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Limits of Social Capital for Refugee Integration: The Case of Gay Iranian Male Refugees' Integration in Canada

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ABSTRACT

Each year thousands of refugees, including racialized LGBT refugees, are resettled in Canada. Currently, economic independence is the foremost policy goal in integrating Canada's refugees. This policy often relies on social capital as a non-economic solution to integration. I draw on 35 multi-sequential interviews with 19 gay Iranian men to connect the empirical and theoretical debates around refugee integration and argue that over-reliance on refugees' deployment of social capital for integration has grave shortcomings for their senses of belonging. I suggest that examining racialized LGBT refugees' integration strategies best reveals communitarian social capital's flaws at the conjunction of sexuality, gender, race, and class. I draw on Bourdieu's writings on social capital to highlight internal group differences, social inequalities, and the vital convertibility between financial, social, and cultural capital in building transferrable resources for refugee integration. I conclude by urging policy-oriented studies of social capital.

INTRODUCTION

Two months after I had finished the first phase of my fieldwork with gay Iranian refugees in Canada in 2017, one of the men whom I had expected to participate in the next phase of this study committed suicide in Vancouver. As explained by my participants, this heart-wrenching deed was driven by experiences of social exclusion, poverty, separation from family, and the consequent severe but unaddressed depression. Nevertheless, currently, refugees' economic independence, rather than their all-encompassing social, cultural, and economic integration, is the foremost priority for governments of the Western countries (Ives, 2007). Various policy and resettlement reports released by Canadian Federal and Provincial governments underscore a focus on individual income support for food, shelter, and basic household expenses (see Policy Research Initiative's, 2005 report). Although both levels of government allocate budgets for local service providers who assist with basic knowledge of everyday life, the social and cultural aspects of integration, and hence provisions for social and cultural capital accumulation, are strikingly absent in governments' policies and practice models.

Under Canadian multiculturalism, policymakers often presume a straightforward ethnic assimilation story, in which ethnic communities play a major role in absorbing and supporting newcomers'

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integration by providing information on housing, employment, and healthcare as well as access to ethnic businesses. Such presumptions rely on a simplified and community-based (i.e., communitarian) definition of social capital that neglects the role of other forms of capital and assumes ethnic communities' automatic support for individual members' integration needs (Edwards, Franklin and Holland, 2003; Bauder, 2005; see Canada's (2005) Policy Research Initiative on social capital). Also, these presumptions and the resultant policies are informed by and perpetuate neoliberal understandings of social belonging, which push the role of the state as the guarantor of social citizenship rights to the margins and present integration as the responsibility of the individuals (Brodie, 1997).

In this article, I explore the strengths and weaknesses of social capital for racialized LGBT refugees' integration. I bridge the gap between the empirical and theoretical literature on refugee integration and capital accumulation, and, drawing on 35 interviews with gay Iranian refugees, argue that over-reliance on refugees' deployment of ethnic social capital for integration has grave shortcomings for sexual-racial minority refugees' integration and sense of belonging. Future academic and policy analyses must account for various forms of capital involved in facilitating refugees' integration.

To this end, after presenting some critique on communitarian approaches to social captial, I draw on Bourdieusian theory and his understanding of social capital, i.e., access to durable networks (Bourdieu, 1986), to present a path forward. The Bourdieusian approach emphasizes the convertibility logic between various forms of capital necessary for refugees' successful integration, and addresses the limits of conventional theories on social capital regarding individual agency, power relations, and social policies vis-à-vis inequalities (Woolcock, 1998; Cheong et al., 2007; Akkaymak, 2016). Along the same lines, I understand integration as a multi-dimensional two-way process that starts before emigration, is shaped by various reservoirs of capital, and is informed by a desire for social belonging in destination countries (Karimi, 2018).

In what follows, I will first review the literature on integration and social capital, and outline a critique of this body of research in relation to ethnic ties and the wider social networks in destination countries. Second, I will explicate Bourdieu's approach to capital accumulation. Third, I will discuss my six-month fieldwork consisting of 35 semi-structured interviews with gay Iranian men in Canada. Next, I will discuss the findings in three thematic sections. For a systematic breakdown of data and theoretical analyses, I follow Ager and Strang's (2008), Strang and Ager (2010) categorization of social capital into social bonds with group insiders, bridges with other groups, and links with government services. In the latter section, I will address the relations between social links and refugees' housing, employment, education and cultural training, and mental health issues. I will conclude by urging policy-oriented empirical studies of refugees' social capital accumulation at the conjunction of sexuality, gender, race, and class, and for states' intervention in facilitating capital accumulation for integration purposes.

INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Traditionally, migration studies scholars have relied on various forms of network theory to analyse the role of ethnic ties in immigrants' and refugees' integration. On the one hand, some scholars maintain that strong, close-knit ties provide ethnic groups with entrepreneurship opportunities, mainly outside the states' purview, and that ethnic communities provide support for the integration of the second generations (Bankston, Caldas and Zhou, 1997; Zhou, 2005). These scholars argue that family and community members' internal bonds allow "enforceable trust to function as an economic *modus vivendi*" (Waldinger, 1997). The majority of such research views ethnic ties as equal to social capital, e.g., Zhou's (2005) "ethnic social capital" or Bankston, Caldas and Zhou's (1997) "ethnicity as social capital."

However, a growing body of research which draws on the earlier critique of social capital (e.g., Portes, 1998; Portes and Landolt, 2000) as well as the limited studies on gender and ethnic networks (Boyd, 1989; Menjivar, 1995), underlines that, in the absence of financial and cultural capitals, newcomers' limited ethnic social capital not only does not translate into fruitful social participation, but it also channels newcomers into the margins of the job market and hampers their successful integration (Molyneux, 2002; Evergeti and Zontini, 2006; Bauder, 2008). More specifically, scholars claim that intra-group diversities create systems of inclusion and exclusion that regulate individuals' access to social capital through the interplay of gender, class, religion, and age (Woolcock, 1998; Anthias, 2007; Shah, Dwyer and Modood, 2010). Zontini (2010) argues that communitarian social capital is a double-edged sword: family and community networks enable individual members' access to the social capital while simultaneously obligating the recipients, young adults and women in particular, to follow patriarchal-religious norms that restrict their opportunities in the destination society.

On the other hand, a second scholarly group reasons that building inter-group weak ties, i.e., social bridges, is more important for immigrants in establishing support networks that lead to finding jobs and participating in social activities (Granovetter, 1973; Waldinger, 1997; Lin, 2000). Expanding the definition of community and, thus, social capital, Putnam (1993) defines social capital as a public good, as "features of social organizations, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit" while claiming that family and community ties may be less valuable than weak ties found in larger social organizations (Putnam, 2000; also see Fukuyama, 2002). Accordingly, the Canadian government has explored the potential of community and societal social capital in contributing to social policies on refugee integration (Tanasescu and Smart, 2010). For instance, Policy Research Initiative (PRI), which contributes to the Government of Canada's policy planning, produced a report (PRI, 2005) that, regrettably, relied mainly on the works of Putnam (2000, 1993) and Coleman (1988), and took a network-based approach to social capital and refugee integration.

Consequently, despite academic scholars' recognition of the interwoven and reproductive logic of various forms of capital, financial support, albeit meagre, and economic independence remain the main tools as well as goals of the Canadian government when it comes to refugee integration (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2011). Migration and citizenship scholars have asserted that the current integration policies are also informed by neoliberal ideologies that reduce state membership to access to legal status and overlook social inequalities (Brodie, 1997; Abu-Laban and Gabriel, 2002).

In sum, the first group of scholars understands ethnic ties as automatically translating into social capital while the second group assumes social actors' benevolence and ignores the realities of power dynamics in society (see also Akkaymak, 2016). Both lines of argument neglect individual agency, power relations within (ethnic) groups, and the embeddedness of structures and the role of destination society, all of which regulate individuals' access to capital, power, and social distinction (Palmgren, 2017). Social capital is not an inherently beneficial or detrimental factor in social integration, and it only becomes influential in interaction with other forms of capital and structures.

In the case of racialized sexual minority refugees, the research on gender-sexuality and migration shows that close-knit ethnic groups' sexual politics indeed draw on traditional gender, class, and religious values to regulate members' access to social capital (Röder and Lubbers, 2015). To make the matters worse, racialized LGBT refugees not only face marginalization within ethnic communities but also in the destination country's LGBT communities (Adam and Rangel, 2015; Kahn and Alessi, 2017; Karimi, 2018; Carillo, 2018). The sexual politics of these communities are based on assimilationist equal rights agendas, defined as "homonormativity" (Duggan, 2012), and require assimilation into the dominant heteronormative institutions and the creation of a consumerist-privatized gay subculture (Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens, 2010). Similar to ethnic social ties, homonormativity cuts both ways: membership in the community is permitted, but conditional on

assimilation with White, middle-class, and consumerist values, thus limiting racialized working-class members' access to social capital and future capital accumulation opportunities.

While racialized LGBT refugees' access to community social capital is restricted due to their gender and sexuality as well as their race and nationality, social capital provided through government services becomes a vital source of capital accumulation and successful integration. Yet the economic-centred nature of the refugee integration policies in Canada means that such policies fail to implement practice models that mobilize the convertible and reproductive logic between state-provided social rights, economic success, and various forms of capital among refugees (Nee and Sanders, 2001; Cheong et al., 2007; Palmgren, 2017).

BOURDIEU ON SOCIAL CAPITAL AND REFUGEE INTEGRATION

Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - or in other words, to membership in a group." Forming or renewing of social ties is a time-consuming process that requires individuals' continuous (re)investment of time and capital (Portes and Landolt, 2000) since membership in a social group does not automatically translate into access to social capital. Thus, without assuming that "immigrants have both the proclivity and ability to form bridging ties to others" (Cheong et al., 2007), the Bourdieusian approach to social capital emphasizes individuals' agencies and their differences in accessing various capital resources through their ties with various social groups (Edwards et al., 2003).

Bourdieu (1986) emphasizes that the "volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected." Here, Bourdieu underlines the role of families and ethnic communities and their internal power dynamics in regulating access to various forms of capital.

In addition to social capital, Bourdieu presents three more convertible categories of economic, cultural, and symbolic capital defined, respectively, as financial profit, educational and intellectual qualities, and the prestige and recognition of these forms of capital in each social field (Bourdieu, 1986). The convertibility between various forms of capital, and the individuals' and groups' access to various forms of capital condition actors' power positions within each relevant context (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The status and class position of individuals and groups are judged against the values and position of the social class which owns and regulates access to the most valuable and (re)productive forms of capital in each society (Bourdieu, 1984).

In case of racialized LGBT refugees, this convertibility and the reproductive logic between various forms of capital indicate that refugees who have experienced loss and devaluation of their capital reservoirs will have to adapt their practices to their new environment, to those groups who hold power positions and social distinction, so to re-evaluate and accumulate capital (Kelly and Lusis, 2006; Thieme, 2008; Bauder, 2008; Akkaymak, 2016). To understand such process of social capital accumulation it is important to account for individuals' reservoir of capital, their ability to build new ties to access other resources, group power dynamics, and the fact that various forms of capital are ultimately converted into and reproduce, or lack thereof, other forms of capital that, depending on the contexts, will support individuals' integration. Further, Bourdieu's (1977) emphasis that individuals' navigation of the complex web of social relations and structures is informed by societal rules as well as individuals' knowledge of rules indicates that, through targeted policies and sound practice models, national policies must re-evaluate their communitarian and neoliberal approach to social capital in order to facilitate refugees' access to various forms of capital over extended periods.

I believe that the case of gay Iranian refugees' integration exposes various drawbacks of communitarian social capital, and that Bourdieu's emphasis on the convertibility between various forms of capital allows for understanding their daily practices as they arrive with minimal individual financial and cultural capital, face marginalization within diasporic groups and White mainstream LGBT communities, and confront job-market deskilling in Canada (Creese and Wiebe, 2012; Frank, 2013; Jackson and Bauder, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

My discussions here are based on six months of fieldwork, including interviews and ethnography, with 19 gay Iranian refugees who had left Iran and had been resettled in Canada. They all made asylum claims to the UN offices in Turkey (which are the closest to Iran) and were then resettled to Canada after a two- to three-year-long process. I found participants in Canada through one of my contacts from previous phases of fieldwork and further snowball sampling. I asked this contact to forward my contact information and project description to gay Iranian men who were born in Iran, had sought asylum in Turkey, and had then been resettled to Canada. After they consented, I communicated with them through social media and by telephone. In 2016 I interviewed eight participants in Vancouver. I interviewed 11 more participants in Toronto and Ottawa during the winter of 2017. Interviews lasted for about two hours each and were complemented by detailed field notes taken during and after interviews. Next, and upon initial data analysis, I conducted 13 follow-up one-hour interviews via phone and Skype. After outlining the first draft of this article, I conducted three two-hour follow-up interviews in Vancouver during the fall of 2017 to discuss any changes in employment and housing conditions and access to services (*total interviews N = 35*).

The interviews were conducted in Persian,[1] except for one which was conducted in English. All participants were born and raised in Iran and all but one had a university education. All self-identified as gay and as middle-class in Iran but working-class in Canada. None expressed strong religious beliefs. They ranged in age from 22 to 37 and their length of stay in Canada ranged from 2 to 7 years.

In designing the interview guide, I focused on the participants' social trajectories, the social construction of relationships, and the meanings of these contacts for them (Erel, 2010). I explored the participants' experiences of seeking asylum and resettlement to Canada, their feelings about their current situations in Canada, and their future aspirations and expectations. I conducted semi-structured interviews to collect narratives based on each participant's personal experiences (Evergetti and Zontini, 2006). All interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of each informant. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. In analyzing the data, I started with open coding and attached comments to quotes and excerpts from the data and, once the thematic categorization of data was established (as presented in the following sections), I undertook a more rigorous analysis to make sense of my data and the emergence of these typologies (Charmaz, 2014). The Bourdieusian social theory and the concept of social capital, complimented by Ager and Strang's (2008) categorization of the social capital in the context of refugee integration, proved to best connect the dots in my data.

Regarding this study's limitations, I must point out that snowball sampling was my method of participant recruitment because I was working with a social group that is multiply-stigmatized. In the absence of system information and under feelings of fear and distrust, the chain of referrals that depended on participants' network of friends enabled me to gain access to this population in three different localities. I recognize that my sampling method is susceptible to exclude individuals who were not members of my network or were excluded due to gatekeepers' bias. Further, the difference between my immigration background and my informants' experiences of asylum-seeking

added layers of complexity, because of my limited knowledge of asylum wait times and life experiences in Turkey as well as the hardships of the resettlement process.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Bonding social capital

Despite the commonplace belief that family and ethnic ties best embody social capital and support integration (Bankston et al., 1997; Waldinger, 1997; Zhou, 2005), I found that gay Iranian men tend to make strong bonds with other gay Iranian men – note the importance of sexuality besides ethnicity – while distancing themselves from their families in Iran and co-ethnics in Canada.

According to my participants, sexuality intersects with ethnicity in forming *primary* strong social bonds in form of friendship groups with four to five gay Iranian men with refugee backgrounds. One participant mentioned that "being gay has been my most important point of identification... other [Iranian] gay men... best understand me and that is the best mental support that I can have now."

It was evident in several interviews that gay Iranian men had formed transitory communities in Turkey while awaiting the results of their asylum claims, and relied on their connections to find other gay men residing in their vicinities in Canada. My participants had exhausted their financial resources during their wait in Turkey and were unable to support each other through loans, temporary housing, or transportation. Their strong ties provided "*mental-emotional support*," but were not successful in reproducing social, cultural, and financial capital.

> I spent all my savings in two years in Turkey...I got here [Canada] with no money but found out that guys who were relocated before me were not doing great either... you can't have expectations! There is nothing to offer except friendship. (Participant 12, 32 years old)

Going beyond the co-ethnic gay friends, sexuality, again, played a critical role in forming *secondary* strong ties, as my participants were highly inclined to make bonds with gay men from different racial backgrounds. I discovered two divergent tendencies: some participants were more inclined to make friends with native-born White, gay Canadian men, while some were more open to bonding with racialized gay men. The former bonding was slightly more likely to result in higher social capital than the latter because of the various forms of capital that were possessed by the White gay men and or lacked by the racialized gay men. Common points were that these friendships were not as close-knit as friendships with co-ethnic gay men, therefore they were considered to be *secondary* because *"not the same [intimate] as my friendship with my Iranian friends"* (Participant 19, 22 years old); and that class boundaries were barely crossed. One participant said "...maybe it is because of where I work or the place that I live... I don't get to know rich people! I'm always among my co-workers or gay guys from around here". When I asked about the possibilities of making friends beyond class boundaries, he said "networking would need money because then I have to go to expensive clubs and restaurants... own an apartment in decent neighbourhoods because a decent guy, friend or whatever, will not come to my dingy studio" (Participant 1, 26 years old). In section 5.3, I will further discuss the ways that the limited access to proper housing, in turn, adversely impacts racialized LGBT refugees' capital accumulation.

Further, despite the heterogeneity of the LGBT communities and the existence of several Canadian LGBT-oriented organizations such as the Rainbow Railroad and Access Alliance that advocate for LGBT refugees' rights, only two of my participants had reached out to them for support. This lack of participation in community activities, which ultimately limit cultural and social capital

accumulation, has several overlapping reasons: mainstream LGBT communities' implicit homonormative agendas which prioritize the demands of White middle-class members and marginalize the voices of racialized members so as to reproduce forms of capital that are mostly accessible and beneficial to White middle-class members (Duggan, 2012); advocacy groups' limited resources and outreach; and my participants' cultural background which does not encourage involvement with local communities and organizations (Karimi and Bucerius, 2018; Karimi, 2020).

> I have been to a few LGBT community meetings...I went there to make friends, but it seems their connections are already built, and there is no place for others... they talk about things that seem so trivial to me like book clubs or stuff when some [*immigrant*] gay men have a hard time making ends meet. (Participant 5, 37 years old)

Accordingly, my participants' primary and secondary bonding social capitals were insufficient in overcoming challenges of lower earnings and unemployment (i.e., limited economic capital), as well as marginalization in the LGBT community (i.e. limited social and cultural capital). In line with the critique of community social capital presented earlier, my findings highlight that, first, bonding social capital in the form of close-knit ties with families and ethnic community must not be taken for granted, since different social groups define systems of membership, whether self- or other-ascribed, through disparate factors and not merely through ethnicity (Röder and Lubbers, 2015). Second, strong ties with individuals who possess similar and limited amounts of capital render bonding social capital as a medium of pigeonholing immigrants into the margins of society rather than facilitating their integration and upward mobility. Similar to the sojourn-single-male labour migrants' situation (Nee and Sanders, 2001), bonding social capital with less-resourced individuals puts my participants at a disadvantage.

Bridging social capital

For my participants, as a minority within a diverse ethnic group, weak ties or social bridges were represented in ties with heterosexual co-ethnics and non-co-ethnics. Despite the presence of well-established Iranian communities in Canada, my participants were unwilling to reach out to community resources and social opportunities, since their non-confirming sexuality and histories of rejection inhibited the development of ethnic ties (Lacroix, 2004).

Except for two individuals in Toronto, none of my participants had accessed any information on the job market, health services, or housing options through heterosexual Iranians or other Middle Eastern communities. One participant said "they ask so many questions...why are you single, or, where is your girlfriend ... I guess finally they will put it together...I'm gay and then I am sure the harm is more than the benefit". (Participant 13, 28 years old). The two participants in Toronto had relied on their friendship ties to find jobs with Iranian businesses including a restaurant and real estate agency. Both participants had hidden their sexuality from co-workers and did not express any motivation for changing jobs even though they were overqualified for their current low-paying jobs.

> I have to hide so much from my co-workers and customers, who are mostly rich Iranians or the Lebanese... sometimes I think about leaving. But I don't know how because didn't get a degree [*from Canada*]... this job has taken all my time, and now I don't have chances of getting a better job. (Participant 14, 30 years old)

These quotations support the research findings on the restrictive role of social capital and reveal that the volume and efficiency of bridging social capital made available to individuals are highly regulated by ethnic communities' patriarchal-religious cultural values (Zontini, 2010; see Phan et al., 2015 on traditional gender roles and social networks vis-à-vis immigrant integration in

Canada). In the case of sexual minority members, bridging capital plays a restrictive role in their integration since it comes with time-consuming reciprocal obligations and expectations of following cultural norms that limit my participants' capital accumulation outside the community. This, in turn, negatively influences the accumulation of and conversion between economic, cultural, or symbolic forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Gay Iranian men's lack of access to social capital through ethnic ties has hindered their ability to attain the levels of social and structural integration that the Iranian diasporic communities have achieved in their destination countries (Maghbouleh, 2017; Cohen and Yefet, 2019). The fungible and reproductive logic of capital accumulation means that specific groups, e.g., White LGBT groups or the Iranian diasporas, have the power to regulate non-members' agencies and access to capital and, thus, their successful integration.

On the other hand, during interviews I found that bridging social capital with, often White, non-co-ethnics had led participants to find jobs and learn about educational and training opportunities without having to confront the stigmas surrounding sexuality. For instance, one participant who was working as a trainer said "I was dating a Canadian guy and his friend helped me with finding and getting this job... I learn about many work opportunities and workshops on fitness training through my team members" (Participant 2, 27 years old). Interview findings show that non-co-ethnic social capital, similar to the above-mentioned secondary bonds with White gay men, were linked to financial and cultural capital accumulation despite the latent race and class stereotypes that serve to marginalize racialized minorities. These forms and amounts of capital, however, fall short of sufficiently supporting gay Iranians' participation in the job market and against the widespread discriminations that channel newcomers into the margins. Indeed except for one participant who had a white-collar office job in Toronto, all participants held blue-collar low-paying jobs, such as security guard, maintenance worker, and hairdresser assistant. One participant said "...they look at you and you are an Arab or East Indian to them. Now go figure how to explain it otherwise!" Later on, he linked racial stereotypes with finding jobs, making social ties, and crossing class boundaries:

> I have learned a lot from my co-workers... I have found jobs in retail stores but all in the same positions. All my managers have been Canadian, born here... maybe it's language or colour issue, actually it might be a religion thing, because I am brown so I am Muslim! Anyways, I think so because it is not easy to connect with managers and higher-up people; our lives are separate!
>
> (Participant 5, 37 years old)

In sum, my participants' access to bridging social capital is regulated by Iranian immigrant groups' patriarchal cultural norms and this, in turn, limits their participation in capital accumulation. Further, gay Iranians' bridging social capital engendered in their networks with White, non-co-ethnics has an ambivalent status (see Akkaymak, 2016 on Turkish immigrants in Canada), in that it facilitates gay Iranians' access to jobs, i.e., economic capital, in the secondary and tertiary job market, but it does not allow for their access to the jobs or forms of cultural capital that might translate into climbing up to and attaining positions of power.

Linking social capital: The government services

In what follows, I will examine the role of linking social capital, i.e., integration services offered by Canadian governments, and their strengths and weaknesses in providing access to accommodation, employment, cultural and language training, and mental-health support. Although the vast majority of refugees tackle such issues, here I will explicate the details of how gay Iranian men experience homophobia and racism while impacted by their access to limited governmental services.

Housing

Several participants mentioned that the policies and staff in welcome centres fail to consider the concerns of racialized LGBT refugees. One participant said:

> I was in [a] refugee centre for two weeks but I tried to find a place and get out as soon as possible… I left Iran because I was worried about my safety. I was threatened by homophobia in people… here they put me in a dorm with ten other homophobic refugees from North African countries! Because I was in a rush to get out and did not know much about the housing market in Vancouver, I moved to the wrong place, and I had so much trouble finding another place.
>
> (Participant 6, 29 years old)

With regards to housing policies, my informants' stories highlight the necessity of considering LGBT refugees' experiences of trauma and years spent in a third country (Carter et al., 2009) to facilitate their access to suitable safe spaces during their initial days in Canada, and to develop stronger ties with temporary housing staff in providing information about the housing market and long-term legal support. Throughout the fieldwork, I discovered that the majority of my participants in Toronto were living in social-housing buildings in St. James Town and Cabbagetown under destitute conditions while participants in Vancouver were living with at least two roommates to share the housing costs.

> I have been in Canada for six years now…but I am not sure if I can be independent any time soon. I am almost 40 years old and I have to live with two roommates… (they) are my friends but I feel that at this age I need more privacy but cannot do anything about it. (Participant 5, 37 years old)

Another participant said *"living in social housing limits my networking chances to others who live under similar conditions here because the neighbourhood is a tag…that tells other people how much I earn or if I went to school…"* (Participant 4, 25 years old).

Currently, federal and provincial policymakers do not prioritize refugees' housing concerns, since they believe that newcomers will rely on families and ethnic networks, i.e., their social capital, to find housing (Tanasescu and Smart, 2010). These policies neglect the social processes of inclusion and exclusion within various communities which, in turn, regulate access to capital accumulation and to power positions (Carter et al., 2009; Grace et al., 2017). The combination of factors, such as lack of access to safe spaces in welcome centres, insufficient information about housing services, and the refugees' limited financial resources, negatively impact LGBT refugees' long-term social relations and capital accumulation efforts. Improvements in housing services will help refugees to expand their social relations and accumulate cultural and social capital beyond their immediate surroundings (Waldinger, 1997; Lamba and Krahn, 2003). Consequently, access to proper housing allows for the purposeful accumulation and "expenditure of time and energy and so, directly or indirectly, of economic capital" as well as cultural capital, all of which, in turn, enable reproduction of capital and, ultimately, access to successful integration (Bourdieu, 1986).

Employment and financial resources

My findings show that limited networking and financial resources, in addition to meagre governmental income support, urge racialized LGBT refugees to invest their time and energy in applying for and, as one participant said, "getting any entrance jobs" and "hoping to get something better one day." Throughout my fieldwork, I discovered that gay Iranian men, similar to other racialized immigrants in Canada, find themselves trapped in low-paying jobs that do not provide them with sufficient social or economic capital (Creese and Wiebe, 2012; Frank, 2013).

FIGURE 1
CIC (2011) REPORT ON THE GAP IN ANNUAL INCOME BETWEEN RECIPIENTS OF REFUGEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (RAP) AND THE LOW INCOME CUT-OFFS

Table 3-10: Social assistance income, CIC RAP income support vs. low income cut-off (LICO) levels 2009 - Single employable

Single person	Social assistance (including applicable allowances)			CIC RAP			LICO	% of LICO	
	Basic social assistance	Other benefits*	Total	Basic support**	Other benefits (Non-RAP)*	Total		Social assistance	CIC RAP
Sample cities									
Toronto, ON	6,877	624	7,501	7,620	624	8,244	18,421	41%	45%
Vancouver, BC	7,320	458	7,778	8,220	458	8,678	18,421	42%	47%
Calgary, AB	6,996	245	7,241	7,584	245	7,829	18,421	39%	43%

The negative impacts of the inadequate income supports – regarding amount and duration of payments (see Figure 1) – are amplified by the absence of non-financial supports that could promote networking opportunities and cultural capital accumulation which would, in turn, maximize the benefits of financial support. According to my participants, a coherent but targeted employment programme including elements of language training, legal assistance, and workplace skills training would be beneficial, as they must now confront insufficient and overcrowded language courses, inconsistencies between different settlement service providers, and complicated bureaucratic referral procedures. One participant said that "when I started looking for jobs, I realized that I would never find anything through them [*agencies*] or I will get some basic job, which I did without their help". In response to why he did not follow up with the agencies, he said:

> It's so complicated that takes a long time to... register for some information sessions, wait for a referral to a settlement or social worker, and then they say, oh you need this and that document or this level of English competency and language certificate... then there is someone else to help you with a resume, and after all of this you will be applying for some basic jobs... (Participant 19, 22 years old)

Studies have looked at what happens to refugees when the emphasis is placed on their immediate economic independence when they are not equipped with sufficient cultural and social capital (Carter et al., 2009). In support of these findings, Valenta and Bunar's (2010) research in Scandinavian countries shows that the simultaneous combination of long-term (up to two years) financial support, family care, and mandatory cultural and language courses results in more successful job placements and refugee integration in the long run. Valenta and Bunar rightly point out that a combination of the Scandinavian integration model and North American affirmative action policies could best address current policy drawbacks to refugee integration.

Education and cultural training

In the absence of family and community social capital, racialized LGBT refugees mostly rely on government services to compensate for their socioeconomic disadvantages by providing access to cultural capital.

> We received a few sessions of cultural training before leaving Turkey. I was expecting to hear things about Canada as my new home... there were a few other gay men and a family in

> those sessions. The mentor talked about such unimportant stuff ... actually said when you go to Canada you should not stare at women in bikinis on the beach or in the pool. (Participant 17, 30 years old)

In contrast to service providers' beliefs "that the Canadian Orientation Abroad (COA) pre-departure information sessions adequately prepared" (CIC, 2011) refugees for their arrival in Canada, my participants claimed that the cultural training that they had received was mostly "meager in content" and "random points" that did not contribute to their knowledge of life in Canada, i.e., their cultural capital.

> Training inside and outside Canada cover the very basic needs and skills... not very helpful in knowing the culture or family and friendship norms... I wanted to learn about society, about how to go to school here... I took the occupation-specific language courses which helped with finding a job but everyday communication in English is different! I never had the time or the money to improve my English. (Participant 3, 32 years old)

Another participant said:

> I wish there was a way for me to go school... it's mostly about getting a degree, but also learning the culture, making friends and connections, and going through the path that almost every young person goes... feeling the same as other people of my age... (Participant 19, 22 years old)

Since various types of capital, cultural practices and educational credentials in particular, are institutionalized, protected, and evaluated differently by institutions and employers (Bourdieu, 1986; Kelly and Lusis, 2006; Erel, 2010), it is necessary for service providers to rethink the process of (d)evaluating refugees' and immigrants' educational degrees — possibly the most important form of cultural capital — as well as the content of social-cultural training workshops. To support successful capital accumulation, policies and services must consider the target audience and focus on elements that will help the newcomers to accumulate the necessary social and cultural capitals to interact successfully with the destination countries' society (Alessi et al., 2018). Indeed, the majority of services currently provided in Canada focus on creating targeted resumés and cover letters, interview preparation for the tertiary job market, workplace skills training, and basic computer skills. Although vital, these offerings, informed by a neoliberal approach to social capital policies, do not necessarily augment individuals' long-term reservoir of cultural capital or their capacity to construct social relations to respond to social prejudices against sexual and racial minorities.

Mental health

During the initial resettlement years, refugees are often unable to afford therapy sessions. They have limited coping resources due to working-class and minority-status backgrounds. These factors, coupled with experiences of discrimination and long-term deskilling, become sources of stress and barriers to integration. My interviews revealed that the combination of several factors including separation from family, ongoing social marginalization, dissatisfaction with employment status and earnings, and inability to plan for the future, has resulted in prevalent feelings of depression, isolation, and hopelessness among gay Iranian refugees.

> Things change when you arrive here. You have to face the reality that you don't belong here and then you have to see if you can find a way to belong! And as long as I know there is no one to tell you how to do it. The friendships that we had from home or in Turkey fall apart. (Participant 15, 25 years old)

Another participant talked specifically about his friend's suicide, mentioned in the opening of this paper, and insisted that most gay Iranian men in his friendship circle are struggling with feelings of loneliness and isolation:

> It's a strange feeling being here but being depressed because when... I was in Iran I was worried about my life and future and thought being here would change things for better. Life here is good in general, but we are suffering from a new kind of pain. (Participant 10, 34 years old)

As discussed earlier, policymakers should consider that bonding and bridging social capital might actually hinder racialized LGBT refugees' opportunities to communicate their experiences of exclusion and trauma, access unbiased care, and construct feelings of belonging (Phillimore and Goodson, 2008; Alessi et al., 2018). Although family and community social ties play a vital role in helping refugees with experiences of trauma, such social capital is often characterized by patriarchal-religious intolerance for "deviant behaviour," including homosexuality (Mckenzie et al., 2002). This inaccessibility of family and community social capital necessitates the implementation of extensive counselling services for refugees. Currently, all refugees in Canada have access to the Interim Federal Health program (IFH), which addresses basic and emergency health needs in addition to providing limited mental health services. Although the literature on refugees' access to mental health services has emphasized the importance of culturally sensitive services within the increasingly multicultural societies (Patil et al., 2015), racialized LGBT refugees' needs remain mostly absent in such research and services (for exceptions see Hopkinson et al., 2017; Kahn and Alessi, 2017; White, Cooper, and Lawrence, 2019).

CONCLUSION

In this article, I discussed the flaws of the mainstream social capital theories and suggested that an analysis informed by Bourdieu's theoretical framework can best address the limitations of social capital, both as a stand-alone theory and a neoliberal approach to social policy with regards to refugee integration. Qualitative research and analyses cognizant of the interactions between sexuality, gender, race, and class challenge the traditional taken-for-granted ethnic assimilation narrative and reveal that activating social capital depends on the fungibility of other forms of capital and on individuals' embeddedness in structures. My goal was to highlight the limits of bonding and bridging social capital for racialized LGBT refugees' integration in Canada, underline the connection between governmental services or social links with other forms of capital, and argue for the necessity of institutional intervention to equip individual refugees against social adversities, and to facilitate their access to social rights.

This latter point is crucial because, currently, integration policies, in line with neoliberal understandings of social belonging (Brodie, 1997), render state membership to individuals' financial resources and overlook social inequalities at the conjunction of sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, and immigration backgrounds (Edwards et al., 2003). Based on my findings, I argue that newcomers' navigation of the complex web of social relations and structures is informed by societal rules and norms, individuals' reservoir of capital, and their knowledge of rules. To respond to the disconnect between the state's presumption regarding refugees' access to ethnic social capital for economic independence, and the embeddedness of social capital and the refugees, we must acknowledge the circular-convertible relation between state-provided social rights, economic success, and the process of social capital accumulation for refugees who arrive with non-existing financial resources, community support, and cultural proficiencies.

To contribute to the recognition of the connection between various forms of capital, and the need for implementation of practice models that enable regeneration of practice and access to capital

accumulation, and based on my interview findings, I recommend subsidizing the LGBT-oriented organizations to fight racial prejudice and promote their capacities to serve more resettled LGBT refugees. I also recommend that these organizations build closer ties with state immigration bodies that handle LGBT refugees' asylum cases, to boost their advocacy roles and to develop ties with refugees who may not know about the existence of these organizations. I recommend the immediate creation of safe spaces in refugee welcome centres, as well as the development of pre-arrival workshops about life in Canada for racialized LGBT refugees. The features and contents of these spaces and workshops should be developed in consultation with community members and delivered by mentors who are familiar with racialized LGBT refugees' lived experiences. Further, I underline the need for including therapy services for racialized LGBT refugees, particularly through the recruitment of specialists who are familiar with the culture, language, and experiences of exclusion and trauma in both the home and destination countries. Such services would address the depression and feelings of isolation that threaten the refugees' sense of belonging and make it difficult for them to form sustainable communities.

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