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Refugee Settlement and Religion in British Columbia

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REFUGEE SETTLEMENT AND RELIGION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Abstract

In this working paper, I have two objectives. First, I use data from a pilot study I conducted in British Columbia during 2011-2012 to reflect on the practical challenges these groups face in contemporary society. Among other issues, I am interested in what is happening in and to these groups in an era in which religious identity and observance have become increasingly (or at least differently) problematized. I interviewed leaders of religiously affiliated agencies, as well as civil servants, to assess their perspectives on the state of government-agency relations. The evidence indicates that religiously affiliated refugee settlement agencies serve as excellent case studies for understanding the evolving relationships between religious communities and secular societies. The second objective of this working paper is to describe and assess the ideological environment in which discussions about the relationship between religious groups and government aims might occur. In particular, interviews confirm the power of closed secularism to delimit not just the ways in which agency leaders and government workers interact in the present, but also the ways they think about how they might interact in the future. While volunteers may complain about one or another feature of the private sponsorship system in Canada, religiously affiliated agencies generally accept the restraints placed on them by a secular state. However, the discursive norms that discipline both government and religious actors may reflect a society in which the latter are expected to misrepresent themselves. Whether or not this pattern of silence surrounding the religious commitments of service providers (or refugees themselves) will remain unproblematic or practical in an increasingly multicultural, religiously pluralistic, post-secular future remains an open question.

> I almost wish that every single religious community would go on strike, symbolic strike for a week, and point out for the government how much the religious communities are contributing to the well-being [of society]…. There is something that really bothers me about government devolving their responsibility to promote the common good off onto... churches and synagogues and civil society. (volunteer)

It is difficult to provide a proper account of Canada's commitment to the most vulnerable people in the world – refugees – without speaking about religion, and yet the vast majority of recent writing on and government attention to refugee policies and challenges in Canada is devoted to those secular state-sponsored refugee programs which process about two-thirds of the roughly 10,000 refugees Canada accepts each year (Denton 2003; Treviranus and Casasola 2003; cf. Ferris 2011: 610; 622).[1] This pattern is rather puzzling since the remainder of Canada's refugees use the private sponsorship route, and most of the groups that comprise this important sector of our refugee system are motivated by and frame their objectives in explicitly religious terms (Derwing and Mulder, 2003; Indra, 1988; cf. Fiddian-Qasmi-yeh 2011; Hagan and Ebaugh 2003; Iacovetta 2006; Wilson 2011). Christian groups, for example, were instrumental in settling over 20,000 Vietnamese "boat people" who arrived during the early period of Canada's refugee settlement activities in the late 1970s. This pattern continues today, with an increasing number of non-Christian groups involved in Canada's response to new and enduring humanitarian crises from Rwanda to Sudan to Iraq to Afghanistan. The benefits accruing to refugees from "faith-based" settlement agencies have been well documented in Canada and the United States. The success of these groups seems to be rooted in their capacity to share with refugees their "long-term community presence and established local networks, capacity for advocacy, and strong motivation for service based on core beliefs and values enshrined in various religious traditions." (Eby et al. 2011: 586; cf. Beiser 1999 and 2003; Beiser and Johnson 2003; Breslow et al. 1997; Denton 2003; Hagan and Ebaugh 2003; Ives 2007; Ives et al. 2010; Ives and Sinha 2010: 213; McLellan 2009; Portes 1995; Rousseau, Drapeau, and Corin 1998; Wilson 2011)

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1   Notable and fortuitous exceptions to this pattern would include several articles on this topic collected in a special issue of the journal *Refugee* in 2011.

affiliated refugee settlement agencies serve as excellent case studies for understanding the evolving relationships between religious communities and secular societies. The second objective of this paper is to describe and assess the ideological environment in which discussions about the relationship between religious groups and government aims might occur. In particular, interviews confirm the power of closed secularism[2] to delimit not just the ways in which agency leaders and government workers interact in the present, but also the ways they think about how they might interact in the future. While volunteers may complain about one or another feature of the private sponsorship system in Canada, religiously-affiliated agencies generally accept the restraints placed on them by a secular state. However, the discursive norms that discipline both government and religious actors may reflect a society in which the latter are expected to misrepresent themselves. Whether or not this pattern of silence surrounding the religious commitments of service providers (or refugees themselves) will remain unproblematic or practical in an increasingly multicultural, religiously pluralistic, post-secular future (Habermas 2005) remains an open question (Wilson 2011: 560).

The project: sample, method, and context

This ethnographic project is based on twenty-two in-depth semi-structured conversations, mostly with senior organizers of religiously affiliated settlement agencies and a small sample (5) of senior and mid-level bureaucrats of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (hereafter, CIC), the government department most involved with refugee policies. The settlement agencies and individual participants were selected for this pilot study using a snowball sample and were intended to reflect a diversity of religious identities. The groups were located in the two main population centres of British Columbia – the Victoria and Vancouver areas – and included Jews, Unitarians, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, United Church Christians, and Muslims. Roughly half of the participants were women. The ages of participants ranged from mid-30s to early 80s, with a median age of 60. All but one of the interview subjects was university-educated. Those agency participants who were paid employees (four) worked with refugees as only one of

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2   Defined here as the ideology that frames secularization processes as positive, inevitable features of the maturation of humankind and that frames religion as a threat to the progressive changes in society and thus something best restricted to private life. Clearly this account owes much to the discussions initiated by Gerard Bouchard and Charles Taylor as part of their 2007-08 *Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences* that analyzed the state of these issues in contemporary Quebec*.*

many features of their job;[3] only four of the participants were immigrants; five of the participants (with

an average age in the mid-40s) were associated with CIC. It is difficult to determine whether or not this

is a representative sample of agency workers or CIC staff, but the available academic literature combined

with many discussions with agency and government representatives elsewhere in Canada as well as with

scholars and practitioners at the 2012 national refugee settlement conference in Richmond, British Co-

lumbia and at many Metropolis Project events in Canada and abroad, lead me to suspect that the forces

outlined below are at work in other regions and national settings.[4]

In the interviews with agency volunteers, I posed questions about the current state of their

group's activities: How many members of their communities were actively involved in refugee settle-

ment? Are these numbers growing or shrinking? How many refugees did they settle each year? What

economic, social, religious, and personal forces within their communities affect their abilities to serve

refugees and fulfil the explicit religious mandates of their group? What drew each member to refugee

settlement work? I also engaged leaders in discussions about whether they preferred to work with refu-

gees associated with their own religious or ethnic communities. I made inquiries about whether or not

they expect them to attend religious services or special events. I discussed related issues with CIC staff,

with an emphasis on their own and their department's role in the intake of privately sponsored refugees,

and their interests in the religious features of the agencies in question.[5]

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3   There were no apparent differences in the responses of the paid and unpaid worker, so I refer to all of them as "volunteers."

4   This research project is closely related to a similar project being undertaken in the prairie region by my colleagues Mary-Lee Mulholland of Mount Royal University and John Biles of CIC. These pilot studies will lay the groundwork for a national project that explores the ways groups in all of the provinces – which face different local settlement challenges, use different policy instruments, and seek different refugees – are faring, and the ways they relate to the federal government and provincial and regional realities. In that larger study we plan to attend not just to the senior levels of the agencies and government agencies, but also to the experiences and perceptions of refugees who are the "recipients" of this support.

5   At the time of the interviews, CIC staff members and agency representatives were anxiously awaiting details about both the budget cuts that might affect the department, and the implications for refugee services of these cuts and a new bill (C-31) intended to improve immigration and refugee policies. Soon after interviews were completed, many people at CIC lost their jobs, several regional offices were closed, and many services were central-ized or limited to online formats. These cuts and policy changes put further pressure on the remaining staff and those agencies that work with CIC, and do not alter the argument developed below; if anything, these changes un-derline the urgency of addressing the concerns I outline. For the official parliamentary account of C-31, see: http://www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Mode=1&billId=5383493&Language=E; for minister Kenney's speech on the policy changes, see: http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/speeches/2012/2012-03-28.asp ; for news coverage of the bill, see: http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/story/2012/06/11/pol-immigration-ref-ugee-bill.html, and http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/story/2012/05/03/ottawa-refugee-healthcare-costs-doctors-upset.html

As well, following the insights of Ferris (2011: 615; cf. Clerkin and Grønbjerg 2007), I was curious about whether or not leaders of religiously affiliated settlement agencies felt any pressure from the broader society or from officials at CIC to secularize their service delivery. That is, I wondered if in its demands for professionalism, accountability, and transparency, the state has sought to impose a secular discourse on them. I was interested in whether they might be undergoing what Peter Beyer (1993) calls "institutional secularization," the growing emphasis on explicitly secular rather than traditional religious concerns within religious institutions themselves. In addition, I engaged leaders of these agencies and CIC officials in conversations about what each expected of the other.

The regulations governing Canada's refugee programs are numerous, complex and subject to significant alterations as governments, and political pressures, come and go.[6] In public discourse there is certainly conflation between the many forms of refugee settlement, but in practice the avenues by which refugees might arrive in Canada are quite distinct. It is probably the case that best known to – and most alarming for – many Canadians would be those individuals and families who are "asylum-seekers," meaning those who seek refugee status after arriving in Canada and who must prove to a judge that they ought to be considered as refugees. It is usually these refugees whose status and rights while in Canada are most hotly contested in the media. Less controversially, the federal government offers a government-assisted refugee program, in which the government or a service agency takes full responsibility for the expenses and labour involved in settlement, and in which the refugees are identified by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and selected by the government prior to coming to Canada.

In this paper, however, my interest is in the private sponsorship system. A small number of refugees in the private sponsorship system will be supported through the "joint assistance sponsorship" program, which entails a logistical and financial collaboration between Citizenship and Immigration Canada and a sponsoring group. Others will participate in the "group of five" program, which enables any group of five Canadians to work with CIC to sponsor an individual or a family, or the "community sponsor-

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6   For details on Canada's refugee system, see: http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/index.asp (for the orienting web-page); http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/ref-sponsor/index.asp (for the PSR program); http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/outside/resettle-gov.asp (for the GAR program); http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/timeline.asp (for a history of refugee sponsorship in Canada) (retrieved July 26, 2012); Denton (2003); Treviranus and Casasola (2003); See also "A Brief History of Canada's Response to Refugees," on the website of the Canadian Council of Refugees (http://ccrweb.ca/en/brief-history-canadas-responses-refugees retrieved February 20, 2012).

ship" program, which allows a larger group to sponsor an individual or family.[7]   This research concerns those agencies that are affiliated with a religious tradition and are themselves, or are associated with, a "Sponsorship Agreement Holder", a group or cluster of groups (sometimes a diocese) that applies to the government and then enters into a formal arrangement to work with CIC to offer services to these privately sponsored refugees.[8]

The kinds of needs these religiously affiliated agencies must fulfil are quite significant, and although CIC will in some cases offer some financial assistance to offset costs, the groups are generally expected to raise funds and organize their efforts on their own. In addition to being asked to provide evidence that they have the financial resources needed to welcome a refugee (the figure fluctuates and depends on the city in which the refugee will settle, but is roughly $30-35,000 for a family of five for one year), these organizations are typically involved in providing an individual or family with assistance in locating housing, furniture, and clothing; navigating the transit system; registering children for school; introducing the family to the Canadian medical system; coping with xenophobia from other Canadians; adjusting to culture shock; and often dealing with bona fide (or something closely akin to) post-traumatic stress disorder associated with the often horrendous political and material conditions they suffered during the months or years they may have spent in their country of origin, refugee camp, detention centre, or on the run.

The backdrop: secularization and secularism in Canada

The questions I pose here emerge from broader debates about the current situation of religion in an increasingly secular Canada. While scholars debate both the definition and the effect of the process of secularization, obviously some fundamental shifts are occurring in our society. Some of the grander expectations (and hopes) of secularization theorists have not been realized (Swatos 1999; Casanova 1994; Habermas 2005), at least in the sense that religion does not seem to be definitively in retreat globally; nor does some version of it (qua "spirituality," for example) seem to be in retreat for individuals in the modern West; nor does the fascination with religion on a social or cultural level appear to be reced-

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7   In addition, there are differences between those "visa-office-referred" refugees and those selected or identified by a Canadian resident or group as being in need of assistance.
8   Because the UNHCR has determined that these individuals are bona fide refugees, their legal status in Canada does not ordinarily attract the kind of attention associated with asylum-seekers.

ing.

For our purposes, the most relevant dimension of these changes is what Beyer calls "societal secularization," (1993; Dobbelaere 1987; Simpson1988) in which religion gradually (or suddenly in some cases, such as Quebec) ceases to serve as the basis of a common culture, politics, and social life, and in which religious institutions are increasingly marginalized from public life as they are replaced by secular ones. Such processes are clearly unfolding in many places and in many ways throughout western liberal democracies (Bramadat and Koenig 2009), including Canada, but of course the devil is in the details and in this respect it is difficult to see a simple unidirectional arc (Casanova 1994). Moreover, there remains strong evidence for the continued power of Christianity in predominately Christian societies. Consider the implicitly Christian (often, specifically Protestant) orientation of some of our laws (Berger 2006), educational policies (Seljak 2005; Biles and Ibrahim 2005a and 2005b), elected officials (MacDonald 2010), and assumptions (Beaman 2003).[9] I would suggest that while such privileges are problematic and difficult to withdraw, they seem conspicuous largely because by and large the federal, provincial, and municipal government machinery and the society it is supposed to serve have fairly effectively – if also often unevenly – moved ahead in the direction of societal secularization.

Numerous federal policy makers have promoted a so-called religiously neutral public square or what might be considered a "functional secularism" in which explicitly religious ends are separated from the machinery and objectives of the state (Bhargava 1998; cf. Biles and Ibrahim 2005b). Such an approach has emerged in response to both the exclusionary effects of the privileges Christianity has been afforded in Canadian history, and the social changes that increasing (non-Christian and non-European) religious diversity represents for a formerly less diverse society. Of course, most of these policy makers and leaders have emerged out of at least nominally Christian backgrounds; many of those from Quebec had vividly negative experiences of living through the "Grande Noirceur" of the Duplessis years (the period characterized by the overlapping of religion and politics that gave rise to the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s); and some policy makers and other social leaders had come to believe that official multiculturalism was inconsistent with established privileges for Christianity. Regardless of the motivations of

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9   The classic illustration of the ongoing power of Christianity in Canadian society is the timidity of the Ontario and Canadian governments to alter the constitutionally guaranteed right of (only) Roman Catholics to receive state support for their schools.

the individuals and groups involved, over the last forty years there has emerged something approaching a general consensus among – arguably most – policy makers that the relationship between religious communities and government policies is fraught with potential dangers for governments and minorities. As such, when governments do engage religious communities or religious issues, it is with great caution (Biles and Ibrahim 2005a and 2005b; Bramadat 2008).

Against this backdrop, consider first, that many of the privately sponsored refugees who settle in Canada are assisted by religiously affiliated groups the members of which explicitly link their efforts to religious feelings, ideas, institutions, norms, and objectives; and second, that the federal government that allows these groups to function and the department that facilitates these sponsorships are both explicitly committed to secular mandates. The tension between the missions – if you will pardon the pun – of religiously affiliated agencies and of the federal government creates an opportunity to reflect on the changes underway in the way the government relates to religious groups, and the way religious groups conceive of their place in a (putatively) secular state.

Challenges facing religiously affiliated agencies

The interviews I conducted echoed in a number of ways key concerns raised in academic and popular writing in the past decade about the challenges facing religious groups seeking to establish or protect their place in Canadian society. Participants articulated their insights and worries concerning secularization, securitization, attrition, group leadership, proselytization, trust, and bureaucratization. In this section, I outline the implications of some of these concerns for our understanding of the present and future state of religiously affiliated refugee settlement agencies.

Attrition: Whither the Stalwarts? A question about Canadians' religious identification is posed every ten years on the national census, and while we do not yet have religion data available from the 2011 census, there is no reason to expect the recent trends to change a great deal. Between 1991 and 2001, the percentage of Canadians identifying with the United Church fell by 8%; for the Anglicans, the decline was 7%; for Presbyterians the decline was 35%; for Lutherans it was 5%. The Roman Catholic and Jewish populations have grown, though only minimally (5% and 4%, respectively), and most growth in the former case is due to immigration and in the latter case to high birthrates among ultra-orthodox communities. The Muslim population, by contrast, increased by 129% in the same decade (though only

to a raw number of roughly 580,000 in 2001; likely about one million today), and the Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh populations each nearly doubled in the same period.[10]

Given the strong "discourse of loss" (Bramadat and Seljak 2009) that characterizes the way many of Canada's largest and oldest religious communities have come to speak about their current trajectories, I had wondered if the settlement agencies (especially those dependent upon the major Christian denominations) might be suffering from declining participation. Interestingly, most participants understood the issue of their membership levels within the context of broader challenges facing the religious communities within which the groups are embedded. In fact, there are larger structural and demographic problems facing churches in Canada. As one Anglican volunteer put it, "The diocese is currently dealing with declining attendance, which is influencing people's willingness to take on big projects. In addition, other major expenditures, like new roofs, are high on the agenda. Many parishes are uncertain about their future, their ability to pay utilities...."

Several long-serving volunteers indicated that they were tiring of the onerous commitment associated with this work. While finding new workers to assume leadership positions in such organizations may be a perennial problem, the social and economic conditions facing such groups in this region and at this point in history may exacerbate the situation. A number of people noted that the high cost of living in Victoria and Vancouver makes it difficult for younger people (by which they normally meant those people under 45) to volunteer. One Muslim leader said: "I do worry about demographics. I look around and you don't see the young people volunteering the way it had been, well, when we did it.... Many people now, basically you have to have... both parents working."   Moreover, these challenges have overlapped in recent years with a global financial crisis that has arguably deepened the level of ambient anxiety about financial security in our society. According to several of the participants in this study, these changes place increased burdens on individuals and families and make it more difficult for people to remain committed to the additional labour associated with volunteerism.

Many religiously affiliated groups rely upon the volunteer efforts (and donations) of community stalwarts who form the backbone of religious communities in Canada. When those energetic and gen-

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10   These figures have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number. Source: http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/english/census01/products/analytic/companion/rel/pdf/96F0030XIE2001015.pdf

erous men and women are no longer with us, the future of this component of the refugee settlement sector does not look very bright unless a new cohort of volunteers emerges that is able to devote the amount of time, money, and attention that refugee settlement requires. As one leader commented:

> I think [succession is] a problem. And I should know this because I have children. What the charitable giving practices of younger people are [makes me skeptical…].To the extent that mainline churches are involved with this—their hair is getting greyer. You sit at the back of the church and ask: 'Where is the new energy coming from?'

One suspects that if or when systemic challenges such as church closures – a dire reality for Anglicans and United Church Christians – threaten the core functions of the religious communities within which these agencies are housed, refugee services will also be curtailed. However, at present most of the participants I interviewed are more concerned about changes in government policies (see below) and global political challenges facing refugees than they are about the survival of their agencies. While many refugee activists expressed anxieties about the struggles their communities are facing with regard to membership and attendance, it appears that refugee work is not negatively impacted more significantly than other activities within their religious community. For many groups, refugee settlement activities happen "off the corner of the desk," as one participant put it, but they still happen. "At the moment you have to be on the fringe to be entrusted with [refugee settlement work]. I look at the clergy, the parishes, [and] this is not a priority," said one volunteer. His colleague echoed his sentiments: "I would say the same. [But] there will always be that group of people there that care enough to make it sustainable."

A few agency members suggested that it is possible that, while some Christian groups might fade away as their members age and some of their churches have to be shut down, rapid growth in minority traditions during the past four decades might suggest that other groups (Muslims and Sikhs, for example) could "pick up the slack" created by the demise of larger groups. In fact, this might foster creative collaborations between new and emerging groups interested in supporting refugees, and meaningful long-term interfaith cooperation in the process.[11] However, as Connor suggests (2009), within relatively new

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11   Eby et al. observe that: "As the tone of the dialogue around Muslim and Christian identity and religious practice in the US becomes more strident…[t]he involvement of faith communities at the local and national level in refugee resettlement…will continue not only to improve integration prospects for refugees and the communities that welcome them, but also to promote greater tolerance and justice in US policy and society at-large." (2011:

ethno-religious communities younger members often follow the identification patterns of the dominant society and thus may come to have less and less formal attachment to the religious institutions associated with their families. Indeed, since most of the children and many of the parents of these families are eager to secure their financial futures in an expensive part of the country, it is far from clear that agencies rooted in Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu or Sikh communities will compensate for the decline of the long-standing Christian groups.

I had expected CIC representatives to be anxious about the long-term viability of religiously affiliated groups which, after all, shoulder a fairly significant burden in refugee settlement. However, just as most volunteers are most concerned about their responsibilities to refugees, CIC staff were clearly most driven by their immediate duties as policy makers and the present challenges facing their department (which was on the eve of major administrative cuts when I conducted my interviews). As I discuss below, these government workers were not very concerned by the potential that some of their agency partners might disappear.

Bureaucratization and trust: Several participants spoke of the frustrations they have faced when trying to carry out the work of their settlement agency within an increasingly risk-averse and bureaucratized context shaped by CIC regulations (indeed, by the federal government in general) (cf. Denton 2003: 267). This is not the place for a full discussion, but it is worthwhile to list some of the sources of the increased bureaucratization that clearly irritates many agency volunteers. First, the evidence of corruption that emerged in the Gomery Inquiry (2005) into corruption in a federal sponsorship program operating in Quebec (and intended to bolster federalism) arguably led to increased scrutiny of all subsequent expenditures and partnerships with non-governmental entities, from religiously affiliated settlement agencies to universities. Second, in the 1980s and 1990s, the government and (arguably) also the broader public became more aware of and remorseful about the damages inflicted by Canada and other states on subaltern groups, from Aboriginal populations subjected to residential schools to Japanese Canadians relocated or interned during World War II; as a consequence, the potential, implicit, or explicit forms of proselytization of refugees (by hosts or sponsors) became especially problematic. Finally, perhaps as a

backlash to the state's perceived laxity with regard to newcomers, we have seen the growth of what Phil Ryan (2010) calls "multicultiphobia". Of course, the aversion Ryan observes in conservative Canadian political, public, and intellectual discourse is related to the debates over the future of multiculturalism in Europe and North America (Bramadat and Koenig 2009). Some have argued that recent changes (e.g., Bill C-31) in Canada's immigration and refugee policies reflect growing ambivalence among Canadian politicians and lay people over how well newcomers are integrating into Canadian society.[12]

Addressing his own frustrations about the "securitization" of immigration and refugee policies, one Anglican volunteer reflected that: ""The impression you get is that there are tons [of people taking advantage of the system], especially if you base this on what you get from the media or the present government. But ultimately, no, there aren't." A Roman Catholic volunteer complained that he felt the government no longer trusted him and his colleagues. He said:

> It's the suspicion [from the government] right from the beginning that that [agency worker or refugee] person is not trustworthy... In order to try and avoid the bad apple that might be there, it becomes everybody. They try to avoid the worst by making the whole program impossible. The question of the 'bad refugee' is very strong right now. [It is] the same thing with the volunteer because of all the [sexual] abuse cases [in the news]. Yes, to some extent [these concerns are] legit, but the question is how we go about it.... Years ago, back in '79 with the Vietnamese, [work with refugees] was just 'bang, bang, bang' [easy]. Now it's very bureaucratic. And it's that lack of flexibility that causes a lot of problems.... If the federal government showed that we weren't meeting needs once people arrived, then they'd have a case [for increased scrutiny]. But we've never had any of those.[13]

This individual's perception is that in the past decade – especially since September 11, 2001 when

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12   Many theorists have argued that there has been a consistent tendency within Canadian and other western societies to "securitize" immigration (Bramadat and Dawson forthcoming; Denton 2003), especially since September, 2011. It is probably not a coincidence that this shift has occurred in a period during which the source countries for immigrants and refugees are largely Asian and African (with the notable exception of Roma asylum-seekers from Hungary) and during which the percentage of "visible minority" Canadians is approaching or has surpassed 50% in our largest cities.
13   Commenting on the experience of refugees in Manitoba, Tom Denton notes that "to the knowledge of the Manitoba Refugee Sponsors, no privately sponsored refugee has ever had to have recourse to the government welfare system during the initial year of sponsor responsibility." (Denton 2003: 261)

many politicians began to be more cognizant of and responsive to public anxieties about foreigners – the federal bureaucracy has subjected newcomers and agencies like his to increasing scrutiny. Another participant had also internalized these concerns, noting, "I know in myself when I go out speaking at churches [to raise money and consciousness] I don't use the word refugee anymore because it's just become laden with criminality and terrorism, so I talk more about the [international] situation, people in need, just to create less barriers." (cf. Haddad et al 2003; Wilson 2011: 554)

Preference and Proselytization: While increasing the restrictions governing refugee settlement practices is intended, among other things, to make it difficult for sponsoring groups to proselytize refugees, I did not find any evidence in my interviews to suggest either that groups exclusively sought out members of their own communities, or that they would regularly try to encourage the refugees they helped to join the religion associated with the group (cf. Treviranus and Casasola 2003: 195). Indeed, one volunteer commented that: "CIC, quite rightly, specifies that sponsors must not proselytize." (Ager 2011: 465; Eby et al 2011: 594; Ferris 2011)) None of the volunteers appeared to resent this restriction, and CIC staff did not indicate that they had witnessed significant evidence of proselytizing. One volunteer said, "This question [of sponsoring Christians] comes up rarely and usually from someone in the congregation [who is not involved in the group]. But it's disposed of pretty quickly."

When I asked a Roman Catholic about the role of religion in choosing refugees, he said matter-of-factly that there was "none," adding "I don't think there were even any Catholics, apart from the [refugee family from Eritrea], who we knew were Catholic. [The recent refugees his agency has settled] were all Muslims." I asked if the religious background of the refugees were noted on their files. Another Catholic replied: "No. But that's something we might do in the future, to help them find a religious support group."

Echoing this general theme, a Muslim agency leader observed: "We are not dealing with the refugees because they are Muslim, we are not dealing with the subject from the beginning. And we are not approached by the government on that basis. ...They have [been declared] refugees through the UN, [as people] who need humanitarian assistance, they need settlement, they need to live somewhere and we come forward like everybody else. We are part of the [broader] community, and we can provide services

like everybody else."[14] Indeed, not only have the mostly Christian volunteers I met with been engaged

in settling mostly Muslim refugees in recent years, but as one participant noted, sometimes it is CIC that

points out the potential benefits of Christian groups sponsoring Christian refugees: "I remember being at

a meeting in Toronto two years ago and the federal government said, 'Why don't you bring in Christians

from Iraq?' When that situation was deteriorating more and more they made a presentation to us about

the [Christians] being pushed out of Iraq.")[15]

While I found little sign that the agency leaders were engaged in, or the government staff were

worried about, proselytization, it is worth wondering whether the legitimate public and political aversion

to anything that resembles coercion creates a hyper-sensitivity in agencies that might limit otherwise

ordinary and quite supportive interactions between refugees and religious host groups. Commenting on

an American case (although the insight is also apparently apropos in Canada), Eby et al. argue that "Out

of fear of offending newly arrived refugees, and understanding that their past persecution may have

been related to their faith or cultural practices, some faith-based co-sponsorship groups err on the side

of caution... and do not invite refugees even to social functions at places of worship." (Eby et al 2011:

595; cf. Wilson 2011: 554)[16]

Personal idiosyncrasies: Finally, throughout my interviews I found clear evidence that even those

religiously affiliated settlement agencies that had been functioning for decades were in many cases al-

most entirely dependent upon particular individuals or families; when this was not the case, the number

of volunteers actively engaged in refugee settlement activities was rarely more than a dozen. In one

organization, almost all of the hundreds of refugees that had been sponsored were settled by a sup-

portive and dedicated group revolving around a now elderly man and his son. One of these men was an

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14   Notable in this last comment was the volunteer's eagerness to demonstrate that his (Muslim) group has a capacity to contribute to the settlement of refugees, just as the other (mostly Christian) religious groups have done in the past.

15   By way of an anecdote about the sorts of refugees who get sponsored, one Anglican participant said that since 2009, his group have settled three Iraqi-Palestinian families, a brother and sister from Eritrea, and a family from Eritrea; currently his agency is in the process of finalizing the paperwork necessary to settle another Iraqi-Palestinian family, and a family from Ethiopia. One Muslim leader noted that: "I never got the indication from the government that they were interested in whether the refugees were Christian or Muslim or Hindu whatever. That's-I think they were least interested in that."

16   Of course, this extreme caution is not indicative of all religious groups' approaches to refugee settlement. *Beyond the Welcome: Churches Responding to the Immigrant Reality in Canada*, a recent (2010) report commissioned by World Vision Canada (a Christian organization), outlined ways congregations might be more welcoming of immigrants and refugees.

outspoken critic of the conservative turn in the denomination with which the agency was affiliated; since the refugee settlement umbrella group the men lead depends on donations and cooperation from local members of the church (and its official hierarchy), relations were sometimes strained.

In another organization, for many years most duties were handled by a lone charismatic woman. Although no one doubted the sincerity of her motivations or the positive effect she had on the lives of refugees, questions did arise about her extensive travel in pursuit of refugee work, as well as her tendency to direct the attention of local congregations toward refugee settlement (an emphasis that was supported morally, but that necessarily detracted from other priorities within the denomination and congregation). In an Anglican settlement agency, the group floundered after the clergy member who had supplied most of the energy for the settlement services was fired after allegations of sexual impropriety (with his own congregants).

The particulars of these relationships between individual leaders and their home religious communities are not as important as the general observation that the personal idiosyncrasies of (and institutional support provided to) the key volunteers is an extremely important determinant of the present (and likely future) state of a particular settlement agency.

Discursive naturalization: don't ask, don't tell

Now I would like to consider what these interviews can tell us about the broader ideological environment in which conversations about the relationship between religious groups and an ostensibly (or increasingly) secular government occur. I am interested in religious groups devoted to refugee settlement, but the general findings may also relate to other interactions between religion and the state. On this topic, the interviews supplied strong evidence of the deep entrenchment of secularist logic.

When asked about his motivations, an Anglican volunteer who has worked with refugees for several decades provided a fairly representative response. He commented that his own interest "comes from my sense of Christian obligation, which is to help and support vulnerable people—wherever they are, and wherever they're from." Echoing Erin Wilson's observations about the significance of the monotheistic notions of "hospitality" within faith-based humanitarian organizations (2011: 549), one participant – who was also a member of the clergy – noted: "I also [promote the work of my group] from the pulpit.

[My sermons on this issue have been based] on the biblical idea of 'Welcome the stranger and you welcome God in your midst.' Every time there was a scripture reading, I would mention this... Obviously the religious aspects are a motivation, but I think it's more general than that." In response to a question about religious motivations, another clergy member commented that he saw his agency's work as part of expressing the relevance of Christianity to a secularizing society:

> We try to pitch to the parishes, to put forward the fact that taking on sponsorships represents
> an amazing opportunity to... show the wider community 'Look what we're doing!'.... And for
> a church that questions its own relationship and relevancy to the wider community, which is
> questioning its relevancy and relationship to the church, something like refugee sponsorship is
> an amazing opportunity to address both of those.[17]

However, when I asked volunteers whether they either did – or might like to – share their religious motivations or the religious roots of their agency with representatives of CIC, almost no one replied positively. Similarly, when I asked CIC representatives if they are interested in these motivations and roots among their agency partners, they said no.

Although similar discursive rules characterize the ways governments and refugee workers interact in other national contexts (Wilson 2011: 549), I was nevertheless fascinated that both groups seemed uninterested in or uncomfortable with talking about religion with the other group. On the surface, this seems counter-intuitive. After all, settling refugees (which often means settling a family with many complex needs) requires a tremendous commitment of time and money, most of which is provided by volunteers who are inspired by distinctly religious beliefs, convictions, and feelings. For CIC, these motivations animate agencies that save the state and society both money and energy and promote (in the national and international spheres) positive views of Canada's humanitarian record. Why, then, would such deep motivations be considered off-limits *a priori*? Why would the state take no interest in such matters? These are, of course, rhetorical questions, since such rules are clearly already deeply engrained in the

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17   In *Beyond the Welcome: Churches Responding to the Immigrant Reality in Canada* (2010), the report's authors note that: "The second motivation [for reaching out to refugees and immigrants] is sociological. Churches need to respond to demographic trends – they need to remain relevant to a culturally diverse society in which they now find themselves. For some participants who held this view, the very survival of the church in Canada was at stake." (p. 14)

norms governing interactions between the government and these agencies.

There are at least two reasons that religious motivations and interests are not discussed. First, probably the most basic explanation may be implied in the response of another participant who said her work with refugees emerges from "compassion for refugees—I think we're very blessed to live in this country, and there are many in great need. It's just the compassion for me...*the compassion and religious convictions are intertwined but still separate.*" (emphasis added) I heard several very similar responses to these questions. These putatively universal – or to use the words of one volunteer, "more general" – sensibilities are the common ground on which CIC staff are able to engage agency leaders. According to this narrative (which has been a well-established *leitmotif* in political theories for many decades), these shared humanitarian values do not just demarcate but, indeed, create the so-called "neutral public sphere" within which it is safe for religious groups and representatives of the (secular) state to converse, but as ostensibly secular citizens, not as members of one or another religious group. As such, there is arguably a tacit assumption on the part of the groups and CIC staff that, although they are inspired by different value systems, they are able to agree on the importance of providing assistance to refugees.

The second explanation for silence on the topic of religion is that the functional separation (Bhargava 1998) of political and religious discourses has become so naturalized that most of the religiously affiliated settlement agency representatives had never even imagined that such conversations about religion might occur with their government partners. Just as most leaders would not harbour frustrations over never discussing religion with their mechanics, physicians, or accountants, most seemed unperturbed by the fact that they have a relationship with CIC that operates according to discursive norms that categorically exclude discussions of their actual motivations. For their part, CIC representatives also seemed puzzled by my question about whether they would ever discuss the religious motivations of the agency volunteers. "Religion" and "religious motivations" are deemed, from the outset of the interaction between these parties, to belong in a psycho-social compartment that is by definition off-limits.

I was so fascinated by what I came to think of as the "don't-ask-don't-tell" policy at work for the groups and the government that I posed a patently absurd scenario to CIC staff. I invented a religious group that was applying to be a Sponsorship Agreement Holder; I explained that the group worshipped regularly at night in Vancouver's Stanley Park forest, and that they organized themselves around ex-

tremely unorthodox views about fairies, tree spirits, and extraterrestrial life-forms. I further indicated that the group had a coherent and well-funded settlement plan. I then asked whether CIC would grant them the legal right to sponsor refugees. The instrumentalism of the CIC representative was striking:

> I think, again, we stick to the facts. We look at the eligibility criteria and, you know, the fact is [that the UNHCR has determined that] this [person] is a refugee. You can come up with the [the most bizarre description of religious motivations], but the fact is that this is a refugee and if this [group] has sufficient resources, and the settlement plan is sound, and they have all the details covered, again, my thoughts on whether this [agency] guy has spent too much time at Stanley Park doesn't matter.

His colleague added:

> What I need to assess is whether you meet the criteria and whether you have demonstrated that yes, you can actually help this family to resettle in Canada and whether God told you to do that or not, I don't know, I don't know, I don't have that experience.... But we wouldn't make [providing assistance to refugees] extra hard for them just because they claim that God spoke to them.

At present, the government adopts what one might call a studied indifference toward the core religious sensibilities of these groups, but finds the commitment and competence of the volunteers to be extremely useful (and cost effective) for supporting the government's settlement efforts (cf. Eby et al. 2011: 588; Hagan and Ebaugh 2003: 1146; Ives and Sinha 2010: 216).[18]   As such, there need not be any substantive interaction on the issue of deeper motivations, theology, and so forth. When asked to reflect on why a secular government might be open to working for so long with religious groups, one participant observed that, "The easy response is that I think it's a utilitarian equation for them."

By way of an exemplification of this tendency, when I discussed the problems of succession with CIC, I asked: "[Succession is] a big issue for [these groups], but it doesn't sound like it's keeping you awake at night." "Um no, not operationally," one CIC staff member replied. Another used a market metaphor to explain his colleague's remark: "[We do not concern ourselves with the fate of the agencies]

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18   Regarding the limitations placed on federal staff, one CIC staff member commented that "loyal implementation [of government policy], that's what we signed up to do."

because we are here to provide a service, but whether there is a demand for the service, well it's up to them to send the applications to us [laughs], right?" Playing along with their joke, I asked: "Right. I mean, it's not like you are going to hire somebody from the government for $30 an hour to do what the [stalwarts] are doing for free, right?" This was a rhetorical question, of course, and they responded accordingly with a unison "No!"

The stakes

Even though volunteers might be concerned about attrition, bureaucratization, and the other challenges I have just outlined, should anyone else – especially people who are non-religious (or anti-religious) – also care? After all, perhaps these groups have simply (or will soon have) run their course and are no longer needed by the state or society? Perhaps other coalitions of social justice groups might be asked to carry on the tradition that was originally (almost entirely) Christian? Perhaps the state should handle all refugee sponsorships?

By way of a response to these legitimate questions, I can share that – not surprisingly – many of the volunteers I interviewed felt that the decline of long-established agencies will represent a significant loss both for our state and society. On a very crude level, if some of the larger Christian organizations fade away and are not replaced by other groups, the state will lose the free labour the religious groups have provided for decades. It is difficult to place a dollar value on this labour, but I have asked agency workers to estimate the costs of settling refugees – in both financial and temporal terms (e.g., the hours spent raising funds, purchasing supplies, welcoming and orienting them to their new homes, registering them for school and language classes, health challenges, and educational transitions for children). Participants almost all have the same response: first, they sigh, and then they usually say "countless," or words to that effect. One Muslim speaker mentioned that if they added the direct costs of settlement (i.e., the amount of money CIC requires agencies to commit at the beginning) to the (anticipated) cost of hiring staff to provide the necessary settlement support for each family, the cost would be "over $100,000."[19]

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19   By way of a very conservative estimate of the costs of settling a family of five, consider the following scenario: If a group is expected to raise roughly $30,000 to support the costs of an average family of five for one year, and if we assume that agencies settle 3000 refugees (or 600 families) in a given year, they would be saving the government nearly $18,000,000 each year. The number of actual hours involved would vary widely depending on the refugees in question, the size of the family, or ethnic community involved, etc. However, let us assume that settling each family would require only 100 hours of volunteer labour (e.g., committee meetings, shopping, fundrais-

There is a general sense among the volunteers that the government does not understand the nature or scope of their efforts. One Unitarian volunteer mused about the idea of a general strike:

I wish, I mean I almost wish that every single religious community would go on strike, symbolic strike for a week, and point out for the government how much the religious communities are contributing to the well-being [of society].... Sometimes I feel like [groups like ours] are almost like a necessary evil.

When asked what would happen if the agencies declined, he added:

I think enormous costs would devolve back to the provincial and federal government if... they are ready or able to pick it up.... Personally, I think that the responsibility of the provincial and federal government should be the provision of really, really sustained, concerted resources – once we approve someone to come here – to enable that individual, or that family to really be able to connect and to thrive.... There is something that really bothers me about government devolving their responsibility to promote the common good off onto... churches and synagogues and civil society.

Moreover, in addition to the significant financial contributions these groups make to Canadian society, there are arguably political benefits as well. For example, the wide network of agencies and their positive image in the refugee community allow both the government and other members of Canadian society to claim that Canada is a compassionate society. As such, they both help refugees in obvious ways and the Canadian state more subtly by sustaining the common benevolent Canadian self-understanding as well as our international reputation or "brand". On the latter dynamic, Treverinanus and Casasola write the following:

Canadian NGOs, *particularly faith and ethno-cultural groups* had assisted refugees with their integration long before the arrival of the Indochinese and continued to do so after the end of the movement of resettled refugees. This tradition was recognized by UNHCR in 1986 when it awarded

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ing, hosting, welcoming events, doctors' visits, etc.) each, and if we estimated the value of this labour at only $20 per hour, each year a group would be donating $1,200,000 worth of labour to Canada's refugee settlement efforts. This is almost certainly a conservative estimate when one considers the length of an average committee meeting (perhaps two hours) and the number of committee members (perhaps five people); so, each meeting would "cost" each group ten hours of (free) labour, and many of these hours would be "spent" in the months or years before the refugee family arrives in Canada. As well, many group members observed that they often provide material and other forms of practical assistance to refugees well past one year.

its Nansen medal to the "People of Canada", the first time the medal was awarded to the people

of a country. (2003: 185; emphasis added)

However, as Harold Troper notes, Canada has reaped disproportionate benefits from its refugee

history: "By the 1970's it was widely held that Canada was then and always had been a haven for the

oppressed. In retrospect, the public imagination turned a select series of economically beneficial refu-

gee resettlement programs into a massive and longstanding Canadian humanitarian resolve on behalf of

refugees."[20] One of the agency leaders I interviewed reflected a widespread consensus among other or-

ganizers that Troper's critical historical perspective is still merited: "There is this perception that Canada

is pretty open and welcoming. Every passing year, that becomes less so.... [But] we still have a warm

fuzzy image."

Conclusion

When trying to understand the relationship between the state and groups committed to improv-

ing the lives of refugees, it is important to remember that the religious groups and the government

have been affected over the past few decades by broader national and international debates concern-

ing the nature and future of religion, the responsibilities of western democracies toward refugees, the

relationship between a socially cohesive federal state and a complex multicultural society, the "securi-

tization" of ethno-religious minority communities, and the effort to develop a distinctly Canadian form

of secularism.[21] The current situation of these groups in Canada affords us an opportunity to glimpse the

ways several of these forces intersect. In particular, three factors are worth considering and might merit

further analysis.

First, declining membership and participation in mainline religious groups is likely to threaten the

long-term viability of established agencies. Although at present these groups are not in "crisis mode,"

most of the leaders sense that the social conditions that have supported them in the past –stable

religious institutions, affordable cities, sufficient economic prosperity, a communitarian ethos of vol-

unteerism, and an open bureaucratic environment – may deteriorate if social, political, and economic

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20   See: http://ccrweb.ca/en/brief-history-canadas-responses-refugees . Accessed August 10, 2012.
21   In the Canadian context, these debates have developed differently in Quebec than in the rest of the
country. In the broader project my colleagues and I plan to launch, we will be able to address differences between
provinces and regions.

realities continue to move along their current trajectories. It is unlikely that any government could significantly redirect such social trends. However, a society and a state that rely on religiously affiliated agencies to enact our much-vaunted commitment to refugee settlement would be well advised to attend to the implications of these changes for this critical source of volunteer labour. Even if the state simply wishes to sustain (as opposed to increase) the contributions of these groups to the broader social good, it may need to engage them on their own terms, which will, or might, mean that state actors would need to increase their familiarity with the religious and cultural sensibilities that motivate these volunteers.

Second, it is important to reflect critically upon the role of the scholar in the debates that have emerged over refugee settlement – debates revolving around how many to allow, how and where best to settle them when they arrive, how to adjudicate claims from asylum-seekers, how to protect them once they arrive, which global calamities to address through refugee policies, who will pay for the settlement, and toward what social goals our policies ought to be oriented. While refugee activists tend to frame the government's recent policy changes as cold and cynical, it is sometimes the case that the situation on the ground reflects a more basic Weberian "rationalization" at work.[22] As Christian Joppke observes in *Citizenship and Immigration* (2010), it is often the case that governments "manage" the sometimes xenophobic segments of their populations through the introduction of apparently anti-immigrant and anti-refugee measures while simultaneously streamlining the system and protecting (even in some ways expanding) the rights of newcomers. Perhaps a similar set of apparently contradictory processes are at work in Canada, too, and perhaps there might be innovative ways for agency volunteers to position themselves with regard to the new regime. If scholars and policy makers can elucidate the local, national, and international forces behind particular policy changes, they could help to calm the sometimes heated debates that occur in our society on the issue of refugees and immigrants.

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22   Most agency workers belong to the political "left," and as such are often critical of the current Conserva-tive government. However, it is important to bear in mind that religious groups have been critical of the previous Liberal government's approach to refugees. Consider, for example, a letter written to Minister of CIC, Judy Sgro, in 2004, in which the director of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada wrote: "We are also concerned and disap-pointed about your recent statement, 'The protection of our country and of Canadians has to be the number one concern.' Comments such as this draw an inappropriate and unfounded link between refugees and security con-cerns, and reinforce popular prejudices regarding refugees. There is no evidence that refugees pose any threat to Canadian security." (Epp-Buckingham 2004; cf. Denton 2003: 258)

Third, my interviews with agency leaders confirm that closed secularism is the least obvious but perhaps most powerful force at work in the way Canadian governments tend to engage religious issues and religious groups such as the agencies on which I have focused my attention. In the interactions I have explored – obvious examples of a secular government engaging directly with and relying heavily on religious groups – it is not surprising that the relationship is characterized by a "don't ask, don't tell" sensibility. Here the relationship is especially complicated. In this case, we see a risk-averse government that observes both ambient public anxieties about multiculturalism and refugee integration and nativist anti-multicultural developments in Europe and the United States (Cesari 2009), and fairly predictably responds by insulating themselves from or tightly disciplining any overt engagements with religion. Perhaps this is the quintessentially conservative Canadian approach to a workable if not entirely happy arrangement. However, on a practical level, I suspect that (at this point merely hypothetical) discussions about religion with agency volunteers might embarrass a government that is (or that wishes to be seen as) committed to a secular multiculturalism, and might create suspicions in the minds of government representatives about the groups with which they have a long and generally productive working relationship.

As Ager notes, "we work in an era when across an increasingly broad array of 'public' contexts our discourse reflects the language and mindset of secularism, while acknowledging domains within which individuals or communities may legitimately deploy faith-based thinking and actions." (Ager 2011: 458) To this I would add that the conversations I have had demonstrate both the mighty and subtle power of a particular – increasingly closed – form of secularism. This is the best way to characterize what is, in Canadian terms, a relatively new regime for defining the relationship between religion and the state: one that requires ancient religious traditions with transcendent moral imperatives on the one hand *to translate* their interests and motivations into a so-called neutral secular discourse of values, and on the other hand *to forget* that they are engaged in such a process of translation.

A few religiously affiliated settlement workers bemoan what they perceive to be the arrogance implicit in the secularist regime, but in fact this discursive system evidently "works" for both parties. For the government it keeps religious groups engaged in providing (mostly free) refugee settlement services, and for agencies the "don't ask don't tell" regime keeps the government engaged in what they see as

the religious (or more universally, the "ethical") act of supporting refugees. While religious groups do not generally protest the government's disinterest in the religious nature of their groups or their motivations, there is reason to believe that this research evidences some of the costs, or the dangers, of functional secularism.

This rather guarded, formal, and officially disinterested relationship between the Canadian state and religious groups would work perfectly well in a national and global situation characterized by the ongoing and more or less system-wide (i.e., individual, institutional, and systemic) advancement of secularization, both in Canada and abroad.   If, however, the rest of the world (Ager 2011: 469), not to mention Canada, is not undergoing secularization on the individual, systemic, or institutional levels (or is not undergoing all three forms of secularization at once), then we may ask whether it is wise for the government to avoid meaningful engagement with a whole dimension of the experience and priorities of some of its settled citizens, immigrants, refugees, and its international partners. Ager reminds us that 90% of humanitarian workers are "'people of faith'," (2011: 469) a fact that might make us pause before assuming that the sphere in which governments (or funders) engage with such workers ought to be utterly free of religious content. If the functional secularist status quo reflects neither the commitments of refugee NGO volunteers nor employees, it also "fails to relate effectively to the dynamics of faith within displaced populations" themselves. (Ager 2011: 458; cf. Hagan and Ebaugh 2003)

The fact that agency volunteers whose social activism is shaped by religious convictions are not aggravated by this failure indicates how deeply this kind of secularism has become naturalized in our society. Although one might expect agency leaders to be concerned about what Ferris (2011) describes as secularizing pressures that are brought to bear on religiously affiliated groups, there was very little evidence of this in these interviews. Nevertheless, one United Church volunteer articulated a sentiment common among those I spoke with concerning what draws them to devote so much time and energy to settling refugees. Echoing Wilson's argument (2011) regarding the centrality of notions of hospitality in the ways agency workers think about their work, she observed:

> I just happen to feel it. Working for people, trying to make the world a better place, it sounds very, terribly banal, [but for me] this all is religion… basically I would say that in the refugee, especially the ones I don't like- I see the Christ figure and I am called to respond.

Another volunteer affirmed this insight: "Yes, and for me too, religion is not something you keep in safe boundaries, you must live it. It must be very political."

One of the few scholars involved in the interviews mentioned:

> I see the work that [these groups do] as a recognition that [the religious and political worlds] are not separate…You can't separate those realities. They are intrinsically about what it means to be human.

Ager captures well the value – and urgency – of bringing these two spheres together in an effort to address some of the core issues facing refugees and those who support them:

> [W]e need to find a way past, or through, functional secularism…. We need to construct ac-counts for engagement… that are true to the dynamics of faith and action within communities, as well as the broader principles articulated in the vernacular of humanitarian policy makers and analysts. Such accounts will require humanitarianism to explore the 'post-secular age'. (Ager 2011: 466; cf. Wilson 2011: 560)

The style of secularism that has coalesced in Canadian society during roughly the past four or five decades has been associated with formal efforts to de-Christianize the public arena and, under the aegis of state multiculturalism, to decrease barriers to the full inclusion of ethnic and religious minorities (Bra-madat and Seljak 2008; Bramadat and Seljak forthcoming). While this approach sought to transform our society, it is worthwhile to ask whether it has established a relationship between religion and the state that may no longer serve our society's needs quite as well as it once appeared it would. At the moment, neither the volunteers nor the federal government workers I interviewed appear to be greatly concerned by the current silence with respect to religion. However, if our society moves in what we might call a "post-secular" direction because of continued immigration from (relatively) more religious parts of the world; continued debates about the ways religion might appear in the public arena; or continued social and political upheavals here or elsewhere, it will become necessary to rethink the relationship between the government and these important contributors to the common good.

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