STORIED DISPLACEMENT, STORIED FAITH

STORIED DISPLACEMENT, STORIED FAITH:

ENGAGING CHURCH-BASED ACTIVISM IN CANADA

WITH REFUGEE FICTION AND DIASPORA STUDIES

By

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Abstract

This dissertation gives a number of answers to the following two research questions: given the storied nature of faith and displacement, what does literary studies have to offer church-based refugee activists in religious diasporas? And what might church-based activists, who are involved in daily struggles to interpret cultural, ethnic, and religious stories for the sake of cultural transformation, have to offer literary studies of displacement? The analysis of this thesis uses literary and cultural theory (diaspora studies, postcolonial theorizations of the exotic, discursive analysis, formalist textual examination, and more) to understand interethnic church-based refugee activism taking place within a specific religious diaspora, the Christian Reformed Church in Canada. The formation of diasporas and faith groups through shared allegiances to communal stories makes literary studies a fitting vantage point from which to examine a religious diaspora. Because religious diasporas have explicitly storied identities, their discourses are open to the potential of stories to effect communal change. Refugee novels and other cultural texts that are valued in diaspora and refugee studies can have a part in shaping the storied identity out of which church-based refugee activism is done, helping religious diasporas to more deeply understand the experiences specific to refugee-ed people and to more closely align their activism with the stated desires of refugee-ed people.

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Introducing Displacement, Faith, and Literature

In October 2006, a newly appointed Pastor of Community Outreach in a Christian Reformed church preached a sermon about ethnic identity and the misplaced desire for purity, a sermon that seriously unnerved its Dutch constituents and ignited arguments across its 300-member strong congregation. The sermon was part of a series on difference and ethnicity and was prompted in part by the recent profession of faith and regular attendance by an extended Liberian refugee family as well as the increasing interconnectedness with a French-speaking Congolese congregation that shared the space, many of whose members came to Canada as refugees. Part of a diasporic Dutch denomination, this congregation was being challenged to untangle and then prioritize various strands of their identity.[1]

The stir that this sermon caused was enough to make the pastor, Elias, take to the pulpit again two weeks later and address "the elephant in the room," that is the angry response that his sermon had received. Discussions that followed hinged on the community's combined ethnic and religious identity as negotiated through various interpretations of its shared ethnic and religious stories. In effect, they were asking, what do our past stories say we should look like in the present, and who are we, as both religious and diasporic? And even more importantly, who gets to be part of the negotiations over our shared identity? Are members of the community that have been refugee-ed fully a part of us, and if they are, how does that change our identity as a religious diaspora? In the midst of those intra-communal discussions exist corollary inter-

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[1] A denomination is a group of congregations associated together under a common set of identity narratives.

communal questions about the church's relationship to the nation as a religious diaspora, as an agent of refugee activism, etc. The conflicted response this sermon engendered was a result of the complicated dynamics present in a community that is engaged in inter-ethnic refugee activism even as it is struggling with its own displaced and changing identity within the narrative of the nation-state of Canada. In an interesting twist, that activism, done out of a sense of sameness and identification with refugees as displaced people in Canada, resulted in the diversification of the church; and, in foregrounding the issues related to that diversification, the sermon challenged the assumptions of unified identity held by Dutch and non-Dutch members.

During the writing of this dissertation, my conversations about and with refugee-ed people and refugee narratives have taken place in two disparate communities. The first community has been found among academic colleagues, beginning a number of years ago with fellow students in a class on diaspora literature and theory and then broadening to include the breadth of interdisciplinary writers that I have surveyed in my first chapter and in another publication. The second community has been in Hamilton churches—among refugee activists, with the leadership in the church I attended when I began writing, and in the CRC denomination as it engaged in work with refugees. This dissertation is an interdisciplinary exploration, researched and written with both of those communities in mind.

My arguments are predicated on the conviction that literature is a powerful shaper of culture and, therefore, that literature could be useful to church-based refugee activists seeking communal transformation. To put flesh on the bones of that conviction, I study in

detail the refugee activism of a single denomination—the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Canada—both in its uniqueness and as embedded in its contexts. That denomination is also diasporic, so I interpret its work in part through the lens of diaspora theory. I draw on a number of disciplines for insights into how a religious diaspora engages in inter-ethnic solidarities and into what fiction might have to offer church-based activism.

Given the storied nature of faith and displacement, what does literary studies have to offer church-based refugee activists in religious diasporas? And what might church-based activists, who are involved in daily struggles to interpret cultural, ethnic, and religious stories for the sake of cultural transformation, have to offer literary studies of displacement? This dissertation uses tools from literary and cultural theory (diaspora studies, postcolonial theorizations of the exotic, discursive analysis, formalist textual examination, and more) to understand the situation described above, a situation undoubtedly surfacing in various forms across the breadth of religious diasporas in Canada. The formation of diasporas and faith groups through shared allegiances to communal stories makes literary studies a fitting vantage point from which to examine a religious diaspora. Because religious diasporas have explicitly storied identities, their discourses are open to the potential of stories to effect communal change. Refugee novels and other cultural texts that are valued in diaspora and refugee studies can have a part in shaping the storied identity out of which church-based refugee activism is done.

Section Three, the final and major portion of the dissertation, takes up the challenge of exploring creative narratives as a pedagogical resource for church-based

activists. I argue that the evocative, contextualized, and individualized narrations of refugee experiences in creative narratives make them a rich source for church-based refugee activists. Based on responses from two discussion groups for church-based activists that I led, I describe three major issues plaguing public representations of refugees: the collective metaphors of natural disasters, the ethics of personal testimony, and the entrenchment of victimhood. Fiction that offers alternative representations of refugee-ed[2] people can nuance activist work and discourse in at least those three areas by narrating individual stories within their communal contexts, providing a self-reflexive frame for refugee testimony, and demonstrating the agency and resilience of refugee-ed people.

In order to understand how refugee fiction might influence the CRC's activism I unpack the discursive and cultural contexts for its work in Section Two. The two chapters in this section each look at one of the discourses that have previously dominated this church's refugee activism: public humanitarianism and reformed theology. I outline the synergy of this religious diaspora's own narration of faith identity as a displaced people assisting other displaced people and point out the dangers church-based activism faces of becoming parochial or inflexible.

The very concept of a religious diaspora, though, is not an established one. So Section One places my discussions of literature's pedagogical potential for church-based activism within the postcolonial sub-discipline of diaspora theory. I argue for the existence of religious diasporas and for the importance of attending to them, and I

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[2] An extensive discussion of this term will follow as part of my introduction to the theme of displacement.

demonstrate the complications of inter-ethnic morphing in a religious diaspora when it engages in refugee activism.

Interdisciplinarity

The above summary description of this dissertation's three parts makes obvious the necessity of my interdisciplinary approach. One disadvantage of interdisciplinarity might be limited disciplinary conclusions. That is to say, when I put forward various arguments in this dissertation I am not able to fully unravel the implications for related areas of thought in a single discipline or give a complete sense of the intervention I am making into a disciplinary conversation. What balances out this limitation is the possibility in interdisciplinarity for deeply contextualized analysis. In interdisciplinary research, the resource boundaries extend outside one academic conversation to encompass several areas of thinking that have pertinence for the topic. My dissertation takes the basic idea of using fiction in popular pedagogy for the church-based refugee activism of a religious diaspora and unravels various contexts that such a study must take into consideration: diaspora theory, theology, international relations, history, literary studies, missiology, humanitarianism, ethnography, cultural studies, refugee studies, etc.

In order to sketch my dissertation's academic context, Section One traces the roles of religion and ethnicity in diaspora theory, which is concerned with contemporary global movement and identity in displacement. I also include some research from international relations to show that a critique of the nation-state is shared by church-based activism and diaspora theory. Section Two draws on a variety of disciplines including humanitarianism, refugee studies, and theology to unpack the cultural and discursive

contexts for a religious diaspora's refugee activism. The investigations of the final

section are located primarily in literary studies. Section Three asks what literature is

capable of, but it also incorporates cultural studies as a significant conversation partner

on refugee representation. The final section also inevitably takes up a social sciences

approach to research because of its work with human participants. The experience of

casting a wider disciplinary net than is usual for dissertations in literature has impressed

on me that the study of literature has much to offer non-academic projects and the

research of multiple disciplines.

What follows is an overview of the thesis, chapter by chapter, followed by a

preliminary introduction to the three terms this project weaves together: displacement,

faith, and literature.

The Narrative of This Thesis

Section One makes a case for the existence of religious diasporas and the

importance of studying them in displacement scholarship and then explores the

reorientation of a religious diaspora that takes place when it engages in refugee activism.

The first chapter demonstrates the complicated and often conflicted interaction of

religious identity and ethnic identity within a single religious diaspora: ethnicity may be

the major identity marker considered in diaspora studies, but in religious diasporas

religious identity is often foregrounded as more powerfully shaping the community. The

second chapter takes up this observation and shows how the condition of diaspora affects

a religious community, particularly in its involvement outside of the diaspora. I finish by

raising the question of why sustained considerations of religion are often absent from

cultural and postcolonial studies more generally. Scholars of displacement and the nation-state (ie. those who are critical of the international state-based order) might find dialogue partners and even activist allies in church-based refugee activists from religious diasporas for whom a shared sense of displacement strengthens transnational connections and decreases loyalty to the nation-state.

Section Two is made up of two chapters, each with commentary on an important context for the CRC's refugee work. The first context is external to the CRC diaspora and functions variously for the church-based activism of any religious diaspora in Canada. The second context is internal to the CRC diaspora. Chapter three surveys the major criticisms currently faced by the activist discourse of humanitarianism and reads the CRC in Canada as an ideal humanitarian citizen—a well-assimilated diaspora, participating under the oversight of the federal government and working hard to limit the suffering caused by global violence. I suggest that in order to encourage civic participation by refugee-ed people the CRC must maintain strategic alignments with humanitarianism while rejecting its apolitical assumptions and dependence on state sanctions. Chapter four is an insider's take on the religious underpinnings of the CRC's work. The worldview of this religious diaspora emerges from a unique combination of historical, ethnic, and religious narrative strands. I unpack their worldview as it is found in a few popular hymns, specifically noting an emphasis on the sacredness of human beings and the non-human world and on the responsibility to remain politically engaged as a community. I then provide a brief critical study of hospitality as the major metaphor for ecumenical church-based refugee activism. Hospitality's contemporary connotations render the

metaphor apolitical and unsuited to the democratic activism churches strive to enact. The chapter closes with a series of bulleted suggestions aimed at the CRC itself for shaping the future of their activism, with particular attention given to the potential of literature.

In the final section I report on the results of a workshop on refugee literature that I ran twice in 2009: once for church-based refugee-ed activists and once for church-based citizen-ed activists, both held in Hamilton, Ontario. Together these chapters provide examples for how church-based activists can use cultural studies, literary studies, fiction, and other refugee narratives to shape their work. Just as importantly, the contributions of workshop participants extend the theoretical concerns of literary cultural studies. Throughout these chapters, academic scholarship, fiction, and workshop comments are woven into my own narrative of the workshop and its results. Chapter five describes the workshop, "Testing the Mutual Pedagogical Potential of Academic Communities and Church-Based Refugee Activist Groups in Conversation Around Fictional Refugee Narratives," as an opportunity for church-based activists to communally reflect on their work and to give me feedback on the usefulness of four specific texts for engaging, stretching, and informing their faith communities: Hollywood film *Beyond Borders*, hip hop video "Soobax," a *Hamilton Spectator* news article, and short story "On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows."

I wrote the sixth chapter to record the surprising questions raised by our workshop about how to use creative narratives (especially, but not only, fiction) for popular pedagogy. As part of my reflections on these questions, I acknowledge the ideological commitments underlying my project's conception and propose a multi-modal approach to

creative narratives that allows them to register variously as entertainment, as social commentary, as a cultural construct and agent, as a script, and as an aesthetic invention. Every mode depends on the other modes to maintain the integrity of a text and to make fiction accessible to a varied audience. Two themes are highlighted: the need for facilitators of popular pedagogy to be aware of multiple subjectivities in the reading process and the value of reading with an ear for both what is different and what is similar to the reader's own experience.

My seventh, eighth, and ninth chapters each take up a single issue related to refugee representation and establish the ability of a workshop on refugee narratives to productively engage church-based refugee activists. Chapter seven addresses the limitations of collective natural disaster metaphors used in mainstream news media to speak about refugee-ed people and offers fictional narratives as a way of individualizing and contextualizing refugee experience. Through creative but limited metaphors and the immersive pedagogical experience of reading fiction, refugee narratives can refresh the language of public debates about refugees.

Chapter eight argues that fictional narratives such as "On the Eve" could be an ethical alternative to publicly performed personal testimony and subvert the question of authenticity plaguing Canadian discussions of refugees. "On the Eve" is contrasted with personal testimony in the contexts of emergency aid mobilization, asylum-seeking processes, and cultural advocacy, which tend to represent refugee-ed people as absolute difference or collapse them into the identity of the listener. Fiction both builds empathy and also reinforces the space that separates the reader's experience from that of the

characters. As unabashedly "untrue" stories, fictional narratives can absorb accusations of inauthenticity, wooing an audience to listen, learn, feel, and contemplate without having to decide on the genuineness of the legal claims being made.

Chapter nine narrates my discovery in the workshops of different priorities for refugee-ed and citizen-ed participants and the resultant conflicting interpretations of *Beyond Borders* and "Soobax" as pedagogical tools. Refugeeness[3] an extralegal determinant of refugee authenticity is confirmed in *Beyond Borders* and challenged by "Soobax." Citizen-ed participants agreed with me that the ubiquitous victim images of refugeeness can be offset by refugee fiction's accounts of refugee-ed peoples' agency. The response of the refugee-ed workshop participants points to a more immediate concern for convincing Canadians to be empathetic and willing to listen to stories of suffering. Their concern that Canadian citizens be shaped by an openness to feel deeply with and about refugee suffering invites an academic discussion on how to use research to promote a culture of care.

Each chapter brings together (forced) displacement, (Christian) faith, and (Canadian) literature to answer, in a variety of ways, the central question of my dissertation: how can creative narratives facilitate a productive conversation between scholarship in literary and cultural studies and the work of church-based refugee activists? A preliminary discussion of each of these terms, as I use them, follows here.

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[3] I use this term in the way Peter Nyers has defined it: voiceless, apolitical victimhood as the culturally recognized (extralegal) sign of authentic refugee life and status. I address this concept more fully in the final chapter of the dissertation.

Displacement

The meaning of *refugee* changes according to context and so does my own use of the term throughout this dissertation. The 1951 United Nations Geneva Convention on the status of refugees provides us with an internationally recognized definition of a refugee:

> A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (UNHCR)

The Refugee Convention formalized an international refugee order developed at the end of World War II to deal with people displaced by the war (LaCroix) and has attracted tremendous critical debate in refugee studies (e.g.s Malkki, "Refugees"; Nyers; Zetter, "Labelling"). A few regional organizations, have written conventions that alter the UNHCR's definition by taking into account the pragmatics of their specific region and attempting to more objectively determine the definition of a refugee. In Africa, the Organisation of African Unity produced an Africa-wide treaty with a revised definition,[4] and in Latin America, ten states drafted the Cartagena Declaration. A generous interpretation of the Cartagena Declaration comes closest to my understanding of the term *refugee* in the context of international human rights:

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[4] "Any person compelled to leave his/her country owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality."

> Persons who flee their countries because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalised violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order. ("Cartagena")

However in this thesis you will see *refugee* used interchangeably with *refugee claimant* and *asylum seeker* as a way of approaching the claims of asylum seekers with a hermeneutic of trust. I do use the term *asylum seeker* at various points when I am discussing an issue that has specific currency for people with that legal label. For instance, the story of Joaquin in "On the Eve" is thoroughly about the legal and political regimes to which an asylum seeker is uniquely subject. As Joaquin's questioning of that label suggests, *asylum seeker* is always a legal label that has been externally imposed.[5]

I coined the term *refugee-ed* early on in my writing as discursive resistance to the representation of refugee identity as comprehensive and dehistoricized. Refugee identity is always in process, is one piece of a person's identity, and is shaped in deeply contextual ways. Using the term *refugee-ed* is an attempt to reshape the noun *refugee* into an adjective describing one quality of a person's life, a life that always exceeds that single adjective. *Refugee-ed*, while (and perhaps because) it is an awkward expression, keeps me aware of the temporary and externally imposed identity that the legal label *refugee* produces. It also registers the identity of refugees as people situated in specific national, cultural, and political contexts with displacing conditions rather than as objects of a human rights regime.

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[5] See Zetter "Labeling" for a thorough discussion of identity formation and the significance of the concept of labeling for refugee studies.

This proposed discursive activism remains in productive tension with the strength of the term *refugee* as it is claimed by refugee-ed activists themselves. That is to say, for some refugee-ed people, the refugee label provides them with a public platform for speaking and acting and is the most powerful descriptor of their experiences. K'Naan and Emmanuel Jal are two such public story tellers whose hip hop art reclaims the label *refugee* as a source of agency. For asylum seekers such as Joaquin, *refugee* is a legal label denoting a privileged displacement status affording various kinds of access that are not offered to people given other labels such as *economic migrant* or *asylum seeker*. I try to remain flexible in my use of these various meanings depending on the context in which I am using the word. *Displacement* often becomes the most useful term for my broad conception of global forced migration and is also the word that fits best with a diasporic framework. For instance, *displacement* spans the similar elements in the experiences of a the CRC as a religious diaspora and the refugee communities with which it interfaces; *displacement* refers to the personal knowledge of being and feeling out of place without explicitly connecting that experience to a national or international order.

What I have just traced is the shift within my own thinking from struggling to define a refugee to conceiving of forced migration more broadly via diaspora studies. A comparable shift has taken place at a disciplinary level within refugee studies. Refugee studies began as an interdisciplinary response to practical forced migration needs in the early 1980s. Between 1982 and 2000 the flow of displaced people from the South to the North increased and restrictions on that flow correspondingly increased. Chimni avers that governments began using the knowledge produced by refugee studies to justify their

increasing management of refugee flows. Despite its cooption by governments concerned to manage rather than assist refugee migration, refugee studies was still able to put a number of important issues on the international radar. Scholarship countered the "parasite" image, critiqued imposed aid, urged policy makers to listen to refugee voices, emphasized and spelled out rights of refugees, urged participation by refugees in research, delineated the special needs of certain refugee groups, and addressed psychosocial health and integration issues for refugees (Chimni 15). Since the 1990s, a move towards forced migration studies has taken place within refugee studies: the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration was formed, *Forced Migration Review* was established in 1998, and several refugee studies centres now offer degrees in forced migration. Chimni says the lack of refugees from the South shaping refugee studies research remains a problem. A shift in terminology has not changed the division of labour that exists: methodological/theoretical knowledge is produced in the North based on empirical/descriptive knowledge produced in the South. Roger Zetter similarly recognizes the way knowledge in refugee studies is always used by states in the Global North to stringently manage refugee migration, but he gives a convincingly positive reading of the motivations for shifting to forced migration.

Zetter's 2007 article updates his influential 1991 article on the refugee label; his update accounts for contemporary global realities, in particular, the fragmentation of labels to describe refugees and politicization of refugee identity. Because of the vast numbers of people leaving failed states and the intricate interrelation of causes, "[i]n the minds of policy makers and immigration officials it is necessary to fragment and make

clear cut labels and categories of the often complex mix of reasons why people migrate and migrate between labels—the so called asylum–migration nexus" (Zetter, "More Labels" 178). Many of those labels are pejorative and serve to reduce the identities that can be conceived of as "authentic" refugees: the more diversity there is within the label *forcibly displaced* the fewer strictly defined *refugees* there are (187). At the same time, the increase of diverse ethnic migrants moving from South to North in the early 1990s is what necessitated the use of the term *forced migration* in refugee studies and other research areas. Researchers recognized that the Refugee Convention did not adequately define and therefore sufficiently protect different identities in the international refugee regime, the obvious example being IDPs. *Forced migration* was an attempt to extend that definition and protection. The use of *forced migration* has triggered the reverse response from immigration departments in the North: a refusal to generalize refugee experience with the umbrella term of *forced displacement* and, instead, a fractioning of *refugee* into various labels to further diminish the numbers who find safety under the term. One response by researchers is to re-label the fragmented terms. For instance scholars such as Anne McNevin replace *illegal immigrant* (one fragmented piece of refugee identity) with *irregular migrant*. In regard to this history of shifting terminology in refugee studies, my approach in this thesis is both to use the term *forced displacement* so as to broaden the inclusion of identities protected by the *refugee* label, and also to re-label where refugee policy directly affects and therefore necessitates recognition of fragmented refugee identity.

Faith

I will leave the task of establishing the need for studies of faith in displacement scholarship to my first chapter. But I do need to set the stage for the first four chapters by saying that what is unique about my take on faith in this thesis is its deep evaluation of a single religious diaspora as an example of the larger cultural role of church-based activism in Canada and its interpretation of faith as communal embodiment of a narrative. I am attempting to hold in tension perspectives that are external to and critical of as well as internal and sympathetic to church-based activism. Additionally, the church-based activism I write about is from and in Canada and would be productively challenged by comparative studies from the Global South.

I have chosen a Christian denomination in part because that is my tradition and so I can more knowledgeably speak about its theology and practice. The choice also comes out of a desire to make displacement research useful to church-based activists, who are major players in humanitarian refugee work in Canada and around the world. Activists in churches are often not trained in any area that relates particularly to refugees, and the kind of work they do varies drastically across denominations, geography, etc. But the community's sustained infrastructure and networks, its capacity for advocacy, its sensitivity to spiritual health, its long-term commitment, and its strength of conviction and hope are all recognized by scholars and recommend it as a key community impacting refugee experiences (Ager and Ager; Allerdice; Bradley; Eby, Iverson, Smyers, and Kekic; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh; McKinlay; Erin Wilson).

The CRC is uniquely placed to influence ecumenical faith-based advocacy in Canada. It is the only church organization to have ecumenical ties with three major faith-based advocacy groups: Evangelical Fellowship Canada, KAIROS, and the Canadian Council of Churches. Members of the CRC routinely chair committees in those organizations, demonstrating leadership and active membership. The CRC's associations with Christian organizations across the mainline-evangelical spectrum in Canada put it in the challenging and productive position of finding fresh ways to think about social justice (including refugee work)—not as partisan to specific political ideologies but trying to communicate across political divisions. In the past decade, mainline churches' capacity for social justice in Canada has been on the decline, says Mike Hogeterp, Director of the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue in Ottawa. Social justice offices have had to cut staff and reduce their advocacy. Yet the capacity for and consistency of advocacy in the CRC has been maintained both in denominational and ecumenical endeavors.

Five years after beginning this project I returned from maternity leave and found a sudden richness of sources on faith and migration, faith and refugee resettlement, and religion and global order. Many of these sources have been added to my analysis throughout the thesis. Apart from a few notable exceptions, though, church-based activism remains an undeveloped area of research despite its high profile in Canadian refugee resettlement. A survey of the relevant research follows.

The November 2011 special issue of *Journal of Refugee Studies* examines "faith-based humanitarianism" and contains articles commenting on the contexts of Australia, Britain, Burma, Kenya, Nigeria, the United States, and the Sahrawi. The introduction

shows that not much work has been done on the response of religious groups to

displacement even though religion as a resource or as the experience of displaced peoples

has garnered recent interest. So my dissertation is adding to that literature. However, my

project makes a distinction between faith-based work and humanitarianism (see chapter

three), and so I use the term church-based activism instead of faith-based

humanitarianism.[6] The 2008 edited volume *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey:*

Theological Perspectives on Migration emerges from the American context, and several

of its chapters describe the work of faith-based humanitarian work. The book differs from

my work in that it is substantially about irregular migrants from Latin America and is

mostly aimed at a Christian audience, providing a theological defense of faith-based

activism. Stephanie Nawyn's working paper "Faithfully Providing Refuge: The Role of

Religious Organizations in Refugee Assistance and Advocacy" examines the interaction

of public policy and religious discourses and networks involved in refugee resettlement

across the United States. A similar document for Canadian policy does not exist but

would be illuminating. Tamsin Bradley has written an article entitled "Does Compassion

Bring Results? A Critical Perspective on Faith and Development," which critiques the

discourse of compassion as it is used by faith-based NGOs in Rajasthan. Bradley

recognizes the strengths that faith perspectives bring to humanitarian work but is largely

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[6] The participants in my workshop would likely call their work "outreach" rather than "activism," as the former term is more generally used in Christian circles. I choose to use the word "activism" to describe their work because its connotations of intensity and focus more accurately capture the spirit of their work: "the use of vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change" (activism) as opposed to "an organization's involvement with or influence in the community" (outreach) (OED).

pessimistic in his conclusions about the ability of faith groups to be self-reflexive. My fourth chapter briefly takes up his arguments.

The wonderful resource compiled by Paul Bramadat and Susie Fisher, "Religious Organizations and the Integration of Immigrants, Refugees, and Temporary Foreign Workers: An Annotated Bibliography and List of Community Organizations" (2010), and Christine McKinlay's Masters thesis "Welcoming the Stranger: The Canadian Church and the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program" (2008) are the only Canadian sources I have been able to find on faith-based refugee activism. McKinlay's thesis explains the history and political function of the Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP) and the substantial but complex participation of churches in that program. She interviewed both sponsorship agreement holders and sponsored refugees as part of her research. Significant changes have been made to the PSRP since her thesis was written, but I do not investigate the PSRP except as one piece of the activism of the CRC.

A question I ask in Section Two is what barriers and opportunities exist in the discourse of church-based refugee activists for refugee-ed people who want to be cultural, social, and political participants in Canada. On occasion I have observed and even participated in shallow discursive analysis, simply taking metaphors to their full rhetorical conclusion or deconstructing ways of speaking or writing to demonstrate their self-referentiality or discursive violence. Whether or not those metaphors are meant to be taken that far and how ways of speaking actually affect action are questions that complicate discursive analysis. My fourth chapter's detailed look at the CRC's historical and theological narratives is an attempt to understand their discourse for refugee activism

while retaining the contextual integrity of their language and framework. The particularity of studying one congregation's embodiment of a religious diaspora responds to an ongoing concern in diaspora studies that we not lose our awareness of locality in our concern for global networks.

Literature

I began this project out of a love for Canadian diaspora fiction narrating contemporary refugee experiences: Camilla Gibb's *Sweetness in the Belly* (2005), Dionne Brand's *What We All Long for* (2005), M.G. Vassanji's "Refugee" (1992), Nega Mezlekia's *Notes from the Hyena's Belly* (2002), Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994), and Neil Bissoondath's "On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows" (1991). Recent additions to that body of fiction, such as Randy Boyagoda's *Governor of the Northern Province* (2006), Kyo Maclear's *The Letter Opener* (2007), Madeleine Thien's *Dogs at the Perimeter* (2011), along with recent comparative South Pacific literature such as Lloyd Jones' *Hand Me Down World* (2010) and Anh Do's *The Happiest Refugee* (2011) have expanded my planned chapter on literary analysis of fictional refugee representations into a discrete future project. As a result, the importance of fiction for this thesis remains primarily in the pragmatic question of my final five chapters: how can the fiction listed above be used pedagogically for Canadian church-based refugee activism? I return to some of these narratives in my afterword to show the kind of detailed literary work that needs to follow the social and discursive analysis of my thesis. Novels are the primary genre in which I have found Canadian refugee-diaspora fiction, but novels take a long time to read and digest, making them less than ideal for popular pedagogy. Therefore,

when designing the trial workshop to answer my question, I relied on a broad understanding of literature, in the tradition of cultural studies that includes more accessible narratives. News media and audio-visual sources were placed alongside textual fiction. This popular literature also bridges the two communities for which I write: academic and faith communities.

In his "valedictory editorial" (2000), Zetter lists the disciplines out of which the articles in the *Journal of Refugee Studies* have been written (Zetter, "Refugees" 352). The list spans his thirteen years as the founding editor of the premier (and at that time *only*) journal on refugee studies and is impressively interdisciplinary. Social/public policy predictably tops the list with forty-eight papers, followed closely by politics (forty), anthropology (thirty-six), sociology (thirty-five), and law (thirty). Five more disciplines make up the second half of his list. Zetter congratulates the journal on deepening refugee scholarship to include articles from such a long list of disciplines in contrast to the almost exclusive hold that public policy and anthropology had on the discussion in 1988. As a researcher in literature, I searched the journal for articles that analyzed the representation of refugee-ed people in fiction and life writing and/or articles on the cultural influence of fiction and life writing. Going by what had (not) been published, my discipline did not seem to be recognized as relevant to the discussion.

My question as to why literary studies is not represented on the list raises the larger discussion of different kinds of knowledge, a discussion that Camilla Gibb attends to in her article "Telling Tales Out of School." Gibb was a Canadian postdoctoral student in 1998, struggling with what had to be left out of her PhD in anthropology. Her

ethnographic research in Ethiopia and her friendship with a fellow grad student, who was a refugee from Ethiopia, had changed her life and her thinking in ways that did not coincide with academic theories of the day or indeed the kinds of questions and descriptions welcomed into academic papers. Her fieldwork was a "total experience not just an intellectual experience" and got her thinking alongside Mary Louise Pratt about the pressure to make one's academic writing "'conform to the norms of scientific discourse'" in such away that one's "intimate experience…[and] sensory memory" are erased from the text (Gibb, "Telling" 44, 43). I share her concern with finding a place for knowledge that exceeds an "intellectual experience" and attends to "sensory memory"— in the case of this dissertation, knowledge about refugees.

A further challenge: while literary studies may be absent from the discussions of refugee studies because the kind of knowledge produced in literature departments is not *acknowledged* as useful in practical or policy-oriented discussions, literary scholars also need to ask how they can write about literature in such a way that makes it a recognizable part of this interdisciplinary discussion. How can literary studies assist in making the total experience of displacement—including the intimacy of sensory memory—which exceeds the bounds of academic writing, part of the interdisciplinary discussion of displacement scholarship? How does the study of literature overcome what Gibb describes as a hierarchy of knowledge without simply collapsing in to theory?

> [F]or all the talk about the boundaries between anthropology and fiction being blurry, and for all we were encouraged to seek new ways of representing cultural experiences—to consider ethnography as text, as narrative, as allegory, or as "true fiction"—fiction "proper" is still seen to lack the authority or prestige of academic writing. (Gibb, "Telling" 46)

The trial workshop is one concrete response to those concerns. I asked people who are not in literature departments what they see as important in fictional texts for refugee activism and then wrote a response that is for them as well as for my academic audience. My other response is that, throughout the dissertation, I choose to treat fictional texts and creative writing as legitimate sources of knowledge in my own theorizing. In the following chapters, short stories, novels, poems, and hymns contribute to my conclusions alongside theoretical articles, sociological studies, and public policy. The specific *kind* of knowledge that creative fiction offers is experiential, contextual, and particular.

Yet, there is a danger in this line of thinking: that fiction about refugee-ed people can be treated as straightforward ethnography. An individual story can skew the reader's perception of the bigger social picture by suggesting that all or most refugee experiences are like this character's, when in fact it is an uncommon one. Alternatively, representations of iconic or well-known refugee histories can overpower less common refugee histories. Entire political histories can be invented. As Gibb reminds us in an interview on Writer's Café, fiction differs most significantly from ethnography in its language. "The scholarly language excludes more than it includes," she says, describing academic language as a kind of shared code amongst academics. The language of fiction allows for invention, and through those inventions it is trying to resonate with a more general truth. The multi-modal approach to literature that I start to articulate in chapter five recognizes that literature functions in many ways and that its many functions are dependent on one another. Reading fiction simultaneously for aesthetic, appreciative, cultural, etc values can keep the refugee characters in refugee-diasporan fiction from

becoming naïve ethnographic informants for a voyeuristic audience or from being held at a remove by the language of theory.

Reaching Outside the Text

In order to understand the refugee activism of churches, I interviewed or had extensive conversations with Tama Ward Balisky who heads up Kinbrace Community and the East Side Story Guild in Vancouver; Alison Witt who facilitates the Refugees and New Arrivals focus group for True City in Hamilton; Rose Dekker who is the Refugee Sponsorship Coordinator at Christian Reformed World Relief Committee in Canada; and Arie Van Eek who is a leading refugee advocate in the CRC and former Executive Secretary of the Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada. All four people were exceedingly generous with their time. I have also been in brief contact with Mike Hogeterp (Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue), Chris Pullenayegem (Citizens for Public Justice), and Bruce Adema (CRCNA Canadian Ministries).

Testing out the pedagogical usefulness of literature for church-based activism, I have been gifted with (heaps of) time, thoughtful engagement, and deeply personal experiences shared by the fifteen anonymous participants in our workshop experiment.

This dissertation breaks the mould for traditional research in literature departments in that it reaches outside the world of textuality and invites participation in shaping the thesis by people whose experiences are the subjects of those books and by people whose work has nothing to do with fiction. For that reason, I find my analysis of texts and my conclusions about theory to be less final than I would like them to be and less neat than they would have been had I written them in solitude. That is to say, the

liveliness of human subjects and my responsibility to several interpretive communities has resulted in different kinds of conclusions meant for varying communities jostling up against each other throughout this thesis. I have appreciated this as a reminder that we always read and write out of shared contexts whether or not we are aware of that as we sit typing at our desks.

SECTION ONE: The Place of Religion in Diaspora Studies

Chapter 1: A Complex Weave: The Ethnic and Religious Strands in Diasporic Identity

Introductory Diasporas

My ancestry was part of a religious refugee diaspora: the French Huguenots. My family's history is intimately bound, then, to the etymological history of the term "refugee," which was actually coined during the 1680s when French Huguenots, including my family, fled the religious persecution of Catholic France led by Louis XIV. Through a series of traumatic events, including a shipwreck and the American Revolution, William Goheen ended up in Port Hope, Ontario on a farm between Toronto and Kingston. Goheens still live on that piece of land, and the history of the Goheen family—persecuted but faithful—is still an identity marker for the oldest generation living, my grandparents and their siblings.

Martin Baumann, in his articulation of the possible stages of development of a diaspora, concludes that, "a diaspora group may vanish by way of acculturating and then finally assimilating structurally and religious-culturally into the host society" (181). He uses the Huguenots as an example. Certainly my own experience would confirm his

analysis: besides returning with my family to France to see where our ancestors came from one summer and using my ancestral shipwreck story as a party trick, little in the way of solidarity has existed between my family and our religio-cultural heritage. As children, my siblings and I were reminded of religious persecution around the world, but we were never aware of others who came from the Huguenot diaspora, beyond our own extended family or written accounts. Through this example of what a diaspora is not, I have come to understand diaspora as any transnationally dispersed community that continues to live out of a shared history of displacement in their new set of contexts.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, my own interest in refugee narratives and religious diasporas does not originate directly from any family history. On the contrary my enthusiasm has emerged from my more recent personal history as an "adopted" member of a Dutch, Christian, and Reformed diaspora in Canada and the United States. While I have not experienced a bloodline diaspora, for some of my childhood and almost my entire adult life I have been an active participant in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), a community emerging from the Dutch Christian dispersion spanning the past two centuries. Having regularly attended five different CRC congregations across Canada and the United States at various periods in my life and intermittently visited over twenty congregations throughout Canada, the United States, and Australia, I have experienced a number of embodiments of the Dutch traditions with varying levels of openness to my participation.

My experience has led to a web of questions driving my research into faith and displacement and into the refugee activism of diasporic faith communities in particular:

Why is religion not a key factor in current diaspora studies? How do ethnicity and religion interact in a diaspora? Which communities can be considered diasporas, and who is considered an "authentic" member of any given diaspora? How do the dual loyalties to national citizenship and to diaspora history interact in multi-ethnic communities? What aspects of culture "count" when considering the transfer and transformation of culture that happens in diaspora? This first section of my dissertation will address these kinds of questions. In this first chapter I argue that religion is a crucial category in defining and describing some diasporas and can broaden our understanding of the concept of diaspora as an axis for inclusion, commonality, and transnational identity.

The CRC as a Religious Diaspora

In 1850 "Classis Holland," a group of religious refugee congregations in Michigan merged with the Dutch Reformed Church, established by Dutch Reformed merchants who had settled into New York during the eighteenth century. Not long after, in 1857, five congregations from that group of refugees and immigrants decided to secede from the denomination.[7] The breakaway group cited the denomination's theological syncretism, acculturation to American culture especially as it related to worship styles, and disengagement from politics in the Netherlands as some of the reasons for their secession. It would be easy to understand these concerns in purely ethnic terms, but their concerns about culture and faith were so tightly interwoven into a single narrative that to separate the threads of culture and faith would be to misunderstand the complexity of the

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[7] Refugees were not yet labeled as a legal group at this time, so I use both terms because, although the people that came to the United States from the Netherlands were called immigrants they were fleeing religious persecution and famine.

community's identity. It is certainly true that they were concerned that they would lose

the uniqueness of their ethnic identity, a fear that was perhaps heightened by their recent

experience of being refugee-ed. However the name they chose for themselves indicated

their desire to regain a lost faith rather than a lost ethnicity. Instead of returning to

something like their original title of "Classis Holland," they called themselves the

Christian Reformed Church. Coming from the Netherlands where their religious story

had been so intertwined with the political, historical, and cultural stories of their people,

the Dutch and Reformed diaspora was struggling to discern what faithfulness[8] looked like

in a new context and could only envision it in relationship to the church's former

embodiment in the Netherlands.

Over the next 150 years, much about the church changed, and a subsequent wave

of post-war immigration from Holland to Canada during the 1940s-1960s refreshed and

reworked the diasporic identity of the church. [9] Yet they undeniably maintain a unified

and unique faith identity. Anyone observing a CRC worship service across Canada or the

United States could expect to hear similar phrases used to describe the church's

uniqueness, similar scholars quoted in sermons, and a shared general knowledge of the

church's history among its members. Books that are distributed with regional contact

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[8] An insider's definition of faithfulness could read, "being the kind of people that will please God" or "being a true embodiment of the gospel (ie. living out the message of the historical Jesus)." The process of discerning God's pleasure, or the process of negotiating what a "true embodiment" looks like, is complex and includes debate over the interpretation of the scriptures, discussion of traditions, personal and communal prayer and self-reflection, and cross-cultural comparison (see Chandler).
[9] Helpful information on this history can be found on the denomination's Web site as well as in the collection of essays edited by Alfred Mulder. I also go into more detail on this point in chapter four.

information for each member also include pages of local businesses and services run by

members. Every year trips are offered for those interested in going back to Holland on

tours and many members make their own journey back to the homeland. For those who

cannot make the trip back, local Dutch Toko shops (often owned and run by church

members, though available to a wider community, including Dutch people without

church connections) import Dutch food and other products to give the community a taste

of home. Though its members are not uniformly Dutch anymore, those who have joined

the community do so with an appreciation for the Dutch Reformed tradition.

Given these features, the CRC appears to be a diaspora community, albeit a

complicated one.[10] Because of its location in pockets around the world, most members

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[10] In defense of my treatment of the CRC as a whole, I maintain that its transnational
organization and communication and its voluntary, recorded membership allow me to
treat the community as a unit. But I do not do so as a rejection of the insights by scholars
that diasporas are often *imagined* communities (adapting Anderson, who was describing
nations rather than diasporas) that deliberately re-make themselves in diaspora through
invented traditions (Hall; Hobsbawm) and *idealizations* of a homeland (Mishra) and that
one difficulty in such a context is knowing how to place those who disagree with such
imaginings and so are not considered "authentic." While it is true that identity is always
in process and that migration can trigger an attempt to recreate an identity that has been
lost, the theological and organizational unity of the CRC justifies a conversation about
that community in the singular, fraught as it is with tensions and variegated
congregational embodiments. One helpful justification for defining a group as a group is
found in Ackermann's study of the diasporizing ethno-religious Yezidi community in
Germany. While he is hesitant to qualify the Yezidi as a full-fledged diaspora because of
the early stages of their dispersal, he says this, before articulating how he sees their
diaspora emerging: "The members of a group stress their 'sameness' by identifying
themselves with characteristic qualities which can relate to language, material culture,
religion, kinship, [etc]….The notion of 'group' means that its members have something
in common with each other, which distinguishes them in a significant way from the
members of other putative groups. Group identity thus refers simultaneously to both
similarity and difference" (157). Ackermann defends the ethnographer's right to consider
what unifies a diaspora in opposition to other diaspora groups. The continued existence of
the denomination 150 years after its inception suggests its adherents, Dutch and non-

can claim to have dispersed ancestors, and the Dutch majority in the church can claim a connection to the Netherlands through bloodlines. Their reformed faith commitments do not accept the separation of the sacred and secular, which is a long held commitment in public life in Canada. As such, their refusal to compartmentalize faith will keep the practicing Dutch Reformed community somewhat marginalized in a secularized West. To quote William Safran's description of a diaspora, "they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it" (83).[11] Floya Anthias' definition of diaspora is useful here as she is concerned to broaden the debate over diaspora identity to include not only ethnicity but also class and gender. For her, diaspora is a "connection between groups across different nation states whose commonality derives from an original but maybe removed homeland; a new identity becomes constructed on a world scale, which crosses national borders and boundaries" (Anthias 558). The key factors in this broader definition—being able to trace a history of dispersion, maintaining a connection to similarly dispersed people in other countries, and continuing to self-identify by means of their story of displacement—are all part of the CRC community's identity and experience.

Dutch alike, find something to make them feel at home in its community as distinct from all others.

[11] I will say more about the way the ideology of secularism has interacted with the CRC traditions in chapter three where I question their work with refugees as "humanitarian."

Religiously Defined Diasporas

Even so, little can be found in scholarship on the condition of diaspora[12] that can put words to the specifically religious experience of this community. Perhaps the absence of scholarship on religion and diaspora is due, in part, to the difficulty of understanding how religion and diaspora interact and the resulting suggestion by prominent typological diaspora scholars that diaspora primarily describes an ethnic not a religious community's consciousness and diasporic transformation. A brief look now at the comments of Robin Cohen, John Hinnells, and William Safran on religious diasporas demonstrates the attempts to untangle religion and ethnicity in diasporic identity. Going beyond his first chapter's central argument that diaspora studies "have to transcend the Jewish tradition," Cohen raises the question of limits to that transcendence in the last section of his book by asking whether or not religions can even claim diaspora status: "In general, I would argue that religions can provide additional cement to bind a diasporic consciousness, but they do not constitute diasporas in and of themselves" (Cohen 189). Here Cohen is referring to the idea that an entire religion and all its adherents worldwide could be considered a diaspora. I would not take issue with his argument if it were to end there. But he goes on to speak of the example of Zoroastrians whose roots can be traced back to Persia and many of whom find themselves in India. An ethnic or cultural distinctiveness can be

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[12] Anthias' article separates diaspora scholars into two camps: those who develop a *typology* of diaspora, which serves as an objectivist criteria for understanding diaspora and its various incarnations, (she uses Robin Cohen as an example) and those who analyze diaspora as a *condition* that destabilizes national affiliations through transnational allegiances (James Clifford is her main focus here) (566). I refer here to the second approach to diaspora, recognizing that it is indebted to the former approach for providing scholarship that, among other things, defines the terms more clearly.

found here, but Cohen characterizes Zoroastrians (Parsees in India) as a traveling religion rather than a traveling nation. In doing so, he assumes ethnicity is connected to political (ie. national) identity while religion is connected to private identity. Further, he argues that the distinction between displaced religious communities and ethnic diasporas is founded on a religion's lack of desire to return to a homeland. "This aspect of Zoroastrianism also limits the extent to which we can call Parsees a diaspora: they do not seek to return to, or to recreate, a homeland," he writes (188). Hinnells argues otherwise in *The Zoroastrian Diaspora* and notes another opponent in Safran who also says that Parsees do not count as a diaspora because they are not widely dispersed and because they have fit into new homes more easily than the Jewish diaspora. Hinnells cannot be referenced to prove my point because he merely wishes to clarify that the Parsees *do* have a strong connection to the homeland and do wish to return and therefore can be considered a diaspora, while I want to reinterpret what a connection to the homeland might look like and question the importance of a desire to return at all. At the level of theory, what is at stake in the exclusion of the CRC or any specific religious group as a diaspora can be found in debates over the broadening of the term diaspora, which has arguably softened this potent cultural concept to a buzzword, without sufficient precision to be useful.[13] For Cohen and Safran the priority of ethnic ties can be one clear indicator of diasporic identity. For Hinnells the desire to return to or recreate a homeland is the defining feature for a diaspora.

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[13] See Brubaker, who identifies three core elements to a diaspora (dispersion, homeland orientation, and boundary-maintenance over time) but urges his readers to recast diaspora as a stance of alternative loyalty rather than a described entity. Brubaker's analysis does not challenge the ethnic basis for his proposed diasporic stance.

Cohen acknowledges that, given his admission of a "cultural diaspora" category for certain Caribbean groups, he is "also opening out the possibility that spiritual affinity may generate a bond analogous to that of a diaspora" (189). Thus diasporic affinity is equated with ethnic affinity, and spiritual and cultural affinities are something else altogether. Likewise, Mishra defines the diasporic imaginary in exclusively ethnic terms as "any ethnic enclave in a nation-state that defines itself, consciously, unconsciously, or because of the political self-interest of a racialized nation-state, as a group that lives in displacement" (423). Cohen, Mishra, and others underestimate the strength and scope of religious and spiritual communal memory to found and grow a distinct group of people who are away from home. Cohen's argument bears some thought, yet it is undeniable that many religious groups in Canada share a diasporic consciousness, maintaining strong ties to their homeland and, to some extent, remaining alien in their new country. Afo Adogame goes so far as to call religion the "'motor' or driving force of African diaspora formation" and "not merely part of the cultural heritage they retain when they emigrate" (19). In a move dissimilar to Cohen's admission of religion as a possible added cohesive element in diasporic identity, Adogame shows that religion can actually be "the central motivation in the decision-making processes that results in both the departure from the home country and actions pursued during the integration process in the host country" (19). Religious identity can "serve as an important resource for reinvigorating the culture of origin in a host country" and its institutions can provide opportunities for "mixing with people from different cultural backgrounds under the umbrella of a common religion" (19). Along with Adogame, my argument is not that an entire religion can be diasporic.

Rather I contend that it is possible in an ethno-religious diaspora: 1. for ethnic and religious narratives to be integrally linked, 2. for that diaspora community to so transform in its diasporic experience that it consciously chooses its faith narrative to be made primary (even when an ethnic identity continues to be externally imposed), and as a result 3. for its ethnic and religious narratives to become shared by those without a direct connection to the ethnic narrative. This new model for understanding diasporas, which is not exclusively ethnically-based, is based in a narrative understanding of identity and provides an opening for understanding the more complex relationships established by diasporas between themselves and their hostland or homeland.

Narrating the Old Home and New Home of the CRC

The CRC is not a politico-religious diaspora in that its central mission is not influencing its homeland's or new country's politics for its own benefit.[14] Neither does the CRC reflect the general trend found in diasporas towards depoliticizing religion and distinguishing clearly between culture and religion. In fact an important part of its theology is the acknowledgement that Christian faith is always embedded in and engaged with cultures. For the CRC the tie to homeland is most evident in the community's valorization of its historical religious influences: French theologian John Calvin, Dutch Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper, Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck, and Dutch philosopher Hermann Dooyeweerd, all of whom were Christian thinkers and retain a revered status in Reformed scholarship and community life. As a community centered on a book (the Bible) and committed to contextualizing its narrative for their place, much of

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[14] See Vertovec for a brief discussion of transnational politico-religious groups.

what they maintain as their "roots" are historical interpretations of the Judeo-Christian scriptures.[15] So Calvin's and Bavinck's theological interpretations of the Bible, Kuyper's exploration of its impact on politics, and Dooyeweerd's philosophical outworking of Reformed theology are part of what newcomers to the community find themselves grafted into.

In its proliferation of cultural institutions, its continued loyalty to these cultural-religious roots, and its attempts to maintain a distinctive presence in Canada, the Canadian CRC is a religious diasporic community.[16] This diasporic religious identity continues to be nurtured in Canada through Christian schools and universities, in nursing homes where staff speak both Dutch and English, in public policy think-tanks such as Cardus, in the Christian Labour Association of Canada, in the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, in the international relief work of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, and through communal worship every week. That last phenomenon provides us with one of the key nodes for understanding this community's diasporic identity.[17] These institutions and activities have allowed the Dutch and Reformed

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[15] This observation speaks again to the question of how any Christian denomination defines faithfulness. The Reformed denomination understands faithfulness to be a continuation of the mission of Jesus, whose story is told in the New Testament of the Bible, and so its definition of faithfulness is largely negotiated through interpretation of that text.

[16] Echoing Anthias' critique of diaspora's reliance on primordial homelands, I want to point to the changing nature of diaspora identity. In this case, fifty years ago the CRC was an exclusively Dutch community. Intermarriage of later generations with people of other ethnicities and the openness the community is attempting to cultivate towards new members means that the CRC currently faces the question of what "trajectory" (to use Vertovec's term) it will follow as a diaspora.

[17] My fourth chapter considers hymns as a key site for tracing the motivations for refugee activism.

diaspora to maintain a distinct presence within North America largely by producing what Adogame calls safe sacred spaces in their new home. Adogame analyzes the religious phenomenon of the RCCGNA Redemption Camp in the United States and points to this religious diasporic institution as "a place where social, economic, cultural, ecological, and political concerns intersect" (24).[18] The reclamation of space for religious purposes, whether through literal buildings in the case of unused church buildings or schools or movie theatres or through networks, results in diasporic religious communities influencing their surrounding community by their everyday activities. The characterization of the CRC as "the Dutch church" by its variously religious and secular neighbours suggests that, for those outside of it, the minority ethnic designation qualifies the religious nature of its community rather than vice versa and points to a continued cultural cohesiveness despite the actual numbers of non-Dutch members. Those who are not Dutch find commonality in ways of thinking about and interpreting the world that are a complex weave of "Christian" and "Dutch" and can share the sacred space because of a common Christian faith.

One way of avoiding the strict separation between ethnic and religious communities that Cohen assumes is to think about the point at which they link. While religion has been popularly conceived of in secular Western culture as a series of beliefs and doctrines that shape a community, I wish to focus on the narratival nature and context

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[18] Adogame's article includes a section on the interethnic cooperation that has been attempted between African and African-American churches. Histories of suspicion based in colonial experiences of slavery make this link hard to actualize. This observation raises the important question of why certain churches in the CRC have been more and less successful at opening themselves up to interethnic cooperation.

of religion, particularly the ways religion provides a story out of which a community lives. Any given community, not only communities traditionally defined as 'religious', answers the question of how they are to live in the world by referring to their own story in the context of a history. In the case of a religious diaspora that story cannot be understood purely as a religious or as an ethnic story. Instead it is made up of a complex interaction of theological, social, historical, and ethnic stories. Thus I would argue that ethnicity and religion are linked at the level of worldview commitments (ie. the most basic beliefs about and commitments in the world which emerge from that interaction of stories) and that the question of a religious diaspora identity is then negotiated in the question of how to develop "faithful worldviews" in a new place. Creative narratives written by members of the CRC play a key role in helping to commemorate and shape their religious and cultural narratives.

One such author is Hugh Cook. In his short story collection *Cracked Wheat and Other Stories* Cook tells the stories of the first generation of the CRC diaspora and of their struggle to integrate the old and new stories they inhabit. Their faith narrative becomes the connection. In "A Canadian Education," Eddie's make-believe games after he moves to British Columbia from Holland include mapping the familiar onto the unfamiliar. But for Eddie, the familiar is not only Holland but also stories, characters, and landscapes from the Old Testament. The Fraser River, instead of becoming the Amster Canal, becomes the River Jordan, where they run from Midianites and Amalekites of the Old Testament. Imaginary wars are fought there against the German submarines, linking the Dutch resistance movement during WWII to the earlier Biblical stories and to the

current Dutch experience in Canada. Eddie's "homeland" is a complex mix of ethnic, national, and religious stories. The experience of diaspora is linked to Biblical imagery in "The White Rabbit" as well: Jaap's own father calls his factory work "servitude to Laban," alluding to the story in Genesis where Jacob spent seven years working for his future father-in-law, Laban, without pay in the hopes of marrying Laban's daughter. For Jaap's father, the hope is that that after putting in his time he will be able to start his own butchery shop, same as the one he had in Holland (38). In each story, characters attempt to narrate the significance of their own lives using their shared faith stories to link the narratives (historical, political, etc) of the Netherlands with the ethno-political reality of Canada. They try to lay these woven narratives over the land of a new place, to create memories and import where they feel displaced.

To discover a shared identity as a religious community in diaspora is to discover ways of living in the world that make sense of ethnic, cultural, and spiritual experiences and beliefs. The CRC would define a faithful worldview as a congruent understanding of who they are as a people, given their own cultural, historical, ethnic narratives and the religious narrative they are trying to live out of—a constant negotiation of their identity through old and new narratives. The language of narrative seems most appropriate given the importance in a diaspora of passing down stories to a new generation, but it also gives scholars the conceptual space both to consider the *process* of developing a religious worldview and also to address the interaction of ethnic and religious identities in that process. Boyarin and Boyarin's work similarly turns to the Rabbinic tradition of interpreting scripture as the process of identity formation in contrast to Zionist aims to

establish a literal homeland in Israel. The process for religious diasporas and their resultant identity is much richer and messier than Cohen's attempts at "vaguely" drawing the line between ethnic and religious communities (187). Understanding the storied structure of that process is also a necessary precursor to the third section of this dissertation where I turn to different kinds of storytelling (diaspora fiction, hip hop, film, and news media) for insight into how a religious diaspora's refugee activism can be creatively strengthened.

Re-linking Religion and Diaspora More Broadly

Another possible reason for the lack of attention given to religion in diaspora studies can be found in the generally accepted casual use of the term *diaspora*. The abundance of recent articles on specific cultural and ethnic diasporas and of fictionalized communities being described as diasporic suggests that diaspora is being used in literary and cultural studies to describe "minority communities." Khachig Tölölyan is strongly critical of such an inclusive use of the word, where members of ethnic minority communities "count" regardless of their active participation in that diaspora. Tölölyan's criticism is based on a desire to more carefully remember history and to maintain a more classical definition of diaspora. This position may have merit, but I would posit that the danger of conceptual fuzziness is predetermined by the very thing that Tölölyan takes for granted: that diasporic membership is based exclusively on ethnic history. If a diaspora is dependent on ethnic unity, then the concept will always tend towards including minority ethnicities regardless of their active participation in diaspora networks, and multi-ethnic diasporas will be overlooked. Extending our study of diaspora dynamics to include

diasporic communities for whom faith is a primary identity marker in their new home opens the way for also considering the place of multi-ethnic diasporas and the importance of self-identification with a diaspora.

In her introduction to the volume *Diaspora and Multiculturalism*, Monika Fludernik notes critically that "the current politics of difference, in fact, forces ethnic groups to foreground their specificity and to create distinct identities that frequently have little bearing on actual origins" (xx). Gerry ter Haar agrees and is unequivocal in arguing against this approach to diaspora studies in which "diaspora" is implicitly defined as "minority ethnicity" (ter Haar, *Strangers* 5). Ter Haar is adamant because of the tendency, in the example of Africans in Europe, to use 'diaspora' as "an ideological instrument to support the idea that Africans do not belong in Europe but in Africa, their real homeland" (5).[19] So, while some racialized immigrants, who have been in Europe for years and who plan to stay, retain their ethnic identity as a refusal to conform to an exclusive nationalist mythology, others remain a "diaspora" long after they would have if given the choice to define themselves. Ethnicity and race tie them to their homeland roots. To use Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin's terminology, a diaspora's "genealogical" and "geographical" narratives follow them, keeping them connected to their origins and hindering them from continuing to refresh their narratives of identity in diaspora (86).

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[19] Ter Haar's edited collection is written out of the discipline of religious studies so that she can write unassumingly in her introduction about "the intrinsic connection between religion and diaspora" (*Strangers* 2). All of the authors in the volume "believe such a connection to exist" and "comment implicitly or explicitly on the problematic use of the term 'diaspora,' as evidenced by their own research in various religious communities in past or present" (2).

M.G. Vassanji's novel, *The Gunny Sack*, points to other dangers in defining religious diasporas purely in terms of their ethnic narratives. That is: the loss of religious texture in diaspora studies and even ignorance about the actual borders of diasporic groups, both of which can have direct impact on public policy. Faced with the difficulty of splitting political representation ethnically in a postcolonial context and the resultant intra-ethnic violence, the novel's narrator points out that "where TANU, the Governor, and Africans, in short everyone else, saw "Asian," the Asians saw Shamsi, Bohra, Ismaili, Hindu, Sikh, Memon, Ithnashri" (Vassanji 178). Which religious group will get to represent the ethnic diaspora?[20] Here religious identity is not emerging only from theological precepts but from various ethnic, cultural, national, and theological narratives that are embedded in various communities with social loyalties to those who share their narrative. Social loyalties are split between ethnic and religious solidarities, but the ethnic narratives do not get at the most primary identity narratives for any of the Asians and often are, as ter Haar would remind us, externally imposed.

The scholarship that has been produced on Vassanji's novel supports my observation that religion has not been sufficiently explored in diaspora studies, in this case when it comes to literary analysis. Vassanji's entire novel is centred in the religious community of the fictional Shamsi. Yet, curiously, the novel's back cover notes the themes of memory, history, politics, and familial relationships without mentioning the

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[20] Consider the politics in Canada of having either a Christian or a Muslim as President of the Canadian Arab Federation.

very basic fact that this is a story about a *religious* diaspora.[21] The Shamsis' origins are in

Junapur, India, in the narrative of the song of hope that Shamas dances one day. On the

heels of his dance come the communal prayers, songs, eschatology, and secret rituals. But

the unique Shamsi mixture of Hindu and Muslim religions is a hyphenated identity that,

in this case, proves to be a disempowering weakness, and the community soon splits over

issues of doctrine. The Shamsi diaspora results from these disagreements and, in the

following generations, develops a complex relationship with the religious community that

remains in the homeland, receiving its missionaries and remaining nostalgic about a city

that is no longer a home to people of their religion (Vassanji 327). Religion here is not

disconnected from ethnic identity, but it is integral to the community's chosen identity.

The situation of the fictionalized Shamsi community and the CRC's complex

ethnic, religious, and national routes demonstrate that a religious group can in fact be

diasporic. However they also broaden our understanding of the kinds of articulations of

culture that exist in diaspora. At this point in my argument I rely on Anthias' article

regarding the new wave of diaspora studies, which concludes with a warning that

"diaspora is [not so much] an alternative to 'ethnicity,' but rather that it requires a much

clearer delineation of the latter's articulations" (570). I would venture further and claim

that a specific culture itself can be articulated in diaspora in numerous ways: as ethnic,

geographical, lingual, religious, etc. Or, as is more often the case, diasporic cultures are a

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[21] The question of the discipline's general avoidance of religion raises a number of possible answers. Is this avoidance an attempt to broaden the discipline beyond its classic Jewish example? Does it come from the assumptions within anthropology that religion is merely a cultural artifact?

weave of ethnic, geographical, lingual, and religious narratives.[22] Different narratives come under the spotlight or diminish in significance as a community evolves in its context. Scholarship produced in the discipline of cultural studies on diaspora has focused on ethnic manifestations of diasporic culture and so provides us with a variety of ways of understanding ethnicity and ethnic traditions in diaspora. The CRC presents us with a diasporic anomaly as ethnic traditions are deliberately sidelined in favour of theological and religious narratives, which a number of levels of leadership see as most essential to their communal identity and as creating more porous borders.[23] In Vassanji's novel, the South Asian diaspora in East Africa struggles with needing to affirm ethnic solidarity in the face of postcolonial upheaval while aligning themselves fundamentally to various communities of faith. These realities require a more serious look at the religious rather than strictly ethnic articulations of culture.

Transnational Religious Identity

It is only fair to note that Christian diasporas might object to the phrase "religious articulations of culture," arguing that theirs is not a religious articulation of culture but is

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[22] My use of *culture* here corresponds to Raymond Williams' second definition of the term: "(ii) the independent noun, whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general, from Herder and Klemm" (Williams). I agree with Williams that both the cultural studies sense of the term (as symbolic system) and the anthropological use of *culture* (as material production) are at work in a diasporic culture.

[23] The importance of leadership, and even cultural or religious hierarchies, in shaping a communal diasporic identity is highlighted in this comment. While the official denominational leadership has a major role in shaping a church's identity, informal and grassroots leaders often decide whether the local congregation embodies or challenges that denominational identity.

rather an ethno-cultural articulation of a larger faith.[24] Many would argue that they have

always had a sense of transnational identity as a result of their faith. Religious diasporic

identity often is transnational because the religious narrative is prioritized. The movement

of a Christian diaspora is simultaneously from national roots to displacement and from

transnational affiliation with Christianity at home to transnational affiliation with

Christianity in diaspora. The significance of this claim for diaspora studies is that, even if

an ethnic or national commonality exists in the original moment of dispersion, race or

nationality are not always the most basic loyalty nor the most sustaining focus for identity

in diaspora. To assume race or nationality as the key factor in defining a diaspora is to

lock a diaspora into that first moment of dispersion, a perpetual reliving of the past.

As I have hinted above, a key part of the task of untethering inherited ethnicity

from diasporic identity is opening up the possibilities for various types of relationships

between diasporas and their homelands. Leaving room for the importance of Tölölyan's,

Safran's, and Cohen's concerns to carefully delineate the bounds of the concept of

diaspora, Clifford's perspective opens up the way for conceiving of diasporas more

broadly. "Jewish (and Greek and Armenian) diasporas can be taken as nonnormative

starting points for a discourse that is traveling or hybridizing in new global conditions,"

Clifford writes ("Diasporas" 306).

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[24] I sense that both could be accurate ways of describing the relationship. Speaking in
terms of religious articulations of culture allows this study to enter into the conversation
of diaspora scholars who have generally privileged ethnicity as the identity marker for
diasporas and to suggest that religious rather than ethnic articulations of culture are at
work here. Those terms are also strengthened in evangelical religions because
universality is a premise of their faith and feeds the expectation that a universal faith will
become transnationally and transculturally embodied in a multiplicity of ways.

> The transnational connections linking diasporas need not be articulated primarily through a real or symbolic homeland….Decentered, lateral connections may be as important as those formed around a teleology of origin/return. And a shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance may be as important as the projection of a specific origin. (Clifford, *Routes* 249-50)

Boyarin and Boyarin, in their study of the Jewish diaspora, are even more skeptical in their assessment of diasporic relationship to the homeland, speaking concretely about the desire for return that is often touted as an important part of diasporic identity. They see diaspora as the greatest "contribution that Judaism has to make to the world" because it demonstrates that "peoples and lands are not naturally and organically connected" (110) and argue for the decoupling of race and land. In the midst of arguments over how to define diaspora, Clifford wisely suggests "tracking (rather than policing) the contemporary range of diasporic forms" (*Routes* 250). My tracking of the Dutch and Reformed diaspora as it is organized in the CRC suggests that religious worldview narratives are most central to this diaspora's identity and that these narratives are what link the CRC to the Netherlands, are what maintain the CRC's distinctive presence in diaspora, and are what unite them across the Canadian, American, and Australian borders.

Even as ethnic and religious narratives are complexly joined in that denomination, the denomination's leadership envisions prioritizing their faith narrative over their ethnic narrative. The specific congregation that I was involved with at the start of this thesis had caught this vision and was highly engaged with refugees and refugee organizations in their city. Their refugee activism emerged from and was shaped by those interrelated narratives. This reality raises further questions: What motivates a diaspora to engage in

inter-diasporic work (that is, cooperation with or outreach to other displaced people)? Given diasporic literature's focus on memories of the homeland and struggle in the hostland, does the hopefulness about the future within the new hostland as exemplified by their refugee activism negate a diaspora's status as such? How do the different phases of diaspora development and the specific locations of a diasporic community (eg. urban or rural) influence a religious diaspora's ability to create inter-ethnic solidarities? The second section of this dissertation will return to these questions from an insider's perspective, investigating the poetry of CRC hymns to understand what compels the CRC towards refugee activism. First, though, we will examine in the next chapter the way the experience of displacement can morph a religious diaspora into an interethnic community and the conflict that can take place during the reorienting process of a diaspora's identity.

Chapter 2: The Reorientation of Religious Communities in Diaspora

"Christians First and Foremost": The Process of Self-Definition in a Religious Diaspora

Ninian Smart's early foray into the topic of diaspora and religion helps us understand what typically triggers the process of extending a diasporic community's ethnic inclusion. Quite often, he says, in religious diasporas there can be found either a missionary impulse or a trend towards ecumenism and a new orthodoxy (294-5). His examples are drawn largely from Hinduism and Buddhism, and he points to the way in which diaspora increases contact between traditional religion and secularism or other proselytizing faiths. Susanne Hoeber Rudolph calls these nodes of interaction "multireligious arenas" and argues that the way forward in a globalized world is

transnational religiosity that spans multiple religions. I will address this idea further in the final section on religion and the nation-state, but for now I want to look further into the response to diaspora in religious groups that tends towards living out of a specific religious narrative without circling the wagons ethnically. The experience of diaspora can trigger the reaffirmation of the church's mission and a reenergizing of its members to pursue that mission.

The need to adapt by articulating one's narrative in a space of contested identity can often lead to both a desire to solidify connections with those who are like-minded and also a desire to share those narratives with others, a kind of missionizing of the community. When I speak of missional activity I am aware of the negative connotations it bears in contemporary Western culture. The distinction between mission*s* and mission made in the scholarship of missiologists is an important one. Mission*s* refers to the more specific activity of intentional evangelism by missionaries who have been commissioned by churches. A church's mission refers to its desire to be a witness to Christ's life in the church's context with the hope that others will find its life attractive and compelling. Missions is a job to be done. Mission (without the "s") is the church's reason for being. It is similar to, say, a business or university mission statement, in that it sets a vision for purposeful living. The church's mission extends comprehensively to the individual lives of each of its adherents and hopes for ongoing transformation in them and in their surrounding environments. As an example of missional work, one church decided to do a community scan to understand its neighbourhood's needs. As a result of that scan they decided to hire a Mental Health Coordinator to serve the high number of mentally ill

people in the neighbourhood and in the church and hold weekly dinners so that people who were mentally ill could learn how to make healthy and cheap meals and/or be affirmed as part of the church community. The lives of many people in the church were transformed as mental illness became a social issue of common concern for the whole community. Mission in contrast to mission*s* tries to be attractive rather than aggressive, to have personal integrity and not only a carefully-honed message, and to be *witnesses in place* to Christ's life rather than *traveling to convince* people of God's existence.

One could argue as Ninian Smart does that the experience of dispersion necessitates missional activity and/or ecumenism, or one could make a case for a missional ecclesiology as scholars such as Lesslie Newbigin have done.[25] The CRC is an example of a community that finds itself having more integrity in the context of diaspora since the church's mission (which is transcultural and transnational) is being reaffirmed. The troubling experience of having displacement foreground the constructed nature of their ethnic and cultural narratives can trigger a renewed interest in negotiating their interpretation of their religious identity. Indeed in a recent editorial in the CRCNA's monthly magazine, *The Banner* (a publication that is sent free to each member's mailbox across North America), Gary Mulder points to the missional nature of the Christian church as his reason for arguing that "we will have to be much more intentional about identifying and eradicating the ways our ethnic roots make it difficult for people to become part of us" (Mulder). So in diaspora, the Dutch and Reformed community realizes its traditions need adaptation and translation in order to successfully witness to

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[25] For more on missional ecclesiology (ie. a theology of the church that interprets its primary purpose as mission) see Newbigin.

its surroundings. Even more central than adaptation and cultural translation is the claim

of many missiologists, whose work he stands on, that the Christian faith has been

contextual since its very conception.[26] People of faith and religion are always in the

process of recontextualizing the stories that shape their identity. Diasporic faith, then, is

where the intrinsic contextual nature of faith is foregrounded for its adherents.

      Mulder takes this insight one step further when he cites an article written in 1980

by then-editor of *The Banner*, Andrew Kuyvenhoven. Kuyvenhoven's article had the

inflammatory title "It's Time to Burn the Wooden Shoes," and in it he called "ethnic

exclusivism" "sinful"—emphasizing that the church does not exist only for its own; it

exists for the sake of others. The tension between ethnic and faith commitments in

religious diasporas brings about intense debates about the purpose of religious

communities and this can often lead to a desire to express one's distinctiveness as an aid

to ecumenical missional endeavours.

      Since its geo-national origins, the CRC has consciously chosen to protect its faith

identity as the central marker of communal uniqueness. One result of this choice is that

the denomination is able to become multicultural and multiracial without losing its

distinctiveness. The denomination's Web site tells the history of its Dutch roots and then

says this: "historically, we came from the Netherlands. But today, although a majority of

our members are still from Dutch backgrounds, we can't honestly be called a Dutch

church….More important to us than such ethnic badges is our place as one branch of the

tree that started growing on Pentecost, almost twenty centuries ago" (CRC). This

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[26] For more on this see the work of Lamin Sanneh, specifically *Whose Religion is Christianity?*

statement links the present-day CRC in North America not only to the Dutch and

Reformed diaspora spanning the last 200 years but to a 2000-year multi-ethnic history.

The result is more stable and inclusive roots for the CRC diaspora. The denomination's

Web site continues with the history by describing how their one branch came into being:

"The Reformed churches flourished in the Netherlands. In the middle 1800s, some of

these Dutch Reformed people moved to the United States, and in 1857 they started the

Christian Reformed Church in North America" (CRC). Ethnic roots remain key for

describing the religious uniqueness of this denomination but the community asserts their

religious identity as more primary than their ethnic identity because it wishes to be open

to others.[27]

As strong and sure as the CRC's claim to be "Christians first and foremost"[28] may

be, the distinction is not clear-cut in the community's lived reality. Since their religious

narrative is largely shaped by a collection of Dutch theologians, Dutch politicians at the

turn of the century, anecdotes of WWII in Holland, blood relations in church

communities, and Dutch philosophers, the tie to an ethnic history is still essential to their

communal identity. I will say more about this later, but for now I only observe that the

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[27] This causal relationship is illustrated in the many conversations that have happened across the country in aging, dying congregations. Congregations in conversation with one another realize that their Dutch identity is often prohibiting inclusion and so try to foreground the mission of the church, the religious part of their identity, in order to avoid being seen as a cultural club. Churches that are successful at this share their strategies with others at conferences and the like. Anecdotally, in high school I was once accused by a Dutch friend of being racist in my criticisms of the CRC for being too much of an exclusive ethnic club. My present estimation is that he was only half right.

[28] A Google search of the phrase "we are Christians first" turns up 1250 results, variously prioritizing religious identity over national, ethnic, denominational, and even political affiliations. A second Google search of "we are Muslims first" turns up 606 results.

CRC community is deliberately attempting to re-make itself in diaspora, maintaining a Reformed theology and worldview while opening itself up to multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-national membership. In short, it is consciously foregrounding the religious aspects of its narrative in order to pare down the requirements for belonging.

Certainly this is not unique to the CRC. To return to ter Haar's parallel example, African churches in Europe also see themselves as "members of what they call international churches, thereby consciously labeling themselves not in exclusive but in inclusive terms" (5). In both cases, though in significantly different ways given the added barrier of racialization for African churches in Europe, mainline denominations continue to refer to these churches with their ethnic label. The externally imposed definition of their racial or ethnic difference, based in deep-rooted racial conflict, is what the African churches resist when they call themselves "international churches." They desire to be conscious of various historical ethnic narratives while re-writing those narratives in a new context to aid ecumenical cross-fertilization. The First Filipino Baptist Church in Hamilton, Ontario recently changed its name to Hamilton International Baptist Church in a similar bid for wider appeal.[29] The Hamilton International Baptist Church did not want to deny its ethnic origins, but it wished to open itself to the participation of people from other ethnicities, particularly a group of Karen refugees who began attending. Similarly, when the CRC chose to use "Christian" as its adjectival label, it was not denying its

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[29] A conversation I had with an inter-denominational leader in Hamilton led to the observation about this congregation and others like it that the ethnicity or race of a church's pastor is quite often what serves to define the church's ethnic identity for those outside the community. According to this logic, as long as the Hamilton International Baptist Church has a pastor that is Filipino they will be informally known as a Filipino church.

ethnic roots but appealing to a historically rooted and transnational community of religious people.

Walking such a fine line, between, on the one hand, maintaining fences for the sake of religious distinctiveness—a distinctiveness that comes from being intertwined with an ethnic history—and, on the other hand, breaking down barriers to multi-ethnic inclusion has proved difficult for the Dutch community in Canada and for other religious diasporas. Recognizing this tension, Elizabeth M. Bounds and Bobbi Patterson look at the second half of the equation by studying International Community School, a public school in Atlanta, Georgia that was established with the goals of teaching children how to express their faiths in a multicultural, multi-religious environment (Bounds). As a microcosm of diasporic identity negotiation in a globalized world, this school found that producing an inclusive space where religious practices could remain distinct was difficult. In each of these instances of religious diaspora community, the process of self-definition remains ongoing and necessarily produces internal tensions and inconsistencies.

"In Our Own Home": Incorporating Multi-Ethnic Members into a Religious Diaspora

Serious conflicts can take place as a religious community attempts to negotiate its identity. One example is the story with which this dissertation's introduction began. The church recently had been developing a vision for cultural and civic service and had been searching for someone to set the pace for them when they hired Elias[30] to come from the Western United States. His job was to help lead this urban church towards its goal of

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[30] Name has been changed.

immersing itself in the city and serving the needs of its neighbourhood. While he did not

share the ethnic or denominational background of the church, he knew its beliefs better

than most members and was committed to its creeds and practices, which were rooted in

the work of Dutch theologians, philosophers, and politicians and emerged from a

particular political and social history. The congregation had voted for his appointment

and had welcomed him with excitement for what his unique experience could bring to the

church. The sermon he preached in October, however, created significant tensions in the

downtown congregation and even caused a few prominent members stop attending the

church for a while.

Elias' sermon was based on Ephesians 2:14-17, and addressed the apostle Paul's

call to Christian converts to break down walls of hostility based in ethnic division

between Jews and non-Jews.[31] The sermon pointed to the mission of the Christian church

as the reason for Paul's rebuke to the racially-divided church in Ephesus and, implicitly,

Elias' own rebuke to the CRC congregation. Faith can become a tool of exclusion, he

pointed out, when it is meant to be a source of reconciliation in the world. Vijay Mishra

explains what is behind a diasporas' protectionist response to the loss of displacement:

"To be able to preserve that loss, diasporas very often construct racist fictions of purity as

a kind of jouissance, a joy, a pleasure around which anti-miscegenation narratives of

homelands are constructed against the reality of the homelands themselves" (423).

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[31] "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near."

Quoting Miroslav Volf's book *Exclusion and Embrace*, Elias called the church to quit its pursuit of false purity—both ethnic and religious—a pursuit that in religious communities is often disguised in the language of sin. "Sin is here the kind of purity that wants the world cleansed of the other rather than the heart cleansed of the evil that drives people out by calling those who are clean 'unclean' and refusing to help make clean those who are unclean" (74). Volf's concern, which the sermon highlighted, is the "deadly logic of the 'politics of purity'" that has led to major world conflicts (74). Germany and Europe, Serbia, Rwanda, Northern Ireland, and the Congo are just a few examples Volf gives.

Making the theoretical personal, Elias pointed to the colonial history of the Netherlands, commenting extempore on the saying "if you ain't Dutch, you ain't much" as an accurate description of the community's attitude, and mentioned the danger of expecting assimilation from outsiders. One particular barrier he noted for the congregation was the formalism in dress, attitude, and acceptable noise with the implication that such formalism might result in the exclusion of children, other cultures, and lower classes. Following in a vein similar to Kuyvenhoven's article, Elias challenged the hidden desire for ethnic purity that he sensed in the church and experienced major backlash from many of the Dutch adherents who previously had been supportive of his work.

Four factors in this situation highlight the complexities of how religion and ethnicity interact in diaspora when the communal choice to relativize ethnic identity is taken seriously by a diverse leadership. A fifth factor demonstrates the influence of national identity on a diaspora. Simple analyses based in power relations cannot

adequately account for the dynamics at work here. The conflict occurring in this and many other diasporic churches is not a conflict between a powerful majority and an underprivileged minority; it is a conflict between two or more broad groupings, one a minority in the nation but a majority in the church (i.e. Dutch immigrants) and the other a majority in the nation but a minority in the church (white, English-speaking Canadians, many of British ancestry), both of whom take their mutual ownership of the community seriously. Add into the mix those who find themselves a minority in both contexts—the Liberian, Congolese, Laotian, and Mexican families who are members as well—and the analysis of power exchange becomes quite complex. In fact, at this point, analyzing power relations may not be the right approach to understanding the situation. Diasporic, inter-ethnic religious communities form networks that transform the cultural matrix of power relations. The Dutch bring their minority status within the nation into the church where they are racially linked with the majority culture; they mistake their ethnic status for a weakness when in fact it is a power within the church, thus often taking less responsibility for welcoming and listening than they would if they self-identified as having power. The white non-Dutch and non-white non-Dutch end up sharing a vision for ecumenism and for multi-ethnic community that is at times the more powerful voice and at other times a double disempowerment for non-white non-Dutch and an affront to the assumed power of non-Dutch white members.

Second, this situation demonstrates the boundaries of inclusion and the way those boundaries are constantly being negotiated. For certain Dutch members Elias' sermon challenged their assertion of living "out of a religious story," since the challenge to their

ethnic narrative and their response made clear their investment in it. On the other side of things, people who did not share the ethnic narrative of the Dutch and Reformed diaspora found that the battle to *partner* in leading and visioning for the church (as opposed to *being hosted* as non-Dutch members of a Dutch church) was ongoing in the negotiation of the community's "official" story. The two stories clashed and highlighted the varying levels of investment in the strands of the community's narrative identity.

Third, the sermon touched a nerve in the congregation, and that nerve was the fear of identity loss that exists in a religious diaspora despite the ideals of inclusiveness. Angry members did not feel they should be subjected to ethnic criticism "in their own home," to use the language of hospitality.[32] In correspondence with Elias about this chapter he points to another nerve that was touched—a strong "shame dynamic," of which he was unaware, within the Dutch immigrant community. He writes, "Indeed, I was invited into the 'home' of this community and then courageously criticized the home. In criticizing the home so publicly, I broke a 'family rule' in this community (in some people's eyes) by bringing public shame to the community through this act" (Elias). While the Dutch members were the largest single ethnic group in the church community, their self-understanding emerged largely from their position as a minority ethnicity in Canada. In their discussion of the difficulties encountered when trying to create "common democratic space" for displaced communities, Bounds and Patterson follow Cynthia Cockburn in emphasizing the important task of balancing "fluid identity and a

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[32] I unpack this metaphor more fully in chapter four. In this moment, precisely what Derrida writes about in his essay "On Hospitality" took place as the actual affective limits of hospitality clashed with the ideals of absolute hospitality.

sense of safety" (Bounds 186). This of course raises the question: at what point is a community no longer characterized by its displacement? I would argue that this question cannot be posed until the diaspora's first generation has passed on. Hinnells writes that "a community remains a diaspora as long as the diasporic frame of mind and social structure continues" (Hinnells 726). In the case of this congregation, many of those who were angered by the sermon were first generation immigrants, but some of the younger Dutch members were similarly outraged. One could account for the intense ethnic loyalty of this Dutch diaspora's second and even third generation (in contrast to the second and third generation of some racialized diasporas who feel the attraction to majority culture more keenly) by understanding the religious narrative as extending the shelf life of the ethnic narrative, so to speak. Braiding a small diasporic ethnic narrative into a larger historical religious narrative strengthens and extends its influence. Whether because of that or because of the continued presence of the first generation of immigrants, the question of how to balance mutability and familiarity is still a pertinent one in that community.

Fourth and significantly, the only thing that could serve as the arbiter for this church's conflict and many other religious conflicts was, in the end, conversations over interpretations of the community's narrative as it is embodied in text. That fateful sermon, as Elias now calls it, was based on an interpretation of Ephesians, a text that the entire church— African-Canadian, Canadian, Dutch, Dutch-Canadian, Laotian, and Liberian alike—shared a commitment to listening to and to shaping their lives around, a text that forms part of the Biblical narrative they purport to live out of. Conversations over what certain Biblical texts dictate in the case of ethnicity and otherness are now

ongoing at that church. I say *significantly* because this insight gives us a more specific

way of thinking about what holds the community together. "Faith commitment" implies a

variety of traditions, practices, etc, but in this case it most basically represents a

commitment to listening to a text's narrative: that of the Christian scriptures.

Although the commitment to scriptures is not shared by all religions, it is by

many.[33] In the novel, *Sweetness in the Belly*, Lilly, a Muslim woman from Ethiopia,

continually argues over textual interpretation with her "co-wives" and her partner, Aziz.[34]

When her "co-wife" Amina is finally reunited with her husband, Yusuf, they find that

Yusuf cannot cope well in the new environment given the psychological and emotional

trauma he has passed through in refugee-transit. The one place that he finds solace is in

reading the Qur'an: "The only thing that is certain is the Qur'an," Lilly muses. "Precise

and uncompromising—exactly as it was delivered to the Prophet Muhammed as he sat in

a cave and received the words of God through the angel Gabriel more than thirteen

hundred years ago. To read the Qur'an with your family around you is to be home"

(Gibb, *Sweetness* 235). Faced with the chaos of social, political, and familial upheaval,

Yusuf knows that he can trust a text to remain the same. The book can be transported

intact. Granted, the interpretation of the Qur'an in Lilly's fictional case and of the Bible

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[33] See David Abram's *Spell of the Sensuous* for a critical perspective on the way the magic of reading a text has overtaken the magic of oral storytelling and bodily interaction with the world and for an alternative way of understanding the spirituality of the world that comes from indigenous religions in South Asia.

[34] I put co-wives in scare quotes because Lilly presents an anomaly to her cultural milieu. Although Lilly is not actually attached to these women's husbands, that phrase is the closest she can get to describing her relationship with the women she lives with.

in the CRC congregation's case must be continually renewed in diaspora, but for many communities its place as arbiter of communal disagreements can remain.

Abdullahi A. An-Na'im is helpful for understanding what is going on in the above situations, though he is not working with the concept of diaspora. His tentative conclusion regarding religious fundamentalism is that "religious traditions are constantly being contested by competing interpretations of the scripture in the specific context of each community of believers" (33). A common commitment in the communities to a text can open up room for democratic discussion. An-Na'im finds reason for hope in this interpretive discussion as it provides room for inter-religious consensus in the global context. Islamic fundamentalism, he writes, may contrast with this way of reading, but must be understood on its own terms: that is, that it "should be understood as an indigenous response to profound social, political, and economic crises and *not* as the inevitable outcome of Islamic religious scripture or history" (28-9). So Yusuf's desire for the safety and stability of a text that is immutable stands in contrast to the diaspora that surrounds him, which is trying to understand how this stabilizing text is to be applied in the new context. Yet in both cases, reading the Qur'an functions as a sort of home and centre in an alien and changing environment. Sacred text can be the stabilizing centre through which the new diasporic identity can be safely negotiated. Counter-intuitively, it can allow for more flexibility. As An Na'im does in his discussion of Islam, I find hope 1. in the democratic space that can be opened up by the CRC's common commitment to listening well to a single narrative and to interpreting its significance for their own placement and 2. by the way its recent interpretations have emphasized the need for

multi-ethnic, multi-cultural communities (CRC; CPJ; Conroy; A. Mulder; G. Mulder; Pohl *Making Room*; Somerville). The importance of story and narrative to their identity also presents an opportunity for literary studies to contribute to the process of contextualization happening in this and other religious diasporas.

The fifth factor points us to the strength of national narratives in determining a diaspora's narrative. Again in correspondence with Elias, I became aware of another dynamic at work in the clash between his sermon and the community. Elias was brought up in the United States but was speaking to a diaspora in Canada. About processing the experience, he writes this:

> I have been engaged in a "Peer Learning Group" with some other CRC ministers in the region over the past year. Among [the] books we have read and digested together [are]: the CRC pamphlet you mention in your chapter, Ortiz's *One New People*, Deymaz's *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, Yancey's *One Body, One Spirit*, Sheffield's *The Multicultural Leader*, and Livermore's *Cultural Intelligence*. Through this experience I am becoming more aware of …my own preconceived and, until recently, unarticulated assumptions about issues of ethnicity and identity, and it surrounds my experience as an American—an experience in which I am raised to believe that I have no particular ethnic identity outside of the mainstream American identity that is part of what is involved in being assimilated into American culture. We have reflected together as a group on the challenges and differences of the proverbial "melting pot" vs. "mosaic" of American and Canadian cultures. I am realizing that through this, part of the unique challenges in wrestling with these issues in faith communities is making room for each ethnic group to BOTH embrace fully their own ethnic identity AND make room for the "other" and their ethnic identity. These dynamics intensify the challenge of negotiating the community's story it seems to me! (Elias)

The Canadian context, in particular the official multiculturalism that was initiated by Pierre Trudeau's government in the 1970s, has influenced the CRC diaspora's sense of how it fits into its wider surroundings. When Elias questioned the *rightness* of their

ethnic purity he was interpreted as also questioning their *right* to be ethnically distinct. Their resistance to his theological critique came out of a belief in their minority rights within the multicultural nation of Canada and foreshadows the discussion in chapter three of this dissertation where I discuss the clashing loyalties of a humanitarian rights-based discourse and a Christian faith-based discourse. To a certain extent a diaspora in Canada depends on and is invested in a highly contentious and flawed national narrative of official multiculturalism.[35]

Conclusions on Ethnicity and Religion in Diaspora

To sum up I return to the original point of my first chapter, i.e. that displaced religious communities deserve more attention in the current proliferation of diaspora scholarship. From the example of the CRC and the other narratives and scholarship I have drawn on, the understanding of religious diasporas is broadened and it becomes obvious that studies of cultural identity in diaspora must take into account not only ethnic but also religious narratives. Ethnic and religious narratives alike occupy the space of worldview commitments, symbiotically influencing a community's narration of identity. Religion has the potential to uniquely impact diaspora communities not only as a social cohesive but also, as one example, by creating varied relationships to the homeland that more easily afford inter-ethnic solidarity. The assumption that ethnic identity equals diasporic identity is flawed. Recognizing this flaw can open up space in diaspora studies for examinations of what *is* rather than what *should be* and for studies of self-identified diasporas rather than externally-imposed ethnic identities. The fact of ongoing diaspora

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[35] For example analyses of Canada's national narratives see Bissoondath *Selling Illusions*; Coleman "Muscular"; and Mackey.

identity transformation means that the balance between religious and ethnic narratives can change through generations. In religious communities committed to mission (without an s) or where the experience of displacement has influenced them towards ecumenism[36], this process can be quite intentionally focused on broadening membership, even while that missionary impulse remains complicated by the diaspora's fear of identity loss as a minority in its new country. Multi-ethnic religious diasporas require sensitive exploration of the complex power relations at work in internal and external forces. Sacred texts not only can provide a stable narrative of identity in the upheaval of displacement but also can play an important role in arbitrating differences within a diaspora, and given room for interpretive discussion, they can actually provide an important tool for re-forming religious and ethnic identity in the diaspora. Finally, Canada's narration of itself as multicultural plays varying roles in shaping diasporas' identities and can become a fault line in discussions over how to incorporate multi-ethnic members into a religious diaspora. We now turn to the relationship of ethnic and religious narratives to the nation-state, another important part of the complex weave of diasporic identity.

Home Away from Home: The Interaction of Religion and the Nation-State in Scholarship on the Condition of Diaspora

Yusuf, Lilly, and Amina in Gibb's *Sweetness in the Belly* share a desire to create a new home away from their old home, to root themselves in a new nation. That desire brings us to another element of many diasporic communities and perhaps also to another

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[36] Though I have not addressed this phenomenon directly, the church I am using as an example hired an "outsider" to give leadership to the church's mission—a brave ecumenical move for a diaspora. In addition they were founding members of a citywide ecumenical movement called True City, an organization that participated in the workshop that I analyze in later chapters.

reason for the absence of scholarship on the condition of religious diasporas: the clash

between religious valorization of "roots" and diaspora studies' valorization of "routes."[37]

Donald Akenson, in an article outlining his "skeptical appreciation" for diaspora studies,

points to both the helpful and unhelpful contributions of studies of the condition of

diaspora to diaspora studies as it has been classically defined. He outlines what he calls

"the real attractiveness of the concept of diaspora to historians of English-speaking

Canada" as introducing a set of concepts that can help open up new ways of

understanding history (Akenson 385). Akenson is speaking as a historian, but for the

cultural theorist, these are concepts to deterritorialize culture, and for the person in

religious studies, they are concepts to challenge monolithic religion. At its best, he writes,

diaspora "allows us to escape the tyranny of the nation-state….[and] allows an entirely

new set of viewpoints" (386). He continues,

> Like a histologist's changing his or her plane of incision, we can gain new
> insight by altering our angle of vision. For example, instead of perceiving
> post-1945 Italian immigrants to Toronto solely in terms of their actions
> within Canadian society (a useful view-point, to be sure), they should also
> be perceived as part of an international web of migrants….The lives of
> these citizens of Canada cannot be adequately understood if one sees them
> solely as being Canadian. (386)

In this description of diaspora studies and in the work of Clifford, Gilroy, Hall, and

others, diaspora offers a unique way into studying the world because it focuses on the

transnational "routes" of people rather than their national "roots." My article in *Re-*

Routing the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium addresses the absence

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[37] The clever distinction between the homonyms roots and routes was first used by Paul
Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* (19) and is explored extensively in James Clifford's *Routes:
Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*.

of refugee movement in such a conception, an absence that is symptomatic of celebrating

voluntary migrancy in diaspora cultural studies. The realities of *forced* migration and the

temporariness of the label "refugee" on a person's identity both would indicate that the

diaspora paradigm of productive transnational movement and of migration as normative

in human experience is inadequate for understanding literature written about refugee

experiences, such as *Sweetness in the Belly*.

      Kokot, Tölölyan, and Alfonso seem to argue a similar point in relation to the

place of religion in diaspora studies but distinguish between two elements in the diasporic

paradigm. They end their introduction to a new volume on diaspora, identity, and religion

with the brief comment that "a renewed focus on both sides of diasporic practice—the

mobile as well as the rooted—will bring the meaning of religion back to the fore" (Kokot

7). This fascinating claim is not sufficiently elaborated upon, but what I gather from their

introduction is that poststructuralist diaspora scholarship more often has been associated

with "the celebratory anti-national rhetoric of mobility…as well as the political discourse

of uprootedness and dispersal among diaspora elites" while religion has been shown to

frequently characterize sedentary or fossilized identity in diasporic communities (Kokot

5). Highlighting the missing link between studies of religion and studies of diaspora, they

call for scholarship that accounts for the local expressions of diaspora and for religious

organization in diasporas as they attempt to root themselves. Here is where I see the

connection between, on the one hand, a strong and elaborate body of scholarship focused

on challenging national sovereignty and its violent logic of exclusion (in cultural studies,

Gilroy; in anthropology, Clifford; in political science, Nyers, Soguk; in legal studies Bosniak), and on the other hand, the lack of scholarship on religious diasporas.

What is the relationship of religion to transnational routes and national roots as they are found in diaspora scholarship? Depending on one's perspective, religion can be figured in at least two ways: first, as a global community and thus supportive of diaspora and transnationalism in undermining nation-states, or second, as an anti-cosmopolitan force because of its tendency to venerate tradition and propagate the idealism of purity in identity. Salman Rushdie's experience as an author has triggered global conversations about religion and literature. I do not wish to take up the specifics of his secular reading of Islam nor the angry responses his writing has incurred since much has been written about that. Rather I wish to place his diasporic paradigm into this matrix of religion, scholarship on the condition of diaspora, and our earlier discussion of ethnic absolutism as a way of showing the conceptual links attendant to diasporic dismissals of religion.

Rushdie's discussion of *The Satanic Verses* in his essay "In Good Faith" describes his novel as "a migrant's-eye view of the world. It is written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis (slow or rapid, painful or pleasurable) that is the migrant condition, and from which, I believe, can be derived a metaphor for all humanity" (Rushdie, *Imaginary* 394). Rushdie's "metaphor for all humanity" is the migrant, whose pain can be normalized psychologically through an acceptance of uncertainty and politically through the rejection of cultural nationalism. Gilroy similarly gives cultural theorists the choice between "the overintegrated conceptions of culture which present immutable, ethnic differences as an absolute break in the histories and

experience of 'black' and 'white'" or the "more difficult option: the theorization of creolization," a choice that would seem, "from the viewpoint of ethnic absolutism,…[to] be a litany of pollution and impurity" (Gilroy, "The Black Atlantic" 51).

Elias' sermon, using Volf's Christian critique of purity, would have sounded quite similar to Gilroy's cultural critique, except for the fact that it was deeply religious and theological. Understandably and especially in the case of Rushdie, the more extreme conservative, and often nationalist, expressions of faith are what have shaped secular understandings of faith, and so religion is often associated with just such absolutism. This is so much the case that, in an academic book on religion and global society, editor Juergensmeyer can open with the question, "is religion the natural enemy of globalization?" (1). He goes on to explain that "religion is often identified with the culture and politics of the hostile antiurban village" (2). Throughout Rushdie's "In Good Faith" and his subsequent essay "Is Nothing Sacred?" the concepts of "purity" and the "sacred" are associated with rooted religion, and Rushdie, a self-professed secular humanist pluralist, associates "hybridity" and "freedom" with the diasporic literature of migrancy. Though he writes that he supports an ongoing dialogue between the two ways of viewing the world, his own perspective on the usefulness of rooting oneself in faith is clear:

> throughout human history, the apostles of purity, those who have claimed to possess a total explanation, have wrought havoc among mere mixed-up human beings. Like many millions of people, I am a bastard child of history….The argument between purity and impurity,…the argument between the monk and the roaring boy, between primness and impropriety, between the stultifications of excessive respect and the scandals of impropriety, is an old one; I say, let it continue. Human beings understand themselves and shape their futures by arguing and challenging and

> questioning and saying the unsayable; not by bowing the knee, whether to
> gods or to men. (Rushdie 394-5)

He goes on later to claim that "[T]he idea of the sacred is quite simply one of the most conservative notions in any culture, because it seeks to turn other ideas—Uncertainty, Progress, Change—into crimes" (416). The sacred is linked to purity and both are seen as the conservative roots of religion. This chain of conceptual links is helpful for understanding why religion generally has not been a welcome factor in diaspora studies and cultural studies. If religion functions as a root then it too must be cut off in order for migrant routes to be normalized, in order for diaspora to be configured as a liberating model of transnational identification.

The recent international faces of Christianity and Islam found in George Bush and Al Qaeda and the Canadian faces of Christianity seen in Stephen Harper and Jason Kenney support those observations. The expectation from either side is that religion will be a conservative factor in shoring up a national or a diasporic identity, a part of the desire for purity. By contrast, however, as Elias' sermon and another set of anthropological and sociological studies of religion in diaspora show, religion can be a factor in broadening a diaspora's horizons. Far from encouraging the ethnic absolutism that concerns Gilroy and other diaspora scholars, religions are possible allies in resisting the "tyranny of the nation-state."[38] Let us return to the other way in which the relationship between religion and nationalism can be conceived: religion as a transnational community. In diasporas, religion comes into contact with new cultural and

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[38] A Google search on this phrase suggests that it is a commonly used phrase in published books and in online discussions.

religious practices, often creating new and unique religious identities. Recall Smart's thesis that religious communities in diaspora have a propensity to participate in ecumenical endeavours. Reciprocally, in religion, diasporas find a strength in membership-rights that exist beyond the reach of the nation-state.

The fieldwork of studies focusing on religious identity in specific diasporas points to the dynamic nature of religion in diasporic contexts. In the Prologue to the published results of Religion, Ethnicity and New Immigrant Research II (RENIR II is a joint research project that followed up RENIR I, their earlier study of thirteen transnational congregations from six religions), Janet Saltzman Chafetz and Helen Rose Ebaugh write that "with the exception of [a] few studies…transnational religious ties have been ignored in the literature on transnationalism" (Chafetz 6). In 1999 Chafetz and Ebaugh began RENIR II in order to fill "this lacunae in the transnational migration literature." Part of their interest came from a review of the results of RENIR I when they discovered "some tantalizing hints in the RENIR I data to suggest that these dense webs of two-way communication across borders, combined with regular travel in both directions, spur the spread of religious innovation" (xv).[39] The seven chapters in their published results demonstrate a wide variety of types of transnational religious communities but all show the ongoing exchange between diasporic groups and their homeland's religious counterparts as altering both communities. Smart's article concludes similarly. He writes generally about all major religions but focuses on Hinduism when he suggests that "the

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[39] *What is the What* by Dave Eggers gives us an example of transnational networking amongst refugees from the Sudan who, lacking the financial and legal resources to physically travel across borders, used phones and other technology for transnational participation.

diaspora itself contributes to the process of self-definition [within Hindu communities] an

ecumenical spirit and a kind of new orthodoxy" (Smart 294). That is, when Hindus move

from one place to another, they join new religious communities and bring to these

communities a desire for openness to different expressions of the Hindu faith and a push

for renewing the community's sense of what is orthodox. Though it seems

counterintuitive, openness to difference and increased negotiation over orthodoxy are

complementary and not at odds in this experience. In fact the identity of Hinduism in

diaspora is so dynamic that Smart can confidently state: "In a sense Hinduism is a new

religion, although its roots are of course very ancient" (294). Manuel A. Vasquez and

Marie Friedmann Marquardt include in their book, *Globalizing the Sacred*, a chapter

called "Theorizing Globalization and Religion." They use the terms "deterritorialization"

and "relocalization" to describe the experience of migration in globalization and argue

that,

> Religion…is one of the main protagonists in this unbinding of culture
> from its traditional referents and boundaries and its reattachment in new
> space-time configurations. Through this interplay of delocalization and
> relocalization, religion gives rise to hybrid individual and collective
> identities that fly in the face of methodological purity and simplicity
> sought by modernist sociologies of religion. (Vasquez 35)

Vasquez and Marquardt are particularly interested in creating an "anchored approach" by

understanding the technological communication structures available to transnational

religious groups. Homi Bhabha's theorization of hybridity becomes for them a helpful

tool for understanding "multiple, fluid, and often contradictory religious identities and

practices that have proliferated with globalization" (Vasquez 58).

But the fieldwork done on religious diasporas points not only to the shifting of

religious identity in diaspora but also to the transnational strength of religious networks.

In her well-known book on transnational migrants in the United States, Peggy Levitt

leads the way in moving beyond an assimilationist approach to immigration issues:

"instead of loosening their connections and trading one membership for another

[increasing numbers of migrants] are keeping their feet in both worlds. They use political,

religious, and civic arenas to forge social relations, earn their livelihoods, and exercise

their rights across borders" (Levitt 3). Her sixth chapter, "God Is Everywhere," looks

more closely at the way religious life functions across borders for Catholic Mirafloreños

migrants from the Dominican Republic living in the United States.[40]

> Membership in the religious organizational system linking Boston and the
> Dominican Republic allows individuals to move almost seamlessly
> between these two settings….It also integrates migrants into a powerful,
> resource-rich international religious institutional network they can access
> regardless of their political citizenship. (Levitt 160)

The "horizontally and vertically integrated religious transnational system" within which

the migrants move is rarely formalized but exists more in the "frequent, informal

exchanges of parishioners, labor, resources, programs, and training" (165). This dynamic

exchange, of course, means that churches in the Dominican and in the United States are

experiencing mutual change as a result of this transnational affiliation. And yet their

religious affiliation also provides continuity for migrants. One might say Catholicism is

their route-able roots. "At one end of the continuum of change," Levitt writes, "are norms

about God and faith. Beliefs about God are, in some sense, intrinsically

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[40] Levitt's specific argument in this chapter is that the Catholic practices of the
Mirafloreños serve to strengthen the durability of their transnationational ties.

transnational….God is present, in whatever form, wherever the believer is" (169). Or, to put it confessionally as Ronald Sider does in his Afterword to *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*: "our citizenship in heaven transcends the differences in our earthly nationalities" (Sider 142).[41] Roland Robertson's sociological study of religion in globalization is summarized by Vasquez and Marquardt in this way: "religion helps forge a shared consciousness of the world as a single place" (Vasquez 50). Their attempt to understand how this consciousness comes to be is shaped by a cosmopolitan ethnography that studies sites such as the Internet rather than individual congregations. They deliberately attempt to blur the boundaries between purity and hybridity, the sacred and the secular.

The majority of the anthropological and sociological work done on religious diasporas does not address the implications of a diaspora's faith for their relationship to nation-states. Its theorizing about hybridity and its focus on a transcendence of national citizenship does not make use of insights into ways religion should or should not be interacting with nation-states, insights that could be gleaned from political science or international relations. Here we come to the crux of the question about why theories regarding the exclusionary logic of the state have not been brought together with religious studies. At least one answer to the question presents itself as we come full circle to the beginning of chapter one to consider the emergence of the decidedly secular

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[41] It is important to note that Sider's use of the word "transcend" does not suggest an otherworldly preoccupation as some secular scholarship suggests. In the context of the entire book this transcendent citizenship is meant to mobilize Christians in the United States to accept and support undocumented Hispanic migrants.

modern nation-state, beginning with the history of the Huguenots in France during the 17th century.

Daniel Philpott's *Revolutions in Sovereignty* is famous for its treatment of the Peace of Westphalia—brokered by two treaties in 1648—which followed and was aimed at ending a century (and a particularly brutal past thirty years) of so-called religious wars in Europe. Philpott argues that the treaties aimed to purge nation-states of religious influence. Traditional political science and international relations scholarship now assume this history of the modern nation-state as a tale of peace negotiated by a non-violent secular state amongst violent religious factions. Rushdie's own diasporic writings have at their roots this view of the secular nation-state: "To be an Indian of my generation was also to be convinced of the vital importance of Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of a secular India. Secularism, for India, is not simply a point of view; it is a question of survival" (Rushdie 404). Charles Taylor's tome on secularism describes the aim of the modern nation-state in this way: "to undercut the reasons for rebellion being all too irresponsibly urged by confessional zealots…. In the context of the early seventeenth century, with its continuing bitterly fought wars of religion, this emphasis was entirely understandable" (Taylor 160). Revulsion to religious killing "legitimize[s] the transfer of ultimate loyalty to the modern State" (Cavanaugh 397).

It is no wonder then that scholars writing on the condition of diaspora, disenchanted as they are with the violence of the nation-state, do not want to turn to religion for solidarity. To do so would be to return to the problem that necessitated the construction of what is now the new problem. But William T. Cavanaugh provides a

convincing second interpretation of the history of the secular nation-state: "'Wars of Religion' of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe are evoked as the founding moment of modern liberalism by theorists such as John Rawls, Judith Shklar, and Jeffrey Stout," writes Cavanaugh, but in fact "the 'Wars of Religion' were not the events which necessitated the birth of the modern State; they were in fact themselves the birthpangs of the State" (Cavanaugh 397-8). In other words, "These wars were not simply a matter of conflict between 'Protestantism' and 'Catholicism,' but were fought largely for the aggrandizement of the emerging State over the decaying remnants of the medieval ecclesial order" (398). Princes wanted the authority to control the faith of the people within their borders, and religious groups wanted to remain supranational (400). Cavanaugh narrates the French Huguenot situation, showing that the absolute sovereignty of the state was being debated rather than any particular religious belief:

> The early settlement of civil dominance over the Church was a crucial factor in the building of a strong, centralized monarchy during the rule of Francis I from 1515 to 1547. When Calvinism began to challenge the ecclesiastical system in France, it therefore formed a threat to royal power. The rising bourgeoisie in provincial towns, anxious to combat centralized control, joined the Huguenots in large numbers. Moreover, as many as two-fifths of the nobility rallied to the Calvinist cause. They wanted to reverse the trend toward absolute royal authority and coveted power like that of the German princes to control the Church in their own lands. (401)

The important thing we learn from this history is that "for the main instigators of the carnage, doctrinal loyalties were at best secondary to their stake in the rise or defeat of the centralized State" (401). The Queen Mother Catherine de Medici had been attempting to consolidate her power by combining both Protestants and Catholics into a state church (a prospect that both resisted) but, realizing that the Huguenots were beginning to gain

power, chose to side with the Catholics and ordered the massacre of Protestants in 1572 on what is now called St. Bartholomew's Day. Cavanaugh's article gives a fuller rendering of the political, religious, and social activities happening throughout Europe during that time, but his insightful account helps us to see that 1. "the principal promoters of the wars in France and Germany were in fact…kings and nobles with a stake in the outcome of the movement toward the centralized hegemonic State" (Cavanaugh 403); 2. "the concept of religion being born [at this time] is one of domesticated belief systems which are, insofar as it is possible, to be manipulated by the sovereign for the benefit of the State"; and 3. the "emergence of nation-states" at this time gave states "known lines demarcating the exclusive domain of sovereign power, especially its monopoly over the means of violence" (408). Thus his conclusion: "the Church needs to reclaim the political nature of its faith if it is to resist the violence of the State" (409), a statement that has great import for church-based activists such as the ones I discuss in later chapters.[42]

His use of "political" here seems to refer to the not only private but also public nature of faith. Cavanaugh's understanding of the political nature of faith is a direct rejection of the privatization of religion by a state that wishes to undercut any loyalties that might challenge national sovereignty and contains similarities to the work of Nyers and McNevin in developing the concept of the "political" as more than state-centric action. He is emphatically not recommending "mere strategies to insinuate the Church into the making of public policy" (409). Instead, he is trying to free religion from "the

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[42] My third and fourth chapters return to the need for religion to resist the violence of the state by dialoguing with the critiques of humanitarianism and offering an alternative faith discourse.

thrall of the State" so that it can take its place as a single sub-community of many working towards "a common political culture based on peaceful consensus" (409-10). Undoubtedly, religions have warred against each other, he writes, but submitting communities of faith to the violent exclusions of a "secular" state does not solve that problem. Religion is public and political and needs to maintain that self-understanding if it is to avoid becoming an unwitting enforcer for the state.

In Cavanaugh we find a faith-driven critique of the state that coincides strongly with scholarship in political science and international relations on the exclusionary logic of the state and with scholarship on the condition of diaspora.[43] His final words reference the action of liberation theologians in Latin America, who share their wealth and food rather than waiting for the state to do it, and give a hopeful vision for what the church can be, which "transgresses both the lines which separate public from private and the borders of nation-states, thus creating spaces for a different kind of political practice, one which is incapable of being pressed into the service of wars or rumors of wars" (Cavanaugh 416). The transnational nature of many religious groups means that they can be institutions that help democratize international institutional power.

Conclusion

The increasing attention given to fundamentalism in the context of globalization similarly highlights the strange definition of religion that emerged from the Westphalia's creation of the secular, sovereign state (Joustra 263). Humanist scholars need to take

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[43] On page 413 Cavanaugh goes so far as to call the war-making of states a "protection racket" and follows Charles Tilly in saying that state-makers bear striking resemblance to organized crime.

seriously the many faiths that people hold globally (263). If what happened on September 11, 2001 was symptomatic of, among other things, a secularized world in which religion is not taken seriously as a legitimate vision of the world, and if the War of Terror that followed was symptomatic of the sanctioned violence of nation-states that was established by humanist thinking in the 16th and 17th centuries, then the way forward for humanist scholars is not to continue putting religion away on a cultural display shelf. Instead, the challenge is to understand the various storied religious worldviews, to take their stories seriously, and to begin encouraging those religious groups and activities that are committed to living in peace with those who are different from themselves. Further, if the study of diaspora is to be pursued with an ethical concern for those people who are actually in diaspora, then the rooting and routing potential of faith needs to be acknowledged as more than (and often not at all) a conservative institution in collusion with the nation-state.

SECTION TWO: Two Dominant Narrative Contexts for Church-Based Refugee Activism

Chapter 3: Gated Barriers and Doormen: Discourses of Humanitarianism and the Humanitarian Citizenship of the Christian Reformed Church in Canada

Janet Hinshaw-Thomas and the Response of Canadian Humanitarianism

In September of 2007 Janet Hinshaw-Thomas was arrested at the Canadian border for assisting a family of Haitian asylum seekers. She did not try to cross the border with them; she merely assisted them in reaching the border. For her pains Hinshaw-Thomas had her vehicle impounded, had her cell phone confiscated, and spent the night in jail.

She was charged under Section 117 of the federal Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) with smuggling people without proper documentation, an outrageous charge given the normal lack of documentation asylum seekers face possess. "'Refugees, by definition, don't always arrive with perfect papers,'" points out Mary Jo Leddy. "'If they did, would they be refugees?'" (Swan).

The Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) wrote letters of protest as did Amnesty International, The Canadian Bar Association, the Presbyterian Church of Canada, the Refugee Lawyer Association, the Mennonite Central Committee, and many others (CCR, "Proud to Aid"). A strongly-worded letter was sent by former federal ministers, including Lloyd Axworthy, Joe Clark, Allan Rock, and Irwin Cotler, who framed the criminalization of humanitarian aid workers as a blockade to "individuals like Ms. Hinshaw-Thomas [who] play a vital role in helping ensure that Canada does in fact comply with its international human rights obligations" (Axworthy). The immediate and intense outrage expressed by Canadian community workers and organizations has been credited, by Hinshaw-Thomas herself, as a significant factor leading to dropped charges two months later.

A quick read of these letters and articles reveals the discourse upon which Hinshaw-Thomas's work—and therefore the welcome of refugees into the country—is legally and politically founded. Those who defended her did so on the basis of humanitarian values. Official petitions and statements along with pressure growing through public forums and letters from community and faith-based groups framed the event—almost without exception—in terms of a crisis of humanitarian values.

Humanitarianism was counted on to give supposedly 'non-political' institutions and communities access to political action on behalf of non-citizened people. This was the first time in Canadian history that an individual's assistance of asylum seekers out of humanitarian rather than mercenary motivation had been declared illegal. Access to the Canadian border was denied when humanitarian action was rejected as political.

Protestors repeatedly drew attention to the fact that Hinshaw-Thomas was not making money for her assistance. Undoubtedly the discourse of selfless, non-profit-driven humanitarianism speaks across international borders and strategically unifies groups working with disparate motivations but with similar goals related to refugees. Many groups rallied to this discourse out of the betrayal they felt that Section 117 of IRPA had been used against a humanitarian worker. In discussions over this legislation in 2001, the UNHCR and others had been reassured that it could not be applied to faith groups.

In the case of Hinshaw-Thomas, the incongruence of a sixty-five-year-old Quaker grandmother being arrested by the Canadian Services Border Agency had public appeal and lent credence to protesting groups. The various protestors found this incongruence especially troubling, not only because of international commitment to humanitarianism but also because of the particular national location of the crisis: Canada, a nation with an international reputation for humanitarian work. Hinshaw-Thomas has been quoted as praising Canada, even after her arrest, for having "'an outstanding record of fairness to asylum seekers, which the United States does not'" (Swan). This positive imaging of

Canada as a nation is, at least in part, a strategic unifying discourse for activists who wish to keep the Canadian government responsible to international human rights laws.

Responding to the arrest of Hinshaw-Thomas, the Canadian Council for Refugees reiterated the assumption of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act's third stated objective with respect to refugees: humanitarian ideals are a basic part of Canadian identity and fair consideration of people claiming persecution is a "fundamental expression of Canada's humanitarian ideals" (IRPA 2C). A letter signed by twelve major faith organizations associated with the CCR was sent to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, and to the Attorney General of Canada. This letter called on the government to halt the criminalization of humanitarian activity, arguing that IRPA was flawed and contradicted Canadian humanitarian traditions if it allowed for such prosecution. People who act out of compassion and a desire to oppose injustice should instead be "honoured for working to uphold Canada's humanitarian ideals" (Adema). Letters and statements of protest appealed to the value of humanitarianism not only as universal but as Canadian. "Canadians were awarded the Nansen Medal by the UN for our generosity in 'aiding and abetting' refugees," points out an article in *The Globe and Mail* commenting on the Hinshaw-Thomas case, and then the writer asks: "Are we all smugglers now?" (Brouwer). Our good reputation is at stake; our national identity is in crisis.[44]

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[44] Some Canadian literary scholars have suggested that this 'crisis of identity' is in fact the unifying national narrative, which might lead us to conclude that this very crisis of identity is what allows us to exclude the other as a threat to our fragile self-identity as a nation. See Mackey; Kroetsch.

What first intrigued me about the Hinshaw-Thomas case was that the refugee activist groups who signed on to various protest letters were not uniformly aligned with either the discourse of humanitarianism or the discourse of citizenship. Bruce Adema, the Director of the Christian Reformed Church's Canadian ministries, was one of the twelve representatives of faith organizations who signed the letter. That letter was unique from other letters of support in that it acknowledged the signers' particular investment in providing solidarity with Hinshaw-Thomas given her Quaker (ie. religious) background (Adema). Each of the five paragraphs of the letter conspicuously mentions humanitarianism—a clear response to the language of the legislation and surrounding discussions. Yet humanitarianism is not part of the self-understanding or shared language of Adema's denomination.

What is the importance of such an observation for our present topic? For one, in order to understand how creative refugee narratives might helpfully interject into the CRC's activism, it will be important to understand the stories that have shaped it thus far. In this second section, we examine the cultural and religious narratives that provide discursive contexts for the refugee activism of Christian communities, specifically the religious diaspora of the CRC, in Canada. The discourses that have dominated that activism thus far come from humanitarian, theological, and ethnic narratives. When we dig further into the various faith organizations that signed the letter of protest from the Canadian Council of Refugees, the discussion of motivations and worldview assumptions becomes quite complicated. For instance, the Mennonite Central Committee of Canada

(MCC), a signing member of the document, baldly describes its relationship to

government in the following way:

> MCC enters into agreements with existing governments where we work. In doing so, MCC takes care not to make agreements that would hinder following its principles of serving those in need, regardless of their race, religion or nationality. MCC also witnesses to governments in Canada and the United States calling them to remember the needs of the poor. This witness is rooted in Christian faith rather than a political ideology. (Mennonite Central Committee)

Humanitarianism may or may not be one of those political ideologies, but it is not the

ideology MCC depends on for its work. Members of MCC share with humanitarians a

commitment to human beings but are committed to and act out of a religious

understanding of the world as created by and accountable to God. Their relationship to

the federal government is simultaneously cooperative and conflicted. They share the

government's desire for a peaceful society and for fair immigration and refugee

determination processes, but their desire comes out of a religious understanding of

shalom[45] and an ecclesiology based in the experience of sojourning. Commitment to the

notions of citizenship, nationalism, and the sovereignty of the nation-state are secondary.

I do not aim to challenge the powerful display of unity demonstrated in the

advocacy that took place surrounding the Hinshaw-Thomas event or even to question the

authenticity of that unity. Rather, I want to raise the question of whether or not

humanitarianism is the best description of what refugee activists do for two reasons. The

first is a matter of accuracy: in the case of Hinshaw-Thomas, her identity as a person of

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[45] *Shalom* is a Hebrew word that indicates a holistic peace: a rightness of relations among human beings, between humans and God, between humans and the non-human world, and between humans and themselves.

faith reminds us of the difficulty in assuming refugee activists work from a foundational humanitarian impetus. Religious communities often work out of alternative interpretations of citizenship, nationalism, and refugee advocacy. Yet accuracy is not a simple matter of insisting on truthfulness; being accurate is also important in order to understand how to further foster refugee activism in Canada. Cavanaugh's call for churches to regain their political identity as an alternative to rather than as co-opted by state-centric politics presents a challenge to the traditional humanitarian interpretation of the work of church-based activists.

Encountering Barriers: The Discourse of Humanitarianism

Patricia Wood is an Associate Professor in Geography at York University and has written extensively on citizenship and the politics of identity in Canada. In a session on Access to Public Spaces and Institutions at the inaugural conference of the Canadian Association for Refugee and Forced Migration Studies, Wood noted that, while barriers to access and belonging are usually framed as social diversity issues, often the barrier is our discourses themselves. This chapter makes a start on the agenda set by Wood's comments by examining discursive barriers to and openings for civic participation by refugee-ed people in Canada, as they are encountered in church-based activism.

The heavy criticism that the discourse of humanitarianism has received recently makes it a precarious foundation for sustained work in the future. I see the strategic use of humanitarian discourse by faith groups (rather than a wholesale commitment to it) as a way of avoiding the criticisms that have been levied against the discourse, and resulting work, of humanitarianism. Furthermore, if my observation that a majority of the

organizations involved in refugee activism are motivated by some faith or another is true,[46] those invested in encouraging just and sensitive responses to irregular migration in Canada would do well to familiarize themselves with the internal motivations of faith communities. To that end I take up narratives that are internal to the CRC and that guide the denomination's refugee activism in the next chapter.

The public and external context for the work of church-based activism is the discourse of humanitarianism. In this chapter we look at its function for church-based activism with refugee-ed people. The power of humanitarianism to unify disparate groups, to insist on a certain interpretation of law despite its claimed apolitical nature, and to intervene in a national narrative are striking in the Hinshaw-Thomas event. Most striking, though, is the continued power of a discourse that recently has come under considerable criticism precisely for its claim to be apolitical.

Refugee Activism as Apolitical Humanitarianism

In a post-9/11 environment, the distinction between humanitarian intervention and neo-imperialism is arguably unclear. As a discourse, humanitarianism has been under fire since the 1990s for cozying up to states and for operating under the pretense of neutrality. Michael Barnett attributes those two criticisms to two opposing perspectives on the definition of humanitarianism and the role of humanitarian agencies in the world, arguing that they are either Dunantist or Wilsonian. The first, named after Henry Dunant, holds to a classical definition of humanitarianism as impartial, neutral, and apolitical aid, while the second, named after Woodrow Wilson, aims to influence the root causes of whatever

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[46] Consider that, as of April 2008, sixty-three of the eighty-four Sponsorship Agreement Holders in Canada were affiliated with a faith organization (McKinlay, Appendix F).

their aid alleviates, be it displacement or poverty. Barnett betrays a Dunantist bias in his

brilliant article on the transformation of humanitarianism in recent years. He traces the

history of humanitarianism in the following paragraph, giving us his particular take on

the role of politics in humanitarian work:

> [T]he widely accepted definition of humanitarianism—the impartial,
> independent, and neutral provision of relief to those in immediate danger
> of harm—emerged in opposition to a particular meaning of politics and
> helped to depoliticize relief-oriented activities. Many activities might
> alleviate suffering and improve life circumstances, including protection of
> human rights and economic development; but any actions that aspire to
> restructure underlying social relations are inherently political.
> Humanitarianism provides relief; it offers to save individuals, but not to
> eliminate the underlying causes that placed them at risk. Viewed in this
> way, humanitarianism plays a distinctive role in the international
> sacrificial order. All international orders have winners and losers and thus
> require their quota of victims. Humanitarianism interrupts this selection
> process by saving lives, thus reducing the number of sacrifices. However,
> it does not aspire to alter that order; that is the job of politics. (724)

B.S Chimni similarly is disturbed by the new political humanitarianism that has recently

emerged. Emphasizing the colonial history of humanitarian aid, he argues that

humanitarianism's classical definition is what has kept it from becoming oppressive and

controlled by states. Chimni warns against "sharply contrasting the role of humanitarian

agencies and western state policies (for example Zetter 2007: 189)" (22). He goes further

to say that "[h]istorically speaking, there has been no necessary conflict between the two:

the two often worked in tandem during the colonial era and continue to do so in the post-

colonial era, i.e., other than when classical humanitarianism briefly took root during the

Cold War" (Chimni 22). To put it baldly, "the structural role of humanitarianism has

arguably been that of the caring arm of imperialism" (23). Chimni, therefore, argues that

the historical moment of classical humanitarianism is the only time that humanitarianism

has not been implicit in colonial politics.

This classical definition of humanitarianism is precisely what supporters of Janet Hinshaw-Thomas were referencing in their demands for her release. Supporters argued Hinshaw-Thomas was not profiting from her work nor was she being legally underhanded. The participation of the United States and Canada in international humanitarian contracts such as the UN Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (hereafter, UN Refugee Convention) legitimate her work as a part of the legal order. One could say from the perspective of classical humanitarianism that her compassion for humanity trumps the responsibility of citizens to maintain the state's borders because her work does not operate on the macro-scale of state sovereignty, but rather on the level of immediate and direct human kindness to assist an individual's emergency escape from suffering.[47] Her humanitarian interests should have meant that she was not a threat to the international order. However a border guard did deem her a threat; and enough people agreed that she found herself in jail. Were her interests, in fact, political? Janice Stein reframes the question for us. "What matters is not *whether* humanitarians engage in politics—they do—but rather *what kind* of politics, and *how much* agency humanitarian organizations have within these politics" (Stein 743, emphasis mine).

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[47] This argument for humanitarian exceptions to the law appeals powerfully to the projected Canadian identity and remains vulnerable to the criticisms I have just recounted, including the accusation that I encountered in a personal conversation with a U.S. citizen who was angry about extended grace periods for people whose visas had run out. Her argument was that humanitarianism is often used just as an excuse for "liberals" to contravene the law. Her charge opens up the discussion of overlaps between legality and ethics, a conversation that rightfully has garnered much recent attention.

Refugee Activism as Political Humanitarianism

A second perspective on humanitarianism, represented here by Stein, is helpful in understanding Hinshaw-Thomas' case. Scholars from this second camp argue that separating humanitarianism from politics is disingenuous at the least. Impartiality is itself a political position; impartial humanitarian agencies are always acting politically despite their best protestations; and, worse, aid that is naively impartial is often co-opted by one side or another in a conflict, usually the more powerful.[48] Stein traces an alternative history in response to Barnett: "the defining logic of neutrality and independence, characteristic of humanitarian thinkers and organizations since their earliest days, came undone as the end of the cold war melted the frozen status quo and opened up political space for transformative logics" (741). Faced with broader and more complex political situations, humanitarian organizations

> remain committed to the assistance of all the parties to a conflict, but what that assistance should be, where in the chain of transformative logic humanitarian organizations should focus their energies, and how assistance should be delivered so that it does not create undesirable political consequences are all now hotly contested. (Stein 741)

What appears to be a new problem (i.e. the insinuation of politics into humanitarian work) is actually the implicit being made explicit. Humanitarianism is coming to the "grudging recognition that it is a political player" (741). This recognition has the potential to better protect refugee-ed people. Classical humanitarianism insists that refugee-ed people not be political actors. This insistence on keeping the political sphere separate from humanitarian action makes political action by refugees and other victims of

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[48] See Macrae, who identifies four streams of critique in an effort to defend the concept and practice of humanitarianism.

conflict a dangerous thing. If humanitarian aid is only given to perceived neutral and impartial victims, those who choose to actively participate in disputes can find themselves no longer eligible for humanitarian aid, no longer able to claim the title of refugee.[49] Refugee-ed people are asked to forfeit their right to protect themselves in order to receive help, to present themselves as victims rather than participants. Those who advocate radical civic inclusion see this forced depoliticization of displaced citizens as dehumanizing and even violent.[50]

Nyers has outlined the history of the accepted distinction between political and humanitarian social action and the critiques that have been made of that distinction, though he argues that there is a more important critique to be made than that of pointing out humanitarianism's disingenuous claims to impartiality and neutrality. He makes a case for the importance of exploring the division between the concepts of humanity and citizenship. Ultimately, what is "at stake with being human is who can be considered a political subject in the first place" (Nyers 37). If human rights are actually dependent on a state's recognition of an individual and if citizenship is the legal means for recognition,

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[49] See "Evasive Maneuvers: Refugee Warrior Communities Recast the Political" in Nyers.

[50] Consider the results of the Somalia peacekeeping mission in the early 90s as Sherene Razack recounts them. "[Canadian and American] troops went to Somalia with high expectations, anticipating that they would be engaging in humanitarian activities and that they would be appreciated by a grateful and hungry local population" (Razack, *Dark Threats* 106). When Somalis turned out to resent the presence of the troops and to act of their own accord, sometimes in antagonism towards the peacekeeping troops, "Canadians soon found themselves deep in imperial fantasies, fantasies shaped from the start by the vitality of the peacekeeper myth and by the strong sense that Canadians were in Africa to save Somalis from themselves….For Western subjects to feel whole and to understand their presence in that space as necessary and justified, Black savagery had to exist" (*Dark Threats* 69). The result was violence and brutality perpetrated by troops even against children for petty thievery.

the activities of politics and of humanitarianism are far more intertwined than

humanitarianism allows. At a discursive level, this strategy launches the citizenship-less

person into a never-ending argument about the legitimacy of their actions, trying to prove

their political subjectivity to a government that is based on the very distinction they are

choosing to ignore (ie. the government's responsibility is to the Canadian citizen as

distinct from general humanity). Graziano Battistella similarly writes in his critique of

human rights as a basis for migration ethics that the "unauthorized migrant" has only

human rights to depend on. Building on Agamben's articulation of "bare life" in order to

offer a Christian concept of human identity, he notes the dilemma that,

> human rights only find protection in the same state that is the source of
> exclusion. While human rights are founded on the naked life, on the idea
> that first comes membership in the human family, their exercise depends
> on being a subject of a state, members of a nation, a legal resident in its
> territory. (Battistella 185)

Humanitarianism and human rights are flawed foundations for refugee activism because

ultimately they depend on the very power they seek to challenge—the sovereignty of the

state. Even the United Nations as the legitimating source for humanitarian action has no

power beyond what it is given by sovereign states.

The international humanitarian community's discourse contains other

dehumanizing contradictions, even within the UN Refugee Convention. Scholars have

argued that the UNHCR's definition of a refugee is dehumanizing in that it assumes

refugees are driven by *fear* and gives the responsibility of determining whether or not that

fear is well founded to *reasoning* citizens. Nyers' work aims to broaden the definition of

political action and so to make more porous the borders between universal, apolitical

humanity and exclusive, political citizenship.

Hinshaw-Thomas' work, though it is far from anti-state (she emailed the border to

let them know she would be coming and has not disclaimed any legitimacy of the state in

patrolling its borders), affirms the rights of people to move across borders and indirectly

supports the process of recognizing asylum-seekers as legitimate political actors

regardless of their legal status.[51] As such, her work is rightfully considered political.

Even her conciliatory efforts to communicate and her praise of the Canadian ideals of

humanitarianism were not enough to convince authorities that her work was legitimate.

Her supporters' use of the discourse of humanitarianism demonstrates a gap between

what is and what must be projected in order to create political space for work like hers,

leaving us with Stein's pertinent question in her 2005 article: how long will the classical

definition of humanitarianism be capable of protecting humanitarian workers?

> The claim to apolitical status served political purposes at the same time
> [as] it opened space for political action at particular moments in history.
> Whether that claim to be apolitical continues to provide significant
> political benefits in today's global politics is an empirical question" (Stein
> 743).

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[51] The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a Pastoral Letter on Immigration and the Protection of Refugees in 2006 that outlines a similar position. They write, "the Church supports the right to migrate; however, this is not seen as an absolute right of individuals. Instead, it is to be subject to the requirements of the common good. This means that states can exercise a certain control over immigration, although it is not to be inspired by selfish attitudes or 'restrictive policies'…. The Church teaches that every country is to see that the rights of refugees are assured and respected 'as much as the rights of its own citizens'" (Canadian Conference). Though the insistence on refugee rights is absolutely essential and admirable, their letter leaves the question of what constitutes "restrictive policies" open, a phrase that could use much clearer definition if the pastoral letter were aimed to be an effective policy intervention.

The answer to that question is yet to be seen, but the increasing securitization of borders in Canada and the United States appears to be criminalizing the very concept of a refugee, regardless of refugee studies' defense of apolitical identity.

Widening the Gate: Humanitarian Citizenship and Church-based Refugee Activism

Church-based activism, for better or for worse, maintains its own networks and projects and so constitutes a parallel and sometimes competing loyalty. The relationships among humanitarian groups, churches, and federal government vary widely according to context, theology, etc. But the often-conflicted nature of relationships between government and faith communities became clear to me in conversation with people working for the CRC, who described the Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP) as a long line of churches, waiting for their applications to pass through the narrow gate of long processing times, refusals, and low target numbers for refugees to arrive in Canada. Faith groups and other Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) have been trying to widen that gate for years, they explain. Until recently churches were able to submit unlimited applications for sponsorship; the long line of waiting applications demonstrated their desire to receive more refugees. However, since 1 January 2012 CIC has dramatically shortened that line by having its SAHs sign a new agreement, limiting the number of sponsorship applications they can submit.[52]

To place this relationship in the context of our previous discussion, many faith groups do not directly challenge the right of states to have borders and to decide who can

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[52] The overall total for all SAHs in 2012 is 1350, which averages about fifteen to twenty individuals per SAH—not families, individuals. For the CRC this means that no new applications can be started in 2012 since a number of congregations had begun application processes in 2011 that fill the denomination's quota.

enter, but they lobby for more inclusive policy, broader categories of those eligible to enter, and a generous rather than protective spirit in the law.[53]

In a sense, the CRC and other religious diasporas involved in refugee activism look, as a collective, like the ideal humanitarian citizen: groups of people privileged with political voices because of their national citizenship, aware of their own incorporation into the Canadian mosaic as ethnic outsiders, and passionately motivated to ease the violence of the "sacrificial international order" that Barnett sees as the context for humanitarianism. They lobby for wider gates, but they don't take torches to the fence itself.

Case Study Description: The Church-Based Refugee Activism of the CRC

The CRC, a relatively small denomination in numbers (only 275,000 members across North America and a couple of hundred congregations across Canada), has been actively involved in refugee sponsorship since the beginning of the PSRP and in more general advocacy work even earlier. As I will argue in the following chapter, the historical and theological roots of the CRC and the church's popular adaptation of those roots in its hymns present a compelling case for political and social involvement, making it a more active denomination than its size might warrant. The denomination was one of the original SAHs with the Canadian government and continues to sponsor refugees

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[53] I would be remiss to put forward any position as a universally Christian position. For Christian groups that *do* challenge the legitimacy of the state to control borders, see the Scalabrinians (who describe migration as "ennobl[ing] human destiny by broadening the concept of motherland beyond the physical and political boundaries, making the whole world man's motherland" [Tassello 127]); or Catholic writers such as Gioacchino Campese (who argues that "the affirmation of the right of a nation to control its borders as one of the main principles of church teaching on migration can be manipulated to justify the continuation of policies that cause the death of migrants" [Campese 290]).

every year. At any given time, thirty to forty congregations out of 250 are at some point in the sponsorship process. Up until the recent changes to PSRP, some of those congregations submitted over twenty applications in a single year. Enormous effort—financially, socially, and administratively—is expended every year to make Canada accessible to international refugees. Churches can spend up to $30,000 on one refugee case, and the denomination has produced educational and promotional material that is distributed to congregations across the country.[54]

The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC), the international relief and development organization supported by the denomination, is a member organization of the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR). Rose Dekker, the current CRWRC Refugee Coordinator, sits on the CCR's Working Group on Overseas Protection and Sponsorship and attends their annual Consultation on behalf of the CRC. Interviewing her in 2008, I was aware of the enormous amount of energy she puts into her work and heard that there is always a steady stream of congregations applying to sponsor refugees. Dekker's work consists largely of preparing churches to receive refugees and monitoring their relationship once the refugees have arrived. Dekker admits that the denomination has had to focus on refugee sponsorship at the expense of national advocacy work largely due to a lack of resources. Without enough staff to develop a more comprehensive approach, their office's major point of contact with the government has been acting in their formal role as an SAH (Dekker).

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[54] Rose Dekker notes that questions were raised in 2008 about the cost effectiveness of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees program and responds by observing that congregations seldom allow the financial cost of sponsorship to halt their work since their faith calls them to be lavishly generous (Dekker).

Initially the advocacy work of the denomination consisted of consulting with officials in the Refugee Protection Division of the Immigration and Refugee Board to try to work out the best possible arrangement for expediting greater numbers of claims with greater haste by the fairest criteria possible. In 1978 the General Secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches, Don Anderson, called a meeting to discuss the rising numbers of Vietnamese refugees and to ask if the churches should respond somehow. In principle, the immediate answer was yes, but working out how that should look took longer. Within half a year churches had received the invitation from the Refugee Protection Division to sit down and talk with them about partnerships. Out of this was born the PSRP. The CRC was the second group to sign, following the MCC, in 1980, and the United Church soon after as the third official SAH. Arie Van Eek, former Executive Secretary for the Council of Christian Reformed Churches, remembers the event as singularly anticlimactic, walking into a Tim Hortons and signing a paper across the table from Hon. Collen in a matter of minutes.

Since then Van Eek recalls many instances of advocating on behalf of refugee claimants and of exceeding the bounds of the sponsorship program's mandate, going even so far as to join well-known immigration lawyer Barbara Jackman and others in going to the Supreme Court to challenge a ruling for deporting a Caribbean mother who was a legal resident but who had been found guilty of criminal activity. As he points out, such work fought to eradicate provisional citizenship and to recognize the legal rights of refugees and even of immigrants to the benefits of citizenship. Such advocacy is far from apolitical, and the Canadian government has noticed when they exceed their mandate.

When the CRC tried to assist family reunification plans by nominally signing on as sponsors for family members of people already in Canada, they were reprimanded by the federal government for assisting "queue jumpers." When they were told that the government simply did not have the people on the ground to screen all the claimants overseas, the CRC and MCC sent volunteers to help them speed up the process. But church-based activists continue to push for wider gates.

The CRC as a Humanitarian Citizen

The work of the CRC through its own international aid organization, CRWRC, appears to exemplify classical humanitarian citizenship as the work of concerned citizen groups attempting to limit the collateral damage (ie. poverty, famine, displacement, violence) of a world willing to sacrifice a few for the global good. In the spirit of improving humanitarian action, Jean-Herve Bradol writes convincingly about the place of humanitarian action in the current international order. While "the production of order at the international level—just as at national or local levels—demands its quota of victims," humanitarianism "directly challenges the logic that justifies the premature and avoidable death of a part of humanity in the name of a hypothetical collective good" (Bradol 5). In short, humanitarians ask "'are all these deaths really necessary?'" (5). Bradol calls the humanitarian commitment an arbitrary and radical challenge of the logic of sacrifice. CRWRC, particularly in its disaster relief and refugee advocacy, effectively challenges the logic of sacrifice with a humanitarian spirit, which is the internationally and nationally legitimate intervention into the logic of sacrifice. They attempt to minimize the damage of war, of state sovereignty, of collective selfishness.

The humanitarian citizenship of the CRC is shaped by its partnership with other organizations as well. In addition to specifically refugee-focused programs, the denomination's Committee for Government Contact was founded ten years earlier in 1968 and continues to function today as the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue. It is charged specifically with leading the denomination in the pursuit of social justice at the level of national public policy. E-mail contact with their Director, Mike Hogeterp, confirms again that the tightness of resources requires the Centre to choose its commitments wisely. Advocacy on behalf of refugee-ed people in Canada was part of this task in the late seventies and early eighties. For the past twenty years, refugee policy was not one of their priorities, though related issues have been addressed (Hogeterp "Interview").[55] In 2012 the Centre announced refugee policy as its major new area of focus.

The CRC also has been the major supporter of Christian public policy think tank Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ), originally called the Committee for Justice and Liberty, since its inception in 1973. CPJ's *raison d'etre* mirrors that of the earlier ecumenical work done on behalf of refugees in that it is primarily concerned with the danger of basing political and social decisions on purely economic grounding and insofar as it attempts to reshape public policy debates according to priorities of justice and

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[55] Two such issues: 1. The CRC recently established a committee to study the issue of migrant workers. Their church members in the Holland Marsh are some of the largest employers of migrant workers in Canada. 2. Aboriginal issues have been a top priority of the committee in recent years.

compassion rather than economic gain.[56] The chosen name of this organization speaks again to the strategic alignment of churches with certain legal discourses. In this case, the discourse of citizenship is recognized as a powerful asset and is explicitly claimed and leveraged to promote a more inclusive use of such terms.

Another more recently established organization affiliated with the denomination is KAIROS, an umbrella organization for Christian Canadian ecumenical social justice initiatives. Their work is shaping public policy through advocacy on such issues as the refugee appeal process (or lack thereof), the Safe Third Country Agreement, detention, migrants' rights, the security agenda and its threat to refugee rights, and family reunification strategies. The language of KAIROS' mission statement makes clear their deeply religious grounding, and the tagline "churches working together for justice and peace" is found all over their Web site (www.kairoscanada.org). At the same time their recommendations for advocacy and their reports on the trips of international delegations or research urge the government to be aware of humanitarian crises, to fight against human rights violations, and to fulfill their humanitarian duties.

The denominational and ecumenical efforts of the CRC and other Christian denominations in Canada explicitly use the language of national citizenship to claim a legitimate political voice and call on the internationally recognized language of humanitarianism as a way of working outside of the absolute claims of citizenship. As such, in their interaction with government and other social and political entities they

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[56] The inclusion of refugee sponsorship in immigration numbers by the Canadian government is at risk, argues Arie Van Eek, of reinventing compassion-based work in accordance with economic concerns (Van Eek).

occupy the position of a humanitarian citizen, attempting to widen the gate for increased social and political participation by refugee-ed people.

The CRC as an Ideal Humanitarian Citizen

The CRC is more than a comfortable occupier of that position. One might even say that it is a sort of *ideal* humanitarian citizen in Canada not only because of its status as a religious diaspora in a multicultural context, but also because of its image as an ideal Canadian immigrant community.

Once again, Hugh Cook's collection of short stories, *Cracked Wheat*, provides both a helpful narrativization of the CRC diaspora in its early moments and also a window into the ethnic othering it experienced early on. Together, these short stories communicate Dutch immigrants' displacement narratives and the marginal identity they had in Canada in the 1950s. In his first story "Exodus," the dual perspectives of Mieke and Anton, a young married couple recently moved to Canada, demonstrate the gender-inflected difficulties of negotiating identity in a new place. For Anton "every new day still felt strange, not his familiar world" and at work he's called "Dutch," a reminder that he is an outsider (Cook 13). Mieke struggles at home against giving birth in a hospital and refuses to even leave her room after the baby is born because of the overwhelming fatigue that fills her when she considers making her way in a new world. "It's a new world, Mieke," Anton acknowledges about Canada, and then says: "We will have to face it" (12). Hennie's mother in "Homesickness" responds to the dislocation in a similar way to Mieke, becoming severely depressed and eventually having two nervous breakdowns.

She lies in her bed unable to move or to speak, and her daughter is forced to deal with the effects of a living but absent mother who is unable to adjust to her new surroundings.

Jaap's son in "The White Rabbit" feels self-conscious of his father's immigrant appearance and way of doing things. Waiting for his dad to exit the factory where he works, the boy sees "the young men burst from the building, full of banter, combing their hair and lighting cigarettes, silver lunch pails squeezed between elbow and waist. Then they drove off in shiny cars" (Cook 35). His father is an obvious outsider:

> Ten minutes later the boy's father appeared, alone, wearing his black beret and a grey striped suit too baggy for church but still too useful during the week to be thrown away. Then he mounted his black Dutch bicycle with the black plastic mud flaps encasing the chain…and he pedaled the four miles home with the boy. (35)

The bicycle is both the poor person's mode of transportation and a way of sticking to the traditions of his home country where bicycles are the main way of getting around.

In each of the short stories a specifically complex mix of theological, historical, and ethnic narratives is clearly the source of both hope and alienation for the newly arrived migrants, something they are continually reminded of by others' reactions to them. Flash forward sixty years to the present day CRC and we find a group that still considers itself an ethnic minority, but that has, through time and effort, found the strength to re-root itself in Canadian culture. Its advocacy work is motivated by the memory of its own displacement but is done now out of the strength of citizenship in this new country.

Elias' sermon on ethnic purity, which I analyzed in the second chapter according to the underlying tension between ethnic and faith commitments in religious diasporas,

speaks to the importance of national contexts in defining a diaspora. His response to my

analysis, as I mentioned, was to point me to the differences between American and

Canadian national narratives, narratives that in turn shape religious diasporic identity in

their respective countries. The melting pot image of American assimilation may not be

that different in practice from the image of a mosaic in Canadian multiculturalism, but

the official national narratives do give a specific shape to the activism of churches in each

nation. For pastors of the CRC in Canada, as for many other religious diasporas, the

mosaic metaphor gives their religious diaspora a legitimate place in the national

narrative, as an ethnically marginal and legally citizen-ed group.

The CRC is able to advocate from a position of strength, not in spite of its

diasporic identity but in part *because* of how well its members appear to have

acculturated as an ethnic immigrant community in Canada, learning English, establishing

public institutions, and—through no effort of their own—being white. Frans J. Schryer's

study of postwar Dutch immigrants to Ontario several times mentions the image of Dutch

people as ideal Canadian immigrants.

> Historians and social scientists alike agree that, taken as a whole, Dutch-Canadians have been highly successfully in integrating into Canadian society. Indeed, they have been labelled as both an 'invisible' as well as a 'silent' minority (Van den Hoonard 9-10; Reitz 91; Hoogendorn 83). Postwar Dutch immigrants did not form block settlements or conglomerate in inner city neighbourhoods…. Although they comprise one of the larger groups of postwar immigrants, the Dutch do not have a national ethnic organization. (n.pag. Schryer)

This diaspora's success especially in business and education also fits well with the

Canadian dream: work hard and make the most of opportunities. Citizenship and

Immigration Canada explains Canadian multiculturalism for visitors to its Web site in

99

this way: "Canadian multiculturalism is fundamental to our belief that all citizens are equal. Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging" (Citizenship). If "new Canadians" are not pushed to assimilate, Citizenship and Immigration Canada hopefully assumes that immigrants will "freely choose their new citizenship because they want to be Canadians" and thus "contribute more fully to Canadian society" (Citizenship). It only takes a bit of encouragement to get multicultural citizens to "integrate into their society and take an active part in its social, cultural, economic and political affairs" because "through multiculturalism, Canada recognizes the potential of all Canadians" (Citizenship). The CRC, accepted and allowed to belong without changing, has gradually become more integrated and now works to help other displaced people find their place in the Canadian mosaic.

As a successful example of a diaspora that has found its place in the Canadian context and now uses its citizenship to mitigate the effects of refugee crises around the world, the CRC appears to provide a picture of the ideal Canadian humanitarian citizen. This religious diaspora's refugee activism would seem then to be caught in the same bind as humanitarianism. When they cheerfully take up their role as ideal humanitarian citizen, they risk naïve co-option into state agendas, disingenuous political neutrality, and other critiques levied against humanitarianism.

Conclusion: Strategic Humanitarian Citizenship

Jon P. Gunnemann's article on sanctuary and modern property rights reminds us that whoever builds or patrols a boundary "can exercise extraordinary power [to]

dominate…or use the space to extend power outside the walls" (99). Religious

institutions in particular have the potential to "stand on the boundaries" in order to

monopolize or "control access" but they have another option as well:

> Religious beliefs can also critique boundaries (as Luther did…); create boundaries that are protective of persons and groups (as in the Christian doctrine of the *imago dei* present in all human beings); [and] critique finite institutions that, by claiming absolute control of the boundaries, essentially declare a divine right to define sacred space. (Gunnemann 99-100)

Churches in Canada, because of their partnerships with the government through the

PSRP, are uniquely placed to act as state-hired doormen, relying on the federal

government to decide who can enter and who cannot. Put together that power with their

theology of the sacredness of space and the sacred in each human being: churches in

Canada are also uniquely placed to make national borders flexible and generous.

The refugee activism that the CRC has been involved in is done on the basis of

the privilege of citizenship, even model citizenship. Its public use of the discourse of

humanitarianism has the potential to confirm its place as one of many citizen patrols on

the Canadian borders, defined by a conflicted discourse that is struggling to retain its

power. However, where its use of humanitarianism is strategic—a way of circumventing

the absolute loyalty claimed by national citizenship and belonging—an altogether

different picture can emerge with fresh potential for church-based refugee activism in

Canada. In order to maintain a strategic alliance with the discourse of humanitarianism,

those religious communities that stand on the border must nurture an alternative discourse

that coheres with their communal identity while remaining flexible and open to critique.

Chapter 4: Putting Out the Welcome Mat: A Sympathetic Perspective on CRC Refugee Activism

Contextualizing the Activism of a Religious Diaspora

The public face of the refugee activism of the CRC diaspora is that of the ideal Canadian humanitarian citizen; the discourses of citizenship and humanitarianism are commonly present in its public advocacy. But the CRC's self-defined church-based activism, as it emerges from their history as a *religious* diaspora and as it is shaped by the religious commitments that we find poetically rendered in the denomination's hymns, offers a unique and sympathetic perspective. In this chapter, we recount some of the narratives internal to the CRC that shape its identity, with an eye to ways in which creative refugee narratives can encourage its position as an ally to refugee-ed people.

As one of three church groups who have led the way in initiating refugee action in Canada, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) serves as an example of an alternative way of understanding refugee activism, one that avoids some of the criticisms made of humanitarianism yet remains politically effective. Dutch Reformed theology as found in its hymns and self-narrated history both broadens the scope of social action for faith-based organizations to include explicitly political work and also challenges the citizenship-humanity binary, providing a model for strategic humanitarian citizenship. I have alluded to the potential for humanitarianism to be the discourse through which this religious diaspora challenges the comprehensive claims of citizenship. I want to add now that the discourse of humanitarianism does function as an official bridge between the church's own religious narratives and the narratives of state sovereignty and citizenship.

What actually motivates a faith-based group such as the CRC to be involved in refugee advocacy? Ultimately, this motivation does not come from the national narrative, from the discourse of citizenship, or from the discourse of humanitarianism. Along the same lines as my first chapter, this analysis recognizes a specific combination of historical, theological, and liturgical narratives as the worldview out of which the CRC engages in refugee activism. Refugee-activists in the CRC see themselves as fellow sojourners in solidarity with refugee-ed people, as agents of cultural renewal, as agents of hope, and as welcoming hosts for displaced people. Most importantly, their internal discourse distances itself from the concept of state sovereignty, instead laying claim to another authority that compels them to be responsible to all people and not only fellow citizens. This alternative authority is explicitly political in its aims. In what follows, I do not address each of those ways of self-identifying as separate points. Rather the reader will notice the themes of solidarity, cultural renewal, hope, welcome, and political work (that is critical of state sovereignty) emerge organically from the history, poetry, and theology that I discuss.

The diaspora's adherence to its own creeds and ideals is uneven across and within congregations, so the last section of this chapter broadens our discussion to an ecumenical Christian context, suggesting that church-based activists in Canada often capitulate to national narratives and their fearful securitization of Canada's borders. Specifically, we look at the metaphor used broadly by Canadian churches to describe their refugee activism: hospitality or "welcoming the stranger." The phrase is given narrative context by commonly used passages from the Judeo-Christian scriptures.

Hospitality is useful for motivating activism and attempts to sidestep the power of citizenship discourses but the metaphor's actual effect on the activist work of churches is often less than radical. The conclusion of this chapter offers hopeful comments for church-based activists who wish to foster a prophetic hospitality, pointing especially to the possibility of pedagogical fiction as it is explored in the following chapters.

CRC Refugee Activism: The Diaspora's Self-Narrated History

One of the most significant historical events to have shaped the Canadian CRC's commitment to social justice is the participation of reformed churches in the underground movement in the Netherlands during World War II. However, the cultural roots that led to their participation in that resistance movement are shared with their American counterparts, rooted in the Eighty Years War of the sixteenth century. During the eighty years it took Spain to conquer the Lowlands, the rallying motif was freedom of religion. An outnumbered group of disparate rural groups, unified across regional barriers by the desire for religious freedom, participated fiercely in defending themselves against the Spanish Empire. Longtime members of the denomination still aver today that "that unequal fight is in our blood" and that their involvement in WWII is reflected in their ongoing desire through the Dutch diaspora to stick with the disadvantaged no matter the cost (Van Eek). Their answer to the question of motivation—"Why do we care about refugees?"—is the same answer given to the question of identity—"Where did we come

from?" We have refugee roots, claims the CRC in North America; therefore we stand in solidarity with other refugees.[57]

Consider the story of church leader Albertus Van Raalte who faced religious persecution and famine in The Netherlands in the mid-nineteenth century. Having fled to North America, Van Raalte and a small Dutch colony set down roots in Holland, Michigan. To this day, a cultural colony of sorts remains in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where the names of economic and social heavyweights Amway founders (De Voses and Van Andels), the owners of the Meijer supermarket chains (Hendrik Meijer and descendents), and Hekman Furniture founder (Edsko Hekman) still can be found on public and private building projects and their descendents still hold social and financial cache in the city. Undoubtedly making up a sizeable portion of that region's middle and upper-middle class, this powerful Dutch immigrant community bears little resemblance to its earlier refugee roots, influencing political and social realities as participants in the capitalist enterprise and in tandem with their development of numerous churches focused on the personal piety of their communities.[58]

The Canadian branch of the CRC has a somewhat different story. Its roots are found largely in the wave of Dutch immigrants that began arriving in Canada in the early 1950s following WWII. Immigrants rather than refugees, arriving at a time when national

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[57] Christine Pohl calls this phenomenon "strangers welcoming strangers" ("Making Room" 27).

[58] My reader will need to forgive me for describing the situation so generally. These statements do not describe the community comprehensively as any community contains variations, but they are accurate as comparative truths when the community is placed in relation to its Canadian counterpart. The differences between these two communities would be an interesting study in diasporic identity as it differs across national borders and between historical waves.

and international optimism were at a low, in contrast to their American counterparts,

Dutch Canadians were also coming out of a different political environment than the

Dutch Americans. The CRCNA Web site admits that this second-wave of immigration

introduced "significant cultural clash" into the denomination.

> While the Dutch Canadians shared a commitment to the Reformed
> confessions, they differed from their American cousins in life experience,
> mindset, and moral and religious values. Dutch Canadians tended to focus
> their spiritual energies on working out the social ramifications of the
> gospel, not on personal piety. (CRC)

The Dutch immigrants after WWII were so affected by their experience in the

underground movement that they could not relate well to or be understood by the

American "mother church." The restlessness of Canadian churches with the

housekeeping agendas of the denomination's Synod meetings led, in 1968, to the

establishment of a Canadian Council that wished to focus more on the political,

geographical, and international contexts of their congregations ("Acts of Council" 12-13).

Although that kind of engagement did not live equally well in all of the individual

churches, the leadership was united in its desire to broaden the scope of its work.

Because the denomination has its roots in a white, Western European nation, its

current status as a diaspora in Canada is easily unperceived by those who come into

contact with its members. From the outside, the church looks like a part of the privileged

mainstream culture of Canada[59]; being white and speaking English now provide the

diaspora with significant privilege. Previous to the research done for this chapter, I had

been concerned with the level of uncritical investment the church has in the official

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[59] My discussion in chapter six of a white diaspora's over-identification with non-white
refugee populations expands on this observation.

multiculturalism of Canada and its lack of self-reflexivity when it came to understanding racism and ethnocentrism in Canada. Through conversations and interviews my sense has shifted to understand the self-awareness of the vision among, at least, the refugee activists in this community. The Canadian CRC's communal sense of displacement has given emotional and psychic currency to their engagement with forcibly displaced people, giving them a deeply rooted desire to engage political and social structures on behalf of people groups who remind them of their own displaced status. Because they have experienced displacement they feel compelled to stand in solidarity with people who are displaced today.

Yet even as their history and communal identity has shaped them thus, their theology has provided a flexible framework for this work. The most significant influence on this denomination's understanding of theology and public policy during the interim between the American and Canadian waves of immigration time was Abraham Kuyper, founder of the Vrij Universiteit, journalist, theologian and prime minister of The Netherlands from 1901 to 1905.

CRC Refugee Activism: The Diaspora's Hymns and Theology

The "Comprehensive Scope of the Gospel"

Much of the Canadian CRC's refugee activism is rooted in Kuyper's unique vision for the interaction of faith, politics, and social action, which is often called Kuyperianism. The Stone Lectures that Kuyper gave at Princeton in 1901 provide a helpful launching point for understanding his vision. The antithetical nature of Kuyper's work is clear in his concern that the Christian church's integrity would be compromised

by the influence of Enlightenment modernism and his proposal that the church develop

its own comprehensive vision (Kuyper). He articulated three philosophical dangers that

needed to be challenged: 1. The segregation of reality into sacred and secular realms and

the resultant sequestering of the gospel into the sacred realm.[60] 2. The belief that the

gospel transforms only individuals and not societies. 3. The notion that public life is

neutral or irreligious.

Kuyper was pointing to the ideological (or as he called it, religious) assumptions

undergirding every social arrangement and calling his compatriots to be aware of and in

dialogue with those assumptions. The phrase "every square inch is the Lord's" has been

taken from Kuyper's writing to provide a theological grounding for the CRC's civic

participation: "There is not one square inch of creation about which Christ does not cry

'mine!'" (Kuyper). Paradoxically, the ownership Kuyper attributes to God explicitly is

not meant to serve the purpose of joining church and state. Rather, Kuyper suggests a

plural, secular society that allows room for varying religious expressions and a religious

church that sends its members out to affect society rather than joining institutional forces

with the government. Gunnemann's study of the relationship between sanctuary and

property ownership sees the inviolability of public space as an important concept to

recover (Gunnemann). That is, land is sacred and should not be controlled by the

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[60] "Gospel" comes from the Greek word that means, literally, "good news," and carries explicit countercultural meaning. It refers to the good news that the Early Church proclaimed in its context that the powerful Roman Emperor, Caesar, was not *kurios* (the Lord, demanding absolute loyalty), but that the death of the Jewish Christ made him *kurios* (the Lord, who is a suffering servant).

powerful but should be shared equally by human beings who are merely renters of a sacred space that does not belong to them.

Kuyper's impetus for engaging in "the public square" or what we might call civic society is a strong doctrine of creation. The doctrine of creation submits that every part of the world was created ontologically good regardless of use-value; that the brokenness of human beings has wreaked havoc in every part of the earth, resulting in environmental degradation, abuse of power, violence in relationships, etc; and that Christ's claim to be "Lord over all of creation" (or *kurios*) is the hope that fuels the pursuit of renewal in every sphere of human life. Quite often that renewal is described as shalom, in other words, right relations between God and human beings, among human beings, and between human beings and the nonhuman creation. What constitutes "right relations" is a massive and ongoing theological debate, but the significance for people of faith in ascribing to this strong view of creation is that they cannot only be concerned with pursuing personal piety; they must be engaged in social action at all levels.

The influence of neo-Platonism[61] on evangelical denominations has frequently resulted in a loss of impetus for corporate social activism, but for the CRC, as a diasporic denomination highly influenced by and explicitly working within the Kuyperian vision, this neo-Platonism has been a philosophical and theological opponent. The following

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[61] In defending their own theology as different, Reformed scholars often point to Richard Tarnas's *The Passion of the Western Mind* which traces neo-Platonism as the influence of Augustine's synthesis of Platonic philosophy and Judeo-Christian theology. The popular appropriation of this philosophy is in evangelical Christianity's belief that the afterlife is spiritualized, whereas Reformed traditions insists that the physical creation will be renewed and therefore that renewing human interaction with creation and with various spheres of human life is worthwhile.

sections take three theological keystones in the CRC denomination, some of which are shared with other denominational groups and draw on popular hymns to tease out the way their lyrics shape a congregation's imaginative horizons for social activism and thus for action on refugee issues.

"All is Sacred"

The hymns that are included in a church's music book reveal what a faith community senses its purpose to be; they are poetry that the church has chosen to use to nurture its own beliefs and that congregations sing weekly to refocus themselves. A committee of delegated worship leaders, musicians, and pastors from across the continent together decide on each addition or omission of a hymn in the CRC's hymnal editions. I understand hymns to be devotionally sung poetry that nurture a prophetic imagination for countercultural communities. My choice of hymns as the texts in which I anchor my discussion of theology may be surprising given the possibilities of other texts such as theological treatises, denominational confessions, and even the Judeo-Christian scriptures, but the choice is purposeful and provides readers with the most apt examples of lived Reformed theology as a platform for refugee activism for several reasons.

1. Hymns affirm the sacredness of the secular world. Hymns come out of and are written for the context of worship. Therefore a hymn that addresses issues of social and political significance, when sung communally as worship, bridges the sacred/secular divide, bringing together justice and worship. Hogeterp writes in a recent denominational magazine that "justice and worship are tied together: The Old Testament prophets declared that worship was contemptible when there was injustice in the land" (Hogeterp,

"Beyond" 19). In reformed theology, worship and work must go hand in hand; the sacred is the secular and vice versa.

2. Hymns are prophetic texts.[62] If justice is born of a prophetic imagination, birthing takes place in the devotional poetry of hymnody. The prophetic imaginations of poets, who are struggling to express in lyrical writing their vision for Christian community and action, is put to music to make those words a source of communal encouragement and re-visioning. Singing hymns in a group is, in itself, an odd practice, a ritual that sets apart a worship service from many other kinds of gatherings.

3. Hymns are popular texts. Because this poetry is part of a weekly worship service, sung and often memorized by many laypeople, it, of all texts, most ably demonstrates the projected lived theology of the church. In a reciprocal dynamic, worship directors choose hymns that will respond to the experiences of their congregations and congregations take up those devotional words as wisdom for their daily living.[63] As Candy Gunther Brown writes, "hymn narratives function culturally to integrate doctrine and experience….The narrative form, in contrast to more prescriptive forms of discourse, is particularly well attuned to express a community's collective growth process" (Brown

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[62] I use the word *prophetic* in the tradition of Walter Brueggemann who says "the task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around [it]" (3). As such, those sub-communities involved in prophetic ministry have a long and available memory, express a sense of pain, have an active practice of hope, and develop an effective mode of discourse (Brueggemann xvi).

[63] The introduction to the CRC Psalter Hymnal contains a Statement of Principle. It finishes with the statement, "[The music of worship] should reflect the church at worship today and throughout the ages in ways that are relevant, enduring, festive, and dignified" (Psalter Hymnal 11).

196).[64] More than bringing together the weekday work and Sunday worship of a

community, hymns help their singers to internalize "the theological values embedded in

the narratives and [to live] out the values they sang" (197).

The "grey" Psalter Hymnal, which the CRC uses, contains topical entries on

Labour and Industry, Justice, the Nation, Peace, Pilgrimage and Conflict, Poverty, Race

and Culture, Society/Social Concerns, Stewardship, and War and Revolution and

indicates a strong emphasis on the social responsibilities of the church community.

"Father Help Your Children," a hymn written by Fred Kaan in 1966, expresses well the

Kuyperian response to the sacred/secular dichotomy.

Father, help your people in this world
to build something of your kingdom and to do your will.
Lead us to discover partnership in love;
bless our ways of sharing and our pride remove.

Lord of desk and altar, bind our lives in one,
that in work and worship love may set the tone.
Give us grace to listen, clarity of speech;
make us truly thankful for the gifts of each.

Holy is the setting of each room and yard,
lecture hall and kitchen, office, shop, and ward.
Holy is the rhythm of our working hours
hallow then our purpose, energy, and powers.

Strengthen, Lord, for service, hand and heart and brain;
help us good relations daily to maintain.
Let the living presence of the Servant-Christ
heighten our devotion, make our lives a feast.

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[64] Brown's fascinating article on 19th century hymns and their use of pilgrimage as a metaphor for the Christian life describes a very different theology than the one I am exploring, though she similarly notes the ability of hymns to erase the secular/sacred divide and to shape a community's present story and future hope according to an older story.

(Psalter Hymnal #607 "Father, Help Your People")

The third verse calls congregants to remember that "holy is the setting of each room and yard, lecture hall and kitchen, office, shop, and ward." Faith is not a matter of personal values and Sunday worship: "Holy is the rhythm of our working hours." Holy does not mean untouchable in the way that the word's colloquial use would suggest, but, used as a descriptor of lecture halls, is a reminder that all of life is undergirded by religious beliefs and that the Christian call to grace, love, and service is as present there as it is in a time of religious worship. Beyond that, Kaan's hymn suggests that it is not just the attitude or character of the Christian as they engage in work that matters but that the actual work is worth doing well on a cosmic scale even when it is not explicitly about faith concerns because it is part of a sacred creation. That is, a Christian preparing a lecture is doing as important work in the world as is the person preparing a sermon. Thus the song asks the "Lord of desk and altar" to help people live more holistically and lovingly.

In contexts where the church wields power, the language of cultural renewal could connote coercion because it combines a normative worldview with a plan for social action. Popular articulations of a Reformed theology of cultural renewal sometimes read as if the culmination of social transformation is intra-historical rather than recognizing the inevitability of delay as churches wait on divine intervention (a point that Boyarin and Boyarin make similarly of Zionism). The popular versions of this theology have also been critiqued for not taking seriously the call to suffering that is part of their Christocentric theology. By way of comparison (or perhaps as a prophetic call to congregations), the final verse of hymn 607 emphasizes a relational rather than a

theologically dogmatic approach to Christian presence in the public sphere. The final image is of a church making its communal life a feast offered to whoever is hungry. A feast promises nourishment, conversation, abundance, and celebration, and so as the church itself becomes the feast, it offers all those things to anyone who senses the hunger pains of brokenness in the rhythms of their working hours. Recently Reformed scholars have begun to note the tradition's earlier ethnocentrism and lack of humility. These scholars, philosophers, theologians, and historians, have urged the church to return to the example of Christ in his suffering and self-abnegation for the sake of others.

The CRC's belief in the comprehensive scope of the gospel and its strong focus on the work of cultural renewal gives its members a capacious and hopeful vision that is well-expressed in the last verse of the hymn "As Stewards of a Vineyard": "We search in new directions for justice and for peace, / rejoicing in our labors: God's blessings will not cease. / We wish to heal what's broken; we seek to ease the pain. / If in the Lord we labour, our work is not in vain" (Psalter Hymnal #611). The author responds to the discouragement experienced by people attempting to be Christ-followers as they constantly search for more faithful ways of pursuing justice and peace but are overwhelmed by the immensity of the brokenness they face in the world and in themselves. For church-based refugee activists who face the barriers of compassion fatigue, communal selfishness, and insurmountable unjust structures, this hymn reminds

them that proximate justice is not a submission to the powers that be. Rather, whatever small piece of the brokenness can be healed is worth working at, this hymn suggests.[65]

Personal Piety Versus Cultural Renewal

"The City is Alive, O God" is a contemporary song that, alongside the two hymns mentioned earlier, was adopted by the CRC as a hymn in their official hymnbook when it was revised in 1987 as part of the church's attempt to consciously shift their hymnody "from a more subjective and pietistic approach to our faith, characteristic of the nineteenth century, to a broader concern with our calling as Christians to live in full awareness of our societal relationships and kingdom tasks" (Psalter Hymnal 13).

The lyrics of "The City is Alive, O God" were written in 1969 by Methodist William W. Reid, Jr. and is widely used during weekly worship meetings, particularly in urban Christian Reformed churches in Canada.

The city is alive, O God, with sound of hustling feet,
with rapid change and flashing lights that pulse through every street;
but oft there's inhumanity behind the bright façade,
and throngs with empty hungering hearts cry out for help, O God.

Is it your will, O loving God, that races live in strife?
That loneliness and greed and hate should mark a city's life?
Do you desire one person's wealth to keep another poor?
Must crime and slums and lust abound? O Lord, is there no cure?

In Galilee the people heard your servant Christ declare
Through healing touch, through word and cross, the good news of your care.

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[65] This hymn is copyrighted by the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC), a union committed to working out of a reformed philosophy of work. Work is meaningful not merely as task but also as calling, and all types of work can be meaningful ways of "loving our neighbour." The connection between social justice organizations, such as CLAC, and the church community is evidenced by the inclusion of their song in the hymnbook. Doubtless the influences run in both directions between the institutions.

He said your heart touched every heart that longed for peace and right,
That those bowed down by burdens borne could find your life, your light.

O God, inspire your church today to take Christ's servant role,
to love the world, to hear its claims, to sense its yearning soul,
to live within the marketplace, to serve both weak and strong,
to lose itself, to share its dream, to give the world its song.

(Psalter Hymnal #597 "The City is Alive, O God")

The first verse paints the picture of "hustling feet" on pavement and the pulsing life of

lights, activity, and human movement that hides "inhumanity" in the urban landscape.

Giving that inhumanity a name, the second verse asks rhetorically if God's will is for

racial strife, greed, loneliness, hate, unjust class structures, violence, poverty, and sexual

exploitation to "mark a city's life." It ends with the question, "is there no cure?" Without

answering that question outright, the third verse begins a story: in Galilee, Christ healed

people, told them stories, and then died, and in those three activities he "declared" his

care for the world. Such a person's goals resonate with "every heart that longed for peace

and right" and provide, in the connections of those who surround him, a place of rest and

rejuvenation for further work.

This narrative poetry continues then with the fourth verse and answers the

question of what such a story might inspire a church to do. The list of activities gives a

clear interpretation of how the story of Christ translates into contemporary action. What

is heartening and wise about the hymn's vision of church-based activism is the gentleness

of its verbs. The melody of the hymn functions to split the list of activities into three

melodic phrases. I imagine the first phrase (fourth verse, second line) would put the

church in the position of intuitive listener: the inspiration of Christ to the church is "to

love the world, to hear its claims, to sense its yearning soul." The church must first love

and in order to love must hear the claims of those around them and try to sense what the

people that they are attuned to desire most. The goal of understanding is not for the

purpose of knowing how to manipulate, but rather so that the church will be capable of

the second set of involvements which position the church as an active participant in

society. Having listened to "the world" and understood its needs, the church is no longer

a participant driven by ambition; instead, the response of the church to Christ's life is

recognizing a call to *live* in the marketplace and as part of that living to *serve* those both

more and less privileged by that marketplace, without regard for status. Of course that

service is meant to be a witness; the desire to share their faith is still present but in the

form of offering what they can without expectation rather than of arguing people into

their way of life. The third phrase's set of verbs (fourth verse, fourth line) unclenches the

church's fists and puts the faith community into a posture of constant self-emptying

without losing its vigor for transformative work. Though the church is called to lose

itself, it is still called to have a dream for better living, to share that dream with those who

would listen, and to offer them this song that an urban church can sing on Sundays

despite the pain they experience through the week, because they have found rest and

rejuvenation in the story of Christ and his community's work.

     "Losing" itself, which I interpret to mean giving of itself in such a way that claims

to ambition or to ego are lost, "sharing" its dream, and "giving" the world its song are the

climax of this hymn's perceptive exploration of the church's response to brokenness and

injustice in urban settings. Verbs such as losing, sharing, and giving, might strike the

reader as weak, but this weakness is precisely the uniqueness of this hymn's expression

of the church's identity. The language of cultural renewal and the comprehensive scope

of the gospel, which could lead a church to develop an ecclesiology based in power and

influence and to be imperialistic in its evangelism, is here distinctly applied so that the

church must take the posture of active, listening servant and respondent to the world's

needs as a result of their calling to be involved in Christian work. To be involved in the

church's mission is to fight racism, respond to loneliness, reject greed, overturn class

structures, etc.[66] A congregation that has internalized Kuyper's articulation of the

comprehensive scope of civic engagement and the call to cultural renewal does not find it

easy to tackle the dilemma of how to work that out in material contemporary realities.

How does one maintain a desire to influence culture without becoming coercive? How

does one determine what faithfulness to one's many overlapping stories looks like in the

sphere of public justice?

The *Imago Dei*

"God of All Living" (Psalter Hymnal #604) is only one of many hymns that

speaks to the doctrine of the *imago dei*. I have chosen to look closely at it, however,

because it was written during the 1970s, when hymnody was experiencing a revitalization

in the form of social justice concerns, and because it was not only adopted by the CRC

but its lyrics were thought significant enough to warrant a new tune, which was written

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[66] An interesting (and large!) side project would be to explore possible connections between German Pietism of the 18th and 19th century and colonial imperialism of the same period. While initially a strong sense of the gospel's comprehensive scope of influence might appear to coincide with imperial agendas, in fact, precisely that theology is what kept churches from minding their own business during the Holocaust.

by Emily Brink in 1987 on the occasion of its inclusion in the Grey Psalter. Additionally,

this hymn makes obvious the link between the church's call to justice and the *imago dei*:

God of all living, we make our confession:
too long have we wasted the wealth of our lands.
God of all loving, renew our compassion
and open our hearts while we reach out our hands.

Brothers and sisters of mine are the hungry
who sigh in their sorrow and weep in their pain.
Sisters and brothers of mine are the homeless
who wait without shelter from wind and from rain.

Strangers and neighbours, they claim my attention,
they sleep by my doorstep, they sit by my bed.
Neighbors and strangers, their anguish concerns me,
and I must not feast till the hungry are fed.

People are they, men and women and children,
and each has a heart keeping time with my own.
People are they, persons made in God's image;
so what shall I offer them—bread or a stone?

God of all living, we make our confession:
too long we have wasted the wealth of our lands.
God of all loving, renew our compassion
and open our hearts while we reach out our hands.

(Psalter Hymnal #604 "God of All Living")

Kenneth Morse's hymn, #604, begins and ends with the same refrain: "too long we have

wasted the wealth of our lands," it confesses. Now, "renew our compassion and open our

hearts while we reach out our hands." Similar to #597, the church is asked to take on the

posture of open-handed, openhearted, self-emptying service. Bookended by this refrain of

confession and call to compassion,[67] verses two through four look carefully at examples

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[67] Though the term compassion often implies condescension to "those less well off," in
the context of confession, compassion is leveraged as an alternative to the self-absorbed

of who the church is asked to be open-handed with and the reason for that calling. Each

verse begins with a metaphor for understanding the worshipper's relationship to the

displaced and the metaphors get progressively more distant. Verse two calls on the

kinship of siblings to describe people who are displaced; once removed from that

closeness, strangers and neighbours are the subject of verse three; and verse four simply

calls them "people." The poet begins with a metaphor that aims to connect with the

emotions associated with the familial loyalty of its listener, and once he has established

the emotional connection with his reader, he leads them further and then again further

away from that actual kinship, thus extending that loyalty to all people who are "made in

God's image." One could argue that the movement toward a more generally defined

humanity also points to the reality of a church whose members are variously placed and

displaced.

In verse one the homeless and those in more destitute poverty are sisters and

brothers—family members who therefore have a right to ask for equal privileges purely

because of their relationship to the singer. Verse two casts the homeless and those in

poverty as "strangers and neighbours." And the final verse equalizes the playing field

completely. "Each [person] has a heart keeping time with my own. People are they,

persons made in God's image; so what shall I offer them—bread or a stone." Here the

rhetorical question Jesus asked the Pharisees (what parent would give their child a stone

if they asked for bread?) is used to suggest that inaction on the issues of poverty and

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life that forgets about the disparity of wealth in the world or does not sense its own
ethical responsibility to others. This moment of turning eyes outward is only the first
moment of continual learning for church-based refugee activists.

homelessness is as nonsensical and mean-spirited as giving a child a stone to eat. Key to this configuration of social action is the climax of the hymn's logical trajectory: people are made in God's image, the *imago dei*. That is to say, because God has created each person and sees each person as reflective of himself and his own character and abilities, the responsibility to other people is not only to their humanity but also to the image of God in them. To put it in yet another way, because of God's creative work in the world and his presence in each human being, his claim on a Christian's loyalty extends to the way they treat others, so that they are constantly in search of his image in others and treating them as God's image.

In this dialectic, the category of humanity is not separated from the category of citizen. All people are believed to reflect the sacred and therefore are recipients and givers of grace. The ethical responsibility of one human being to another is strengthened in the appearance of the third, divine party. We might formulate it thus: I am responsible to pursue justice with you and on your behalf because God loves you. When you offend me and break contracts for how I think humanity should act or when you arrive at my doorstep looking "less than human," I still offer hospitality and refuge because of my responsibility to God's image in you. Further, the privilege of citizenship includes the responsibility to extend that privilege to those who might want it. The ethic of responsibility to non-citizens is undergirded not by a commitment to humanity in terms of humanitarian discourse, but by a commitment to the image of the divine in each person.

M. Daniel Carroll R. begins his popular book on Christians and migration in the United States by suggesting that any discussion of migration must begin by affirming the value of human life. His starting point is a common one for Christians thinking through faith and displacement (see Bretherton; Groody; Pohl, *Making Room*). Carroll recognizes a number of different Christian understandings of what *imago dei* refers to but notes that in each instance "everyone is made in God's image and therefore has a singular standing before God and in the world" (Carroll 67). Both migrants and non-migrants share that image. The implication for migrants is that they are respected and welcomed "irrespective of whether they are here with or without documents the government might mandate" and, on the other hand, that people in the majority culture of the "host country" are to "reflect the divine image" of care for every individual human being (69).

As a popular form of prophetic visioning, the hymns of the CRC provide an alternative discourse for church-based refugee activism. They emphasize persistent hope in the face of activists' discouragement; they insist on the sacredness of every part of culture and on the importance of political and civic participation in the context of pietistic evangelical faith; they hold up servanthood and compassion as a response to apathy in the Global North; they point to the *imago dei*, which collapses the distinction between citizens and non-citizens. The discourse of humanitarianism serves as a bridge between neo-Kuyperian theology (as it is embodied in a particular diaspora faith community's church-based refugee activism) and the overwhelming power of citizenship discourses, but it does not reflect accurately the discourse on which that activism is built. Most pertinently, church-based refugee activism does not find its legitimacy in "the same state

that is the source of exclusion," to return to the critiques of humanitarianism made in the last chapter (Battistella 185). Instead the sacredness of and in creation demands responsibility to one another as a priority.

Welcoming the Stranger: Hospitality as a Conflicted Metaphor for Church-based Refugee Activism

Citizenship and Immigration Canada frame their acceptance of refugee claimants as "protection of the vulnerable," and humanitarian organizations like Oxfam frame their work as "speaking for the voiceless," but "welcoming the stranger" is the most prevalent frame for ecumenical church-based activism. The metaphor of hospitality contrasts that of protection and protection's fraught corollary, security, in its personal warmth, in its inference that private homes are being opened, and in its non-political character. Not only acting in response to a public legal contract (ie. the Canadian government's responsibility to the UN Refugee Convention), church-based activists share their own private lives and offer all that comes with hospitality in one's home.

The practice of hospitality in refugee activism does not always live up to the projected prophetic vision of texts, theology, and activist leaders, though. Used as popular motivation for refugee activism in the CRC and in the broader community of Canadian churches, hospitality is a metaphor filled with radical potential, but the ways in which the metaphor can be taken up into a local congregation's work with refugee-ed people varies widely. Derrida would see this tension as inherent to the concept of hospitality. He writes that, "We will always be threatened by this dilemma between, on the one hand, unconditional hospitality that dispenses with the law, duty, or even politics, and, on the other, hospitality circumscribed by law and duty" (135). Biblical texts on

hospitality and a historical theology of hospitality offer to church-based refugee activism a framework for radically equalized relationships between activists and refugee-ed people. They reflect the kind of absolute hospitality Derrida is writing about (though, I disagree with Derrida's readings of the Biblical texts he uses to illustrate this and thus differ in my conclusions)—a law beyond the law. Yet, the popular use of the metaphor and its contemporary connotations of privately hosting friends in one's own home, when used to motivate church involvement with refugee-ed people, results in activism that reflects the other side of Derrida's dilemma—a hospitality that "is no longer graciously offered beyond debt and economy" (83). While Derrida's formulation of the contradictions inherent to *hospitality* are helpful for setting up the tensions within the use of *hospitality* in the discourse of church-based refugee activism, the following section attempts to recover a distinctively Christian and prophetic understanding of the metaphor.

In "A Call to Conscience: A Statement on Refugees from Faith Communities of Canada" (1995) the only explicit reference to the common faith of the signers refers to the responsibility to welcome strangers: "A people who have been shaped by the biblical tradition, we are called to *welcome the stranger* as we would welcome God in our midst" (Leddy 276). This phrase is the base common denominator for churches that disagree on all sorts of other theology; they can agree that hospitality is a part of the Christian tradition. "Punishing the victims of persecution: Churches speak out on detention" is a statement that was circulated at the UNHCR Executive Committee meeting in 2005 (Geneva) by the World Council of Churches Global Ecumenical Network on Uprooted Peoples (shortened to GEN). After a long description of current state policies—tightened

borders, increased use of detention centres, increasing exploitation of asylum seekers, the criminalization of refugees, etc.—the signers state their commitment to the *imago dei*, to advocacy, and to hospitality:

> Faced with this situation, the WCC GEN participants reaffirm our belief in the God-given dignity of all human beings, our commitment to advocating for the rights of uprooted people, and our dream of a world of compassion and hospitality. We recall and reaffirm the words of the World Council of Churches Central Committee in its 2005 statement, "Practising hospitality in an era of new forms of migration." (WCC)

For church-based refugee activists such as these, hospitality is one of three key beliefs shaping their work. Hospitality finds its way into public statements and protests because it is *the* significant popular metaphor for refugee activism that is nurtured in church communities.[68] The metaphor has a long tradition of use by churches[69], and its potent connotations translate easily from passion into action.[70] In every Christian liturgy on refugee-ed people that I have come across (from a variety of denominations) this language of hospitality forms the core of the call to action. Assuming the importance of a shared discourse for shaping communal action, let us look more closely at this metaphor and its influence on church-based activism.

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[68] For other studies linking hospitality with migrant activism see Bevans; Bretherton; Murphy; Nawyn; Pohl "Biblical Issues"; Senior.

[69] For more on hospitality in Christian church history and theology, see chapters 2 and 3 of Pohl's *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*: "Ancient and Biblical Sources" and "A Short History of Christian Hospitality."

[70] See Erin K. Wilson for a generally positive view of the way faith-based organizations in Australia have developed and executed political interventions on asylum issues out of an ethics of hospitality, particularly in their offer of extended community care as an alternative to detention.

The Textual Basis for the Discourse of Hospitality

The metaphor of hospitality and welcoming has its basis for church communities in a number of scripture passages, which provide narrative context for the ethics of hospitality. Two are used particularly often to back up claims that the church is called to be hospitable to displaced people. The first is the verse that follows: "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2). The allusion in the verse is to Genesis 18, when Abraham and Sarah welcome three strangers, without any social status or mutual relationships, into their home only to find out the visitors are angels, bringing a message from God. If any person could be a messenger from God, so the logic goes, every person should be welcomed and treated with generous hospitality. The Hebrews text suggests that hospitality was a key activity of the newly established church. Even more than an activity, hospitality was a core identity marker: "Early Christian writers claimed that transcending social and ethnic differences by sharing meals, homes, and worship with persons of different backgrounds was a proof of the truth of the Christian faith" (Pohl, *Making Room* 5). Further, the early church to which Hebrews was written deliberately tried to show hospitality in ways that contrasted with their surrounding culture. Instead of hosting in order to create beneficial connections with powerful people, they were focused on hosting those who could not host back (Pohl, *Making Room* 16-23).

The second is the story of Zacchaeus, a hated tax collector who gouged the people he collected from.[71] One day he set out to find and listen to a man whose public teaching

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[71] This story is told in Luke 17.

had been causing quite a stir in the region. Because he was short, he had to climb a tree to see over the crowds and satisfy his curiosity about what the famous teacher, Jesus, looked like. As Jesus walked by the tree, he looked up and called Zacchaeus by name, asking him to come down and to show Jesus the way to his house. Zacchaeus "welcomed him gladly." Jesus ate with Zacchaeus, even though his life of fraud and greed was compromising Jesus' reputation. Somehow over the course of their conversation Zacchaeus came to a point where he wanted to promise to give half of what he owned to the poor and give back to people everything he had stolen—multiplied four times.

Loren Balisky is a member of Kinbrace, a transitional and communal living house for asylum claimants in Vancouver. He writes this about the Zacchaeus story: "Jesus turns hospitality on its head. He invites himself as guest, but subversively becomes the true host, welcoming Zacchaeus into a place where his identity is renewed and secured - a 'son of Abraham'" (Loren Balisky, "Radical"). Pohl elaborates on the same point, writing that the "intermingling of guest and host roles in the person of Jesus is part of what makes the story of hospitality so compelling for Christians. Jesus welcomes and needs welcome; Jesus requires that followers depend on and provide hospitality" (Pohl *Making Room* 17).

In both of these passages the act of hospitality is a radical equalizer. In both cases, the person hosting is a powerful person who offers a no-strings-attached welcome. Somehow in that act of hospitality, the person hosted becomes the host and the original hosts find themselves changed. "The guest becomes the host's host" (Derrida 125). Church-based refugee advocates extrapolate from this story the command to see the

divine in every guest and to offer self-sacrificial welcome to people regardless of their

standing in the broader culture, including whether or not they have legal status. More

importantly the message is that hospitality, as a prophetic act, goes two ways and that the

power relationship intrinsic to hosting and being hosted must be equalized so that no one

is disempowered by hospitality.[72] A look at church history and the major texts cited in

theologies of hospitality (see also, Exodus 23, Matthew 25, Luke 10, Luke 14, Romans

15) show that "Christian hospitality has always been partly remedial, counteracting the

social stratification of the larger society by providing a more modest and equal welcome

for all" (Pohl, *Making Room* 63). The remedial and socially grounded nature of a

Christian conception of hospitality maintains a prophetic character without taking on the

impossibility of Derrida's absolute hospitality, in which hospitality is ultimately

antinomian. In the work of church-based activists with displaced people in Canada,

Balisky's and Pohl's *hospitality* could translate into welcoming the participation and

leadership of displaced peoples in both civic and social communities.

At the borders, though, is where prophetic hospitality finds its greatest challenge.

Allowing the government to choose whom we host and then being generous with the

chosen guests is one level of prophetic hospitality. Advocating absolute hospitality by

letting go of the idea of powerful host and grateful guest at a national level and offering

hospitality to any displaced migrants who ask for it requires a greater level of sacrifice

and trust—understandably since hospitality has had great cost in past centuries. Pohl cites

"more extreme cases of political and religious persecution" such as the underground

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[72] See footnote 55.

railroad and the sanctuary tradition, which have "sometimes made the difference between life and death for those fleeing danger….In its resistance to the dominant powers, this kind of hospitality has cost some hosts their lives" (Pohl, *Making Room* 64). The cost for those assisting asylum seekers into Canada today is considerably less because of the safety nets of citizenship and of international contracts, but for people like Janet Hinshaw-Thomas there is still a cost.

Limits to the Metaphor of Hospitality to "the Nations"

Despite what appears to be a radically egalitarian basis for the metaphor of hospitality in church-based activism, when the metaphor is used at a popular level in relation to welcoming asylum seekers who have not been approved yet by the government or the UNHCR, the power of the metaphor's contemporary connotations often wash out its prophetic possibilities. If one were to ask me for a contemporary example of hospitality, I would most likely remember the dinner parties I have hosted lately for friends, the lack of customer service I received from the hotel I paid for last month, or the kind friends who put me up while I vacationed in their city. Hospitality in its current usage has to do with either private hosting of close friends or payment for public hosting services. "Hosting the stranger" is an activity largely left to the world of couch surfers and farm co-operatives that offer room and board for labour. Extending the metaphor to a fuller application within the bounds of contemporary usage, we might ask what happens when the person we invite into our home puts the dishes back in the wrong place, changes our routine, or even takes something that we treasure? Staying civil with a family member, let alone a stranger, becomes difficult, and the host's sense of ownership

might result in ejection of the guest. Canadian civility often proves to be this anemic as well.

When it comes to providing a framework for church-based activism, hospitality, as generous, private hosting of well-mannered guests, becomes too tame a metaphor to counteract the kind of reactionary nationalism that claims a nation can only take in so many strangers before it is overrun. For church-based activists, the metaphor of hospitality provides a powerful motivation for Christians to be sacrificial in their welcome of strangers and a powerful critique of the cold lack of welcome demonstrated by Canada's concern for security and by narrow international definitions of "deserving" refugees. The limitations of this metaphor for framing church-based activism come to the fore, though, when a church community or a person using the metaphor does not comprehend the prophetic nature of hospitality and instead sees their work of welcoming as being in sync with national agendas.

When hospitality to refugees is seen as a task that the church does within the confines of national goals and regulations rather than as a prophetic way of life that challenges the self-preservation of national asylum seeking policies, church-based activism can be co-opted more easily into those national goals. In an article on mission and migration, Pohl writes "as citizens of privileged nations and as members of comfortable churches, it is easy for Christians in the West to become wary of the large numbers of refugees and migrants. We become fearful of refugee flows that might overwhelm limited resources and interrupt our valued ways of life" (Pohl, "Biblical Issues" 11). Due to the fact that the projected image of a hospitable church (rather than

the actual limitations that fear places on practiced Christian hospitality) is often what

makes its way into liturgies and newsletters, I have few written sources to back my claim

here. My conviction that hospitality as a metaphor for church-based activism needs to be

revitalized to gain its prophetic edge comes from: numerous conversations with

Christians committed to both national prosperity/security and to limited hospitality,

sermon illustrations and worship-leading that subtly affirm the rightness of powerful

hosts and grateful guests, and Christian students who argue for a limit to generosity for

the sake of middle class Canadian standards of living. Pohl's answer to the fearful

attitudes of Christians in the Global North is to urge a prophetic (not necessarily

oppositional) stance for churches:

> We will not be able to resist this instrumental valuing of people if we do
> not maintain some distance from the world and its institutions of status
> and power. Without some sense of our own alien identity and our
> connections to God's kingdom, we will find it difficult to see people from
> God's perspective and to offer generous welcome without concern for
> seeking advantage. (Pohl, "Biblical Issues" 11)

One of the ways that popular texts such as liturgies and Christian fundraising

material encourage a co-opted and limited hospitality is by using the phrase "the nations"

to describe those to whom they show hospitality. Popular contemporary Christian use of

"the nations" is an example of the phenomenon Oliver O'Donovan describes in *The

Desire of the Nations*: treating "the Scriptures…as a mine for random sociological

analogies dug out from the ancient world" (22). Consider the worship chorus "Jesus,

Hope for the Nations" by popular songwriter Brian Doerksen. "Jesus, hope of the nations,

Jesus, comfort for all who mourn," it begins. While Doerksen's use of "the nations" is a

reference to the Old Testament language within the specific narrative of Israel, a

wandering slave tribe searching for the promised land, its use and ambiguous recontextualization in contemporary Canadian churches makes it susceptible to uncritical cooption into narratives of state sovereignty and ethnic nationalism. Boyarin and Boyarin note the same dynamic intentionally at work in Zionism: "[Zionism] represents substitution of a European, Western cultural-political formation for a traditional Jewish one that has been based on a sharing, at best, of political power with others and that takes on entirely other meanings when combined with political hegemony" (712). As they so skillfully argue, social justice is endangered when particularism joins with temporal political power. Doerksen's use of "the nations" connotes a combined political and ethnic particularity even as it constructs a binary between the majority white and Christian church and those who are referenced by "the nations" as a metonym for minority ethnicity. While "the nations" as a metonym for ethnicity works on a descriptive level when embedded in the Old Testament story of Israel, its recontextualization within the state sovereignty regime, as codified by the Peace of Westphalia, requires more nuanced explanation and even translation. Minority and majority status will need careful attention in that process.

The category of "the nations" is not only found in the poetry of worship music but also features prominently in Christian programs engaging in refugee work. Some Christian organizations rely on the theological category of "the nations" to describe how refugees relate to their church presently, increasing the urgency of this point for our central theme of church-based refugee activism. An obvious example is Tucson Refugee Ministry, which has as their tagline: "Building a Bridge Between the Church and the

Nations at our Doorstep." The nations they reference are visible minorities in the United States, with no mention of their legal status. Though they are attempting to foster good relationships among citizen-ed and refugee-ed people, their fundamental separation of the two identities of "the church" and "the nations" permanently attaches a refugee-ed person to a nation-state they have left and unwittingly falls prey to a form of ethnic nationalism that takes on religious dimensions. "Hope for the Nations" is an NGO based out of Canada, with admirable and progressive goals. Their very name, however, reinforces the invisibility of Canadian identity and the obvious otherness of people connected to different countries. Even if these and other more subtle texts emphasize the prophetic nature of hospitality to refugees (which few do) their use of "the nations" entrenches refugees as other (coming from "the nations," now hosted by "our nation"), separates refugee-ed objects from citizen-ed subjects, lends credence to national belonging as the most basic identity marker for all involved, and does not adequately consider the changing context in which the phrase is being used. "The nations" as a significant trope in Christian worship lyrics takes a context-specific concept in the Old Testament and makes use of it in a way that demonstrates a lack of critical distance from contemporary narratives of ethnic nationalism and state sovereignty. More studies such as O'Donovan's, which attends to the shifting meaning of theological terms such as "the nations," and Pohl's, which attends to the contextualization of the theological concept of hospitality, are needed so that such terms may be recontextualized intentionally by Canadian churches. In particular, Pohl's call to the church to distance itself from

powerful institutions is much needed as a corrective if prophetic hospitality is to be enacted.

The Kinbrace Community in Vancouver, mentioned earlier, is a part of Salisbury Community Society, which published a newsletter of short opinion pieces written by its community, collectively critiquing contemporary limits to hospitality and calling for prophetic versions of Christian hospitality. Their writing came out of their experience of communal living and the interaction of citizen-ed and refugee-ed members in the house. After several essays nuancing the limits of hospitality as a metaphor for their work, Balisky asks the question in his piece, "How can we maintain a posture and practice of welcome to the world's refugees?" His suggested answer is: "Hold lightly the gift of being citizens in this country. By what merit are we given so much power? We share our power of place on this earth with those who have none" (Loren Balisky, "A Matter" 19). The presumption of one's own power as host and the assumption that citizenship decides a person's legitimacy or non-legitimacy for civic participation are subtle but dangerous ways of thinking for church-based refugee activists. Prophetic hospitality can be developed when churches acknowledge citizenship as power and as an undeserved gift and when citizen-ed and non-citizen-ed members work side by side at welcoming asylum seekers regardless of legal status. Experiences of this kind of migrant activism, in the words of Donald Senior, "challenge the false ideologies of unlimited resources, the myth of unchecked progress, the idolatry of unconditional national sovereignty, and the absolute claim to individual satisfaction that so plague our contemporary world and choke its spiritual capacity" (Senior 29)

But the prophetic critique can go even further. The recognition that citizenship is an arbitrary marker of power and legitimacy most often leads Christian activists to call for an extension of that power and legitimacy. Certainly in many cases an extension of state-sanctioned legitimacy or legal status is the kind of action that is desired. However, indigenous studies point us also to the desires of displaced people who reject the offer of citizenship.

> [A]ll displaced people do not seek the same solutions to their circumstances. While many asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants spend years and significant resources seeking UN-sanctioned refugee status or citizenship within a hosting nation, many Indigenous peoples resist citizenship in an effort to retain a previous national identity that was denied by the Hobbesian theory of the state of nature. As Canadian Indigenous people's canny decision to name their political association 'the Assembly of *First* Nations' indicates, many Aboriginal people contest, rather than seek democratic inclusion in, the nation-states that have displaced them. (Coleman, et. al., "Introduction" xx)

Citizenship is not always a gift. It can be an imposed burden or a reminder of a history of dehumanizing, forced inclusion, of paternalistic gifting. Canada's colonial history must remain forefront in Christian discussions of refugee activism as a corrective to absolute loyalty to the nation-state and to the implicit celebration of citizenship.

Conclusion: Hopeful Suggestions for Canadian Church-Based Activism

I want to provide here a few specific summary commendations and suggestions for Christian discourse with the purpose of encouraging and shaping church-based activism with refugees in the CRC and other denominations. Several of these suggestions anticipate Section Three of this dissertation by referring to the particular contribution literature can make to refugee activist work.

1. What is commendable about the discourse of church-based activism: a. Its belief that our economic gain should never be the motivator or arbiter for Canadian assistance to displaced people (a position urgently needed in today's economic climate, especially considering the conversations happening in Canada about who to prioritize in the queue for visas); b. Its insistence on hope in a cynical climate (the gap between knowing about inequality or suffering and acting on that knowledge is often created by a sense of hopelessness in the face of overwhelming issues); c. Its veneration of Christ and his theological portrait as a stranger offer the potential for displaced people to be honoured and for refugee activism to be conceived of mutually as strangers welcoming strangers.

2. Van Eek describes the general difference between the MCC and the CRC by referencing the "leading motifs" that inform their respective refugee activism. Both groups acknowledge the importance of justice and compassion working hand in hand, but for the MCC the lead motif is compassion and for the CRC it is justice. The insistence that justice and compassion work together has the potential to correct apolitical pity with the language of civic solidarity and to humanize the strident call to rights. Fiction about refugees in Canada has the potential to both humanize the political concept of a refugee through its representation of suffering and also demonstrate the capability and resilience of refugee-e people as fellow civic participants.

3. In the midst of painting an extremely discouraging portrait of humanitarianism in the Global South, Razack writes that "our only chance to assume a more

responsible role lies in rejecting the simple and deeply raced storylines of traumatized nations, middle-power countries and their special capabilities, and showdowns with 'absolute evil'" (Razack, *Dark Threats* 50). Here are four comments roused by her observation: a. The church's over-narration of humanitarianism and refugee experience can rival the oppressiveness of apathetic non-narration. b. In order to avoid a neocolonial paternalism that works out of the supposedly neutral boundaries of the modern-state, church-based activist discourse must become more open to participating in activism that exceeds or is outside of the traditional models of citizen-ed intervention through state-sanctioned avenues. c. The call to listen to refugees can be broadened to include all displaced people, with renewed sensitivity to particular causes of displacement. d. The desire of citizen-ed activists to help or care for refugees must be sifted in light of the tendency towards unequal relations. The sensitivity of diasporic Canadian authors to the constructed nature of borders and to the need for recognizing the agency of displaced people make diasporic fiction a useful resource for churches wanting to be more responsible in their roles. Creative narratives can assist in the work of refreshing the overnarration that churches find themselves rehearsing.

4. Given the strength and completeness of Christian discourses that undergird social activism, church-based activists must be vigilant in making space for "discursive redemption," a phrase coined by Habermas and used by Robin Hoover to describe the democratic theories of the organization "Humane Borders" (Hoover 176).

Continued partnerships with ecumenical groups and with non faith-based

organizations assists churches in being accountable to types of exclusion to which

they are not sensitive. Those partnerships also open up the opportunity for

historically established discourses to be challenged and shifted where needed. The

immersion process of reading fiction about refugee experiences in Canada is

another way of retaining a capacity for self-reflection and discursive change.

SECTION THREE: The Pedagogical Potential of Literature for Church-Based Activists

Chapter 5: The Workshop and the Texts

Bringing Together Activist Action and Reflection

As we have traced in Section Two, the external and internal discourses of the

CRC in Canada are variously weak and strong in promoting a vibrant and informed

refugee activism. In its attempts to engage in refugee activism, the CRC brings with it

challenges unique to the condition of being a religious diaspora. Our discussions in

Section One and Two indicate that these challenges include the difficulty of untangling

ethnic and religious narratives, the conflict that results from becoming a multiethnic

diasporic community, the appeal of uncritically taking on the public identity of an ideal

humanitarian citizen, and a tendency to over identify with refugee-ed people. And along

with other non-diasporic church-based activists, the CRC faces the difficulty of renewing

the metaphor of hospitality to more accurately reflect the mutual welcome of Christ. With

these challenges identified, a practical question presents itself: how and when do the CRC

and other church-based activist groups find time and contexts in which to deepen their

understanding of refugee activism through a discussion of these and other challenges?

In *Response Strategies of the Internally Displaced: Changing the Humanitarian*

Lens Report, a publication of the proceedings from a seminar held in Oslo, Norway, the

Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council addresses the competing demands

of research and action for activists. His "Welcome Address" outlines the dilemma:

> the complexity of the task is clear. On the one hand, humanitarian
> organizations need to respond quickly and efficiently in an emergency in
> order to avoid loss of life. At the same time, however, in order to respond
> appropriately, we need to understand and work within a complex and
> changing social fabric. How do we balance these sometimes competing
> interests and needs? ("Response Strategies" 4)

Practitioners are trying to identify immediate and specific solutions, strategies,

partnerships, etc, while many researchers are trying to understand that complex and

changing social fabric, the broad strokes of history and culture. Humanitarians and

activists understand the importance of research and reflection for their work but often

have to prioritize immediate action.

If the same issues that activists face are being researched in refugee studies and

diaspora studies, how can that research be made available to practitioners who don't have

the time to research? The "Final Plenary Discussion and Recommendations" of the

previously mentioned publication points to the existence of "a substantial amount of

knowledge in the research community, particularly within academic environments, which

should be more widely shared" ("Response Strategies" 44). It asks, more polemically,

"What is the point in gathering information which does not reach key actors or feed into

policy making? Our challenge is to spread information and make it useful and valid for

all concerned with IDP issues" (44).

It was my hope from the beginning of my work on this dissertation to bring together academic and practitioner concerns about refugee-ed people. I chose Christian church-based activism in Hamilton, Ontario as the practitioner community, rather than business leaders, non-government organizations, or organized labour.[73] My choice does not make an argument for this community's importance in contrast to any other community's importance. Instead this thesis points to a major stakeholder in the conversation about forcibly displaced people that has only begun to attract the attention of researchers in the past two years: communities of faith.[74]

The most concrete way that I have been able to create dialogue in my research has been through a workshop that I developed and led for two reading groups in January and April 2009.[75] The workshop was, in part, an opportunity for activists to step back and do

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[73] In Settlement and Integration Services Organization's impressive feasibility study for a civic resource centre for refugees and vulnerable immigrants in Hamilton, Ontario, the researchers identify the key stakeholders in the city as being business, labour, education, government, and non-governmental funders (Trillium Foundation, The United Way, and Hamilton Heritage Foundation) (SISO 13). Though SISO regularly partnered with churches for resettlement of refugees, their report does not mention religious organizations as important stakeholders in the larger civic discussion.

[74] See the *Journal of Refugee Studies* special issue, "Faith-Based Humanitarianism in Contexts of Forced Displacement" (September 2011); and "Religious Organizations and the Integration of Immigrants, Refugees, and Temporary Foreign Workers: An Annotated Bibliography and List of Community Organizations" compiled by Paul Bramadat and Susie Fisher (2010). The discussion of this topic by two graduate students is also worth mentioning: Hannah Allerdice's PhD thesis touches briefly on the role of churches in her comparison of the resettlement of Sudanese refugees in the USA and in Australia (2011). Christine McKinlay's MA thesis examines the role of Canadian churches in the government's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (2008).

[75] I reworked this workshop into a five-week course for high school students. I was also asked by a workshop participant for permission to lead the same kind of workshop in conferences she was organizing later that year.

some communal thinking on the issues related to asylum seekers in Canada. Participants

were invited not from a single organization but from various Christian congregations in a

single city. It was also an experiment in offering diaspora scholarship and literature as a

resource for church-based activists. Knowing that the moments of overlap between

theoretical articles and sermons are few and far between and unlikely to draw a large

crowd, I saw creative narratives as a possible meeting point for the two communities. The

workshops consisted of discussing four refugee narratives, first with a group of church-

based refugee activists and then, at the urging of the first participants, a group of people

with refugee experience.[76] While I was putting together the workshop, I was asked to

lead a ten-week high school course. So the material was used in that context as well. In

order to create dialogue with the thoughts and writings of academics, I chose and

organized the narratives in such a way as to prompt the discussion of several major issues

and ongoing debates in diaspora and refugee studies at a practical level. My own position

as moderator in the workshops allowed me to introduce concepts from specific authors

(for example, Derrida's neologism "hostipitality," which participants found helpful) and

to ask questions probing a conceptual direction when it was natural to the discussion. But,

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[76] I had invited refugee-ed people to the first workshop but had been unsuccessful in recruiting anyone with cold calling and chose not to approach personal contacts because of the pressure it might put on them to participate. At the end of the first workshop, one participant asked me if I was going to be speaking with any refugees as part of my research. When I explained my desire to do so but the difficulty I had had in recruiting people, the participants offered their assistance in gathering participants for a second workshop. They said that getting feedback from refugee-ed people about the narratives' representations of refugees would be invaluable to my research, and their networks provided me with four participants for a second workshop. The unintended result for my research was the segmentation of refugee-ed and citizen-ed participants' responses.

in the spirit of popular education rather than academic education[77], I chose to function mainly as a facilitator and fellow participant so that I could evaluate whether or not creative narratives contained the potential within themselves to kick-start such dialogues.

The results of the workshops have affirmed the usefulness of creative narratives in sparking important discussions with church-based activists about refugee representation, but, as is to be expected when working with human subjects rather than textual objects, the results have far exceeded my aims. My original questions have been stretched to include prerequisite questions about what narratives "do" in the world, what the interpretation and analysis of creative narratives aims to discover, and whether a greater discursive gap might lie between refugee-ed people and Canadians than between church-based activists and diaspora scholars, as I originally anticipated. In addition to unlocking the exciting pedagogical potential of creative narratives, these workshops brought me up against the pedagogical limits of those same narratives. How can one evaluate a text's pedagogical function given the multiple nature of subjectivity, the vulnerability of a text, or an audience that reads out of an ethic of sameness? Throughout all of this my understanding of the place of stories in critical pedagogy on the one hand and in church communities on the other has been deepened as I see how the worldviews of each community affect their approaches to texts and to social change.

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[77] Taking my cue from Razack, I see popular education as discussion-oriented, with the purpose of increasing communal knowledge through shared insights, with a minimal amount of "information transference" from an "expert in the field" (Razack, "The Gaze") While I recognize the disadvantages of this kind of education, it is the more appropriate model for a three-hour workshop with laypeople volunteering their time and hoping to benefit from the networking opportunity.

I begin here by narrating my process for organizing these workshops. The next chapter unpacks the underlying questions about textual analysis that were raised by the two workshops, in particular the limitations on pedagogy as a result of multiple subjectivity, that is having a variety of readers commenting on their understandings of a single text. In all of this I am grateful for the trust given me by participants in both workshops as I work directly and indirectly with their words and thoughts.

Setting up the Workshop

The seeds for the reading group workshops were planted in a casual conversation with Daniel Coleman in 2007 over a kitchen counter just before a meeting. The articles that I was reading at the time were theorizing Canadian diasporic culture and literature and pointing out traps that well-meaning people in my own church were falling into. How could this research be made accessible and useful to the church-based refugee activists I knew in Hamilton? Why not set up a reading group, Daniel suggested, as we moved to the living room for the meeting. And so the project began with an application to McMaster's Research Ethics Board (REB) in 2007 titled "Testing the Mutual Pedagogical Potential of Academic Communities and Church-Based Refugee Activist Groups in Conversation Around Fictional Refugee Narratives." The application was approved with one major suggestion, from which the project gained considerable depth: include refugee-ed people in the discussion.

My revised project description had as its main research question, whether or not fiction about refugee experiences can be useful pedagogy for layperson activism in Hamilton churches. The workshop asked this question of citizen-ed and refugee-ed

participants in relation to four narratives. Recognizing the importance of stories for shaping a religious community's identity and action, a dynamic that I explored extensively in Section One, I proposed to take stories about refugees and test their pedagogical potential in a reading group. My questions were trying to assess the usefulness of such stories for activists; the points of tension and points of agreement between the worldviews of these stories and the worldviews of the participants; the usefulness of participants' practical wisdom in dialoguing with the stories; the extent of the disjunct between standard academic interpretations of these texts and the interpretations of participants; and the overall effect of such reading and discussion practices on various churches' understandings of refugee identity.

I contacted the chairperson of an interdenominational, city-wide committee for church relations with refugee activism in Hamilton and several other public leaders in refugee activism by email and asked them to pass on to their committee members, staff, and volunteers an invitation to participate in a research study of activist responses to literature by and about refugees. My original intent had been to hold two evening workshops, discussing a novel and a short story at each meeting. Such an extended time commitment became a prohibitive factor to participation, though, and so I decided on a Saturday morning session of three hours instead with only one short story to read ahead of time. In place of the novels that I had intended for us to read, a short newspaper article, a Hollywood film clip, and a music video were added to the literary short story since they could be viewed during the workshop time. While I indicated that participation was open to activists with any citizenship status, only citizen-ed activists ended up responding to

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the first call.[78] Ten contacts agreed to participate in the first workshop. They received an information letter about the research and its purposes, with details about participation in the project and a preliminary information survey.

Several participants from that first group helped me gather contacts for a second session. The second workshop was several months later, this time with participants who had first-hand experience with being refugee-ed. While the refugee-ed participants were also associated with churches in Hamilton, their legal status gave them a different vested interest in the narratives than the citizen-ed activists had. Exploring that differentiation within church communities created an interesting learning experience for me as I could compare their collective responses to the same narratives. In fact, as I elaborate further in the final chapter, those comparisons yielded the most surprising results in my research.

There were four participants in the second workshop. All had first-hand experience as a refugee or refugee claimant in Canada except for one participant whose experience was once removed as the fiancé of a refugee claimant. Because written communication was more difficult than oral communication for at least three of the participants, none of the participants filled out the preliminary survey and the workshop evaluations contain less written information than the first group's do.

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[78] Later when I specifically attempted to recruit a group of refugee-ed participants, the difficulty they had in finding time to attend and to read ahead because of jobs with erratic hours and other stressors and the diffidence some expressed at the challenge of English as a second language highlighted for me the complexity of involving Canada's more vulnerable residents in research. Even more importantly, it demonstrated the pertinence of one of the key conversations in refugee studies, i.e. "voiceless" as either an accurate or a determining descriptor of refugee-ed people. I take up this conversation in my final chapter.

The preliminary survey asked five questions: 1. What is the scope and nature of your work with refugee-ed people in Canada? 2. What fiction, if any, have you read about refugee experiences? 3. How would you describe the relationship between your organization and the refugee-ed people you interact with? 4. Speaking generally, what do you sense is the attitude of parishioners in your church towards refugee-ed people entering the church? 5. Do you anticipate that workshops centered on reading fiction would be useful to church-based refugee activists such as you? To parishioners uninvolved in this work? Not all participants filled out the survey or filled it out extensively, making the survey of limited use. So I will only give a brief summary of the answers here. Answers to the first question showed a variety of experiences from those with minimal involvement with refugee activism through their churches to those whose occupations had to do with resettlement. A few people had read fiction about refugee-ed people (though most had not and none had read Canadian fiction) but no one had read the same texts as each other, so no common body of refugee literature existed for this group. The attitudes of parishioners as perceived by participants ranged from "welcoming" and "curious and eager to help" to "patronizing" and "apprehensive." Even within a single faith-based community, the survey respondents indicated that attitudes towards refugee-ed people vary widely. Something that did recur in several surveys was the tendency of church members to want to give to asylum claimants but not to receive from them, in other words a kind of imbalanced relationship despite an abundance of good will. This observation demonstrates the pertinence of the section on radical hospitality in chapter four, given the strength of hospitality as a metaphor for refugee activism. Answers to the

final question were again varied. One participant thought stories would be useful for activists but not for the average churchgoer. Another participant thought the opposite. Several participants were undecided. Overall, no one had given much thought before to the central question of my research project.

Workshop Protocols

With the permission of the participants, our oral discussion was collected on audio tape. Each participant received a transcript copy of the discussion and was asked to provide any edits or changes to the workshops they thought necessary. As remuneration each participant received twenty-five dollars after their participation in each stage of the research: attending the discussion group, reviewing the transcript, and reviewing the interpretive material. The honorarium was meant to honour the time and energy contributed, while not inducing participation. Participants were able to withdraw participation at any point.

The workshop was intended to contain further advantages for the participants, advantages that, unsurprisingly, turned out to be variously very beneficial or only somewhat beneficial to the different individual participants. The discussion group was designed with two purposes, both of which I hoped would benefit this group of participants and broader society: first, to gather their responses to refugee narratives as a way of assessing whether or not such literature and standard academic interpretations of it could be helpful tools for church-based activism with refugee-ed people; and second, to give participants the opportunity to listen in, so to speak, on the academic discussion happening in cultural studies about refugees. The opportunity for them was to contribute

to such discussions through the data that I collected and have since included in my thesis and published articles. Participants were offered time to reflect on the work they do, facilitation for that reflection, and the opportunity for wider dissemination of their opinions.

The Participants

During introductions, participants shared their denominational affiliations. In both workshops there was diversity. Three of the participants came from the CRC, three were part of a Brethren in Christ congregation, one was part of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, three were members of an Associated Gospel congregation, one was part of a Baptist congregation, one attended a non-denominational community church, and one attended a Roman Catholic church. One participant did not share his/her denominational affiliation. None of the participants will be named in my writing in order to preserve anonymity.

A variety of faith perspectives on the relationship between political advocacy and church-based refugee activism surfaced in the workshop that I led. Though we did not define political action at any point in the conversation, the transcripts suggest that political action was assumed to be any point at which our work intersects with the government's work. Particularly, involving ourselves in "politics" takes place in the moment when we become critics or dissidents. This narrow understanding of what is political surely shapes the kind of refugee activism that churches engage in and would be productively challenged by Nyers' and McNevin's work on loosening the political from its state-centric definition, along the lines of my suggestions in Section Two. One

participant suggested offhand that churches should support people of any legal status, noting that the community will receive as much as it gives in relationship with non-status migrants (Workshop 1). In response, another participant pointed out that that statement was dependent on what the goal of church-based activism with refugee-ed people is: "Is it to integrate or is it to motivate action politically?" Put in terms of our understanding of politics, the choice is between supporting the political status quo or trying to change it. The kinds of stories we tell and listen to, they pointed out, will depend on what our larger goal is. A participant who came from a Catholic background joined the conversation, claiming an apolitical position: "I don't like the church to get involved too much in politics. I think focusing on the person, the needs, the individual, the family [is our focus]—bringing them in and making them part of the community" (Workshop 1). Someone from a Baptist denomination connected the act of motivating political action with "guilting people into doing stuff" in contrast with telling stories and allowing people's hearts to be changed through worship and prayer (Workshop 1). That is, leaders can push stridently for specific political action or change, but it will only be manipulation unless the perspectives of people actually change. Throughout the discussion, though, two participants from the CRC consistently touched on political involvement as key to the work of church-based activism. These two participants raised questions of legal status, Canadian responsibility for indigenous displacement, and hospitality that turns empathy for the guest into condescension and thus restricts people from being full civic participants. Their concerns were acknowledged and discussed by the rest of the group. Ironically the practical issues of political injustice were not disputed, but the word

political raised some theological hackles. The benefits of expanding our definition of

political would be a fascinating discussion with this group. According to official

denominational statements, the MCC, the CRC, Baptist denominations, and the Roman

Catholic Church have significantly different understandings of the church's purpose and

what counts as political action. Those differences were also present in our diverse group.

Remarkably, they come together in Hamilton as partners in Christian refugee activism.

Workshop Evaluations

Our discussions of the individual texts and comparisons between them were lively

and invigorating. Some participants expressed gratitude for the time they were given to

be thoughtful about their activities and to connect with a wider network of similarly

interested activists. Three participants in the first group rated the workshop "moderately

useful" in contrast to the others' "very useful" ratings. One of those participants

explained in their feedback that they wanted the workshop to connect more clearly to

their role and responsibility to refugees, that is to answer practical questions of what to do

with the empathy elicited by the narratives. The majority of the first group responded

positively to the experience, evaluating the workshop with words such as these:

    a. "great opportunity to network with others working in the field"
    b. helps us not to be "passive" interpreters
    c. "I learned a lot!"
    d. "Expectations were exceeded. I wasn't sure what to expect but felt it was
       really stimulating."
    e. "The opportunity to reflect and discuss in a group what our understanding
       of refugee-ed people is [is] really helpful."

Articulating what they would take away from the workshop, participants wrote:

    a. I am encouraged by the things that were shared and feel re-inspired to continue thinking about the role/spirit of church hospitality and involvement with refugee-ed.

    b. Thinking through how to present so others with less exposure to refugee issues are moved to get involved.

    c. The complexity and diversity of the refugee-ed stories—the perceptions and emotions that are triggered.

    d. It is important to ask good questions and help people reflect/analyze what they are being exposed to (media-wise). The messages are sometimes blatant and sometimes disguised but they definitely shape our views.

    e. I was interested in how the media can colour our view of refugees—either in a positive or negative light—and how we can use media as well to educate or draw church into meaningful discussion around refugee issues.

In the second group, two participants found the workshop "very useful" in contrast to the "moderately useful" evaluation of the other participants. All participants in the second group found the workshop "easy to participate" in (other options were, "too simple," "difficult to participate," and "too difficult to be helpful"). When asked what one thing was that they would take away from the workshop, one participant referenced our discussion of refugee voices and whether they need to be spoken for: "The voices of refugees are waiting to be heard. They are journeys of humanity." Another participant pointed to our discussion of the *Spectator* article as particularly helpful. When asked whether or not they would recommend this workshop for their churches, all of the participants responded positively:

    a. Yes.

    b. It would be very useful and helpful for people in my church.

    c. Yes, [it] is good to bring [to] schools and churches.

    d. Yes, because it would allow them to reflect upon their preconceived notions.

When asked what reasons they would encourage others to come to the workshop with, participants gave these answers:

a. It teaches a lot about newcomers.
b. I would tell them about refugee life and the suffering in refugee camps.
c. It provides people [with the chance] to explore the refugee issue on a personal level. Allows "refugees" the dignity they deserve.

Workshop Texts

Three of the four narratives I chose were authored by Canadians (all except *Beyond Borders*, which was screened internationally). They cover a variety of sources with different kinds of refugee representation: a Hollywood film, a music video, a newspaper article, and a short story. I should acknowledge that, as I chose the texts, I did so believing that some texts are better representations of refugee experience than others, particularly when they are narrations concerned with representing refugee-ed people (direct representation) as opposed to representing the response of citizen-ed people to refugee-ed people (incidental representation). I organized the workshop discussion in two parts, each part contrasting an incidental representation with a direct representation.

During the first half of the workshop we watched and discussed a clip from *Beyond Borders* (incidental representation) starring Angelina Jolie, a UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, and then watched and discussed the hip-hop music video "Soobax" by Canadian hip hop artist and refugee K'Naan (direct representation). Both clips were visual and aural representations of refugee-ed people, and each portrayed refugee camps or refugee-ed people in groups that were neither resettled nor at home. We switched in the second half to examining textual representations of asylum seekers: first reading and then discussing a *Spectator* newspaper article titled "Hamilton next stop for wave of Mexican refugees?" (incidental) followed by discussion of a short story by diaspora

author Neil Bissoondath entitled "On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows" (direct), which participants had been asked to read ahead of time.

The first two clips together produced a contrast between the usual representation of refugees as voiceless, neutral victims and pitiable recipients of humanitarian aid (via *Beyond Borders*) and a less common representation of refugees as active, opinionated political activists and vibrant culture-makers (via "Soobax"). They also contrasted the representation of refugee camps, on the one hand, as exotic places of destitution where victims languish helplessly (via *Beyond Borders*) and, on the other hand, as ordinary places of communal life where people who have been forcibly displaced create a new home for themselves and speak out against their displacement (via "Soobax").

The second half of the workshop compared two representations of asylum seekers, one in a mainstream news story and the other in creative fiction: a brief outsider's description of collective refugee migration (*Spectator* article) versus a more lengthy insider's narration of an individual asylum seeker waiting for a decision on his status ("On the Eve"). The first text represents asylum seekers as dangerous objects, a security risk, and an uncontrollable wave (*Spectator* article) while the second text represents asylum seekers as vulnerable subjects, often isolated, at risk, and at the mercy of individuals on the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada ("On the Eve"). The first text includes no larger context for its description of a single event and is written with the interests of citizens in mind; while the second text draws on the internal emotional life of the subject, his personal history (which is also tied into political history), Canadian

and Latin American cultural and legal contexts to tell the first person account of one asylum seeker.

Beyond Borders

Beyond Borders, released by Paramount Pictures in 2003, was directed by Martin Campbell and stars Angelina Jolie and Clive Owen. The tagline of the film reads, "In A Place She Didn't Belong, Among People She Never Knew, She Found A Way To Make A Difference" and could just as easily be a reference to the real life work of Angelina Jolie as to her character in the film. The IMDB announces that this film and the research Jolie did for her role were inspiration for her global relief work. She was appointed as a Goodwill Ambassador with the UNHCR in the year the film was released and that same month published *Notes from My Travels: Visits with Refugees in Africa, Cambodia, Pakistan and Ecuador*. Both the film and the book are variously lauded for their social message and criticized for their artistic merit and/or reductionist representation of refugee-ed people. Polarized responses to *Beyond Borders* is evident in IMDB discussions and in its two award nominations: it won the Political Film Society award for promoting peace and the Razzie Award for Worst Actress. Reviews gathered on Rotten Tomatoes give the film an average of 4.3 out of 10. The Web site's summary of the critics' reviews reflects my own reasons for using the film: "Beyond Borders is good-intentioned, but the use of human suffering as a backdrop for a romance comes across as sanctimonious and exploitative" (Rotten Tomatoes).

In the first clip Jolie[79] enters a refugee camp for the first time. It is 1984 in Ethiopia. She has brought with her a dying woman and her skeletal child, who Jolie rescued from a vulture as she traveled through the expansive desert that surrounds the camp[80]—a stunning desert, which has been portrayed through beautiful cinematography. Jolie has brought the woman and child to be treated in the hospital, but the doctor in charge, inundated with dying people and somewhat hardened to their suffering, is angry with her for her idealistic and indulgent actions. He lectures her on triage and on wasting resources on hopeless cases, but she insists the woman and her child be treated. Once inside the camp one of the humanitarian workers explains to Jolie how the camp works and gives her a tour of the makeshift hospital. As she walks slowly through the ward full of dying and sick people, she suddenly stops. Her smooth white brow wrinkles and her eyes widen in horror as the camera focuses in on her face. The next shot is the scene she is seeing: a black man, a refugee, sitting on a cot, his face completely marred by large tumors and damaged skin. The camera stands as far from him as Jolie does. He stares blankly back at her, at the camera, at us, his viewers. The camera cuts back to a close-up of Jolie who blinks and forces herself to look away and move on, and we do too. After the clip finishes, Jolie goes on to assist with surgery on the woman she brought to the camp. The woman does not live, but her child does.

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[79] I call her Jolie because her celebrity status makes it hard to think of her as anyone else through the entire movie.

[80] This earlier scene is most probably a comment on the controversial photographer Kevin Carter and his Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of a starving toddler and predatory vulture in Sudan, 1993. The controversy hinges on the question of what happened after the photograph was taken.

The scene confronts viewers and aims to shock them out of complacency, perhaps meaning for viewers to ask what can be done. Jolie's insistence that the dying woman be seen and thus her insistence that every act of compassion—no matter how small and seemingly pointless—is worthwhile is both vindicated (the child survives) and questioned (the mother does not). We do not see the child again in the film. In effect, the event is meaningful as part of the larger narrative because of the way it changes Jolie and the way she sees the world. She is the subject of the film; refugee camps are the setting for her personal growth; and refugee life and death are the catalysts for that growth. Because of my own interest in the ethics of representation, this clip raises questions for me about celebrity culture, about how refugees come to be silenced, and about the exoticization of refugees.

"Soobax"

K'Naan's hit single "Soobax" was released in 2005 on the album *Dusty Foot Philosopher*, which garnered a Juno award for Rap Recording of the Year. K'Naan aims to be an activist musician, calling himself the dusty foot philosopher and speaking out boldly on political and social issues. He was first drawn to hip hop as a medium for speaking about his refugee experience because "'the people that were making hip-hop records, who were speaking about this destitution, made me relate in a way because they seemed to be in exile in their own land'" (Egere-Cooper). Like the hymns analyzed in chapter four, hip hop nurtures a community with prophetic distance from the status quo. K'Naan boldly claims the label *refugee* and is transparent in his attempts to instill more positive and respectful perceptions of refugees among North Americans. In an interview

with Egere-Cooper, K'Naan speaks about his first album as being a response to popular

humanitarian representations of Africa.

> 'When they show Africa, especially in those programmes that come on late at night, pleading for help, they often show children. And when they show children, they often pan the camera to their feet, and it's always dusty which is to portray poverty. But, I thought, I used to have those same feet….I wanted to call that child The Dusty Foot Philosopher, the one who is articulate about the universe, but doesn't have anything.' (Egere-Cooper)

K'Naan's albums and videos are admired both for their social statements and for their

artistic, musical value. His first full album was nominated for and won several awards,

and more recently, "Wavin' Flag" from his album, *Troubador* was used as the 2010 FIFA

World Cup Tour anthem.

The "Soobax" music video begins with the visual of fast-forwarded urban scenes

accompanied by the powerful sound of ululating women and hand drums. "Basical'y; I

got beef. I wanna talk to you directly," K'Naan begins. "I can't ignore, I can't escape,

and that's cause, you affect me, you cripple me, you shackle me, you shatter my whole

future in front of me, this energy, is killing me, I gotta let it pour like blood: Soobax."

The final word translates from Somali "come out with it" and becomes the repeated

demand throughout the chorus. The words "cripple," "shackle," and "shatter" paint a

devastatingly violent picture of the way being forcibly displaced affects a person's ability

to act and to speak and to hope for the future. In response to this violent silencing,

K'Naan issues a challenge to those responsible. The Somali chorus translates "you have

exasperated the people, so come out with it. The troubles have increased, so come out

with it. You've spilled the blood so that it drains on the roads, so come out with it.

You've burnt the root of the earth, so come out with it." The "you" is never given a single identity. Clan violence, international complacency, Somali gunmen are all part of the tangle of "who's to blame." K'Naan challenges the viewer with his powerful physicality and his direct eye contact, singing and dancing with crowds of Somali refugees in Kenya. The bright colours, catchy rhythms, and constant moving bodies both woo viewers toward and also insist that they join his political protest.

The visuals of the film show no crippling, shackling, or shattering. What they do show is life—powerful, communal life. K'Naan says in a 2005 interview,

> Struggle in the western hemisphere is quite misunderstood to be something that holds the people hostage, and sentences them to this form of depression or something, but struggle for us includes celebration. It includes the opportunity for change and that's what people celebrate. That's why you see the power of that video being people who are struggling, but people who are doing it in a dignified way, and are able to rejoice about possible change. (Carter Flinn)

No one would know just from watching that the musicians, dancers, crowds, soccer-players, school children are all from refugee communities in Kenya. The scenes could be from most large cities around the world. The shots of K'Naan in the middle of people singing and dancing together are set alongside scenes from ordinary urban life (kids play soccer in an empty lot, imposing and decrepit buildings look down on people walking the streets, people catch buses). Amongst the life and vitality of city life are interspersed short shots of individual figures in moments of solitary reflection: K'Naan dancing on the beach, sitting and staring, and playing the kalimba (thumb piano). A man sitting, reading a book. I understand these moments as showing that refugee action is shaped by more than the communal life of refugee camps; it is shaped by thinking, reading, writing,

making music in moments of quiet reflection as well. In some of the final scenes, K'Naan

stands defiantly within a line of men and then of boys, challenging the camera with a

resolute stare. In the context of the lyrics, it seems he is both challenging the viewer to

take responsibility for what s/he has seen but also maintaining the resolution of his first

lines: I'm being forced to be a refugee, but I will not be silent about what has brought me

to this place. The final still is of a beach and either a sunset or a sunrise.

Hamilton Spectator Article

"Hamilton next stop for wave of Mexican refugees?" was written by Sharon

Boase, then Faith and Ethics reporter at the *Hamilton Spectator*. The short news report

was published 21 September 2007 in the Local News section of the paper and consists of

eight short paragraphs. I retrieved this article from the *Hamilton Spectator*'s Web site by

searching for "refugees" and selecting the first article that the search engine returned. The

rhetoric of the article is not uncommon in its representation of refugees as threats to the

Canadian way of life.

The article opens with the speculative statement, "a wave of Mexican refugees

swamping services in Windsor is expected to hit Hamilton in a couple of months," and

then bases its own speculation on the prediction of the Windsor mayor, whose city

recently received 100 Mexican refugee claimants and was expecting "hundreds" of

refugees and "believes some of the refugees will continue on to Hamilton" (Boase).

When Boase contacted immigrant and refugee agencies in Hamilton about the possibility,

those agencies reported no increase in Mexican clients, but "imagined" it was a

possibility. Boase concludes, "at least one thinks it's just a matter of time before the wave

reaches Hamilton." The rest of the article describes the number of Mexican refugees who have come to Canada, showing an increase between 2003 and 2007 from 2,500 refugees to just under 5,000. She concluded the article with two statements about refugee claimants in Canada: firstly that the United States has rejected a bill that would allow undocumented migrants to become citizens, and second that word is spreading in Mexican networks that Canada is a good place to claim refugee status in particular because a visa is not required to get into the country. Put together, the two facts suggest that the hardline of the United States and the permeability of Canada increase the likelihood of Hamilton social services being swamped by waves of refugees.

My own concern with this text is that the meager facts Boase offers as context for her predictive news reporting perpetrate the commonly held myths about refugees that agencies such as Amnesty International, The Canadian Council for Refugees, and the UNHCR continuously work to debunk.[81] Those myths include refugees as a drain on Canada's economy, refugees as a security risk to Canada, and refugees crossing the border as queue jumpers. Tellingly, two years later in July 2009, Citizenship and Immigration Canada imposed a visa requirement on Mexicans wanting to travel to Canada. In his announcement, Citizenship, Immigration, and Multiculturalism Minister, Jason Kenney used the language of queue jumping, and the new visa process now boasts screening for security risks, financial dependence, and health issues in applicants (Kenney). I put these two statements side by side to show that popular misconceptions

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[81] See these online sources for examples of documents educating the public about common refugee myths: http://www.amnesty.ca/Refugee/myths.php, http://ccrweb.ca/documents/FFacts.htm, http://www.unhcr.org/4ba880059.html.

about refugees' experiences and about their impact on Canadian society, fed by texts such as this short, unassuming news article, play a part in discussions of policy and law.

"On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows"

Neil Bissoondath, author of "On the Eve," is a well-known, prolific, and controversial Canadian author whose novels tell stories of displacement and exile, often focusing on the Caribbean diaspora in Canada. He was born in Trinidad and Tobago and emigrated to Canada when he was eighteen. *Selling Illusions*, his first major non-fiction work, stimulated much critical discussion of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act among authors and theorists with its suggestion that multiculturalism, as a government policy, promotes division and a culture of victimhood. Bissoondath currently teaches creative writing at Université Laval in Quebec City. A number of prominent literary figures in Canada have criticized Bissoondath for appropriating voices other than his own for his stories. Though Bissoondath is not a refugee himself, he defends taking up the voices of others in imaginative writing as a "basic human thing to do. It's one of the ways we learn from each other, and we learn to get along" (Van Toorn 133). He writes in *Selling Illusions* of a woman in one of his classes who was a Romanian refugee and who, after a school reading of "On the Eve" thanked him "for explaining to her classmates more clearly than she could what it was like to live the life of a refugee" (Bissoonath, *Selling*184). His recounting of this conversation points to the possibility of stories speaking for people who do not want to explain their experiences or who find that re-telling traumatic. Written by a person who is involved in literary and diaspora debates in Canada and who has experienced displacement firsthand, "On the Eve" was the one

literary representation of refugee-ed people that I chose to use in our workshop discussion.

This longish short story narrates a day in the life of Joaquin, an asylum seeker from Brazil, who is waiting for a determination on his asylum claim. Joaquin lives in housing with seven other claimants from different parts of the world. We find out as the story progresses that Joaquin has been tortured in Brazil for his union activities. His hands and knuckles in particular have been broken and scarred, and the narrative leaves no room for doubt about the truth of his story. These particular twenty-four hours are not packed with action. Instead they show the forced and empty inactivity of his day as a kind of psychologically and relationally torturous process. He, along with the other claimaints, must live in the face of "uncertain tomorrows." Amin, the other claimant who appears briefly and speaks in the story, refuses to be contained in the present, instead speaking with determined hope about his future in Canada. Ultimately, his claim is denied. Joaquin responds differently to the decision that is about to be made about his legal status. He walks the streets, drinks at a local café that has become a hub for non-status migrants from South America (La Barricada) and talks with the bartender about nothing personal. He keeps to himself, trusting no-one. Time begins to feel meaningless as he floats in between his past home and the home he is trying to reach. Because a future—of any kind—is what the asylum claimants in the story have come to Canada for (as opposed to migrating in order to join family or to find work), the uncertainty of that future becomes destabilizing.

The only major event in the short story is when a woman named Tere attempts to commit suicide at La Barricada and Joaquin helps the bartender to hold her wrists and stop the bleeding. After he leaves, he walks through the streets, suddenly noticing the spring weather and the "little domestic spectacles" of lighted windows. By helping Tere he has, for a short time, been able to forget the signs of torture on his hands and simply use them; he has forgotten his refugee status and has simply acted as a human being to help another person. As he walks back to his house, he is feeling strong and confident in himself. His ability to help and be productive has birthed in him a sense of at-homeness in this city. As I found in chapter four's discussion of the metaphor of hospitality, neither a warm welcome nor a host community's compassion could produce this sense of home. Given my concern that refugee activism is mutual and recognizes the agency of refugee-ed people, I find it telling that in order to feel at home he needed to participate in and contribute to a community.

One underlying theme in the story is the question of what defines a refugee. Joaquin challenges the UNHCR's strict definition with the question, why is starving any less dangerous than bullets, any less worthy of protection? And who decides how much torture is enough to warrant protection? Joaquin has been tortured to the point of death, and so he finds it arbitrary and absurd that Flavio, a fellow claimant, is judged inadmissable because he "wasn't involved in enough union activity….to endanger his life" (Bissoondath, "On the Eve" 16). Some of the characters would be categorized as illegal immigrants, some are Convention refugees, and some like Joaquin are waiting to be assigned a status. All of the characters share a sense of being caged and of not being

allowed to participate fully in the world, while remaining completely dependent on a process that feels foreign, arbitrary, and at times hostile. The story interacts with legal definitions of and processes for refugees at the level of their impact on refugee claimants. It also takes up the refugee studies questions about authenticity and the performance of refugeeness, the medical risks for non-status people, the psychological strain on those going through the process of becoming a refugee, the refugee system's unresponsiveness to refugee experience, and the difficulty of (forced) integration.

Workshop Results

The rest of my dissertation proffers what I learned in the process of leading and analyzing the workshops' discussions of the aforementioned texts. The next chapter deals with the theoretical insights I have gained through the process of the workshop, particularly the conditions necessary for the pedagogical potential of creative narratives to be maximized. The subsequent three chapters delineate the applied results, ordered around three major issues in refugee studies and/or cultural studies as they were taken up in the workshop's comparative discussion of the workshop texts. For each issue I present the research context for the issue and then make use of my own analysis alongside that of the participants' analyses to consider what the refugee narratives offer the research context and how the narratives might inflect the narratives of church-based activism.

Chapter 6: What is Good Pedagogy?

Discovering the Breadth of Critical Approaches to Fiction

The workshops were, in part, an experiment in popular pedagogy, using creative narratives to popularize insights from refugee and diaspora studies. Out of the individual texts and their pairings, a number of questions emerged about the nature of text, particularly fiction, and the practice of reading and of analysing. These questions were beyond the scope and time of the workshop. Yet the interest of participants in these questions demonstrated both the usefulness and also some complications of using creative narratives in popular education. Being part of the workshop discussion allowed me to unearth the narrow basis of this thesis's initial research question about the pedagogical potential of creative narratives for refugee activism and to see further possibilities if I let go of my expectations for what good pedagogy could look like in a popular education setting. The emerging questions function as evidence for the needfulness of knowing and expressing one's own approach to text when engaging in this kind of research, if only to acknowledge how a multiplicity of readers affects research conclusions. More than that, though, they point to the importance of not containing creative fiction's pedagogical usefulness within a single ideological approach and of finding ways to open up the many modalities of any given text. My conclusions regarding good pedagogy and creative fiction are that a multi-modal approach is richest and allows a text to speak as fully as it may to its readers and that the pedagogical process must keep in mind the dialectic between difference and sameness.

Emerging Questions

During the second workshop, as we discussed the *Spectator*'s representation of refugee-ed people in a poorly-researched and hastily-written article on Mexican asylum seekers, one participant asked, "is it a good newspaper to read?" I began to explain to the best of my knowledge the strengths and weaknesses of the *Spectator*'s reporting by commenting on political bias and parochial writing, but the participant interrupted me with the more urgent question: "jobs?" She[82] wanted to know if the *Spectator* had a healthy "Help Wanted" section. As a cultural theorist with my financial needs covered by a SSHRC scholarship, my evaluative frame of reference for newsprint media was a critical understanding of its discursive and political representation, but what distinguished a good newspaper for this participant was the vitality of its job opportunities section—its ability to be a democratic space, making interviews accessible to any person with the coins to buy a paper. The secondariness of discursive critique became embarrassingly obvious to me again when, during a fascinating discussion about how to get people to move from merely observing a film about suffering to actually acting on their knowledge, this same participant abruptly left in order to fax their lawyer at the pharmacy across the street. When she returned we found out that her asylum application had been rejected just the day before.

Musing on what would have been a humorous exchange if not for the high stakes, I began to question my assumptions about what textual interpretation and analysis aim to discover about a text. Given our two vastly different evaluations of this newspaper at a

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[82] To preserve anonymity, all participants are referred to with feminine pronouns.

pragmatic level, imagine the possibility for difference in evaluating or theorizing the different narrative representations of refugee-ed people. Since this was the first time I had embarked on a literary studies project that involved human participation, my methodology was necessarily improvised. I spent time trying to figure out what questions I wanted to ask about the narratives in order to see what they could be used to teach, but I never asked what philosophical approach to the text my questions were shaped by. During the course of the workshop, I recognized that I was dialoguing with participants who had a variety of more and less decided approaches to creative narratives. I could appreciate the richness of narrative pedagogy that was affirmed in the variety of questions that grew out of the participants' discussion. Yet I also knew that our discussion could have benefited from leadership that more clearly articulated the parameters of the workshop's philosophical approach to narratives. At the very least, this kind of precision would have offered an opportunity for participants to transparently discuss their agreement or disagreement. Prior to the workshop I needed to clarify what *I* expected from a text and what assumptions my questions held about a text's relationship to the world. So in my subsequent analysis of the workshop transcripts, I began searching for something to help me understand how the participant's assumptions about creative narratives were interacting with my own, an interaction that both enriched and limited our pedagogical experience. Richard Macksey's Foreword to *The John Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* (JHG) provided me with an insightful, albeit brief, introduction to the topic.

Macksey provides what he calls a "baker's dozen of queries directed to either textual parts or wholes" as a way of explaining why critics in various schools cannot hear the value in each others' criticism (Macksey x). The queries are clustered around these categories: ontological, epistemological, teleological, archaeological, descriptive, interpretive, performative, normative, historical, cultural, psychological, appreciative, and metacritical. While many of the categories overlap and literary critics sometimes combine approaches in their work, Macksey provides sarcastic labels for each category that help us to recognize common critiques of each approach and that underscore the antagonistic relationship that often exists among those who hold dogmatically to certain approaches (for example, he nicknames the descriptive approach "lemon squeezing," and the cultural approach he calls "the new illiteracy").

Risking the criticism that I am merely working out of the first category of ontological criticism, I interpret his thirteen critical nodes as a helpful way of categorizing the many modalities of a text and therefore of textual interpretation. Indeed working through a text with each of these approaches would provide a richer interpretation of a text than would be possible with only one focus. This richness is what I had a taste of in the workshop, but is also what I was not prepared to explore with participants. So I begin that exploration here, not in relation to the individual texts we read but in relation to the workshop discussions, starting with the approach that my original questions most resembled and then choosing a few alternate modalities through which to think my research questions.

Categorizing the Initial Research Questions

When I first wrote my REB proposal, my questions were related to the

pedagogical potential of texts as commentaries on contemporary culture. I wanted

participants to understand the constructive and the damaging potential of different

narrative representations of the refugee segment of the Canadian population. My original

questions fell quite directly into Macksey's cultural category since they had to do with

finding out what a text might say about refugee-ed people in Canada and evaluating its

accuracy and ethics.[83] In the case of the newspaper article that we read, I was asking,

once we see the underlying message about refugee-ed people in this article, can we also

see how our broader culture and we have been influenced by the perspectives of news

media and Hollywood films? Uninterested in a strictly formalist approach to literature, I

had expanded my definition of *text* to include a hip hop video and prepared for

participants more questions about the text's use than questions about the text's aesthetic

qualities. Going into the workshop I was curious how the expertise of cultural and literary

studies might be used to assist church-based refugee activists in their own work and in

the mobilization of their communities. I hoped to discover how refugee narratives could

be used to communicate to church-based activists the concerns of cultural and literary

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[83] Macksey defines the cultural approach in this way: "How may literary documents (and popular culture generally) illuminate our understanding of cultural groups, ethnic and gender interests, 'marginalities,' and so on? This is an approach, related to the question of history and of much recent currency that shifts the focus of inquiry away from the institution of literature toward an account of these collective bodies. Against the formalist emphasis on the 'work' as an independent entity…the cultural question attends to calibrating issues such as the degrees of exclusion and inclusion, of domination and sufferance, of complicity and resistance in the social sphere. It also tends to extend the notion of the textual well beyond traditional notions of 'literature'" (Macksey x).

studies regarding the ways refugee-ed people are represented and spoken about and, at the same time, to serve the desire of church-based activists to be sensitive and informed.

So as I wrote my preliminary notes, I was eager to discover how a contemporary moment of exoticisation in popular media might be leveraged to teach both what is true about refugee-ed experiences and what is not true about refugee-ed experiences. Or, could showing and discussing a film such as *The Visitor* help to normalize the condition of statelessness for a church community? Could an exercise in discursive analysis, such as unpacking and critiquing a common metaphor like hospitality, lead to a fresh understanding of how language and stories subtly shape our activism? Might reading a story about an asylum seeker by an author who is trained in cultural and literary studies lead to constructive dialogue about how to combat the fear of outsiders in Canada? Could reading and discussing creative narratives be a solution to the ethical problem of asking traumatized asylum seekers to rehearse their stories for the purpose of raising awareness in communities? My concern regarding literature was somewhat pragmatic, since I wanted to know what and how narratives could uncover assumptions about refugee-ed people and how narratives could expand our understanding of refugee situations. Yet it was not pragmatic enough to consider the value of the texts in terms of the refugee-ed participants' immediate needs, as is clear from the story with which I opened this section. Nor was it pragmatic enough to satisfy the participant who wanted a connection between how the stories made them *feel* and what they should *do* about that.

My initial questions sat squarely in the critical camp of cultural analysis of literary texts. My experience of the workshop and my work with the resulting material

demonstrated the need for a more clearly expressed and well-rounded philosophical

approach to text engagement. I do believe that texts are cultural products and culture-

makers and that Canadian refugee narratives can tell us a lot about the experiences of

refugee populations in Canada. Partly because of the diverse readership with whom I

worked and partly because of the open nature of the dialogues I facilitated, I became

aware of *what else* I believe about literature—what other questions should be asked of

literature.[84] Those questions are here helpfully organized through a selection of

Macksey's categories: ontological, teleological, descriptive, interpretive, appreciative,

and performative.[85] Any subsequent workshops I run would be enhanced by a selection

of questions developed from a variety of these categories.

The Ontological and Teleological Modes

What is a text's ontological and teleological value if it "isn't true," that is, if it is

fiction? For the pre-meeting questionnaire, one participant answered the question, "Do

you anticipate that workshops centred on reading fiction would be useful to church-based

refugee activists such as you" in this way: "Maybe. I think there's no substitute for face-

to-face interaction" (Questionnaire). After the workshop, that same participant rated the

workshop "very useful" but still wrote that they would take away from the discussion:

"that there are very few substitutes for direct communication with the 'other'" (Workshop

Evaluations). Her answer to the question of what fiction is and what it is, by nature,

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[84] I must also credit Susie O'Brien's questions during my comprehensive examination (about how I was proposing to read texts as either literature or ethnography) for starting me on this line of thinking.

[85] I am sure I have taken some creative license in my interpretation of these various categories as Macksey provides very little context for each category—sometimes only a few sentences.

supposed to do, led to the conclusion that more "genuine" knowledge could be obtained in conversations with people than from reading a book. Our comparison of K'Naan's conversational hip hop video with Angelina Jolie's fictional, narrative film led one participant to say that even if the movie "allows people to think, there's still that tendency to say, 'oh that's Hollywood; how much do I know is real?' But this is him [K'Naan] speaking out against something and having a voice and…allowing people to actually [see what it's like to be a refugee]" (Workshop 2). As this participant rightly pointed out, the popular understanding of fiction as entertainment and untruth makes one story less believable and thus less powerful than the other. Can fiction teach as competently as personal anecdotes if fiction only mimes reality? The distinction between "reality" and "stories" was raised on occasion throughout each of the workshops, subtly raising the teleological question, what is the purpose of literature, and the ontological question, what is language or literature or fiction? Even when the discussion was not directly about those questions, we were all commenting and asking questions out of our own understanding of the answers.

Being trained in cultural studies, I wish the workshop had ventured into discussing the common understanding of fiction as "untrue" stories. I have found Susan Gallagher and Roger Lundin's introduction to the study of literature helpful for unpacking the assumptions of the distinction between true and untrue stories. Their chapter "The Language of Literature" demonstrates simply the metaphorical nature of all language. What I see as a false dichotomy between scientific language and poetic language, between "literal" and "figurative" language, and thus between their

counterparts—"true" stories and "literary" stories—was an obstacle for some of the workshop participants as they worked through the use-value of a text for activism. I assumed the relationship between story and lived reality to be a close connection with mutual influence. The participants' comments called into question that assumption on which I had based my research. The dichotomy assumed by some of the participants raised the questions: What makes fictional narratives about refugee-ed people different from memoirs or documentaries; and how do we balance analyzing the aesthetic quality of literature and reading literature for cultural insight?

The Descriptive Mode

Macksey's fifth category of textual analysis is descriptive: "What can be said formally about the intrinsic characteristics of the work itself…This question is usually extended to include most semiotic, stylistic, and rhetorical analysis" (x). The need for first order skills in describing a text through rhetorical analysis was demonstrated in both our moments of analytical failure and of success. One participant who had a liberal arts university education and was trained in rhetorical interpretation made the textual observation that Joaquin's hands in "On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows" were "a metaphor for the entire refugee community—a visible awkwardness that people shy away from; something that's still healing. It puts you [ie, the refugee] at a disadvantage because you're not necessarily seen in [other peoples' minds] as functional" (Workshop 1). The comment was engaging the text at a descriptive level with some sophistication. My excitement at the richness of this observation and my desire to use that observation as a steppingstone for cultural analysis were quickly swallowed by the realization that not

everyone in the discussion had seen that in the story. In order to delve into the cultural

debates that this particular portrayal of refugee-ed people raised, we first would need a

half hour to describe the text itself. Participants themselves noted that the skill level

necessary for interpreting literature is a barrier for even wider participation in such a

workshop. Several participants wrote in their evaluations and commented during the

workshop that "this would be useful and accessible to a segment of our people—more

university or college educated" but that especially the literary short story was "a

challenge" and that the work of interpreting it was "very heavy" (Workshop Evaluations).

The nature of the workshop I proposed was such that it assumed the first order

skills of description (the focus of a formalist approach to text) as a given and focused on

cultural analysis as the more important task. In both workshops the news article lent itself

most easily to descriptive analysis. The text was short and easy to get our heads around

quickly, and the familiarity of the form made more participants confident to contribute.

Paradoxically, my expansion of the understanding of *text* to include a film, a music video,

and a newspaper article, made the workshop accessible to a wider audience, even as the

richest text in my estimation was underused due to its difficulty as a literary text. The

challenge for church-based activists to learn through literary texts was underlined. Yet

the workshop confirmed the benefit of formalist training in literary analysis as well as the

dependence of good cultural studies projects on that same formalist training that cultural

studies has tended to assume and abandon. Asking basic descriptive questions such as,

"what does this significant event/action mean" and "what rhetorical devices does the

author use to make it mean that" could be the difference between a pedagogy that aims to

show something in one text and a pedagogy that gives participants the critical tools to analyze other texts representing refugee-ed people.

The Interpretive Mode

Participants also pushed the boundaries of interpretation by asking questions about the texts' relation to personal experience or anecdotal evidence, in the interpretive mode. This mode, as Macksey describes it, looks at the relationship between the text's "thesis statement" or "thematics" and the "'real' world" (ix). At times participants used the creative narratives to interpret their own experiences. One participant read the moment in *Beyond Borders*, when Clive Owen's character questions Jolie's character about her motivations for saving a dying refugee child, as a personal reprimand for their own motives. "I…felt a bit guilty [watching the film]," she said. "Sometimes even with my job, the people who would be able to offer expertise and what's really needed aren't the people who are being asked the questions about what is needed. It's people who are in positions of power already or who have resources to make decisions that call the shots" (Workshop 1). I added to the discussion by suggesting that this moment in the film could be deliberately leading the viewer through that process of guilt and then of vindication when the child's life is saved. Yet my response was inadequate since it left unanswered the question of when it is helpful to engage in that kind of self-examination at the hands of a narrative, so to speak, and when a narrative's power to re-interpret our realities should be limited. Other participants erred on the side of limiting the narrative; they tested the film against their own anecdotal evidence. The child whom Jolie insists on caring for is a partially computer generated image, the result being a child who looks

scarily inhuman. While "it's hard to imagine that this would be a person that could have feelings and express a personality," one participant argued that her own experience of being welcomed into the home of a Sudanese, refugee-ed family gave her reason to doubt the representation in the film. Her reality suggested that "each [refugee-ed person] has a life, and each one is so significant," and her experience of reality made her question the film's representation of reality (Workshop 1).

Once we had finished our wide-ranging discussion of the film clip's representation of refugee-ed people, I asked the group about this narrative's potential for teaching people in their congregations. Their responses, which will be addressed again later, were varied as they articulated their own views of the relationship between narratives and their own activism. One participant described the pressure she felt to tell and show these horrific stories in order to mobilize responses. In this participant's line of work stories are powerful motivators. But generalizing from individual stories produces stereotypes and can undermine the end goal of activists and refugee programs; donors and volunteers can develop an inaccurate distinction between authentic and inauthentic refugee experience based on generalization emerging from those motivational stories. When they discover refugee-ed people who do not fit the stereotype, they assume inauthenticity and want to withhold resources. This participant wanted narratives to be absolutely accurate reproductions of refugee experiences but recognized the difficulty of maintaining such a simple relationship between narrated and lived reality.

Another participant argued the need for showcasing personal stories as a way of encouraging congregations that their work remains useful despite the enormity of the

issue.[86] However, once that empathetic connection was developed through individual stories, the bigger issue for her was how to create practical change, and she did not see value in narratives for integrating knowledge and practice. Yet another participant was more concerned with the relationship the narrative might have with a future reality: if these stories of horrific suffering are told now in order to create sympathy and thus mobilize refugee activism in resettlement programs, "how would we relate to people once they are here in Canada, in our lives, and in our communities? How would we build friendship, cooperation, that kind of thing?" (Workshop 1). This participant's comments alight on the important distinction between the aims of people involved in asylum activism (i.e. to encourage empathy and goodwill towards the entrance of refugees into Canada) and in resettlement activism (i.e. to encourage respect for refugees as civic participants in Canada). The first requires a foregrounding of the needs of refugees, while the second benefits from a demonstration of refugee-ed peoples' resiliency.

Friendship, cooperation, and civic participation built on a relationship of pity and sympathy would leave displaced people always at a disadvantage, stuck in the original crisis discourse of refugeeness. Church-based refugee activists will need to be vigilant in keeping their discourse flexible to accommodate the dynamism of refugee identity, both politically and socially in addition to a variety of other ways. This raised a variety of questions in my mind: how do we gauge at what point refugee narratives correct our interpretation of our experience of reality and at what point does the reader's experience correct the reality of refugee narratives? Which stories do we pick for teaching about

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[86] Some of the ethical issues involved in carrying out this suggestion are addressed in my eighth chapter.

refugee-ed people when the variety of realities that the stories can be related to are so diverse: future/present, academic/activist, etc?

The Appreciative Mode

During the workshop our engagement with questions of pedagogical potential was inevitably linked to our critical appreciation of or our lack of enjoyment of the text.[87] K'Naan's music video made this especially clear, since people responded strongly to the hip hop medium, either as representative of the foreign language of youth culture or as a lively visual and aural experience. The video perhaps even appealed to the group on another level because of its similarities to the ritual of worship services—people singing together as a way of nurturing their identity as a prophetic subculture. In fact our entire discussion took on a different energy after watching K'Naan's strong, upbeat video. Some parts of the video brought smiles and even laughter, and participants commented that they were drawn in because of its liveliness (Workshop 1). "I liked it," one participant gushed. "I loved the strong beat. I liked the energy. I liked the last part with the ululations, mixed with the beat…the repetition, the strength, and the visual together. The combination works" (ibid). Later, as we compared each narrative's ability to mobilize their communities, one participant raised the issue of enjoyment outright: if I were to show and discuss one story with my church, she said, "I don't think it would be ["On the Eve"]. I think it would be something that's a bit more upbeat" (ibid). She saw the short story as depressing a reader and the video as infusing life into the viewer. "I

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[87] This has been my personal experience also in researching texts for this thesis. Perhaps my earlier point that the literary text was the least accessible but most rich and useful text comes out of my own enjoyment of literary analysis.

would want [people in my community] to feel good about the difference they could make in a refugee's life and about the difference Canada can make for a refugee's life…[T]his story ["On the Eve"] would come after that because [this story's portrayal] is the reality while they're waiting—the bleakness and the loneliness and the isolation and the emotional struggle" (ibid). So the difficulty of the asylum process is important to communicate, but people will be less receptive to hearing about what is wrong with the world if they have not first been drawn to listen to a story with joy in it.

More than mere enjoyment, the appreciative line of enquiry also has to do with *critical* appreciation of the text's construction. A discussion of the genre of hip hop videos brought us to the observation that the genre itself allows for quite a sophisticated representation of refugee-ed people. Individual faces, individual lives, individual bodies were distinguishable and celebrated in the visual presentation while the music that "drew in the kids—dancing—and the repetition and people joining in on…the chorus" meant that the overall effect was that of a "unified voice" (ibid). Unlike the Hollywood film's presentation of a nameless, faceless, victimized, and lethargic mass, this group of refugee-ed people was actively together in community. And viewers were drawn to participate as well. Furthermore, participants pointed out the video's complex representation of refugee life in that the viewer's eyes are encouraged to move between a foreground of lively, free-moving people and occasional "visuals of imprisonment in the background" (ibid). Though for different reasons, the short story "On the Eve" was also appreciated for its textual construction. One participant commented on her evaluation that the short story was "a good immersion activity" (Workshop Evaluations). Though it was

less accessible as a text, its effect on the reader who was patient with it was more rewarding than with the easier texts, such as the newspaper article. The impact of a text's critical appreciation mode was reflected in the workshop evaluation forms which rated "On the Eve" as the most useful in our discussion and "Soobax" as second most useful, while "Beyond Borders" was most accessible and the *Spectator* article was second most accessible. The workshop results suggested an inverse relationship between levels of accessibility and usefulness in a narrative. The more work it takes to understand a text, the more rewarding it is. If the purpose of this workshop experiment was to find ways of deepening the engagement of church-based activism, the evaluation form results suggest that narratives must be sufficiently difficult to reward the hard work of engaged activists. What texts will particular readers and viewers find enjoyable enough to engage with and aesthetically deep enough to learn from?

The Performative Mode and Multiple Subjectivities

As I worked through the material from both workshops, what struck me most, as alluded to in the above discussions, was the varied ways that texts could be performed by different readers beyond my own expectations as the facilitator. Texts were animated differently even in the two workshops I led. Sherene Razack suggests that the usefulness of stories in critical pedagogy[88] suffers from two tendencies: "our failure to recognize the multiple nature of subjectivity and hence the complex ways we construct meaning, and our failure to develop an ethical vision based on our differences" (Razack, "The Gaze"

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[88] In her chapter, Razack is working with a definition of critical pedagogy influenced by Henry Giroux: "a radical or critical pedagogy is one that resists the reproduction of the status quo by uncovering relations of domination and opening up spaces for voices suppressed in traditional education" ("The Gaze" 42).

46). Razack is writing specifically about gender and race in the contexts of classrooms and courtrooms and so the failure she speaks of is the failure of stories to empower women in their dismantling of patriarchal discourse. Her assessment is also of relevance to our discussion of refugee stories in popular pedagogical contexts. Communities of readers listening to stories about and by refugee-ed people need to remain aware of how the reader's and the teller's subjectivities might shape the knowledge that is gleaned from the interaction, and cannot assume that a common humanity will make the experience mutually beneficial.

A background story will help to set the scene for my discussion of the performative mode of texts and of multiple subjectivities in the reading process. I first discovered *Beyond Borders* in a pile of DVDs at a townhouse where I was vacationing a number of years ago. My fellow viewers and I found ourselves extremely moved, even shamed, by its depiction of the suffering of refugee-ed people, particularly as it contrasted with our—what now seemed like—luxurious vacation.

After viewing independent films about displaced people, returning to postcolonial criticism and refugee research, and watching *Beyond Borders* again, I began to question my initial experience of the film, taking on, instead, a critical perspective on its representation of refugee-ed people: it uses celebrity to sell but ends up focusing more on the celebrity than those who suffer; it says more about the commitments of humanitarian aid than it does about the perspectives of those who humanitarian aid aims to benefit; it gives little cultural, historical, or political context for the displacements it focuses on; and, most pertinently, it dehumanizes the masses of people that it depicts. My purpose for

using this film in the workshops was to present a negative example of refugee representation and to help viewers take the same steps I had, from absorbing the film's emotional appeal at face value to understanding what made that emotional appeal powerful and why that might be dangerous. As an alternative I offered K'Naan's "Soobax," which presented refugee-ed communities as vibrant and active, suffering but resilient.

My discussions with refugee-ed participants and citizen-ed refugee activists brought out, on the one hand, an expected consonance between my postcolonial critiques of *Beyond Borders* and the responses of activist groups and, on the other hand, a surprising enthusiasm for the Hollywood film among the participants with refugee experience. After lively introductions in the second workshop we watched the clip from *Beyond Borders*. Their responses to the clip were audible and empathetic. Several participants gasped at the sight of the emaciated baby that Jolie saves, groaned over various characters' statements about the death and starvation facing refugees, and were visibly disturbed at the end of the clip. When I then launched into my academic questions with the subjects of my questions, I realized without a doubt my own investment in a uniquely academic discussion. I acknowledged my own distance from the portrayed experiences and invited participants to respond however they would like. They did so emotionally and experientially, drawing out the similarities between the clip and their own lives. I explore this in more detail in the following chapter, but for now it should suffice to say that most refugee-ed participants preferred this film as a pedagogical tool over the hip hop video.

The experience puzzled me, and I enlisted the help of colleagues in thinking through what had happened. My instinct and the instinct of a fellow colleague was to understand the second group's enthusiasm for *Beyond Borders* as a tactical or political move: that is, recognizing the power of celebrity culture, the participants thought this film would reach more people than an emerging artist's hip hop video. But this explanation does not account for the strong emotional impact that the film obviously had—on me the first time I watched it, and on the second group that day.

Razack's critique of critical pedagogy helps me understand this experience in terms of the differences between reader and text and among readers. The multiple nature of subjectivity occurs both within a single person and among persons in a group. Certainly multiple subjectivities are what I experienced when I moved between being a vacationer in the Global North who was unexpectedly confronted with suffering while watching a movie for pleasure, and being a scholar analyzing a movie for cultural insight out of the knowledge gathered from postcolonial studies. The example shows a complicated intertwining of subjectivities within the self, since it would be ludicrous to suggest a simple linear progression from one of these "selves" to the next. I had already read postcolonial scholarship before watching the film, and I still have a hard time watching some of the more poignant scenes in the film because of the intense empathy it elicits. Both subjectivities exist simultaneously within me. Context, company, exposure, and so many other factors help to decide which functions more prominently at any given time. As a white, citizen-ed student of postcolonial and refugee studies from the Global

North this experience is a reminder of my own various positions in relation to the subjects of my study, to my students, and to my colleagues.

The importance of recognizing multiple subjectivities in the interpretive and pedagogical processes is also flagged here. A story demonstrating the resourcefulness of people when they are displaced could be recounted for the purpose of building mutuality among refugee-ed and citizen-ed people, but a certain kind of reader might read the story as an example of non-citizens "manipulating the system" or as proof of inauthentic refugees ("they don't really need our help"). Popular pedagogy cannot rely exclusively on the power of stories to influence an audience nor can it assume a kind of universal human response to suffering. The presentation of stories and the practices of interpreting them are always deeply embedded in complex contexts.

Understanding that contexts and "selves" lead to conflicting interpretations does not lead me to conclude that those interpretations are mutually exclusive or that my knowledge is doomed to be hopelessly flawed, though the partiality of an individual's interpretation is a given. Instead, this understanding can motivate the reader or viewer to search more rigorously for ethical and accurate interpretations. I can agree with Santos, Nunos, and Meneses that "self-reflexivity…is the first step towards the recognition of the epistemological diversity of the world" and that "the principle of incompleteness of knowledges is a basic condition for the possibility of epistemological dialogue and debate among knowledges" (Santos, "Introduction" xlvii). My own interpretation of the film has been deeply enriched as I have been forced to ask which parts of my multiple self I am more committed to and which interpretations of the scene are accurate in the context of

the whole film, in the context of real world tragedies, in the context of other representations of refugee-ed people.

Our communal discussions of each text were, in a sense, small re-enactments of those texts. We variously re-enacted them as part of larger narratives (our lives, the lives of refugees in Canada, refugee policy) and/or on their own with as much internal accuracy and coherency as we could find. The participants negotiated not only the complicated claims of their own stories and of the stories told in the text, but also the story of my research, and the implied story of the author. The multiplicity of audiences and the multiple subjectivities internal to each reader resulted in complementary and conflicting interpretations of texts, demonstrating the texts' various uses and dangers. The differences of opinion among participants regarding the usefulness of any given text and the participants' comments about different levels of usefulness for segments of their communities led me to the surprising conclusion that my question of pedagogy was too simple. I did not need to ask which of these narratives would be most pedagogically rich for church-based activists. I needed to explore the ways individual texts might animate and be animated by multiple subjectivities, multiple purposes.

Introductory Thoughts on Linking Texts with Various Subjects in Canadian Churches

Beyond Borders is "performed" by a viewer with experience as an aid worker differently than it is "performed" by a viewer with the experience of being a refugee, both in the act of viewing and in the evaluation of its pedagogical value.[89] In the workshops,

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[89] I hardly need to mention the endless proliferation of possible sub-categories and cross-categories that nuance a person's unique re-enactment, or performance, of a single text.

the first audience felt guilty watching a film that reenacted the dehumanization of refugee-ed people and the second audience appreciated the film's message as the justification of their asylum claim. As a portrayal of the extreme, iconic refugee experience of famine, starvation, and limited humanitarianism, *Beyond Borders* is a useful point of entry, so to speak, for people without awareness of or concern for global realities such as refugee migration and/or suffering. Most people watch the film for entertainment purposes initially, and the film's appeal as entertainment with a message is one way of starting viewers on a search for other, more ethical representations of refugee-ed people. The film's plot touches briefly on major contentious issues in humanitarian work such as the lack of resources, limitations imposed in certain political contexts, the supposed neutrality of humanitarianism, prioritization of care, immediate versus long term care, etc. as a way of priming the viewers' interest in those issues. Online comments point again and again to the emotional impact of the film and its ability to trigger concern and care for situations beyond the viewer's own experience. The responses of participants in the second workshop affirm the importance of texts that will trigger any kind of positive emotion toward asylum seekers, perhaps pointing to the importance of recognition.[90] The film is effective, though contentious, in creating sympathy for refugees by focusing on Jolie's responses to refugees.

The workshop participants showed an awareness of multiple subjectivities through their comments about the importance of knowing an audience before using a text

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Once that multiplicity is established as a fact, the question of how to understand consonance among people remains.
[90] Some of the hymns analysed in the preceding chapter could be thought of in this way.

pedagogically. One participant suggested that the *Spectator* article be paired with a handout such as "Top Ten Myths about Refugees" put out by the Canadian Council for Refugees. She knew that the language of fact and empirical proof are privileged ways of knowing in our culture and that they will therefore speak more powerfully to a skeptical audience. The specific *Spectator* article we discussed has an obviously negative perspective on asylum seekers and makes use of popular rhetoric but does little in the way of proving its position. As a short piece of news media, the text is easily understood at a descriptive level, and a discussion of it can move quickly from description to critical interaction with it. Inasmuch as a newspaper article is a commonly read text, readers feel more capable of critiquing it. Therefore a group that is not accustomed to the activity of discursive analysis would find this text the easiest to work with. On its own, the article would be useful for pedagogical contexts in which people are sympathetic to refugees but not aware of the powerful, negative discourse controlling our discussions of asylum seekers in Canada. Paired with a fact sheet, it would speak powerfully to people who worry about the burden of refugees on Canadian social services. Logistically this text is of great use to people who are not invested enough in refugee activism to spend a significant amount of time learning or researching, since its length and manageability are conducive to a short, containable, but powerful exercise.

"Soobax" is a dynamic text for popular pedagogy because it is written, produced, and performed by a refugee. K'Naan's growing popularity makes this video a familiar cultural text for the vast numbers of people who listen to hip-hop. It is aimed at a young audience. Some members of the workshop suggested that the clip was difficult to

understand because they were not familiar with hip-hop music videos. However, they enjoyed trying to understand. So the clip has potential to reach beyond its current audience to those who wish to work hard at cultural translation. The video is also an unusually hopeful and enjoyable portrayal of refugee life, making it refreshing pedagogy for people heavily engaged in refugee activism. For a community in the Global North that has already taken the first step in learning about their global context, the suffering that occurs in the Global South, and reasons for forced migration, this clip would provide an effective foil to images of destitution and suffering. The clip is compelling proof of the lively and strong communities that can grow in the face of forced displacement. Further, K'Naan's highly charged and assertive performance provides a healthy corrective for people whose pity and sympathy may distort their refugee activism. Pity does not fit as a response to the video; the possibility of activism in solidarity seems more appropriate.

"On the Eve" is a long text and uses extended and intertwined metaphors to demonstrate an uneven political landscape and to bring to life several complex subjects. Thus its pedagogical usefulness depends on the participant's willingness to dedicate time to the process and the participant's ability to engage in literary analysis. As I consider the workshop participants' comments, it strikes me that two different communities could benefit from reading and studying this text. First, those activists who are concerned to avoid voyeurism but wish to understand refugee-ed people's experiences better in order to be more sensitive in their work. One participant, quoted earlier, suggested just this use for the story. Listening to this single narrative could serve as a way of recalibrating the personal dimension in work that can come to feel very impersonal. The second group is

made up of those who see the importance of working with government-sponsored refugees but shy away from work with asylum seekers because of the legal grey area this type of work involves. A few participants who were passionate about compassionate care for refugees expressed discomfort with churches becoming politically active in refugee work, and their perspective is common within Canadian churches. The Canadian PSRP provides churches with a sanctioned method for refugee activism that is solely aimed at resettling UN Convention refugees and thus avoids the difficulties of sorting through the "morality" of participating in unsanctioned methods of refugee activism, such as sanctuary, radical acts of citizenship, and asylum-seeking assistance outside the bounds of the nation. However, Bissoondath's short story questions the UN's narrow definition of a refugee and presents asylum seekers as refugees whose experiences are not recognized by the international refugee regime. This story serves as pedagogically useful to Christian audiences committed to refugee activism through exclusively officially-sanctioned paths in that it presents the cracks in a legal system claiming to be just and evenhanded and so expands the reader's imaginative horizons for what forced displacement might look like and what kind of activist responses might be required of them.

As I present possible pedagogical contexts in which each text might be usefully animated I am aware of Razack's initial warning that reading out of an ethics of sameness can result in pedagogical failure. Even if the right reader is paired with the right text, how that person interprets may affect the ability of the text to speak to them. In my research I have come across countless approaches to refugee advocacy based on an ethic of

sameness. Sometimes it takes the form of highlighting the immigrant nature of all Canadians so as to normalize refugee migration in the context of Canadian colonial and immigration history. At other times the theological or humanitarian language of a common humanity attempts to motivate action across difference (eg. Groody). Refugee novels and research show the tenuousness of citizenship by telling the stories of a world of "potential refugees," a world in which a very thin line of privilege separates citizens from refugees (eg. Gibb; Nyers; Daniel). Action in solidarity is the language of many refugee activists who wish to avoid uneven participation in social justice initiatives. While each of these discourses leads to very divergent political strategies, I can list them together because they emerge, similarly, from an ethics of sameness.

Ethics of Sameness/Ethics of Difference

The language of solidarity with refugees in humanitarian activism is an attempt to avoid setting up a one-way relationship of giving and receiving charity and to place non-status and citizen-ed activists on equal footing. Similarly for many church-based refugee activists, community and mutuality among non-status and citizen-ed church members are built by focusing on what is held in common. "'We' need to relate to 'them' like anybody else," said a workshop participant who describes herself as an "educator of awareness" in a mostly white Canadian congregation (Workshop 1). "The people I'm interacting with [citizen-ed church goers] need to understand more of 'how we are the same' rather than 'how we are different,'" she explained. Another participant shared her advocacy strategy: you "draw parallels to your own life and then that's where people can develop some empathy…. They can identify with [a refugee's experience]. We have to feel more the

same as someone…than…different …in order to develop a relationship"" (Workshop 1).

Throughout the first workshop the church-based activists were consistently trying to find

moments of connection between refugee-ed and citizen-ed experiences, sharing with each

other pedagogical activities that displace people in small ways as a way of building

understanding.[91]

Sameness functions as a motivation for care as well as the ethic for church-based

activism. Church-based activists, who want their communities to become aware of the

injustices that affect refugee-ed people and to recognize their own duty of care as

Christians and their culpability as citizen-ed Westerners, urge other Christians to think of

themselves in solidarity with displaced people. A concept that they often return to in

order to demonstrate that duty is summed up in the phrase "we are all

aliens/refugees/strangers." Outworkings of this concept range from tracing the history of

the Jewish exodus out of Egypt and their later exile from Jerusalem (Somerville; Pohl

Making Room) to demonstrating Jesus' status as a refugee (Campese; Carroll), from

spiritualizing the Christian life as "sojourning" in an alien land (Brown) to pointing out

the biblical call for all Christians regardless of nationality or legality to be an alternative

community (Senior). Each argument calls for empathy and compassion that emerges from

self-identifying as fellow sojourners in the world.

Daniel Warner's short article entitled "We are all Refugees" was published in

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[91] Boyarin and Boyarin trace the theological roots of sameness to the "Pauline rhetorical drive to sameness" (697). Their concern is the way in which Jews came to represent "unruly difference" in early Christianity and the oppressive results of that rhetorical drive for Jews throughout history, but their analysis has some import for our concern with sameness as a basis for refugee activism.

1992. Warner's writing is an example of the kind of academic work that is based in an ethic of sameness. By focusing on the similarities between refugee and non-refugee people rather than on the differences, he argues, 'we' learn to empathize with 'their' situation. He proposes: "going beyond the specificity of the legal definitions [and discerning] the universality of the refugee situation, and how the otherness of refugees can be refuted" (Warner 368). He is aware that universalizing the category of refugee can be a barrier to genuine understanding, and so he clarifies his project as "seeing how those outside the refugee category are similar to refugees" rather than the other way around. "The situation of the refugee becomes the basic norm and we, the outsiders, disclose our similarity. The differentiation between refugees and non-refugees diminishes as we see the important ways in which we are all refugees" (369). His use of the phrase "we are all refugees" builds on Nietzsche and refers to the modern condition as one of homelessness, of disconnect between our selves and a nostalgic desired home. The homesickness and homelessness of modernity is what refugee and non-refugee people share, what makes them more alike than different.

> Even though the refugee has been disjoined from his or her traditional place, the disjuncture between self and 'home' existed before flight and will exist after flight, whether there is voluntary repatriation or asylum. It is this disjuncture which causes the refugee and non-refugee to be similar. If the refugee is searching for a 'home', so are we all, 'we' being those who have not been forced into exile. (370)

Warner's appeal to a common homelessness resonates with the position of church-based activists in that both are trying to bring refugees close to non-refugees, to make neighbors out of strangers so that our commonness can supersede the differences of our life narratives and legal statuses and provide us with equal footing.

Approaching activism from an ethic of sameness holds the promise of solidarity but also the danger of over-identification. Consider the example of the CRC as outlined in chapter two of this thesis. A White, Western European immigrant community, now firmly placed in the Canadian middle class, engages in refugee activism out of a shared sense of displacement with Black, West African asylum seekers and racialized, East Asian government settled refugees most of whom are barely making ends meet financially. The obvious differences appear to outweigh the similarities. Yet their strong empathetic identification with displaced people elides those differences and eventually allows the CRC to make judgments about how other communities should process their displacement and interact with their "host" culture. A kind of amnesia about the ethnic othering that the Dutch originally experienced can occur, and allow, for example, a Dutch immigrant to opine that Indonesian churches should only have English-speaking worship services. Many moments of public empathy have turned into cringe-worthy moments of over-identification with "our African brothers" or "our African sisters," in effect silencing the parts of refugee narratives that differ from the diaspora stories of the CRC: their historical contexts, their experiences of racialization, their choice or lack thereof in migration, their translatable work qualifications or lack thereof. The importance of allowing for difference in communal and individual life narratives is not merely a matter of allowing another person to tell their life story accurately. Conflating a religious diaspora's story with a refugee community's story could limit the ability of public discourses to recognize dissimilarity in responsibility for communal failures, in vulnerability to structural power, in what a community can rightfully ask for, etc.

The same pitfall awaits popular pedagogy when a story that cannot speak back is read with an eye for what is already recognized. I introduced Nadine Gordimer's short story "The Ultimate Safari" to a first year university class in 2007 and asked them to consider what image the story offered of refugees. The answer of the student who spoke first reflected exactly the image of an African refugee in a World Vision infomercial and bore no resemblance to our text. My intent, in fact, had been to present a narrative of refugee experience that counteracted precisely those infomercials. The student read for what he knew and superimposed the familiar on the unfamiliar. This is, in part, Razack's point: storytelling in critical pedagogy (in our case, the stories of refugee-ed people told to citizen-ed people) assumes that a privileged audience will naturally see the truth when it is confronted with a strange voice in a story. The assumption is that a reader's humanity is what prevails as she listens. Yet it is the very presumption of sameness that disallows narratives to refresh the reader's thinking. The differences between teller and listener means the story can be used as entertainment and/or that that the assumptions of a common humanity keep vital differences from being addressed.

Razack's call for a critical pedagogy based on difference finds something of an answer in the work of Boaventura de Sousa Santos. In his chapter "Human Rights as an Emancipatory Script?", Santos lays out five conditions for a democratic rather than imperial conception of human rights. His first proposed condition is that a "moment of discontent" with the incompleteness of one's own cultural epistemology is the starting point for intercultural dialogue on human rights (Santos, "Human Rights" 25). Church-based activists have varying tolerances for a discontented epistemology, but church-based

activism on the whole has difficulty with incompleteness because of the strength of their

Christian worldview convictions. Thus the call to be open to discursive redemption,

mentioned in the conclusion to my fourth chapter, is of utmost relevance to their work.

Applied to the activity of reading refugee stories for activist pedagogy, the attitude of a

reader is one of humility before the differences one expects to find in the text.

      Santos's final condition for intercultural dialogue is a bridge between equality and

difference: "people have the right to be equal whenever difference makes them inferior,

but they also have the right to be different whenever equality jeopardizes their identity"

("Human Rights" 28). The introduction to the same volume explains the dilemma clearly:

> [T]he affirmation of equality based on universalistic presuppositions, such as those that prevail in Western individualistic conceptions of human rights, lead to the decharacterization and denial of differentiated identities, cultures, and historical experiences, particularly through the refusal to recognize collective rights. Yet the affirmation of difference in itself can serve to justify discrimination, exclusion, or subordination in the name of collective rights and cultural specificity. (Santos, "Introduction" xlvii)

Therefore, we must "defend equality whenever difference generates inferiority

and…defend difference whenever a call for equality implies a threat to or a loss of

identity" ("Introduction" xxiii). This strategic mobilization of the concepts of difference

and sameness (what he calls equality) with the end goal of creating genuine dialogue is a

helpful way forward for those engaged in popular pedagogy. In discussions where the

communal reading of a text borders on making refugee experience exotic, the importance

of common humanity is a useful corrective. For conversations about a text that exhibit an

over functioning empathy, a reminder of the differences between reader and text can

provide space for more genuine listening.

Conclusion

When using narratives in popular pedagogy, facilitators must take into account that the vulnerability of a story to the power of its reader's epistemology offsets the power of a story to change its reader. Because stories can only speak once and then have to rely on the care of the reader to be understood and because the inertness of the text means it cannot respond to a reader's interpretation, stories, no matter how carefully crafted, are vulnerable to being read for exotic difference or to reader overidentification. For much church-based activism this danger is particularly present because, as Tamsin Bradley points out, church-based activists' base motivation of compassion is interwoven with a religious narrative, so that to question compassion's effectiveness is to question an entire identity (Bradley 342-9). Unlike Bradley, though, I see equal potential for church-based and secular activists to act self-reflexively if they are given the opportunity to do so. Asking questions that attend to the various modes in which texts function is a step towards giving a story a full hearing. Carefully selecting stories for specific audiences takes seriously the contextual nature of and the multiple subjectivities within the reading process. The following three chapters each take a troublesome issue found in contemporary refugee representations and offer ways for creative narratives to contribute to more responsible narrations of and more responsible conversations with refugees by church-based activists.

Chapter 7: Initiating New Discourses: Collective and Individual Metaphors for Asylum Seekers

Destructive Waves and Birds in Cages

In the second half of the workshop we read the *Spectator* news story "Hamilton next stop for wave of Mexican refugees?" and compared it with "On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows" by Bissoondath. The local news story informs readers about the impending destruction of Canadian social services by a dangerous collective of asylum seekers—Mexicans in particular—while the short story presents readers with a day in an individual asylum seeker's life, a life on the verge of destruction by deportation. The pedagogical aim of contrasting these two particular narratives was to explore what human rights scholar Amy West points to in an interview in which she criticizes refugee research for categorizing:

> hordes of human beings as ceaseless masses, flows, or waves…. Media pictures focus on images that reinforce refugees as the most destitute and miserable of populations, barely ever capturing the resourcefulness and organization that dominates camp life. After a time then, refugees become for us a lump sum. We fail to see individual faces, and we speak about them, not to them. (West 407)

Her concern is with both the dehumanizing effect of humanitarian and human rights discourses regarding refugees and also the fear that can be provoked by imagining refugee-ed people as groups of migrants threatening to pour into an unwelcoming place rather than as individuals carrying histories and assets with them. An article written by Paul Baker and Tony McEnery outline the findings in their linguistic study of the discourses, metaphors, and descriptive words that surround "refugees" and "asylum seekers" in British newspapers and in publications of the UNHCR in 2003. They confirm

the negative connotations associated with common collective metaphors for displaced

refugees and asylum seekers. The first table in their article lays out the frequency of the

study's target words: *refugee*, *refugees*, *asylum seeker*, and *asylum seekers*. Though they

do not comment on this particular finding, I note that the plural versions of both terms,

but especially of *asylum seeker*, are used substantially more often in both news texts and

UN texts.[92] The researched news texts generally used collective rather than individual

metaphors to speak of asylum seekers and the connotations of those metaphors were

more often negative than positive. While the authors are hopeful that the discourses about

refugees and asylum seekers used in 2003 news texts are less overtly prejudiced than

studies of news texts from the 1980s, frequent collocation of negative words with each of

the terms points to continuing, though evolving, negative representations of refugees and

asylum seekers in news texts (Baker 222).

All too often in news stories about refugee-ed people or asylum seekers,

collective metaphors draw on the language of natural disasters. Consider the ironic use of

a collective metaphor in this cynical take on Immigration Minister Jason Kenney: "[he]

did a smiling impersonation of a warm and fuzzy welcome mat yesterday, *throwing open*

Canada's arms to a higher wave of refugees for resettlement here" (Martin, emphasis

added). The irony of opening one's arms to a wave of water make a welcome mat seem

foolish and even irresponsible. Or consider this comment that begins with the passive

form "it is," thus connecting an agentless fear with the collective water metaphor: "*It's*

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[92] In news texts *asylum seeker* was used ten times, but *asylum seekers* was used 131
times. They found nineteen instances of *asylum seeker* in UN texts, and 206 instances of
asylum seekers.

feared the ship may be the first wave of defeated Tamil Tiger fighters fleeing for safe

haven after the end of Sri Lanka's 25-year civil war, says another security expert"

(MacLeod, emphasis added). The prospect of continuing and increasing waves evokes

fear of an obviously destructive force. MacLeod cites this unnamed expert, who is able to

get away with citing a generalized fear of humanitarian responsibility within a discourse

that figures asylum seekers as a destructive collective, using the language of a natural

disaster.[93]

Once we have connected the collective metaphor of waves to a general though

unidentified fear, an obvious extension of the metaphor is to imagine those waves

"swamping" a country. In Australia, a country surrounded by water, the metaphor of

swamping waves is used unrelentingly in news media about asylum seekers arriving by

boat. Here, in the second sentence of a recent article on Tamil refugees coming to

Australia, fear is again connected with the collective natural disaster metaphor: "The

forthright comments by Sri Lanka's high commissioner in Canberra, Senaka

Walgampaya, came *amid growing fears that Australia could be swamped by Tamil*

asylum seekers following the end of the country's bloody civil war this week" (Stewart,

emphasis added). Eight months earlier, a different journalist writing on a different

refugee situation used nearly identical language: "The Rudd Government is being warned

to take a tough stand against the 14 boatpeople - thought to be from the Middle East -

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[93] MacLeod's citation of a *security* expert on an issue that traditionally would have been considered an issue of humanitarian responsibility demonstrates the current slippage in public discourse between refugees as international responsibilities and refugees as a matter of national security. Sadia Habib's article on teaching refugee novels to elementary students registers this concern strongly; she observed a complete conflation of the terms *terrorist* and *refugee* in the vocabularies of her students.

intercepted off Australia's northwest coast, *amid fears they could be the first of a fresh wave of asylum-seekers*" (Taylor, emphasis added).

Metaphors taken from the phenomena of collective natural disaster, when applied to newcomers, taps into the fear of any majority that change, at too fast a pace, will overwhelm the status quo and destabilize the peace.[94] Carroll notes the emotional charge of these collective metaphors in his popular book on Latin American immigration to the United States. Speaking about the public response to the "complicated landscape" of immigration debates, he writes:

> The multiple issues seem intractable, the number of people overwhelming. Emotions run high, and rhetoric flourishes. Metaphors used in the media heighten the perception of a massive and uncontrollable influx of foreigners. Hispanic immigration is labeled a "flood," a "rising tide" or a "tidal wave," a "horde," or an "invasion." (Carroll 27)

Later in the chapter he addresses the fear that these metaphors both draw on and elicit, namely the question of American national identity and whether it will be overcome by these destructive waves. His conclusion is that national identity has never been a static thing nor has adaptation to immigration (either by the immigrant or by the host country) ever been an easy experience. Authors who make use of negative collective metaphors to describe asylum seekers base their interpretation of the contemporary situation on a naïve belief in the existence of a coherent national identity in the past and unrealistic expectations for homogeneity in the present. To return to our discussions in Section One

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[94] J.W. Sparling's introduction to J.S. Woodsworth's 1909 *Strangers Within Our Gates* demonstrates the long history of this reality. His introduction begins: "Perhaps the largest and most important problem that the North American continent has before it to-day for solution is to show how the incoming tides of immigrants of various nationalities and different degrees of civilization may be assimilated and made worthy citizens of the great Commonwealths" (3).

and Two, understanding how national narratives influence a religious diaspora's narrative will also help to clarify what role its refugee activism plays in creating communal identity.

Boase's news story in the *Spectator* on Mexican refugees begins with a negative, collective metaphor: "A wave of Mexican refugees swamping social services in Windsor is expected to hit Hamilton in a couple of months." She continues with "it's just a matter of time before the wave reaches Hamilton." The first section of the workshop began with an introduction to the article and its representation of asylum seekers as a faceless, nameless collective. Participants had already read the short story's representation of a small number of individual asylum seekers and their unique journeys. "On the Eve" tells the intensely personal story of a single asylum seeker, Joaquin, who is waiting for his hearing. But his story is not only individual. His story is interwoven with the stories of other asylum seekers over the course of two days. Bissoondath's limited third-person narrator locates its internal focalization in Joaquin, but Joaquin in turn becomes the focalizer for his fellow asylum claimants. Thus their stories are retold through his observations and accounts. A significant metaphor for their shared experience is that of caged birds.

I want to make it clear at this point that the dichotomy I am setting up between a dehumanizing collectivist metaphor and a humanizing individual metaphor is not based on the idea traced back to the Enlightenment that we are at our most human when we are recognized as autonomous individuals. Quite the opposite. Collective metaphors decontextualize individual asylum seekers. Their political histories, social relationships,

and faiths are not important in collective representation. By contrast, characters in

Bissoondath's story are uniquely individual but find the isolation of waiting on legal

status—acceptance into a society—to be dehumanizing. Individualization does not equal

humanization.

Unlike what readers of the *Spectator* article might expect of refugees who are

"swamping social services in Windsor," Joaquin doesn't use social services and actually

finds he is most alive and happy when he is given the opportunity to act decisively and to

serve someone in his community. Unlike the article's insinuation that groups of

undocumented migrants, denied citizenship in the United States, are coasting on an

enormous underground network that surreptitiously "spreads the word" of a free ride in

Canada, groups of asylum seekers are portrayed by Neil Bissoondath as deeply reserved,

even distrustful of one another, and caged, so unable to contribute from their potential

resourcefulness and experience to Canada.

The article's representation of asylum seekers as an undifferentiated mass allows

myths about overloading social services and laziness to remain unchallenged and

succeeds in preying on peoples' fear of a wild, unknown, and uncontrollable group of

outsiders.[95] The short story can constitute an intervention into such public discourses and

their use of popular collective metaphors to describe asylum seekers and refugee-ed

people in Canada. Bissoondath's representation of asylum seekers as individuals, in

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[95] Khosravinik helpfully points out that collective representation of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants (RASIM) "is not restricted to the pluralization of RASIM linguistically" as agents or passive objects in a sentence, "but it can be pragmatically communicated through common political discourses dealing with the 'issue' of RASIM" (494). So even when a collective metaphor is not present, the representation of refugee-ed people as "an issue" presents them as a homogenous group.

varying degrees of community, provides readers with the opportunity to immerse themselves in the lives of another person and focus on the reality of that experience rather than on their fears about destabilizing the status quo. My approach to the workshop was to see if the stories themselves would trigger a discussion of the issue of collective versus individual identity without flagging the issue myself, and they did.

Popular Media and Collective Metaphors

In the first workshop, the newspaper article was received well but the simplicity of the language and the straightforward presentation made the analysis obvious. The participants were uniformly critical of the article's representation of refugee-ed people. That being said, if the participants in the workshop had been variously positive and negative toward asylum seekers in Canada generally, this narrative might have generated a different discussion. While the group laughed at the ridiculousness of the reporter's misrepresentation, one participant pointed out, "if my dad read this article, he wouldn't be laughing," with the unfinished thought being 'he would be afraid of refugees after reading it' (Workshop 1). Someone decided to play devil's advocate and challenged our negative reading of the article by giving their own response to the article's emotive language: "Wow! The need is great!" Another participant responded with "I see it the same way as you do, right, and we all here do. But for a lot of people out there, [refugees] are a burden on society. They don't see the incredible beauty and resource that these people bring" (ibid). The unified perspective evidenced among those in attendance at this workshop came from their commitment to refugee-ed people in Canada and from the firsthand experience they had had in refugee activism. As a result, the discussion of the

article was energetic, with people finishing each other's sentences, but consistently critical of the article's central metaphor.

The workshop participants had fun spinning out the article's central metaphor of a "wave of refugees" to understand what that metaphor said about media perceptions of refugee-ed people as a collective. Concerns included the dehumanizing comparison of human beings to a natural disaster, the alarmist and violent discourse of waves "hitting Hamilton," and the defensive position this puts Canadian citizens in—no one stands by when a tsunami arrives; we either protect ourselves or run. Their comments are reflected in the findings of Baker and McEnery's research:

> The movement of refugees is constructed as an elemental force which is difficult to predict and has no sense of control. If refugees are likened to the movement of water, then they are dehumanized and become something that requires control in order to prevent disaster to others (e.g. non-refugees). (Baker 205)

The main point of contact between this 'violent wave' and 'stable Canadian society,' as described by the article, was social services. And this is where the rubber hits the road in terms of discursive influence on culture. One participant shared her experience of working for an organization, started by a CRC church in partnership with other local churches, that provided a home for asylum claimants. She received numerous phone calls from concerned Canadians who believe the myths perpetuated by media representations such as these: callers were indignant that refugees get "magical resources" while war veterans are suffering, were concerned that the home might be harbouring terrorists, criticized the work of the home on the assumption that refugees do not pay taxes and therefore do not deserve social assistance, were genuinely worried that refugees had

become an overwhelming burden to the Canadian social services system. One participant

noted "lots of people in our church read the paper" to emphasize the danger of

irresponsible representations of refugees in this article. The narration of refugee

experiences in newspapers shape public discourse and place limits on what Canadians

believe is appropriate church-based activism.

In fact Alison Jeffers, in her short article on participatory theatre and asylum

seekers, blames "the popular press" in the UK for entrenching public discussions about

asylum rights within "the popular language of anti-immigration" (Jeffers 218). Majid

Khosravinik's careful research on refugee representation in British newspapers builds on

a similar argument made by T.A. Van Dijk, which is that mass media has "a nearly

exclusive control over the symbolic resources needed to manufacture popular consent,

especially in the domain of ethnic relations" (quoted in Khosravinik 478). Framed by

anti-immigration discourse, the language of collective, natural disaster metaphors are

normalized to describe people who may be, ironically, fleeing natural disasters.[96]

Pictured as a tsunami wave in the *Spectator* article, refugees and asylum seekers become

an undifferentiated mass, sinister and powerful to overwhelm and wreck a stable yet

vulnerable social services system. The article is not unusual in its representation of

refugees and asylum seekers as a dangerous collective, using metaphors that feed anti-

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[96] The extent to which water metaphors have become normalized is demonstrated in Baker and McEnery's finding that even the UNHCR, which was established to aid refugees, uses them. Granted, the UN draws on words that come from scientific discourses rather than emotive or violent discourses. Still, the collective dehumanization of the metaphor is present. "It becomes very difficult to talk about a subject except in terms of the dominant discourse surrounding it," Baker and McEnery write in reference to the discourse of liquid movement and refugee/asylum seeker representation (222).

immigration fever and that rely on myth.[97] "Many of the linguistic strategies used to refer to refugees and asylum seekers—such as referring to them as an indistinguishable mass or vague quantity, using metaphors, describing them as bogus or referring to unspecified 'fears'—serve…racist discourses" (Baker 222). Jeffers observes that, "this xenophobic stance has necessitated 'myth busting' by refugee advocacy organizations, which routinely include a section on refugee myths and counter myths in both printed and online information" (Jeffers 218). The cycle of unmasking is exhausting and never-ending for refugee-ed people and refugee advocates.

As part of the workshop discussion we took time to unmask the hollowness of the fearful rhetoric by looking critically at the numbers that were cited, by recognizing the language of a hypothetical future that became "proof" of danger, and by allowing quotes to stand on their own without the author's commentary. The article's lack of context, manipulative use of numbers, and use of the term "Mexican nationals" to play on the general fear of *political* refugees all concerned the group, causing one participant to emphatically say of the article, "it's very irresponsible" (Workshop 1). Participants shared further examples of how this kind of irresponsible public discourse has affected

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[97] The shortcomings of using one article alone for popular education on such a complex topic become clear when reading Khosravinik's thorough analysis of refugee representation in British newspapers during two specific events, using Critical Discourse Analysis as his methodology. Especially challenging was his assertion that "the use of typical metaphors for refugees or immigrants…does not automatically create a negative representation of them, and the function of metaphor use strictly depends on the social, cultural, political and cognitive elements constituting the 'interpretive context'" (487). Even so he referenced numerous studies that critique collective metaphors, concluding "'unsympathetic accounts of refugees' are usually collective with no reference to the reasons for and conditions of the refugees' flights, potential lifestyles, income levels, education, etc" (485). Additionally, proximity of the "wave" to the reporting country (in his case, Britain) was inevitably negative.

the treatment of refugee-ed people by housing assistance, by other members of their churches, and by hospital workers. Participants assumed a clear link between this article's alarmist representation of a dangerous asylum seekers' collective and the kinds of protectionist behaviors and language that they encounter in their own communities. Which one precedes the other would be impossible to determine, but certainly the reader's generalized stereotypes remain unchallenged by this short article.

Creative Narrative and Communities of Individuals

In the last chapter I mentioned a participant's suggestion that the *Spectator* article be paired with "The Top Ten Myths about Refugees," published by the Canadian Council for Refugees. While my evaluation (that the language of fact and empirical proof will be a powerful apologetic for the skeptical reader) is one legitimate response to the rhetoric of news media's value-laden genre, another option is to refuse to enter into the cycle of myth busting and instead to invite the curious learner into the inductive learning experience of reading creative narratives. Eastmond suggests that the genre of story, with its self-consciously interpretive approach, provides more textured representations of displaced people. At a basic level, "from personal accounts we may…glean the diversity behind over-generalized notions of 'the refugee experience'" (Eastmond 249). "Narratives are vital in the research process" for these and other reasons (249)—not only because stories are self-consciously interpretive but also because they may be the most natural mode of expression for individual stories told by refugee-ed people themselves.

Within the context of our discussion, we might say that a mass of asylum seekers is unable to self-narrate or self-construct and so must be narrated or commented on by

experts.[98] Baker and McEnery point to a hierarchy in news media of those who are cited

as "knowing" the most about refugee issues. Inevitably the mainstream news and

UNHCR documents "do not contain texts where refugees and asylum seekers as subjects

are self-constructing; rather, they have their own identities and discourses surrounding

these identities constructed for them by more powerful spokespeople" (Baker 200).

Nyers' introduction expresses a similar concern that "despite the multiplicity of refugee

experiences and reasons for flight, conventional analyses of the subject remain committed

to a hierarchical mode of interpretation that works to efface this multiplicity" (xiv). In his

examination of the UNHCR's construction of refugee claimants as "fearful subjects,"

Nyers turns to the poetry of asylum seekers to argue his case, introducing the poetry with

these words: "The impact culture has among refugees and their communities exceeds the

problem-solving perspective of these agencies; there exists a polyphony of refugee

cultural practices than [sic] cannot be contained by the technical view" (62). For

Eastmond the concern is for accurate and ethical forced migration research. For Nyers,

the concern is to recognize the political agency of refugee-ed people. In the face of

violent, dehumanizing, and collective metaphors, it becomes important to emphasize the

polyphony, multiplicity, and diversity that characterize refugee-ed people's experiences

as a whole.[99] Both Eastmond and Nyers turn to creative personal narratives to re-capture

that important insight.

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[98] See Lisa Malkki "Speechless" (especially pages 390-4) for an excellent article on this phenomenon in the case of the Rwandan genocide.
[99] I write this not out of an ideological commitment to diversity, polyphony, and multiplicity but because they are missing elements in irresponsible representations of refugees and asylum seekers.

Boase's article produces flattened and typical representations of refugees en masse through her use of popular metaphors and of collective representation and her dependence on mainstream news media's generic values. As a professional reporter, she intends to communicate new information with urgency through familiar language and the result is her use of a collective natural disaster metaphor. Indeed when we came to Bissoondath's short story the workshop participants noticed the depth of individual characterization. Early on in our discussion of "On the Eve," one participant shared that she had been surprised to discover that "the refugee community….is a community of individuals" (Workshop 1). Characters are portrayed as individually unique despite their shared legal status. Joaquin's reluctance to share his story and to become part of Canadian culture becomes a foil to Amin, his ebullient housemate, who eagerly tells his history and who is trying to discover the best name, clothes, and mannerisms to help him fit in. There are seven asylum seekers in the house altogether, coming from six different countries and four regions of the world. Because of their precarious legal statuses and Joaquin's reticence to socialize, we do not discover much about their stories. The narrative's refusal to satisfy our curiosity is, in itself, a way of demonstrating the vast number of refugee histories that exist beyond our knowledge. Even the patrons of the Latin American bar to which Joaquin goes, all of whom are claimants from the same continent, have had radically different experiences. Miguel has come through his asylum process and now helps other claimants through his business and at great cost to himself. Teresa's husband was tortured and killed on the eve of their departure for Canada, and she is depressed in her new situation, longing to return home but knowing that exile is the

safer option for her children. Francisco has been blackmailed by the man who is renting

him a social insurance number and has to find medical care from friends at the bar; he

looks to Joaquin like Joaquin's torturer and triggers memories of the pain. The individual

lives of these asylum seekers and refugee-ed people are intertwined in community. The

narration of this community of individuals invites understanding of a complicated reality,

unlike the collective metaphor of a wave. The limited third-person narrator allows the

reader to understand both Joaquin's present emotional journey as he waits and waits and

also bits of his history—his torture and captivity. The psychological torture of particular

persons waiting for asylum hearings and the individual histories of refugee-ed people are

both missing elements in most hard news reports on asylum seekers entering Canada.

In addition to providing an individualized and contextualized portrait of asylum

seekers, the story makes use of a central metaphor that is quite different from that of a

tsunami wave: Joaquin is a caged bird. Joaquin's day begins before dawn. He watches a

male pigeon pin a female pigeon against "the chickenwire enclosing the little wooden

balcony" and perpetrate "avian rape" (Bissoondath, "On the Eve" 1-2). Hearing her

"wings scratch and scrape at the wire, batter at it, [creating]…a raucous plea for escape,"

Joaquin frantically hits the wire but "to no sound, no effect" (2). The birds have "panicky,

red-rimmed eyes….they call to mind infection, physical corruption." He is horrified by

this scene, by their presence inside the chicken wire cage. But in a sudden shift of

understanding, Joaquin sees that the birds are the free ones. They are outside the balcony,

and he is the one caged, panicky, sleepless, and physically corrupted. He is both inside

this cage and outside, watching in horror; he is unable to escape his cage yet alienated

from his caged self and helpless to act. Today is the eve of his uncertain tomorrows; his asylum hearing is set for the next day, and tomorrow seems "like a forbidden woman, enticing, creeping into his daydreams, invading his fantasies" (5). Unlike the virility of the violent pigeon before dawn, he finds that tomorrow "robs him of his sleep" but "grates his nerves into a fearful impotence" (5). While Joaquin waits for his tomorrows to arrive, his housemate Amin has arrived at the day when his tomorrows will become certain. Amin is trying to hide his nervousness about the hearing. "[T]he desperation of his jaw" calls to mind the panic of the pigeons, and Joaquin can only watch in silence.

This metaphor of being caged continues throughout the story. The refugee-ed characters awaiting decisions on their asylum claims are caged both by the endless days, weeks, months, years of waiting and the trauma that they re-live internally every night. Joaquin walks the streets, enters restaurants, and glances into the windows of homes as he passes, knowing that he has been contained—but on the *outside* of Canadian culture and everyday life. Everyday life cannot be recreated even in ex-centric places, such as the home for claimants where he lives or *La Barricada*, a Brazilian bar, because of the isolation that has been produced by a history of betrayals and by his constant inner turmoil. Joaquin describes *La Barricada*, the one place where asylum claimants can feel safe because of the owner's commitment to them, as a "shadowed cocoon" and a "closet for the soul" ("On the Eve" 13, 15). It entrenches him in his past, makes him despairing and timid. The necessarily underground hospitality of *La Barricada* entrenches his lack of belonging in this new country, making him unsure of his place. He is jailed, waiting

for rebirth. Life cannot begin afresh until even the confines of its safe welcome are no longer needed.

The central metaphor of the tsunami wave in the *Spectator* article contrasts strikingly with Bissoondath's metaphor of a caged bird or a cocooned butterfly that has almost given up hope of ending its unusually long confinement. While the tsunami wave is unstoppable, destructive, and feared, the caged bird is immobile, vulnerable, and fearful. Being caged also means Joaquin is being put on display; he is a kind of exotic curiosity. To Joaquin, his own lawyer's response to Joaquin's physical signs of torture— fear and fascination—is irrational. The fascination of his lawyer does not feel safe, and he wonders what makes people fear that which is powerless and contained.

Furthermore, as we see with Joaquin's placement both inside and outside the cage, the comparison of an asylum seeker to a caged bird refers more to the circumstances in which the asylum seeker finds him/herself than to a vulnerable and again dehumanized identity. The metaphor is changeable.[100] At two points in the story Joaquin tastes the certain tomorrow he is hoping for. The first taste occurs as he walks outside and notices the signs of spring. People crowd the outdoors "hungry for the sun like prisoners emerging into a prison yard after a too-long, too-dark night," and he laughs at the joke of a passerby that spring may be right around the corner but that it's a "big corner" ("On the Eve" 12). Later he tastes that future again when the very signs of his "physical contamination"—his hands—are used to save a woman made so desperate by

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[100] The changeability of the metaphor may, in part, emerge from the author's realization that any closed metaphor can become tyrannical, repressing the difference that is also part of the comparison.

the confines of her situation that she has tried to end her own life. Buying oranges at a

store,

> he realizes with a gentle jolt that he feels less distant from these people now, strangers become a little less strange not through any act of their own but—in a twist he cannot understand—through an act of *his* own: in this city, he has helped save a life. (21-22)

Regaining agency in a moment of service and care is what restores his own sense of

humanity—as if he has been let out of the cage for a short while. He has avoided the

exoticising gaze for a short while as he acts, fully in the moment. Thus even the central

metaphor of a caged bird is undermined within brief moments of human agency and the

character's longing for the potential of a new tomorrow. The "scenes of comfort and

domesticity" that he observes through house windows are what he desires. "[T]hese little

domestic spectacles…so trivial, so inconsequential" are "attractive in their banality" (23).

While the Spectator article portrays the collective presence of asylum seekers in Canada

as a spectacularly draining and demanding force, Joaquin and Amin only ask for "A

simple life. Khappiness [sic]" (24). They ask for the opportunity to join everyday life but

find they are made powerless and vulnerable by legal, social, and emotional confinement.

Unlike the insinuations in the *Spectator* article that asylum seekers have formed a

powerful and wild underground organization, the only organization of asylum seekers

mentioned in the story is at *La Barricada* where the owner has arranged to break a beer

flute if immigration officials enter so that those who need to hide can be warned. It is

low-key in contrast to the sinister nature of the powerful, organized underground

movement that the *Spectator* article warns readers about.

The stories of the individual refugee-ed characters are quite disparate despite their shared legal status, and the story concludes with a direct challenge to the narrow UNHCR definition of a refugee, which is itself an externally-imposed collective metaphor. Bissoondath's main character is a labour organizer who has been tortured for his role with unions in South America, but his housemate Amin is refused refugee status because he is classified as an economic refugee. Joaquin's response is to wonder rhetorically, "Are you less a refugee, Jeremy Windhook, if you are in danger of dying from hunger rather than a bullet?" (25). In the context of a well-developed personal narrative, these words are striking. The strength of his words form a challenge to any refugee activism that believes in the neutrality of humanitarian work and affirms the importance of a theology that develops a prophetic discourse and a critical distance from public policy.

Genre and Pedagogical Potential

Based on my research prior to the workshops, I had concluded that the value of creative literary narratives for refugee studies and for non-academic communities lay in their ability to be at once particular and varied. Or, to put it another way, because creative stories of particular refugee experiences (in contrast to stories about humanitarian workers or stories about a refugee issue) focus on an individual's experience, they can remind their readers/viewers/interpreters of the specificity and uniqueness of every refugee situation and so help to develop a broader framework for understanding without reverting to the stereotypes produced by collective representation. One workshop participant expressed the way Bissoondath's story does just that:

> For me [the story] highlights the complexity—no one person's story is the same. Joaquin and his analysis of everything that is going on around him

> being filtered by his own traumatic set of experiences and his desire to somehow move beyond but the difficulties he is finding. And also the community—the pub setting or the café—all of the people in that room and the multiple layers to how they develop as people in that place…I just felt overwhelmed by it all. (Workshop 1)

Creative narratives can simultaneously individuate and differentiate refugee experience without removing an individual from her/his social and other contexts. Creative narratives are often expected to give complex contextual information so that the reader can be immersed in the characters' world. Thus the individual character can be both individual and embedded, and a display of suffering can be placed alongside a critique of structural displacement.[101]

Conclusion

My analysis of the two texts and the discussions of the workshops found a strong contrast between mainstream news reporting and this creative short story, in terms of the discourses they use to describe asylum-seeking experiences. The first uses a popular collective metaphor with strongly negative connotations to a dehumanizing effect, entrenching the average reader's already-established discursive framework for refugee experiences. The second uses a fresh individual metaphor that allows for movement (the caged bird finds freedom occasionally and can hope for more consistent freedom) and offers the reader an inductive learning experience through exposure to a complex community of individuals. In the first text, asylum seekers' experiences are narrated and

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[101] Sam Gregory's article on human rights advocacy using video technology briefly touches on this potential in stories, mentioning Paul Farmer's insistence that case studies be placed into larger contexts and noting "the complexities of this move from the individual to the structural story, contextualized in the local yet aware of its place in the political economy of a broader system" (202).

commented on by an apparently omniscient third-person narrator but without any access to the internal worlds of its subjects. In the second text, an asylum seeker appears, through the use of a limited third-person narrator with fixed focalization in Joaquin, to comment on and interpret his own experience. We were not able to address all of my own questions in the workshop discussion in part because of the workshop's structure as open-ended discussion and in part due to time constraints. However, the key distinctions between the texts' respective discourses were noted and explored. That is, in our observation of these two texts, asylum seekers represented as undifferentiated masses without social, political, or historical detail elicit uninformed fear and suspicion, while asylum seekers represented as individuals in complex communities within particular contexts provide empathetic connection and the opportunity to learn.[102] Creative narratives are uniquely capable of telling an individual's story without removing them from their communal, political, and historical contexts, and those that are most useful pedagogically do so with the assistance of fresh metaphors and discourses. The focus of creative authors on initiating new public discourse rather than using the expected language of its audience could make their writing a useful source for CRC refugee activists who wish to renew their own discourses.

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[102] This becomes even clearer in the next chapter when we discuss the usefulness of creative short stories for activist organizations trying to create empathetic connections with their audience.

Chapter 8: Reframing Personal Testimony: Telling Stories and Soliciting Testimony Responsibly

The Function of Personal Testimony in Refugee Activism

Personal testimony is an indispensable practice for refugees in a world of increasing displacement and well-circulated news stories. The reality of displacement, at the level of public fact and general knowledge, is indisputable, if not ubiquitous. Yet, perhaps *because* of its ubiquity, the reality of displacement often evokes fear and defensiveness in those who are not displaced; general knowledge does not always translate into the empathy that one might expect. Creating a personal connection to the experience of displacement is one way to reinvigorate an audience saturated with general knowledge about displacement. The power of personal testimony is a widely recognized method of eliciting empathy and motivating donations and volunteerism. Meg McLagan's editorial to *Technologies of Witnessing* traces the use of testimony in human rights activism back to those testifying about war crimes after the Holocaust (McLagan). Authors of another article in that same issue explain the power of testimony in this way: "[t]estimony as a genre is presumed to hold socially and morally transformative properties. In this sense it is not just a representation but also more akin to a 'speech act' that occasions beneficial change in a process that involves both speaker and listener" (Torchin 215). Testimony is culturally understood as a transformative speech act, authenticated by its embodiment by its teller. I am reminded of the workshop participant whom I quoted in chapter six as saying that "Soobax" was a more powerful and authentic witness to refugee experiences because of the presence of a firsthand witness in K'Naan.

I experienced the power of personal testimony in my own research. During the second workshop, rather than relying on conviction to deconstruct the news story, participants responded to various misconceptions of refugee-ed people with personal stories about their individual lives. Their testimonies as they sat before me stood as authoritative, living proof in contrast to the vague and inflammatory article by an unknown author that represented asylum seekers collectively. One participant discussed the difficulty of finding work despite being highly qualified as a bilingual professional and paired that reality with the ridiculousness of those who assume refugee-ed people would rather sit around bored and without an income (Workshop 2). Another participant expressed the frustrations they have with being dependent on charity—however well meaning it is—and related this to their experience of Canada as being just another refugee camp (Workshop 2). In the refugee camps some of them had come through, as well as in Canada, survival is the goal and dependence is expected, necessary, and structurally enforced.

Szörényi's article, "Till Human Voices Wake Us," examines refugee testimony in the contexts of various discourses, asking how personal testimony is framed and circulated for different purposes. I have found her work helpful in clarifying the distinct discourses used to frame refugee testimony but use my own categories here and incorporate her insights. Refugee-ed people and those who work with and for them recognize the usefulness of individual stories, particularly in the form of personal testimony, for at least three key moments in refugee experiences: for the mobilization of disaster aid, during the asylum seeking process, and for cultural refugee advocacy work

in the national and local community contexts. In each case, personal testimony has the potential to be both productive and destructive, in part because of how the testimony is framed.

Mobilizing Emergency Aid

For NGOs working in emergency situations with masses of displaced people, either in refugee camps or in war zones, personal testimonies are key for mobilizing ongoing financial aid and volunteers. Personal testimony in this context draws on the emotional and sensory experiences of displaced people in order to create an empathetic connection with the audience, who presumably have resources that could be mobilized to alleviate the situation; testimony translates the foreign experience to those outside the crisis. In the case of NGOs such as the UNHCR, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International, Szörényi suggests personal testimonies are used in their educational sectors to promote understanding and sympathy. I extrapolate from her discussion two concerns with this framing and circulation of personal testimony. First, each story is "positioned as an *example* from a collection of similar stories….A singular 'refugee experience' is thus manufactured from the myriad and disparate political situations and life histories that can cause people to relocate" (Szörényi 179). Narrated in a context that predisposes its listener to hear sameness and respond with a generalized emotion, personal testimony framed in this way can actually contribute to the generalization and flattening of a refugee's experience into an apolitical and ahistorical example of neediness. Second, "people who tell these stories are also generally positioned as victims and as naïve informants—they tell of their own experiences but the task of explaining and analyzing

the situation remains with the 'experts' belonging to the organizations" (179-80). Giving citizens direct access to the voices of victims can increase victimization when done in the context of a discourse that locates refugees "more as examples than as participants in the conversation" (180). The pressure on humanitarian aid organizations is to communicate the enormity of a situation in such a way that will inspire its audience to act. As such, personal testimonies are required to stand in as metonyms for more widespread suffering, and experts are called on to translate those 'foreign' experiences of refugee-ed people to an audience in the Global North. That 'translation' process may produce a testimony that has more to do with what a refugee testimony is expected to say and what will solicit funds than with what that individual has actually experienced.

Making a Case for Asylum

During the asylum seeking process in Canada, members of the Immigration and Refugee Board are charged with evaluating the veracity of personal testimonies. What happens when no physical evidence of persecution exists? Asylum seekers must convince their listeners through believable personal testimony. Personal testimony, in this context, must create a narrative whose sensory details and emotional authenticity acts as proof in the place of other, less-disputable evidence.[103] Jeffers briefly points to a major issue at stake in this use of personal testimony by refugee-ed people and their advocates— lawyers, advisors, community organizations, etc—in the UK. In an attempt to confirm the legitimacy of asylum seekers,

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[103] The ethical issues involved in testimony at this legal level have been well documented by recent research in refugee studies (e.g.s. Eastmond; Showler).

> refugee advocates [are] concerned to halt, or at least slow, the negative semantic slide of the term *asylum seeker* before it becomes synonymous with *illegal immigrant*. One tactic in this endeavour is to demonstrate asylum seekers' reasons for coming to the UK, which necessarily involves a simultaneous staging of suffering and victimhood. (Jeffers 219)

The re-enactment of victimhood, in addition to being disempowering, can produce a re-traumatization or re-victimization of the teller, a point that I will return to in a moment. As an example of how theatre can produce a different performance of personal testimony, Jeffers tells the story of a theatre performance at the University of Manchester in which an asylum seeker and her judge act out a moment of "bureaucratic performance" (218). The woman takes on the cloak of victimhood, in an ironic performance of "anecdotal evidence…about the ways in which asylum seekers are 'coached' by their legal advisors, in often contradictory ways, in their performance of their victim's narrative for the courts" (218). She prostrates herself before the judge, begging for mercy, but then surprises her audience by suddenly breaking into a challenging dance, reminiscent of the well-known scene from *Bran Nue Dae* in which an aboriginal youth sings and dances in response to the punitive punishment of a priest. The surprising switch in performances underlines the performative nature of testimony as part of the bureaucratic process and raises the question: what would be said if personal testimony were not under these legal pressures? The peculiar pressure on this legal testimony is to perform what is considered to be an authentic experience of refugeeness that will result in the granting of asylum. The process of this legal testimony can be a self-alienating process in which someone testifies to a pre-packaged experience in order to be considered "genuine."

Advocating for Cultural Change

Even when asylum is granted, those personal testimonies remain both a burden and an effective practice for refugee-ed people. This brings us to the third moment in refugee experience for which personal testimony is key: refugee advocacy at a cultural level. In this context, the emotional and sensory experiences communicated in personal testimony serve as popular education, sensitizing and informing an audience in order to increase acceptance of displaced asylum seekers and to create space for civic participation by relocated refugee-citizens. Personal testimony framed as advocacy for cultural change is the kind of refugee testimony used by church-based activists trying to influence their congregations and communities to be involved in refugee activism. This kind of framing also takes place in community cultural events.

A negative example of personal testimony used for community education occurred during a conference that I was involved in organizing. I was chairing a panel on creativity and agency in displacement and was anticipating the performance of a short theatrical piece by a community theatre group. The theatre troupe had collected stories from refugee-ed people in the surrounding area and then had used them to produce a play that consisted largely of pathos-inducing monologues. Throughout the performance I became increasingly uncomfortable with its representation of displacement through performed personal testimony. Most of the actors clearly were not refugees themselves, and they spoke bits and pieces of these true, personal, traumatic stories, in such a way as to make refugee-ed people into examples of victimhood and triggers for pity. The performance, as an intervention into cultural conversations about refugee-ed people,

disappointed me and many in our audience because it did not challenge any of the popular stereotypes that might be found in sympathetic but simplistic news reports: personal testimony was made impotent to challenge the assumed imbalance between refugee-victim and discerning citizen. Citizen-ed actors told the deeply personal and violent stories of their refugee-ed sources with intense pathos, attempting to horrify the audience with their trauma and making no acknowledgment of their own position in relation to the people whose stories they told. The agency of those whose testimony was being shared was all but absent. Faced with the pressure to undo negative stereotypes of refugees and asylum seekers as illegal or parasitical or undeserving, community organizations and advocacy groups often reproduce an opposing stereotype that is just as singular. Wanting to increase space for civic participation, they emphasize the refugee's lack of choice and the horrors of their story, producing an exotic spectacle instead of recognizing a fellow civic participant. For each of these three uses of refugee testimony, an examination of the discursive framing of and outside pressure on personal testimony raises ethical questions about its use. Yet even the option of asking refugee-ed people to testify personally without expert framing is wrought with challenges; the ethical dilemma extends beyond discursive framing.

The Dilemma of Using Personal Testimony in Refugee Advocacy

Marita Eastmond's article on stories in forced migration studies describes the ethics involved in asking refugee-ed people to continuously retell their trauma narratives as political testimony, writing about what the experience is like for some refugee-ed people. Eastmond was involved in investigating testimony as a kind of therapy for those

involved in the Chilean military coup of 1973. She found that "telling one's story as political testimony of torture during the Chilean military dictatorship was a moral obligation to the members of the exiled opposition, vital in mobilizing support for their cause, but that doing so was often a harrowing experience for the individual" (Eastmond 256). Eastmond notes that, for one Chilean refugee, retelling his story for legal purposes was "'a return to hell'…leaving him deeply distraught for weeks" (256). The same ethical dilemma is present, if not heightened, in humanitarian work when refugee-ed people are asked to tell their stories to sympathetic or skeptical public audiences as a way of "raising awareness" or sensitizing a community. For some refugee-ed people this would be perceived as a chance for influence and for some the request to tell their story would be welcomed, but for others the idea of retelling their stories is abhorrent. As Lifton points out, "some survivors remain silent because they need to dissociate themselves from painful memories (Lifton 1988) or fear that their stories will not be believed, or be bearable to the listener" (Eastmond 257). It might seem a necessary evil that refugee-ed people re-live trauma for the benefit of other asylum seekers or for a greater cause, such as education. Here we can include other contexts in which personal testimony is used ostensibly for cultural change (our third category), namely academic research and teaching.

Mackenzie, McDowell, and Pittaway's article on refugee research addresses this concern indirectly by exploring how an ethical relationship can be established and maintained between researchers and refugee subjects. A simple description of refugee research flags the obvious need for ethical considerations: "[R]esearch involving refugees

and [IDPs] is often undertaken in politically complex, difficult and sometimes dangerous settings and with participants who may be traumatized and vulnerable" (Mackenzie 299). The authors give some practical suggestions, including iterative consent processes and concrete reciprocal benefits, for ensuring that research with human refugee-ed participants goes beyond "do no harm" and actually benefits the participants or a similar population in the future. A second ethical concern for the authors is "how to be attentive and respond to the effects of forced displacement, encampment, and dependence on humanitarian assistance on refugee participants' capacities for autonomy, while also recognizing and respecting their resilience and agency" (300). Their insights are essential for academic researchers in refugee studies, which tend to emphasize either victimhood or agency.[104] The warning for humanist researchers is important: even with a commitment to the good of one's subjects, researchers can inadvertently tread on the complex vulnerabilities of refugee-ed people and asylum seekers.

For the popular pedagogue, how can the work of raising awareness be done without asking refugee-ed people to tell their stories, without falling prey to the dangers of coercing testimony, of causing harm to those who testify to suffering, and of facilitating voyeurism? The workshop participant, who spoke about the pressure they felt to tell stories of horrific suffering in order to get volunteers to make food or donate furniture for asylum seekers, recognized this danger but felt their hands were tied by an audience that was accustomed to personal testimony as proof of suffering.

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[104] My own workshop research would have benefited had I discovered their article earlier. I would have brainstormed with participants in both workshops about possible reciprocal benefits and done immediate follow-up with participants from the second workshop.

These questions are too large for a comprehensive exploration within this short section. In raising them I suggest that a broad target audience and the peculiar dual purpose of educating and soliciting complicates the work of community activists. Many of the workshop participants understood this dilemma: knowing a complexity about refugee experiences that could not be communicated to their communities because they needed to prioritize the first step of convincing people to welcome refugee-ed people into their community. I shared with the group my own discomfort at seeing asylum seekers' testimonies made into examples of suffering or of multicultural celebration at church events, but with the knowledge that some participants face the a priori challenge of skeptical audiences and resistant church communities. Refugee advocates are not unaware of the dangers of using personal testimony but also recognize the success rate of personal testimony in achieving their goals. The witness of abject bodies—starving, broken by torture, psychologically shattered—is one of the few undeniable signs of authenticity. The physical presence of a refugee given a legitimate platform for speech by a trusted organization builds empathy by making foreignness feel close and is a signifier of authenticity.

Addressing the Dilemma

Emmanuel Jal is an American celebrity rapper, who has written about his experiences as a Sudanese refugee and a child soldier. In his Afterword to *Out of Exile: Narratives from the Abducted and Displaced People of Sudan*, Jal admits that he finds telling his own story "difficult and depressing. Sometimes I feel as though I lose a sense of pride by sharing my experiences" (Jal 379). Those experiences include the destructive

ways his family was affected by the war, his "lost" childhood, suicidal tendencies, and his struggles with self-acceptance. Publicly repeating stories of pain and loss made Jal lose respect for himself. He writes, though, that he "found a way of communicating easily without experiencing so much pain. I use artistic expression, putting my story into poems. When I started sharing my story to people through music, I found it therapeutic. I believe art is one of the most effective ways to help people overcome a horrific past" (379). Jal's commentary on his experience of giving personal testimony speaks to the therapeutic element of artistic expression, but he also points to an alternative for framing testimony.[105]

What personal testimony provides, in part, is an empathetic link to refugee experiences that makes what is foreign *feel* close. This capability is something that personal testimony and creative narratives share. What if creative textual, aural, or visual narratives were able to serve as teaching tools, as an initial testimony to represent what is foreign and ultimately unspeakable in the Global North? Could creative narratives bring 'foreign' experiences close, without pressure being placed on refugee-ed people to participate at a cost to themselves and to continually speak in defense of their own position? Could the narratives' mode as fiction provide the distance needed to keep discursive framing at the forefront of interpretation, while still achieving the closeness needed to woo readers into action? When creative narratives replace personal testimony in popular pedagogy, we switch from short personal stories, framed as examples by

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[105] Personal testimony as therapeutic and healing for displaced people is well documented in recent research (Agger; Agger and Jensen; Weine, Kulenovic, Pavkovic, and Gibbons; Leubben), but that research does not address instances of public personal testimony spoken for the purpose of inspiring humanitarian aid.

advocates and meant to elicit a specific response, to a discussion of the individual

characters' embedded life experiences with the possibility of generalization to broader

issues. Literary expression can provide a fresh discursive frame for the personal

testimony of displaced people, wooing people to listen to stories that are often difficult to

hear and assuming subject positions in the reader, author, and subject that allow for more

space.

A popular response of current research to dilemmas of personal testimony is to

cite examples where silence resists voyeurism, humour creates distance, or holes in the

narrative represent the unknowability of the experience (see Agamben; Dawes; Ghorashi;

Jeffers; Zembylas). What holds these diverse responses together is the attempt to create

analytical distance from the subject to trigger self-reflexivity in the reader/listener and, in

the case of refugee testimony, to avoid dehumanizing displays of suffering. Szörényi

responds to the problem of dehumanizing voyeurism by urging her readers to "disrupt the

predictability of the way refugee and asylum seeker testimonies are framed, in order to

suggest an ethics that does not require the display of suffering in order to inaugurate a

sense of accountability" (175). Yet, as Szörényi acknowledges, even in nuanced

publications by academic editors, personal testimony is often framed as a way of

"humanizing" refugees, which creates "a hierarchy between subjects…even as the ability

of testimony to make us recognize others as subjects is celebrated" and "positions

[refugees] as those whose assimilability, and by extension very humanity, is open to

question" (183). She reminds her reader of the importance of self-reflexivity. Self-

reflection on one's framing, facilitating, or encouraging of personal testimony uncovers

the various subject positions of those testifying, those witnessing, those observing, etc. Szörényi's solution is "complicating viewing positions" (184). Concretely, she suggests that testimony can address citizens in the second person and question *their* humanity rather than trying to humanize the one who testifies, thus providing a challenge to the passive commodification of personal testimony to trauma. Not only is the refugee-ed person now the arbiter of what is human (e.g. you call yourself human and yet you have no problem detaining other human beings in inhumane places), but the citizen-ed person is now required to reflect on their own responsibility.

This response, though it fits the theoretical issue and presents a coherent and ethical option for a different kind of refugee testimony, would likely struggle for popular appeal. Very little stands in the way of an audience easily turning off to antagonistic challenges. Furthermore, given my concern for the specific audience of church goers who may or may not have the prerequisite empathy for refugees (i.e. for whom distance from refugee-ed people is already the norm) and who may or may not recognize the "theoretical intervention" of silence or aporia, my answer cannot stop there but must build on Szörényi's observations in order to find a way for personal testimony to bring differently placed subjects close without collapsing their differences. I chose "On the Eve" in part because it is a story that is told with intimate knowledge of one main (and several minor) character's emotional, psychological, physical, memoried, and public life—it is an individual's story or testimony, but its telling is complicated by the character's particular personality and history and its frame is overtly-constructed fiction.

Creative Narratives as Personal Testimony

Even though I did not state outright during the workshop that offering a creative

narrative as an alternative to in-person testimonies was one of my underlying objectives,

the very first comment dropped us into the middle of the discussion. After noting the

complexity of the individual stories and their relationship to one another, the participant

said this about reading the story:

> I thought it was really helpful for me because these are things that you
> wonder about. These are things you won't be told, necessarily. It will take
> a long time for someone to say you know, 'this is how I felt the first
> months that I was in Canada or this is my experience.' These are the
> things I wonder about that I'll never really know. (Workshop 1)

This participant had worked closely in both professional and personal relationships with

refugee-ed people in Canada but out of respect had not pushed them to speak about their

experiences. The story had opened up to this participant a world that was helpful to their

work. At the same time, this participant noted, the story had been so specific and

subjective as to prevent generalizations about "the refugee condition."

This first comment triggered a discussion about storytelling by refugee-ed people.

One participant valued what had been shared with her almost a decade earlier by Kosovar

refugees. These refugee-ed people desired their anger and the injustice of their situation

to be heard, and telling the story was a part of their healing process. Others in the group

had very rarely been trusted with stories, so together participants surmised the factors

involved in different levels of openness, including legal status, age, language, and

culture. We came to no conclusions about the value of "On the Eve" as a replacement for

personal narratives, but as mentioned earlier, evaluation forms confirmed the story's

usefulness as a rich immersive experience and a stimulus for extensive dialogue. In the course of our discussion of the story, we grappled with the very real dilemma of needing to motivate and elicit empathy without exploiting vulnerable people—a rich discussion compared to simply critiquing the unfit metaphor of a "wave" in the *Spectator* article.

Through further consideration of the implications of our discussion, I note three points in the pedagogical process at which this creative, fictional narrative can function as a responsible way of framing personal testimony for cultural advocacy work.[106] The first has to do with the author/subject/reader relationships that the author establishes during writing: First, the limited third person point of view of many creative narratives allows the person who testifies via a narrator to simultaneously be brought close to the reader through narrative focalization and remain distant from the reader because further questions about "what happened" demonstrate the boundaries either of the narrator's knowledge or the narrator's willingness to share. The second emerges from Coleridge's debated but still popular description of the reading process as "willing suspension of disbelief." That is, the touchstone issue of authenticity in personal testimony temporarily is set aside as the reader is immersed in reading the narrative. And third, in subsequent conversations about the text, deliberation over how to apply the knowledge gained from the immersion experience grapples with the testimony's frame necessarily because it is fiction.

In the evaluation form I asked participants to rate the accessibility and usefulness of each text. Participants rated the newspaper article the most accessible of the four

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[106] My conclusions about the usefulness of this particular story, "On the Eve," could be broadened to include many creative, fiction narratives.

narratives but the least useful for learning in contrast to the short story, which was the least accessible but the most useful. Their evaluation *both* affirms the potential of reading this literary text as a practice in intimacy, coming close to refugee experiences through immersion in the personal testimony of a character, *and also* acknowledges the complex and difficult framing of that immersion experience. The dual action of bringing close and distancing that occurs in creative fiction can be explained in part by relationships that are established among readers and subjects and author through point of view and narration, our first point.

Narration and Point of View

Let us return briefly to news media. The news story's attempt to report empirical fact presupposed oneness between the reader and writer, set over against the refugee-ed subject. "She" helps "us" to understand "them" through a first-person point of view, presenting as a third person omniscient narrator. That is to say, what we read in the text is a conflation of the narrator and author, reporting on her limited collected observations; yet the narrative voice is authoritative and purports to offer a complete understanding of the matter. The alliance between reporter and concerned Canadian citizen is clear throughout Boase's article, as she informs her readers of the danger that has overwhelmed Windsor and that looms on Hamilton's horizon: "at least *one thinks* it's just a matter of time before the wave reaches Hamilton" (emphasis added). She tosses in bits of extra information, like conversational asides, to help the reader understand the seriousness of the situation: "Mexicans don't require a visa to enter Canada."

In relief, Bissoondath's narrator offers the reader a connection with the subject of the narrative rather than with an authoritative narrator. We are curious about Joaquin's reading of his world, not the narrator's perspective. The elusive narrator frequently blends with Joaquin's thought process, allowing the trauma of a moment to change the sentence structure. For example, as Joaquin watches the bird the sentences become choppy and partial. New paragraphs begin before sentences finish and single words stand in for entire thoughts:

> His heart races, temples engorge with blood. Lucidity slips, his mind an ungraspable swirl, as he steps out onto the balcony, knowing for the moment nothing but the noise of birds.
> Slaps at the wire with the back of his hand.
> To no sound, no effect.
> They cannot—will not—take note of his protest.
> He stands back. Horrified. Witness, in the quiet of the morning to unwilling coupling, an avian rape. (Bissoondath, "On the Eve" 2)

The author encourages the reader not just to observe the panic but to experience it through the prose, our only connection to the experience. Yet our connection to the character is not a simple voyeuristic identification. Later, when Joaquin's memory of torture is jogged, we "read" his memory, to a slight degree traumatized as well. Just when we think the description is too clear and painful the paragraph ends with a dash: "Pain came in vivid memory, flushing hot and cold through his belly and into his chest. His hands throbbed, nipples burned—" (6). "Space," the next paragraph begins. Space is what Joaquin needs from his memory, and because the narrator is limited, either by knowledge or out of respect, the reader also is required to give Joaquin space. "What else happened?" readers might wonder morbidly, but the narrator does not finish that story and readers are reminded that this is Joaquin's experience, not theirs, and that much is

unknown in this testimony to suffering. Joaquin is not the naïve informant or example used for a humanitarian organization's end goals. The narrator's focalization within Joaquin's perspective gives Joaquin power over the narrative's shape based in his unique and singular knowledge. In partnership with the narrator, he offers pieces of his story and holds back other pieces. Furthermore, Joaquin's story is not paraded in public, packaged for quick and easy consumption, but is made available to those who search for it and are willing to commit to a certain level of personal engagement.

Szörényi suggests second person point of view, that is direct address of the citizen-ed audience, as a strategy for avoiding refugee testimony that becomes a naïve example of suffering, but in this story the opposite strategy is effective. At no point does Joaquin or his narrator even acknowledge that he has an audience. Very little is assumed about the unclear, implied reader, giving readers the opportunity to read without feeling pigeonholed. When I led a series of classes for high school students on refugee narratives I introduced them to a selection of poems that angrily address the reader in second person. Sympathetic though the students had been, they suddenly turned defensive. Several dynamics were at work: the issues had become personal, they felt accused of something they had hardly known about until recently, they felt attacked, and their assumed position as discerning citizen was being upended. I tried to use the moment productively to ask why we would be offended at honest outrage, but another dynamic at

work was that the author's assumed reader had missed its mark. These particular

teenagers needed to learn before being taken to task for their failings.[107]

The Problem of Authenticity

The question of "authenticity" is a constant theme in assessing the personal

testimony of asylum seekers in Canada. In popular discourses terms like "queue jumper,"

"illegal," or "bogus" are used to describe people who do not fit the assumed shape of

refugee claimants. A letter to the editor found in a 2009 issue of the *Sydney Herald* reads:

"Australians do not support giving legal status to boatpeople/illegal immigrants/asylum-

seekers. Australia is already swamped with huge numbers of unwanted legal immigrants

so there is no tolerance left for those trying to queue jump" (McCarthy). Asylum seekers

are interchangeable with illegal migrants and with cheaters for John McCarthy, who

appears to be unaware of the definition of a refugee and of international laws that protect

them. His ignorance is representative of many Australians.[108] For McCarthy, only the

people who are already in the lines deserve to be there—and maybe not even them.

When refugee-ed people give their testimony, either in person or through written

word, the listener/reader is always processing the truthfulness or validity of those claims,

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[107] This pedagogical moment also points out the danger of reading poetry or creative prose as a transparent expression of the personal feeling of the author. Second person point of view can function as a deliberate and formal invocation of the *limits* of seeing the world through a simple self/other, us/them binary; so while this narrative style might initially provoke defensiveness, it can also be an occasion to talk through that reaction as an index of what it feels like to be the object of any exclusive discourse.

[108] See Power for a paper written by the CEO of the Refugee Council of Australia in which he surveys polls from the last sixty years on Australian opinions towards asylum seekers. He concludes "These polls really point to large-scale public confusion about refugee policy, with people's opinions being shaped by what, from the limited information supplied to them, appears to be 'fair'" (Power 4).

given the culture of suspicion mentioned previously. When readers[109] approach a short story, they willingly enter into a fictional world without asking whether or not the story is true. Coleridge's description of reading as "a willing suspension of disbelief" draws attention to the trust that the reader is willing to put in a narrative and its author, according to the expectation that fiction will be made up and need not be verifiable. Personal testimony as, or embedded in, creative narrative can make use of this and disarm readers of their inherent suspicion of refugee testimony. When readers pick up a fictional refugee story they are not primarily concerned with authenticity. The question "is this person telling the truth?" is moot since the frame is explicitly fictional. In a sense, fictional framing woos the reader into listening with openness to a refugee's experience and delaying the question of veracity.

"On the Eve" also picks up the question of authenticity thematically, from the focalized perspective of Joaquin as he observes Amin going to his refugee hearing and attempts to survive the inquiry himself. Questions of political authenticity are replaced with the dilemma of needing to perform what is recognized as authentic in order to be recognized. Joaquin's choice to remain silent in an attempt to survive lends insight to the postcolonial language of finding a "voice" and thus an authentic self. Part of the reason that Amin has been rejected, Joaquin's observations lead us to believe, is that he does not demonstrate adequate refugeeness, appearing "too self confident" and not completely trustworthy or pitiful (Bissoondath, "On the Eve" 4). Amin has picked up Canadian slang, dresses successfully, and endlessly discusses the kind of image he will need to

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[109] Here I am referring to a layperson who is reading fiction, not to a literary critic whose reading process might be quite different.

foster if he is to earn respect yet keep people from fearing him. Joaquin understands the forces that eventually lead refugee-ed people to be vague about their identity "and, eventually, to [fashion] an invented self" (19). He has had to re-invent himself on his way to Canada to ensure safety. While he may be under pressure to tell his story well, to offer his body as proof of his suffering, or to present himself as "the genuine refugee," he does not want to tell his story and finds his lawyer's gaze on his damaged hands "pornographic."[110] The trauma of his personal history is re-lived every sleepless night and is triggered often by the simplest of sensations. Joaquin is silent, untrusting, and self-protective in comparison to Amin's effusion. Bissoondath's fictional creation is, in a sense, the answer to his own character's need for space and silence.

The Trouble of Fictional Framing

If reading creative narratives about refugee-ed people remained enjoyable experiences of fiction, their pedagogical value would be limited. Critical pedagogy moves the reader from consuming narratives to interpreting narratives in light of the reader's and author's political, cultural, and social contexts. At this stage, the distance that fiction can create between the reader and the subject is helpful. We discovered in our workshop discussions that fiction as a frame for any sort of learning can trouble people. The last chapter addressed the concerns of participants that we were reading fiction rather than "true" stories. My take is that this discussion helped us to avoid the danger of seeing all stories of marginalized people as "suppressed knowledge" and therefore as

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[110] Lisa Malkki's influential article critiquing the use of visual images to represent refugees addresses the international refugee aid practice of replacing words as proof with bodies as proof (Malkki 231-2).

uncomplicated testimony to the truth. While reading creative narratives is done with trustful immersion, knowing what to do with the knowledge gained in that experience requires careful discussion and analysis. The troubling frame of fiction triggers that discussion of personal testimony based on its genre rather than on the latent suspicion of refugee-ed testimony. In a sense, fiction carries the burden of doubt for the personal testimony, which has already been heard without the testimony's authenticity being questioned.

Consider the personal testimony that one hears at fundraising banquets, told tearfully and embodied by specific persons, meant to convince the skeptical and to draw the audience so close to the story that they want to pull out a chequebook and fix the story's ending. Then consider a creative narrative read without the baggage of distrust and discussed with questions such as, "So this is one character's experience, but do all refugees experience it similarly?" or "How does this story relate to the personal testimonies I have heard from other people?" or "What needs to be done to change this kind of situation?" Notably, these are healthy questions that flesh out an ethical response to refugee testimony, but some of those same questions would be inappropriate in the context of personal testimony.

The danger of voyeurism does remain with a creative narrative. Reflection on the reader's relationship to the subject represented, to the structures represented, and to creative texts remains an important part of the process. That being said, I was reminded throughout the second workshop of the potential for self-reflexivity to become as much a barrier to listening and understanding as the absence of self-reflexive reflection. The

question of how to avoid either extreme (silencing through voyeurism or through excessive self-reflexivity) emerges again in the next chapter, where I discuss refugee studies' criticism of narratives that represent refugee-ed people as voiceless victims.

Conclusion

The rich immersive experience of reading creative narrative provides an alternative to refugee testimony as it is usually experienced. Personal testimony for cultural advocacy often produces naïve informants whose stories bring foreign refugee experiences close, who are made into examples of suffering, who are then framed by the words and discourses of citizen-ed experts, and who are finally fixed through an audience's response of pity and aid. By way of contrast, fiction frames personal testimony in such a way that the testimony both distances and brings close the audience, bypasses the question of authenticity, and foregrounds the presence of framing discourses for any personal testimony. For religious diasporas that identify with stories of displacement and are thus less prone to reflect on their own position in relation to refugee-ed people, creative narratives offer a complicating frame that resists synecdochal reading and overidentification between reader and subject. Church-based activism that aims to encourage positive responses to refugee-ed people in their congregations and to create a wider base of support for their work can find a powerful tool in creative narratives that spark dialogue without succumbing to the regime of authenticity that usually governs such discussions.

Chapter 9: Debating Refugeeness: Refugee-ed People as Voiceless Victims or Vibrant Culture Makers

Refugees as Voiceless Victims

Possibly *the* most commonly cited topic in contemporary refugee studies and particularly in the crossover of cultural studies, literature, and refugee studies is the widespread representation of refugee-ed people as incapacitated victims. In his 2000 Valedictory Editorial, Roger Zetter, founding editor of *The Journal of Refugee Studies*, traces the morphing discussion of thirteen years of refugee scholarship and mentions particularly that the journal has "challenged many assumptions about refugee incapacity" (352). Yet Sarah J. Steimel's survey of Australian, British, American, and Canadian research on media coverage of refugees finds that, still, in each country "news coverage of asylum seekers often positions asylum seekers as frauds, victims, or some combination of both" (Steimel 222). In contrast to cartoons of fraudulent asylum claims or articles trying to weed out genuine asylum seekers from bogus claimants, "harrowing stories of victimization" are meant to put a human face to refugees (222). Stories in which refugees present as victims are considered the positive representations.

Voicelessness often characterizes victimhood. The need for refugee-ed people to be "given a voice" or "spoken for" is frequently cited by refugee advocacy groups (Szörényi) and is a concern shared by postcolonial theory. Early versions of Gayatri Spivak's debated article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" have ensconced the language of voice and silencing in postcolonial and diaspora scholarship. The preceding two chapters have touched on the problem of narratives and images that represent refugee-ed people as voiceless victims. This final chapter's discussion of refugee representation has

implications for the two issues discussed in the previous two chapters: collectivism versus individuals in communities and complicated subject positions in the reading and listening process. I began the seventh chapter with a quote from Amy West that connects dehumanizing collective representation with the presupposition that refugee-ed populations are "destitute and miserable" and therefore deserving of pity and in need of a champion. In *Beyond Borders* images of collective masses of voiceless victims are simply framed by the professional narration of humanitarian aid organizations, and, unlike the experience of reading a creative narrative like "On the Eve," viewers are neither invited into refugee experience nor asked to respect the space of difference. Throughout the workshop, participants repeatedly came back to a critique of these kinds of representations that are meant to present the "plight of refugees" sympathetically but that result in further victimization because of their silencing effect.

The first half of each of the workshops was a discussion of a clip from the Hollywood film *Beyond Borders* followed by a discussion of the hip-hop music video "Soobax." My purpose in viewing these two texts together was to call into question the representation of refugee-ed people as voiceless victims as a way of questioning common assumptions about refugeeness. I was critical of the film's predictable portrayal of refugee-ed people and enthusiastic about the music video's fresh portrayal. *Beyond Borders* was an example of representing refugee-ed people as victims and so causing further victimization. The film gives the viewer a sense of closeness with Jolie and other Western aid workers and elicits pity for refugee-ed characters as voiceless victims. The music video, in contrast, holds the viewer at a distance even as it draws the viewer into a

shared experience with the subjects as vibrant culture makers. Placing the two in conversation with each other produced an engaging pedagogical experience. Activists and researchers share the concern that refugee-ed people should not be represented as victims because the image of victimhood is dehumanizing, disempowering, and inaccurate. The participants in the second workshop surprised me, therefore, when they affirmed the representations in both videos, avoiding the distinction between voiceless victims and culture makers. I return to those results after laying out the scholarly conversation into which those results can speak.

Victim(izing) Representations in *Beyond Borders*

Jolie's character, Sarah, as our interpreter of refugee experiences, comes across as sympathetic but naïve: "in a place she didn't belong, among a people she never knew, she found a way to make a difference" (*Beyond Borders*). Starving refugees in exotic locations provide the justification for well-meaning and uninformed Western charity, and her success at making a difference proves that little has to be known in order for us, the viewer, to act on behalf of refugees. The impulsive, unreflecting passion of Jolie makes white, Western, middle-class viewers somewhat uncomfortable at first as she reflects them in the film and appears absurdly self-confident.

One scene attempts to pre-empt this critique by having Owen, a doctor, stare down Jolie, a donor, who is holding a dying child and who is insisting that he be treated. He violently mocks her: "What. You think just because you bring this money you can do whatever you want?! Want me to take a picture? White woman holds poor dying black baby in her arms" (*Beyond Borders*). As workshop participants in the first group noted,

this scene addresses white Western viewers who feel guilty about the gap between themselves and the refugee-victims and gives voice to their discomfort at seeing Jolie, dressed in white and wearing perfume, making decisions of life and death over refugee-victims. Her lack of self-reflexivity makes us worry that we do the same thing in watching the film and doing humanitarian work. Flattening this potentially rich exploration, Campbell allows Jolie to succeed at saving the child's life, providing easy vindication for the do-gooder who has been criticized as being naïve and providing hope for future charity projects by white Westerners to accomplish much good despite the power differential. Yet this scene's pre-emptive message falls flat when we begin to realize that that refugee child will never be given a name or even a single line in the film. The child is there to stack Jolie's success record and to salve our guilt. In fact the film falls directly into the trap of categorizing refugees as nameless, faceless, victimized masses and white Westerners as specific agents.

As I described in the last chapter, when I first watched *Beyond Borders*, the film moved me. It was not until I had watched two contrasting multimedia narratives (2002 film *Dirty Pretty Things* directed by Stephen Frears and the video for K'Naan's 2006 hip-hop hit, "Soobax") that I began to see how its representation of refugee-ed people was reproducing "refugeeness" (a concept I discuss shortly) and serving to victimize displaced people further.

Sight and Sound and the Reviewers' Responses

As I watched these films, two dissimilarities became quite clear in comparison to the visual and aural presentation of *Beyond Borders*. The first difference has to do with

what we *see* in the other two films: the main characters, the main figures that the camera focuses on and asks us to focus on, are refugee-ed or non-status people. Their lives are complex and varied and their decisions, behaviors, and activities are recognizably human. As a result, the citizen-ed viewer is invited to enter into the subtleties of refugee lives and empathize in some way or another with the lives portrayed. The second difference has to do with what we *hear*: the scripts and actors shape a video with voices that speak often in languages other than English, and most English-speaking voices have accents other than American, Australian, British, or Canadian. Somali is the second language in both the music video and the film. For Western viewers who understand only English, the second language—left untranslated—and the strong accents keep them at a slight remove from the characters and the plot, keep them from assuming they have understood just by watching, and force them to experience empathy without complete understanding. Especially in "Soobax" a feeling about the spirit of the message and content of the chorus is somehow communicated without the English-speaking audience being able to translate directly.

What we see in *Beyond Borders* are the white bodies of Angelina Jolie, Clive Owen, and their fellow humanitarian workers set against the backdrop of amassed black refugee-ed bodies. What we hear in *Beyond Borders* are generally the strong American, Australian, and British accents of the humanitarian workers interwoven with the occasional argument, threat, plea, or explanation of people with various accents depending on where the workers are temporarily located. On second viewing, I found myself unable to respond emotionally to *Beyond Border*'s portrayal of refugee experience

because the other narratives had caused me to notice the exoticism and the troubling

presence of celebrity charity behind the film's production.

The film did not do well in box offices and was recognized by many reviewers as

neither ethically nor artistically worthwhile. A reviewer on Rotten Tomatoes hits the

dominant note of reviews when he writes:

> the romance would be a more welcome element if any of the film's non-white characters were humanized to the point of personal interest. But complimentary of director Martin Campbell's exotic locales, they're just a suffering backdrop who are either waiting for help or are ready to ambush our heroes with gunfire. (Palermo)

In this reviewer's estimation, the film is unsalvageable as a piece of good drama let alone

pedagogy because it is dehumanizing; he compares it to a dramatic human-interest story.

Going one step further in describing the movie's exoticised refugees, Jake Wilson

characterizes Jolie and the baby she saves from death as "extraterrestrials": "Angelina

Jolie cradles a starving Ethiopian baby that goggles at her like a Spielberg mutant, the

freaky pathos of its prominent ribcage enhanced by CGI."[111] Another reviewer writes

sarcastically:

> Fortunately we're not required to learn much about the people actually being helped. The locals (with the aid of some computer animated enhancements) are either figures of pity, or brutal killers threatening Nick, Sarah, and the other relief workers. Oh yes, and the masses as well. Mustn't forget them, even if the film does. (Kimmel)

As in news media, this film presents representations of refugee-ed people either as killers

(ie. fraudulent refugees) or pitiable victims. The killers, corrupted victims now

victimizing others, speak in the film, but their words are not to be trusted. The victims do

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[111] It is a startling scene and image. In the workshop the participants described it
similarly: "not even human," one woman said of the child (Workshop 1).

not speak: the destitution of their poverty and their starving bodies appear to say all the

film needs them to say.

Refugeeness: The Unreliability of Voiceless, Faceless Victims

Peter Nyers uses the term "refugeeness" to refer to the qualities that have been

internationally accepted as signs of authenticity for refugees: voiceless, placeless,

invisible, and victim.[112] Nyers challenges these signs of authenticity as part of the

dehumanizing, even violent, humanitarianism, which I discussed in my third chapter.

Similar to Said's and Spivak's concerns with the participation of intellectuals in

discursive colonial power in orientalist and subaltern studies respectively, Nyers' concept

of refugeeness demonstrates the asymmetrical relationship between refugees and those

who study them: the UNHCR, for example, or well-meaning photographers, or even

impassioned academics, each determined to give refugee-ed people a place, a face, and a

voice, yet unaware that their definitions and the work they have generated often

contribute to depoliticizing refugees and often say more about their own commitments, a

la humanitarianism, than about the subjects they study.

Lisa Malkki's article outlining her fieldwork in Tanzania with refugee-ed people,

the UNHCR, and two Christian aid organizations makes clear that humanitarianism,

reproducing representations of refugees as victims, is the preferred option to apathy. She

shows how humanitarian work, supposedly founded on legal definitions of refugee

identity, is strongly shaped by (often unidentified) cultural assumptions about what a

refugee looks and acts like and points to the need for discursive renewal in humanitarian

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[112] See also LaCroix on the perpetuation of refugeeness by Canadian refugee policy.

work. Malkki compares what Hutu refugees and international organizations understand

the identity of a genuine refugee to be. In the refugee camp she was visiting, UNHCR and

partner organizations had a

> pronounced tendency to try to identify and fix the "real" refugee on
> extralegal grounds. And one key terrain where this took place was that of
> the visual image of the refugee, making it possible to claim that given
> people were not real refugees because they did not look (or conduct
> themselves) like real refugees. (Malkki, "Speechless" 384)

Visual images in common public circulation have become so implicated in the process of

defining a genuine refugee that the voices of refugees narrating their own history can be

considered unreliable unless accompanied by bodies showing "proof" of that history.

Malkki's reading of the camp was that "[refugees] were frequently regarded as simply

unreliable informants" (ibid). In Malkki's article and in Nyers' discussion of the

UNHCR's paradoxical definition of convention refugees, speechlessness or voicelessness

is exposed as a part of the discourse of refugeeness in the international legal regime.

Speechlessness also exists as an extralegal expectation at the level of federal processes

for asylum seekers. Szörényi explores the paradox of expected speechlessness and

required testimony in the national asylum seeking process, writing that, for asylum

seekers, "the act of speech can work to restore a person to the status of recognized

subject, [even as] the narrative of victimization and objectification, precisely to the extent

it is convincing, repositions the speaker as powerless and passive" (176). The voiceless

refugee figure is arguably at its most powerful at the cultural level, which influences both

the international legal regime and national processes of asylum. Szörényi points to the

public "regime of suspicion" into which refugee testimony enters, a regime that depends

on stereotypes that have been produced and maintained by public visuals meant to prove

suffering and now used to prove authentic claims. In cultures of the Global North as in

their humanitarian work in the Global South, the stereotype of asylum seekers as

"destitute, helpless, distraught beggars….is one which is so inextricably associated with

passivity, helplessness and visual paradigms of proof that the act of speech can come to

appear intrinsically suspect" (Szörényi 177). The power of refugeeness as a composite

sign of authenticity, means that refugee-ed people must project speechlessness and

victimhood unless (and when) asked to recount their experiences of being speechless

victims. One could argue that the refugee activism of the CRC, externally defined in

chapter three as an ideal humanitarian citizen, perpetuates the silencing effect of

refugeeness when it functions according to the paradigm of classic humanitarianism:

understanding its work to be speaking on behalf of victims of trauma and offsetting the

human cost of widespread displacement yet not addressing the structural issues that cause

refugee movement.

Refugeeness: The Danger of Non-Political Victims

Speech is only the beginning of what becomes suspect within this regime of

suspicion based on stereotypes of voiceless, passive victims. Refugees must be voiceless,

fearful, and able to reasonably describe their fear, but they must also refuse to act

politically in order to be accepted as UN convention refugees. Aid workers must be

similarly nonpolitical to qualify as humanitarian. Due to the UN's strict definition of

convention refugees, any refugee-ed people who choose to act politically find themselves

denied refugee status. The helplessness of victimhood predetermines that refugees,

portrayed as victims, are unable to act politically. The nonpolitical nature of refugeeness

is shaped both by the commitments of classical humanitarianism to apolitical action, as

discussed in the second chapter, and also by the role of political histories in propagating

the violence that displaces people in the first place. To return to the results of Malkki's

fieldwork, the narrations of political history that were so important to Hutu refugees'

sense of identity were seen by camp administrators "as a potential trouble factor

threatening to complicate the administering of the projects" because those narrations kept

alive ethnic and political conflicts (Malkki, "Speechless" 383). In this case their attempts

to silence political history and so diminish political action was both an ideological and a

practical consideration.

Director Martin Campbell has produced a classic example of refugeeness in his

visual and aural representation of refugee-ed people and refugee camps in *Beyond*

Borders. The film touches on the struggle of humanitarian aid workers to remain

nonpolitical but never challenges the assumption that refugees and those who run refugee

camps should be neutral and passive in the face of war or genocide, instead placing the

struggle of Doctors Beyond Borders in the context of resource management and the

possibility of financial gain if they were to transport guns with their food. Creating a false

separation between the political realm and the purview of emergency aid, the movie asks:

do you sully the pure work of human kindness with mercenary or political matters if you

feel the end justifies the means? The question is not resolved in the film and remains a

dilemma for white humanitarian workers to resolve, as the human agents in an unfolding

drama of dehumanization.

Extending Academic Concerns: From Highlighting Agency to Sitting with Suffering

Highlighting Agency

The first group to participate in my test case workshop (citizen-ed refugee activists) were predictably sensitive to poor representations of refugee-ed people in the media and had a good handle on the scope of the issues I would have raised in a class— the colonial history of refugee crises, the iconic Ethiopian famine in relation to varied refugee experiences, problems with celebrity culture, the relationship between Canadian national identity and refugee claimants, and the need for refugees to be recognized as political agents and as more than their legal label.

Beyond Borders, then, frustrated them as it had the reviewers. They used words like "helpless," "hopeless," "insignificant," "purposeless," "no dignity," "almost invisible," to describe refugees in the film and protested, "there's more to being a refugee than despair" (Workshop 1). The exoticised refugeeness of the film seemed dangerous to them. As I described earlier, the participant who had worked at a home for refugee claimants commented that the popular consumption of such narratives has meant that s/he feels pressure to inspire donations or volunteers by coming up with "this amazing story" about "how bad" it was before arriving. "Do we have to have a token refugee who has had an experience of rape and mutilation and that will make you feel like this is worth your time or worth developing a relationship?" she asked, dramatizing a hypothetical conversation with a voyeuristic volunteer applicant. The victim-refugee is a recognizable and entertaining figure that makes it an easy character for films to represent and for viewers to understand; it both produces and is produced by refugeeness as a cultural

marker of authenticity. If the work of cultural critics is, in part, to provide alternatives to binary interpretations of the world, binaries that entrench the oppressed always in opposition to the oppressor, then the need for regenerative alternatives is essential.[113] Where do we find representations that stretch viewers and regenerate refugee identity rather than merely affirming refugee stereotypes through flat, refugee-victim characters?

My answer, built into the structure of the workshop, was "Soobax." K'Naan's voice challenges the idea that refugees are voiceless and instead asks if citizen-ed people are willing to listen. Somali refugees dance, make music, sing, play soccer, and create community in this video. Many of them look directly at the camera, each with a different emotion, some challenging, some shy, some laughing. K'Naan, the "star" of the video, can be found dancing in the middle of groups of people, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with a line of young boys, and praying with angst on the beach. The moments of silence that are displayed in the video are found in the contexts of personal reflection or accompanied by challenging stares rather than produced by externally-imposed voicelessness and victimhood.

K'Naan's use of languages other than English and the richness of visual, aural, and lyrical elements made his music video a challenge to access, and participants in the

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[113] Daniel Coleman first pointed me towards "Spaces We Occupy" a chapter in Taiaiake Alfred's book *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Actions and Freedom*. I have found Alfred's theorization of "regeneration" as "the principle of acting against our ingrained and oppressive fears" helpful in thinking about how to respond to the dehumanizing of refugee-ed people (Alfred 151). Rather than *recovering* indigenous identity, he advocates *regenerating* "ourselves and our nations" as a way of "embracing the struggle to transcend what has been done to us rather than the effort to gain compensation for the crimes or to placate feelings and sensibilities" (151). An original refugee identity is impossible to recover as it does not exist; what scholarship can discover is how refugee-ed people want to regenerate and self-identify in various contexts.

first workshop asked to watch it twice before discussing it. Even so, watching it changed the very atmosphere in the room from one of serious contemplation of the difficulties of educating fellow-Canadians to palpable excitement about the possibilities of refugee narratives. "Energy," "vitality," "unity," "vibrancy," "taking back power," "almost a celebration," "something has to change," "they're victims, but they're going to do something about it rather than be passive," "they're speaking for themselves." These were the participants' observations this time around. "It's important," one woman commented, "to have something that shows the contrast of the refugee image," "of being more active and taking control and being assertive" (Workshop 1). K'Naan's video demonstrates the agency of refugee-ed people as culture makers.

Who is responsible—for forced displacement, for responding to forced displacement? In our earlier discussion of *Beyond Borders*, one participant had noted that in the film "you don't have a sense of the external cause [of the refugees' suffering]. It's kind of undefined….we can't identify, we can't name the villain per se….By not being able to name the villain, you can't clearly explain the whole victim's side" (Workshop 1). Because the villain is not named and because the protagonist is "too broad to really relate to in this story," the refugee becomes a voiceless object of pity and the viewer's relationship to their suffering remains unexamined. Our discussion of K'Naan's video, however, revealed both the artistic integrity of his work and a thoughtful portrayal of refugee-ed people as active culture makers. Someone began with the question "who's he singing to?" and participants continued the discussion, giving proof on various sides that he was addressing either Somali gunmen or North Americans or even Somali refugees as

responsible for the violence resulting in forced displacement (Workshop 1). The

multiplicity of possible intended audiences did not simplify the villain to a single group

or person, but this matched his refusal to flatten refugee-ed people into a mass of victims.

Instead K'Naan, surrounded by a community of other refugee-ed people, takes up the

position of protagonist and insists that refugee-ed people (and whoever else listens to his

music) need to do something even as the construction of his poetry sparks a conversation

about who *is* responsible. 'Are we the responsible ones?' participants asked, as members

of the Global North. That conversation is important and is generated by K'Naan's poetry,

but whatever the answer, the video shows Somali refugees taking responsibility for

regenerating Somali culture and Somali refugee identity.

The strength of K'Naan's representation of refugee-ed people as culturally

productive and politically active led us into a discussion of Derrida's neologism

"hostipitality," and participants asked how far Canadian citizens are willing to go in

opening up their "home" to refugee-ed people. We used the metaphor of hospitality to

question the limits we place on refugee-ed peoples' involvement in churches: will

citizens be okay with refugees putting the dishes back in different cupboards, so to

speak? K'Naan's upbeat message and his aim of making viewers "fall in love with my

people" connected deeply with the aims of church-based activists who had been cajoling

long-time Canadian citizens to see refugee-ed people as fellow civic participants, as

assets rather than burdens (K'Naan). In "Soobax," refugee-ed people are active, well-

spoken, and creative culture makers. The only concern of the participants was whether or

not the medium of hip-hop would communicate well to people in their congregations.

Sitting with Suffering

I came away from this workshop quite encouraged, and I expected that the second workshop would further confirm the usefulness of such critical pedagogy. I expected that K'Naan's storytelling through hip-hop would again epitomize the kind of narrative we would want to use for cultural advocacy and pedagogy. The participants in this workshop had been refugee-ed and so had firsthand experience of the issues the films raised. As I have flagged, far from confirming my critical pedagogy exercise, this workshop threw into question any easy conclusions about what can be considered an accurate or useful refugee narrative.

The first participant to speak after we had watched *Beyond Borders* had survived the Rwandan genocide, though many in her family had not. Her explanation of the horrors of the war that made her a refugee silenced the rest of us. "When I just saw this movie," she shared, "I remembered" (Workshop 2). Instead of picking up on the question I had posed before the clip and discussing the issues of refugee representation, participants began sharing parts of their stories with one another, comparing their stories to what they had seen in the film. Climates differed, they pointed out, and so survival methods were not the same, but many of the issues faced by the Ethiopian refugees in the film had been their issues as well: disease, malnourishment, lack of medical care, corrupt local government, and tensions between quality or quantity of refugee care. When I finally spoke up with my postcolonial/representational concerns about the film, one woman agreed with me that Jolie is portrayed as speaking for "voiceless people" and then explained to me, "those people, you know…they don't have their rights and they don't

have opportunity to speak up for themselves. So some people who have energy and strength have to speak up for them" (Workshop 2). Flying in the face of arguments—that I had made previously—against portraying refugee-ed people as voiceless, her words reminded me of Elizabeth Ellsworth's argument in her article, "Why Doesn't this Feel Empowering?" "Words spoken for survival come already validated in a radically different arena of proof and carry no option or luxury of choice" (302). Apolitical refugeeness may be a necessary strategy for survival, and a feeling of voicelessness may actually be forced upon someone. Refugees in destitute conditions may not have the luxury of choosing *not* to be victims. The experiential truth of voicelessness is triggered by refugee representation in *Beyond Borders*. How do I respond to these words spoken by a person who has fought for survival when I am writing in an academic context? Self-reflexivity as my end goal seems indulgent in the face of a group that trusts one another and is insistent that the suffering of refugee-ed people be heard and understood.

This focus on the experience of suffering was pervasive in our discussion. One participant appreciated Jolie's strong feelings because Jolie saw people and empathized with their human suffering rather than considering them numbers in a camp. In fact one participant's description of their own experience of refugee camps suggested to me that *Beyond Borders*' portrayal of refugees in camps as exotic objects for Western eyes to consume was not only *not* irresponsible, as one reviewer had suggested, but was actually an accurate and powerful commentary on some refugee camps. This participant told us how difficult it had been to hide in the jungle from the Burmese military and explained that arriving in Thailand and living in a refugee camp along the border was like:

> running away from a tiger…[to] face a lion….In refugee camps, you are like animals in the zoo. You could not go out anywhere. And then they give you food…you know, the cheapest rice, like you feed the *animals*…with dirt…and weeds and seeds and kinds of rock in the rice. (Workshop 2)

I had felt like a guilty voyeur watching Jolie's film and so held it at arm's length with my critical theory, but this participant affirmed its portrayal of refugees on display. Her experience *was* one of voicelessness and victimization, and the Hollywood film, in ways that probably exceeded its intention, portrayed the pain of that experience. Indifference to the suffering portrayed and inaction in response were equally dangerous potentials both for people uncritical of the film's representation and for those whose critical training dulled their empathy and replaced it with self-reflection.

I hardly needed to ask the question of these participants, "would you want to show this film to people in Canada to teach them about what it's like to be a refugee?" One participant imitated citizen-ed Canadians watching *Hotel Rwanda* for the first time in order to suggest that films like *Beyond Borders* would raise basic awareness: "'Is it possible…? We ask you! This happened to your country?' I told them: 'this is nothing. This is a movie. The reality was even…something you can't even believe'" (Workshop 2). This participant was less concerned with uncovering oppressive ideologies in aesthetic representations and more with having neighbours who even cared that war and genocide happen in the world. Another participant affirmed the need for images that would hold viewers' attention and influence them without losing them, suggesting Internet research and conversations with refugee-ed people as next steps for those influenced by the film. The only objection raised by participants was that the film's portrayal of—what they all

agreed was—only two percent of their reality might be *too* real: "I think it is very good to show people. The only problem is that some people, they don't want to see this kind of…you know, it is violence and trauma. People who have trauma, stress. And they don't want to see movies that are based on reality" (ibid). Later as we compared the two films as pedagogical tools someone remarked, "that one [referring to *Beyond Borders*] is too deep emotionally, like you would break peoples' heart…it's based more on [the] reality of what [a] refugee's life [is] like" (ibid). The irony in the dissonance of this person's concern for not breaking peoples' hearts and the film critics' summary dismissal of the movie's dramatic or mimetic quality flagged for me the consistent danger of critical discourses such as Said's discussion of orientalism or Nyers' discussion of refugeeness being co-opted for the maintenance of an apathetic status quo. While crass, a straightforward translation might read: "since this movie exoticises refugees and portrays them only as voiceless victims, I don't have to care about the suffering it portrays."

This workshop group did not dislike K'Naan, though, and were enthusiastic about the way he could serve to remind Canadians that "just because they are a refugee does not mean they are dead. They are alive; they have life" (Workshop 2). In fact that phrase was repeated several times: the music video spoke to them of the importance of living "like one who is living" regardless of the oppression and discrimination faced. A discussion about the need for community, for social interaction, and for safe places to tell stories of trauma flowed naturally from the video. Life in Canada, they all agreed, was different from their lives at home because it lacked consistent and deep community, while the video captured something of their desire for less fettered sociality. Despite these positive

assessments of "Soobax," K'Naan's video failed to elicit the same lively dialogue in the second workshop as I experienced in the first. Furthermore, as they discussed which video was more useful for teaching Canadians about refugee experiences, a consensus gradually emerged that *Beyond Borders* was more important because it showed the suffering. "The suffering, the suffering," one participant repeated slowly and quietly, without any sentence to contextualize the word (Workshop 2). If people were willing to enter into the stories of refugee suffering, this group felt people needed to hear them.

Constant reflection in academic writing on "our" or "my" position in relation to those I listen to is an important step in a much larger process. Being self-reflexive without taking the first step of merely allowing the stories of others to affect us will result in no more agency for those who suffer than if we had not recognized our own position in the first place. Eastmond's final paragraph urges academics not to get stuck on the problem of power relations but to move forward:

> Thus, the challenges and limitations of narrative research notwithstanding, we need to continue seeking ways of listening to and representing refugees' experiences, in their great diversity. This is particularly urgent as solidarity with refugees in their plight appears to be giving way to distrust in many parts of the world. As a result, refugees' stories are either not deemed relevant or credible or, increasingly, not heard at all. (Eastmond 260)

After hearing the responses of the workshop participants to these narratives, I was made aware that listening to the stories of suffering whether or not they are framed sophisticatedly, whether or not they are aware of themselves as constructed, whether they demand recognition or elicit pity, and allowing myself to sit with that suffering to the point of caring is a necessary response. My academic language of responsible

representation, subject positioning, and discourse analysis must remain accountable to the suffering of displacement as it is communicated and experienced by refugee-ed people. The responses given by participants in the second workshop extend the theoretical concerns of extant scholarship on refugee representation to include not only questions of agency and the widespread, victimizing concept of refugeeness, but also the importance of being silent to hear expressions of refugee suffering and of remaining emotionally accessible to narrations of suffering.

Conclusion

The previous two chapters argue for the immense potential of creative narratives to be used pedagogically by church-based activists: creative narratives offer an immersive learning experience, using fresh metaphors for more responsible representation and foregrounding the framing of refugee testimony by providing a fictional frame that absorbs the questions of a regime of suspicion. This final chapter augments that celebration of fiction by recognizing the potential for creative narratives to be conflicted sources of refugee representation, for narratives to do both more and less than they intend, and for a narrative's aesthetic qualities to impair or enhance its ability to represent refugees well. The participants in each workshop point to two issues they respectively see as most urgent in refugee representation: convincing citizen-ed members of churches in Canada that refugee-ed people are agents of cultural change and are capable of regenerating refugee identity when given space to participate; and convincing skeptical citizen-ed people in Canada to listen to narratives of forced displacement and to allow that suffering to shape them as political and cultural agents. Academic concerns for

encouraging agency and critiquing the exotic can be refreshed by this important question of how to cultivate a community of care that engenders trust and openness.

In our introduction to *Countering Displacement*, Daniel Coleman, Wafaa Hasan, Agnes Kramer-Hamstra, and I affirm scholarship that is shifting the focus from reiterating refugee experiences of victimhood to highlighting refugee capacities for resilience. Similarly, Linda Bosniak, Paul Gilroy, Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed, Lisa Malkki, Anne McNevin, Peter Nyers, Nevzat Soguk, Daniel Warner, and others, in their respective research fields, peel back the official discourses about refugees (defined by victimhood) to demonstrate the presuppositions on which those discourses rest— presuppositions about what it means to be human, about the naturalness or artificiality of citizenship and the state, about the inherent differences between refugee and non-refugee identity, and about the role of refugee identity in national narratives. The comments of the participants in the second workshop remind me that many people in the Global North remain unaware of those discussions, or even of the need for them. A growing antipathy towards any kind of migration continues to drain the Global North of its capacity to think creatively about the human dimension of forced migration. Therefore, another urgent need co-exists for scholars: counteracting whatever blocks people from listening sympathetically to stories of forced displacement.

Afterword

The story of Elias' sermon, with which this dissertation opens, crystallizes the productive tensions present in religious diasporas that are engaging in refugee activism in Canada. That church's activism did not emerge from the dutiful idea of beginning a charity or outreach program. Instead, the community began to diversify as it lived out its mission in displacement, and the presence of refugee-ed and racialized members made reflection and action needful. How are refugees a part of us, this religious diaspora asked? And how did the borders between the CRC and Canadian evangelicalism, between citizen-ed and refugee-ed members, and between religious diaspora culture and the broader Canadian culture get drawn in the first place? Scholarship on the condition of diaspora helps us to understand the motivation for and peculiar shape of the CRC's activism—how it relates to the nation-state and its homeland, how it positions itself in relation to refugee-ed people, where the points of tension emerge as it becomes multiethnic, etc.

In contrast to the work of mainstream evangelical churches in Canada, a religious diaspora does refugee activism out of a sense of unsettled and minority identity, making it a particularly useful site for teasing out the relationships among ethnicity, faith, and national belonging. I discussed the need for a prophetic distance from national narratives in chapter two's section on the relationship of a diaspora to a nation-state, as well as in chapter three's call for churches to only strategically align themselves with humanitarianism, and chapter seven critiques collective metaphors based in the fear of losing a national culture to multiethnic "invasions." The four short texts I used in the two

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workshops barely scratch the surface of literary study's potential to begin teasing out such complexities. The relationships among ethnicity, faith, and national belonging would be profitably explored through other narratives of forced displacement, such as Bapsi Sidwha's *Cracking India*, Camilla Gibb's *Sweetness in the Belly*, or Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*. Sidwha tells the violent story of India's Partition and the cracks that were created in diverse and peaceful communities of Hindus and Muslims because of the sovereignty of a purist national policy. Gibb's main character, Lilly, is a convert to Islam, a refugee from Ethiopia, and a citizen of Britain all at once. She unsuccessfully searches for a home in either Ethiopia or Britain, and the novel ends with an uncertain hope for a new start in Canada. Selvadurai tells the back-story of a young boy who becomes a refugee, but Selvadurai does not portray arrival in Canada as a hopeful dream. Rather Canada is a loss. In fact, novels or short stories written by Canadian diaspora authors rarely narrate an uncomplicated, triumphant, or relieved arrival in Canada, thus resisting the power of national narratives to overtake the personal narratives of their characters.

A religious diaspora understands the need for collective self-narration, but comes up against the limits of unity when it embarks on inter-ethnic refugee activism and discovers the importance of sharing that process of contextualization with refugee-ed people it invites into community. Here the theme from chapter seven of collective versus individual representation intersects with chapter eight's theme of the need for self-narration. These two themes were foregrounded through the comparative structure of the workshop but can also be found in a single text: Madeleine Thien's *Dogs at the*

Perimeter. Thien's beautiful and dark narration of human responses to the Khmer Rouge's violent attempts to collectivize Cambodian society, records a systematic, destructive transgression of the perimeters of individual identity and self-narration. For her characters, keeping a diary is reason enough to be killed, not only because it is a sign of education and elitism but also because it is a defiant act of individual narration over against collective identity. People reinvent themselves, rename themselves to rid their life stories of anything that could get them killed. Thien's novel concretizes the intricate challenge in diaspora, expressed by Boyarin and Boyarin, of maintaining particularity and producing communal structures.

The process of narrating communal identity by finding fresh contextualizations of old stories is part of any community's life yet is an obviously live issue for displaced religious groups. A diaspora's dynamic identity and use of stories to root itself create an opening for the conversation I have begun: what potential exists for creative narratives to shape CRC and other church-based refugee activism and to shape the communities out of which that activism is done? Section Two argued that the major public discourse available to the CRC and other church-based refugee activists in Canada is humanitarianism within the paradigm of state sovereignty and under the norm of citizenship. The need for activist discourses that are open to renewal and fresh metaphors surfaces again in the workshop results described in chapter seven. Through my analysis of "On the Eve" we see that diaspora and refugee authors are in the business of finding creative ways to write about displacement.

Lloyd Jones's story of Ines in *Hand Me Down World* unsettles readers of any preset approach to refugees by piecing together a range of believable perspectives on irregular migration. He does this through a series of first-person narrations about a single woman. Read through the eyes of the many people with whom she has interacted on her journey, Ines is a mysterious, violent, unknowable, and devious illegal migrant. The reader finally hears Ines in the fourth and final part of the novel. She tells her story of being conned out of her own baby by a rich German tourist at a Tunisian resort, of smuggling herself into Italy to find and reclaim her child, of sexual exploitation by a man who assists her, and of the accidental murder of a woman who welcomed Ines into her home. The novel's summative effect is to impress on the reader the partiality of outside perspectives on irregular migration and the complexity of being without papers. Listening to Ines' self-narration is key to understanding the issues she faces, reminding church-based refugee activists who read the novel to reflect on their own process in representing refugee-ed people and to listen to refugee-ed people.

A culture of care, derived from a discourse differently positioned from secular humanitarianism, is something church-based activist groups offer to refugee studies. As we have seen in chapter four's analysis of the CRC's hymns, church-based activists are open to partnering in and promoting broader projects of care because they have as their starting point a deeply entrenched desire to care for others. The workshop results described in the final chapter of this dissertation raise the need for scholarship to cultivate a culture of care that breeds trust. Nega Mezlekia's *Notes from the Hyena's Belly* ends with a similar plea when he asks a single thing of Canada: to become more considerate of

the rest of the world. M.G. Vassanji's short story "Refugee" also portrays the importance of communal care. An asylum seeker Karim finds himself paralyzed by an inability to trust anyone until the very end of the story when he discovers a group of other irregular migrants who have created a community based in trust and solidarity. Two very recent refugee novels, *Dogs at the Perimeter* and Kyo Maclear's *The Letter Opener* complicate the need for care with detailed stories of people who have disappeared from Canada. Neither of the characters' stories would be told unless someone cared to find out why they disappeared. But their migration, experienced by friends as disappearance, is from Canada to another place rather than the other way around. This plot trajectory is unusual for diaspora novels in Canada and serves to affirm the centrality of refugees to Canadian identity. The characters are missed when they leave; their regretted absence rather than resented presence is an attractive alternative to the suspicion of news media discussed in chapter seven and foregrounds the importance of mutuality in friendship and activism.

Section One of this dissertation notes that the condition of diaspora can energize a religious community to engage in inter-ethnic friendship and refugee activism. Precisely because they identify as displaced, religious diasporas require self-awareness and reflection on their motivation for church-based activism. The dialectic of sameness and difference is a useful conceptual tool for balancing self-reflection with care for others. That same dialectic appears in chapter six as a prerequisite for the kind of dialogue across faiths and between diaspora scholarship and faiths proposed in chapter two—the kind of dialogue that can lead to a shared ethic of care and respect. Chapter seven returns to that dialectic, this time offering limited third-person refugee narratives as a way of creating

simultaneous intimacy and distance between readers and subjects. Many creative refugee narratives would offer this to church-based activists, but Maclear's and Thien's novels are particularly powerful.

Thien's novel is an excellent example of this delicate balance between the need for care and the need for space, the need to be known with the need for privacy. That balance subsists most clearly in the friendship of Janie and Hiroji. The two characters are colleagues and live alongside one another, breaking the solitude of each other's lives infrequently but deeply. They share the experience of having lost brothers in Phnom Penh. Thien uses the images of dissolution and fragmentation set over against the images of internal coherence and unity to explore the effect of a traumatic past on her main character. Janie and Hiroji have both become fragmented in the present because of their need to work through the past. Janie's memories of her brother's death and of her experiences in Cambodia overwhelm her, and she appears to be an unreliable spouse and a violent parent. Hiroji leaves work without giving notice to search for his brother.

At one point before their respective difficulties come to a head, Janie realizes that Hiroji's gift to her has been metaphors that help make sense of her experiences, particularly the experience of living in the present while being consumed by the past. Janie asks Hiroji, "'Why are you so kind to me?' Hiroji had looked at me with a gentleness that I will always remember. 'Because you're my friend, Janie. Because a friend can do no more'" (Thien 147). Notably, Hiroji does not say, "a friend can do no less." Instead, his statement points to the limits of care and the gift that non-invasive support can be for people who feel defined by their trauma. Yet that respect for another

person's privacy and process is balanced by the extreme lengths Janie goes to in order to find out whence Hiroji has disappeared. No pity is to be found in their relationship—only mutual respect and care.

Maclear's novel similarly explores the tension in displacement of wanting to be known yet needing to maintain distance. The tension is worked out in her main character, Naiko, and Naiko's relationships with her partner, Paolo, and with her colleague, Andrei. Her partner is present and committed, yet Naiko resists moving in with Paolo because she fears the kind of reorganization it would necessitate. At the same time she is fascinated by the intrigue surrounding Andrei's life—his escape from Romania, the death of his illicit lover, and his eventual disappearance from Canada. Maclear does not give the satisfaction to either Naiko or the reader of knowing what has happened to Andrei. Instead, she merely hints at possibilities of repatriation or intrigue and brings Naiko to a point of contentment with what is unknowable. Paolo never moves in, but Naiko finds a way to commit to the relationship without losing her carefully guarded sense of self. Distance and closeness, detachment and involvement are all a part of the care Maclear's characters embody, powerfully nuancing what hospitality to refugee-ed people looks like. Both Maclear's and Thien's novels give church-based activists a vision for gentle, respectful, and mutual hosting, avoiding the limited contemporary connotations of hospitality discussed in chapter four of this dissertation.

I was reminded of the power of creative narratives to push back the horizons of a reader's knowledge and imagination when I taught a short high school course on refugee narratives during the time I was writing this dissertation. I had the students play word

association with the word "refugee" during the first class and the result was a two-dimensional portrait of refugeeness that reflected the advertising of development organizations such as World Vision. Africa was the only geographical place mentioned. The adjectives they offered were uniformly negative: desperate, insecure, faceless, and scared. The kinds of refugees they knew of were boat people from Asia or refugees in African camps, and the causes of refugee migration all registered as foreign to the students: corrupt foreign governments, communism, war, and famine. At the end of our course, having studied a variety of refugee representations but with a focus on poetry, films, and short stories, the students played word association again. This time the words they associated with "refugee" were remarkably different. Students gave a representative sampling of places where people are becoming refugees today, and the listed causes of displacement recognized global culpability in developments such as colonialism and third world debt. Adjectives such as "fathers, mothers, children," "workers," "hopeful," "angry," and "strong" both normalized refugee life and recognized the agency of refugee-ed people. In this simple game of word association I was reminded that fiction and other kinds of creative narratives could powerfully shape and change a group of readers' collective knowledge about refugee-ed people.

Section Three demonstrates that discussions of creative narratives can be effective pedagogical experiences for church-based activists of religious diasporas in Canada, both for nuancing ongoing refugee activism and for producing empathy in a broader—and often skeptical—community. So the significance of fiction's potential to shape imagination is about more than knowledge. As postcolonial literary scholars have

unfolded, fiction is itself always influencing and changing culture, and fiction writers are political and social actors. Fiction is a part of culture (not defined as high culture but as negotiated community, along the same lines as Stuart Hall's conception of culture). Heike Härting and Smaro Kamboureli, in the Spring 2009 issue of *University of Toronto Quarterly* on peacekeeping, security, and Canada, see the "ethical turn" in the Humanities as an indication of the strong link between cultural production (for this thesis, writing literature) and public life (Härting 670). They point to two cultural functions of writing: "rewriting…mythologies…and producing an act of witnessing" (667). Refugee fiction's witness to contemporary experiences of refugee-ed people and its ability to rewrite mythologies surrounding refugee identity make it a powerful source of cultural renewal.

Creative narratives can also play a part in changing the way we perceive historical moments of displacement and therefore the way we respond to current displacement. Philip Marfleet makes a case for the rehistoricization of Refugee Studies in his 2007 article. For instance, the examination of history, he points out, shows us that the story of India's Partition has always been told via the official narratives of colonial and local authorities, when in fact the main characters were the millions of displaced people in India. For years Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* was the only place that one could find, "Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians, [bearing] witness to both the reality of sectarian tensions and to generations of mutual accommodation and interaction between and among families and neighbours; arrangements that were shattered by Partition" (Marfleet 144). The story of state violence and its human cost first found a

place to be told in fiction, and the specific story of India's Partition has now been told by myriad authors and filmmakers.

Literary studies and creative narratives are untapped resources for allying church-based activism more closely with the concerns of refugee-ed people in Canada. Church-based refugee activists, whether refugee-ed or citizen-ed, continue to fight compassion fatigue, a culture oversaturated with stories of suffering, cynicism, parochialism, and many others barriers. Reading refugee fiction—together and with care—can be a demonstrated commitment to remaining vulnerable to the stories of refugee-ed people. Not only that, but the process of reading and together interpreting these stories (and other stories as they are written) offers church-based refugee activists and their broader church communities the opportunity to grapple with questions of how best to ally with refugee-ed people, how to ethically structure their communal activism, which parts of their discourses need regeneration, where to speak and where to listen, and what their allegiance to the nation-state looks like in the face of state violence against refugee-ed people. Framed by literary discussion, these questions can slip out from under the cloud of suspicion that so dominates contemporary public discussion of refugees in Canada. Posed by a multiethnic religious diaspora, these questions can uncover cracks in Canada's identity as a nation and challenge the normative distinctions between citizen-ed and refugee-ed people. The question, "what can we do for refugees?" necessarily moves to include, "how are we evolving as a community?" One might even say that refugee-ed people who recently have become members of the CRC constitute the prophetic future of this religious diaspora and that creative refugee narratives bring that reality to the fore.

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