

## **Migration, Refugees and Conceptualizing Canadian Identity: The Syrian Refugee Crisis and the Discursivity of Canadian Politics**

### **Introduction**

*It is important for Canada to “pick [...] genuine refugees and to maintain all standards of security screening. This is a responsible approach [...]” – Stephen Harper (cpac, 2015a, 19:45–19:54)*

What began as small city protests in Syria in March of 2011 quickly escalated into a series of demonstrations by summer and culminated in a full-fledged revolution later that year. The ‘Syrian Revolution of Dignity’ sought to restore Syrians’ dignity in the face of state violence and corruption. However, revolutionaries were met with increasing brutality from the totalitarian regime. By 2012, the Revolution had transformed into civil war. In 2013, state violence intensified with the use of chemical weapons to attack suburbs and public infrastructure such as hospitals and schools (Tesch et al., 2011). Such ongoing violence in the country eventually led to a mass displacement of Syrians. Accordingly, in February 2015, the then United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHRC) António Guterres urged countries to establish more accessible and legal avenues for Syrians seeking refuge, stating that “international support is far from keeping pace with the magnitude of the needs” (UNHRC, 2015a).

While the vast majority of externally displaced Syrians sought refuge within the Middle East, amounting to roughly 5.5 million individuals (or nearly 80%), the crisis received substantial media attention in Europe and North America. In fact, the UNHRC even released a near-300-page report summarizing the press coverage of the crisis (UNHRC, 2015b). The arrival of refugees in Europe and North America became a highly politicized topic, taking centre stage in the Brexit campaign (CES, 2019) and fostering a turn towards populism in many Western countries (Bergmann, 2020, p. 142). Simply

put, the Syrian Refugee Crisis has been a prominent and contentious subject since 2015. Canada has not been immune to such polarization.

Between 2015 and 2017, over 40,000 Syrian refugees arrived in roughly 350 communities across Canada (Government of Canada, 2017a). This influx of refugees was most concentrated from November 2015 to February 2016, during which time roughly 26,000 Syrians resettled in the country (Government of Canada, 2017b). It is no wonder, then, that immigration was a key topic discussed by political leaders in the months leading up to the 2015 Canadian Election. This paper analyzes the discursive framing<sup>1</sup> of these refugees, specifically answering the question: “Which conceptions of national identity were reflected in the discussion of Syrian refugees by the Conservative Party, Liberal Party, and Bloc Quebecois throughout the 2015 electoral campaign period?”. This question stems from the contention that the discursive framing of refugees by political figures has important implications at the national and individual levels. To illustrate, a negative framing can lead to a reduced national willingness to welcome refugees, and increased difficulty for refugees to successfully integrate within the host country. Conversely, a positive framing can do the opposite: bolster national readiness to welcome refugees, and ease their integration (Bauder, 2011, p.55).

In this paper, I examine the overall political framing of Syrian refugees in order to provide a more comprehensive account of how the crisis was portrayed to the Canadian public. My analysis is based on political discourse, as it is a central act of politics; it

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<sup>1</sup> As per Moses and Knutsen (2019), “‘Discourse’ refers to specific patterns in the use of language – broadly conceived, it refers to regularities in a linguistic system – regularities that can tell us something about the speakers and their contexts” (pp. 215–216). Therefore, discourse analysis concerns both verbal and written language.

embodies the “doing of politics” (Kranert and Horan, 2018, p. 1). Political speech at the federal level is especially relevant to conceptions of national identity because “nationhood as a form of social identity is produced, transformed, maintained and dismantled through discourse” (Kranert and Horan, 2018, p. 37). In this way, as the aim of this research paper is to understand the relationship between refugees and national identity, a broader scope that pertains to all Syrian refugees (rather than female Syrian refugees, or ones of particular religious minority) is warranted. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the discursive framing of refugees may vary in terms of the different aspects of individual identities such as gender (see Freedman et al., 2017; and Hajdukowski-Ahmed et al., 2009), ethnicity (see Gray, H., and Franck, A., 2019), religion, social class, and education. While these specificities will not be individually examined in this paper, such factors do indeed permeate the political discourse presently analyzed. Further, it is important to acknowledge that my perspective as a Canadian-born citizen, particularly in terms of national identity, may be somewhat biased. However, I have attempted to counter any bias of this sort by adopting a rigorous methodology.

To answer my specific research question, I will employ political discourse analysis using a qualitative approach, paying close attention to the subtleties of language (see Gulmez, 2008, p. 891). While a quantitative approach to analyzing discourse could be adopted and would provide fruitful findings, a qualitative analysis supports my interpretative approach and enables me to better present the nuances in the various discursive framings that will be discussed. What is more, my intention is not simply to categorize the types of framings present within the discourse of Canadian political leaders but

rather to fully grasp the context within which they are produced and, more importantly, their broader implications for national identity. As such, I have adopted a constructivist approach throughout.

My analysis focuses on the Conservative Party, Liberal Party, and the Bloc Quebecois for a variety of reasons. First, the Conservative and Liberal parties are the two principal parties in Canada. Since the country's first federal election in 1867, either the Conservative or Liberal Party of Canada has obtained the majority (Canada Guide, n.d.). These two parties have generally represented a large part of Canadian voters, and accordingly, can provide valuable insights into national identity over time. Second, the Bloc Quebecois has been included because the party's perspective is rather unique. While it is a federal political party, its viewpoints are based on the Province of Quebec. Thus, it provides a distinct perspective on national identity, which is a central concept in this research paper. The country's two other prominent parties, the New Democratic Party (NDP) and Green Party, have not been included in this analysis because their discursive framings of Syrian refugees generally coincided with the Liberal Party's, and therefore, an analysis of these parties would have been somewhat redundant.

To continue, an election period is an opportune moment for understanding the significance of political parties and the discourses that they employ. As per Moscovici (1961/2008), social representations are systems of knowledge that allow individuals to comprehend the social world and position themselves within it. It is not only the existence of these systems of knowledge that matters, though. What matters too is how these systems are communicated, given that they "mediate social relations within and between groups" (Kadianaki and Andreouli, 2017, p. 836). Further, since national

identity is not static but changes over time, it is important to limit its study to a specific period (Ariely, 2011, p. 540). The Syrian refugee crisis, which took place between October 2015 and February 2018, is particularly useful in this regard. Skey contends that there is a “threshold of tolerance” for migrants by citizens of a host country (Skey, 2011, p. 77). However, given the volume of this crisis, it is possible or even likely that this threshold was surpassed. Briefly put, the 2015 Canadian election period is analytically rich for understanding the relationship between the discursive framing of refugees and national identity.

In Part One, I will provide the empirical and theoretical context needed before delving into the specificities of this paper. Here, I will briefly review Canada’s stance on migration over time to demonstrate that although the country has been portrayed as a welcoming, hospitable nation, its migration policies continue to maintain a racial hierarchy and uphold discriminatory practices. This section will serve as a backdrop against which discourse will be later analyzed. I shall then move to discuss some of the causes and consequences associated with the 2015 Syrian Refugee Crisis, including the details of how it manifested in Canada. Thereafter, I will define the concept of national identity that is utilized throughout this paper and the discursive frames through which I will analyze the politicians’ discourses. In Part Two, I will detail the discursive framing of refugees by the Conservative Party of Canada, the Liberal Party, and Bloc Quebecois as communicated during the 2015 electoral campaign. In Part 3, I will analyze which conceptions of national identity were reflected in each of these discourses. I argue that while the Conservative Party’s discourse was more demonstrative of nationalism, the Liberal Party and Bloc Quebecois’ framing were more

reflective of constructive patriotism. Part 4 will explore the potential positive and negative impacts of these framings on an international, national, and individual scale. While the focus of this research paper dates to 2015, understanding the significance of how refugees are framed in relation to the nation has become ever more important. The number of people seeking refuge is expected to rise substantially in years to come, and yet the international climate has become increasingly hostile, as exemplified by the rise in populism globally. This paper provides insight into how discourses on refugees relate to broader questions, such as national identity and statehood.

## **Part 1: Context**

This section is divided into two main parts. First, I will provide the empirical context that is required, including a brief history of Canada's migration policy, and an overview of the Syrian Refugee Crisis. Second, I will provide the theoretical and conceptual context surrounding national identity and frame analysis before delving into the body of this research paper.

### *A Brief History of Canada's Migration Policy*

Since the country's colonization in 1867, various migration systems have been established. Here, I shall provide a brief overview of these systems and their respective policies; accordingly, the following is not an exhaustive account of Canada's migration policies. The intention of this section is to demonstrate that while some efforts were made to render Canada's migration system more inclusive over time, it can be broadly characterized as upholding discriminatory practices towards various migrant groups (Dirks, 2006). Further, migration policies have been largely self-serving and based upon

national goals such as the desire to bolster the country's infrastructure and economy. Despite this, Canada prides itself on its reputation as a welcoming and friendly nation "that celebrates diversity" and multiculturalism, a sentiment frequently emphasized in political discourse (Muszynski and Gassim, 2014, pp. 39; 41). This section aims to shatter this myth by providing an account of how discriminatory practices have persisted, including during the 2015 Syrian Refugee Crisis.

Canada adopted its first Immigration Act in 1869. This act sought to implement an 'open-door' approach to immigration in the hopes of achieving large-scale entry that would surpass the rate of emigration (Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, n.d.a). However, the act did discriminate against those with disabilities: ship captains were penalized for every travelling immigrant listed as "lunatic, idiotic, deaf or dumb, blind or infirm" (ibid). The act also gave Canadian immigration agents the authority to send these individuals back to their port of departure. Therefore, the open-door policy of this time was not equally applied to all groups.

In 1885, the Government of Canada passed a bill through which restrictions towards Chinese immigrants were imposed such as an increased head tax. These restrictions later evolved into an independent policy in 1923 known as the Chinese Immigration Act (Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, n.d.b). In 1919, updates were made to the Immigration Act which made certain migrant groups ineligible to migrate to Canada including those who identified as Communists along with certain nationalities such as Austrians, Hungarians, and Turks (Dirks, 2006). In the late 1930s, Canada also applied these exclusionary policies to Jewish people aboard the MS St. Louis seeking refuge from Nazi Germany. The country denied entry to 1000 Jewish refugees, forcing them to

return to Germany (Yarhi, 2015). Restrictions of this sort continued in a more blatant fashion throughout the pre-World War II period. However, following the war, many of these restrictions eased, including that against Chinese migrants in 1947 (Dirks, 2006).

In 1967, Canada adopted a point system for the selection of immigrants, aiming towards a more standardized and 'objective' immigration system. The total number of immigrants admitted into the country every year would be predetermined and fixed.

Applicants were categorized per their family ties in the country: 'family class', 'assisted relative class' or 'independent and business class' (i.e., those who do or do not have immediate or extended family in Canada). The first class was based on kinship alone, and along with refugee status, was given top priority within the immigration system. The second and third classes were based on the number of points received with respect to age and level of education and training, among other factors. Notably, gender, religion, ethnicity, nationality, and 'race' were not officially factored into the point system, though they could have been indirectly accounted for under 'personal suitability'. Thus, the number of immigrants admitted to Canada from the second and third classes depended

on the total number of points they received (Green and Green, 1995, pp. 1007–9).

Figure 1 details the distribution of potential points for admission.

Figure 1: Canadian Immigration Point System (in accordance with the distribution of points in 1992)

**TABLE 1**  
**Point system, 1992**

Category	Potential points
Education	12
Special vocational preparation	15
Experience	8
Occupational demand	10
Arranged employment/designated occupation	10
Age	10
Knowledge of French or English	15
Personal suitability	10
Levels control	10
	<hr/> 100

**NOTES**  
70 points required to enter  
nominated applicants given 10 points credit

(Green and Green, 1995, p. 1010)

In 1969, the country officially became party to the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, nearly two decades after its creation. Under Canadian Prime Minister Pierre-Elliott Trudeau, Canada established a Multiculturalism Policy in 1971, followed by a Multiculturalism Act in 1988, which solidified the existing policy into a legal framework. This act sought to “protect the cultural heritage of all Canadians” while reducing discrimination through the implementation of multicultural initiatives for immigrants and refugees (ibid). Canada was the first country to pass an act that would legally establish multiculturalism. In this sense, the country was ahead of its time. In many ways, this legislative framework shaped Canadian national identity, giving the country its reputation as a welcoming and diverse nation (CBC Radio, 2019). Through political and

popular discourse, this reputation has been produced and reproduced countless times, leading to a 'positive imaginary' of the country's identity.

Following the events of 9/11, refugees came to be associated with criminality and terrorism by many national governments, including Canada (Ma, 2020). Resultingly, many efforts were made to 'securitize' the border and immigration policies and practices more broadly. Finally, in 2012, Bill C-31, Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act received royal assent (Parliament of Canada, 2012). While the act sought to improve the immigration and refugee process, it has been widely critiqued for the amendments it made to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, including the restrictions it imposed on refugees such as mandatory detention provisions and a more limited definition of who qualifies as a refugee (Ma, 2020).

To summarize, Canada's migration policies have upheld various discriminatory practices. While these policies have been less restrictive than many other countries, to this day, they are not entirely inclusive. For example, while Canada accepted some Indian immigrants (mostly English-speaking and well-educated) during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they "were not able to become Canadian citizens, and faced legal discrimination ([while] a person of British origin would have been granted Canadian citizenship)" (Davis, 2018, p. 84). Such has also proven to be the case for Africans applying to become Canadian immigrants. According to Creese and Wiebe (2012), Canada prioritizes the immigration of highly educated individuals (p. 56). They further state that "recent research at Statistics Canada now confirms a persistent and growing gap between immigrant and native-born incomes that is no longer projected to converge at all" (ibid). This converges with Davis' claim that Canada's immigration policy reflects

a racial hierarchy and demonstrates its continuity over time. Therefore, while Canadian migration policies shifted over the years to become more welcoming, broadly speaking, those who seek to immigrate or refuge to Canada are often faced with various forms of discrimination upon arrival in Canada, such as unequal access to opportunities.

### *The Syrian Refugee Crisis*

The causes of the 2011 Civil War in Syria, which was the precursor to the 2015 Syrian Refugee Crisis are multi-faceted and rooted in a lengthy history. While the war only began in 2011, its roots can be traced back to the colonial period, whereby the withdrawal of France from Syria as a colonial power in 1946 led to enduring political instability (Tesch et al., 2011). The war can also be located within the wider context of several pro-democracy uprisings throughout the Middle East denouncing authoritarian regimes, generally referred to as the 'Arab Springs'. Beyond the political conditions associated with the Syrian uprisings, there were environmental factors that contributed to the unrest within the country. More specifically, between 2006 and 2010, Syria had experienced its harshest drought in modern history (ibid). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully delve into the many contributing factors that led to this civil war and its wider geopolitical context, a general overview of it will be provided to better understand how the 2015 Syrian Refugee Crisis came to be.

In March of 2011, in the Southern city of Dara'a, a group of fifteen children between the ages of ten and fifteen were arrested for graffiti that denounced the state-led violence occurring throughout the country (UNHRC, 2021; Open Doors, n.d.). The graffiti read 'Freedom', and 'Down with the regime' (Tarabay, 2018). The state responded to the graffiti by detaining these children for more than a month and using torture tactics such

as breaking finger joints which sparked public outrage (ibid). This response and the broader political situation, along with the significant economic difficulties the city faced as a result of the droughts, led to a series of small protests within Dara'a. By July of 2011, the uprisings had gained momentum and escalated to country-wide protests against the regime for the poor political, social, and economic conditions. By the end of the summer, it was apparent that a social movement had begun and the 'Syrian Revolution of Dignity' was born.

The main goal of the movement was to restore the dignity of the Syrian people, which had been stripped away by the state and its leader. These pro-democracy peaceful protests were met with continued violence from the Syrian regime; however, as explained by Hinnebusch and Imady, this "[...] had the effect of inflaming, not dampening the protests" (ibid). This violence was accompanied by government killings, which were recorded and spread via social media. Syrians were outraged, and such crimes ultimately lead to the multiplication of uprisings that took place throughout the country (7). As the conflict persisted, sectarian divides became prominent and were mobilized by the regime. For instance, the Syrian government produced propaganda to incite fear amongst minority, non-Sunni communities, warning that they would be targeted by the majoritarian Sunni opposition (Tesch et al., 2011).

By 2012, the social movement had progressively given rise to opposition militias such as the Free Syrian Army thereby leading to a civil war. In 2013, the Syrian government was accused and found guilty by the international community of using chemical weapons to attack suburbs and public infrastructure such as hospitals and schools (Tesch et al., 2011). As divides became more prominent within the country, they also

became evident to the international community. In 2012 and 2013, the civil war in Syria had become a regional proxy war, as countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar began to fund and arm rebel groups (ibid). The United Nations Security Council put forth a draft resolution condemning the Assad regime and permitting an intervention (in accordance with the Responsibility to Protect), but China and Russia exercised their veto power and blocked the resolution. Similarly, interventions from the Arab League saw no success.

In this way, as the civil war endured, there was a large displacement of Syrians both within and outside of the country, totalling approximately 13 million individuals (Connor, 2018). Though this number of displaced peoples reached its peak in 2013, given that the conflict is ongoing, displacement has persisted. For example, the enduring violence between December 2019 and February 2020 in Idlib, a city in Northwestern Syria, led to the displacement of more than one million Syrians (UNHRC, 2021). Moreover, many Syrians have been displaced several times over as a result of the damage to infrastructure and neighbourhoods. The widespread humanitarian impacts and massive displacement of Syrians that resulted from this long-term civil and proxy war have come to be known as the 'Syrian Refugee Crisis'. It is worth noting, though, that the socio-economic and political crises in Syria began long before the 'crisis' of 2015, seeing as the civil war can be directly traced back to 2011. As such, the 'Syrian Refugee Crisis' more accurately denotes the discursive crisis created through the mass mediatization and politicization of the state of Syria and its people (Triandafyllidou, 2018, p. 210).

*National Identity and Immigration*

Here, I will briefly lay out the concept of identity and then that of national identity. In doing so, I will highlight how these concepts relate to questions of migration. More specifically, this section demonstrates the interconnectedness of national identity and discourse insofar as variants of national identity can be instrumentalized to form specific reactions towards migrants.

As stated by William E. Connolly, identities are inherently based on socially recognizable differences; moreover, he claims that “Identity *requires* difference in order to be [...]” (Connolly, 2002, p. xiv; italics added). This claim has been echoed many times by various scholars (see Campbell, 1998; De Buitrago, 2018). In this sense, identity has an important relationship with the ‘other’; and this simple fact is “enough to produce the understanding of a threat” (Campbell, 1998, p. 350). Further, this articulation of this threat through political discourse is the state’s “condition of possibility”, meaning that it is a central act in producing and maintaining statehood (p.353). Thus, there is an important relationship between the communication of threats and the existence of a collective national identity.

What is more, there exists an important identity-emotion nexus. As stated by De Buitrago (2018), “emotions are closely linked with identity formation and expression, social processes, (political) decision-making and the shaping of self-other relations” (p. 305). Therefore, the discursive production of values that constitute a state’s morality is a significant component of national identity.

Seeing as though there are many constituting components of national identity, it follows that the latter is not unidimensional. In his article *Nationalism, patriotism and aggression: A clarification of functional differences* (1994), Seymour Feshbach was one

of the pioneering scholars to argue that national identity is exhibited through two main forms: nationalism and constructive patriotism. This dualistic conception of national identity is supported by many other academics (see Blank and Schmidt, 2003; and de Figueiredo and Elkins, 2003). Stated succinctly, nationalism is the sense that one's nation is superior to other nations; conversely, constructive patriotism is the sense of loyalty felt towards a country, without sentiments of superiority (Ariely, 2011, p.541).

That said, many other authors have since identified other forms of national identity, demonstrating that national identity is multidimensional. For example, scholars have recognized sub-classifications of patriotism such as pseudo-, militaristic- and civic-patriotism (see Davidov, 2011). Nationalism is also said to have taken new forms over time; for example, Eirikur Bergmann has stated that the rise of populism is attributable to a form of neo-nationalism that is nativist (Bergmann, 2020). Given that nationalism and constructive patriotism serve as overarching categories and emphasize the role of social (d)evaluation in conceptions of national identity, I have chosen to focus exclusively on these two main variants.

In his article, Gal Ariely has analyzed national identity in relation to immigration (Ariely, 2011). Ariely states that the two forms of national identity leads to mixed responses towards migrants: "[...] constructive patriotism and nationalism are not only two distinct elements of national identity; they also have dissimilar impacts on out-group devaluation" (ibid). In other words, these forms distinctly influence our perception of 'others'. Nationalist responses are quite defensive towards migrants and reflect an out-group devaluation, as 'others' are perceived as a threat. In contrast, constructive patriotism, which relies on the value-laden communication of statehood, entails positive

conceptions of one's nation without equating that to the inferiority of others. Further, constructive patriotism is often found to be negatively correlated with out-group devaluation (Ariely, 2011, p.541). In this way, these variants of national identity are crucial to the perception of migrants within a country. It is important to bear in mind that these types of reactions are somewhat dependent upon the national context. In other words, countries that have strong "ethnic conceptions of nationhood" are less receptive to migrants, while multicultural ones (like Canada) are more so (ibid). Ariely also claims that these perceptions of immigration can be identified through political discourse because "the relations between national identification and out-group devaluation are related to the social representation of the nation" (ibid).

In sum, the relationship between migration and national identity is complex; several factors collectively shape this relationship, including a country's level of multiculturalism, economic conditions, the number of migrants, and how they are socially represented (542). As previously stated, national identity has an important relationship with the communication of shared values and the existence of outside threats (which may be perceived or real). It is thus relevant to analyze how political leaders frame immigration. In what follows, I shall employ the conceptions of national identity identified in this section to further analyse this relationship.

### *Discursive Framings*

As the purpose of this paper is to analyze political discourse, doing so first requires establishing the different types of discursive framings. Several academics have developed frames through which the discourse on the Syrian Refugee Crisis can be understood. For instance, Rebecca Wallace has examined the media coverage of the

Syrian Refugee Crisis in Canada in 2015 and presents six thematic themes in which to categorize these discourses (conflict, citizenship, family, services, human rights, and religion) (Wallace, 2018, pp. 215–6). Similarly, many academics have developed frames to understand the political discourse on this topic, which has come to be referred to as frame analysis. This methodological tool will be employed here to examine the parties' discourse on the 2015 Syrian Refugee Crisis in Canada. Frame analysis enables me to determine divergences, similarities, and shifts in discourses (Verloo, 2016, p. 19). Further, it evidences the processes of exclusion that result from dominant frames (ibid). However, there are limits associated with this methodology. For instance, the following does not provide a comprehensive or exhaustive summary of the political discourses throughout the campaign period. Moreover, my choice to select certain frames influences how such discourses are understood and represented herein. Despite this, as will be explained in the paragraphs that follow, the frames I have chosen provide insight specifically on the relationship between refugees and national identity, and thus, most directly respond to the research question at hand.

This section is based upon Anna Triandafyllidou's meta-analysis of the mediatization and politicization of the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Europe, where she argues that there are three main types of frames employed in discourses on Syrian refugees: threat, morality, and rationality. Expanding on this idea and inserting the works of other authors into this debate, I analyze three similar types of discursive framings. These types of framings have different focal points, and accordingly, varying impacts. The first framing revolves around security considerations, including the ideas of risk management and mitigating threats. The second revolves around morality, whereby the plea to welcome

refugees is based on moral duty and human rights. However, this framing can slip into being centred on pity, whereby refugees are merely portrayed through their victimhood. The third and final type of discursive framing is that of rationality. This type of framing involves self-interested discourse, whereby refugees are only represented through their utility for the nation. In the paragraphs that follow, these types of discourses will be further explained.

Several works have been dedicated to detailing how migrants are securitized<sup>2</sup> through politics. For instance, various scholars have delved into how immigrants and refugees arriving via the Mediterranean Sea in Europe were securitized through government policy, allowing governments to create an imaginary delineation between 'deserving' and 'underserving' migrants (see Basaran, 2015; and Mavelli, 2017). More pertinent to this inquiry, though, are the works that have delved into how vulnerable peoples, including refugees, are securitized through political discourse. As per these many works, migrants can be securitized through various means. For example, Gulmez, Abbas, Holmes, and Castañeda discuss the conflation of Syrian refugees with suspects of terrorism. Abbas argues that this contributes to a racialized biopolitics (Abbas, 2019, p. 2450). Claudia Aradau has also demonstrated how "dangerousness becomes 'a quality immanent to a subject'" through these convergences, thereby linking refugees to risk in our collective imaginaries (Aradau, 2004, p. 267). Further, Holmes and Castañeda detail how migrants are securitized through the tropes that are employed in reference to them. More specifically, they discuss the use of water metaphors such as

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<sup>2</sup> Securitization occurs when people or groups of people are "integrated within a continuum of danger" (Aradau, 2004, p. 252). This securitization relies upon the widespread perception that the 'dangerous' subject indeed presents an existential threat, to the point that this perception becomes a social consensus (Skidmore, 1999, p. 1010).

'flood', 'tide', and 'flow' to portray migrants as threats and embody the fear that welcoming 'too many' refugees could lead to the country being "overwhelmed' or 'inundated,' and 'drown'[ed] as a consequence" (Holmes and Castañeda, 2016, p. 18). Triandafyllidou associates the use of these metaphors to convey the idea that "asylum-seeker flows are like a natural disaster", they are sudden, erratic, and difficult to manage (Triandafyllidou, 2018, p. 212). To put it briefly, a securitized framing presents refugees as a potential looming security threat to the nation. This kind of framing has a variety of negative impacts, such as the devaluation of refugees and the rise of xenophobic attitudes among 'in-groups' (Holmes and Castañeda, 2016; Gulmez, 2019). Therefore, this framing calls for the governing, screening, and controlling of these peoples as a means for mitigating the discursively manufactured 'risk' they represent.

The second discursive framing explored herein is centred on morality; it calls for the welcoming of refugees into the nation based on a moral responsibility (Triandafyllidou, 2018, p. 211). This framing employs national values and human rights in discussions of refugees. The discourses that employ this frame can encourage empathy, and accordingly, can also "foster new commonalities in the face of diversity" (Aradau, 2004, p. 256). In this sense, outcomes can be positive. However, discourses centred on morality can easily slide into the territory of a "politics of pity" (Aradau, 2004), whereby emotions are used as a means for altering personal and collective imaginaries (Schlag, 2018, p. 210). Such can occur when "asylum seekers are personified only to present their tragic plight" (Triandafyllidou, 2018, p. 2.11). In other words, their humanity (and relatedly, their human rights) becomes contingent on their suffering. This politics involves tropes of victimhood and therefore has the effect of divorcing individuals from

their agency. While pity has been more closely examined as a tool that is employed through visual modes of communication, such as through the image of Aylan Kurdi, a young Syrian boy who had been found deceased on the beach (Schlag, 2018, p. 216; Molnar, 2016), emotions, including pity, are powerfully communicated through discourse as well. This framing may also lead to the normalization and de-politicization of human suffering (Schlag, 2018, p. 224).

It is important to note that discourses centred around pity cannot coincide with security-centred ones for the same group of individuals, as the former “cannot work for those who are deemed responsible for the ills that have befallen them or those who are considered dangerous to the community” (Aradau, 2004, p. 258). Therefore, this necessitates the separation of refugees who are considered victims of the injustices they are fleeing from those who are perceived as culpable of contributing to those injustices. This distinction is critical, as it demonstrates how refugees as ‘others’ may not only be hierarchized in relation to ‘insiders’, but also internally hierarchized as deserving and undeserving.

In addition to the frames discussed above, there is a third type of discourse based on rationality that is relevant to this research paper. This type of framing attempts to employ a ‘neutral’ stance; as explained by Triandafyllidou, it distances itself from emotional claims surrounding human rights while simultaneously avoiding the adoption of a security framing (Triandafyllidou, 2018, p. 213). Frames of rationality are pragmatic and emphasize the utility of refugees in serving the host nation and its goals. This framing includes, for instance, the insistence on the economic benefits of welcoming refugees and how they might serve to improve the nation’s reputation. In other words,

those who adopt this type of discourse do not rationalize the welcoming of refugees based on morality or solidarity, but rather through the expected and calculated benefits.

To summarize, there are three types of discursive frames: the first is centred on security, the second on morality, and the third on rationality. In what follows, these frames will be employed to analyze the political statements made by the leaders of the Conservative Party, Liberal Party, and Bloc Quebecois during the 2015 electoral campaign period.

## **Part 2: The Parties' Discourses on the Syrian Refugee Crisis**

While the Canadian political discourse on the topic of Syrian refugees may appear to be positive, this section scrutinizes the subtleties of these discourses to uncover the underlying messages they may carry.

In what follows, I will discuss the parties' overall framing of the 2015 Syrian Refugee Crisis in Canada. To proceed with this analysis, I will predominantly rely on the campaign platforms developed by each party and their statements during the 2015 debates aimed at a pan-Canadian audience, those being the Munk Debate, the Globe and Mail Leaders' Debate, and Consortium general debate. This section will not fully delve into the specificities of the parties' strategies for welcoming Syrian refugees but instead probes how the topic was framed through their discourse. As Michel Foucault warns, there are "discursive limits to what can be said [...] in a given society" (Moses and Knutsen, 2019, p. 214). As such, it is to be expected that a nation such as Canada which prides itself on its reputation would not have *blatantly* negative discourse surrounding the topic of refugees. However, this does not discredit the fact that these

seemingly positive messages can have significant impacts and therefore merit further analysis.

### *The Conservative Party's Stance on the Syrian Refugee Crisis*

Stephen Harper was elected Prime Minister of Canada in 2006 and remained in this position until 2015. Because the Syrian Refugee Crisis began as a civil war in 2011, Harper's last four years as Prime Minister coincided with this crisis. While his tenure as Prime Minister between 2011 and 2014 falls beyond the scope of this paper, as the leaders of the Liberal Party and Bloc Quebecois frequently discussed the handling of the Refugee Crisis by the Harper government, some important facts will be briefly mentioned to serve as context. In 2012, the Conservative Party stated that the government would not resettle refugees unless referred by the United Nations (UN), nor would it allow for private sponsorships to take place unless the refugees were granted official status by the UN (this was later overturned) (Wallace, 2018, p. 219). In 2013, the UN formally requested states to open their borders to refugees; in response, Harper committed to bringing in 1,300 refugees by 2014 (ibid). However, the government failed to deliver on this promise. As of July 2015, the Conservative government had brought in only roughly 1,002 Syrian refugees (The Canadian Press, 2015a).

For the 2015 Canadian Election, the Conservative Party developed the "Conservative Plan to Protect the Economy". Within this plan, the topic of Syrian Refugees was addressed in a subsection entitled "Protecting persecuted minorities around the world" (Conservative Party of Canada, 2015, p. 8). More importantly, this topic was addressed under a larger, overarching section entitled "Our Conservative Plan for a More Secure Canada", wherein various other security-centred topics were discussed such as "The

fight against ISIS” and “Strengthening our military assets and institutions” (ibid). I demonstrate throughout this section that during the 2015 campaign period, Harper predominantly employed a frame of security whereby refugees were frequently discussed in terms of the potential threats they presented. However, following the mass mediatization of the picture of Aylan Kurdi, Harper began to employ frames of pity in his discourse on Syrian refugees.

To begin, the Conservative Party’s plan states that there has been “an immense toll on innocent civilians, creating a refugee crisis of historic proportions” (p. 84). As such, they pledge to “resettle 10,000 Syrian refugees by September 2016” (ibid). Therein, Syria(n) is mentioned nine times. Of those, seven instances frame Syria(ns) through security concerns such as the discussion of them in union with “the ISIS reign of terror” (p. 84). For example, the plan states that “The so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria – or ISIS – is the greatest threat to Canadian security today” (p. 81).

Throughout the 2015 campaign period, there were several other reported instances of the Conservative Party making “unsubstantiated links” between Syrian refugees and terrorism (Molnar, 2017). Further, many of the statements and actions of the Conservative government insinuated that terrorists were among Syrian refugees. For instance, in October of 2015, “the Conservative government audited claims of 1,300 refugees already vetted by the UNHCR on the grounds of suspicions of terrorism” (Molnar, 2016, p. 70). This implied that Canada ought to be suspect of Syrian refugees given the terrorists present within Syria. Bauder stipulates that this act of discursively linking immigration to terrorism is a trend that has persisted in Canada since 9/11 (Bauder, 2011: 53).

Further, during the Globe and Mail's Leaders' Debate in 2015, Harper defended his goal of accepting 10,000 Syrian refugees, contrasting it with the Liberal Party's plan of "throwing open our borders and literally hundreds of thousands of people coming without any kind of security check or documentation", which, he characterized "as an enormous mistake" (The Globe and Mail, 2015: 55:12–55:21). Harper further stated that to accept more than the number of refugees proposed by his campaign would be "reckless" (56:45). In response to this statement, Thomas Mulcair, then leader of the NDP, stated that Harper was attempting to incite and exploit fear amongst Canadians (cpac, 2015b, 55:03–55:43). Similarly, the previous Chief of Defence Staff for the Canadian Armed Forces stated that Stephen Harper had been using security concerns as a pretext for inaction (Radio-Canada, 2015, 1:42:55 – 1:43:21). However, Harper doubled down on his stance during a campaign stop in Windsor, Ontario, by stating that "They [the Liberals and the New Democrats] would have acted in ways that were reckless and irresponsible. We have been generous and we have been responsible" (Campion-Smith, 2015). In fact, "generous but responsible" became a slogan-like phrase in the Conservative party's messaging of their strategy for welcoming Syrian refugees into Canada. This statement presents the responsibility towards refugees, 'outsiders' (i.e., moral responsibility), as antonymous with the responsibility of the state towards its 'insiders'.

These security-centred statements do not blatantly construct Syrian refugees in negative terms. However, as per Hynie, "negative discourses also construct refugee migration in dehumanizing ways by representing refugees as an uncontrolled and deindividuated mass" (Hynie, 2017, p. 3). This was frequently done during Harper's

discourse on Syrian refugees. For instance, he stated that “[...] it is not the time to simply open the doors as it were. It is not responsible. We must maintain our selection system of priority and ensure our security” (CBC News, 2015, 1:44:08–1:44:22). This statement emphasizes the need to exercise caution when ‘opening our doors’ to avoid the inundation of refugees into the country. In this way, Mulcair’s response to Harper during the 2015 Globe and Mail’s Leaders’ Debate is warranted: the latter was indeed portraying Syrians as an uncontrolled mass with the potential to threaten Canadian security.

While securitized framings were present in the vast majority of Harper’s discourse on Syrian refugees, there were also instances when he employed a frame of morality and pity, particularly following the mass mediatization of the photograph of Aylan Kurdi. As previously mentioned, Aylan Kurdi was a young Syrian boy whose photograph was taken as he laid deceased on a beach near Turkey; Aylan’s mother and brother also died on their journey to Europe. The young boy (and his family) became a powerful image of the humanitarian toll the crisis entailed. For the Conservative government, this picture represented a great failure, as the Kurdi family had previously applied for asylum in Canada but their claim was denied (thus, they sought refuge in Europe by sea) (Murphy, 2015). Images featuring individual refugees (rather than groups of refugees) “are particularly powerful because of their explicit emotional appeal [...] [and] may more readily evoke sympathy” (Bleiker et al., 2013, p. 406). This argument has been substantiated through research which has found that “people are simply less able to empathize with the latter [groups] than the former [individuals]” (Murphy, 2019, p. 108).

Therefore, it is unsurprising that the mass mediatization of this image led to a significant change in the discursive framing of Syrian refugees by Harper.

On September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015, during a campaign stop in British Columbia, Harper addressed the picture. He articulated how it made him and his wife reminisce about their own son when he was that age, thereby emphasizing the Kurdi family's humanity and forging direct relations between 'us' and 'them'. He further stated that although Aylan's death was a tragedy, "it [the situation in Syria] is far, far worse than that" (Rebel News, 2015, 1:20–1:25). Statements of this sort reflect the use of a frame of morality through which shared humanity is emphasized. However, these statements also reflect a frame of pity, whereby suffering is hierarchized and one's humanity is contingent upon tragedy.

To continue, during the Munk Debate on foreign policy, Harper claimed that it was important to "pick [...] genuine refugees and to maintain all standards of security screening" (cpac, 2015a, 19:45–19:54). This idea of cherry-picking between worthy and unworthy refugees was echoed by the Conservative Party throughout the 2015 electoral campaign, emphasizing that they would prioritize Syrians of religious and ethnic minorities given that "it is the ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq and Syria who are, in fact, targeted for extermination by the armed group Islamic State and their allies" (The Canadian Press, 2015b). Yet, the discrimination of refugees based on race, religion, or country of origin is prohibited under Article 3 of the Refugee Convention (OHCHR, 1954).

Harper also stated that Canada would select the most "vulnerable" refugees (CBC News, 2015, 1:40:00). Chris Alexander (the then Minister of Immigration, Refugee, and Citizenship Canada and Conservative representative for Ajax – Pickering, Ontario in the

House of Commons) stated that “these people deserve our protection” (ibid). This inadvertently implies that there are certain groups of refugees who are more deserving of protection than others, even though they are all fleeing from the same atrocities. Through the discursive distinguishment between deserving and underserving refugees, Harper contributed to a ‘politics of pity’, wherein “suffering must be seen as underserved, since pity cannot be experienced towards the culpable and the dangerous” (Aradau, 2004, pp. 258–9). Thus, two distinct groups exist within his discourse: the dangerous and unworthy refugees and the pitiful, worthy ones.

To summarize, the Conservative Party under the leadership of Stephen Harper securitized Syrian refugees by linking them with terrorism. He insinuated that refugees could flood the country, and therefore, a responsible approach was required in order to ensure Canada’s security. Beyond securitizing refugees, Harper simultaneously employed a pitiful framing in his discourse. In doing so, the leader implicitly distinguished between deserving refugees (such as religious and ethnic minorities) and underserving refugees (such as men). In this sense, the discourse presented by Harper on Syrian Refugees was very polarizing (or “schizophrenic”, to borrow Claudia Aradau’s term) as refugees were portrayed either as threats or threatened (Aradau, 2004, p. 251). What is more, his discourse either focused on Canadian security or refugee insecurity, implying that these were mutually exclusive. This polarizing framing impacts the collective understanding of Syrian refugees and affects their ability to integrate within the country.

*The Liberal Party’s Stance on the Syrian Refugee Crisis*

In 2015 (and again in 2019), Justin Trudeau was elected leader of the Liberal Party. In the party's 2015 campaign platform entitled "Real Change: A New Plan for a Strong Middle Class", the question of immigration and refugees was discussed under the section on "Security and Opportunity"<sup>3</sup>. The names of this section and the main subsection in which Syrian refugees are discussed, "A More Compassionate Canada", are important to highlight as they provide insight into how refugees are predominantly framed within this plan. Herein, I shall demonstrate that throughout the 2015 campaign period, Trudeau employed a frame of rationality, whereby the welcoming of refugees was centred on the desire to improve Canada's reputation abroad and reap the economic opportunity they represented for the country. However, some instances also reflected the use of morality as a frame through which Syrian refugees were discussed.

The plan mentions 'Syria' seven times, each time within the context of the Syrian Refugee Crisis (the Islamic State or ISIS is not mentioned a single time). The Liberal Party's stance on accepting refugees is clear: their goal is to "welcome more refugees from Syria to Canada" by "expand[ing] Canada's intake of refugees from Syria by 25,000 through immediate government sponsorship" (Liberal Party of Canada, 2015, p. 64). It is worth noting how these goals are framed; for example, the plan states that "We will restore Canada's reputation and help more people in need through a program that is safe, secure, and humane" (65). Similarly, during the 2015 Consortium debate, Trudeau stated that "Canada has always been very engaged in the world. We have lost a lot of

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<sup>3</sup> Though the name of this section could hint at a securitized framing of refugees, this is not the case. Security centred statements are entirely absent from the section on Syrian refugees. They are solely present in the section entitled "Renewing Canada's place in the world and strengthening our security". Nonetheless, the coupling of these themes under a section is noteworthy.

our reputation with Mister Harper. We have to come back in the middle of that noble cause [...]” (CBC News, 2015, 1:35:35–1:35:46). Through this statement, Trudeau recalls Canada’s ‘preferred memory’ and presents Syrian refugees as an opportunity to be seized to restore the country’s reputation.

Further, Trudeau stated that their plan to bring in more than double the number of refugees than promised by Harper was merely a matter of “political will” (Hynie, 2017: 4). Therefore, despite the significant increase in the number of refugees promised to be admitted into the country, Trudeau did not consider this to be a potential threat to the nation’s security. Instead, during the debate hosted by the Globe and Mail in 2015, Trudeau echoed his aforementioned stance, insisting that refugees and immigrants are intimately related to the economy. While the UN distinguishes between economic migrants and refugees (see OHCHR, 1954), these two groups are presented as one in Trudeau’s discourse. For example, during the segment dedicated to the Syrian Refugee Crisis, Trudeau stated, “I think Canada has long known that immigration is essential to our growth” (The Globe and Mail, 2015, 50:08). Likewise, during the Consortium debate, the leader stated that Canada is a country that has benefited tremendously from immigration (Radio-Canada, 2015, 1:49:48–1:49:55). The convergence of these two distinct migrant groups has important consequences, which will be elaborated on later.

However, Trudeau was adamant about the fact that refugees are not “just workers” (The Globe and Mail, 2015, 50:48), but rather essential to creating “strong communities” (50:41). This statement was reiterated during the 2015 Munk Debate, in which Trudeau stated that “it is incumbent upon us to help these people, to help them resettle in Canada, to grow our economy, [and] to help our communities flourish” (cpac, 2015a,

20:50–21:04). Similarly, in their campaign platform, the Liberal Party stated that “Our communities are strengthened when we come together to help those in need” (Liberal Party of Canada, 2015, p. 68). As such, the leader of the Liberal Party framed refugees as desirable and integral to the Canadian economy and society at large.

Trudeau was not the first Canadian politician to frame refugees as economic opportunities. In fact, such framing reflects a broader trend of the 1990s where the emphasis was placed on the economic worth of migrants (Bauder, 2011, p. 54). While this kind of framing undercuts “anti-immigrant voices [...] [that] depicted immigrants as competitors in a zero-sum competition for economic resources” (ibid), perceiving refugees as merely economically beneficial can also be problematic. The Liberal Party’s framing of Syrian refugees as vital to the Canadian economy reflects “the desire to ensure the present and future economic prosperity of the country” (Cros, 2018, p.771). In this sense, it is self-interested and “ruthlessly rational” (p. 768).

While Trudeau predominantly employed frames of rationality in his discourse on Syrian refugees, there were also various instances during which frames of morality were present. For instance, in the Liberal Party’s campaign platform, it is stated that “Canadians have been deeply moved by the suffering of refugees in Syria [...]” (Liberal Party of Canada, 2015, p. 64). Accordingly, it says that “We have a responsibility to expand our refugee targets and give more victims of war a safe haven in Canada” (ibid). In these statements, refugees are framed through their suffering and victimhood, demonstrating the presence of pity in his discourse. Further, the argument in favour of welcoming more refugees is made manifest in an emotional appeal to what a “Canadian response” would be (ibid).

In short, Trudeau employed frames of rationality and morality in his discourse on Syrian refugees in 2015. Syrians were presented as a means for enhancing Canada's economy, communities, and international reputation. However, the argument for welcoming more refugees was not solely based on these forecasted benefits, but also a sense of responsibility towards Syrians as victims of a humanitarian crisis.

### *The Bloc Quebecois' Stance on the Syrian Refugee Crisis*

It is important to note first that while the Bloc Quebecois is a party at the federal level, its views are predominantly based on the Province of Quebec. This is reflected in their discourse, as presented in the paragraphs that follow.

Gilles Duceppe was elected leader of the Bloc Quebecois in the 2015 elections. The campaign platform put forth by this party was much shorter than that of the aforementioned parties (totalling 24 pages, whereas the Conservative's platform was 159 pages long, and the Liberal's 88). In it, there is no mention of immigration, migration, refugees, or Syria. That said, the Bloc Quebecois did communicate its stance on these topics during the federal election debates in which they participated.

Throughout this section, I shall demonstrate that much like the Liberal Party of Canada, the Bloc Quebecois primarily adopted a frame of rationality and morality, which at times shifted into frames of pity.

While the Bloc Quebecois was critical of the Conservative Party's handling of the refugee crisis, the former reiterated the same goal of welcoming 10,000 refugees into the country (Bloc Quebecois, 2015). However, during the 2015 campaign period, Duceppe argued that Canada ought to improve its response to the refugee crisis by

accepting more refugees and doing so at a much higher pace. He justified this stance by arguing that the Canadian and Quebecois image had been negatively impacted as a result of the current government's response to the crisis (Oliver, 2015). Duceppe frequently spoke of Canada's success in welcoming Kosovan refugees during the late 90s and believed that the country should adopt a similar approach for Syrian refugees in order to replicate that success and the image of Canada that accompanied it (CBC News, 2015, 1:45:00). Through this discourse, Duceppe employed a frame of rationality whereby Syrians were portrayed as a means for achieving a desired end, that being the improvement of Canada's (and Quebec's) image and reputation abroad.

In addition, Duceppe's use of rationality was also evident in his discourse on how the welcoming of these refugees should be managed. In these statements, Duceppe adopted a neutral stance distanced from claims of morality or security. For instance, during the TVA's head-to-head debate, he said: "[...] we shouldn't make it a partisan issue. We should bring people of all parties, work in concert with civil society. I spoke about the red cross, working with the provinces and municipalities, that's what we have to do" (CBC News, 2015, 1:48:53–1:49:08). In this passage, Duceppe clearly attempts to depoliticize the Syrian Refugee Crisis and adopts an impartial stance. Further, his emphasis on the governance of the crisis through the coordination of the federal government's efforts with other involved stakeholders (such as the provinces and municipalities) also reflects the use of a rationalized framing.

To continue, Duceppe also adopted frames of morality in his discourse on Syrian refugees. For instance, during the Consortium debate hosted by Radio-Canada, he stated on multiple occasions that Canada had a duty to intervene as there were crimes

against humanity occurring in Syria (CBC News, 2015, 1:48:50). Similarly, in a statement released by the party, Duceppe expressed that opening the doors of the country to refugees is a “moral responsibility” [devoir humanitaire] (Bloc Quebecois, 2015). However, this morality framing morphed into a pity-centred discourse, as Duceppe stated that “the main victims of the Islamic State and the Islamic army are Muslims, women, and young girls [...]” (CBC News, 2015, 1:36:24–1:36:30). Variations of this statement were repeated throughout this debate (see CBC News, 2015, 1:49:06–1:49:11). This sentiment exhibits the use of a frame of pity, as Syrians are portrayed solely through their victimhood. Further, it demonstrates the necessary distinction between those who are deemed responsible for the crisis and those who are victims of it, as explained by Claudia Aradau (Aradau, 2004, p. 258). In this way, in Duceppe’s statement, Muslims, women, and young girls are treated as a separate group whose suffering is prioritized over that of non-Muslims, men, and young boys. The latter is especially important to consider, as young boys are no better equipped than young girls to cope with a crisis of this sort.

Thus, during the 2015 campaign period, Duceppe employed frames of rationality through which refugees were seen as a means for improving Canada’s reputation on the world stage. This frame was also noticeable through his discourse on the management of the crisis. Further, the leader too adopted frames of morality, though this manifested in the form of pity in some instances.

### *Comparative Analysis of the Parties’ Discursive Framings*

Overall, there were various frames used in the discourses on Syrian refugees by the three aforementioned political leaders. Harper primarily adopted a securitized framing,

wherein refugees were frequently linked to terrorism and other concepts evoking insecurity. Yet, he simultaneously adopted a frame of pity for certain refugees, who he portrayed solely through their victimhood. Both Trudeau and Duceppe, however, employed a frame of rationality, emphasizing the utility of refugees. While Trudeau and Duceppe mentioned security considerations in their discourses on Syrian refugees, this was not a focal point of their discourse. For example, during TVA's head-to-head debate, Trudeau dismissed the host's question which converged Syrian refugees and terrorists,<sup>4</sup> stating instead that "[...] we have always looked after security concerns. We must do more. Canadians want us to do more" (cpac, 2015b, 54:15–54:20). All three leaders employed frames of morality in their discourses with varying degrees of frequency through which refugees were often portrayed in a pitiful manner. How this relates to national identity, and the specific impacts this entails will be further explored in Part 4.

To summarize, while the parties were rather diplomatic in their discourse on refugees, this section has demonstrated that these discourses contained important subliminal messages.

### **Part 3: How Discourse on Refugees Relates to National Identity**

Drawing on the information presented in the preceding section, I will now demonstrate which conceptions of national identity are reflected in these discourses on refugees. To

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<sup>4</sup> The host posed the question: "Do you think that terrorists are going to take advantage of an open-door approach to enter Canada?" (cpac, 2015b, 52:04-52:08).

do so, I will rely predominantly on Ariely's conception that there are two main variants of national identity: nationalism and constructive patriotism.

As was previously argued, "national identity, like any type of social identity, requires a comparison between or among social groups" (Ariely, 2011, p. 542). In other words, national identity is a form of social identity that is inherently defined through its relationship with others. Therefore, it is foreseeable that any variant of nationality would emphasize a certain degree of difference between those belonging to the ingroup ('us') versus those belonging to the outgroup ('them'). The main difference between nationalism and constructive patriotism, then, is the way in which outgroups are evaluated: "nationalism is inherently related to out-group devaluation, whereas patriotism is positively related to one's own national group but does not necessarily lead to out-group devaluation" (p. 541). Therefore, in order to claim that the political parties' discourses reflected conceptions of either nationalism or constructive patriotism, one must determine whether there existed some form of outgroup devaluation in their portrayals of Syrian refugees in relation to Canadians.

Security-centred discourses demonstrate national identity's inherent relationship with the communication of perceived or real threats (Campbell, 1998, p. 353). In this sense, discourses of danger relate specifically to nationalism, whereby security threats must be externalized as a condition of the state's existence. In other words, these discourses do not merely require the recognition of difference (which would be present in any form of national identity, be it nationalism or constructive patriotism). They necessitate the derogation of the other because they are contingent upon the existence of a perpetually looming outside threat.

As I have demonstrated, the Conservative Party led by Stephen Harper consistently constructed refugees as potential sources of insecurity. Harper thus emphasized the need to screen applicants and limit the overall number of refugees allowed entry into Canada. Madeline-Sophie Abbas advances the argument that “the convergence of the “Muslim refugee” and the “terror suspect” as threatening mobilizes a racialized biopolitics present in intersecting counter-terrorism and asylum regimes that prioritise security concerns above human rights” (Abbas, 2019, p. 2450). In other words, prioritizing security concerns rather than the human rights of refugees is demonstrative of a racialized perception of Syrian refugees, whose security is portrayed as less important than that of Canadians. Finally, it has been well demonstrated that racialized perceptions and ideologies can be perpetuated without using apparent racist language. Several scholars have commented on this, arguing that state-perpetuated racism has not disappeared but has merely been rendered invisible through diplomatic language (see Maynard, 2019; Lentin and Titley, 2011). Such language is notable in Stephen Harper’s framing of Syrian refugees.

The emphasis on security concerns in the discursive framing of refugees by the Conservative Party is reflective of a nationalist construction of national identity in which outgroups are devaluated because they are depicted as threats and potential sources of insecurity. Their inferiority relative to Canadians is expressed by insinuating that their security and livelihood are less valuable than that of Canadians. Finally, this is also demonstrated by looking at the other side of the same coin: by externalizing the ‘threat’ onto Syrian refugees, Harper suggests that Canada would otherwise be safe (in other words, that Canadian security is maintained so long as not too many of the ‘wrong’

refugees are permitted into the country). This too contributes to a national superiority, whereby the 'self' is valued and the 'other' is devalued.

However, as discussed, Harper also adopted a discourse of pity in his speeches on Syrian refugees, specifically in regard to the photograph of Aylan Kurdi. While this discourse did portray refugees in a more humane and emotive way, their humanity was contingent upon their suffering. Even in these discourses, Harper emphasized the need to cherry-pick between deserving and undeserving refugees. While this latter framing does not reflect nationalist conceptions of national identity, it nonetheless contributes to a racialized biopolitics. To put it briefly, Harper's discourse was more reflective of nationalism as refugees were hierarchized within themselves and further devalued in relation to Canadians.

As previously argued, both the Liberal Party and the Bloc Québécois' discourses used frames of rationality and morality, though the latter shifted into a frame of pity in some instances. While there are negative impacts that result from discussing refugees in such manners, which will be further elaborated upon in Part 4, these framings are not associated with nationalism. With regard to the frame of rationality employed through their discourse, refugees were portrayed as being desirable and thus framed in a positive light. For instance, Justin Trudeau claimed that by welcoming refugees, the Canadian economy and communities would "flourish". Gilles Duceppe stated that by welcoming refugees into the country, Quebec and Canada's image abroad would improve.

Furthermore, these leaders' use of morality in their discourse did not lead to the devaluation of the 'other' relative to Canadians. For instance, Trudeau's discourse on

what a 'Canadian response' would entail (by stating that "Canadians are open, accepting and generous – qualities that should be reflected in Canada's response to those seeking refuge [...]") (Liberal Party of Canada, 2015, p. 64) is an important demonstration of national identity. As previously stated by de Buitrago (2018), this discursive production of shared values is a formative component of national identity (p. 305). This framing also aligns with Ariely's conception of constructive patriotism, as he states that this form is related to a positive view of one's nation. Most importantly, this self-valorization does not come at the expense of refugees. In other words, while Trudeau clearly expresses shared national values, and therefore a sentiment of proudness and loyalty towards Canada, there is no derogation of non-Canadians or other countries. However, these discourses do feed into a collective imaginary of Canada's identity, which has been especially notable since the post-war period.

Lastly, it is important to recall that Duceppe did hierarchize refugees by stating that Muslims, women, and young girls were the main victims and thus required immediate assistance. As previously stated, though this does not reflect the use of nationalism in his discourse since refugees are not depicted as inferior to Canadians, it nonetheless reflects a racialized biopolitics that can have significant negative impacts.

While it is important not to romanticize their discourses, these leaders framed refugees in a positive light throughout the 2015 electoral campaign. Overall, their discourses are more reflective of Ariely's conception of constructive patriotism; while differences between 'us' and 'them' are acknowledged, this does not lead to outgroup devaluation. In this sense, their discourses differed substantially from that of Harper.

#### **Part 4: Understanding the Impacts of Diverse Types of Framings**

The previous section related Canadian political discourse to national identity and concluded that only Harper's discourse reflected nationalism. In that sense, his was the only discourse that devalued refugees in relation to Canadians. While this hierarchization is important there are additional consequences that result from the use of certain tropes in the politicians' discourse. As per Verloo (2016), "a frame is an interpretation scheme that structures the meaning of reality" (p. 19). Thus, frames influence our collective understanding of a phenomenon, in this case, the Syrian Refugee Crisis, and as such are accompanied by specific impacts.

Several scholars have recognized the negative impacts that result from the use of frames of security in political discourse. As was previously mentioned, these security-centred discourses often evoke a racialized biopolitics, whereby some individuals' security is prioritized over that of others. The impacts of this are evident at several levels. Internationally, this practice reinforces "neo-colonial configurations of vulnerable/protector", whereby the West is constantly portrayed as a secure realm that provides protection against the unsafe, risk-laden East (Abbas, 2019, p. 2464; Xu, 2020, pp. 12–13). At a national level, Xu explains that "Canadian generosity towards selected, 'genuine' refugees does not break the 'securitized culture of mistrust' that characterizes Western refugee reception contexts, nor does it challenge the racialized imagination of Middle Eastern refugees as terrorist threats" (Xu, 2020, p. 11). Stated differently, these discourses impact the collective perception among Canadians of Syrian refugees by instilling mistrust in the latter. In this regard, these discourses normalize the relationship between refugees and security threats. As these securitized

discourses spur nationalist responses to migrants, they also render refugees' integration more difficult.

Further, when security-centred discourses are accompanied by pitiful discourses, there is the creation of two separate 'outgroups': those who embody that threat and those who embody victimhood. Frequently, the latter consists of women and young girls. Resultantly, through this discursive distinguishment, men and young boys become primarily seen through a securitized gaze (Abbas, 2019, p. 2452; Gray and Franck, 2019, p. 281). In other words, while women and young girls are portrayed as *threatened*, men and young boys are instead seen as *threatening* (Gray and Franck, 2019, p. 2810). Lastly, at an individual level, scholars have also related the use of securitized frames in discourse to a rise in xenophobia (Gulmez, 2018, p. 891). Since securitized framings tend to reflect conceptions of nationalism, this directly relates to xenophobia which can be defined "as the feeling of 'extreme nationalism or a very strong level of ethnic identity'" (Gulmez, 2018, p.888). This xenophobia and related racism impact individuals' everyday lives; for example, through their deskilling<sup>5</sup> (see Creese and Wiebe, 2009). Contrary to frames of pity, whereby refugees' agency is removed, frames of security tend to impose a preconceived notion of how refugees, especially men, will choose to exercise their agency: by threatening Canada. Again, this feeds into the prejudice that Middle Eastern male refugees are terrorist suspects.

The use of frames of morality in political discourse is generally viewed as positive, given that they recognize and are centred on the humanity of refugees. However, when that

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<sup>5</sup> This deskilling can be exhibited at various levels (whether that be through legislation or hiring practices amongst private employers). It refers to the failure to recognize the expertise and experience of refugees and immigrants, forcing them to find employment in a different field that does not utilize their skills.

recognition of humanity becomes contingent upon suffering, this frame shifts into one of pity. In these instances, there are notable negative impacts. At the international level, these framings contribute to an “Orientalist image of refugees as passive victims without agency and history” (Xu, 2020, p. 1). In other words, these framings feed into notions of Third World-ism, whereby the West is depicted as the saviour (Kyriakides et al., 2018). Nationally, these discourses render resettlement and integration for refugees more difficult, especially for refugees who challenge the “Orientalised involuntarism of refugeeeness” (Xu, 2020, p. 13), or “the unequal power relationship being imposed on them” (Hynie, 2018, p. 7). In other words, if refugees attempt to escape their imposed victimhood, their integration suffers. At the individual level, Claudia Aradau argues that a discourse of pity involves victimization in which the person is stripped of their agency (Aradau, 2004, p. 276). Relatedly, the inability to recognize the agency of refugees leads to the failure to acknowledge their dignity and competencies (Hynie, 2018, p.7). Stated succinctly, the pity-centred framing of refugees contributes to an asymmetrical power relation between the West and the East, whereby the former is portrayed as the saviour and the latter as in need of saving. This relationship trickles down into the national and individual levels whereby refugees’ agency is negated.

Finally, frames of rationality also entail certain negative consequences. Broadly speaking, through this frame the argument in favour of welcoming refugees hinges upon their perceived utility. In this sense, the frame fails to centre the focus on their shared humanity and sees refugees solely as an opportunity to be seized upon (Mavelli, 2017). As such, this approach can be considered as highly calculated and self-centred. More specifically, frames of rationality centred on economic arguments may result in the

confounding of refugees with economic migrants, though they are considered to be two separate groups by the UNHRC. As such, they are reflective of a broader “neoliberalization of public policy” (Bauder, 2011, p. 54). As such, it has the potential to foster neoliberal racism, whereby refugees may be seen as competitors “in a zero-sum competition for economic resources” (ibid). Accordingly, these discourses have the potential of evoking a “neoliberal hierarchy of desirable and undesirable migrants” (Jaskulowski and Pawlak, 2020, p.1). As previously argued, discourses of rationality evoke conceptions of constructive patriotism. In this sense, they tend to be accompanied by the bolstering of the state’s image, though this is not followed by the devaluation of ‘others’. While the argument that welcoming refugees will improve the nation’s reputation appears positive, insofar as refugees are not derogated, this message has an important impact: it contributes to a narrative of Canada’s positive imaginary. By continuously recalling Canada’s reputation, politicians discursively reproduce a collective imaginary of the state as welcoming and friendly. Coupled with the legitimacy already granted to the state, the racism perpetuated by the Canadian government becomes further camouflaged (Maynard, 2019, p. 12).<sup>6</sup>

To summarize, while the use of these frames does not necessarily equate to the negative portrayal of refugees, they nonetheless involve negative consequences. The consequences that stem from the use of these frames are notable at various levels, impacting international relations, national perspectives, and individual experiences.

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<sup>6</sup> While not directly related to this work, it is important to recall the power of camouflaging state-perpetuated racism through discourse. Despite having committed a genocide towards Indigenous people within Canada, the country maintains its reputation as a friendly and welcoming nation. This highlights the sheer power of this collective imaginary in feeding into a “preferred memory” (Decter, 2018, p. 26).

## Conclusion

In 2015, the Syrian Refugee Crisis was a central topic discussed by politicians globally, including in Canada. Throughout this paper, I have demonstrated that the leaders' discourses on this topic diverged, converged, and shifted in some cases. Stephen Harper adopted frames of security and morality/pity in his discourses on Syrian refugees; Justin Trudeau and Gilles Duceppe adopted frames of rationality and morality/pity. Resultingly, there were mixed conceptions of national identity reflected in the discourses. While Harper's discourse was reflective of nationalist conceptions of national identity, the two others promoted constructive patriotism. However, it is important not to "romanticize" the framing of refugees by Trudeau and Duceppe, to borrow Cros' terms (Cros, 2018: 768). As Part 4 exemplified, each of these framings entailed negative consequences, most notably through their ability to shape collective imaginaries and impact refugees' integration and agency. Using the brief history of Canada's migration policies presented in Part 1 as a backdrop, this paper sought to demonstrate that while Canada is generally idealized as an exceptionally friendly country, its political leaders contributed to discrimination through their discourses.

In closing, while this research paper is based upon an event that occurred more than five years ago, I contend that its arguments are especially important in today's context. According to the United National High Commissioner for Refugees, there are currently "79.5 million men, women and children displaced by violence, conflict and prosecution worldwide" (UNHRCb, n.d.). This number will undoubtedly increase in the future, as climate change is "compounding threats for people already living with conflict and insecurity, further driving displacement around the world" (UNHRCc, 2020).

Accompanying the increasing number of those seeking refuge is an increase in populism throughout the world, which is generally characterized by its aggressively defensive response to immigrants and refugees (Brubaker, 2017). Thus, it is and will be all the more essential to understand the impacts of political discourse surrounding refugees, and the relationship that these discourses have with broader questions of national identity, political approaches (such as populism), and statehood.

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