



CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

REFUGEE

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SPECIAL ISSUE

Refugee Women

This issue of *Refuge* emphasizes gender as a key dimension of the refugee experience.

We begin with a conceptual argument on the importance of gender and suggest the need for qualitative methods to generate action research questions.

We present here a wide range of experiences of refugee women including: the psychological effects of torture, efforts to restructure family life and the search for religious meaning in otherwise shattered lives. Programmes to address problems faced by refugee women are reviewed as well as long-range solutions requiring political lobbying.

It is hoped that such information will sensitize readers regarding the issues and concerns of refugee women, and foster understanding of their plight from different perspectives: individual, institutional, societal and cultural. We hope that this exercise will generate research, programmes and policies that are relevant and sensitive to the needs of refugee women.

Christina Lee
Penny Van Esterik



Isabel Gonzales (centre left), a teacher from Guatemala, her husband Edwin, an electrical engineer, and their daughters Denisse and Karina wait in a Plattsburgh, New York, motel room after being refused entry to Canada as a result of new measures recently announced by Immigration Minister Benoît Bouchard.

(CANAPRESS PHOTO SERVICE)

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Editorial: The Trust of the People of Canada

Three scant months after the Government accepted the Nansen Medal on behalf of the People of Canada, it has negated the

CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES **REFUGE**

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very spirit of its entitlement. The recent series of measures restricting refugee-claimant inflow tells us more about the government's hyper-sensitivity to criticism than its attempt to govern with compassion through informed self-conscious policy.

There is little doubt that Canada has experienced a sudden influx in asylum claimants in recent months, especially since January. Instead of devising ways to assist provincial governments and non-governmental organizations who have taken the lion's share of the tasks of accommodation and support, it has opted to satisfy the carping criticism of those sectors having least contact with refugees and to restrict future entry.

While the stress on persecuted peoples throughout the world is increasing, Canada has scrapped the list of "protected" country origins facilitating rapid and safe entry, and instead twisted visa, transit visa and summary return regulations into a tangle of bureaucratic red tape which leads asylum-seekers back to the very countries which had imperiled their protection!

None of the problems of demand for asylum in Canada is solved, and more are made. With the backlog of claimants already approaching 20,000 people for the refugee determination process, the government has decided to add more to the queue by requiring those formerly admissible on Minister's permits now to join the file. On paper this appears as a streamlining into a single process. In practice it has inundated a system already overflowing with cases. Chaos in the name of efficiency!

Even more potentially dangerous for would-be claimants (mainly Salvadoreans and Guatemalans) seeking asylum by crossing the border from the U.S., claimants must return to the U.S. to await a hearing. Nothing more than a verbal undertaking from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) assures protection of these would-be claimants in

the U.S. until a Canadian hearing is scheduled. The INS is notorious for failing to protect people whom it classifies as "economic migrants" — codeword for Salvadoreans and Guatemalans. This is one area of foreign relations which requires independence from intervention by, or compliance with U.S. immigration authority.

Recall that the distinguishing feature of refugee policy from immigration policy in general is the focus on humanitarian concerns — which by their very nature transcend national interest. In such light, reaction to waves of public concern over alleged abuses of administrative and operational policies for refugee intake should represent only a surface manifestation to alert government as to whether its humanitarian policy is being correctly understood or implemented. Careful reflection is required on issues which become political because of unmet needs. No better example can be found than the contents of this copy of *Refuge*, devoted to refugee women. As editors Lee and Van Esterik demonstrate in these pages, gender issues are often ignored and easily bypassed. It is the caring government that seeks to be responsive to its less privileged members — no less true in the global community than within our borders.

The federal government has compounded problems in its already formidable agenda of inland refugee determination. It has instead devised ad-hoc ways and means to keep as many asylum seekers as possible away from Canadian borders. Canada distances itself while people fleeing persecution wait in uncertain if not unprotected circumstances. Canada has opted to protect its borders rather than refugees. We urge the government to turn back to compassion. In so doing, it will return to its true role of policy-making.

C. Michael Lanphier
Howard Adelman

Gender: A Key Dimension of the Refugee Experience

by Doreen Indra

One of the key contemporary challenges facing the world today is to bring women into positions where they can more effectively define and shape women's perspectives, more forcefully call society's attention to women's experiences, and contribute to the evolution of a social world-view which incorporates the perspectives of both women and men. In a microcosm, the universe of refugees should reflect these same concerns. And yet, while refugees today claim a great deal of attention, women refugees do not. Hence, both researchers and aid workers involved with refugees face a strong imperative to incorporate gender issues into their work. This challenge arises from the indisputable fact that from the process of defining a refugee to the final phase of resettlement, both the overall discourse, practice, and research concerning refugees today remains primarily a male paradigm, even if in a superficial way it appears to be a universal and general one.

One can see the systematic neglect of gender as a critical consideration in every facet of the refugee situation, beginning with the popular culture image of "the refugee". As Edelman¹ has noted, public images constitute one of the most profound constraints on social action, for through the power to form societal images and symbols comes the power to set the stage for formal responses to social issues. In this case the popular image of "the refugee" clearly influences the allocation of significance within the overall discourse on refugees. The image typically does not differentiate men and women as distinct kinds of refugees. Mass media materials soliciting sympathy for refugees usually tend to identify notable refugees with men, as in the popular UNHCR poster depicting Einstein as a refugee. Otherwise, the generalized image "refugee" predominates.

¹ M. Edelman, *Political Language: Words that Succeed and Policies that Fail* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), p. xxi.

Generalized references to "refugees" obscure more than they illuminate. They obscure the ways in which gender may play a major role in how refugees are created, and how distinct the refugee situation can be for women and men. They also obscure the divergent relationships to the state and to the public realm which women and men have in source countries. Far from a politically neutral concept, the current image of "the refugee" is therefore deeply political.

To illustrate the depth of gender delegitimation in refugee contexts, consider the practical and ideological consequences of extant gender bias in definitions of a refugee. Almost universally, the following Geneva Refugee Convention criteria predominate: that a refugee is a person who "from a just fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, belonging to a social group or on political convictions, is outside the country of *his* nationality and who cannot or will not invoke the protection of this country as a result of such fears. . . [and] will not return to *his* country." [italics ours]. It is remarkable that sex and gender oppression are not even mentioned, whereas oppression arising from parallel forms of invidious status distinction such as race or religious conviction are central. Thus, an individual risking death at the hands of majority group institutions for maintaining a minority religion (say, Bahá'í in Iran) fits the definition, whereas a woman (again, say in Iran) facing death by the same institutions for stepping out of her "appropriate role" or for deviating from misogynous sexual mores does not.

Many women around the world could be unambiguously considered refugees on the basis of sex and gender oppression without doing violence to the spirit of the Geneva Convention. Yet ironically, almost the opposite is sometimes the case: the attempt to maintain minority group "traditional culture" patterns which include profound sexual stratification in the face of

forced state acculturation may actually be contributory grounds for the granting of refugee status.

One can go even further. As de Neef and de Ruijter² have eloquently shown, there exists strong international resistance to the inclusion of gender as an explicit criterion for refugee status, most particularly on the part of those states which fear that this might result in a critique of their national gender relations.

Moreover, potential male and female refugees almost never stand in the same relationship to those criteria for refugee status which at the United Nations are generally accepted -- race, religion, nationality, etc. Women sometimes have a lower probability of achieving refugee status because the key criteria for being a refugee are drawn primarily from the realm of public sphere activities dominated by men. With regard to private sphere activities where women's presence is more strongly felt, there is primarily silence -- silence compounded by an unconscious calculus that assigns the critical quality "political" to many public activities but few private ones. Thus, state oppression of a religious minority is political, while gender oppression at home is not. In addition, "oppression" itself has strong gender implications: physical violence, cultural, political, and religious intolerance all have their distinctly gendered consequences.

Likewise, the process of flight has strong gender implications. Sometimes scarce resources that make flight possible are preferentially allocated to men by culture, gender role constraints, and context. When in flight (an eminently "public" activity) men may also command superior

² C.E.J. de Neef and S.J. de Ruijter, *Sexual Violence Against Women Refugees* (Amsterdam: Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, 1984).

moral resources by virtue of local expectations that men may travel without the "protection" of kinsmen, but that women should not; in some countries women not so "protected" fall prey to a host of difficulties: sexual violence, kidnapping, robbery, enslavement, death. Similarly, the agents of the various states and agencies with whom refugees in flight deal -- those of the source and host countries, aid workers, etc. -- are predominantly men (especially those in positions of power), with the result that gender relations are a critical dimension of refugee flight.

The salience of gender is no less high for refugees in camps. The organization of camps is often predicated on the family unit as the primary building block of the system distributing goods and services to individual refugees. Although there are many benefits to using the social category of family in this context, the gender implications must be seen more clearly than they are at present. To do otherwise is to consign women's concerns to the shadows of the private world and to the periphery of refugee policy and practice. Moreover, a camp's typical emphasis on males as family spokespersons and as brokers between refugees and (primarily male) camp functionaries guarantees the close identity of public camp discourse on "family" or "refugee" concerns with the concerns of certain men. Relief distribution systems can thereby become highly politicized along the lines of gender. The same can be true of "traditional culture" when operating in the camp context; for example, the tradition of men and (male) guests eating before women and children has traditionally allocated a superior diet to men in many cultures; in refugee contexts the consequences of this practice for women can be severe.

It is relatively rare that in those cases where there are serious efforts to resettle refugees in Western countries the formal criteria of selection overtly discriminate against women. And yet in this process women often suffer from many of the same gender-based disabilities that they

would face in their home country: men and women in virtually every refugee source country have different relationships of production. Men likewise are likely to have significantly superior competitive class resources: education, literacy, occupational skills, public sphere interaction skill, etc. This differential, combined with the routine identification by selection officers of "heads of household" with men mean that women primarily move to resettlement in third countries as dependents of male kin and with inferior class resources.

During the actual process of settlement in third countries control over the definition of the refugee situation shifts from international agencies primarily to the third country state and its associated social welfare system. All such states are gender stratified in varying degrees.

But what impact does this have on refugee resettlement? Initially, neither male nor female refugees constitute a significant pressure group in respect to the conditions of their own resettlement; they are defined by the system rather than being definers of it, and societal patterns of social welfare are consequently mapped over onto refugees largely unchanged. This is doubly the case for refugee women, who, in addition to suffering the disabilities of being a refugee are further constrained by being women; they often lack the class and cultural resources to make their concerns heard, and they are constrained from protesting by both traditional gender roles and by altruistic considerations of the marginal psychological statuses of their men. They thus suffer from two levels of gender inequality; that of their host country context and that of their source culture.

Inevitably, the overall practical consequence is that settlement proceeds on the (obvious, but possibly incorrect) thesis that these people are refugees first and women or men second; if one considers that in such third countries there is virtually no significant social, political or cultural context in which any other dimension of a person's self is of greater

import than gender, one might at least occasionally consider the situation in reverse: that these people are men and women who happen to be refugees. To do so might make far greater sense out of many patterns of practical refugee programming.

From a research point of view, it is clear that if gender is to be apportioned its proper weight in understanding how refugees are created, the social organization of the camps, camp and third country social service delivery systems, and immigrant community structure, a new, gender-informed perspective must come from far more than just inductive empirical observation. Irrespective of their disciplines, researchers may also consider that their academic paradigm itself is at least partially a reflection of extant societal values, and of societal allocation of salience to certain social issues and social problems rather than others. To the extent that these forces enter into research paradigms, they usually delegitimize gender issues. This occurs also through an unconscious research bias towards the analysis of formal structures like community organizations, towards named statuses like ethnic group spokespersons, and towards abstract conceptions of social life, such as ideal models for the family. The necessary corrective is essentially the same as it is across the social sciences: irrespective of topical focus, one must place gender at the centre of the analysis. It is critical therefore to be conscious when researching "refugees", "refugee communities", "refugee culture", and "refugee concerns" to ask the appropriate gender-linked questions: what refugee, whose community, culture or concern?

Doreen Indra, an anthropologist at the University of Lethbridge, recently co-edited Uprooting, Loss, and Adaptation: Southeastern Refugees in Canada, being published by the Canadian Public Health Association.

Life Histories and Action Research

by Penny Van Esterik

Responding to Doreen Indra's comments on the research paradigm, one strategy for keeping gender issues central to refugee issues is the collection of life histories of refugee women of different ages and backgrounds. These biographies document life changes and significant events in these women's lives in their birthplaces, in the camps, and in the country of asylum. Viewing the refugee process from the perspective of individual women's lives provides another approach to complement more quantitative research. After collecting a number of representative biographies, analysts could look for common themes and issues emerging from the life histories. In this way we could interpret events through their impact on local communities and specific individuals.

There might be several practical applications for research of this kind. The process of constructing one's life history might have real psychological benefits as women come to view their personal worth and identity through the eyes of a sympathetic listener. In addition, we might begin to identify the factors promoting and hindering successful adjustment in North American communities. For example, we know refugee women who sit isolated, depressed, and powerless in their communities, and refugee women who hold together their families and friends while pursuing activity schedules that would exhaust many of us. Life histories would help us understand the differences between these groups of women. In addition, life histories are an excellent source of action research questions -- research which can inform new programme initiatives for refugee women. For example:

1. How do refugee women utilize their time? How do they find time to participate in whatever language, skills, income generating or cultural adaptation programmes that would assist them?
2. What work conditions do refugee women face?
3. How is the content of English as a Second Language (ESL) courses relevant to the life experience and needs of refugee women?
4. How do refugee women deal with the educational system on behalf of their children? What are their expectations regarding the education of their male and female children?
5. What informal systems have refugee women developed to deal with child care, medical problems, housing, and food shortages?
6. How do refugee female heads of household differ from male heads of household in adjusting to resettlement?
7. Are refugee women more at nutritional risk than refugee men?
8. What are the most important markers of personal and ethnic identity for refugee women?



For a Cambodian refugee family, life in Canada now means freedom to play.

One Cambodian Woman: For example, the life story of one Cambodian woman reflects more generally on the experiences of Southeast Asian women. Her life story (to be published in a forthcoming issue of the *Atkinson Review* dedicated to Refugees) reveals both structural features and personal characteristics that may be important predictors of successful refugee adjustment.

Throughout her life in Cambodia, this woman's commercial and entrepreneurial skills were encouraged and utilized. Consequently, she developed a calculating sense of how to use profits to insure her family's security. In spite of (or perhaps as a result of) her concern with the careful shepherding of economic resources, she spent a proportion of her profits on the regular support of the religious institutions of Theravada Buddhism. During the years under the Pol Pot regime and the family's escape, she struggled to reunite the extended family and keep it intact after the decision to flee. Her commitment to family is demonstrated by her decision to include two elderly sick female relatives in her family's escape and resettlement plans, even though they represented a financial burden on the family's scant resources.

There are certain structural characteristics of her situation which contributed to her capacity to adjust to the new sets of constraints and opportunities facing her as a refugee. First, her children were teenagers and took responsibility for themselves. In addition, the youngest son and daughter (thirteen years and fourteen-years-old, respectively) took over the domestic work of running the household, leaving their mother free to attend English classes and vocational training. Second, as a widow she was entitled to certain benefits and treated as a female head of household, eligible for ESL classes, basic education, and vocational training. In

programmes with limited placement, men are often favoured over women. Being a female head of household allowed her to receive these services without "bucking the system" before she knew how "the system" operated.

Finally, the fact that she was surrounded by a network of supportive female kin enabled her to reassert control over the reunited family. As her English skills increased, she and her mother became key figures in family decision-making. Her mother retains her position as head of the family, even though she speaks virtually no English and has no intention of learning any.

The personal characteristics that contributed to her successful adjustment include her absolute realism; her capacity to live in the present and retain a sense of humour and serenity throughout; her ability to accept the loss of her children and her wealth; her persistence in attempts to obtain all possible rights and opportunities available to her as a refugee. During the most difficult months after resettlement, she was saved from the depths of depression facing many of her family members by her optimism and practicality (her pride did not stop her from accepting used clothes, unlike some of her relatives). She refused to acknowledge her marginal position in society and lack of opportunities, attributing her problems to her lack of sufficient English skills and the economy. As a result of this attitude, she continued to seek out business opportunities, confident of her abilities and business potential.

Her entrepreneurial excitement should not be stilled: perhaps it will even be contagious, infecting her refugee sisters with a renewed vision of women's potential and new strategies for changing existing conditions. Judging from one woman's struggle, the women of Southeast Asia who come as refugees will enrich our lives and contribute a sense of detached, composed strength which cannot be compromised. For they know their worth.

Penny Van Esterik is Associate Professor of Anthropology at York University specializing in Southeast Asia.

Refugee Women in Canada: The Lingering Effects of Persecution, War and Torture

by Mary Carmen Romero-Cachinero

Since the Second World War, it is estimated that about half a million refugees have settled in Canada, about half of whom were women. Despite the great differences in their social, economic and cultural backgrounds, these women share a common experience of escaping from life-threatening circumstances. They also share the experience of being forced to abandon their homes and native lands, with all the trauma that entails. Finally, most refugee women share the status of "sponsored relatives" upon arrival in Canada, a category which generally denies their true plight.

What effect does this traumatic background have on their adjustment to life in Canada? Let us look briefly at three individual cases. The names of the three people have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

Case 1: María is twenty-three years old. She came from South America. Her father was tortured to death and her only brother managed to flee the country after having been detained and tortured himself. Though very young, María was forced to leave school and earn her living as a sales clerk. She became an active member of a local union, and as such was subject to harassment by the police. She received threatening phone calls, her family's home was regularly searched, and her mother beaten. She was detained for five days in solitary confinement and interrogated, beaten, and raped. She was also threatened with being made to "disappear" (as her father did) if she did not become a police informer. Upon her release, María fled to Canada. She had to undergo a process of one and a half years to have her claim as a sponsored refugee accepted.

María has found her adjustment to Canada very difficult. She is subject to periodic bouts of severe depression, anxiety and intense rage against the authorities of her country of origin.

Case 2: Lillian is in her early thirties and comes from a country in Eastern Africa. During a political upheaval in her native land, her fiancé, along with many others, was detained by the authorities, and never heard from again. She was later detained at work and accused of being disloyal to the new military regime. Lillian spent over five months in prison, without charges being laid against her. She was deprived of adequate food, water, clothes, medical care, and forced to live in an overcrowded and dirty cell. Eventually, her fiancé's family was able to provide sufficient money to gain her release and she escaped to a nearby country without contacting her family. After two years she was sponsored by a Canadian church group to immigrate to Canada as a refugee.

Even though she could speak English, her professional qualifications (hotel management) have never been accepted, and she has been forced to support herself doing cleaning. Alone in Canada, she has experienced great loneliness and lack of support, which she has tried to overcome by becoming actively involved in church activities.

For years, she has retained the belief that her fiancé is still alive, a situation which has inhibited the development of new relationships with men. She lives in constant anxiety about the safety of her family in her country of origin.

Her brother-in-law disappeared leaving her sister with three young children to support. The worst blow of all was when she received the news that her fifteen-year-old sister had been raped, murdered and decapitated. Lillian herself, in addition to her psychological trauma, still suffers the physical effects of her ordeal. She has permanent kidney damage and numerous scars all over her body from the beatings that she received while in detention.

Case 3: Rosa is a twenty-four year-old Central American with three children. Shortly after the birth of her third child, Rosa went to live with her parents in order to escape the violent and abusive behaviour of her husband. Her husband was accepted into Canada as a Convention refugee and he arranged to sponsor Rosa and her children to come to Canada. Rosa agreed, because of her constant fear of violent death and torture in her homeland.

As Convention refugees in Canada, they received the basic assistance offered by the Federal Department of Employment and Immigration. Although Rosa is now free from the political violence of her homeland, she is once again in a situation of violence. She and her children are regularly subjected to abuse from her husband. He sometimes takes the government support allowance for himself; when that happens, Rosa is forced to rely on charities. Rosa would like a divorce, but has decided to put up with the present situation because she is afraid of being deported (as she is a sponsored relative, she is thus dependent on her husband), losing custody of her children and not having any support from her husband. Not knowing English, her only friends are other Spanish-speaking refugees. She would like to finish her high school education, learn English and take some kind of vocational education, but finds this impossible in her present situation. Finally, Rosa, like the others, experiences much anxiety about the safety of her family in Central America, and feels guilt because of her inability to send them any help.

Refugee women face the same obstacles as other immigrant women: language barriers, cultural differences and culture shock, economic constraints and racial discrimination. As is clear from the cases outlined above (which are similar to thousands of others), refugee women need to overcome the psychological scars left by traumatic and violent experiences. Nevertheless, whether they arrive as refugee claimants (María), privately sponsored refugees (Lillian), or as sponsored relatives (Rosa), they have little

chance of getting either initial or ongoing assistance in their struggle to overcome their psychological problems. Because of this lack of support and counselling, their problems often persist indefinitely.

Even though every case is unique, there are some psychological effects which have a higher incidence among refugee women than among other immigrant women.¹ Some of these symptoms include: general anxiety and depression, guilt (about inability to assist families left behind), fearfulness, paranoia, insomnia, psychosomatic illness, and menstrual irregularities.²

Some of these symptoms may not appear immediately on arrival in Canada.³ Commonly, during the first few months (sometimes years) in their new country, refugees experience the so-called "honeymoon effect". This period of euphoria eventually turns into a period of realism about the difficulties of adjustment in the new land. It is during this somber period that the ghosts of their past experience emerge. Very often they are reluctant to talk about their psychological problems to their new acquaintances, people who can hardly imagine the circumstances that gave rise to these problems. These people very rarely search for help outside of their immediate circle, primarily because there is an almost

complete lack of services directed to the support and guidance of refugee women.⁴

In 1986, the Secretary of State and the Department of Health and Welfare organized a task force to prepare an in-depth study of the special mental health needs of immigrants and refugees in Canada. The twelve-member task force is exploring the circumstances contributing to stress among the newcomers. During its two-year mandate, the task force will summarize existing research and will call for briefs from concerned organizations and individuals across the country. Fortunately, refugee women will be addressed as a target group. We can expect that the report will pinpoint the severe lack of culturally and linguistically sensitive services for refugee women (English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, vocational counselling, psychological counselling, etc.). It is hoped, therefore, that the final report will make governments and health service agencies sensitive to the needs of refugee women and will lead to the establishment of appropriate mental health and orientation services. In the meantime, ethno-cultural communities should become actively involved in lobbying for these programmes. Ultimately, it is within the boundaries of their neighbourhoods and communities that refugee women can either be helped or continue to be neglected.

1 G. Cowgill and G. Doupé, "Recognizing and Helping Victims of Torture", *The Canadian Nurse* (December 1985), pp. 18-22.

2 E. Domovitch, P. Berger et al, "Human Torture: Description Sequilae of 104 Cases", in *Canadian Family Physician*, 30 (April 1984), 827-83.

3 C.J. Frederick, "Violence and Disaster: Immediate and Long Term Consequences", in *Helping Victims of Violence* (The Hague: Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs, Government Publishing Office, 1983), pp. 32-46.

4 I. Kaprielian, "Creating and Sustaining an Ethnocultural Heritage in Ontario: The Case of Armenian Women Refugees", in *Looking into My Sister's Eyes: An Exploration in Women's History*, edited by Jean Burnet (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986), pp. 139-153.

Mary Carmen Romero-Cachinero is a PhD candidate at OISE and has worked as a refugee counsellor. Currently she is co-ordinating ESL programmes for Spanish-speaking refugees.

The Refugee Woman and her Family

by Eva Allmen

As survivors of a disaster, refugee families arrive already under the stress produced by the refugee experience. Upon arrival they have to continue to cope with these stresses, as well as the new stresses that are part of the immigrant experience.

In order to help, we need to know more about the dynamics of the refugee family and the ways support can be given in restoring its members' sense of well-being to a reasonable level of functioning.

The refugee family has to deal with many losses:

- loss of the support of the extended family;
- the sense of loss of dignity and self, particularly in the case of victims of torture and imprisonment;
- loss of material possessions;
- loss of status; and,
- loss of culture and language.

To cope with these losses there is a need after escape to reorganize and reconstitute. It is essential for the survival of the family after a crisis to readjust the roles of its members to the new situation.

A critical factor of stress for refugees is not only the dislocation they experience, but also that the time between dislocation and settlement can take anywhere from six months to many years.

In some cases, the rebuilding and restructuring of family life needs to start three or four times before the final destination is reached. Some of the symptoms of stress become entrenched and others are suppressed. Since the functional necessities of life -- shelter, food and the need to secure a final destination -- are overwhelming, the psychological effects of the stress are often delayed.

In studies of families that are victims of a disaster, the capacity of the family to rally around, to reorganize its internal resources

is a key element in its members' emotional and economic recovery.

Coping mechanisms often include the following:

- In some cases, families go to the extreme of isolating themselves from the outside world until it is safe to connect again.
- There may be intense activities involving all family members with a great deal of interaction and time spent together.
- They may develop ways that would supplement the loss of the extended family, such as establishing networks with fellow refugees which provide a semblance of the extended family.

Roles of Women

Women's pivotal role in family life is a known fact, but this role is even more critical in the refugee situation. A great deal of the rebuilding, reorganizing and nurturing of the family falls on women. They are called upon to continue their task of maintaining a home during transition and immediately upon arrival. Regardless of the circumstances, they must cook, take care of the children and be supportive to others.

Women in these situations have to expand their traditional roles. They must maintain their status as homemakers and mothers and must assume additional roles as workers or students. At the same time, men's role as providers may be undermined in the context of a new country, forcing them to assume tasks that were previously considered female functions. Very often the extension of the woman's role is resented as it is seen as a threat to the family.

Helping Strategies

At Ontario Welcome House, hundreds of refugee women come for services. This is

but one of the agencies that services refugees in Toronto, and is the one with which I am most familiar.

Through many years of observation, I have formulated the following suggestions to facilitate and improve the services rendered to refugees:

- 1) It is important to recognize that most refugees are successful and capable individuals. They are only recent casualties of political and social events well beyond their control.
- 2) Service provided should investigate and note their previous life style and not make assumptions based on what they do or where they live now.
- 3) Child care requires sensitive support. The economic need that leads to a parent's decision to place a child in the care of strangers is difficult to cope with.
- 4) Refugee women are often extremely isolated. They feel the loss of the extended family's support. Alternative networks of women with similar experiences would help.
- 5) Because of the stresses and the length of the transition from exile to settlement, refugee women's health may have been neglected. They need extensive health care and nutritional information.
- 6) Refugee women need language and job training if they are to effectively contribute to the economic betterment of the family.
- 7) The trauma and the losses of exile often cause emotional problems. Moreover, a new life in a new land carries with it additional pressures and burdens.

Eva Allmen, a Supervisor of Settlement Services on leave from Ontario Welcome House, is currently involved in establishing a National Working Group of Refugee Women under the sponsorship of the Canadian Council for Refugees.

Women and Religion: "Mennonite Hmong"

by Daphne Abergel

The Hmong of Laos, a traditionally animist and preliterate people, speak a Sino-Tibetan language and are culturally close to the Chinese. Due to their strategic location and scouting and fighting skills, the Hmong were singled out during the war in Indochina to collaborate with the CIA as front line guerrillas. The eventual assumption of power in 1975 in Laos of communist-backed Pathet Lao forces, resulted in increasing hardships and danger for those Hmong who had complied with the U.S. Army Special Forces. By 1980, more than 110,000 Hmong were forced to flee Thailand. Most Hmong from Thai refugee camps resettled in the U.S., France, Australia and Canada. The Mennonite Central Committee's (MCC) policy to aid sponsor cases like the preliterate and non-industrial Hmong resulted in a proportionately high influx of Hmong to Ontario; hence Kitchener-Waterloo (K-W) has been dubbed the "Hmong Capital" of Canada by immigration officials.

Of the fifteen to twenty Hmong families that initially resettled in Kitchener-Waterloo in 1979, only five or six were baptized Christians before their arrival. Over the last seven years in Canada there has been a steady increase in the numbers of Hmong converting to Christianity, specifically the Mennonite faith. The Hmong Christian Church (Mennonite), established under the auspices of the Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Québec in 1984, has proven to be an important arena for the negotiation of Hmong beliefs, values and norms, specifically those relating to male-female relationships.

Of the estimated sixty-five Hmong families now living in the Waterloo region, approximately one half attend the Hmong Christian Church, a substantial increase from six years ago. The Hmong church has adopted an "open door" policy for those Hmong who are intimidated by rigid institutional rules or structures. Among older Hmong in particular, the church serves more as a facility for social interaction with other Hmong than as a source of spiritual help. The church

leadership has struggled over the last few years to get people involved. Recently Hmong women began to be very active in the church. Although the young Hmong pastor tried to draw women into the church by offering Hmong literacy classes to women and organizing workshops on nutrition and hygiene, the women themselves have taken the initiative by contributing their services to the congregation.

When Hmong women first arrived, they were unresponsive to volunteer efforts. They were also reluctant to get involved in government and community-sponsored language and job-placement programmes. When asked why they resisted attempts to resettle and integrate them into their new community, they responded that they felt uncomfortable participating in these programmes with Hmong men. Hmong women were in these and other cases abiding by traditional norms governing male/female roles. For example, the traditional custom of arranged marriages between young teenagers continued until Mennonite church officials intervened and counselled Hmong on acceptable Christian and Canadian legal practices concerning marriage.

The involvement of women in the workforce has brought about significant changes to the traditional notion of the family as an economic unit, particularly in those cases in which women are the sole source of family income. Virtually all Hmong women are wage earners working on assembly lines in local factories. Women now exercise greater freedom in choosing marriage partners and are marrying later.

Although these changes to some extent parallel those of the much larger Hmong communities in the U.S., there are major differences between Canadian Hmong and their American counterparts. In American cities such as Denver, Minneapolis and Orange County, segmentary kinship based on corporate sub-lineages at the clan and lineage levels is common. Relationships based on common descent link many Hmong families within the wider Hmong

clan-based system in the U.S., providing them with a wide range of networks and support structures. By contrast, K-W Hmong are a small and highly differentiated community consisting of people from all parts of Laos, most of whom are not related to others in the area. Thus what one finds in K-W is a relatively small community of Hmong, internally differentiated along geographical, ethnic, linguistic, religious and other lines. It is clear then that a significant number of Hmong attend church out of a desire for community and not doctrine. The Hmong Christian Church thus provides an opportunity for regular social interaction which would otherwise be severely curtailed. However, the church provides additional incentives for women in particular. The Women's Fellowship Committee is available as a forum in which women can share their ideas and concerns. Church attendance not only gives women the chance to socialize but also share information and make use of educational facilities and other services offered by the church. Most importantly, it provides an opportunity to build important support networks.

Although it may be a while before these women gain the confidence to face new challenges, the congregation will continue to provide them with a non-threatening environment in which they can continue to negotiate their identities as Hmong women in Canadian society.

Daphne Abergel is a doctoral candidate in Sociology at York University working on "Mennonites" in Kitchener-Waterloo.

A Note on Lowland Lao Women

In Toronto, Lao women actively support the establishment of a Lao Buddhist Temple. Refugee groups such as the Lao have lost their own religious institutions at the very time they face the most severe personal stress and alienation. Although women cannot be ordained as monks, they actively participate in ritual events and provide both financial and food resources to the temple. Women outnumber men at services, and it is women's donations of food and money that make it possible for the Lao to maintain their ritual traditions in Toronto.

New Experiences for Refugee Women

by Joy Simmonds

Latin American refugee women new to Toronto, have tremendous obstacles to overcome in settling here. Disorientation, unemployment and an inability to communicate in English, prevent them from integrating into their new society. Over the past four years New Experiences for Refugee Women (N.E.W.) has developed a unique programme that addresses these and other problems.

The goal of the programme is to assist refugee women with their social, cultural and economic integration into Canadian society. To achieve this we focus on each woman as a whole person with many varied and interrelated abilities, experiences and needs. We see her as a woman first, as a refugee, a mother, a wife, a social being, a worker. Our three-component programme of English, Orientation and Employment has been designed to build on all of these.

Who Are the Refugee Women at N.E.W.?

The refugee women at N.E.W. come primarily from Central America, mainly from El Salvador and Guatemala. These women have been forced to leave their countries due to the escalation of civil war. They have seen and experienced violent repression in the form of killings and disappearances of family members and in some cases have themselves been in prison and tortured. They have been forced to leave their homelands and make the long and arduous journey to Canada.

Many have been fortunate enough to have been sponsored by the Canadian government and so have come here directly. Others have had to go via the illegal and dangerous route through Mexico, crossing into the U.S., and slowly proceeding north to Canada. Some of our participants have taken years to get here and have lost family and friends along the way to illness, death and deportation. While still dealing with the emotional, psychological and physical trauma of the past, these refugee women arrive in Toronto and are bombarded by the demands of a new society. Most are mothers and wives and have the awesome responsibility of holding their families together. Marital and family problems often include abuse and violence. Many have limited work experience and those who have skills find that they are not recognized in, or transferable to the Canadian labour market. Financial crisis is common. Affordable housing is practically non-existent. The women often have less access to English classes than their husbands and children and so become isolated from Canadian society. The loss of community and familiar surroundings, coupled with an inability to fend for themselves leads to a loss of identity and self-worth.

N.E.W. Programme

N.E.W.'s programme is six months long and is offered to refugee women in groups of fifteen.

The first fourteen weeks of the programme take place on the premises of N.E.W., and involve classroom training, including:

- English as a Second Language (ESL).
- Orientation/Information/Life Skills.
- Employment Preparation.

The final twelve weeks consist of on-the-job training and Canadian work experience. During the six months, each participant receives a training salary and a metropass.

English as a Second Language

Intensive ESL instruction is provided to prepare participants to communicate effectively in day to day situations. Emphasis is on participants speaking English and role playing. Activities include field trips into the community, audio visual materials, and music. The programme is staffed by bilingual instructors and volunteers.

Orientation, Information and Life Skills

This component specifically addresses the sense of alienation and the loss of identity and confidence experienced by Latin American refugee women in the process of settlement.

Through orientation/information sessions participants begin to understand the historical, political and economic context within which immigrants and refugees have come to Canada. They become familiar with the basic infrastructure of the community and learn how to access and utilize the resources. Finally they learn to know legal rights and responsibilities as a woman, a refugee, a parent and a tenant.

The life skills sessions include:

- Assessing personal situation of the American woman in Canada.

Reasons for Coming to Canada

The following results are from research conducted by N.E.W. in July 1986. The total number of people surveyed was seventy-five. The figures represent percentages.

Lives of family members in danger	54.6
No longer wanted to live in a state of war	52.0
Life in danger	49.3
Family members of friends:	
imprisoned	41.3
tortured	37.3
killed	22.6
To join relatives	9.3
To join husband	8.0
Other reasons	13.3

- Identifying personal needs and aspirations
- Developing communications and assertive skills
- Setting goals and making decisions.

Personal counselling is provided throughout this process.

Employment Component

The Employment Preparation provides participants with an opportunity to assess past work experience, skills, education, and English levels.

Sessions prepare women to do job search, to conduct themselves in a job interview, to fill out application forms and employment contracts. Information is also provided on employment standards, labour legislation, employee rights and benefits and pay cheque deductions. They learn of possible entry-level employment opportunities and of their qualification requirements.

The work placement involves on-the-job training in an organization. Work placements are secured with the understanding that the participant will work and receive training for four months and will then be hired as a permanent employee.

The employment component has always faced somewhat of a dilemma. The reality of today's employment market, is that most of the entry level jobs currently available to participants in N.E.W.'s programme are found at the lower ends of traditional female occupations such as clerical work, community work, day care, home service and light manufacturing assembly work. Past experience has been that Latin American refugee women are primarily interested in jobs they can relate to and that have good working conditions and reasonable wages. It is inevitable that the majority of participants will find employment in traditional women's occupations.

Joy Simmonds is the Community Liaison worker at N.E.W.

Service Delivery to Southeast Asian Refugee Women

by John Van Esterik

The delivery of services to refugees in three counties of upstate New York occupied much of my time and attention for almost four years in the early 1980s. As an anthropologist who managed a programme of educational and employment services to refugees, I was interested in applying an anthropological analysis to the delivery of such services.

The refugee population in the three rural counties of upstate New York covered at the time was mainly Southeast Asian. Almost half of the adult population had little or no education, the bulk of these being women.

Women are responsible for household operations in all Southeast Asian groups. Thus, women were particularly affected by the limitations attendant upon large family size and low incomes. Southeast Asian women play important roles in the household, participating in all family decisions and usually handling the family budget and income.

Yet, refugee women are especially disadvantaged in North American society since the majority of the women have much less education than local populations or refugee men. The women are responsible for the care of children in a society where child care is expensive and difficult to obtain. In their own societies, child care was often left to elderly relatives, friends, or neighbours, all of whom lived close by.

The programme of services sought to provide educational and employment placement services to all refugee adults in the three-county area. But it was soon discovered that refugee women faced problems that impeded the delivery of programme services to them.

Education Backgrounds

Many Southeast Asian refugee women were very poorly educated and therefore unprepared for living in the modern, post-industrial society they were entering. Rural Southeast Asians often prefer to have males formally educated than women. Yet, refugee women wanted and expected to work and earn money. It became very apparent that a one entry-level salary family could not afford many consumer goods in the new society they had entered. Refugee women seeking employment had to face the problem of limited educational backgrounds and their continuing responsibilities of homemaking.



A few students in the Beginning Class, St. Paul's Methodist Church, Ithaca, New York.

Day-Care Services

The English as Second Language (ESL) classes were held in space provided by two churches in the largest urban centre (population: 27,000) in the counties. A problem that arose immediately was day-care services. No provision was made for day care.

The programme sought to solve the problem by planning class times so refugee women could trade off babysitting chores. Elderly relatives suffering their own disorientations in a new land were not prepared to care for two or three young children. Besides, refugees did not live all together and were not necessarily neighbours or, for that matter, friends. As a result, some private sponsors paid for professional day care. A classroom space with a day-care facility was donated, and two day-care workers were hired. However, none of these "solutions" was satisfactory.

Travel

Another problem was getting children to the day-care centre, since New York law required infant seats for any young child travelling in a car. Some refugees did not have cars and walking with three or four children through winter snows was not very convenient. This was usually solved by breaking the law and carrying several children in a car owned by one of the refugees.

Child Care in the Home

In Southeast Asian villages, seven, eight, and nine-year-old daughters often take care of younger siblings. Of course, this is done in a context of open dwellings in proximity with the houses of relatives and well known neighbours. In housing projects even in small towns people are not always very friendly or understanding. In one case where both refugee parents worked, a number of complaints was raised against their leaving young children alone at home. At one point the state child abuse agency was called in by a neighbour. State workers seemed receptive to cultural explanations but ultimately the law was obeyed.

Training Courses

Education involved more than English language training. Some special courses

were devised to directly appeal to women's interests and concerns. One of the most successful was a sewing class utilizing resources of the local vocational high school. Using patterns and power sewing machines appealed to many refugee women who in their home country weaved cloth and made their family clothing.



Some refugee women waiting for their sewing class to begin.



Refugee women attending a popular sewing course. This course had to be dropped afterwards because it could not be readily justified for employment purposes.

Unfortunately, it was difficult to justify the course for employment purposes. A cottage industry in sewing could not be supported because it was against the law

to do piecework in the home. This course, however popular and well attended, was therefore dropped. Other courses such as housekeeping, food preparation, and health services, which had specific employment goals, were not as popular, but offered better opportunities for jobs in local restaurants, cleaning jobs, and other service occupations.

On-the-Job Training

With their poor educational background, many refugee women had difficulty learning to read and write. It was soon discovered that even seemingly simple, labour-intensive jobs like cleaning required knowledge that many Southeast Asian refugee women did not have. Cleaning motel rooms, fraternity houses, and private homes demanded a knowledge about a wide range of products, techniques, and equipment these women had no experience with. The programme had to provide on-the-spot tutors and interpreters to lead the refugee woman through the job. Otherwise, even this minimum wage employment could be lost to the family.

Summary

In summary, the programme sought to address refugee women's needs. But there are barriers for women to access these services. These constraints include government and legal restrictions that limited the development of cottage industries, traditional child care and access to day care. The cultural characteristics of refugee women, including their lack of literacy, education and job readiness, posed additional difficulties.

John Van Esterik teaches in the Social Science Division and co-ordinates the The Studies Project at York University.

Salvadorean Refugee Women and Employment Creation Programmes in Costa Rica

by Tanya Basok

As decades of political repression had by 1980 culminated in a full-scale civil war in El Salvador, thousands of its victims fled the country in search of haven. Costa Rica was viewed as one of the most politically stable and non-repressive countries of Central America and therefore many Salvadoreans asked this country for asylum. At the end of 1980, there were more than 2,000 refugees in Costa Rica and by March 1981, the figure had risen to over four thousand. Between 1980 and 1983 an average of 9,000 refugees per year arrived in Costa Rica.

As early as the end of 1980, the Costa Rican government realized that the alarming flow of refugees was not going to stop and that new measures had to be adopted to attempt to integrate refugees into the economic structure of the country. In order to protect national labour, it was decided not to allow refugees to compete for wage labour jobs. Instead, a program designed to create small and medium-size urban and agricultural businesses for refugees was introduced. The Costa Rican Red Cross was put in charge of programme implementation. The funds for this programme were to come from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Later on, a number of other voluntary and government agencies assumed the responsibility for refugee resettlement and started implementing refugee projects.

More than half of the implemented projects for refugees have failed. In 1986, during seven months of research, the author was able to locate and interview members of sixty-seven small urban projects for Salvadorean refugees. When the average income earned by women in projects is compared to that of men, some significant differences are noted. While men earned on average 7,284 colones per month, women were earning only 5,438 (1 Can.\$ = 27 colones in 1982, 40 in 1986). How can this be explained?

The answer can be found in the difference between two employment creation programmes and the sex distribution within them. At the end of 1980, the Costa Rican government, in cooperation with the UNHCR, adopted a "durable solution" model of refugee resettlement. Under this programme, small and medium-size businesses of a predominantly collective nature were established. Apart from contributions for machinery, tools, furniture, etc., agencies used

to pay the salary and rent for the first few months until a project reached self-sufficiency. Refinancing and technical expertise were offered along with some short training and business administration courses. The initial investment per capita was 63,723 colones. When refinancing is taken into account, the total investment per capita becomes 73,208 colones. At the same time, more than half of these projects failed. Those businesses which survived, lost about half of their members. Therefore, it was decided that the programme was very cost inefficient and had to be replaced.

The new programme to replace the "durable solution" projects was called "local settlement" and was to be administered by a government agency funded by the UNHCR. Under this programme, some refugees received small domestic sewing machines and ovens as well as raw materials, some received tools and raw materials and others just raw materials. The average investment per beneficiary was 13,855 colones. No assistance with initial salary or rent was provided; nor were technical assistance or refinancing schemes made available. The beneficiaries of the "local settlement" programme were expected to work at home.

Sex distribution of the projects for Salvadorean refugees is the following: there are thirty-seven projects which include only men, twenty-three which include only women and seven which are mixed. Out of the thirty-seven projects for men, twenty-three are "durable solution" projects and fourteen are "local settlement" ones. For women's projects, the reverse is true. The majority (sixteen out of twenty-three) of the projects are "local settlement" ones and only seven businesses were established through the "durable solution" programme. All seven "mixed" projects were implemented through the "durable solution" programme.

Few women joined the "durable solution" projects because most of these projects were of a collective nature. Project members were expected to rent a place where all of them could work together. Women who had small children could not accept this arrangement. Day-care facilities were scarce in Costa Rica and, when available, it was so expensive that a woman's salary generated in a project at times was not sufficient to pay for it. For this reason, many women with small children preferred staying at home while receiving the UNHCR emergency aid.

In 1985, the UNHCR assistance was discontinued for Salvadorean refugees in Costa Rica and, as a consequence, all refugees who were still receiving aid were expected to integrate themselves into the labour force. The "local settlement" programme enabled women to engage in some productive activity while taking care of their children.

Most of the women in the programme were given a sewing machine or a stove. Some major problems arose. First, it was assumed that all women could sew or bake. However, it turned out that their domestic skills were not sufficient to make their businesses work well. Second, the machinery was inadequate. The average investment in machinery per "durable solution" project was 38,650 colones, while in the "local settlement" programme it was only 11,300 colones. The sewing machines and stoves given to Salvadorean women were suitable for poor quality domestic production, which made it difficult for the beneficiaries to compete in the market.

Third, when "durable solution" projects were implemented, the first few months of rent were paid for them. That gave participants an opportunity to find a location in a relatively good neighbourhood. When the assistance was cut off, they had already had a chance to establish a clientele and could then continue paying the rent on their own. The "local settlement" recipients, on the other hand, who had mainly survived on the UNHCR assistance and some occasional jobs, lived in low-income houses in poor neighbourhoods. The "local settlement" programme did not offer them any opportunity to move out of their neighbourhoods as no assistance with rent was offered. Although these small producers saw their location as an impediment to the survival of their business, they nevertheless did not want to take the risk of moving out of an inexpensive house. Their clients therefore were mainly low-income people who did not generate a sufficient demand for custom-made goods and paid little on credit.

While all this may not create a problem for refugee women whose husbands also earn an income, the situation of single mothers is truly desperate, as they cannot support their families on what they earn from the "local settlement" programme. It is these women who need more institutional support.

Tanya Basok, a doctoral candidate in Sociology affiliated with the Refugee Documentation Project at York University, has recently returned from field-work research on the resettlement of Salvadorean refugees in Costa Rica.

Immigrant and Visible Minority Women in Canada: Organizing and Building a Coalition

by Christina Lee

The special needs of immigrant women and the difficulties they encounter in adapting to Canadian society have long been neglected. Recent attention is largely a result of the organizing efforts of the women themselves in their attempts to articulate needs and press for change.

Immigrant women have called for greater access to services, more equitable allocation of funding and representation in the decision-making process, among other things. In 1981, in response to this continued advocacy campaign, the federal government initiated the first national conference of immigrant women in Toronto. The goal was to identify key problems facing immigrant women in their adjustment to Canadian society and to facilitate a process of intervention. At the conference, seventy-eight recommendations were made, and a National Follow-up Committee was struck to establish provincial networks and to prepare for a second conference.

Historically, the federal government's approach to immigrant women's issues has been ad-hoc and piecemeal. This apparent fragmentation is attributed to the fact that immigrants are generally considered preserves of separate government departments, a perception that results in the marginalization of this population group. For this reason, immigrants are totally segregated from the overall development of mainstream policies and programmes.

The need for change is long overdue. Yet, four years after the first national conference, most of the seventy-eight recommendations remain unimplemented. With persistent pressure from the community, a national consultation was called by the Minister of Multiculturalism, then Jack Murta, in June 1985. Thirty-seven women representing over forty national immigrant and visible minority women groups and ethnocultural organizations were invited. The consultation was an unprecedented decision of the federal government to initiate an integrative approach in dealing with immigrant and visible minority women's issues. Other Ministers present were Flora MacDonald, Employment and Immigration, Walter McLean, Status of Women, and Jake Epp, Health and Welfare.

The representatives refined the 1981 proposal and developed a brief with twenty-five recommendations. As one participant said to the government, "none of our recommendations would startle you. They may differ in form,

but in essence they are the same as those that have been put forward over the last ten years." The recommendations covered important areas on language and skills training, employment equity, health and social services, immigration policies and funding. A ten-member Action Committee was formed to continue dialogue with the government and to reconvene the consultation in a year's time.

In September 1986, the consultation was reconvened in Ottawa. David Crombie, Minister of Secretary of State and Multiculturalism, Gerry Weiner, Minister of State for Immigration, Maureen Law, Deputy Minister of Health and Welfare, and Kay Stanley, Co-ordinator of Status of Women, represented the government. The following is a status report:

- Canada Employment and Immigration, in response to the Action Committee's original recommendation, has spent \$50 million on language training. In addition, Flora MacDonald has allocated \$1 million to the Settlement Language Training Programme to provide 200 demonstration projects of 300 hours of language training to those who do not intend to enter the work force. These projects will include on-site child care and access allowance, and will benefit homebound immigrant women.
- The funding criteria of the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Programme (ISAP) was amended to allow for services to non-landed domestic workers. Settlement programmes will now be able to provide subsidized services to non-landed domestics. This is an important gain for immigrant and visible minority women who have come to Canada as domestics.
- Immigrant and visible minority women were included on the agenda at the Federal/Provincial Ministerial Conference on Status of Women in June 1986. A working group was formed to examine data collection, language training and certification.
- In 1986, the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women published its first background paper on immigrant women.
- The Secretary of State Women's Programme is currently conducting a review of its mandate, policies and funding criteria with regard to immigrant and visible minority women. Traditionally, immigrant women's projects fall primarily under the jurisdiction of the Multiculturalism Directorate "Cultural Integration Programme". The budget for 1984-

85 was \$2.6 million and its allocation was for all immigrants. On the other hand, the Women's Programme had a budget of \$9 million for 1984-85, and \$12.8 million for 1985-86, from which mainstream women's groups could secure operational and project funding. Since ethnocultural, immigrant and visible minority women represent more than one third of the female population, the Women's programme should allocate its funding accordingly.

- The federal government has created an Interdepartmental Committee on Immigrant and Visible Minority Women as a mechanism to establish an integrative approach in dealing with these women's issues.

- The joint sponsorship of the Federal Task Force on Mental Health of Immigrants and Refugees by the Secretary of State, Multiculturalism Directorate, and Health and Welfare is a result of this integrative approach. Of the twelve people appointed to direct this study, there are five women from various immigrant and visible minority communities.

- In terms of appointments, the present government has committed itself to increasing the representation of immigrant and visible minority women on boards and commissions. Since September 1984, there have been 404 women appointed by Governor-In-Council, with fifty-one from an ethnocultural background.

What has been achieved is the sensitization of the policy-makers and a general recognition of the issues of immigrant and visible minority women. What has not been achieved is the concrete legislative changes required to promote efficient delivery of programmes. The summation of the consultation emphasized immediate changes in language training and the Canada Job Strategy.

- Language training, as part of the National Training Act, is channelled through the provinces. This has resulted in overlapping federal/provincial jurisdictions and confusion in service delivery. The government is urged to conduct a thorough analysis of language training, and to examine the feasibility of diversified programmes such as language in the workplace, job-related English as a Second Language (ESL) training for professionals and media language programmes for the homebound or illiterate women.
- The Canadian Job Strategy as a global response to job entry and re-entry has failed to meet the needs of immigrant and visible minority women. The programme must be reviewed to remove restrictive eligibility criteria and to ensure representation on local advisory councils, access to refugee claimants and persons with Minister's Permits, and the allocation of training funds to community-based non-governmental organizations rather than to private business.

Besides the priorities to review language training and the Canadian Job Strategy, the urgent and unresolved need to formulate a long-term co-ordinated approach to immigrant and visible minority women's issues is still outstanding. Such an approach must be co-ordinated on the federal/provincial level since education, health and social services, all delivered under provincial jurisdictions, are the areas with the most direct impact on the everyday lives of immigrant and visible minority women.

After frustrated attempts to obtain action, immigrant and visible minority women groups requested federal assistance for a national conference in Winnipeg in November 1986. Over 250 delegates from across the country participated. The conference was attended by David Crombie, Minister of Secretary of State and Multiculturalism, and Barbara MacDougall, Minister responsible for Status of Women, together with other senior government officials.

The gathering provided a forum for the delegates to gain a deeper understanding of the commonality of experiences which oppress both immigrant and visible minority women. Being immigrant, visible minority and women in a predominantly white society, they are confronted with daily practical problems of racism, sexism and various forms of discrimination. The discussion also underscored the unique situation of the immigrant and refugee women, whose life and work conditions are compounded by transitory compensation such as the lack of language and job skills and the loss of traditional support systems. These conditions are reinforced by the systemic barriers in immigration policies that classify most women as "sponsored" immigrants, rendering them ineligible for language and skills training assistance, and further enforcing their economic dependence and social isolation.

What has emerged in the Winnipeg Conference is a powerful coalition of immigrant and visible minority women. An interim board was elected to form a constitution and to continue the lobbying work of the Action Committee. This historic development marks the beginning of an important era in the immigrant and visible minority women's movement and in their collective struggle for social change, so that they can participate in Canadian society more fully, productively and meaningfully.

Christina Lee was a member of the Action Committee on Immigrant and Visible Minority Women. She is currently a Visiting Fellow at the Ethnic Research Programme at York University.

Book Review

Tania Das Gupta
*Learning from Our History:
Community Development by
Immigrant Women in Ontario
1958-1986 - A Tool for
Action*

Toronto: Cross Cultural
Communication Centre, 1987

by *Christina Lee*

This is a resource book written specifically for those working directly with immigrant women in community development, education, health and social services. The approach is primarily participatory research. Originally from India, the author has spent the last seven years working with immigrant and visible minority organizations. The information is drawn directly from the real life experiences of Southern European and Third World immigrant women in their efforts to develop services for their constituents.

The book focuses on the process of community mobilization and development, a crucial component in the collective efforts of these immigrant women to better their lives, and to effect changes in services and programmes. Beginning with a schematic analysis of the history of community development of immigrant women in Ontario for the last twenty years, and interspersed with reflections, specific examples are used to illustrate the process and outcomes. Examples include networking, community health, employment orientation, co-operative enterprises, skills training, battered women shelters, elderly immigrant women services, and special programmes in large formal organizations. The individual case studies give a poignant portrait of the struggles and initiatives of these immigrant women, as well as the lessons learned from the development of these programmes. The adaptability of such projects in different contexts and locations is also noted. A resource list of

significant programmes in Ontario and a selected biography of references are included.

In addition to the information on community development of immigrant women, the book raises important issues for mainstream and ethnic service providers. As revealed from past experiences, employment has been an issue around which immigrant women have developed community programmes, and there is a strong need to obtain secure and acceptable working conditions. The development of collective structures as an approach to community mobilization is also described, particularly in a non-hierarchical way by which immigrant women have equal access to decision making. Since insufficient and unstable funding has always been identified as a major obstacle, concerns are raised regarding the increasing privatization of immigrant women's programmes. Such a move would tend to be counterproductive to the community development spirit and would eliminate the supportive, developmental and empowering process inherent in these programmes. The author argues for the need to allocate funding so that it is reflective of the best interest of the people being served.

The book provides a comprehensive review of the history of community development of immigrant women in Ontario and offers valuable insights regarding the planning and implementation of these programmes. Moreover, significant questions are raised to develop awareness and understanding of immigrant women's issues. The answers to these pressing questions are critical in assisting immigrant women to organize to bring about change to their lives.

Tania Das Gupta, Community Coordinator at Cross Cultural Communication Centre, has recently completed her doctoral thesis at OISE on the deskilling of garment workers.

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News Digest

• The Dean of Graduate Studies and the Refugee Documentation Project at York University, have been co-sponsoring a 1987 Seminar Series about Refugees in Policy and Practice. The closing session on "The Role of Agencies and Practitioners: Appeals-Programmes" will take place at noon on March 20th, Room 035, Administrative Studies Building, "Area 7", York University. Participants include Phillip Berger (Consultant, Medical Practitioner, the Canadian Centre for the Investigation and Prevention of Torture), Michael Schelew (Amnesty International), Tom Clark (Inter-Church Committee for Refugees), Doris Dobbin (Co-ordinator, Refugee Referral Service), C. Michael Lanphier (Director, Refugee Documentation Project; member -- Canadian Council for Refugees).

Previous seminars in this series have dealt with "Refugees and the Law: International-Canadian Perspectives", "Researching Refugee Issues: Library and Field Work" and "Refugee Women: Mental Health and Settlement Issues".

• **Forcible Repatriation After World War II: An International Symposium**, Oxford University, England, March 20-22, 1987. For more information please contact Professor Hugh A. Macdonald, Department of International Relations, The London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London, England, WC2A 2AE, tel.: (01) 405-7686 or Dr. Lubomyr Luciuk, Department of Geography, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, tel.: (416) 978-5042.

New Publications

- John Garrick and Janice Reid, *Indo-Chinese Welfare Workers: Issues from a Cross-Cultural Training Programme* (Richmond, Australia: CHOMI, 1986).
- Kati Sunner, compiler, *Press Views: Migrants and Unemployment* (Richmond, Australia: CHOMI, 1986).
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