews to include questions that worked best and were more important to the community.

All interviews with Yazidi refugee families were conducted in the homes of the participants in their first language, Kurmanji, with the help of an interpreter who was a young woman and familiar with the Yazidi community and knew Kurmanji as well as Arabic. The interviews were audio-recorded unless the participants refused to consent to the recording of the sessions in which case, we took notes. The first phase of interviewing started from Christmas day of 2018 when we met with the first family and ended in August of 2019. There are plans for continuing with longitudinal interviews.

The interviews were semi-structured and were flexible to the conditions of each family. The interview guide, the HA tool, includes 15-20 open-ended questions, however, in each household we strategized on the ground on how to approach each section of the questions. This was to adjust to the level of traumatization of the family. Some of the women deal with panic attacks or what is more accurately called non-psychogenic seizures. The HA sections came in order because following Dr. Banerjee's advice, we started with questions that we realized families were more open to and leading to some of the questions that could be perceived as emotionally more challenging and ending with the interviews with more neutral or positive questions so as to not leave the family with negative emotions. Nonetheless, we always went with the flow of the topics that each family wanted to discuss and played it by the ear. The final version of the HA tool that was used included the following sections in order of the guide: Basic

information (demographics), youth and family questions (if they had children), CCIS and services questions, Family Hosts, settlement experience including health, school and education, the community in Calgary, housing, employment and background, income, family time and hopes, and a section where we asked each family what message they liked to extend.

I had long conversations with Dr. Banerjee about the possible ways we could work around the trauma and we consulted with CCIS staff who worked closely with the community. We also debriefed after every interview with the team, especially after the more difficult interviews – interviews we found emotionally and intellectually challenging. I had separate debriefing sessions with my supervisor following almost all interviews when we discussed and analyzed our findings. After almost every interview, I learned something new on how to work with our questions and with the dynamics in the households, and often we had to re-strategize. By intention, the study and our questions were designed to focus on the present and the future of the Yazidi families since they came to Canada. We avoided asking questions that could take the families back to the genocide and their trauma; nonetheless, the horrific memories and the deep sorrows were an inseparable part of the families' narratives.

### *2.5.2 Interviews with key CCIS staff.*

The staff interviews were made possible through Dr. Banerjee's relationship with CCIS and the relationship I created with the agency since I was introduced to them. The larger research project includes 11 interviews with CCIS resettlement staff who have been working with the Yazidi refugee community closely—for my analysis I am using 7 of these interviews with women staff. One of the staff, the coordinator of the Community Connections for Newcomers program (informally and in this thesis referred to as the Family Host program) was interviewed

three times with three different focuses—two times by me and one time by Dr. Banerjee. In total, I conducted interviews with nine staff and Dr. Banerjee did four of the interviews. These interviews were conducted at CCIS premises except the one in which the participant requested to be interviewed at a café outside of CCIS. I attended these interviews alone and except for two participants who refused, all the interviews were audio-recorded. These interviews were all transcribed by me.

We developed a general semi-structured interview guide for staff interviews (guide in Appendix F). The guide includes four general sections of questions as follows: basic information and demographics, individual's work background, resettlement experience, and insights on Yazidi refugee families. Nonetheless, we customized our questions for each interview and did not limit the interviews to the questions on the interview guides. For the interviews I conducted with the more critically situated staff, I developed specific question guides under Dr. Banerjee's supervision that related to the individual's particular area of service. I used the data from interviews with seven CCIS staff who were women for the purpose of my thesis and to answer my research questions.

### *2.5.3 Analytical Note.*

Using this methodology, I highlight the nuances of the roles that Yazidi refugee mothers, women CCIS resettlement staff, and women Family Host volunteers play within the resettlement of the Yazidi refugee community in Calgary. The findings of this qualitative quest have allowed me to develop *maternal strategies*, which I explain and illustrate in Chapter 3, as a conceptual tool to identify and understand the centrality of the work that the women do to make resettlement possible. In addition, *maternal strategies* highlight the importance of social and personal

resources within the resettlement process of the community by identifying the creation and maintenance of personal relationships as part of the strategies that women utilize to enable their resettlement. This finding also reflects the general mantra of this research and how data was gathered because my understanding of the data comes from the personal relationships my supervisor and I developed with the Yazidi families and CCIS staff. The fruits of this analysis relate back to the prevalent neoliberal structure within the Canadian immigration and refugee policy as well as the Canadian economic system. This connection is made through demonstrating where the absence of structured service provision and support has created gaps in resources and services that are felt as barriers to integration by the Yazidi refugee community. Further, the responsibility to fill the gaps or work around them is moved onto the shoulders of individual people and the resettlement NGO, which as my analysis reveals, is most critically taken up by women as key agents of resettlement (as mothers, resettlement staff, and volunteers).



## CHAPTER 3: WARMED BY MATERNITY

### *3.1 Introduction*

The literature shows that through forced displacement, the structure of family and domestic life changes, and that women from patriarchal cultures find more agency as the new society and economic conditions require them to participate in the labor market and social spheres (Spitzer 2006). The change of gendered division of labour during resettlement process has been talked about mostly with regards to resettlement in developed countries of asylum where after settling in the new society, refugee women find leverage to change the domestic division of labour, participate in the society more, and experience more agency (Spitzer 2006). Nonetheless, the extension of women's efforts to make family and community as part of the resettlement process is underexplored. The fact that women manage motherhood and caregiving with low income and lack of adequate resources and supportive policies is a reality that stems from the refugee resettlement sphere and across the different roles that women take within the resettlement structure. In specific reference to the present study, the resettlement of Yazidi refugee families in Calgary, women take roles as a) mothers and caregivers of Yazidi refugee families at home, b) Canadian Family Host volunteers<sup>13</sup> as family and friends to Yazidi refugee community, and c) staff working at the resettlement agency.

The present chapter is aimed at elaborating the role of women who are agents of caregiving

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<sup>13</sup> The Host program, formally called "Community Connections for Newcomers" (CCNC) program at CCIS however in conversations with CCIS staff and Yazidi refugee families, they are referred to as Family Hosts which is the term I will use. The program is established by Immigration, Refugees, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (IRCC), then called Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) in 1984, is a volunteer-based program where each newcomer family is "matched" with a Canadian "Host" family in order to enhance the newcomers' resettlement and integration experience (Wang and Truelove 2003: 578; Government of Canada 2010; Meinhard, Lo, and Hyman 2016: 282; Lutaba 2017). The program is one of the three "core programs" funded by the federal government and is run by IRCC and service delivery organizations aimed at improving newcomers' integration into the Canadian society (Wang and Truelove 2003: 578; Mukhtar, Dean, Wilson, Ghassemi, and Wilson 2016: 395).

within the resettlement process of Yazidi refugee families in Calgary and identifies the managing-maneuvering skills of these women that enable resettlement on a daily basis as *maternal strategies in resettlement*. This chapter provides a task analysis (Daniels 1987: 406) of the efforts women make in different roles that are involved in the resettlement of Yazidi Refugees in Calgary. On the other hand, the type of care provision that is at the locus of *maternal strategies* is perceived, naturalized, and normalized as women's "innate" realm (McKenna 2015: 51). As Daniels (1987) explains, this perception is rooted in the gender stratifying definitions of work that consider caring skills and "emotional work" as part of women's "natural talent" and as expected outcomes of their inherent character (410). Further, not only are women's interpersonal skills devalued, but they are also viewed as "spontaneous gestures that are loving or supportive" and are given freely, which does not equate a standard unit in a monetized economy (Daniels 1987: 410), specifically not in a neoliberal one.

I argue that without *maternal strategies*, which are strategies implemented by women in different roles involved with the resettlement of Yazidi refugees, the resettlement of Yazidi refugee families would not have been possible. Moreover, I argue that *maternal strategies* are an inevitable part of making the resettlement of refugees in a country that is shaped by neoliberal economic structure – Canada – possible.

I will add to the existing literature on refugee resettlement in Canada with what I am calling *maternal strategies*. These are various and innovative forms of providing care in the absence of structured support that women in caregiving roles, both as mothers and family members at home and as professional and unprofessional staff and volunteers, execute throughout the resettlement process. My findings will allow me to arrive at the definition of *maternal strategies*. I will first discuss the literature that uses the word *strategy* and/or similar

terms in support of the *strategies* refugees use in their resettlement process. Strategies are used and referred to as a term(s) but are not discussed as a concept that reflects the amount of skills, thought process, management, and execution that is required by women to undertake in order to be able to work with the given circumstances (neoliberal policies, limited resources, small community network). This literature is partly in the field of refugee resettlement as well as within the studies that have looked at motherhood and family life of low-income mothers.

I will present my findings in two main sections: to show how *maternal strategies* are utilized by women as *Mothers Towards the Resettlement of Yazidi Refugee families* which consist of mothering work under financial constraints, making Canada home for the children and, managing absence of key figures and emotional/mental needs. The next section captures the *maternal strategies by Extended Caregivers Towards the Resettlement of the Yazidi Refugee Community* who do care work as part of resettlement labour both as staff and as volunteers in the role of Family Hosts to Yazidi refugees.

### 3.2 Maternal Strategies

Motherhood and maternity have various definitions and it has been agreed by scholars that there is no one definition to what is called maternal (Risman 1986; Walks and McPherson 2011; Bowen, Elliott, and Brenton 2014; Vandebeld Giles 2014; McKenna 2015). In their book “Anthropology of Mothering”, Walks and McPherson (2011) emphasize that the work of mothering is similarly practiced by both biological mothers and non-biological mothers (4). They specify “social aspects” of mothering which include but are not limited to “everyday tasks such as being responsible for children’s nutrition, health, education, spiritual development, and language learning” in addition to “distributing appropriate discipline and care” (Walks and

McPherson 2011: 4). Vandebeld Giles (2014) states that “mothering occurs whether or not it is biologically, legally, and/or socially/culturally recognized as such” (417). They define mothering as “the work of primary caregiving, being responsible for the economic, educational, and social care of another human being” (Vandebeld Giles 2014: 417). I define mothering following these scholars and place it within a broader spectrum of maternal care, which “continues to be highly gendered” (Vandebeld Giles 2014: 417) but is not limited to biological relations nor gender and sex (Risman 1986). Hence, what I refer to as *maternal strategies* is aimed at capturing the type of work and caregiving that is gendered and associated with women being mothers or motherly. But this work can also be provided by non-biological mothers and goes beyond the private sphere of the household and is not limited to a specific sex/gender identity.

In defining and explaining what is meant by *maternal strategies*, it is not possible to ignore the role of neoliberal ideology and neoliberal economic structure in the shaping and existence of such phenomenon – mothering and caregiving is always class-based and is tied to economic resources (Daniels 1987; Walks and McPherson 2011; Bowen, Elliott, and Brenton 2014; Vandebeld Giles 2014; McKenna 2015). *Maternal strategies* are more essential forms of daily living strategies that have emerged in response to inequality and gaps in social services that the neoliberal system has brought with itself – they are more essential because they are more intensely required to make living under disadvantaged and resourceless conditions, such as forced displacement and refugeehood, possible. Canada is a prime example in that with the emergence of neoliberal policies, women who were economically disadvantaged were further marginalized while their issues became invisible in the light of market growth. Given such, they then had to come up with different ways to combat their social and financial struggles (Daniels 1987; Bowen, Elliott, and Brenton 2014; McKenna 2015).

### 3.3 Findings

The findings of this study suggest two re-emerging themes for analysis which support the presence and necessity of *maternal strategies* within the resettlement process of Yazidi refugees in Calgary. The two themes are separated by the sphere and extent of caregiving to and by Yazidi refugee families. The first theme occurs at the home of Yazidi refugee families and therefore focuses on the role of mothers, both biological and non-biological. Under the first section, *Mothers Towards the Resettlement of Yazidi Refugee families*, I look at how mothers navigate through everyday challenges and do mothering work under financial constraints, make Canada home for their children, and manage the absence of key figures and emotional/mental needs. The second theme, *Maternal strategies by Extended Caregivers Towards the Resettlement of the Yazidi Refugee Community*, emerges with subsections as it looks at the maternal care provided by caregiver figures who are outside of the household; CCIS staff as extended caregivers, and Family Hosts as an equivalent for Canadian family or Canadian close net community. *Maternal strategies* are not fixed categories of acts and can neither be rigidly defined, rather, they are parts of the families' livelihood and the maintenance of the resettlement process. *Maternal strategies* encompass caregivers' ability to maneuver and manage the gaps in service provision and programming within the resettlement field and can, therefore, take many shapes. Incidentally, *maternal strategies* are everyday acts of survival that adapt to circumstances on a daily basis to make resettlement under the Canadian neoliberal framework possible.

#### 3.3.1 *Maternal strategies by mothers towards the resettlement of Yazidi families.*

At home, mothers manage the material and emotional aspects of new life situations to maintain their families. In the case of Yazidi refugee families in Calgary, Canada, who have

passed through war, terror, captivity, displacement, and more, the resettlement process and starting a normal life is the prime situation to which mothers have to adopt. These efforts overlap with what has previously been addressed as the “invisible work” of low-income mothers (Daniels 1987). The idea of invisible work has been explored by feminist scholars of immigration and refugee families who illustrate the role of mothers in managing global and social inequalities through their everyday maternal work (Moon 2003; Banerjee 2018; Brainer 2017; Romero 2018; Banerjee 2019; Chung, Young, and Kerr 2019; Manohar 2019; Banerjee, Chacko, and Piya forthcoming 2020). For Yazidi refugee mothers and caregiver women, these efforts, which are mutual and often overlapping, include mothering and caregiving under financial constraints, making Canada home for children, and managing the absence of key figures and emotional/mental needs. I will present each of these in subsections that follow.

*Mothering and caregiving under financial constraints.*

At the heart of what mothers do to make Canada home for their children lies providing food and cooking meals, which is not unique to Yazidi refugee families – cooking is at the locus of “good mothering” practices and is in fact induced by neoliberal standards (Devault 1999; Walks and McPherson 2011; Bowen, Elliott, and Brenton 2014). Further, cooking has always been related to money and is class-based (Bowen, Elliott, and Brenton 2014). In addition, cooking is also related to culture: immigrants often cook the food of their home countries to pass on culture to their children (Banerjee 2015). For Yazidi refugee mothers, however, food and cooking hold additional significance: as compensation for their children’s experiences of hunger and malnutrition during captivity and displacement. The emphasis Yazidi refugee mothers place on taking care of their children also entails the unjust treatment that many Yazidi children

received during captivity and displacement. Mothers who still have children and younger siblings back in refugee camps have shared the experiences of their children, which reasonably justifies their emphasis on wanting to take extra care of their children's current physical and mental health. For example, Nigaar who is a 26-year-old single mother who lives in Calgary with her six and four-year-old daughters in a larger household of relatives explained the experiences of one of her sons who was taken captive by ISIS militants and after being freed, is still in a refugee camp in Iraq as follows:

My son was six years old when they [ISIS] took him away. Now he is ten years old and a month ago he was able to flee [ISIS premises]. But he is really sick because they were feeding him what animals eat. He even doesn't know how to speak our language. He was with them [ISIS] for four years, so he doesn't even know who we are as his mother and his father [who is missing]. My son is now in Iraq with his brothers.

The ability to provide adequate food and home-cooked meals is affected by the affordability, time, and availability of ethnically familiar food which in Calgary is particularly challenging as Calgary generally lacks broad and well-developed ethnic or religious communities for refugees (Wood, McGrath, and Young 2012: 32). Many of the Yazidi mothers expressed their concern for not being able to buy the food that their children desire and a few mentioned that their children don't really like Canadian food. The financial barrier to easily buy the ingredients they ideally wanted was portrayed in the narratives of Yazidi mothers who expressed concern for having spent a lump sum of money occasionally to buy the food that their children asked for. Rozin, a 35-year-old single mother of six children shared:

My kids don't really like the food here because they grew up in Iraq. Last time I went shopping I had to spend like \$120 and it wasn't enough, but you know every time I have

to cook for them. My salary is only enough for rent and utilities, so I have their money for the food and other expenses and they just started paying us. They are kids and, whenever we go and do shopping, they ask me for things, they are kids and I have to get them those things. The money is not enough. One of the kids has a salary for \$450, how would that be enough for her? Because they are kids – they want food for the school they want and need clothes and they want things. It's really hard when they ask me for things and I want to get them – they were captured for 3 years, so you know! Especially when they were captured, they were hungry, and they are kids. Now I want them to be happy and whenever they ask for some things, I want to get them that.

Here Rozin associates rewarding her children with cooking the food that her children like, and she uses cooking as a strategy to make up for the time she was unable to provide and comfort her children during the captivity period. Rozin repeatedly emphasizes that her children “are kids” and by that she implies the pressure she feels to provide anything that they need. This pressure is vividly expressed in another quote that Esma, a 35-year-old Syrian-Yazidi mother of four children:

My kids, sometimes they want to buy things and are asking us to buy them some stuff but we don't have enough money, because the money we are getting from the government it is only enough to pay the rent and the bills and expenses. I feel sorry when my kids ask me for something, and I have no money to give them. I am now doing level 4 English and when I finish this level, I will start looking for a job.



Yazidi refugee mothers manage the shortcomings of their low budgets on a daily basis. We<sup>14</sup> observed that in many of the households, mothers, and other women who shared caregiving engaged in making bread at home and ethnic dishes for feeding the family. A few of the households, women would share cooking and exchange food items with their neighbours across or down/upstairs – this could be to both reduce costs and/or share the workload and helping each other in maintaining their families. The various aspects of their financial constraints and the ups and downs of the process to provide for their children are portrayed throughout the above narratives. The peak of these struggles that further complicates Yazidi refugee mothers' lives, more so the single mother households, is the obligation to have to choose between what is needed for their family. Mothers are put in the position to have to choose to buy the best and enough ingredients or pay for an unexpected expense, paying for rent or utility bills, or buying the necessities for their children. Rozin's narrative is a relevant example of this struggle:

This month it was very hard because we got our money and my kids didn't have enough clothes and I went and bought them clothes so I haven't paid the rent yet because they had nothing to wear and I had to buy them clothes. Because we are planning to move to a bigger house I don't know if the money would be enough or not.

In addition, some of the Yazidi families experienced delays in receiving child support which put extra pressure on their budgeting challenges. Based on our findings, from the time that a refugee family or parent is in Canada, it can take up to about six months for the childcare support to start. The Yazidi families are aware that child support is intended to be saved for the expenses of the children and they take Canadian law very seriously. The Yazidi refugee families

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<sup>14</sup> As explained in the Methodology section of Chapter 2, this we, or where I use "our" to refer to the findings, refers to me collecting data alongside Dr. Banerjee and/or the research team.

in Calgary have by majority been trying to not spend the child support money, at least as much as they can, and to save those up for their children's expenses. However, because their living expenses outnumber their income assistance, especially during winter with the high utility bills and need for winter clothes, child support money is often part of how they are able to pay for their expenses. Therefore, the delay period when they do not have that extra financial help, especially the single mother families, are additionally challenged. Some mothers borrowed money from possible resources which were sometimes a small loan they received from an institution or from their community members.

In families with adult or older teenage children, like Nucan's family, sometimes mothers hope for and rely on their children's future contributions as help with their personal expenses:

My daughter (16 years old) has two 2 months holidays from school, and she has said if she is able to get a job at a market or something, I will do it. It's for herself – Because of the trip that she is on she had to spend \$30 and buy things for herself so she spends a lot. I keep telling her that she is spending a lot but her father says it's okay to let her do it. So, if she would be able to get a summer job and save some money for the next semester it would be great. (Nucan, a 52-year-old mother of four adult and teenage children)

Finding jobs is generally a big struggle that persists for Yazidi refugee families – only a small number of adults have been able to secure part-time and on-call positions. Nucan's quote provides a sense of budget and affordability in Yazidi refugees' households – \$30 dollars is a significant amount of expense that families can't cover. Nonetheless, Nucan's quote is not a reflection of Yazidi refugee parents' approach towards managing their children's expenses with their low budget. In the majority of households, even ones with single-headed mothers, children were well taken care of regardless of age. Taking care of children for Yazidi refugee mothers

even extended to taking food to their child's bedroom, grocery shopping, cleaning, budgeting, and more. In families that had a reliance on children's ability to get a job was portrayed, it often came out as distant goals. Moreover, reliance on children is more strongly expressed in terms of the English language. For example, Peri, the 35-year-old single mother of five teenage and younger children said:

Kani (12-year-old daughter) is the only one who has good health [other children have disabilities], I am insisting for her to learn the language faster to help us. I don't want her to work but I want her to learn the language faster and I am trying to focus her on learning the language.

Peri also shared her plans for getting a job herself this way:

I have never thought of getting a job because I have only two days of the weekend and during those two days even, I have no time to rest because I have to take care of medical appointments, grocery shopping, and my kids.

For sure I would like to get a job and make my kids' life better but how can I do it if I don't know the language and I don't know how to get around?

Lack of available support network and accessible childcare<sup>15</sup> is among the top barriers to employment for Yazidi refugee mothers. Like food affordability, childcare is too a "class-based problem" in Canada (McKenna 2015: 42). However, challenges due to lack of childcare and a kin and community support network have yet to fully develop for Yazidi refugee mothers because many of the Yazidi refugee families were still on the federal income assistance at the

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<sup>15</sup> Childcare support services are available to Yazidi refugee women who attend English classes for a limited term and for very young children. Families who have minors coming home from school and those who live far from the CCIS center are unable to make use of the available childcare service.

time of the interview. In a few months or less, their income assistance is going to be changed to the provincial program which will be less than what they were getting and had become accustomed to receiving. With such changes, as many Yazidi refugee women have expressed that they would have to quit everything else and find a job to be able to survive financially. This may also change the nature of existing support systems in place as each Yazidi refugee family would be facing more challenges within their own household.

Without any exclusions, all the Yazidi refugee parents expressed great emphasis on wanting their children to have a better life in Canada. For them, the motivation for moving to Canada centers around the possibilities their children can have in the future. Mothers, in particular, were the ones who expressed concern for their children's future and talked about their plans. Esma, (a 35-year-old Syrian-Yazidi mother of four children) shares a quote which speaks to many of the Yazidi refugee mothers' hopes and concerns regarding the financial aspect of their children's lives:

I keep thinking of saving some money for my kids to be able to study at the university in the future because for me the most important thing is that for my kids to get into the university and since here the university is not free like in Syria. I keep thinking about different ways to at least save some money for the future. I keep telling my husband somehow, we have to get jobs and start working and saving some money because of the money we are getting right now, all this expense for our living expenses and for rent. We are even using the child support money to pay our living expenses, so I keep thinking about saving. If we can get some more money, we can start saving for our kids and not using their money to pay for living expenses.

Other than money, transportation has been shown to act as a barrier for low-income mothers for cooking and childcare in general (Bowen, Elliott, and Brenton 2014). For example, a number of the families found receiving food from the Food Bank<sup>16</sup> useful (though a number of families did not like the food they received) and were unable to make use of the service because the location is distant. Within the Yazidi refugee families in Calgary, only a few women expressed interest in obtaining their driver's license, and therefore, women heavily rely on male figures, either family or male community members with drivers' licenses or cars for accessing the Food Bank. Dilsoz is a 60-year-old single mother who lives with her adult children. Her son has not yet received his full driver's license and they can't afford a car. Dilsoz, who has a colon condition, shared: "the main Food Bank, where we can get more food is really far and we didn't have money for the taxi to pay for it to go and come back." Therefore, For Yazidi mothers, maintaining relations and scheduling sharing rides to and from grocery stores, whether with community members and relatives or Family Hosts, becomes part of the tangible ways of maintaining the livelihood of their families.

To maintain their families and move forward with their resettlement process, Yazidi refugee mothers' *maternal strategies* include but is not limited to the active role they take in managing their scarce financial resources to provide their children with home-cooked meals, sharing cooking with other families, budgeting which often leads to choosing to pay for one of their families' basic needs over the others, looking for resources to borrow money from which

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<sup>16</sup> Food Bank is a chain of grocery stores and food agencies that are known as Food Banks Canada which is a "national charitable organization dedicated to helping Canadians living with food insecurity" (Food Banks Canada n.d.). Access to a Food Bank requires an application which for the Yazidi refugee community, in majority of the cases, Center for Newcomers and/or CCIS counselors have helped with. They have been able to receive larger amount of food with lower costs though many of the Yazidi families claimed that the cost for gas for commuting to the branch in Calgary has made their purchase not as feasible. Also, not all items were useful to Yazidi refugee families as many food items were unfamiliar to them.

often is within their own community, trying to save and plan for their children's future, and working hard at language acquisition in the hope of finding employment. In addition, the efforts that Yazidi refugee mothers make towards cooking and providing nutritious meals as well as satisfying their children's basic needs have additional value and significance to their resettlement as it is tied to the children recovering from their past traumatic experiences. In this way, what Yazidi refugee families do on a daily basis can be considered a new form of maternal labour (Brainer 2017) which can be distinguished from the usual mothering work (Banerjee, Chacko, and Piya forthcoming 2020). Further, Yazidi refugee mothers extend their efforts to make life normal by making Canada feel like home.

*Making Canada home for children.*

It has previously been acknowledged by scholars that "cooking isn't just about the time it takes to prepare the meal. It also involves planning ahead to be sure the ingredients are on hand and means cleaning afterward" (Devault 1999; Bowen, Elliott, and Brenton 2014: 22). For Yazidi refugee mothers the planning process for cooking, especially in the first few months of their resettlement into Canada, has been additionally challenging as they have also been struggling with lack of English literacy, difficulty in navigating transportation, and learning where and how to do grocery shopping in Calgary. In addition to these challenges, many of the Yazidi refugee women suffer from physical, emotional, and mental constraints that the experiences of war, captivity, and displacement have left them with. Rozin identified that presence of family members or relatives could be a great help in allowing her to manage care for her children:

Last week, for example, I was in sharp pain and my kids were at school and I was alone at home – I couldn't do anything because of the pain so I tried to lie down but then I had to cook for my kids, so I stand by the oven by I couldn't, I couldn't stand. So, if I had a family member living close to me I would have gone to them and asked them to help me. So yes, it's very important to have a family member or your relatives living close or living with you.

Even though Yazidi refugee mothers are not yet in the labour market, they still face the “time dilemma” that low-income mothers often struggle with to manage home-cooked meals and for cooking diverse dishes (Bowen, Elliott, and Brenton 2014: 22). Yazidi refugee women find their schedules quite busy. For Yazidi refugee mothers, even attendance in English classes is a struggle. In addition to the English classes they attend (majority attend part-time), managing medical appointments for their children, children's commute to school, and taking care of the household and other members leave them no time to spare. Mothers may even reject the services they need for themselves or withdraw from receiving services because of a lack of time. Kaja is a 32-year-old mother of two who lives with her aunt and cousins. In our interview, she was expressing that she needs help with her children's schoolwork because her English is not that good yet. When asked if she would like to have someone help her she immediately said: “our Family Host friend is helping. CCIS asked me if they should send me someone to help but I don't have time so I said no because I can't manage my time.”

Maleek, a 30-year-old mother of four children describes her typical day as what follows:

I have a full day of activities every day and a short time to do each task. I get up at 6 am and make breakfast and prepare the kids for school. Then I have to get the children to school – sometimes my husband helps. Then after, I go to my own school/class for

English. I get back home, and I make lunch. I pick up the children from their school bus station. I feed the children and then I make dinner. I help the children with their homework and then I go to sleep.

Maleek's quote reflects the busy schedules of typical Yazidi refugee mothers, nonetheless, mothering and managing care can be further complicated for many Yazidi refugee mothers. Particularly, single mothers who are the head of their families and are sometimes responsible for multiple dependents including parents and siblings. The younger siblings are often taken care of by young mothers and/or older siblings in the same way as their children and the caregiving mother/older sisters or sisters-in-law take care of the majority of household duties. For example, Nina is a 31-year-old single mother of four children and is the head of her family and she also takes care of her senior mother, who neither knows English nor how to get around and has medical needs, as well as her not abled-bodied sister. Nina herself suffers from occasional attacks that make her unconscious and all her children have physical and mental needs that require constant supervision. Managing the medical appointments as well as other tasks related to her role leaves Nina with a very tight and tiring schedule. Nina shared with us how she has to cook multiple dishes and implied buying ingredients for each diet is expensive for her:

I have to cook for my sister separately. Then I have to cook special meals for my mom. Then I have to cook for my kids, for their school. Then I have to cook for the rest of the family.

Mothers and caregiving women sacrifice the services that they personally need and use as a strategy to manage the fulfillment of their domestic and childcare responsibilities. For instance,



Irem, a 31-year-old mother who lives with her husband and five children, \ expressed “I can’t go to English classes because I have to take care of the kids. And I am pregnant it is very hard for me, but I wish I could go to classes.” That the need of children was prioritized was a reoccurring theme in mothers’ narratives. There is also a division of labour among mothers and other adult women who live in the same household. For example, in some families, women with no children would help out during the time they were at home. Though the majority of the domestic labour fell on mothers. Specifically, mothers who had infants and/or were pregnant and were limited to staying at home were left to spend all their time towards cooking and other chores while younger and childless women would focus on learning English and finding employment. Even in the case of Lezin, who is 30-years-old and not a mother yet and who lives with her husband and 21-year-old sister and 16 and 18-year-old brothers, she was the person who did all the domestic and care work while her siblings attended full-time English classes.

With all of the present challenges, Yazidi refugee mothers manage the life of their families and have progressed. The mothers take the well-being and growth of their children very seriously – even though they have not received formal education themselves, they constantly expressed that they want their children to have better chances and opportunities. A caseworker at CCIS who has closely worked with the community and especially the high needs and single mother families shared her opinion on the work that the Yazidi refugee mothers do as follows:

For the moms, there is a rush for them to integrate I think for their kids. I am sure you have heard that they say I have come to Canada only for my children. And that’s another unique thing about this group that I wanted to say: they are very focused on their children’s education and it is extremely, extremely, important for them so I think with the

moms, I think their main focus has been their children and that's their driving force.

(Lydia)

Each house we went to was clean and the families were up to date with their medical needs unless a problem of lack of interpretation existed. As part of their *maternal strategies*, Yazidi refugee mothers arranged with CCIS for interpretation, appointments, and commute to get where they needed to get. Their efforts to make Canada home extended to bringing in Canadian elements and creating a comfortable living space. In many of the houses, Christmas trees, and/or Canadian flags were present along with pictures from the family members they had lost or were missing. Mothers also managed to maintain their relationships with community members and/or neighbours for exchanging favors, food, and sharing rides and accessing relevant information. In particular, mothers kept ties with their Family Hosts who played an important role in managing shopping, commuting to medical services, and most importantly, taking children out for fun and/or sports. For example, women invited Family Hosts for meals and teatime.

The efforts of Yazidi refugee mothers that are reflected in this section are aimed at Yazidi mothers and caregivers working hard at maintaining their family life as normal. To encourage and promote adaptation to their new life, Yazidi refugee mothers' *maternal strategies* encompass mothers working around their busy schedules, working around their own trauma and health needs, and prioritizing their children's education. These efforts often come at the expense of Yazidi refugee mothers having to sacrifice their own needs. Nonetheless, they also have to manage the absence of key figures in their household such as the father of their children, siblings, and grandparents.

*Managing the absence of key figures and emotional/mental needs.*

As the narratives above reflect, the need for a support system is shared among most of the Yazidi refugee families, but more significantly in single mother households. Nina expresses the need with regards to childcare and social aspects of her children's care:

The problem is that my younger kid's school is a bit far away from home and whenever I go to get them, I start to get headaches and I fall unconscious. I can't control myself. The problem is that the school is far from us. So, it takes me time to walk to the school. The kids have some mental and health issues so I have to carry them to the school because they cannot walk. So, let's say if I'm carrying them, and I fall down, if someone sees me, they have to call the ambulance to come to get me, and it's very hard.

For the Yazidi mothers, childcare is tied to medical care. That is, the need of the Yazidi refugee mothers for a trusted and close support system is most highlighted with regards to the medical attention that their children need. Peri is a 35-year-old mother who lives with her five children. Only one of her children is completely healthy and the resettlement manager of CCIS described Peri's typical week as having to attend "ten medical appointments in a week and all over the place". Peri explained the challenges she faces and need of a caregiver she can trust as follows:

It's really hard for me [to manage] because I don't know the language, my children all have disabilities and I am the one who has to do everything like going to the market. I have to work all the time. And they are all kids, so let's say that one had a medical appointment and I had to take her, the rest of my kids have to stay at home and there is no

one to take care of them and keep an eye on them. I have no one here, no neighbours or relatives to take care of them while I'm gone so it's really hard for me.

If one of my children goes under surgery at the hospital [*she is referring to her 16-year-old girl who has a leg disability and is waiting to do her surgeries*] I have to stay with her at the hospital for at least for 2 days and the rest of my children are minors and here in Canada its illegal to leave minors at home. So, if there would be someone to take care of them while I'm at the hospital and to make them food and take care of them [it would be very helpful]. They don't know how to go to the market and how to use public transportation.

The two narratives show the challenges of everyday mothering and caregiving for Yazidi refugee mothers. Many of the Yazidi refugee mothers have to attend multiple medical appointments for their children and family in a week. Managing and distributing their attention is particularly hard for single mothers with multiple children. Lack of a support network or caregiver to help with the tasks is particularly devastating for single Yazidi refugee mothers. Aside from the issue of trust, which for the Yazidi women is significantly a sensitive issue due to their experiences during war and captivity, Yazidi women come from a patriarchal culture where they are used to relying on male figures. Both Nina and Peri lacked a male figure and were both hoping for their brothers to reunite with them in Canada. For Peri, she shared: "I don't trust anyone with my kids when I am away so I can't leave my kids with anyone. No one is able to take care of my kids like my brother or sister would do while I am away."

For women who lived with their partner and/or adult brothers/brothers-in-law, the reliance on male figures created more space for mothers to manage their caregiving and domestic tasks as women directed the public sphere related responsibilities mostly to men. For example, for transportation, shopping, banking, and language, women relied on the assistance of present

male figures. Though even in such families, the core responsibility to care for children was by the majority on women. Despite these facts, CCIS key staff who work closely with Yazidi single mothers expressed that the Yazidi single mothers have been exceptionally resilient and strong and have helped their families through the resettlement process. Kazhan, a counselor and interpreter at CCIS who has worked closely and daily with Yazidi single mothers expressed:

Single moms are now more strong than like the first year. She doesn't have a man with her, and she has three kids and she left four kids with ISIS but if you see her now she is now mom, dad, uncle. Also, she doesn't have any parents because they are missing with ISIS, *but she is being all those people for those three kids.*

We have men – like husbands – but I don't feel like they are more strong than the women. Women are now more strong. For women, it doesn't matter if she has a husband or not but she's strong more than her husband. For example, we have a family in Calgary, she almost divorced. She is very strong. She is going to school. She rented another house. She is stronger than her husband. Women are stronger.

The fact that Yazidi women are exceptionally resilient and strong however does not forfeit their need for a reliable and accessible support system. The absence of an adequate/needed support system is known to practitioners who have been working with the Yazidi refugees and its importance in resettlement has been acknowledged by previous studies with regards to other groups of refugees in Canada (Danso 2002; Simich 2003; Simich 2005; Bergeron and Potter 2006; Beiser 2006). Although I personally have not had access to the actual documentation that was used for developing a program for bringing Yazidis to Canada, the existing reports (House of Commons 2018; Wilkinson et al. 2019), as well as CCIS' interviews,

show that the importance of support systems was known and taken into consideration upon bringing the Yazidis into Canada. Nevertheless, the measures taken did not allow for available support systems for many Yazidi families. A case manager who specifically works on the Yazidi project at CCIS, explains the circumstances for single moms in this way:

The single moms who have come here most of the time were brought here with people who were supposed to be support systems, but, not everybody's support system has been a true support system because the other members are also going through their own trauma having lost their families and having been through genocide. So that wasn't exactly effective so these moms have had to take that role to just to come under everything that is happening in their lives which is amazing, I love seeing that [her tones is happy and excited here]. (Lydia)

In addition to providing a comfortable home for their children, taking care of their physical health, education, and maintaining relationships with CCIS staff and Family Hosts to attract support, Yazidi refugee mothers also work hard at creating happy moments for their families. The resettlement manager of CCIS, Bella, who knows the community very closely, illustrates an example of the Yazidi mothers' efforts to overcome emotional and mental challenges for themselves and their children through this quote about Peri:

She's so funny. She's just hilarious. Um, but she suffered. She suffered a lot and for her like it's very black and white. It's her children that make her go forward. And she said I don't care about anything else. I just want my children to be good and to be healthy. That's it. There's that hope for even those women that have lost so much that they have some hope in the children that they brought along for the future.

When our research team was at Peri's house, we witnessed her sense of humor in a person. Peri was like an older fun sister- she played with her kids and joked around and laughed and kept the spirit of her household high even though her days are filled with long commutes to reoccurring medical appointments for the disabilities of her children and absence of key supportive figures. Using humor, playing with children despite their personal emotional challenges and absence of key figures in the family as well as protecting the children and younger siblings from constant reminders of the past include parts of how women manage to support the emotional needs of their household and the lack of appropriate and accessible mental support services. For example, in one household Aman, 53-years-old lives with her adult daughters and Kaja, her 32-year-old niece who has 3 young children. Kaja and Birca, one of Aman's daughters, told us as their faces lightened up with smiles that their mother "sits and she tells us stories about her childhood memories, and we laugh. She tells us about the time she met our father." Nucan reflected that she spends time with her family this way: "we sit with each other and we see fun things, thinking, like remembering Iraq and happy memories from Iraq and we laugh." A few of the Yazidi refugee mothers identified grocery shopping as a fun activity that they would do with their children. However, this should be looked at in a context in which that the Yazidi mothers have close to no other means to take their children out for fun activities. In addition to these, Yazidi women socialize with their community members, host their children's friends, and invite their Family Hosts for collective meals.

Yazidi refugee mothers and caregivers work hard at managing the absence of key figures such as fathers, siblings, and grandparents in their household in order for their families to adapt to the new life situation. Their *maternal strategies* in this sense are directed towards extending themselves to make up for the absence of the support that the presence of such key figures could

provide. Whether it is creating happy moments for their families or managing multiple medical appointments with language and transportation limitations, Yazidi refugee mothers use themselves as resources as well as seeking out external resources. In order to manage their lack of support, they try to work around their trust issues and actively reach out to CCIS staff and Family Hosts for help who are important resources for managing their resettlement process.

### *3.3.2 Maternal strategies by extended caregivers towards the resettlement of the Yazidi community.*

In terms of care and relationship with people outside of the Yazidi community, CCIS staff and Family Hosts are the first (often only) groups directly providing care and attention to the Yazidi families. The relationship with CCIS staff (except for Kazhan and Bella who are mainly known as sister and/or mother) remains professional by default as it is the staff's job to provide service and as they are associated with an institution (CCIS). The Family Hosts are in many cases known as Canadian family members by the Yazidi families and in other cases, as close and reliable Canadian friends.

Several sources have confirmed that when the Yazidi started arriving in Calgary and at the CCIS resettlement house, MCRC, extensive measures were put into place to accommodate the group (see background chapter). On one hand, CCIS took initiatives beyond their standard program as an institution to provide the Yazidi community with the best capacity to resettle in Calgary and start their new lives. This ranges from finding new sources of funding to advocacy for their reunification processes, creating positions and program on a needs basis, hiring staff based on their connection with the community, providing families with TVs out of donations to help them connect with the world outside and improve language acquisition, to holding



demonstrations for the community, creating a soccer team, arranging farming activities, and more. CCIS reached out of its usual practice as an institution to help the Yazidi community feel at home. Tantamount to such an approach towards the resettlement of the group is the management of the organization that has taken a maternal stance toward the Yazidi community due to their trauma and experience of genocide. I identify it as maternal because the efforts of CCIS in terms of resettlement did not end with the basics of resettlement which are housing, employment, language, and medical services, but went to provide services for the social and personal emotional wellbeing of the Yazidi community.

CCIS staff who have been working with the community closely, regardless of gender and position, have generally gone beyond their job descriptions and have reflected the same approach in their personal interactions and service provision to the Yazidi community. However, there were nuances to the extent to which they would go. In *CCIS staff as extended caregivers*, I will focus on the efforts by women who have worked as key CCIS staff with the Yazidi community to illustrate that the gaps in funding or programming for the resettlement of Yazidi refugees in Calgary have been filled with the efforts of these women who took their roles beyond their job descriptions.

Further, in *Family Hosts as Canadian family members and maternal figures*, I will show that what care and service remain missing from CCIS staff's contributions due to the limitations that CCIS staff face such as busy schedules and pluralities of cases, gets filled with the efforts of Family Hosts. Most of the Family Hosts assigned to the Yazidi families are Canadian women and almost all our participants except a handful told us that they had a positive relationship with the Hosts.

*CCIS staff as extended caregivers.*

Among the CCIS staff who worked closely with the Yazidi community, women are overrepresented. This is partly because most of the Yazidi refugees are women and girls and would only work with women as counselors and interpreters. In our findings, some of the Yazidi families expressed dissatisfaction or distant relationships with CCIS – more often with a particular staff member whom they had faced issues with. Nonetheless, by far the majority expressed satisfaction and gratitude towards CCIS and admitted their reliance on CCIS. Further, our findings and observations showed that the Yazidi community has maintained their relationship with CCIS on an as-needed basis.

Most of the staff I interviewed expressed that their cell phones were on 24/7 especially during the first two years and that they were working outside of their business hours. The resettlement of Yazidis in Calgary is entering its third year – the majority of families came in large clusters within 2017 and 2018. The staff who have been involved with the group particularly faced challenges due to the amount of work and size of the families that needed help. In many cases, the staff took personal time and sometimes resources to answer calls from the community, interpret, accompany, support, and be there for their needs. In addition, the key CCIS staff who worked with the Yazidi community maintained a personal relationship with the families by visiting them, calling them, advocating for them, and attending their community events.

Except for the CEO of CCIS' resettlement center (MCRC), the key figures in the resettlement of Yazidi refugees in Calgary who worked with the families on a daily basis and one on one have been by majority women. Bella, who is the resettlement manager of CCIS' resettlement house, has been responsible for the Yazidi community from day one and knows

each Yazidi refugee personally. Throughout the multiple visits and interactions that I had with Bella, I was continuously impressed by her closeness with the Yazidi community and her up to date awareness of their issues and status. Despite her busy schedule, Bella always took the time to check up on her staff and ensured their well being in a motherly/sisterly way. She knew which of her staff has a hard time sitting due to her back pain and which of the families were facing an urgent issue. During our interview with her, she answered her phone and when she picked up and heard one of the counselor's shaky voice, her tone reflected her concern and she ran upstairs to see if the counselor was doing okay. Kazhan is the other key figure in the resettlement of Yazidi refugees in Calgary- one without whom the resettlement process would have likely failed since she was the only Yazidi in Calgary and therefore one of the very few people who knew the language. Kazhan was described by several families as well as CCIS staff as the "sister" to the Yazidi refugee families, particularly the single mothers. Bella illustrates the kind of work they do beyond their duty with an example as follows:

I'll give you an example; for the Yazidi member that recently passed away, me, Kazhan, and Sara [another counselor] stayed with the family until nine o'clock on a Friday night. And so, um, that type of thing. And Kazhan, by the way, is taking the second body to Iraq [she has done the same for another Yazidi body who passed away in Calgary]. So she'll be gone for 15 days again. So that's the kind of call beyond duty. If I really want to talk about beyond that, I'll talk about Kazhan because this woman has her Bluetooth phone connected to her ear, 24/7. That's no exaggeration. She has been in the birthing room of every single Yazidi who's given birth. In fact, the big joke is that for one of the first Yazidi kids being born in Calgary, Kazhan was there and when they went to fill-up the

form, somehow there was some miscommunication and it, they had the mom's name and then they had Kazhan's name down. I was like, this is quite funny.

Bella implied that the incident is funny because Kazhan has been so involved with the Yazidi refugee families that this could be as well true. As an example of Yazidi families' testimony to the efforts of Kazhan, a large household with two single mothers and multiple young adults described their satisfaction with CCIS this way:

Kazhan was the only one helping at the beginning. We were blind, we didn't know anything, we didn't know how to get around or speak the language and she was the only one speaking Kurmanji, so she was helping a lot for medical appointments or if we wanted to go somewhere.

Later Bella shared that she thinks something "unworldly" has been driving Kazhan all this time because she handles so much work and hasn't burned out. Kazhan herself talked about her work during the first two years of the Yazidi's resettlement as follows:

In 2014, I also had lost 54 members of my family in Sinjar, like cousins, uncle... we still don't know what happened to those family members and me and my husband were having a very hard time because of the losses. So in 2017, I was really excited to see any Yazidis from my country. Me and my husband I tried to help- like our family. Any Yazidi family that came here we thought oh my brother, my cousin, my sister ... we helped them 24 hours. Sometimes I stayed in the hospital [ with a Yazidi family] until morning and in the morning, I went to work. This was for the first and second year that me and my husband worked like that. My husband would come during weekends when he was home, we would leave our children at home and go help the community. Different

things- sometimes my husband would take them shopping. Especially with single mothers with high needs, we helped them more than families who had a man in the household because we thought the man would help them to some extent. ... I kept working 24 hours. Like sometimes at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning I was on the phone to translate for the Yazidis. I gained more weight because I was depressed [she lightly laughs], I slept less, I ate more. But now I am helping myself a little bit- eating less sleeping more. It was very hard for me in the beginning. If you talked to me in 2017 or 2018 you would have seen me cry 100 percent. But now is a little different.

Kazhan is one of the CCIS staff who are part of the Yazidi community, nonetheless, her role as a CCIS counselor has allowed her to provide much needed service to the Yazidi community. A combination of her role as a staff at CCIS who goes above and beyond and a community member that wants to share her resources has given her the stance she has as the key contact between CCIS and the Yazidi refugee community in Calgary. For Kazhan, a sense of familial relationship existed before the newly resettled Yazidi refugees had come to Calgary. Therefore, the significance of the relationship between Kazhan and Yazidi refugees is two-sided as it has provided Kazhan with benefits such as sharing grief and a sense of community as well.

All the CCIS staff I interviewed reflected that they felt very supported by their team and especially by Bella. Considering the emotionally tiring work with the Yazidi community and the amount of work to be done with little staff who spoke the language, the CCIS team really relied on each other to go through days one by one. Kazhan describes the sense of support she received from her team this way:

Honestly, Bella is amazing. Like every time I told her I want to sit with you for like even 5 minutes she was there and I took my medicine from her. Bella, Lydia, the CEO, Sara ...

if one day I wasn't feeling good they would send me home to rest or take vacations and it really helped me in that way. Especially Bella- if she saw me like [tired or overwhelmed] she would say okay you are not feeling okay you have something and come talk with me. And we would sit and talk if there was a problem with a Yazidi family we tried to help each other. And was the same with Lydia.

Other staff too shared that despite the urgency of their work, they never faced problems asking for time off from work and that the management of CCIS was very empathetic towards their needs. Nonetheless, some of the other key figures who worked hard in the beginning year(s) to support the Yazidi community eventually burned out and left CCIS—as Bella described:

We had people drop. Like just drop like flies because they could not keep up. They couldn't deal with the stories. They couldn't deal with the amount of energy it took, the amount of follow up, the amount of non-therapeutic supportive counseling it took.

One of these staff who no longer works at CCIS was Shila who Bella talked about in appreciation:

She also went beyond the call of duty, not just once, but many, many, many weekends or evenings where she would spend time with the client family, take them to church events or whatnot to get them kind of out of the house and kind of integrated.

The relations between these key women and the Yazidi community within their resettlement process is best described by Lydia, a caseworker who coordinates and supervises the needs of the community:

I am like a stepsister. Bella is the mother, Kazhan the sister, and I am the stepsister. It is mainly because I came to the project later and they did not interact with me from the start and I don't speak the language. Continuity is important to the Yazidi community and so they always come to me through Kazhan - they don't come to me directly for any issues. Now they have started trusting me more but still, they are more bonded with Kazhan and Bella than me.

Trust is particularly a sensitive and challenging issue for the Yazidi community – not just because of the recent genocide but because of a history of collective experiences of exclusion and discrimination. The CCIS staff are aware of the trust challenge with the Yazidi community, especially women who have been severely hurt by people outside of their community. The CCIS staff that I interviewed, especially the women in key roles, were empathetic towards any negative perception or expressed dissatisfaction from the Yazidi community. For example, Kazhan said:

I hear it from people. Or sometimes they say it face to face – but more from other people about me that I am not helping them, not doing anything for them, or I don't take them anywhere or don't take stuff to them. But I am okay. It's a little bit hard it hurts my feelings but after that, I say you know they are going through a lot. Yes, I am missing my family too but maybe I'm a little bit more strong than these people.

The expressed empathy to understand the negative feedback also occurred in the narratives of the other staff I interviewed. They also expressed that they understand the community and that all of the systems are very new to the Yazidi community. Also, on multiple occasions, Bella expressed that she feels proud when she hears Yazidi refugees criticize the services they receive or are vocal about what they want because she sees it as an outcome of their

successful resettlement and that they have gained the confidence to stand for themselves. These empathic approaches are beyond professional sentiments and are in many ways expressed in a maternal way. The women in key roles at CCIS also portray this maternal aspect by making exceptions in the resettlement practice for the benefit of the Yazidi community – for example taking on new tasks or not following the *standard* resettlement practice dos and don'ts in order to accommodate the needs of the community.

Jane is the coordinator of the Community Connections for Newcomers (known as the Family Host program) at CCIS and has been involved with the resettlement of Yazidis from the beginning. She shared:

By definition, all Yazidi clients are very heavily traumatized. So, we [created] the position with the traumatized clients. It was just one person and as soon as this big group Yazidi clients arrived, we just realize it's too much for one person and you know, any changes in terms of government funding, it always takes forever. We had to make a decision in our program and within the program to use the resources we had and work with the traumatized people. I normally would just work with the Community Connection program, not with the traumatized clients, but as I said, the program for traumatized clients had only one person. It was not enough. So we made that switch and it just because I had been working for so long [27 years at CCIS], then hopefully the experience that I have had allowed me to, you know to be prepared to support those clients as well.

Another example of such strategies to overcome structural gaps and lack of available resources is portrayed in what Kazhan shared below which shows how the needs of the community were prioritized over job description and practice:



Every time Bella tells me... because we have to work 9 to 5. Bella tells me to not answer my phone after 5. But I can't. I have to answer. You know because it is especially hard for the Yazidi. Doesn't matter if they are a single mother or with their husbands. They still can't even call 911 if they need help. We have told them more than 100 times, 100 times we have done orientations, but still, they call me. We tell them okay if you have a problem, for example, someone has fallen down you have to call 911 and say the language and that's it. But they call me before and after and I have to call 911. We have a couple of families that are young and have better English, but all the other ones still need such help after almost 3 years.

In theory, Bella does not agree with the dependency relationship that is created between the Yazidi community and Kazhan. However, Bella also knows that Kazhan holds the fragile trust of the Yazidi community and the community needs her and therefore, Bella is too empathic towards the work that is done outside of her staff's job description:

Kazhan became more like a big sister, um, for some of those younger Yazidi girls, a motherly role rather than a counselor. And even though that's not healthy, *in any other case, I would be screaming no, no, no, no*. And I was, I was screaming it, but at the same time, I think it [the extra efforts] was needed. The Yazidi refugees didn't have anybody else and there were huge gaps in their souls. And so Kazhan was able to at least try to cover a little bit of that. She took the first Yazidi [who passed away in Calgary] body back to Iraq. She and her husband, her children have sacrificed every weekend for the last three years. She's always visiting every family on the weekends, cooking food, spending her own money.

Kazhan mentioned that she still regularly visits the Yazidi families and talks with a number of single mothers daily. Bella also is still engaged with the Yazidi community beyond her role—for example, in a narrative, I addressed earlier, she mentioned that she was at a recent Yazidi funeral until nine pm on a Friday night. Lydia, who is a caseworker, shared that for CCIS's management the services they would provide the Yazidi community have been thought of as technically extending for three years, however, that they intend to never turn a Yazidi in need away regardless of when they turn to them.

For women like Kazhan and Bella, such connection and commitment to their work have led to them sacrificing mothering for their own children and family to be present at work and provide 24/7 care to the Yazidi community. Kazhan shared:

In the beginning, my kids were very angry because they were like mom we can't see you at home. First year and second year it was difficult for them. In the weekends I also leave my kids. I left home at 9 and came back home at 8-9 pm took a shower and slept. Sometimes I couldn't talk with my kids because I don't have time. I went home my kids were sleeping or at school. At the weekend morning, we only said hi we ate breakfast together, and then I left. My husband was also sometimes not staying at home in the first year and it was very difficult. My children were born here. But now it's better. And now they understand those are our people and they need help. Sometimes they ask me: mom, do you want to go visit this family to help or do you want to do to a doctor's appointment or something like that?

For Kazhan, her connection to the community and her eagerness to truly help the Yazidi community has created a blend of maternal care provision between her own family and the

Yazidi families. With regards to her own family, Bella showed the reflections of her family in a sarcastic comment from her mother:

My mom said to me: “so we have to become refugees to get your attention?” So, that should say it all.

*Maternal strategies* by CCIS staff within the resettlement process of Yazidi refugees in Calgary consists of the staff going above and beyond their job descriptions in how deeply they empathize with the community, sacrificing their personal time, and engaging in everyday matters of Yazidi refugee families. There are of course variations in the degree to which CCIS staff may express their care in relation to the Yazidi refugee families however, the key CCIS staff who have been working the closest with the community have been involved with the Yazidi families beyond their call of duty. Such key actors rely on their personal connections to the Yazidi refugee community as mothers, caregivers, refugees, and in the case of a few staff, as community members themselves.

The motherly/sisterly efforts of key CCIS staff in working with the given circumstances have played out in different ways. CCIS management and staff have created new programs and protocols to adjust to available resources and/or create new resources through different avenues. Whether it is gathering donations to send a Yazidi body back home or to attend to their social events and/or attend to the families in the weekends, CCIS key staff have strategized to respond to the needs of the Yazidi refugee community while there are gaps in terms of financial and service-oriented resources. An example to clarify the necessity of the personal and social efforts CCIS staff have made to the resettlement of Yazidi refugees is the relationship that CCIS resettlement manager and other key counselors have maintained with Yazidi refugee families. Such personal relationships have enabled the staff to work around the trust issues that the Yazidi

refugee community has, especially the women, due to the genocide and traumatic events they have experienced. CCIS staff actively invent strategies based on the needs they identify in the community in order to be able to do their jobs. Nonetheless, these strategies are *maternal* as they require personal care, time, and empathy that are often viewed through a gendered lens and as women's innate way. Therefore, the effort and agency in such efforts are often overlooked.

*Family Hosts as Canadian family members and maternal figures.*

The Family Hosts are about 83 percent Canadian women and in a majority of the cases, they are older adults or seniors<sup>17</sup>—in some cases, their spouse/partner/friend is also involved. They have helped the Yazidis refugee families with making appointments, taking them to grocery stores and their medical appointments, and practicing English with the family members among other things. One of the most important services they provided the families have been taking the children out to parks, zoos, physical activities, and so on. Therefore, what the Family Hosts provided the Yazidi families, and in particular the Yazidi mothers, was service and care of a familial kind. In the case of the 28-year-old mother of two, Dersima, and her husband, their Family Host has done “even more than [their] parents for them”. Family Hosts would help or take charge of children's education and homework, take initiative to help the adult members improve their English, take them around the city and provide them with rides. Even though the Family Hosts were all Canadian and did not know Kurmanji at all, they accompanied the women to their medical appointments. Family Hosts have been extremely helpful with the few

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<sup>17</sup> As mentioned in the Methodology section in Chapter 2, a visual representation of gender and age characteristics of Family Hosts can be found in Appendix D.

childbirths in the community by being present and giving the women rides. In addition, in many cases, the Family Hosts would visit the families regularly and would invite them to their house.

The Yazidi families found the services that the Family Hosts provided them the most gratifying. They often told us that the Family Host was like their parents and/or very close relatives and friends. Ezin is a 39-year-old mother of 5 children who lives with her husband in a suburban kind of area, far from other Yazidi families. She has four boys ranging from 13- 20 years of age and a five-year-old daughter. Ezin also has another son who is still in a camp in Iraq – during our interview, Ezin showed our team the videos of the flood that had occurred in her son's camp multiple times. We could tell that the recent events had left Ezin with deep scars. She talked about her Family Host this way:

She is still visiting us. And she said that until when you are in Calgary, I will be visiting you. She is also the one who got us all those gifts [referring to boxes at the end of the living room with some toys and PlayStation drum set] for our kids and she is coming tonight to take them to a game. She keeps telling me I'm your sister or your mom. So, whenever I'm tired or sad she is the one who relieves me. We do like her a lot. She is so good. Whenever she can make it she comes to our house, she is so nice.

Family Hosts technically have signed an agreement with CCIS known as a contract for the duration of one year, nonetheless, many of the Family Hosts echo Ezin's Family Host in keeping their relationships beyond the contract period. For Yazidi women and mothers like Ezin, the relationships that they create with their Family Hosts are considered valuable by the families. Many of the narratives that were shared in this study showed that for the Yazidi families, relationship with Canadians symbolizes them being welcomed to Canada. The quote below from

Nucan, a 52-year-old mother with four adult kids echo the relationships between most of the Yazidi refugee families who have a positive relationship with their Family Host:

Like whenever we need something, we ask her and she's very helpful, so she has helped us a lot. Whenever she has spare time, she texts us and asks if we are free and she comes over and asks if we need anything and she comes over and she is really good. Whenever she comes to our house I don't know how to speak with her in English and I try to use body language, I tell her to eat and she tells me "I don't want to get fat" [using the gesture – they all laugh].

The narrative of Nucan resembles the closeness she feels with her Family Host who is also a woman. Many of the Yazidi women and mothers spoke with confidence about the help that their Family Host offers them and expressed their gratitude. There were a few cases that the families were unhappy with their Family Host as they were not helpful or not attending to their needs or that they did not show up, however, the majority of the cases received at least some services from the Family Hosts. Satisfaction was expressed if the Family Host visited the Yazidi family and spent time with them regardless of whether they provided them with services and/or resources. Jane, the coordinator of the CCNC program (Family Host) reiterates the significance of the relationship that Family Hosts have been able to create as follows:

I think if we're talking about the Yazidi population specifically, I believe that [with the absence of Family Host volunteers] the feeling of safety, the feeling of trust, you know, would not be there and healing [for the Yazidi refugee families] would not happen as readily as it is happening right now. I think that social interaction, that human interaction, and positive interaction, um, lead people to heal and trusting relationships are the most crucial for people in that [resettlement] process.

Jane's quote here reflects the role that Family Hosts play for the Yazidi refugee families which is in many ways mediating. Just like how CCIS staff rely on their personal connections with the Yazidi refugee community and go beyond their job descriptions to accommodate their social and personal needs, Family Hosts do the same in their own way. Family Hosts in many ways act beyond the common duties of a volunteer because they pursue their personal relationships with Yazidi families and by doing so have been helping them to trust their new society. As Jane points out, this aspect is a crucial one to the resettlement of this particular community due to their long history of social discrimination and their experiences during the ISIS-led genocide.

Daniels (1987) offers a useful analogy for understanding how important and crucial women's "invisible work" is in homemaking and maintaining community by encourages us to ask how things would work if women's efforts in such tasks were not present (406). Moreover, how much getting the tasks done would cost by paid labour (for tasks that do have an equivalent in the labor market), and if the task(s) can be replaced by another actor (for ones that are untransferable to the labor market such as customized and tailored catering to the taste of a particular family) (Daniels 1987: 406- 407). To follow the same analogy in the context of the present study would be to think how the resettlement process would work without the invisible work of the Family Host volunteers who work with Yazidi refugees, whom are by majority women and go beyond their job descriptions and women in caregiving roles within refugee families who strategize around shortcomings of the service provision. Further, would there be an equivalent of such service within the labour market if one was willing to pay? The answer may be complex and beyond the scope of this chapter, however, the present research does report findings that answer the question to a great extent by showing the dependency of the resettlement

structure on the “invisible work” of those who provide it. I asked Jane, the coordinator of the Host volunteer program<sup>18</sup> at CCIS, the same question: “if this Host volunteer program was to stop, what would happen in the resettlement of Yazidi refugees, what issues would come up?” Jane answered by emphasizing the reliance of CCIS staff on the Family Host volunteers on a daily basis for getting their job (taking care of resettlement needs of Yazidi refugees) done:

Its really hard to just imagine that, but, it [stopping the program] would have a tremendous effect on the resettlement services because with smaller things, questions that volunteers can help with, Yazidi families would be all going back to the resettlement counselors.... Volunteers are able to catch up on some gaps and, you know, help the families to realize what matters should be looked after. So, I think there would be a lot of things that would go on unseen and could cause many more deep problems. I think lots of things [would be lost] ... from my day to day interactions with volunteers, refugee families are asking about things like all a bus pass. And again, those are small things falling into cracks, which is natural. But if it was not for the Family Host volunteers to pick it up, things would go wrong. All the volunteers are applying for subsidies for the kids' programs and those applications are so complex and so lengthy – it's really hard to go through those. Um, I don't think that would happen if it wasn't for the support of the volunteers. (Jane, April 8, 2019)

Yazidi refugee families also have acknowledged their reliance on the presence of Family Hosts by repeatedly expressing their gratitude and appreciation for what they have done. For example, a 25-year-old newlywed woman whose husband is still in Iraq says:

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<sup>18</sup> Officially the program is titled Community Connections for Newcomers program.



whenever we have an appointment and we don't know how to get there the Family Host will help us and drive us there, whenever we want to go to the supermarket, she will drive us there. When I had to talk to a lawyer for my husband, she helped me and took me to a lawyer, and also, I have been doing a part-time job and I had very early shifts like 6 am. So, I have to leave the house like 5 am and at the beginning, I didn't know how to get to the location and my Family Host was the one who helped me to go there. Sometimes they [the Family Hosts] will come and have dinner or lunch with us.

For many of the Yazidi refugee families in Calgary, Family Hosts cross the lines of being volunteers and step into their family zone which entails engaging in the kind of "invisible work" that women/mothers would usually provide their families in order to take care of their well being. A 21-year-old single woman reflected "I love her [her Family Host] so much she is kind and helpful and she tells me anything that you want I can help you. She takes me shopping and to the hair salon."

The Family Hosts provide care that is crucial to the resettlement experiences of Yazidi families. This form of care makes the families feel like they are part of the Canadian society, that they have friends outside of their own communities, and they have a support network. The absence of this form of care has a material impact on the lives of Yazidi families. Peri, a 35-year-old single mother of five children portrays this by saying "My girls are very poor, other Family Hosts are taking the kids to show them around the city but my kids they haven't been out. We've been here for a year and a half and we haven't even been to a park."

When Peri says, her girls are poor she is not referring to monetary poverty. She means they are experientially poor since they are deprived of what is available to other children who

have more involved Family Hosts. Family Hosts then become an important bridge to the new countries' norms and ways of life for these families, whose absence is felt as a loss for the families. They replace familial care that Yazidi families have left behind when they became refugees.

Care work, especially the maternal form of care, is often invisible, nonetheless, it is perhaps the most central to the resettlement process of the Yazidi families who have lost so much of their support system. Family Hosts are able to make up for the Yazidi families' lost care system by providing service and support to them in a familial way which is the main part of *maternal strategies* offered by Family Hosts. Family Hosts indulge in resettlement work that would normally be provided by professional resettlement staff such as school registration, help with communication, outreach, advocacy, education, well being, accessing information, and integration into the Canadian society. On the other hand, majority of Family Hosts maintain a personal and/or familial relationship with the Yazidi families to help them through their resettlement process; the most important outcome of the *maternal strategies* utilized by Family Hosts to enable resettlement of Yazidi refugees in Calgary is the human relationships that symbolize connection to and acceptance of the Canadian society for the Yazidi refugee families.

### *3.4 Discussion and Conclusion*

There are two other things to learn and take inspiration from Daniels' (1987) work: one, is that within the neoliberal structure, anything that is not present and involved with the market gets pushed to the margins and is not valued. The *maternal strategies* I refer to are specifically and mainly within the private sphere with no direct engagement with the market. Nonetheless, this is just the surface. In reality, without these strategies at home, many of the opportunities in

public life would be missed. For example, if a woman doesn't provide her family with enough nutrition, that person may be deprived of other opportunities that need their energy. Second, that the value given to tasks is class-based. For low-income mothers, "working with inadequate supplies and resources to do the job [of mothering]," for taking care of the families' needs, and maintaining the household, is a familiar way of life (Daniels 1987; De Vault 1999). Thus, managing disadvantaged conditions for low-income mothers seems like a default way of life and thus, is invisible.

However, when it comes to women's caregiving within families as an extension and a necessary component of the resettlement process, little has been written to acknowledge this type of care work as beyond the household. Thus, I argue that the caregiving work that women (Yazidi mothers, maternal figures, CCIS staff, and women Family Hosts) do within their household is the most "invisible" of all (Daniels 1987). This lack of acknowledgment by drawing attention to the fact that tasks that fit inside invisible work are viewed as a naturally feminine talent which is expected of women to express. If a male counterpart does the same act, it would be recognized and valued differently (Daniels 1987; Moon 2003; Brainer 2017; Banerjee 2018; Romero 2018; Banerjee 2019; Chung, Young, and Kerr 2019; Manohar 2019). In general, as Daniels (1987) states, "work in the private sphere is regarded as less important" (404).

My research shows that the change within Yazidi refugee families who left their conflicted homes, often directly from refugee camps, and were resettled in Calgary, Canada, is not so much a change of gender expectations within their families but a change that occurred in the form of shaping a new set of *maternal strategies* within each family to mediate their resettlement process and cope with their new lives. It is these employed *maternal strategies* that fill the gaps in service provision and make resettlement possible – though not necessarily a

completely successful one. The strategies are primarily implemented by women, though men may initiate and utilize them too, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. The strategies are more specifically inventions of mothers and female caregivers, which includes women who provide care for children and community members in various roles, as mothers, sisters, relatives, as well as volunteers and staff at a resettlement agency within the resettlement structure.

Within the Yazidi refugee families, these strategies are aimed at maintaining the family and making the homes homey and they include cooking with low budget and absence of ethnic familiar food, rewarding children in different ways because of what they have been through during the war, captivity and displacement (making food they like came up a few times), bringing Canadian elements into the home, moving in between houses to reduce costs, combining households (either to be with family or reduce costs) and sharing food, using different strategies to handle new life situations including sharing money with community members (borrowing/lending) to deal with the shortage of money or delays in payments, working hard at the new language, teaching community members about the ins and outs of life in Canada, sharing cars/rides, and more.

Nonetheless, these *maternal strategies* are not limited to the works of families inside households, it is also formed by service provider staff (counselors, interpreters, management) who work at the resettlement agency, CCIS, who adapted to the unique situation and needs of resettling the Yazidi refugees. In the case of the service provider staff at CCIS, these strategies are present as they fill in the gaps of service provision structure by offering their personal time and resources. Whether it is showing up at the hospital for birth deliveries or surgeries, personal visits of the families, following up with families, or participating in their events, mediating-empathic-personal care is invisibly part of the staff's care provision.

The role of the Family Hosts is most highlighted as they become involved in the utilization of the *maternal strategies* and take over the fulfillment of some of the needed acts both in terms of what CCIS staff offer refugee families (answering simple questions, transportation, appointments, advocacy) and what needs to happen within each Yazidi family (buying gifts, fun time, city tours, activities, visits, sharing food, ...). Further, the relationship they create with the Yazidi families is crucial to them, specifically to Yazidi mothers who in many cases are missing key maternal and sisterly figures (as well as paternal) due to war and displacement.

Even though *maternal strategies* make resettlement possible for the Yazidi refugee families, there is a part of the needed care that remains unattended and un- mediatable which is due to the absence of key care figures such as mothers, parents, siblings, and children. These are again expressed in different means by both men and women but more so with women as they express unattended needs in childcare, family support in times of medical surgeries, parenting guidance for young parents, emotional support, and more.

In Yazidi households with more adult members, the use of *maternal strategies* seem to be divided: if the women live with their sisters or other women, care for children and attention to their well being, care after the house, etc., is divided to some extent and the families have more resources. In families that are solely headed by a woman, or in families with only one adult woman (mother of young children) the use of strategies is primarily about managing the financial and material side of their family life and basically, surviving.

Just like how “change in family structure” brings about change in nature and “amount of work involved in building family,” with forced displacement and resettlement, the work that women take in caregiving roles adapts to the new circumstances and to working with available

resources and despite present challenges (Daniels 1987). *Maternal strategies* spotlight the neoliberal set of strategies that reduce state responsibility towards the social well-being and welfare of refugees among other groups. As Wood et al. (2012) also argued, neoliberal strategies aim to “rely on the individual and the market, rather than conceive of society as a whole” and refrain from “invest[ing] in the collective interests” (22). That is, neoliberal strategies, encourage and compel people to “rely on their own and their household’s resources for their reproduction” (23). *Maternal strategies* are everyday responses to neoliberal restructuring of the social and political life that solely seek to maximize the market and “individual utility” (22). Within neoliberal cities, settlement of refugees is particularly challenging as there is ongoing unequal access to public resources, reproduction of unequal forms of social exclusion, and constant “unshackle” of social actors from “social and political constraints” (22-23). which necessitate the emergence of *maternal strategies*.

In this chapter, I am calling the efforts and contributions of women as Yazidi mothers and caregivers, as CCIS staff, and as Family Hosts within the resettlement process of Yazidi refugees in Calgary as *maternal strategies*. I am extending the idea of invisible work by making the active role of these women, especially Yazidi refugee mothers, and the significance of the ways they manage limitations of services and resources within the resettlement complex, visible. By *maternal strategies*, I highlight the work that these women do as actors of resettlement as an actively planned, assessed, and executed set of strategies that are maternal in how their use is made possible through personal, familial, and caring relationships. Further, I separate maternal work from the work that biological mothers do and include work that women do for other women even outside familial relations. This thesis de-essentializes and decouples maternal work

from what is commonly perceived as work mothers do particularly in regard to the resettlement of refugee families with complex needs.

## CONCLUSION

Yazidi refugees entered Canada starting from 2017 and under a national initiative to host about 1200<sup>19</sup> Yazidi refugees under the Survivors of Daesh Program. Yazidis' horrific recent journey through genocide, captivity, displacement and war has left the community with extensive physical, mental, and emotional needs. The Canadian neoliberal approach towards social services and a neoliberal economic structure further complicates the resettlement process for refugee groups in general-- especially with regards to the pressure it imposes on refugee communities for gaining independence and becoming active agents in the labour market in a short amount of time. This is compounded by the minimal considerations for the unique needs of high needs refugee groups. The challenges that the Yazidi refugee community has been facing in Canada echoes many of the common challenges that previous studies have referred to in relation to other groups of refugees, such as language acquisition, lack of employment- specifically due to lack of Canadian experience and low language levels, housing and scattered communities in Calgary, dealing with mental and emotional needs and living with trauma. Nonetheless, despite the commonalities there are also differences between Yazidi refugees and other groups including but not limited to level of trauma, lack of formal and or written education in English, and speaking Kurmanji which is an underrepresented language in Canada.

About 265 Yazidi refugees (52 families) live in Calgary, Canada, who excluding a handful of families, were all interviewed for this study. The majority of the Yazidi community is comprised of women and girls-- many are single mothers who live alone or with their relatives and/or family members in a shared household. The intensity of Yazidi refugees' challenges in

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<sup>19</sup> As discussed in chapter one, this number grew in later reports and is inconsistent among sources- more recent news sources cite this number as 1400 (MacLean 2019).



Calgary mostly drives from their immense trauma, absence or limited availability of a personal support system, and loss of key figures in the household. Many of the Yazidi families still have children, spouses, parents, siblings, and relatives missing and/or in camps in Iraq living under excruciating circumstances. Therefore, family reunification is particularly important to the Yazidi community.

The resettlement process of Yazidi refugees in Calgary is a combination of *maternal strategies* that work in line with the available structures of service provision and resources. These strategies are extensions of everyday efforts to ensure livelihood by women in roles as mothers, resettlement staff, and volunteers. In other words, *maternal strategies* can be thought of as an intertwined and mutual web of contributions and acts of support that together hold the nest for the resettlement of Yazidi refugee families in Calgary. The significance of this web of support reflects the absence of a more structured state support as well as the domination of a neoliberal culture for livelihood in Canada. That is because the neoliberal culture stems from an ideology that focuses on individuality and merit, according to Canadian standards in this case. For the Yazidi refugee community, the shift into a society shaped by ideals of work and wage is more complicated because of their background; the majority of Yazidis lack a formal education and/or literacy and have previously lived as farmers. From adjustment to social spending and implementation of cost managing strategies, it is the skills of the Yazidi refugee community and the help of persons who support them through everyday challenges that has kept the wheel of resettlement moving for the Yazidi in Calgary.

#### *4.1 Theorizing Maternal Strategies*

What distinguishes *maternal strategies* from the invisible work of women, discussed in the feminist research, although overlapping and not mutually exclusive, is that *maternal*

*strategies* capture the adaptation of multiple roles by women in caregiving roles. *Maternal strategies* specify the extra work that women take in addition and on top of their usual caregiving and domestic responsibilities. For the Yazidi mothers, especially the single mothers, they have to take multiple roles as lost fathers, siblings, relatives and more. In addition, they become agents of resettlement within their household in performing tasks to assist with the resettlement process. For CCIS staff, they take the role of a familial-personally related caregiver. The Family Host volunteers take the extra role of acting like professional resettlement staff in assisting the families with registration, transportation, communication, employment, integration and understanding and using the Canadian social system. Many of the Family Hosts maintained a personal and often familial like relationship with Yazidi refugee families, however, a number maintained a professional-like relationship with them where they only provided educational and minor resettlement services.

Further, *maternal strategies* refer to the invisible work of women in a particular way; their efforts and contributions to the resettlement system gets lost and overlooked while without them, the resettlement process would not operate- at least in the specific case of the Yazidi refugees in Calgary. *Maternal strategies* also come at the expense of the women sacrificing services and circumstances that are of benefit to their personal self. Yazidi mothers sacrifice their English acquisition and attending mental health support sessions among other things to manage their time to attend to their family. For the CCIS staff and volunteers, they sacrifice their personal time and the time and attention they would give to their own families. *Maternal strategies* are the efforts that are strategized to enable survival and to make up for the absence of adequate resources.

Many of these *maternal strategies* rely on creating and maintaining relationships in order to overcome barriers and limitations of access and affordability of resources and services. These relationships among the resettlement staff, Family Host volunteers, and Yazidi refugee community members act as ways to manage the existing challenges in resettlement. In that sense, these relationships can be perceived as resettlement-oriented in many cases. Yazidi refugee families manage their limitations in communication and navigation of the new life through their personal relationships with staff, Family Hosts volunteers, and their community. For CCIS staff, maintaining relationships with the refugee families enables them to access the community through trust building which facilitates their ability to provide services. Furthermore, the Family Host volunteers become an additional connection between the professional staff, the refugee families, and the greater Canadian society. For the Family Hosts, maintaining their relationship with CCIS coordinators and staff as well as the families, allows them to perform the role they have chosen to play as volunteers. Nonetheless, the significance of the role that Family Hosts play as volunteers stems from the absence of funding and structural support for more paid opportunities for attending to the needs of the refugee community, a lack of adequate culturally appropriate mental and emotional support, and the responsibility in service provision that has shifted to the shoulders of the refugee families and the existing staff.

This thesis reflects the limitations of the research study, which include having precise data in some areas— some of the data surrounding the Family Host, in terms of the age of the volunteers or income and expenditure are left in a grey area. This is because, the emphasis of Dr. Banerjee as the principle investigator of the project as well as my own was not to focus on getting exact numbers. Also, a number of the Yazidi refugee families were not sure of some of the facts of their own resettlement. Another limitation surrounds the fact that I did not speak

Kurmanji and relied on the interpretation I received from the interpreter. Although our interpreter was able to capture nuances and participated in the debrief sessions after each interview, the amount of information and narratives shared, especially when families did not agree to voice recording, led to the loss of some exact wording of narratives. However, from each interview, the information, the stories, and the meaning of the sentences have been recorded with great attention.

Regarding the main focus of this thesis, I highlighted the role of women as actors because, on one hand, women are overrepresented in the most integral roles within the resettlement process. Secondly, the type of work that so delicately sits in between service and policy gaps is mostly in the realm that is often perceived to be gendered. Women and mothers are often read as innately wanting to invest in the home and caring of others and/or creating friendly and personal relationships. My thesis brings attention to the active and strategic role that women play within the resettlement process as mothers, resettlement staff, and Family Host volunteers. The focus that my thesis puts on care work and the relationships that staff and volunteers make with the Yazidi refugee community also opens doors for considering care work as a general piece of the resettlement puzzle. The standard resettlement practice mainly focuses on housing, employment, language acquisition and health services. Nonetheless, as evident from the case of the Yazidi refugees, personal relationships as well as community and care giving, are very important for the resettlement of refugees. After about two years (or more for some families) the Yazidi refugee families still significantly rely on their personal connections to navigate the Calgarian and Canadian society. *Maternal strategies* allow for a closer attention to the care that is exchanged within these personal relationships, whether they are within the household or outside, and highlights their significance in refugee resettlement experiences.

My research lays the groundwork for a new perspective towards what is considered maternal work and what that work encompasses. The agency that mothers and other caregiving women express by actively assessing and responding to new challenges within the resettlement process can further be explored within refugee families in Canada. More importantly, my thesis brings in maternal and care work within the realm of resettlement work. Therefore, future studies can take this foundation and rethink resettlement practices and investigate whether gender and/or age differences exist in the resettlement work that is done within refugee families. In addition, future research can invest in studying the nuances of resettlement work done through Family Host volunteers who work alongside resettlement staff and further contextualize what is understood as resettlement practice. My thesis also shows that personal relationships are an integral part of refugees' resettlement and should therefore be credited and supported. Future research can extend this quest to more prominently make the case that encouraging social networks and personal relationships should be part of resettlement service programming and policy.

Future research can create comparisons between the efforts that individuals make based on their gender and age to allow for a more nuanced understanding of resettlement experiences of high needs refugee groups such as the Yazidi refugees in Calgary. My thesis specifically shows the significant role of women in the shaping of the “success” of the resettlement of Yazidi refugees in Canada—an achievement that the country then benefits from as it promotes the Canadian humanitarian image within the international setting. Nonetheless, the efforts of women who are an integral part of the process get overlooked which echoes the widely spoken invisibility of women's work and their particular knowledge and skill set within the economical world.

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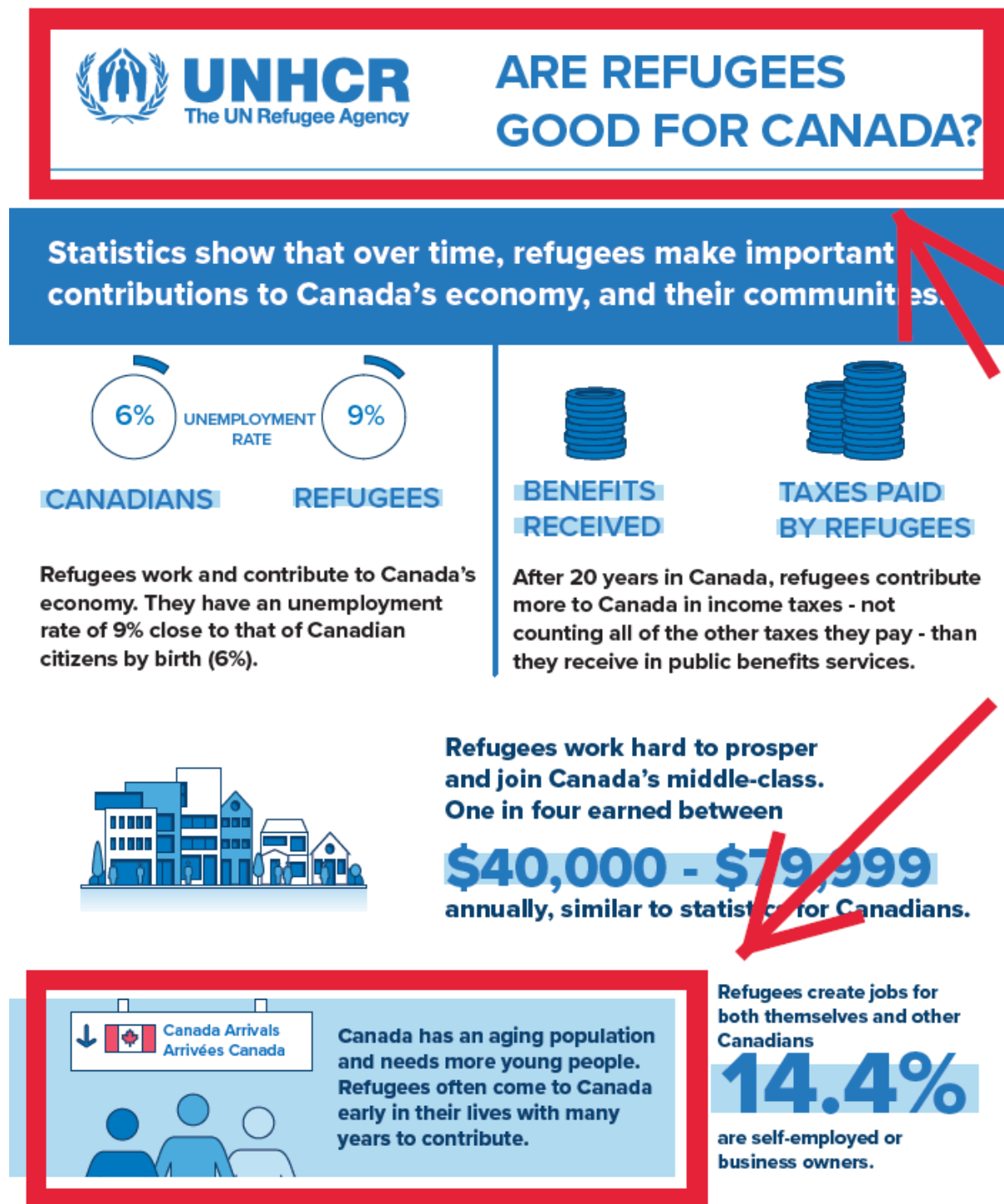
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: UNHCR CANADA PDF TITLED “ARE REFUGEES GOOD FOR CANADA?”

Page 1 of 2 of the UNHCR Canada document titled “Are refugees Good for Canada? (Economic Integration Explainer),” dated August 2019 (UNHCR 2019). The red boxes indicated the parts of the document that I have specifically referred to in my discussion.



Page 2 of 2 of the UNHCR Canada document titled “Are refugees Good for Canada?”.



## ARE REFUGEES GOOD FOR CANADA?

Refugee children perform as well in school as Canadian-born children, and their knowledge and skills contribute greatly to Canada’s workforce.



Refugees embrace Canada and are committed to their communities. They have the highest citizenship rate of all immigration categories (89%).



Almost 50% of all refugees in Canada live in smaller cities and towns.

Refugees buy houses and put down roots in Canadian communities.

**2 out of 3**

become home owners after 10 years in Canada.



## APPENDIX B: ETHICS APPROVAL

11/27/2018

<https://iriss.ucalgary.ca/IRISSPROD/sd/Doc/0/S0G7K4712RH454KVV65OFFFM73/fromString.html>

Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board  
 Research Services Office  
 2500 University Drive, NW  
 Calgary AB T2N 1N4  
 Telephone: (403) 220-4283/6289  
[cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca)

## CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS REVIEW

The Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB), University of Calgary has reviewed and approved the below research. The CFREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS).

Ethics ID: REB17-1987  
 Principal Investigator: Pallavi Banerjee  
 Co-Investigator(s): There are no items to display  
 Student Co-Investigator(s): Negin Saheb Javaher  
 Study Title: Reception and Resettlement of Syrian and Yazidi Refugee Families in Calgary: An Intersectional Approach  
 Sponsor: University of Calgary  
 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

Effective: November 27, 2018

Expires: November 27, 2019

Restrictions:

**This Certification is subject to the following conditions:**

1. Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modification to the approved research must be submitted to the CFREB for approval.
3. An annual application for renewal of ethics certification must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date.
4. A closure request must be sent to the CFREB when the research is complete or terminated.

Approved By:

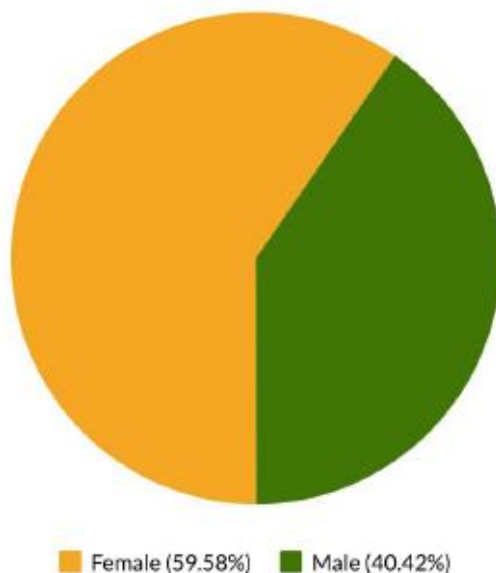
[John H. Ellard, PhD, Chair](#), CFREB

Date:

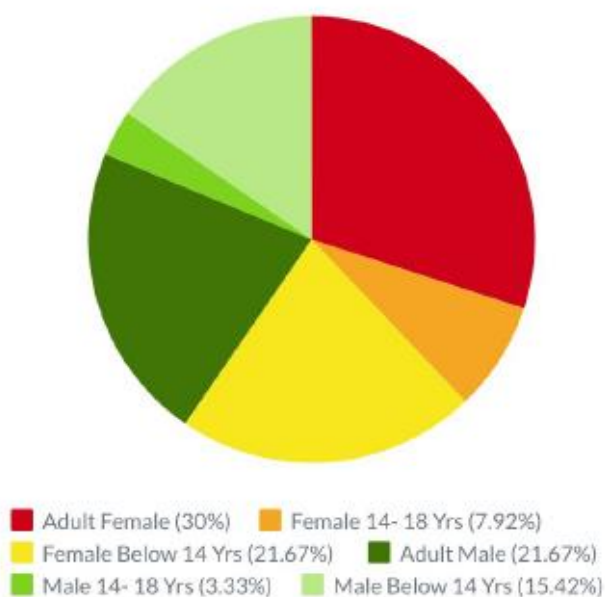
November 27, 2018

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).

## APPENDIX C: YAZIDI REFUGEE POPULATION GENDER AND AGE VISUAL CHART



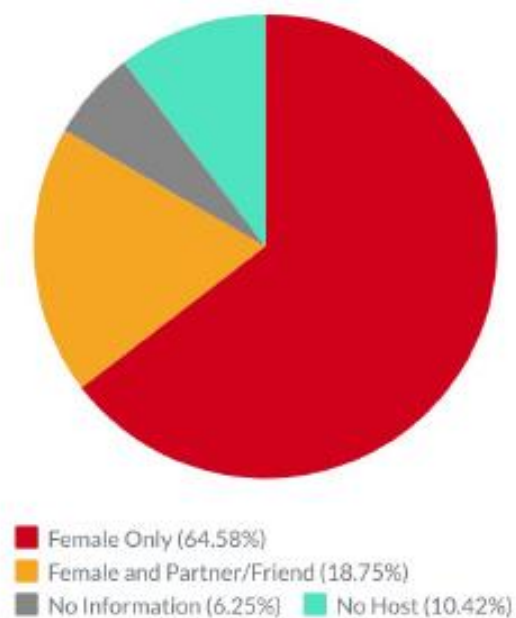
Based on the findings of this study the Yazidi refugee population in Calgary consist of 59.58% women and 40.42% men. This includes all age ranges and all members of the Yazidi household that interviews were conducted at.



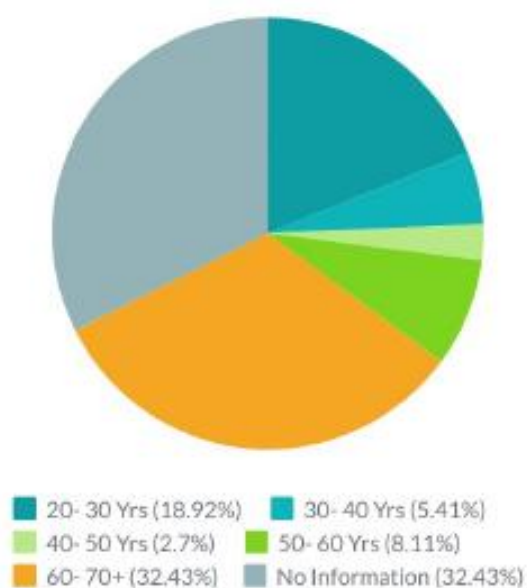
The representation on this pie chart reflect the findings of this study and illustrates the gender composition of the Yazidi refugee population in Calgary based on their age range.



## APPENDIX D: GENDER AND AGE VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF YAZIDI REFUGEE FAMILIES' FAMILY HOSTS



The representation on this pie chart reflect the findings of this study and illustrates the gender composition of the Family Hosts who work with the Yazidi refugee community in Calgary. These findings are based on Yazidi families' interviews of this research project and matches CCIS' official record of Family Hosts gender composition.



The representation on this pie chart reflect the findings of this study and illustrates the age distribution of the Family Hosts who work with the Yazidi population in Calgary.

## APPENDIX E: THE HOME ASSESSMENT (HA) TOOL- INTERVIEW GUIDE

**CCIS One-Year Home Assessment Tool**  
**University of Calgary**
**1. Basic personal information**

- Names:
  - Date of arrival:
  - Family size (number of people)
  - Family composition (name and age of family members)
  - Date of Marriage:
- ➔ What has been some of the good/happy things since you came to Canada?
- ➔ What has been some of the challenges since you came to Canada?

**2. Youth and Children/Family → THIS SECTION SHOULD BE ALTERED DEPENDING ON IF THEY HAVE CHILDREN AT SCHOOL OR DAY CARE, OR IF THEY HAVE OLDER ADULT CHILDREN**

- a. What issues are you and your family facing right now?
- b. What goals do you have for your family in terms of their settlement here in Calgary?
- c. How are your children adopting to life in Canada?
  - In terms of school, community, home life
- d. Are your children involved in any Recreational activities?
  - Have they accessed CCIS recourses?
- e. How was the experience of registering/enrolling children at school/day care?
- f. If you need to communicate with the school, how does that happen?
- g. What is your biggest concern for your children (now and in the future)?
- h. What would help your children (which resources) to have a better life experience in Canada?

**3. CCIS**

- a. What are the services you received from CCIS?
  - How was your first experience with grocery shopping? And everyday tasks including transportation, interpretation
  - Do you attend CCIS orientations and events? Are the orientations helpful?
  - Was there something that you needed but CCIS was not able to provide?
- b. How do you rate CCIS from 1 – 10? [1 bad, 10 very good]
- c. Do you have a family host? Can you tell us about them and in what ways they have been helpful?

- d. Is there something that you and your family immediately need from CCIS right now?
- e. Is there something that you wanted to say but don't want us to share with CCIS? Anything we didn't ask

#### 4. Settlement Experience

Ask following up question if needed to cover:

- receiving medical care
- school (Linc & children's)- if they attend
- using public transportation
- connecting with Yazidi community and the Canadian community

- a. What has been your experience with regards to Health/Wellness both in terms of physical health and emotional support?
  - Do you have everything you need?
  - How can this be improved going forward/in the future?
- b. What do you need with regards to Schooling (adult) to improve your learning and life in Canada?
  - How important do you feel English is?
  - What English-level capability do you want to achieve, i.e. what is your goal?
    - What is their level now?
  - Is there any other skills (driving, life/work skills) you like to learn?
    - Do you have access to a car?
  - How can your learning improve going forward/in the future?
- c. What do you and your children need with regards to schooling to improve your children's learning and life in Canada?
  - How can their learning improve going forward/in the future?
- d. What is your relationship with the rest of the Yazidi community? Do you see them and are you in touch?
  - Do you have relatives here in Calgary?
    - If yes, do they live close?
  - Do you have Yazidi neighbors?
    - Do you see them? Are you friends?

- Do you think about making Canadian friends? Are you interested in that?
      - What do you think you need to make that happen?
- e. Aside from CCIS, is there any other organization or place that has been helping you? [ex: Food Bank, New Comers Society]?
  - How can this improve/what else do you need going forward/in the future?
- f. Do you feel Independent in your day to day life? IF THEY HAVE ALREADY COVERED SOME POINTS YOU CAN SKIP SOME SECTIONS
  - Are you Comfortable in (examples below):
    - finding an address in the city and can get there on your own comfortably? If no, what do you need to be able to?
      - **If I give you a new address, would you be able to find the address on your own? How would you go?**
    - Use of a bank card
    - Schedule their own appointments
    - Take transit
  - What is missing and how can this be improved in the future?
- g. What is your experience with regards to your Housing?
  - Is this the first home you have moved to?
    - IF NOT: who helped you with the move and renting the second/third house?
  - Does it meet your needs?
  - Where would you rather be living? (different neighborhood, different house etc)
    - Why?
  - Are you planning on moving in a year?
    - If so, why? And to where?
  - If you have to communicate with the landlord, how does that happen?
    - Have you been able to communicate if you had a problem with the house?

- 5. Employment: TAKE A HINT, FOR WOMAN, DON'T ASK- THEY WERE HOUSEWIVES & NO FORMAL EDUCATION**
- a. Do you think about working in Canada in the future?
    - IF YES: what is the field/profession?
    - What did you do back home?
      - IF IT'S A INSTITUTIONALY LEARNED SKILL: ask about training/education level
      - What do you think you need to be able to work as that?
        - Such as language, money, more school (i.e. University), mentorship etc?
  - b. What is missing in terms of services in order for you to prepare for your employment goals?
    - How can that be improved?
- 6. Income support: STATE THAT THEY CAN SAY NO TO THESE QUESTIONS IF NOT COMFORTABLE & THAT THERE ARE NO CONSEQUENCES OR ACTIONS ATTACHED TO WHAT THEY ANSWER [WE ARE ONLY ASKING TO KNOW IF THEY HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO LIVE]**
- a. Do you have enough money to pay for your living expenses?
  - b. If you are comfortable, can you share with us the sources of your income?
    - How much child support money do you get?
      - When did you start receiving them?
        1. How much of this money [child support] goes to rent?
        2. How much of this money goes to the kids? In which ways?
      - What are the main sources of expense in your household?
7. What do you like to do with your family on a typical family day?
- a. What are 3 things you like about Canada?
8. Is there any last message that you like to share with us?

## APPENDIX F: CCIS GENERAL STAFF INTERVIEW GUIDE

**Interview Guide****CCIS Staff**

Name of the Interviewer:

Pseudonym of the Interviewee:

Date:

Start time:                      End time:

**Demographics:**

1. I would like to begin by asking you to share some basic demographic information about yourself.
  - Name (pseudonym)
  - Age
  - Education Level
  - Ethnicity/race
  - Gender
  - Your designation in CCIS

**I am now going to ask you several questions about your experience as a CCIS staff. Please feel free to stop me if you are not comfortable to talk about something and we can move on.**

1. How long have you worked for CCIS?
2. How long have you been working with Syrian/Yazidi refugee families resettlement program?
3. Why were you picked for this task?

## Resettlement

Tell me about your experience resettling these communities?

4. What were some of the most challenging experiences and why?
5. What were some of the most gratifying and why?
6. Who or what has been your strongest support in the resettlement process?
  - Ask only if related to answer: What additional resources and from who would have helped to make your job easier?
7. From when you have been part of CCIS, and with the new wave of refugees that came in starting 2015, has there been any changes in providing service to the refugee communities?
  - Prob- if they don't know how to answer ask: if there has been collaboration and/or any form of formal/informal needs assessment in service provision?

## Family Experience

Part of this study is to understand the family dynamics of refugee families through and after resettlement and to see how these experiences have influenced/changed the parenting style and family definitions. We will be asking questions related to this subject from the community but our interpretation can benefit from your insight.

8. How would you describe family relationships and family structure of the in-coming refugee families (overall)? (would you say that most of them came with at least part of their family/a family member?)
9. What are some of the challenges that refugee families coming in faced as a family in your point of view?
  - In terms of parenting/family structure
  - Most important challenges that the incoming refugees had to go through to start a life here?

Anything else you may want to add? Any questions you might have for us.