THE RE-SETTLEMENT EXPERIENCES OF
REFUGEE WOMEN IN DIASPORA

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By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Social Work

McMaster University

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK   McMaster University
(2005)   Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Re-Settlement Experiences of Refugee Women in Diaspora

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NUMBER OF PAGES: iv, 71

Abstract:

With the new *Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act, 2002* Immigrant and refugee issues have been on the forefront of Canadian social policy. Refugees are amongst the most vulnerable population in the world and literature suggests that amongst the refugee population, women are disproportionately represented. Each year, Canada is home to thousands of refugees and is faced with the difficult task of re-settling refugees into a new culture, political and social system. While Canada is often celebrated for its immigration policies, there are significant shortcomings in the process of re-settling refugees. The social construction of 'refugee' and 'women of colour' create a situational space for complex and dynamic experiences that refugee women must overcome in the re-settlement process. These interlocking oppressions impact on the newcomers' sense of belonging and inclusion in their community of re-settlement. This research paper looked at the re-settlement experiences of government assisted refugees as well as asylum seekers in the first two years of re-settlement. A comprehensive literature review was conducted as well a two focus groups with refugee women, and three in-depth interviews with settlement service providers. Research showed that often, re-settlement was left to chance. Refugee women faced many barriers to accessing needed resources and therefore were often shut out from full participation in society. Many refugee women felt isolated in their communities and were marginalized because of their status as a refugee woman, impacting their re-settlement into Canadian society. There are no state protections from the factors that marginalize and shut out their participation as contributing citizens. Implications for this research showed that there needs to be additional support offered to refugee women in the re-settlement process especially those who are asylum seekers.

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Introduction

My focus of research is on refugee women. Refugee women's lives are often shaped by factors of violence, oppression and are vulnerable to many forms of exploitation. Refugee women are amongst the most vulnerable in our society as they share stories of exploitation, persecution and insecurity. Social policies often do not reflect the unique experiences refugee women endure. Gender driven policies impact refugee women's rights to citizenship and social inclusion in society. The Canadian *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, 2002*, is entrenched in a history that contributes to the fabric of Canada's social, political, and cultural existence. The refugee experience is a piece of this fabric created out of humanitarian considerations. Re-settlement into a new culture, political system and society can be both challenging and rewarding. Refugees arrive in Canada in search of safety: their primary goal for migration is to find a safe place to re-build their lives. Communities can respond in a manner which encourages or discourages the plight of refugee women to safety. The migration and re-settlement experience of refugees can negate or foreshadow other experiences they will have in this Country.

This research is important because increasingly there are more people fleeing to Canada from diverse countries. With the increasing presence of war and civil strife occurring in our world, there is the potential for more refugees to be created out of these circumstances, therefore increasing the prevalence of refugees seeking re-settlement into our communities. The events of 9/11 have negatively affected the re-settlement

experiences of racially diverse people as they are viewed as potential enemies and a *threat* to national security opposed to people *in* need of security.

This research paper adds to the growing body of knowledge on the re-settlement experiences of refugees in Canada. It qualifies the experiences of refugee women, creating a space to share their stories of struggle and survival in diaspora. While the marginalization of women in society is common, there is an increased isolation and alienation of refugee women of colour who have recently re-settled in Canada. Since these women are racialized, racism may play a role in their post arrival experience.

My research will look at the re-settlement experiences of government assisted refugees (GAR's) as well as asylum seekers in the first two years of re-settlement. The term 'refugee' is used to include both GAR's and asylum seekers reflecting the common plight to safety for both groups; both groups have been involuntarily uprooted from their homeland and faced persecution. Government assisted refugees re-settle into Canada through the assistance of the Canadian government. Their refugee claim is processed overseas and they arrive in Canada as landed immigrants. Asylum seekers, without the assistance of the Canadian government arrive in Canada and make their refugee claim within Canada. I use the term 'newcomer' as a reference to include both government assisted refugees and asylum seekers in the discussion. The term 'newcomer' is fitting for this research project as it refers to individuals who have not yet integrated or settled into Canadian society. The experiences of immigrants and refugees will intersect in the discussion, however, the re-settlement experiences of refugee women of colour are unique and distinct.

I analyze if factors of racism, discrimination and marginalization perpetuate the

oppression of refugee women, and if these factors influence their participation in the

Canadian Welfare State and participation in Canadian Society. I isolate factors which

impede on the "successful" re-settlement of refugee women in our communities,

analyzing the Canadian welfare systems role in re-settlement, and looking at factors that

foster integration leading to the social inclusion of refugee women.

This paper presents an analysis of Canada's current *Immigration and Refugee*

Protection Act, 2002, taking special note of changes to the legislation and impetus behind

the change. I also take an in-depth look at the re-settlement experiences of refugee

women seeking asylum in Canada.

The central research questions are as follows:

1. What are the key changes that have occurred in Canada's refugee polices over the past two years that have affected government assisted refugees and asylum seekers re-settlement into Canada?

2. How does the Canadian welfare system respond to the re-settlement needs of refugee women?

3. What are the re-settlement experiences of government assisted and asylum seekers in Canada?

I present findings from two group meetings that were held with refugee women in

the community. I examine data relating to the experiences of refugee women derived

from literature and interviews as it pertains to their re-settlement experiences in Canada. I

begin the paper with a conceptual framework looking at the notion of citizenship and

belonging, as well as the Canadian social construction of refugee women. I present a

literature review as well as a review of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, 2002.*

Settlement is distinguishable from integration; however both lie on the same continuum (CCR, 2004). My thesis focuses on re-settlement and not on integration. Settlement (or re-settlement) pertains to the immediate response to the adjustment to a new Country. Integration is a longer process and pertains to the "process through which newcomers become full and equal participants in all the various dimensions of society" (CCR, 2004). The discourse on settlement carriers the assumption that refugee women have never once "settled." This use of language in polices reflect the notion that we allow people in the country to start a new life, and that life begins once landed in Canada. I argue this ideology to say that as life is a journey, so are the lives of refugee women. I use the term "re-settlement" to reflect the true plight of refugee women. To recognize that refugee women come to Canada with a story and a history.

Refugee women, because of persecution are uprooted from their homeland, seeking a community that can provide them a safe haven. Refugee women may have come to Canada to re-build their lives, however, it is important to recognize and celebrate the person and the life that has re-settled in our communities. In order for refugee women to begin the process of re-building their lives in Canadian society, they need the resources and tools to become full participants in their community of re-settlement. Through discrimination and racism, refugee women have not been awarded full citizenship rights and are pushed to the margins of society. The level of citizenship and belonging granted to refugee women is an impacting factor on their re-settlement.

Conceptual Framework

Citizenship and Belonging

The concept of citizenship considers the notions of belonging, inclusion, identity and agency (Abu-Laban, 2002; Daenzer, 2002). Citizenship refers to the level of participation an individual has in their community. Participation has often been defined as the, "active and meaningful involvement of the masses of people at different levels, (a) in the decision-making process for the determination of societal goals and the allocation of resources to achieve them, and (b) in the voluntary execution of resulting programs and projects" (Martin, 2004). Arnstein equates citizen participation with citizen power describing it as the "redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future" (1969 p. 216). Arnstein further suggests that there is a fundamental difference between "real power" and "empty power" (1969). Real power is when the participant has influence over processes and outcomes, "participation without distribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless...it maintains the status quo" (p.216). Those who hold the 'real power' in society create an illusion to the perceived 'powerless' that they in fact hold influential power as well. Newcomers are expected to be full participants in the re-settlement process, however, the operationalization of the immigration and refugee system results in a power-over approach negating the ability of newcomers to exercise any form of control. While immigration laws slowly changed to

allow culturally diverse individuals entrance into Canada, selection criteria and post-migration activities did not promote full citizenship, inclusion or belonging (Daenzer, 2002).

The notion of citizenship raises the question of belonging; "who does and does not belong" (Abu-Laban, 2002). It can be argued that belonging is personal and subjective however, society constructs who is and is not a part of that community; who remains marginalized. In the case of immigration, this notion of belonging can often be reduced to the common denominator of economic requirements to benefit the Canadian economy (Ibid). The ideal citizen is seen as someone who has economic resources to invest; one who contributes more then they withdraw. Refugee women often do not come with the economic resources to invest in the Canadian market and therefore are seen as 'undesirable' citizens. However, refugee women have richly contributed to the social and cultural fabric of Canadian society. There is no doubt that historically, race also played a role in defining who was an 'ideal citizen' as Canada sought immigrants from primarily European nations (Abu-Laban. 2002). "While immigration policy worked on a supposed open door policy...there were always those who because of their race were castigated as inassimilable and as a result faced many obstacles in acquiring access to settler status and citizenship rights" (Abu-Laban, 2002 p.42). While Canada has moved away from overt racism in immigration and refugee laws, systemic discrimination continues to affect the agency and belonging of refugee women of colour in present day society.

Many refugee women describe feeling like aliens in Canada. This experience of feeling isolated from society complicates the re-settlement process. Settlement agencies respond to the needs of refugees who feel "culturally alienated" to encourage the participation and integration of newcomers. Their identity is challenged, therefore adding to the complexities for refugee women who have been stripped of their past identity; leaving family, culture, and their entire lives behind. Many refugee women arrive into Canada without proper documentation or identification; no trace or proof of who they are or were. Re-settling into Canada and re-building their lives thus becomes a process of re-building their identities. One refugee woman described this process as being re-born. In addition, there is conflict between Canadian culture and their native culture, making it difficult to integrate into Canadian society. For example, one settlement service provider explained that newcomers are faced with conflicting ideologies between Canadian and their native culture with childrearing.   In addition, refugee women must compete with dominate ideologies inherent in society regarding their status and prestige.

Western ideologies hold importance to titles such as doctor, lawyer, and teacher, disallowing refugee women the authority to hold such titles. Their professional identities challenged by the gatekeepers of professional bodies, denying refugee women the right to hold their title and status earned outside of Canada. One settlement provider explained that many refugees are faced with the challenge of starting over when they arrive in Canada. "In their own country they managed to climb to the top of the ladder," however here in Canada it may take two to three years and they still cannot climb the first ladder; they are crawling again."

Citizenship and having a sense of belonging is reinforced when refugee women can have full participation in society. Currently we have a "two-tiered" system of citizenship where the privileged in society enjoy a greater level of participation and influence in society (George, et al., 2003). We must be careful of involving newcomers in ad hoc processes, which do not hold power or can influence change. This 'tokenism' only gives a voice but does not offer the tools for change. Re-settlement programs are more effective when newcomers have input over processes and are involved in goal setting (Martin, 2004). George, et al., describes citizenship as a "triangular relationship between civil, political and social rights" (George, et al., 2003 p.71). Civil rights refer to an individual's freedom while political rights refer to the exercising of "political power" (George, et al., 2003 p.72). Social rights refer to the access and belonging of individuals in society (ibid). Agency allows participants to define their needs, ensuring through equitable processes their needs are adequately met. "Citizenship can therefore be linked to the concept of human agency. People must first reacquire a sense of control and the ability to make choices in their lives before they are able to actively participate as citizens in society" (George, et al., 2003 p.76). This notion of citizenship and participation by refugee women is complicated by the interlocking oppression they experience in society.

Interlocking Oppression

The interlocking oppression experienced by refugee women is linked to the socially constructed meanings of race, gender and class (George & Ramkissoon, 1998). The oppression that refugee women face is multi-layered, situational and dynamic. The social construction of 'refugee' and 'women of colour' create a situational space for

complex and dynamic experiences that refugee women must overcome in the re-

settlement process. These variables interact with each other shaping their experiences in

Canada, impacting their identity, and social location in society (Satzewich, 1998).

Ogbagzy states,

> "The identity constructs of race and gender through their
> intersections is the dominant elements which determine immigrant
> women's socio-economic positions and relations. These elements are
> neither permanently static nor always compatible, at times coming into
> direct conflict with one another" (1999, p.69).

Refugee women enter Canada with "pre-existing features of racial and gender

inequality" (Li, 2005). The marginalization and disadvantage that refugee women face

when seeking integration into Canadian society is "rooted in attitudes and conventions"

about their race, age, colour, disability, and class (Abu-Laban, 2002). The oppression,

discrimination and exploitation that refugee women of colour experience can be linked to

race and gender (Elabor-Idemudia, 1999 p.40). Henry argues that, "racial and cultural

barriers influence the provision of services and the quality and appropriateness of those

services" (Henry, 2000 p.208). According to Henry, refugee women of colour are

disempowered in human-services by their "double group identification" as a refugee and

person of colour (p.209).

Historically, racist ideology grouped people into classifications based on

"perceived physical characteristics such as skin colour," thus creating a false "hierarchy

of biologically superior and inferior groups of people" (Satzewich, 1998 p.25; Daenzer,

2002a). Despite the fact that these racist doctrines have been discredited, racist ideology

continues to exist in present day society. Although racism does not have any biological

merit, it continues to be socially and politically significant (Satzewich, 1998).

According to Daenzer, "black women have a long history of exclusion."

(Daenzer,1997 p.280). Black women must overcome first the oppression associated with

being a person of colour and then the oppression associated with being women (Daenzer,

1997). Refugee women of colour as mentioned above, have the additional layer of

oppression to overcome through their status as 'newcomer'.

> "Our struggle then is two-dimensional; it consists of peeling away
> these multilayered oppression, and, second, creating sufficient distance
> from this oppression to be able to reclaim our intellectual and cultural
> selves" (Daenzer, 1997 p.281).

This reclaiming of our 'intellectual and cultural selves' is described as self-

emancipation, a liberation and freedom from imposed ideas and culture from "the

oppressor" (Daenzer, 1997 p.281). For refugee women to be self-emancipated they must

hold onto their culture while being liberated from the dominant ideas, as well as the

social and political discourse of 'refugee' which suppresses their livelihood. This self-

emancipation refers to the activities that refugee women participate in to re-claim power

in their lives. This can also be seen as an 'upliftment' when women of colour take on a

leadership role moving their community out of oppression (Daenzer, 1997). To better

understand the interlocking oppression which confront refugee women of colour, I will

explore the causes of 'uprootment', looking at the theories of migration.

Literature Review

<u>Theories of Migration</u>

Often omitted from the refugee discourse are the prevailing historical, economic and political forces which have influenced the movement of people across international borders. Refugees are often pathologized and blamed for their situation; however, looking into the broader context we see that there are many factors that drive people into exile. These theories of migration have been commonly used to understand the voluntary movement of immigrants between states; however, these theories are relevant to building an understanding of the involuntary movements of asylum seekers. While the cause of movement between immigrants and refugees are fundamentally different, the movement of asylum seekers can be explained in the theories of economic globalization as well as push and pull theories. These theories look at the political, social and economic factors that push people out of its borders pulling them into "better" conditions. Asylum seekers flee their state or country choosing re-settlement into better economic, political and social systems.

The forced migration and re-settlement of refugees can be analyzed through the broader perspective of economic globalization. Policy makers and governments are social actors in the forced migration of refugees, and deeply contested political and economic factors impact migratory patterns (Essed, et al., 2004; Stewart, 2005). Immigrants can be seen as 'voluntary' migrants, whereas, refugees are forced into displacement and can be seen as 'involuntary' migrants (Mohamed, 1999). The social transformation of a nation

state is embedded in the "social and cultural changes in response to processes such as neoliberal policies, economic growth, political unrest, violent conflict and war" (Essed, et al., 2004 p.4; Stewart, 2005). Migration patterns have historically impacted upon the social, economic and political environment of a state (ibid). According to Essed, et al., social transformation cannot be simplified into a cause-and-effect equation (as with the globalization analysis), but rather a 'dialectical process' where "it is both an integral part of globalization and a process that undermines its central ideologies" (p.4).

These migratory patterns can be linked to larger structures which are continuously shaping the global economy, the environment, societal and political structures. Throughout history, colonization and military force lead to mass migration worldwide (Massey, 1999; Castles, S., & Miller, M., 1998). The effect of globalization, decolonization and uneven economic development has shaped and increased the current prevalence of international migration patterns (Castles, S., & Miller, M., 1998). According to Gindin, "capitalism is a social system based on class and competition," which creates class and institutional inequality, as well as the inequality of result and opportunity for individuals (2002; Stewart, 2005).

The process of migration can be understood as the movement across international borders or a transfer from an economic, "social or political unit to another" (Faist, 2000 p.19; Stewart, 2005). Each state or country can be seen as a container of social, economic and political structures which act to push and pull citizens in or out of its borders (Stewart, 2005). These structures often work simultaneously or may be contested elements. Larger structures that alter a states autonomy / sovereignty impact greatly on

these structures and ultimately the shift of people across its borders (Stewart, 2005).

Economic factors that contribute to international migration include economic distress and

a lack of opportunity for progression (Stewart, 2005).

> "Economic globalization has put a new spin on global migration,
> causing global uprootedness and human displacement on an
> unprecedented scale. Because economic globalization exacerbates the
> inequalities between nations, migration for many becomes not a choice,
> but an economic necessity" (Women and the Economy, 2004).

Consistent with the push/pull theory, the movement of people is a direct result of

the "economic pull" from the North while poor economic conditions in the South push

those out of its borders (Daenzer, 1994). Porter analyzed this flight form "intolerable

economic and political conditions" as "desperation migration" (Daenzer, 1994 p.11).

Porter saw migration to wealthier States as an "aspiration for upward mobility" (ibid).

Sassen-Koob similarly linked the push-pull phenomena to economic conditions, however,

placed less emphasis on the motivations of individuals highlighting States actions as

contributing to migratory patterns (Deanzer, 1994). This link to State action can be

explained through the segmented labour market theory.

According to the segmental labour market theory, international migration is

caused by labour demands for cheap and flexible workforce in the North (Massey, 1999;

Stewart, 2005). This theory moves away from the micro-level analysis and looks at

migration emerging from the "intrinsic labour demands of modern industrial societies"

(Massey, 1999 p.37). In this, migration is not seen as caused by primarily "push" factors

but, "pull" factors from receiving countries (ibid). According to Daenzer, "the Canadian

government capitulates to a pull mechanism in order to reinforce its labour pool" (1994,

p.32). This pull comes from the shortage and demand for low-wage workers (Massey, 1999).

These demands stems from four places, the first being structural inflation. Structural inflation keeps wages low because, "wages must be increased proportionately throughout the job hierarchy in order to keep them in line with social expectations" and must "correspond to the hierarchies of prestige and status that people perceive and expect (Massey, 1999 p.37). Therefore, earnings for jobs at the bottom of the hierarchy remain low since increasing wages at the bottom would place pressure to increase wages at the top of the hierarchy (ibid). As a result, it is difficult to attract local workers expecting higher salaries since wages at the bottom rung cannot be raised (ibid). Countries in turn seek migrant workers to fill these low-wage jobs. There is a growing disparity in women's work through programs such as the Domestic Foreign Workers Program and women who are employed as migrant farm workers. In addition, the specialization of jobs in the "secondary sector" is causing employment in these areas to become unstable. Employers have the power to lay off employees when production is down, at little or no cost to them (Massey, 1999). This distinct separation between labour and capital has extended into the "labour market structure" (ibid). Because of low wages, and an instability in the job market, "employers turn to immigrants to fill the shortfall in demand within the service sector" (p.38). Immigrants are seen as readily accessible, inexpensive and disposable labour.

The above analyses do not consider the differential treatment of immigrants of colour and refugee women. "Ethnic enclaves contain low-status jobs characterized by

low pay, chronic instability, and unpleasant working conditions, jobs that are routinely

shunned by natives;" which creates barriers to meaningful participation in Canadian

society (Massey, 1999 p.38; Li, 2003). Newcomers who fill "higher-wage" jobs in the

secondary sector often have obtained higher education and have access to greater

financial resources. Newcomer women compared to men are least likely to be educated,

fluent in English or French, and have access to financial resources (CRIAW, 2004).

Women in many societies are seen as subordinate to men and are therefore denied equal

access to resources and educational opportunities for employment (ibid). This also

decreases their desirability as potential immigrants from wealthy nations. Migrants from

the South or racialized immigrants "are pushed by poor economic conditions, but are not

pulled into the wealth of industrial States" (Daenzer, 1994, p.15).

The above theories also reduce migration patterns to a basic denominator of

consumerism (Stewart, 2005). It makes the assumption that migration is purely on

fulfilling economic needs (Daenzer, 1994). It is problematic to base the underlying

assumption that individuals have control over whether or not to migrate in search of

higher earnings and greater employment opportunity (Stewart, 2005). I would argue that

women especially women of colour located in the South do not have power or control

over migration. Refugee women are further oppressed as they hold virtually no power in

their 'uprootment' and migration, as their migration is forced. These theories dismiss

factors of oppression and racism that hinders or eliminates individual choice (Stewart,

2005). The experiences of 'uprootment' and migration for refugee women are further

complicated by the manner in which they are regarded in the community of re-settlement, or how they are socially constructed in society.

Canadian Social Construction of Refugee women

The social construction of refugees pertains to the image we hold of refugees in our communities. Inevitably these images have an effect on the re-settlement experiences of refugees (Foster, 1999). These images that are held as truth are often translated into discriminatory practices, thus creating barriers to the successful re-settlement of refugee women of colour in our communities. Refugee women are discriminated against and isolated because of the interlocking oppression of race, gender and status they hold, creating obstacles to re-settlement. Refugees who closely resemble the "ideal citizen" and are not oppressed based on factors of race and gender, do not experience the discrimination refugee women of colour face.

Often overcoming war, torture, and political strife, refugees are victors over harsh life circumstances. Despite this, refugee women are often constructed and conceptualized as passive victims of violence and not victors (Foster, 1999; Mohamed, 1999; Essed, et. al., 2004). "Refugee women are rarely described in terms of their strengths and their feelings" (Mohamed, 1999 p. 48). Society expects refugees to be grateful recipients of relief aide and assistance (Essed, et al., 2004 p.2; Foster, 1999). Refugee women should be viewed as active and contributing members of society. "Refugee women have shown by their very survival that they are resilient. Even more important, they have much to offer to their new countries" (Martin, 2004 p.141).

Canada accepts refugees as a fulfillment of humanitarian responsibilities; with this comes a strong image and notion of charity (Mohamed, 1999). Newcomers are often treated as questionable and rated according to their economic and social performance and value (Li, 2003). There is an inherent power relationship between the newcomer and the Canadian state (Foster, 1999). This unequal power relationship is exasperated for asylum seekers who wait in legal limbo to be awarded official refugee status. Refugees are often analyzed within a pathological view and are seen as "problematic, dependent on the system, and unable to adjust to life in Canada" (Mohamed, 1999 p.56). Mohamed, in her research of asylum seekers states,

> "While Somali women in Canada were victimized on many levels – first by their patriarchal culture and traditions and then the systemic racism of the institutional structures in Canada – they are not victims…They invariably continue to struggle against conditions that circumscribe their lives…[engaging] in struggles to make meaning of their fragmented lives as they reconstruct their identities. Their actions can be characterized as resistance... [improving] their current conditions in the asylum countries" (Mohamed, 1999 p.55).

This resistance can be seen as their inability to "integrate" into society opposed to strength for survival. Victimization is seen as inherent to refugee women based on their gender; women are often seen as creating their own victimization (Mohamed, 1999). Refugee policy perpetuates and reproduces this victimization through guidelines that do not explicitly recognize gender as a basis for persecution.

Refugees are uprooted from their homeland in search of safety; seeking to reconstruct their lives in diaspora (Mohamed, 1999). This process of involuntary 'uprootment' changes their citizenship status, leaving refugee women as 'stateless' individuals. This statelessness creates vulnerability especially in the host communities

and place of re-settlement. Through the re-settlement experience, refugee women are reconstructing their lives through a process characterized by uncertainty and displacement. This reconstruction is shaped by the social, political, and cultural *ideas* in host communities. Refugee women are affected by policies as well as social and cultural ideas of who belongs in society. Part of this paper is to look at the aspects of the re-settlement process which enhances or diminishes elements that create inclusion and a sense of belonging. The re-settlement process has the potential to amplify or mediate the stratification that occurs between newcomers and native born individuals.

Re-Settlement

There is emerging data on the re-settlement and economic integration of Canadian newcomers. One of the main objectives of the *Canadian Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, 2002,* is to fulfill labour demands and to foster economic growth (Li, 2005). Therefore, it can be seen that the anticipated policy outcome of the Canadian government is to integrate newcomers successfully into the labour market. The regulations and policy guidelines set out a process which provides resources to aide newcomers in becoming successfully established after arrival in Canada (Valtonen, 2004). It can also be said that the Canadian government expects newcomers to function economically at the same level or higher than Canadian born citizens (Li, 2005).

Settlement is often seen as the sole responsibility of the newcomer. However, settlement should be viewed as a dialectical relationship between the newcomer and Canadian society (Li, 2005; George, 2005.) Integration is the process by which immigrants are incorporated into society, from the perspective of social participation;

how an immigrant becomes part of society (Li, 2005; Israelite et al. 1999). There is no standard that is in place to determine the successful integration of newcomers; however, integration almost always implies a successful outcome (Li, 2005). Important in this step of integration is the ability to preserve your own cultural identity and culture (Valtonen, 2004). The settlement process can be measured against the level of inclusion a newcomer has within their new community. This inclusion is defined as the,

> "basic notions of belonging, acceptance and recognition. For immigrants and refugees, social inclusion would be represented by the realization of full and equal participation in the economic, social, cultural and political dimensions of life in their new country. In a simple but useful sense, therefore, social inclusion for immigrants and refugees can be seen as the dismantling of barriers that lead to the exclusion in all these domains" (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003 p.1)

Several studies have found that newcomers struggle toward integration into the Canadian labour market (Li, 2005; Reitz, 2005). However, there is a significant gap in literature which discusses the specific settlement experiences of refugee women in the labour market (Lamba, 2003). Mohamed states that, there has been insignificant attention paid to the re-settlement experiences of refugee women by scholars (1999). Refugees face many barriers to gaining sustainable employment in the workforce (Lamba, 2003). Along with issues surrounding foreign credential recognition, lost documentation, and unfamiliarity to the labour market, newcomers often tap into informal networking systems to find employment (Lamba, 2003). Lamba (2003), states that, refugees typically experience a decline in employment status, and "a significant proportion of refugees find that their human capital has little or no value in the Canadian labour market" (p.45).

Lamba utilizes Giddens structuration theory as a framework to show how refugees "carve out spaces of control" when they are in a position of powerlessness (2003). Lamba states that the settlement process of refugees can be analyzed within Giddens theory of structure, agency and power (2003). Lamba conducted a study interviewing 525 adult refugees. Results from Lamba's study indicate that a large portion of refugees who were employed held jobs that marked a "downward mobility" in occupation and status (2003). There were evidence to suggest that women compared to men had greater difficulty attaining sustainable employment, since 66% of the women interviewed had part-time employment and higher rates of unemployment. There appears to be strong evidence to show that prior education and training of refugees did not affect the quality of employment (2003). Lamba concludes that factors of racial and systemic discrimination "may play a role in negatively affecting employment outcomes" of refugees (Lamba, 2003 p.56). Interestingly, Lamba concludes that time and energy spent in post-settlement English-language training and education training may hinder employment by postponing the chance to "pursue any career advancement opportunities," through networking (p.60). Social capital in the form of network and family ties operate as a buffer for gaining employment, however, this does not account for the loss of status in occupation experienced by refugees (2003).

Social & Human Capital

As noted above, it is important to look at the social and human capital of newcomers as it can become a predictive measure for successful re-settlement. Newcomers enter Canada with an established set of skills, social ties, education, and

language ability. These factors influence the re-settlement experience and integration of refugee newcomers. For example, a refugee who does not have any social networks or ties in the area of settlement or knowledge of the language may have a more difficult time re-settling than the refugee who is connected to a community and have some knowledge of the language. Social and human capital theories are two ways of analyzing the re-settlement prospective of newcomers.

Human capital refers to the language skills, education, and job experience that an individual possess. Lamba identifies four variables associated with human capital theory; 1) prior occupation; 2) prior education; 3) knowledge of English language; 4) Canadian training and credentials (1999). With the recent changes in legislation the Canadian government has acknowledged the importance of transferable skills, therefore the human capital of each individual is considered. With a shift into the knowledge economy, increasingly more newcomers are entering Canada with advanced degrees and credentials (George, 2005; Reitz, 2005). Many of the refugee women interviewed previously held employment which required post-secondary education; many holding University degrees.

Social capital theory states that, "social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Massey, 1999 p. 43). Social capital can be seen as the bonding within communities and the bridging between communities. Other thinkers have used the term social capital to describe the migrants "immediate social networks" (Lamba, 2003 p.46).

These social networks hold greater importance when an immigrant is considered to be in close proximity with family members and friends (ibid).

Various networks and connections that people create have the potential to be converted into other forms of capital, for example, financial capital through the securing of employment (Massey, 1999). Recent newcomers who have social connections to landed immigrants have access to information, assistance and resources to facilitate their re-settlement (ibid). The presence of social capital connects newcomers with employment opportunities. Human capital are the skills that an individual posses, placing them in a position to compete for jobs.

A critique of the human and social capital theory is the overwhelming emphasis placed on the connection between social capital and securing employment. Human and social capital theory does not address systemic barriers to employment. Massey states, "When migrant networks are well developed, they put a destination job within reach of most community members and make emigration a reliable and secure source of income" (Massey, 1999 p.44). Statistics Canada in 1999 published a report on recent immigrants in the workforce. This report indicated that recent immigrants found it more difficult to secure employment compared to Canadian born job seekers, despite having higher education than Canadian-born colleagues in the same age bracket (Badets & Howatson, 1999). These statistics show that even the presence of human and social capital does not guarantee employment. Recent newcomers face systemic discrimination within the workforce, and those emigrating from culturally diverse areas may have less influence in the social networks they develop memberships with. Social capital is strengthened by

inherent reciprocities that newcomers cannot tap into because of their association with the 'newcomer social group.' Newcomers who network together may not have full access to information and resources native individuals may have thus creating unequal opportunity for advancement. The benefits of social capital are not awarded to the newcomer social group as newcomers are shut out from the social networks because of language and cultural barriers. Gate keepers to professional regulatory bodies do not allow newcomers into their doors, automatically shutting out newcomers from the networking opportunities.

Many of the employment opportunities that newcomers enter support ethnic enclaves in various sectors. Massey acknowledges the "exploitation and victimization" which occurs when entrepreneurs create a lucrative economic niche "promoting international movement for profit, yielding a black market in migration" (Massey, 1999 p.44). Reitz states that there is an underutilization in the human capital of immigrants (2005). With credential inflation, many entry level jobs are now requiring a degree while many jobs no longer offer long term tenure (ibid). One study stated that out of the 174,000 immigrants to Canada in 1998, seventy-two per cent held a university degree (Dawn, 2000). This was compared to thirteen per cent of Canadian-born individuals who held a university degree (ibid).

Social and human capital are interdependent for successful resettlement. However, within this perspective there are limitations to examining the re-settlement experiences of newcomers in relation to the labour market. It does not provide a reasonable answer with the inconsistency of the labour activity of newcomers in the

workforce. In addition, there are many other indicators other than employment that can be used to measure the "successful" re-settlement of newcomers. In this next section I will look at the policies that refugee women enter Canada under to further develop an understanding of the obstacles refugee women face in re-settlement.

Overview of Canada's Immigration Legislation

In this section I will review the Canadian *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, 2002*, noting key changes that have led up to implementation. This section discusses the overview of immigration, providing a background to understand the refugee aspect of the Act. Immigration has been an essential element to the development and expansion of the Canadian population. Dating back to the 1800's immigration has been closely linked to the economic development of the Nation (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002). Enhancing the population growth and expanding on the reserve of skilled labourers has been the impetus behind Canada's immigration policy (George, 2003). Immigrants were widely chosen for the contribution they could make to the Country (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005). This historical trend of economic development is tied to the notion of the ideal citizen, which continues to be forced through contemporary policies (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002).

The Immigration Act of 1910 explicitly prohibited the immigration of people from racially and culturally diverse Nations. The act barred migration from "immigrants belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005). It was not until the Immigration Act of 1976 that Canada stated its humanitarian consideration towards the United Nations Convention of Refugees of 1951, and the 1967 Protocol relating to refugees, allowing refugees and those in refugee-like situations into the country (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005; Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002).

The systematic discrimination of women in the immigration system has been an evolving thread dating back to the birth of immigration in the 1800's. Chinese women were banned from immigrating to Canada during the period of the Chinese Immigration law (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002). British women who were deemed more desirable immigrants were admitted as domestic labourers (ibid). With the new points system in place, women continued to be disadvantaged as they typically fell under the category of family class (Abu-Laban, 1998). It is not surprising that with an immigration policy focused on economic sustainability, women were further oppressed and pathologized as being a burden on the state merely by association with the family class, whose work is seen as not contributing to the overall economy of the Country.

The new *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* - Bill C-11 was tabled in 2001 and implemented in the year 2002, four years following the release of the Liberal governments report: *Not Just Numbers: A Canadian Framework for Future Immigration* (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002; Daenzer, 2004; George, 2003). The report was used as a tool to review legislative policies regarding citizenship, immigration and refugee protection (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002). With the events of 9/11 causing a heightened focus on border controls, and National security, ethnic profiling became a normal activity at borders as policymakers defended the notion of ideal citizen. (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002). With Bill C-11 a myriad of changes occurred in direct response to the events of 9/11, which has had a direct effect on immigrants and refugees entering the country. With anti-terrorism measures imposed by the Liberal government, newcomers are subject to increased security screening as well as an increased threat of deportation (Abu-Laban

&Gabriel, 2002). New permanent resident cards now issued under the new Act are considered 'fraud-resistant' thereby intensifying the myth and image of immigrants and refugees as criminals and threats to security (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002).

The new *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, 2002,* has been criticized for being a framework legislation, leaving implementation of the Act to regulation (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002; George, 2003). This system is seen to be flexible and has the ability to be responsive to the changing conditions of the immigration system (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002; George, 2003). However, it is problematic since "important rights and processes not entrenched in the Act are removed and left undefined…legislation can be extensively amended without Parliamentary scrutiny" (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002 p.77; George, 2003). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to detail each change in the Act, the next section is dedicated to a more in-depth look at the refugee class in the Act.

Refugee Process

Refugees and those in refugee-like situations fall under a distinct category within Canada's *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, 2002.* Citizenship and Immigration Canada define refugees and persons needing protection as "people in or outside Canada who fear returning to their country of nationality or habitual residence" (CIC, 2004a). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are approximately 17.1 million refugees and 'persons of concern' living in the world (UNHCR, 2004). The definition of a refugee is a universal term defined by the UN convention relating to the status of refugees. To place this definition into context, it was

established in 1951 to address the displacement of Europeans after World War II

(Mayotte, 1992).

A refugee is a person who:

> "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of
> race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or
> political opinion, if outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or
> owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that
> country" (UNHCR, 2003).

This definition does not recognize 'gender' as a cause for persecution. While

Canada has made significant gains in extending policy to protect women in vulnerable

situations, women often have a difficult time proving persecution especially persecution

at the hands of an individual actor.

Refugee women enter Canada under two main avenues: (1) the refugee and

humanitarian re-settlement program (government assisted and privately sponsored

refugees); and (2) the in-land refugee protection process, for persons making refugee

protection claims from within Canada (asylum seekers) (CIC, 2004a). Citizenship and

Immigration Canada is responsible for selecting refugees from outside Canada, while the

Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) is responsible for making decisions based on

claims made within Canada.

Asylum Seekers

Citizenship and Immigration Canada determines eligibility in order to make a

claim in Canada. With the new 'Safe Third Country' law, asylum seekers who have

traveled through the United States cannot make a claim in Canada, and must return to the

United States to make their claim (CCR, 2004). All eligible claims are referred to the

IRB for a hearing. Any refugee whose claim has been rejected cannot appeal the decision made. Asylum seekers whose application is granted become 'protected persons' and can therefore apply for permanent residence (CCR, 2004). This status protects refugees from *refoulement* or removal to a country where they are at risk of persecution. According to the Geneva Convention, "no contracting State shall expel or return a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion" (UNHCR, 2003).

Asylum seekers whose status is in limbo have limited rights despite classification of 'protected persons.' For example, they often can receive necessary documents for employment or health care but are unable to have family re-united with them. This uncertainty is especially difficult for women whose children may have been left in their home Country. Refugee women in these circumstances find it difficult to re-build their lives with and uncertain future.

Government-Assisted Refugees

The international community has adapted three durable solutions that aide refugees to find safe living conditions. These three solutions are: (1) voluntary reparation; (2) local integration; and (3) re-settlement (CCR, 2004). Canada participates in the re-settlement program for refugees. Canada is typically a third country for re-settlement primarily because of geographical location (CCR, 2004). Through the resettlement program, refugees are brought to Canada through assistance by the government or private sponsors (CCR, 2004). Refugees in need of re-settlement are referred by the UNHCR or

another organization pre-recognized by the Canadian government (CCR, 2004).

Government assisted refugees (GAR) become permanent residents or 'landed' upon

arrival to Canada (CCR, 2004).

Many applicants who arrive to Canada through government or private sponsorship

were typically living in refugee camps, most likely neighbouring the country in which

they were fleeing. The Canadian government has set targets for the number of refugees

they will aid in re-settlement. For government-assisted refugees the target has been

reduced from 7,500 to 7,300 (CCR, 2004a). Privately sponsored refugees have a target

ranging from 2,900-4,200 (CCR, 2004).

To be eligible for re-settlement refugees must meet the following requirements

(list adapted from the CCR and CIC):

- Must be a recognized as a convention refugee[1];

- Persons who are part of the country of asylum class[2];

- Persons who are part of the source country class[3];

- Must show ability to become successfully re-settled into Canada;

- Must not have another durable solution available;

- Must be sponsored by the government or privately sponsored to show

  financial support for re-settlement;

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[1] Thos who are outside their country of origin but have a well-founded fear of persecution based on: race, religion, political opinion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group (CIC, 2004).
[2] Includes those who are outside their country of origin and are seriously and personally affected by: civil war, armed conflict, or massive violations of human rights (CCR, 2004; CIC, 2004).
[3] Includes those who meet the definition of convention refugee but remain in country of origin (CCR, 2003; CIC, 2004).

- Admissibility: No past criminal activity and cannot pose a threat to National security or to public health and safety.

Applicants apply directly at the Canadian embassy. There are embassies in the DR Congo, Sudan, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, and Sierra Leone (CIC, 2004). According to the CIC, refuges are not eligible to apply for re-settlement directly if an embassy is not located in their country of residence (CIC, 2004). Representatives from the UNHCR or other recognized organizations by the Canadian government often refer refugees who are in need of re-settlement (CCR, 2004). The waiting process for GAR (from outside Canada) can take more than two years to have a decision made (CCR, 2004). Rejected applicants do not have the right to appeal (ibid). According to the Canadian council for refugees, increased processing delays have occurred for privately sponsored refuges as well (CCR, 2004a). Those re-settling from African and Middle Eastern regions have waiting delays for up to 22 months, all other regions can be delayed for up to 18 months (ibid). The exception is in the case where a person is in need of urgent re-settlement (CCR, 2004). They will receive a temporary permit and continue processing once re-settled into Canada (ibid). Refugee women are vulnerable in this waiting period.

Literature clearly states that women are vulnerable to gender-based persecution such as sexual violence and exploitation. "For many refugee women, however, the persecution they face goes unrecognized and the barriers to acceptance for re-settlement they encounter are unbreakable" (Boyd, 2004). The persecution of women is currently not included in the instruments that award people refugee status. Violent acts such as rape

should not be viewed as an "arbitrary act of harm" but a form of persecution and should be adequately addressed "opposed to fatalistically accepted" (Valji, 2003 p.55). It is estimated that there are more than 90 million victims of female genital mutilation in Africa (UNHCR, 2003). During the war in Bosnia it has been estimated that more than 20,000 Muslim women were raped and tortured (ibid). This incidence of mass rape has also been documented in areas such as Cambodia, Liberia, Peru, Somalia and Uganda (ibid).

Responding to the issue of gender-based persecution, the Canadian government made recommendations to address the needs of refugee women (Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, 1995). They recognized that refugee women represent the majority of refugee claimants and have diverse experiences stating,

> " We have become increasingly aware of how gender affects our life
> experiences…The rights and needs of refugee women cannot be divorced
> from the broader issues of women's rights in general…Women's rights are
> human rights" (Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration,
> 1995).

In the selection process, the Canadian government recognizes gender-based persecution as a basis for seeking asylum and will grant refuge to women based on humanitarian principles. Inconsistency in practices amongst visa and immigration officers often hinders expedient selection for women in vulnerable situations.

The phenomenon that women are disproportionately represented amongst the refugee population but often 'overlooked' for re-settlement should not be considered simply a situation rather a problem that can be addressed through strategic policy implementation. Canada's refugee polices have been celebrated by organizations such as

the UNHCR and Canada is considered a leader in progressive polices concerning

refugees, however, fundamental limitations exist. According to the CIC, they are actively

involved in international engagements as well as fluid dialogue between the UNHCR to

meet the needs of refugee women (ibid). The Women at Risk program (AWR) is one

policy initiative, which was formed to address the gender imbalances in the selection

criteria of refugee women.

Women at Risk Program

The nexus of the Women at Risk Program (AWR) was to provide urgent

protection to the most vulnerable of refugee women while keeping with Canada's

commitment to providing re-settlement and humanitarian aide to the world's refugees

(Daenzer, 2004; CIC, 2004). The AWR program was initiated to provide assistance and

protection to refugee women in need of immediate resettlement who have low selection

prospects (Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, 1995). Citizenship and

Immigration Canada (CIC) provide four main criterion for women to fall under this

program: (1) women whose safety can not be ensured; (2) women who often do not have

family or friends to support or protect them; (3) women who are vulnerable to the threat

of rape and other forms of violence due to the lack of protection and; (4) women whose

situations are so critical that urgent protection is required (CIC, 2004). In addition

women must: (1) be outside Canada; (2) be a convention refugee, a member of the source

country class or a member of the country of asylum class and; (3) be in a dangerous

situation without family protection or the protection of local authorities (CIC, 2004).

The program was established in 1988 and from its initiation to 1993, 655 women and children resettled into Canada; to date it is reported that 2,250 women and children have been re-settled into Canada (CIC, 2004). Within the programs directive, it is stated that women do not have to prove re-settlement potential; however, they are expected to become self-sufficient (CIC, 2004). Women and dependents are also subject to medical examinations, security and criminal checks (CIC, 2004). Although the program's objective was to provide urgent safety to refugee women, this has been hindered by slow processing times, therefore not providing the necessary quick response (Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, 1995). This statement was made in review of the AWR program, "our visa office system overseas is so slow and cumbersome that any woman who's truly at risk has long since suffered the risk by the time a decision was made" (ibid).

Other issues arising in the program include the inconsistency in decisions made by visa officers. This issue has been associated with an over shadowing goal to offer assistance to women suitable for re-settlement in Canada (Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, 1995; Daenzer, 2004). Daenzer states, "the first urgent task should have been to lift women out of areas of danger. The second less urgent task should have been to process women according to established procedures" (2004, p.10). Personal and cultural biases may influence the decisions of visa officers processing applications (Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, 1995; Daenzer, 2004). According to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, women are assessed based on a 'sliding scale:' those deemed to have a greater need for protection are not rated as

highly for "successful establishment in Canada" (2004 p.24). Operationally, the criteria

for successful establishment are inconsistently applied (ibid).

The AWR program despite its limitations continues to be a significant aspect of

Canada's refugee and humanitarian re-settlement program. Adapted five years before

Canada released its Guidelines on *Women Refugee Claimants Fearing Gender-Based*

Persecutions, its proactive policy shows Canada's initiative in recognizing women's

specific needs for protection (Daenzer, 2004).

Settlement Policy

Newcomers to Canada have the difficult task of adjusting to their new Country.

Newcomers receive the majority of support and access to resources through settlement

service providers.

> "Refugees arrive in Canada exhausted from a long trip, profoundly
> affected by their recent past, confused about their present circumstance
> and uncertain about their future. They may not speak English; know little
> of Canada and our culture and likely nothing of the new community to
> which they are going. They are unemployed, and many are starting from
> scratch. Some have been traumatized; some have spent years in refugee
> camps and are suddenly expected to live independently (At Work
> Settlement.Org, 2005)."

The Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP) provide income

support amongst other settlement services to government-assisted refugees. The program

was launched in 1974 as a government initiative to provide settlement services to

newcomers. Prior to this date, faith and ethnic communities primarily offered re-

settlement support to newcomers (CCR, 2000). The year 1990 marked the federal

governments' announcement of the Federal Integration Strategy, to consolidate and

strengthen the integration of newcomers by the Canadian government (CCR, 2000). The Canadian government recognized the process of integration as long-term, requiring accommodation from both the newcomer and Canadian society (ibid). This two-way process of integration has remained an integral aspect of newcomer re-settlement as settlement agencies have expanded and progressed throughout the years.

Re-settlement support provided through the program is offered for up to 12 months and extended to 24 months for 'special cases' (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2005). Income levels are reportedly matched with Provincial social assistance rates (ibid). The Canadian council for refugees report that the Canadian government has recently reduced fiscal allocation to government-assisted refugees (2004a). Spending for the resettlement assistance program was reduced from $47.2 million to $41.8 million (ibid). The program was developed to provide government assisted refugees support in order to successfully integrate into Canadian society. Although the ISAP program is available to all newcomers, government-assisted refugees have access to specific resources and services through the resettlement and assistance program (RAP).

The RAP program was initiated to provide assistance to convention refugees and humanitarian protected persons admitted to Canada as government-assisted refugees (CIC, 2004). According to the CIC assistance is provided for:

- meeting refugees at the airport or port of entry;

- providing temporary accommodation when needed typically at a reception house or hotel;

- assistance with providing permanent accommodations;

- assistance for purchasing basic household items;

- financial orientation; and

- links to government programs and community services.

Additional support may include but is not limited to: language instruction, cultural orientation, nutrition, law, rights and responsibilities in Canada, orientation to health care system, orientation to educational system, and access to employment services (Association for New Canadians, 2005; CCR, 2004). In addition, refugees may require support related to past-trauma related experiences (CCR, 2004). Asylum seekers are ineligible to receive these services upon arrival to Canada, which make re-settlement extremely difficult and daunting (CCR, 2004).

Despite government support to settlement agency providers, recent cutbacks have impacted service delivery to refugees. The growing responsibility of supporting newcomers is downloaded to local agencies with limited resources. One settlement service provider indicated the allowance they are allotted for each refugee they serve is not sufficient to meet the needs of refugee newcomers. The government provides financial assistance to settlement service providers towards the re-settlement of refugees. Settlement service providers report, funding falls short as refugees have many needs that require extensive assistance. This places a heavy burden on the system.

Another issue reported by settlement service providers is the absence of support for survivors of torture and trauma. For refugee women, the task of finding housing and employment is exacerbated when dealing with the emotional, psychological, and physical

impact of trauma. Barriers to successful re-settlement affect overall mental health status of refugee women (Bhaloo et al., 2005). Bhaloo, et al., report incidents of "violence, torture, and loss of separation from their families" as variables affecting the re-settlement experience as well as "unemployment, poverty, language barriers and social and cultural isolation" (p.5). One settlement service provider described women who live in constant fear and emotional turmoil from past torture. Survivors of war and witnesses of war suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and live with flashbacks.

> "Generally, when refugee women arrive in Canada, they experience a sense of relief as their physical safety and basic needs are met. However, the state of their mental health remains a hidden but serious issue" (Bhaloo et al., 2005 p.2).

While counseling and support is important, this area of expertise needs development as traditional Westernized models of counseling is not always effective for people of diverse cultures. One settlement provider explained that many women remain in silence of the violence and torture they survived. Westernized models of counseling emphasize disclosure as a part of therapy. Many women want to learn to survive without focusing on the torture they endured. Women remain in silence and refuse to speak about their experience because it is seen as humiliating; stripping away their dignity.

One settlement service provider stated that specific training is needed as there is not enough training on mental health issues relating to refugee women for settlement service providers. Often untrained professionals provide support and counseling; however, this is a 'band aid' solution and does not address the issues. "Service providers are overworked, mental health counselors are burnt out, and there remains the issue of scarcity of resources and that of qualified experts on refugee issues" (Bhaloo et al., 2005

p.3). We are reminded by Bhaloo, et al., that refugee women are resilient and equipped with survival skills that strengthen them to carry on and to re-build their lives.

Methodology

<u>Methodological Approach:</u>

This research project was executed with the help and guidance of community leaders from Settlement and Integration Services Organization (SISO) who work closely with refugee women. This process of collaboration and communication helped to eliminate power relations between the researcher and participants as well as provide cultural interpretations and processes (Isralite, et al., 1999). The Phenomenology approach guided this research project (Polit & Beck, 2004). This methodological approach seeks to discover the "essence" of the phenomena that people experience and what that experience really means (ibid). This approach is guided by the thought that there is "critical truth in people's lived experiences" (Polit & Beck, 2004 p.253). Other researchers have noted the importance of listening to women's narratives analyzing them in relation to the wider "economic, political, and cultural processes" (Geroge & Ramkissoon, 1998 p.3). Through this research project I sought to locate these women's experiences within the political system of the Canadian Welfare state. The phenomenology approach looks at the experiences of individuals as meaningful; my goal through this research project was to capture the lived experiences of refugee women through their initial re-settlement phase.

The purpose of my research project was to explore the re-settlement experiences of refugee women in Ontario. In keeping with the phenomenology theory framework, group meetings and in-depth interviews were conducted for the research project. In the

initial phase of the project I gathered key documents and research studies relating to refugee women as well as their re-settlement. Gaining an understanding of the immigration and refugee system as well as the re-settlement issues refugee women face helped me to be an informed interviewer.

Sampling

The total population for this research study included: (1) all those who have entered Canada through the refugee system, either as a government-assisted refugee or refugee claimant; and (2) all settlement service providers in the city of Hamilton. Refugee participants were recruited through convenience sampling. A copy of the information letter was provided to SISO for the purpose of recruitment, and available participants were identified. Settlement service providers were also recruited through convenience sampling. I identified settlement service providers in the area and contacted available participants via telephone.

Data Collection

Existing data was gathered through internet sources, government publications and documents, as well as, published research findings. I attended a forum entitled: 'Unlocking the Power of Diversity' at the University of Toronto that looked at the re-settlement experiences of immigrants focusing on the economic integration of newcomers.

Original data was collected through group meetings with refugee women as well as in-depth interviews with settlement service providers.

Group Meetings

I contacted the director of services at SISO to explain the research project and elicit support. The group meetings were later arranged by the director and a second settlement service provider from SISO accompanied the women in the interviews.

Two group meetings were held at SISO, for a total of nine women interviewed. The group meetings were conducted by myself with the aide of SISO representative and translator. Since none of the women had met me prior to the group meetings, the presence of community leadership created an environment of trust, with the goal of making the process comfortable (Israelite, et al., 1999). Both group meetings were conducted at SISO, this meeting place was arranged because women were familiar and comfortable at the center. Written and verbal consent was obtained prior to beginning the interview. An information letter was provided and translated for the Spanish speaking participants. Participants were then given an opportunity to have their questions clarified. Participants were notified verbally of their right to withdraw at any point in the research without consequence. Interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes with a short break in-between. Questions were asked in English and translated by the SISO representative when needed. The use of open-ended questions was used to encourage open dialogue and communication between participants.

Consistent with the phenomenological framework, as a researcher I invited conversation about the participants lived experiences without controlling or leading the discussion (Polit & Beck, 2004). In the group meetings I asked simple questions such as,

"how did you find a place to stay" without leading the discussion. Group meetings were audio-taped and later transcribed by myself in English.

In-depth Interviews

I researched settlement agencies through internet sources and contacted them via telephone. I conducted three in-depth interviews with settlement service providers from various agencies in the City of Hamilton. The purpose of interviewing these individuals was to gain insight of the re-settlement process from their perspective. Participants were able to share their experiences with aiding in the re-settlement process, noting common barriers and limitations to available services. I received verbal consent over the telephone to interview each participant. Interview times were set up and conducted in their respective agencies. I recorded hand-written interview notes; data collected was used to supplement research findings.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is used to ensure research findings accurately "reflect the experiences and viewpoints of participants, rather than perceptions and viewpoints of researchers," (Poilt & Beck, 2004 p.57). Trustworthiness reflects the degree of confidence researchers have in their data and can be measured through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (ibid). One researcher stated the importance of using your personal experiences as a key resource in research because our social knowledge is "constructed out of personal experience" (Finch, 1991 p.201). My personal experiences and social location helped me to locate the experiences of the women interviewed socially, politically and culturally.

Credibility refers to the confidence of truth I have in my research (ibid). I sought credibility in my research by keeping participant testimony verbatim in my research findings. Credibility is weakened in my study through the limited time I had to commit to data collection and investigation; however, I encouraged trust with participants through the presence of community leadership and interpretation. Participants were engaged in the process by speaking freely and openly about their experiences without the threat of consequence. Transferability refers to the extent my research can be transferred to other settings (Polit & Beck, 2004). Other researchers who have conducted their research in a similar manner have found that research findings have provided useful information that can be utilized in other areas of research and study (Briant, 2004). Findings from my research can be used to improve service delivery and create awareness around issues regarding refugee women.

Dependability in research suggests that findings are consistent and stable (Poilt & Beck, 2004). Dependability is often tested through replicating the research design, a process beyond the scope of this research project. Confirmability refers to the "objectivity or neutrality of the data" (Poilt & Beck, 2004 P.435). I sought to maintain confirmability in my research through the collection of raw data including field notes (recorded in a journal) and interview transcripts. Audio recordings of interviews are kept on file and remain secured.

One method I used to ensure trustworthiness was triangulation, using multiple sources for data collection in order to accurately reflect reality in my findings and analysis (Poilt & Beck, 2004). I utilized the triangulation method through gathering data

derived from past research studies, governmental documents, in addition to interviewing

refugee women and settlement service providers to closely represent the experiences of

the targeted group (ibid).

Values & Ethics

Ethical considerations were taken since the refugee women were in positions of

vulnerability because of the uncertainty in their legal status. There is an inherent power

differential in the relationship between researcher and participant. The use of community

leadership and representatives known to the respondents was one method to

systematically reduce power inequalities between the researcher and participant

relationship. Another method this research design utilized was the use of translation.

This includes translation for all documents including the completed transcript. The

research paper will be made available to participants and settlement services in the

community. Participants in one of the group meetings stated that it was empowering to

share their story.

Analysis

Transcripts of group meetings were sorted and placed into categories. The

testimonies of the women for both group meetings were compared for similarities in

experiences and characteristics. This method is similar to the concept of "fit" when data

is sorted to find relations between data (Polit & Beck, 2004). Women who have shared

similar struggles was an integral and important discovery for this research project. The

activity of sorting data into categories is similar to Glaser and Strauss' open coding

method. This method of coding is conducive to the cultural diversity of participants as

research data was not translated into the researchers 'language' or words. The

participants actual 'words' were used verbatim to ensure the impact of the testimonies

was not distorted (Polit & Beck, 2004).

Sharing Research Findings

Research findings will be available to all settlement service agencies who

participated in the project. Findings will be translated into Spanish to accommodate the

Spanish speaking individuals who participated. My research paper will be submitted to

various professional publications and journals both nationally and internationally.

Limitations

This sample was not a true representative of the total refugee population in

Hamilton. All refugee women interviewed were asylum seekers and there were no

personal testimonies offered for those who entered as government assisted refugees.

There were many barriers which made it difficult to reach the total refugee population in

Hamilton. One barrier was time and scope of the project. With a short time to accomplish

this research project as well as a small budget, it was difficult to exhaust all resources to

contact the total refugee population. Another significant barrier was language. I am not

fluent in any other language, which makes entering certain communities difficult. In

addition, I used translation during interviews, thus creating the chance that meaning of

both question and response was lost during translation. As identified by many settlement

service providers, many women suffer from trauma related to war and persecution. Many

women do not want to come forward and speak of their experiences because it is too

painful. There may have been limitations to their testimonies since a representative from

the agency whom they depend on for services was present for the interviews. In addition, many women are isolated and may not be accessing services at an agency, especially refugee women who are asylum seekers. Another limitation to the study was the absence of a key political figure or Immigrant and Refugee Board member in the study. Time constraints and timing of the research project (during summer holidays) proved difficult to contact with representatives.

Analysis & Findings

There were similar issues reported by the refugee women in each group meeting. Transcripts were divided into categories, keeping the original language used in the interview. Quotes or testimonies written in the third person indicate the use of a translator.

Nine refugee women were interviewed for this research project. Four women came from Colombia, three with their families, and one arrived alone. One woman came alone from Zimbabwe; one woman arrived alone from Malaysia; and one woman came with her family from Mexico. All refugees interviewed were asylum seekers.

Housing

Housing is one of the biggest challenges facing refugee women, especially asylum seekers who enter Canada without the assistance from the Canadian government. Government assisted refugees (GAR) are met at the point of entry and brought to a welcome center where they receive nutrition and accommodations. Settlement workers assist GAR's to locate housing and they automatically receive financial support from the government. GAR's can begin the process of re-building their lives knowing they will receive assistance for housing and living expenses for at least the first year of re-settlement.

Contrastingly, asylum seekers arrive in Canada without knowledge of accommodations or financial support available. This uncertainty is a source of stress, at

times paralyzing the re-settlement process. Asylum seekers are at risk for becoming

isolated and falling through the cracks of our Canadian welfare system.

There are many barriers with locating housing that refugee women must

overcome. These barriers include but are not limited to: language, being a recipient of

Ontario works, and the legal issues concerning their status. One woman explained that

many landlords do not want to rent to individuals who are recipients of Ontario Works,

and being a refugee woman compounds this barrier. One woman who arrived in Canada

with her family spoke about the many obstacles to finding housing in Hamilton. She

stated that as asylum seekers they were continually rejected stating, "nobody wanted to

rent an apartment to them." In addition, they arrived in Hamilton during the winter

months making it physically difficult to search for housing. Refugee women who are

primary caregivers for their children are burdened with this responsibility, one woman

stated,

> "For me, it was stressful I feel strong in some way because we are
> the whole family, we move as a family, my husband, my son and me. So
> it gave me some strength but at the same time I feel responsible for all of
> them.

Asylum seekers often do not know what resources are available for them. One

claimant through the interpreter recalled her first experience with housing,

> "When they left the airport the lawyer, there was a lawyer who help them,
> who offer them a cheap house. So they rent a place at his house for a
> month. He didn't say to them that there were…like they may have gone to
> shelter. She thinks it would be better to go to a shelter because he ask
> them for $900 plus some additional money for food. After they learned
> that they could go to a shelter".

Refugee women who travel alone are especially vulnerable in these circumstances. Many women may stay in shelters or rent rooms with families or individuals they do not know until they are able to locate alternate accommodations. These living situations may be unsafe, which places these women in a more vulnerable situation for violence. One woman stated that she fled her country in search of safety but does not feel safe in her current living conditions. Often, housing lists are lengthy and there are no immediate solutions for finding safe and affordable living accommodations. Because families may take priority on waiting lists, refugee women who travel alone may face lengthy waiting periods for housing.

> "So now I apply for house through housing, I am waiting for them. The problem with housing is they say I have to wait more than 6 months, it takes quite a long time."

A reality is that many refugee families are only able to find housing in buildings populated with other newcomers. One study revealed the difficulty that Somali refugees encountered in finding suitable accommodations (Israelite, et al., 1999). Certain areas in the city support ethnic enclaves with newcomers living in concentrated areas, typically in high-rise apartments, which are typically overcrowded, poorly maintained and in need of repair (Israelite, et al., 1999).

> "I know its difficult, right now I am working in the building where I lived in the rental office and I receive all these immigrants… They said in other places they didn't want us; but my building is full of immigrants, everyone is just arriving to Canada."

Many Somali women quoted fear for their children in these living conditions (Israelite, et al., 1999); it is this issue of safety that was reflected in these group meetings.

Employment

It was common amongst almost all woman interviewed that they experienced a
drop in status. Employment was seen as important to the women interviewed and many
expressed frustration at the barriers they faced trying to find employment similar to the
employment they previously held. One woman who worked in a bank for 22 years in her
home country was frustrated when her hiring process was delayed because of her refugee
status, despite having a work permit and Social Insurance Number. She stated,

> "If somebody walked in the next morning and they are Canadian
> or they have their papers I already lost the chance, although she was so
> excited about my resume. I am still waiting to hear, she told me that she
> was going to check with immigration…the chances are they are just ready
> to drop you, then what is next? What do you do?"

She also stated that there is a problem in the lack of training opportunities to gain
Canadian experience. She states that with proper orientation and training opportunities, it
would be a relatively easy transition into the workforce. This experience is consistent
with research that shows newcomers who do not have their foreign credentials or foreign
experience recognized, along with a lack of training opportunities impede their entrance
into the labour market (Reitz, 2005; Howatson & Badets, 1999; Dawn, 2000).

> "Some people get a lot of promises when they are applying…they have to
> go through a points system and a huge part of the points system is the
> credentials, but when they come here they don't have any recognition of
> their education."

GAR's are considered for their re-settlement prospects; however, asylum seekers
are not pre-selected for re-settlement into Canada. Refugee women leave behind their
lives and often meaningful careers. Disappointment is a common response upon
discovering they have to start from the beginning, sometimes repeating education. Reitz

shows how the multiple levels of discrimination in the labour market for newcomer women of colour contributes to the underutilization of skills newcomers offer to the Canadian labour market. He states that there are significant "institutional barriers to the effective integration of highly skilled immigrants" (2005, p.2). Reitz also states that there is a correlation between newcomer credentials and earnings by 'race.' (2005), suggesting the marginalization of women of colour in the labour market consequently effecting the re-settlement process.

Women who may not be ready to enter the labour force may have a spouse who is employed. However, employment is not always steady and reliable. One woman told the account of her spouses experience in the labour market,

> "They were on Ontario works for 6 months and her husband got connected with some friend he got some job but he had a really bad experience because he wasn't paid at those jobs. He used to work in the daytime and in the evening at cleaning job but he wasn't paid so he lost wage for 8 months of work".

Another refugee woman stated that her husband also experienced difficulty finding employment despite his past experience and degrees he held. "The English of my husband is perfect, he lived in the United States, so he speak better than me, he speak English…and even though it is so difficult to find a job." One settlement service provider stated that newcomers' intelligence is often doubted because of their limited English or presence of an accent. This experience highlights the hierarchy of oppression inherent in society. Despite having privilege as male, newcomer males who are non-English speaking and are of colour are systematically oppressed in society. This oppression is compounded for refugee women of colour who must also overcome the

marginalization of being a woman. These oppressions compound the difficulties of successfully integrating into the labour market and society.

One refugee woman in the group sought asylum in the United States before seeking asylum in Canada. While in the United States she worked in a company who had a branch in Canada. She was unable to land employment in the Canadian company because of her pending refugee status. This was despite a reference letter from her previous manager supporting her employment. She indicated that in her re-settlement phase her difficulty is finding meaningful employment; she is now applying for positions outside her field and previous training.

> "Now you get to Canada, everything what you have studied and done before doesn't count. They need Canadian experience…it is difficult getting a job, okay getting a job that you want. Because if you decide okay I am going to clean houses, or offices you are going to find it, but you plan to stay in the same position that you had or something similar to help you grow and gain experience here in Canada its almost impossible."

Another refugee woman had similar experiences with finding employment,

> "She work in a factory she was there for 5 days it was really hard. It wasn't the kind of job that she was accustomed to. So it was like more operating, manual job. She found people who were not that kind and so she feels that it's pretty hard. If you're just looking for money, you ended up doing things you have never done before".

These experiences are consistent with other research done in this area. Israelite, et al., found that employers were reluctant to hire refugee women because of their temporary work permits (1999). A Canadian study showed that newcomers were forced to work in the sales and service industry which requires little to no previous experience (Howatson & Badets, 1999). As a result, many newcomers were overqualified for jobs they were employed in (ibid). Similarly, Omidvar & Richmond concluded that newcomer

women are disproportionately employed in low-wage jobs mainly in the service sector (2003).

Literature has shown that the shift of immigration from non-European countries along with the decline in recognition of foreign experience has accounted for the decline in newcomer earnings despite incidents of high education levels and skills (Li, 2005; Reitz, 2005; Lamba, 2003; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). Li states, "the assessment and return of foreign experience and credentials are contingent upon the racial origin of immigrants" (Li, 2005 p.9). Li also states that selecting newcomers with experience from United States, United Kingdom, and Western Europe opposed to immigrants with experience from Asia and Africa "institutionalizes the practice of racial inequality in the Canadian labour market" (Li, 2005 p.10).

For refugee women who hold features of "racial and gender inequality," they are further disadvantaged and marginalized in the process of entering the labour market. This impedes on their overall participation in Canadian society and diminishes factors of citizenship. Their level of social inclusion is also diminished as refugee women are pushed into the margins, not given the opportunity to exercise their skills and talents in the Canadian labour market. These factors of racism and discrimination perpetuate the oppression of refugee women.

Assistance in the Re-settlement Process

There was not one main answer or response to how these women received information regarding available resources in the community. One woman stated that she found community information through the shelter she was residing at. Another woman

said that when she arrived everyone was talking about a certain food bank as the best in the city so that is where she went. One refugee woman caring for a young infant had a public health nurse assigned to her whom she received a wealth of information. There are different points in the re-settlement phase that refugee woman have stated they arrived at SISO for assistance. Asylum seekers are not automatically directed to SISO unlike GAR's who receive full support in the first year of re-settlement and are connected to a settlement service provider.

When asked how they became connected to their community, one woman stated the church as her primary connection.

> "It was very funny because I really wasn't the person going to the church every week back home but here I became a really good member of the church [laughter]…because it was a really good point of connection and I feel really supported, like people guiding you and telling you important thing that you need to know".

Another woman reiterated,

> "It is very important the connection with the church because people from the church connect you with other organizations, so she is now connected to SISO through somebody who told her at the church".

Many women stated that church was essential in their re-settlement process. Church offered more than assistance with the physical needs of re-settlement; it offered a level of spiritual need for the women. This is important as many women have suffered persecution and violence, many women do not openly speak about their trauma; finding it difficult to trust in their foreign environment. Connection to the church community provided them a safe haven and offered them hope. One refugee woman stated,

> "Actually that is what has sustained me. I think I would have been a nervous breakdown, a nervous wreck or something. Each time I go there

its like I get healing, that only God can give, cause what you need for that
time, you find yourself getting more and more strength, otherwise you
wouldn't be able to smile at all but you know it helps...I have remained in
that church and it has helped me. All I used to do is sit down there and cry.
You don't want to use the internet to find out what's happening, the news
is shocking, you just don't want to hear, you can only pray...It does help,
it doesn't really wipe out the problem that you still want fixed. If you go
and pray, you pray that your way be found for people in my position. "

When asked about making connection in their communities, many women replied

that it was relatively easy to make those connections; however, it did not help with their

isolation from the rest of the community. One woman responded, "the reality is that she

doesn't have any Canadian friends." One refugee woman after describing her

experiences of trying to find a dentist in the city agreed that at times she feels unwanted

stating, "Sometimes it makes me feel that I wish I didn't come here. Rejection is painful."

Attaining medical attention is another area that the women reported as a barrier in

the re-settlement phase. Even when medical help is found, women found that they were

subject to long waiting periods to have their appointment. Some medical professionals

did not want to offer care to the women because of their status as a refugee claimant.

One woman expressed her frustration with attempting to locate a dentist, who would offer

her care,

"We are having a problem with dentist; they don't accept the immigration
papers that we give them. Where ever you go they tell you "oh those
papers" that's the attitude until I had to ask them, tell me what the problem
is...you get tired of hearing, "those papers, those papers." You get the
impression that they don't want to see you. So you go around looking for
somebody who can treat you. They don't want them and we don't
understand why...some dentists just don't want to see us. You can even
see a person pulling away before you even...at one place I couldn't even
get to open it even to show them, they just know what you are going to
give them and they tell you no. You don't know where to go and you don't
know who wants you and who doesn't, that hurts also."

One refugee woman who arrived pregnant was unable to see a physician to provide a check up within a two week period despite her expected due date of four weeks. She eventually found assistance at a local hospital by the help of a friend. There she was connected with community supports who offered her additional assistance, she recalls, "Because I stay alone here…I came alone here. They helped me in many ways…they help me for my baby. They introduce me to go to the community programs I go for the 'how to take care of a baby.' Then now, I feel its okay in Canada."

Many refugee women receive social assistance to cover living expenses. While financial support did not cover all expenses related to settling into a new apartment (for example, many stated the $200 connection fee for the telephone difficult to make), many of the women stated gratitude for the assistance they did receive. One refugee woman summed up the help she received from the Ontario government,

> "Yes they help, but I think we appreciate it because it is not like this in other countries where you get here the government steps in and you have people willing to see about your welfare. That we must really applaud Canada because they are excellent. They see how you are doing…its just that some of the things, they cannot be %100 in everything, but there will always be other issues. As we present them they are different, but on the whole they are just number one because they help. They make sure you have a roof over your head and you have some food. These shelters, food banks…we appreciate that very much. It's just that they cannot fix the whole person…"

A major barrier in the re-settlement process is the state of limbo that many asylum seekers sit in while they await their hearing. Many women quoted uncertainty in this waiting process as they were unsure if they would be accepted or deported back to their

home county. "Yes there is still uncertainty…she hasn't gone to the hearing, so she really doesn't know what will happen with her claim".

One refugee woman described the pain she is feeling while she awaits her trial knowing that her children are without a parent in her home country. As an asylum seeker she is unable to be reunited with her children until her claim is heard and accepted. According to the Canadian Council for Refugees, delays in family reunification is a source of stress for many refugees trying to re-settle in Canada (CCR, 2004b)

Many of the women became teary when talking about their experiences at the IRB hearing. The refugee determination system criminalizes the refugee women as they go through a process of evidence evaluation, credibility assessment, court hearings and procedures (Rousseau, Crepeau, Foxen, & Houle, 2002). Research has found that often, these quasi-judicial hearings during the IRB process are flawed as decision-makers have insufficient cultural, political, and social knowledge to make sound decisions (ibid).

> "…Board members were highly insensitive to the use of rape as a political weapon. They showed little empathy for claimants who stated they were raped by authorities during detention, and rejected such claims due to the women's lack of evidence. In many cultures, however, rape results in a loss of honour for the woman and her family, who, as a consequence will not request documentation from a medical authority" (Rousseau et al., 2002).

One woman stated that her family does not know about the pain she suffered through the court process. She said that in her country you only go to court if you have broken the law; going to court here in Canada was both painful and difficult. The 'not knowing' and uncertainty was quoted as being one of the most difficult things to overcome. It is difficult to pick up the pieces and re-build your life not knowing if you

will be allowed to stay. In addition, refugees have no control over the court process,

which amplifies the power the Canadian government and courts have over refugees.

Omidvar & Richmond state that this period of legal limbo diminishes the social inclusion

of refugees in Canadian society (2003). This period can last for up to 5 years greatly

impacting on the livelihood of refugee women while they wait their hearing (ibid).

Refugee women in these situations cannot attain a loan from a bank, vote, they do not

have access to family re-unification programs, are limited in jobs they can apply for,

cannot receive a loan for post-secondary education and experience many barriers to

receiving assistance from the government (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). In these

circumstances, the Canadian welfare system prohibits the integration and inclusion of

refugee women.

<u>Isolation, Safety &Uncertainty</u>

Factors of isolation, safety, and the feeling of uncertainty were interwoven in

many of the areas discussed in the group meetings. Because these women escaped unsafe

situations, situations of violence, persecution and oppression, gaining a sense of safety

was paramount. One refugee woman stated,

> "We made the decision, we felt pressured to make the decision because of
> security issues. We have left all of our lives behind, so again the point
> when you are feeling totally uncertain. You don't have past you don't
> have future, you don't know what will happen. So it was really stressful,
> it's like being born again".

Although many of the women were connected to groups associated by faith,

culture, language or association (newcomer or refugee), they often experienced isolation

from the greater community. This finding was essential as it shows that through the re-

settlement process, many refugee women do not become fully integrated into Canadian society. Women who came with their family also stated that their children were also isolated,

> "We talked with him [her son] a lot from Colombia, so he knew that we would be leaving going to a different country and he miss his school and his friends...but months here he didn't want to go out and have friends, so he was isolated".

Language used by women in the group revealed the feeling of their country of origin as their "home." For example, women would refer to their country of origin as "my country," or "back home." One woman who has been settled here for the longest in the group did not feel that Canada was completely her "home."

> "In my case, I already have more established having a job, my husband have a job with the house, that sort of thing, but still I feel like divided like part of my heart is here and part of my heart is there".

This too was an essential finding to the study as women, despite establishment in their community may not feel a sense of "home." This could possibly be from two reasons, loyalty to their country or origin, or a shortfall in the re-settlement process (or a combination of both factors). The Canadian welfare system can attempt to foster the social integration leading to the social inclusion of refugee women in society, however, refugee women need to feel secure in their status, united and not isolated from their community of re-settlement, they need to feel safe in their environment and certain of their future. The concept of re-settlement as a two-way street is evident as communities need to open up to newcomers especially refugee women who are vulnerable in order to enhance participation and citizenship amongst the refugee population. It is clear that

factors of discrimination, racism and oppression inhibit this process; however, it must be

overcome by progressive actions by the Canadian Welfare State and government.

Discussion & Conclusion

Over the decades, refugees have contributed to the enriched social, cultural and political fabric of Canada. While Canada is often celebrated for its immigration policies, there are significant shortcomings in the process of re-settling refugees in our communities. Often, re-settlement is left to chance. There are no polices in place to ensure the equality of treatment in the labour market; there is no fairness in the process of locating housing or medical assistance. There is a lack of uniformity of practice amongst these institutions as there are no standards in place to ensure the all refugees living in our communities receive the assistance they require.

Through the re-settlement phase, refugee women face many obstacles and barriers to full participation in Canadian society. Inherent in the Canadian political, cultural and social system are factors of systemic discrimination, which impacts the social inclusion and integration of refugee women in society. Refugee women cannot be completely integrated into society unless progressive policies actively work to combat these factors of discrimination and marginalization of refugee women. When speaking about the layers of discrimination the women in the group meetings faced in their communities, one woman stated that being discriminated against in Canada was surprising because Canada is so open to immigrants. One woman stated, "You see people from all over the world, it is a country built with immigrants. That's why I never expected to find any kind of discrimination here."

Many women described the initial experience and process of re-settlement as difficult; they described it as trying to adapt to a new environment. Often they are misunderstood and pre-judged by native born individuals because of their status as refugees. There are no standards to determine the successful re-settlement of refugees in our communities. There are no consistent indicators that the Canadian welfare system can use to measure the success of re-settlement objectives, yet the discourse on re-settlement implies a successful outcome. Based on responses by these women in the group meetings, they have found both success and disappointments in the re-settlement phase. It is interesting to note that even refugees themselves do not have a comparable measure for their successful re-settlement into society.

What does successful re-settlement look like or entail? Often, literature and research in the area measures success by comparing newcomers with native born individuals. This method of measuring successful re-settlement process is idealistic and pathologies the newcomer as they are blamed for any perceived shortcomings. Other research looks at the economic earnings of newcomers, focusing on their "drain" or "gain" on the welfare system. While many newcomers need assistance during the first year or two of re-settlement before they are able to participate in the labour market, this period is considerably less than the time frame it takes to raise a native born child through the public school system before they become integrated into the labour market. Many studies argue that newcomers contribute more to the Canadian welfare state than they take out (Li, 2005; Reitz, 2005). The underutilization of skills and employability of refugee women does not benefit the Canadian economy or the livelihood of refugee

women seeking re-settlement. It appears that it would be a win-win situation for refugee women to become full and active participating members in Canadian society.

One cannot ignore the unique experiences and multiple oppressions that refugee women face in their re-settlement period. We have heard the testimonies of refugee women who have fought to overcome barriers in order to re-build their lives here in Canada. Current legislation does not address the re-settlement needs of refugee women. This quasi-legislation does not deal with the systemic discrimination of refugee women embedded in our social policies at the Provincial level. Provincial policies such as Ontario Works provide insufficient resources for refugee women in the re-settlement process. Delays in family re-unification inherently discriminate against women as they are primarily the caregiver of children. This delay is a significant barrier to the re-settlement process as it contributes to the overall stress and burden on women, creating an inability to continue in their re-settlement phase. This was evident when one women faced with this situation stated that she found it difficult to re-settle while her children were in another country non-knowing if they were safe. Through this research, I have found that the experiences of asylum seekers were more hidden then government assisted refuges since they were often more isolated and alienated from society because of their pending status.

The state of legal limbo proved to be a major source of stress for the women. The refugee claim overshadowed the re-settlement process. Before becoming a landed immigrant, refugees are unequally treated; virtually treated as second class citizens. Their loss of identity and rights exacerbates the oppression, racism and discrimination women

experience in their community of re-settlement. It is difficult for refugee women to become active participants in their community when they are shut out or denied access to resources they need.

The issue of integrating newcomers into society cannot be ignored and needs to be addressed. It is evident through my research that additional assistance needs to be provided to asylum seekers then is currently offered. The Canadian welfare state needs to offer resources and services to asylum seekers in an expedient manner to eliminate the increased isolation, alienation and vulnerability experienced. I recommend that asylum seekers be awarded the same protection rights as government assisted refugees. Asylum seekers can be assisted from the point of entry and taken to a reception house where they can be assisted with: locating accommodations, nutrition, as well as government programs and community services including financial assistance through Ontario Works. Refugee women need to be informed of their rights as well as available resources upon arrival so they can make informed decisions, this can be done at the point of entry. I recommend that there be standards in place so refugee women can access services and resources equally, regardless of status.

Refugee women are amongst the most vulnerable as they experience a multitude of oppression without the initial protection from the State. Although GAR's are offered expedient assistance from the government (compared to asylum seekers), there are no state protections from the factors that marginalize and shut out their participation as contributing citizens, for example, in the labour market. The Canadian government needs to have more accountability in the re-settlement of refugee women. More attention needs

to be paid by the government regarding factors that impede and enhance the re-settlement experiences of refugee women.

The welfare state distributes resources and services inconsistently impeding the re-settlement phase. It appears that services and resources are allocated based on the legitimization of the 'citizenship' status of the individual. Government assisted refugees who arrive in Canada as landed immigrants are awarded more assistance than asylum seekers whose status is pending. Asylum seekers are mistrusted in society and struggle to locate adequate resources and assistance. The Canadian welfare system needs to change their response to refugee women so they can continue their lives in an environment that awards them the tools and resources to become protected and active citizens. Refugee women are in need of more state protection and assistance in order to re-build their lives in diaspora.

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