

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CULTURAL,
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF AFGHAN WOMEN IN CANADA.

by

Natasha Waseema Beg, H.B.A, B.S.W.

A Thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Social Work

School of Social Work

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

September, 2005

© Natasha Waseema Beg, 2005



Library and
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*

ISBN: 0-494-10129-6

Our file *Notre référence*

ISBN: 0-494-10129-6

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.


Canada

ABSTRACT

This study explores the cultural, economic and social integration of ten Afghan women living in three Canadian cities in Canada. Afghan women's experiences and perceptions of life in Canada were captured in ten interviews conducted with women living in Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. This study posits that while factors influencing the cultural, economic and social integration of Afghan women may bare some similarities to one another, Afghan women are not a homogenous group. Their pre-flight and first country of asylum experiences are therefore necessary to understand the factors shaping their integration to Canada. This thesis draws from the immigration literature as it pertains to immigrant and refugee women as well as recent studies and theories to explain integration outcomes. Feminist standpoint theory informs both the methodological approach and analysis of Afghan women's experiences of integration and highlights both the challenges and opportunities facing such women. This thesis stems from the view that understanding the experiences of Afghan women living in Canada may lead to a better understanding of the factors shaping their integration which are necessary to foster effective programs and services to meet their integration needs. This awareness can only be achieved by providing a voice to Afghan women and by documenting their experiences in their own words, which in turn can lead to a greater recognition of their experiences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS/DEDICATION

I would like to acknowledge some very special individuals who have provided me with on-going support and strength to continue this journey. My deepest appreciation goes to the ten wonderful Afghan women who shared their valuable time and showed dedication and enthusiasm, which made this thesis possible. I have learned so much from their remarkable stories and have been inspired by their strength, perseverance and sense of humour! I am deeply honoured by the trust they demonstrated in sharing their intimate stories and I will always cherish our time together.

I am especially grateful to my thesis committee and to my supervisor Professor Behnam Behnia for his support and encouragement from the beginning of my thesis right until the end. I am thankful for his constructive yet gentle criticisms and his quick feedback after reading several drafts. I appreciated his enthusiastic responses to my ideas and confidence in my ability to complete this thesis. I was particularly touched by his kind words of encouragement when I was feeling frustrated which helped to keep my spirits up.

I would also like to thank Professor Pat Evans for her kind words of encouragement and for believing in my ability to complete my thesis. I am also thankful for her insightful suggestions and time spend reading my many drafts. Her enthusiasm for my topic kept me confident and motivated and she instilled in me the importance of thoughtful reflection. Her confidence in my ability to complete this thesis meant so much. I would also like to thank Professor Frances Abele, my external examiner, for her time and for participating in my defense and interest in my topic as well as her contributions to the discussion. Her presence was refreshing, as was her insight about integration.

I would like to acknowledge the support of my family and friends, especially my father Aziz Abdul Mirza Beg (Daddy). Without his love and dedication this thesis would not have been possible. I am forever thankful for the many late nights spent comforting me and holding my hand when I did not think I would make it through another chapter and for preparing my favorite Tikka and Chapatis, which kept me nourished and provided me with “enough petrol to make the car run”. Most of all, I am so thankful for his sweet words “little patcha you shall succeed, Inshallah” when I was feeling frustrated.

To my friends, thank you all for understanding when I was too busy and for the many birthdays and special occasions that I missed. Regardless they all made me feel so special by continuously checking on me, leaving sweet messages and little treats in my mailbox.

To Shareef, my partner, best friend and husband to be, I am thankful for the many nights staying up until the wee hours of the morning, encouraging me and making me snacks and endless cups of tea. His advice and thoughtful comments and many long evenings and weekends spent editing and our engaging discussions, “What are you trying to say here?” will never be forgotten. He kept me focused with positive words, which made a world of difference especially when I felt discouraged.

I dedicate this thesis to my big brother Waseem (Bobby) who passed away in 1999. Words cannot begin to express how much I miss his endearing and over protective ways. His love and guidance has provided me with strength to move forward and he will always journey with me throughout my life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acceptance Sheet	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgement/Dedication	iv
Table of Contents	vi

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction	1
The Problem and Its Significance	3
Study Goals	6
Organization of the Material	6

Chapter II

AFGHANISTAN: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Introduction	8
The Women of Afghanistan: An Historical Analysis	9
Chronology of Afghan Women's Resistance	15

Chapter III

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction	23
Defining Integration	23
Stages of Refugee Integration and the Human capital Theory	26
Feminist Contributions to Understanding Forced Migration	33
Emerging Studies on the Integration of Immigrant and Refugee Women	35
Challenges to Integration	37
Factors Facilitating Integration	40

Chapter IV

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction	45
Women's Agency	46
Feminist Standpoint Theory	48
Basic Tenets of Feminist Standpoint Theory	49

Chapter V

METHODOLOGY

Feminist Qualitative Approach	53
Selection Process	58
Data Collection	60
Data Analysis	64
Ethical Considerations	65
Informed Consent	65
Risk and Safety Issues	66
Factors Enhancing the Study	66
Strengths and Limitations of the Study	68

Chapter VI

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Characteristics of Participants	70
Integration as a Work in Progress	71
Sense of Belonging	74
Multiculturalism and a Tolerant Society	75
Integration as a Two-Way Street	76
Fundamental Rights and Freedoms	77
Peace and Security	79
Autonomy	79
Civil and Political Rights	80
Right to Education	80
The Importance of Language to Integration	81
Barriers to Employment	84
Emotional Impact of the Loss of Socio-Economic Status	87
Other Barriers to Economic Integration	89
Intergenerational Tensions	90
Reconciling the Cultural Divide	93
Support Systems and Integration	95
Family as a Source of Support for Integration	96
Afghan Community Support as a Means of Integration	98
Support through Social Services	101
Learning the System as a Means of Integration	104

Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

Conclusion 106

BIBLIOGRAPHY 114

APPENDICES

A. Map of Afghanistan 121

B. Image of the Public Execution of Afghan Woman 122

C. Interview Guide 123

D. Letter of Introduction 126

E. Letter of Consent 128

F. Confidentiality Agreement for Settlement Worker 130

G. Consent for Interpreter 131

Chapter I

Introduction

This study explores factors influencing the cultural, economic and social integration of Afghan women in Canada. This investigation is principally an attempt to understand the integration experiences from the perspective of Afghan women. Feminist standpoint theory was used as a framework to analyze women's experiences of integration. The experiences, both positive and negative, of ten Afghan women's integration are explored as well as the impact that such experiences have had on their integration in Canada. This study also examines some of the significant changes that take place in a woman's life as a result of forced migration and as such seeks to illuminate the agency and resilience of women who face extremely difficult circumstances. Some recommendations on how to enhance and strengthen the existing services and policies for immigrant and refugee women will also be discussed.

For the purpose of this study I make use of the Canadian Council for Refugees' (CCR) definition of integration which is defined as a two-way process whereby the demands of adjustment to a new way of life must be seen as a reciprocal process. This involves preparedness from the newcomer to accept and adopt new values and laws while retaining their cultural values and identities and a willingness by the host country to foster acceptance, tolerance and to facilitate access to services and resources. Within its definition, CCR also views integration as complex and multidimensional, in turn reflecting the complexity and multitude of experiences that make up refugee integration. What is perhaps most compelling about this definition is that it does not view integration

as a linear or static process but views integration as a long-term process which can last many years, if not generations and should therefore be viewed as a continuum that varies among individuals. (Canadian Council for Refugees: Best Settlement Practices, 1998).

The economic sphere of integration, according to CCR, encompasses entering the labour force and achieving financial independence as well as career advancement, income parity and finding a career in one's respective field of employment. The social sphere of integration is defined as establishing a social network and forging friendships in the host country. Cultural integration refers to adapting to changes in areas such as generational issues, family, gender roles, retaining cultural identity and adapting or reassessing values (Canadian Council for Refugees, 1998).

Exploring issues facing immigrant and refugee women throughout their integration can lead to a deepened understanding of women's experiences. As this study will demonstrate, there is a great deal of the immigration research and literature which attempts to conceptualize integration without considering the experiences of women or renders them helpless victims and therefore understate other domains such as gender, race, class and past experiences-all of which have a tremendous impact on one's ability to integrate. However, more recently competing views have emerged to challenge simplistic explanations of refugee and immigrant integration and attend to the importance of structural issues such as gender, race, class and ethnicity, all of which affect women's ability to integrate. Feminist contributions to understanding women's integration outcomes have uncovered the diversity in women's experiences and have emphasized the importance of women's voices as a means to gain insight into their experiences. Feminist perspectives on forced migration have also led to the recognition of the need for women's

knowledge and standpoints within research and have therefore advanced the study of immigrant and refugee women's integration. From this analysis, women's agency and motivation to change their circumstances becomes apparent as does the gendered nature of immigration which has been largely ignored in mainstream immigration discourse. This study contributes to a relatively new area of research on immigrant and refugee women and attempts to extend the discussion beyond the individualistic models which tend to place the onus on the individual to integrate without considering the responsibilities of a host country to facilitate the integration of newcomers.

In my thesis, I argue that while the factors influencing the cultural, economic and social integration of Afghan women may bare some similarities to one another, Afghan women are not a homogenous group. The individual integration outcomes of Afghan women is shaped by their circumstances in Afghanistan prior to their arrival in Canada. In an attempt to understand the gendered, multidimensional and heterogeneous nature of the integration process, I will draw from the immigration literature as it pertains to refugee women as well as recent studies and theories to explain integration outcomes.

The Problem and its Significance

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, a refugee is a person who, "owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country..." (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Article 1, The 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees there are

approximately 17 million refugees and displaced persons around the world. Even more alarming is that 80% of the world refugees are women and children (UNHCR, 2004). Many refugee women leave their homelands due to war, political, economic upheaval, religious, ethnic or gender-based persecution (Alim et al., 1999). Afghanistan is known as one of the largest refugee-producing countries in the world, and the majority of Afghan refugees are women and children (UNHCR, 2004).

In keeping with its humanitarian obligations, Canada responded to the crisis in Afghanistan by accepting a large number of Afghan refugees, many of whom were women. However, no studies have been done on the integration experiences of Afghan refugee women living in Canada. As a result of this lack of research, little is known about the journey that Afghan women experience during their integration, which in turn affects the services and policies that are intended for such women.

While there are some refugee scholars who have begun to document the integration experiences of immigrant and refugee women, much of the literature on forced migration has not been created by refugees themselves but rather by Western and European scholars who may not always consider the perspectives or experiences of immigrant and refugee women in their research (Malkki, 1995). In addition, a great deal of the existing literature does not recognize the gendered nature of integration but more often discusses refugee integration in generic terms, which does not mirror the realities facing refugee women throughout their integration process. Factors such as gender violence, prolonged periods of unemployment and intergenerational issues are just some of the factors which are largely absent from the existing literature on refugee integration. Only recently have studies documenting refugee women's integration emerged, pointing

to the need for more studies in this area (Olson 2004, Alim et al., 1999, Matsuoka, A and Sorenson, J. 1999. McSpadden, and Moussa, H. 1993). These studies have revealed that refugees are a particularly vulnerable population for a number of reasons and that refugee women are often subject to marginalization due to their gender, race and class, which further compounds the challenges of integration. Moreover, these studies recognized that immigrant and refugee women go through a dramatic change in their roles and identities once they arrive in a new country (Rafiq 66, 1995). Since refugee women are unable to plan their migration in advance and as a result of spontaneous uprooting, they typically arrive in a host country unprepared for what lies ahead. In addition, they must cope with the trauma associated with the sudden separation from family and friends (McSpadden and Moussa 1993).

The political and social situation of Afghanistan has had a significant impact on lives of Afghan women and will undoubtedly shape their integration outcomes. Their past history contains complex relationships of gender, race, class, economic status and ethnicity, which are further compounded by the repressive practices that they were forced to adhere to while living in Afghanistan. In order to respond and to understand Afghan women's needs during their integration, the full context of their lives must be examined.

This thesis stems from the view that understanding the experiences of Afghan refugee women may lead to a better understanding of the factors shaping Afghan refugee women's integration. This awareness can only be achieved by providing a voice to Afghan women and by documenting their experiences in their own words, which in turn can lead to a greater recognition of their experiences.

Study Goals

The goals of this study are to 1) identify factors influencing the cultural, social and economic integration of Afghan women in Canada; 2) to increase awareness of the plight of Afghan women in Canada; 3) to create a new body of research which will serve as an impetus for future research on Afghan women in Canada; and 4) to inform policy-makers and service providers on how best they can facilitate Afghan women's integration by fostering healthy and meaningful policies practices.

Some of the questions explored throughout this study have been; what have been the pre-flight experiences of Afghan women in Canada?¹ How have these experiences impacted on women's integration? How do Afghan women perceive their own situation after they have arrived in Canada? What are their particular needs during their initial period of integration? What informal systems have Afghan women used to cope with their integration needs such as childcare, medical assistance and housing? What are some of the language and employment challenges facing such women? What are some of the measures needed to counter some of their difficulties?

Organization of the Material

Chapter Two explores the history of Afghanistan and includes an overview of Afghan women's resistance throughout three different repressive regimes. Chapter Three includes an overview and discussion of the immigration literature on immigrant and refugee integration. In this chapter dominant models of integration are discussed and they are critiqued in the light feminist contributions on women's experiences of forced migration and integration. Chapter Four describes the theoretical framework which

¹ Pre-flight is a term that refers to the period leading up to refugee flight or prior to an individual's departure from their country. The Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford's Centre for Development Studies. http://earlybird.qeh.ox.ac.uk/rfgexp/rsp_tre/copy.htm, 1999.

guides this study on Afghan women. The concept of voice and women's agency are presented within a discussion on the relevance of feminist standpoint theory to this study. The fifth chapter describes the methodology employed in my interviews with Afghan women and the feminist research principles which were used in my analysis of findings. Chapter Six presents the findings and observations from the interview conducted with ten Afghan women and depicts women's understanding and experiences of integration. Various themes are discussed in this section along with recommendations on how best to foster women's integration. The seventh and final chapter includes a conclusion of the thesis and contains a synthesis of the major findings and themes from the interviews, literature and includes a discussion on the implications of this study for understanding Afghan women's experiences of integration.

Chapter II

Afghanistan: Historical Background

A historical analysis of Afghanistan's tumultuous past, which is characterized by over two and a half decades of civil war, provides an important context for the current situation facing Afghan women. The experiences of civil war, Taliban rule, and gender apartheid are essential in order to understand the factors which have led to the marginalization of millions of Afghan women and the largest refugee movement in history (UNHCR, 2001). It is also crucial to consider the historical position of women in Afghan society in order to gain a better understanding of the events and circumstances which led to the oppression of women and the perpetration of grave human rights abuses.

Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is situated in South Western Asia and borders Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, China, Pakistan, and Iran. It is estimated that 27,200,000 people currently live in Afghanistan which consists of 34 provinces, however, as the proceeding section will reveal, there has been a large dispersal of Afghans in neighbouring countries (Foreign Affairs Canada, 2005). The capital of this landlocked country is Kabul; other major cities include Herat, Jalalabad, Mazar-e Sharif and Kandahar (see Appendix A). The official languages are Dari (Afghan Persian) and Pashto, however, languages such as Uzbek and Turkmen are also spoken. Afghan society organizes itself along ethnic lines and major ethnic groups include Pushtun, Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara, Turkmen and Baluchi (Catholic Immigration Centre, 1998). Strong kinship ties and extended families are central features of Afghan culture and society. Islam is the major religion and Sunni Muslims make up 80% of the population, while the

rest consist of Shi'a and Ismaili Muslims. There is a small minority of Sikhs, Hindus and Buddhists (Catholic Immigration Centre, 1998). Afghanistan has a rich multi-ethnic cultural heritage and a remarkable history. Despite its culturally rich and diverse past, its history has been riddled with invasions, wars and devastating occupations. Periods of war and civil strife have been accompanied by widespread human rights atrocities, many of which have been perpetrated against women and girls.

The Women of Afghanistan: An Historical Analysis

This section will explore the turbulent history of Afghanistan and will consider the place of women within Afghan society in order to understand the realities facing Afghan women today and the circumstances which have led to their forced migration. Some misconceptions and stereotypes which exist and are perpetuated through the Western media must be recognized and then dismantled in order to understand the events leading up to the demise and subordination of Afghan women.

Afghanistan is typified as a haven for terrorists and religious fanatics by various media sources, which has resulted in an oversimplification of the difficulties and struggles facing Afghan people, particularly women. Moreover, images depicting Afghan women as powerless and docile victims who were unable to fend for themselves, have overshadowed the enormous strength and resilience demonstrated by Afghan women throughout decades of war (Amiri 205, 2002). Contrary to popular belief, women in Afghanistan did not always live under the tyrannical rule of fundamentalist Islamists who espoused repressive social mores and acted with inhumane brutality. In fact, as history reveals, the women of Afghanistan have played a vital role in the economic, social and political fabric of the nation (Dupree, 1997).

Women's emancipation in Afghanistan began in the 1920s and by the late 1970s Afghan women had achieved constitutional and legal equality with men (Bakarat and Wardell iv, 2001). The first all-girls school was established in 1921 and the 1964 constitution gave women the right to vote, the right to an education, and the right to employment. Throughout the 1960s, Afghan women were afforded a significant range of legal rights and privileges. During this time, King Zahir Shah resolved to emancipate women in all aspects of society and it was during this time that privileged women were sent abroad to prestigious universities (Lederman 53, 2002).

Throughout the twentieth century Afghanistan made great strides towards modernization and progress, which saw the rapid evolution of a national education system, with the active participation of women (Lederman 54, 2002). The first two women senators were appointed in 1965 and in 1971, fourteen women graduated and apprenticed in Islamic jurisprudence taking positions in the highest courts throughout Afghanistan (Armstrong 55, 2002).

While it is important to recognize the advancements and great achievements of Afghan women, which will be explored in detail in the proceeding chapter, it is also essential to explore the gendered impact that three different regimes would have on the future of Afghan women. The social and economic changes to women's lives that occurred during the Soviet, Mujahideen and Taliban periods are important to explore, as they provide much insight into the precarious situation experienced by Afghan women. As previously mentioned, Afghan women did not always live their lives as marginalized and oppressed women forced to live behind a *burqa*². Prior to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Afghan women made up over fifteen percent of the highest

² Head-to-toe covering with a mesh or cloth face screen, also called a *Chadari*.

legislative body in Afghanistan and by the early 1990s- approximately seventy percent of school teachers, fifty percent of civil servants and forty percent of doctors in Kabul were women (Lederman 47, 2002). During the period of Soviet military occupation from 1979 to 1989, a central feature of government policy was the emphasis on education and vocational training particularly for women. It is estimated that by the end of this period women could be found in all major government departments, in addition to the police force, the army, business and trades (Barakat and Wardell 15, 2001).

While it has been argued that women were granted more rights and opportunities during the Soviet era, it is important to note the devastating impact that the Soviet invasion had upon Afghan women. The Soviet secular Communist approach to education did not reflect the visions or values of all Afghan people, furthermore many children and women were forced out of their homes to attend classes under this regime, which in turn created great hostility, resentment, and eventually fierce opposition. In addition, the Soviet invasion resulted in heavy civilian casualties, the large-scale destruction of infrastructure, massive disruption to local institutions and to the rural economic and social way of life, which meant that both the human and economic costs of the war were colossal. During this time many women became widows thereby heads of households, as their husbands, brothers and sons died in the war against the Soviet occupiers (Barakat and Wardell 15, 2001). The period of Soviet administration witnessed large-scale displacement in rural areas and destruction of the countryside. However, the conditions in the cities remained relatively stable.

The opposite was true of the Mujahideen administration from 1992 to 1996, which saw civil war, particularly large-scale urban warfare and widespread reports of

women being raped and assaulted (Barakat and Wardell 16, 2001). Soon the coercive system under the Soviets was replaced with another equally repressive system of indoctrination under the Mujahideen (Vorgettes 96, 2002). Those opposing the Soviets soon banned women's education and women and girls were pulled from the Soviet run schools resulting in the creation underground of schooling for women and girls. It was during this period that the subjugation of Afghan women began to take its course as systematic gender apartheid slowly began to emerge. In addition, almost all factories and manufacturing facilities were destroyed leaving both men and women without employment.

In 1995, the Taliban forcibly came into power and by 1999 they were in control of over eighty percent of Afghanistan, including the capital, Kabul, which was home to many urban and educated professionals (Armstrong 6, 2002). The Taliban's social policies resulted in a severe curtailment of women's freedom of mobility, employment and their right to education. During the tyrannical rule of Taliban, listening to music and photography were all forbidden, as was kite flying and other popular and traditional activities. Furthermore, this period saw the public execution of women, and women were stoned to death or beaten for attempting to do such things as educating their children or for, "failing to conceal their bodies beneath the *burqa*" (Steinam 67, 2002). Laws relating to dress and appearance also affected men and minority groups. Men were required to grow beards and also required to wear the traditional *piron ton-bon* (trousers with a long over-shirt) (Barakat and Wardell 17, 2001). However, this attire was not nearly as restrictive as the *burqa*. The lives of urban women and girls were particularly affected by the imposition of the *burqa*, as women were suddenly denied the choice to

dress as they wished. Women were no longer able to wear colourful and traditional Afghan woven garments. Women were also forbidden to talk with their husbands in public spaces and were forced to paint the windows in their homes black, in order to prevent onlookers from seeing them in their homes (Armstrong 5, 2002).

As revealed throughout the literature, the *burqa* signified a severe restriction on life itself, both physically and mentally. A woman interviewed by Sally Armstrong, a feminist and activist deeply involved in the plight of Afghan women, recollected the first day she was forced to wear a *burqa* and describes in detail the physical and psychological effects it had on her;

It was hot. Shrouded in this body bag, I felt claustrophobic. It was smelly, too. The cloth in front of my mouth was damp from my breathing. Dust from the filthy street swirled up under the billowing burqa and stuck to the moisture from my covered mouth. I felt like I was suffocating in the stale air. It also felt like I was invisible. No one could see me. No one knew whether I was smiling or crying. The mesh opening didn't give me enough view to see where I was going. It was like wearing horse blinders (Armstrong 4, 2002).

This quote gives some insight into the severe psychological repercussions of the restrictive nature of the *burqa* and how Afghan women were well aware that their fundamental rights and freedoms were severely infringed. In reaction to such repression, women became politically active and began to assert their rights, which has occurred at various points throughout the history of Afghanistan and will be discussed later in this chapter.

When the Taliban took control of the country they created the Department for Enforcement of the Right Islamic Way and the Prevention of Evils, which included strict sanctions against women, preventing them from leaving their homes without male escorts, obliging the use of the veil, and imposing strict laws for shop keepers, which

prohibited them from selling any goods to women who were not covered. These were merely some of the many prohibitions used in an attempt to regulate women's behaviour. It is also important to note that the effects of such strict laws were far-reaching and pervaded all aspects of women's lives. For example, the drastic restrictions imposed on women's access to health care had the impact of creating one of the highest maternity mortality rates in the world (Armstrong 126, 2002).

The Taliban justified these barbaric and oppressive policies by their extremist interpretation of Islam (Nadim 40, 2002). These misogynist practices were rationalized by the Taliban and the Mujahideen as being formally condoned in the Qur'an. According to them, such practices came directly from the highest authority, Allah, which therefore justified the treatment of women as second class citizens. Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar, was once quoted as saying, "a woman's face corrupts men" (Armstrong 2, 2002). With this misogynistic view in mind, women were literally forced out of all aspects of society. For example, female patients were refused at hospitals, women health personnel which included doctors, nurses, pharmacists and medical technicians were banned from working and if caught would suffer harshly at the hands of the Taliban (Rasekh 177,2002).

However, Muslim scholars have denounced and condemned this brutality and have gone on to stage international public denunciations, arguing that these heinous acts cannot be equated with Islam and that the misogynist interpretation of Islam can only be based in contempt for women and nothing more (Armstrong 8, 2002). They have gone further to argue that Islam is forgiving, protective and respectful of women's rights and

that fundamentalist interpretations have been extremely damaging to women and must be stopped (Armstrong 69, 2002).

After five long years of abuses against Afghan people, the Taliban was toppled by a U.S led war. To many scholars and politicians waging a war costly and deadly war against the Taliban was an acceptable price to pay for freedom. The war was also thought to be the stepping-stone towards the liberation of Afghan women. Although the fall of the Taliban in November 2001, during the U.S invasion, marked a significant turning point for Afghanistan and was thought to bring hope for Afghan women, the country continues to experience chronic instability, violence, and the disenfranchisement of women. These factors are again forcing many to flee. Despite the efforts at voluntary repatriation, Afghanistan continues to be one of the largest refugee-producing countries in the world with approximately 2,136,000 Afghan refugees living in neighbouring countries, including Pakistan and Iran (UNHCR, 2004). Many men and women have sought refuge in industrialized countries where they continue to live thousands of miles away from their loved ones and family.

Chronology of Afghan Women's Resistance

A chronology of the significant moments in the history of Afghan women will reveal their conscious-raising efforts and resistance to the brutality and misogynistic practices imposed upon them. More importantly, it reveals Afghan women's voices and commitment to the protection of human rights for all Afghan people. The heroic acts of women involved in the movement for resistance and change is a testament to the agency and collective perseverance of many Afghan men and women. For many decades, especially under Taliban rule, Afghan women mobilized to create survival strategies and

networks to resist the oppression of the Taliban. Such strategies were tools for protection and empowerment (Povey 269, 2003).

The first recorded effort to promote women's equality can be traced back to the tenth century when an outspoken Afghan woman, Mahasty, was jailed on two occasions for her assertion that Afghan women needed to take active roles in society. Another famous Afghan woman is Rabi'a Balkhi, who has come to be known as one of Afghanistan's most famous poet's and as the first Afghan woman to write love poetry dating as far back as the 9th century A.D. She often wrote about her secret love for a man who her family did not approve and went against their wishes by continuing her poetry and secretly seeing this man. As a result she died at the hands of her brother who, like the majority of her family, strongly objected to her affair and her writings. An Afghan royal, Queen Gowhard Shad of Herat, who was in power for fifty years during the 1400s, founded several colleges for women and drafted legislation granting rights to women. She was also a keen supporter of women's involvement in the arts, poetry and philosophy. Another historical example of the thrust towards women's emancipation includes a famous speech given by Queen Sorays, the wife of King Amanollah, the ruler of Afghanistan (Ellis xvi, 2000). In 1926, during an address to a group of women Queen Sorays said,

Do not think...that our nation needs only men to serve it. Women should also take their part as women did in the early years of Islam. The valuable services rendered by women are recounted through history from which we learn that women were not created solely for pleasure and comfort. From their examples, we learn that we must all contribute toward the development of our nation and that this can not be done without being equipped with knowledge (Daoud 107, 2002).

Over time, the women's movement became more organized, sophisticated and politically active. In 1977, Meena Keshwar Kamal, a university student in Kabul, established a grassroots Afghan women's organization dedicated to the struggle for women's rights called, the Revolutionary Afghan Women's Association (RAWA). She was eventually assassinated in 1987 by those who opposed her political and social views (Ellis xvii, 2000). In 1980, a group of young Afghan women staged a demonstration against the Soviet occupation and named their group "The Children's Revolt"; many women were arrested and died for this cause (Ellis xix, 2000). Women placed themselves at the forefront of the movement against the Soviet invasion by engaging in activities such as demanding the release of political prisoners and speaking out against the brutal military campaign which resulted in the loss of the lives of their husbands, brothers and sons. Some women were even involved in the armed struggle against the Soviets by participating in guerilla activities to secure their communities. It is important, however, to note that women paid a heavy price for their involvement in politics and many were imprisoned and tortured but, nonetheless, these women continued their pursuit of human rights and justice (Ellis 9, 2000). Contrary to popular belief, Afghan women have displayed great deal of agency and voice in their efforts to resist war and oppression (Daoud 103, 2000). When the Taliban took power in Afghanistan, the world had never witnessed such grave atrocities committed against women. To many human rights activists, the sheer brutality facing Afghan woman was indescribable. However, women inside continued to resist as the Taliban closed down institutions and began a systematic assault against Afghan women. As one activist from the Women's Vocational Training centre, a non-governmental organization in Kabul, once said, " we continued

our underground activities in our home. Many times we were threatened with imprisonment and torture, but we continued” (Povey 269, 2003).

Many women converted their homes into schools that had anywhere from 100 to 800 students enrolled at different times. Many homes became community centres for women and girls and were financed and managed by women. Each day these children risked their lives, as they would often hide their books, pencils and notebooks underneath their *burqas* and were in constant danger as they snuck away to school. It was mostly highly educated women teaching the courses. Some of the courses they taught included subjects such as engineering, chemistry, biology, English, German, Arabic, cooking, sewing, hairdressing and Qu'ranic studies (Povey 271, 2003). Afghan women were also involved in a number of initiatives involving health care and income generation programs (Mansoor 77, 2002).

Two major groups played a significant role in women's emancipation and sought to reclaim their lives and to help their nation to prosper. One was the Women's Democratic Organization (WDO), which was founded in 1965. This women's group brought about an array of reforms for women aimed at eliminating illiteracy among women and ending forced marriages. As one supporter eloquently remarked during a WDO meeting, “we all had to struggle for our beliefs, but the struggle only brought us closer and increased our commitment” (Vorgetts 95, 2002). Many women attended without the knowledge of their family and made many sacrifices to promote education for women and girls. In Afghan society women are viewed as the transmitters of oral traditions in Islam which are commonly known as *Hadith*.³ In fact, it has been documented that the WDO used verses and teachings from the Qur'an, which value and

³ *Hadith* refers to the sayings and narratives of the Prophet Mohammed

praise reading Islamic scriptures and the importance of education for both men and women. Their approach proved extremely effective as many apprehensive men were allowing their wives and daughters to attend school run by WDO for the first time (Vorgetts 96, 2002).

The WDO approached each social issue with the frame of mind that change could only occur at a grassroots level and not be imposed from above. Much of their work took place secretly in communities where they met with families to discuss women's needs and struggles. They also organized demonstrations, rallies, set up information stands, and offered Afghan women a venue for action and to become involved in decision-making processes. In many ways, the efforts of the WDO transformed the citizens of Afghanistan into resistance fighters (Bernard 71, 2002).

RAWA in Afghanistan

As previously mentioned RAWA, another women's organization in Afghanistan, was founded in 1977 and is still in existence. This women-centred organization has been at the forefront of the struggle for peace, freedom, democracy and women's rights in Afghanistan with many initiatives aimed at improving health, education and solidarity among women (RAWA, 2005).

RAWA works diligently towards the liberation of Afghan women both inside and outside of Afghanistan. In 1981, RAWA launched a controversial magazine entitled *Payme-e-Zan* meaning 'women's message' and exposed the warlord's inhumane policies against women and the mounting atrocities being perpetrated against both Afghan men and women (Armstrong 156, 2002). Through their underground activities, RAWA was successful in acquiring eyewitness reports of crimes against women and raised awareness

among the international community to the issues facing Afghan women. This group of dedicated women were responsible for exposing an infamous incident of a public execution of an Afghan women, Zarmina, accused of killing her husband. Her murder took place in front of a packed audience in a Kabul soccer stadium in 1999 (see Appendix B). When the truth about Zarmina's abusive husband made headlines in 2002, an Afghan female police officer was quoted saying, "at last Zarmina's story can be told, it is the story of one woman. But it is also the story of Afghan women under the Taliban, under brutes who turned our country into a zoo and our women into dogs" (The Mirror, 2002). Throughout their underground activities during the Taliban rule, many RAWA women armed with hidden cameras went on to expose the murders committed by the regime (Mansoor 81, 2002). These images made their way into North America and Europe and acted as a rude awakening to the international community, signaling the desperate need for urgent action in Afghanistan. Their activities ranged from demonstrations and press conferences to special programs for Afghan women to increase their confidence. They facilitated women's education and with that in mind, the founders of RAWA went on to create many schools for women and girls. During the era of the Mujahaddin and the ruthless Taliban regime, most of RAWA's activities went underground, including activities such as literacy courses and teachings on women's rights (Ellis 218, 2000).

According to RAWA supporters, "education is our weapon" and as such RAWA also funds many education programs for the millions of refugees in Pakistan and internally displaced persons in Afghanistan (Bernard 50, 2002). Many RAWA members are widows and orphaned girls often with no family or support system, therefore RAWA offered such women the solidarity and support that they greatly needed. RAWA functions

under the belief that Afghan men and women are equal partners in the struggle for freedom and democracy in Afghanistan and thus must work together to secure the rights of everyone.

Afghan Women in Canada

As the previous sections have illustrated, Afghan women have a long history of grass roots organizing aimed at their emancipation and protection of their human rights. In more recent time, these efforts have transcended with the wave of Afghan immigrants and refugees into North America. From the lessons of the past, Afghan women continue to collectively organize in their communities and to provide services to Afghan men and women living in Canada.

The Afghan Women's Counselling and Integration Community Support Organization, now known as the AWO, originated from the Women's Committee of the Afghan Association of Ontario and was incorporated in June 1990. Their recognition that Afghan women have special needs which differ from those of men has been key in the creation of women-centred services. AWO felt women's settlement needs were unique and required separate representation from men's needs. Support groups were also formed by women in order to address various needs and personal crises women faced in the settlement process. These provided the basis for the development of strong community support networks for the Afghan women, which aids in their adjustment to the new environment. The organization has also sponsored support groups for seniors and youth over the past decade. AWO, like RAWA works towards the betterment of Afghan people, particularly women and recognizes the challenges facing women and attempts to find meaningful solutions for Afghan women and their families. With this in mind, AWO

understands the effects that war, family separation and forced migration can have on Afghan men and women once they arrive in Canada and as such attempt to facilitate their integration, so that they can move through their challenges.

As this section has revealed Afghan women have long been part of an organized and highly politically active movement aimed at raising consciousness, promoting human rights, democracy, women's education and social services for all people in Afghanistan. As the events of three major eras in Afghanistan have unfolded, Afghan women have organized to resist social and political oppression. Women collectively worked to alter the status of women in Afghanistan and to combat the suffocating and draconian rules that were forced upon them. While women in Afghanistan were subjected to years of war, cruelty and misogynistic practices, they also achieved many successes and fought with strength, determination and resilience, to maintain their dignity and towards a better future for their country. In many ways, Afghan women became aware of their own capacities to mobilize and to create a solidarity that would withstand the worst brutality Afghanistan has ever witnessed.

Chapter III

Literature Review

Introduction

The following section will look at some of the relevant literature which has emerged on the subject of immigrant and refugee women's integration. This literature review is not exhaustive in nature, however it does offer some insight into the complexity of immigrant and refugee women's integration. This review will be divided into three sections; the first section will include a general discussion on the debate surrounding the meaning of integration and will include a discussion on dominant models and theories of integration; both their contributions and limitation will be discussed. This discussion is followed by an overview of indicators and factors influencing refugee and immigrant women's integration from the immigration literature and will draw from aspects of some studies on immigrant and refugee women's integration. Building from this discussion will highlight feminist contributions to understanding forced migration and integration.

Defining Integration

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) officially recognized the concept of refugee integration in 1952. According to the ECOSOC, integration is an extremely dynamic, complex and gradual process whereby newcomers become active agents in the "economic, social, civic, cultural and spiritual affairs of the host country". During integration, values are deepened through mutual "acquaintance, respect, understanding" and tolerance. It is a reciprocal process, which enables migrants and the host society to find an opportunity to make their own distinctive contributions to one another (cited in Kage 165, 1962). As Robinson (1998) points out, "integration is

vague and chaotic” and as such is a contested and multidimensional concept resulting in many interpretations.

In spite of cultural, ethnic or religious background, most newcomers find themselves going through a process of settlement and integration (Miedema and Tastsoglou 82, 2000). Within the discourse on immigration, the concept of integration is most often used to describe what is known to be an individual’s resettlement to a new country. However, as it has been suggested in the literature on immigration, integration is multidimensional and complex and therefore is open to debate. Thus, a brief commentary cannot do justice to such a complex concept.

Canada has been home to individuals from a wide range of cultural backgrounds including refugees and immigrants. Beginning in the late 1800s until after WWII Canadian immigration policies were riddled with discriminatory practices which created many barriers for newcomers, specifically non-European immigrants (Kubat 1993, Agnew, 1996). These individual’s way of life was perceived to be different, and threatening Canadian values which would result in the most repressive policies in Canadian immigration history. This sentiment resulted in a view that assimilation would be the best strategy for ensuring that newcomers integrate and would ensure the preservation of Canadian values which were believed to be distinct from those of immigrants and refugees. The assimilation approach to integration was adopted and is considered to be a one-way process whereby the newcomer conforms and substitutes his or her values for those of the host country (European Council for Refugees and Exiles, 2005). Therefore newcomers to Canada were expected to integrate by putting their ethnic and cultural values aside in order to embrace those of dominant Anglo-Saxon Canada. In

the past, much of the discussion surrounding immigrant and refugee integration focused exclusively on conforming and assimilating to all aspects of the host country. Moreover, deviations from the status quo signified poor or incomplete integration and could result in segregation. Therefore, the respect and appreciation for difference and the recognition of how differences can be complimentary to Canadian values was completely ignored.

During the late 1960s, Canada's immigration landscape changed dramatically as more ethnic minorities sought asylum in Canada. Throughout time, the concept of integration has evolved to become more inclusive and to reflect the responsibility of both the newcomer and host society in facilitating integration. In the 1970s there was a shift from these exclusionary policies to recognition of diversity and appreciation for differences. Canada's Multiculturalism policy was announced in 1971 and was based on a growing need to affirm diversity and principles of equality and participation in the cultural, economic, political and social fabric of Canadian society. This realization that ethnic and cultural diversity was fundamental and an irreversible characteristic of Canadian society pushed Canada's immigration policies away of an assimilationist approach and towards a more inclusive and reciprocal vision of integration (Mata 18, 1994). This shift has resulted in new understandings of integration which embrace multiculturalism and recognize the diversity in identities and an affirmation of one's cultural values.

According to Li (2003) integration often entails newcomers becoming members of a new society whereby their potential to integrate is based on their ability to perform in all aspects of life to the same degree as a native of the host country (Li 316, 2003). Social integration on the other hand involves learning official languages and leaving

highly concentrated immigrant areas as well as having a connection to mainstream society. As Li would argue, there is an air of conformity which results from what is known as integration benchmarks which are intended to measure the degree to which an individual has integrated and can include language competency and employment. While the concept of assimilation may appear to be something of the past, this ideology continues to surface in contemporary understandings of integration. Nonetheless, Li encourages us to embrace an alternative concept of integration which is more inclusive and treats individual differences as assets in building a diverse and tolerant community rather than view immigrants and refugees as dependants for whom we are liable and who must conform.

Therefore, it is crucial to examine the dominant theories emerging in order to deconstruct and make more inclusive new theories to explain integration. New understandings of newcomer integration will continue to emerge as scholars attempt to reconceptualize and challenge earlier definitions and models. The following section will include a discussion of two dominant models which purport to explain the integration of immigrants and refugees.

Stages of Refugee Integration and the Human capital Theory

A review of models and theories to understand refugee integration can offer a great deal of insight into the phases of integration and the experiences of immigrant refugee women, as well as the different patterns of adjustment. It can also reveal how dominant models and theories intended to predict refugee integration can often oversimplify and universalize refugees' experiences and as a result become reductionist and exclusionary in nature. Barry Stein (1979, 1986) has attempted to conceptualize the

experiences of forced migration by creating a model to explain refugee integration patterns. According to Stein, refugee adjustment and integration patterns can be analyzed in four basic stages which include; the initial arrival period; the first and second years, after four to five years and a decade or more later. Stein's four stages consider occupational, economic, social and cultural integration. Stein asserts that during the initial period, the refugee will be confronted by the reality of what has been lost. For example, refugees can often move from a high occupational and social status in their country of origin to a life characterized by downward occupational and social mobility (Stein 32, 1979). During the period of one or two years, Stein believes that refugees display will and determination to recover what has been lost and are especially motivated to rebuild their lives (Stein 33, 1979). Nearing four to five years the refugee has completed the "major part of adjustment" and can be said to have achieved a certain level of integration. Stein suggests that less change occurs after this point as the individual has learned the language and retained the culture of the host society. In addition, it is assumed that the individual will have undergone retraining and have been employed. Moreover, Stein asserts that if an individual has not achieved his or her goals by this stage, the likelihood of this becoming a reality are extremely unlikely and the effort may be relinquished. During this period, Stein believes that the refugee is becoming older, his or her skills become stagnant. After ten years the refugee will have achieved a certain level of stability however, as Stein notes, recovery of lost status will have continued but at a much slower pace during this stage (Stein 35, 1979). Finally in the fourth stage, Stein identifies what he refers to as the 'first decade' which is characterized by a significant decline in morale, despite the drive and determination apparent in the initial stages of

migration. The myriad of issues resulting from the initial transition from migration to resettlement will lead to a long-term loss in status and downward mobility which are characterized by unemployment and depression (Stein 36, 1979).

Similarly, Carlos Sluzki (1979) has identified what he believes to be a progression of stages for resettlement which are made up of pre-immigration or preparatory stage, migration, arrival, decompensation and transgeneration in (Hulewat 130, 1996). The pre-immigration stage is when the decision to leave is made during which time ‘splitting’ occurs which according to Sluzki is a “tool often used at this stage as a defence mechanism of intolerable feelings” and resembles a form of resistance. This process involves “idealizing the future and denigrating the past” which makes the decision to flee easier (Hulewat 130, 1996). The second stage, which is migration, can vary among populations as different circumstance precipitate the need to migrate. The third stage constitutes arrival in the host country during which time Sluzki believes that individuals are not aware of the stress they have been under. This period is characterized by both anxiety and optimism. Feelings of depression can also surface as a result of frustration involved in looking for employment and trying to learn a new language. The fourth stage is called decompensation during which time the entire family will begin to experience the losses it has endured. According to Sluzki “at this stage every individual needs to let go of “splitting” as a defense and reacquire his or her ambivalence” which can take up to three years or more (cited in Hulewat 131, 1996). Hulewat argues that those who let go of the “splitting” will succeed in integration. The final stage is known as the transgenerational stage whereby unresolved tensions and conflicts from the overall migration and refugee experience are said to be passed on to younger generations.

Although Stein and Sluzki's models are helpful in understanding the complexity of refugee integration and can be used as a conceptual framework to study refugee integration, both have severe limitations. Both assume that all individuals pass through a specific set of stages without considering the factors which inhibit and facilitate an individual's ability to integrate. For example, neither of these models recognizes the impact of persecution and trauma resulting from such things as, physical assault, imprisonment, rape and the loss of loved ones, issues which are of paramount importance when considering refugee integration. Moreover, gender is not even considered within any of the stages, which calls into the question the usefulness of such models in theorizing women's experiences of forced migration. Furthermore, these models do very little to explain the institutional barriers such as exploitation and discrimination that many newcomers experience and ignores the detrimental impact of racism and sexism on the integration process. In addition, these models put total responsibility of flight and integration on the refugees themselves without considering the responsibilities of the host country or how a country's policies towards refugees can influence their integration outcomes.

The dominant models of integration also fail to recognize that both men and women experience refugee integration differently and that it is not a linear process, which occurs at a similar rate for all refugees. Moreover, within this discussion of dominant models, it would appear that conformity is viewed as the "desirable outcome" of integration. Although stages of refugee integration may provide helpful guidelines, these models assume that refugee integration constitutes a set of interconnected phases and fails to sufficiently recognize that it is possible for some individuals to skip one or several

stages. These models paint a negative picture of refugee integration by failing to recognize the positive aspects and opportunities, which can result from resettling in another country. Lastly, these models do not recognize the needs, resilience or agency alive in many refugees and instead, tend to relegate them to a homogenous population, unable to integrate and therefore focus on the negative aspects of integration.

From these over-simplistic and exclusionary models, it becomes apparent that understanding the outcomes of forced migration requires a multidisciplinary approach which includes a feminist analysis in order to understand the gendered nature of integration. Therefore, a gendered lens from which to view migration patterns would reveal a great deal of the experiences of refugee women. Perhaps a more holistic theory of integration is necessary, which recognizes the gendered experience of forced migration and the issues which facilitate and encourage refugee and immigrant women's integration. This gendered analysis may prove effective in explaining contemporary refugee movements as well as the gendered experiences of being a refugee.

Human Capital Theory

The previous section included an overview of models of integration which attempted to discuss integration in more general terms. However, human capital theory is another dominant perspective which looks explicitly at economic integration and has been used to predict the labour market outcome of newcomers and their ability to integrate economically into the host country. This economic theory stresses the significance of training and education as the key to full participation in society. Human capital refers to the knowledge and skills that individuals acquire through education, training and work experience. These individuals make investments of time, money and

resources in order to increase their chances and opportunities in the labour market. Human capital theory posits that the better-educated, better-trained workers are more productive, which in turn increases their ability to find well paying positions (Mensah 130, 2002). Despite such investments, there is mounting evidence to suggest that refugee men, women and minorities, including those with professional qualifications and experience, often fail to make it to senior positions or to have their credentials recognized (Brouwer 1999, Mata 1994, Akbari, 1995, Jackson and Smith, 2002 and Alboim, 2002). This results in difficulties for many immigrants and refugees finding jobs in their respective fields or at a level which commensurate their education and training. This in turn keeps immigrants and refugees, who often have the necessary skills and education, out of the power and decision-making realms of employment (Jackson and Smith, 2002).

According to human capital theory, the tendency for newcomers to hold menial and low paying jobs is explained by their lack of skills or human capital. Only after a period of time in a host country are immigrants able to attain upward mobility by acquiring new skills and learning languages. This reveals how the economic and social mobility of immigrants and refugees are inextricably linked to the degree to which they become integrated into the host country. The weaknesses of human capital theory have been discussed by many academics (Mensah, 2002, Morawska 1990 and Phizacklea 1983). This model does not take into account the economic integration of refugees who are not always readily available to work as a result of such things as security clearance backlogs, the lack of recognition for foreign credentials, the paralysing financial costs for retraining, licensing, certification and the host country's economic conditions. In addition, this theory fails to account for the earning gap that exists among immigrants and

Canadian born individuals as well as the large menial job pool which is predominantly made up of highly skilled immigrants and refugees (Smith and Jackson, 2002). For example, it has been cited in several studies that refugees often lack their professional and educational diploma as a result of the sudden need to flee a dangerous situations or such documents have been destroyed during conflicts (Brower 1999, Mata, 1999 and Canadian Council for Refugees 1996). Other inherent shortcomings of this model also include its inability to explain why immigrants and refugees, despite their education and skill levels are over-represented in a low wage and menial labour pool. This theory also fails to recognize institutional barriers such as lack of immigration status which affects immigrants and refugees employment rights (Opoku-Dapaah 13, 1994). Lastly, this theory fails to account for the gender gap in wages, and the sexism and discrimination surrounding promotions.

Some possible explanations for the downward mobility of newcomers and the numerous barriers they face in the Canadian labour market are the non-recognition of credentials; lack of “Canadian experience”, negative impacts of economic downward cycles on immigrants, and discrimination against immigrants or people of colour in the labour market. In this way, human capital theory is only a starting point as it accounts for resources which immigrant and refugees must invest in themselves and does not recognize the great contributions that such individuals make to society. Moreover, it does not account for labour market struggles and structural forces affecting a newcomer’s employment outcome (Paulin and Mellor, 277, 1996).

Therefore, this theory is not appropriate in relation to refugee women’s experiences because it does not take into account their past experiences in Afghanistan or

the circumstances surrounding their prolonged absence from the labour market and educational institutions in Afghanistan. Like Stein and Sluzki's models of integration, human capital theory downplays issues of gender, race and class in many obvious ways and therefore remains exclusionary in nature.

Feminist Contributions to Understanding Forced Migration

Doreen Indra, a scholar who has written extensively on gender and forced migration, emphasizes the agency and diversity in refugee women's experiences. According to Indra, (1996) making women's experiences of forced migration visible can be achieved by building on feminist theories and approaches to refugee issues which recognize that refugee women are not a homogenous group but rather their experiences are complex and multidimensional (Indra 36, 1996). Feminist contributions to understanding migration and integration have challenged the mainstream discourse that forced migration is necessarily a negative and disempowering process for all women portraying them as fragile and dependant. Moreover, discourse on forced migration has portrayed resettlement and integration as "isolating and disconnecting refugees from all that is familiar"- a view which does not recognize the opportunities and positive aspects of integration (Lindgren and Lipson 122, 2004). However, what has been revealed in recent literature on migration is that refugee women exercise agency and an eagerness to move forward despite their sometimes precarious circumstances. While integration inevitably involves many obstacles for both men and women, it can also have a positive and empowering effect on women as integration has the potential to create opportunities for women, which may not have otherwise existed for them in their country of origin. For example, the experience of war and displacement has exercised a profound impact on

Afghan women over the past twenty-three years (Mehta, 2002). As a result of widowhood, displacement, and the absence of men for long periods during their involvement in war, women now head more households. This has created a set of new responsibilities thus creating a shift in gender roles. In addition, exposure to refugee camp health care facilities, and to education and vocational training has increased the potential of some women to find employment, resulting in a greater degree of autonomy (Barakat and Wardell xi, 2001).

Moreover, feminist scholars are recognizing the absence of refugee women's voice within the immigration literature and are attempting to reconcile this disparity through their innovative use of narratives by women living in exile. These testimonies are powerful and reveal women's strength, endurance and shed light on the positive contributions they have made in their host countries (Ghorashi 2002, Agmata-Tucker, 2001, Huseby-Darvas 1995, Espin 1996 and 1999). The use of voice and personal testimonies has countered a common thread in the literature on migration which portrays refugee women as tragic victims of their circumstance. Some writers have also begun to problematize the tendency within this discourse to universalize the experiences of refugee women.

Until recently, the gender specific experiences of migration remained frequently undocumented and overlooked (Valji 25, 2001). Academic accounts and theories on migration failed to recognize gender aspects of migration, which is largely attributable to the assumption that men are predominantly at the nexus of migration (Oishi 6, 2002). While there have been some strides made that are apparent in the emergence of new studies on female migration, the theorization of women's migration and integration, as

well as their voices remain, scarce in the literature on migration. However, scholars of migration studies have begun to recognize the distinct female experiences of migration and contend that women constitute a particularly vulnerable part of the population and are therefore considered to be a group with special needs. In the last decade, a number of researchers have begun to document the integration experiences of immigrant and refugee women. What has been uncovered is a myriad of issues which were never recognized and hence ignored. Exploring the issue of refugee women's integration requires a careful examination of what constitutes integration for such women and what factors are considered crucial to achieving integration.

Emerging Studies on the Integration of Immigrant and Refugee Women

This section will draw on recent studies from the literature on refugee and immigrant women's integration and will highlight the challenges and opportunities facing such women. In addition, a discussion on the empowering role that exile can have on women as well as the heterogeneity of refugee women's experiences will also be discussed. Finally, this section will include a discussion and recommendations on the factors needed to facilitate women's integration. The findings from the following studies recognize the gendered nature of forced migration and integration and are thus consistent and reflective of a feminist perspective. Moreover, these studies give voice to refugee and immigrant women and recognize and honour women's standpoints-perspectives which are largely absent from immigration discourse which remains a largely male focused paradigm (Indra 3, 1987).

Susan Forbes (1995) has offered a great deal of insight about women living in exile in industrialized countries. As Forbes explains, living in asylum frequently entails

many changes for women, both positive and negative. Often times, women must flee on sudden notice without their families who make up their support systems. Therefore, many refugee women must create new support systems once they arrive in a host country (Forbes 135, 2004). In addition, many refugee women face significant barriers in their adjustment to industrialized countries such as racial discrimination, family conflicts, lack of language skills and trauma during flight. Her work is also groundbreaking in that it recognizes the traumatic experiences which women have endured during flight such as rape, torture and sexual abuse or the death of loved ones, which make integration difficult especially for those women dealing with symptoms of post-traumatic stress (Forbes 135, 2004). Forbes also identified language to be a significant barrier to women's integration and contends that the difficulty for women to learn a new language can make it more difficult to cope with the demands of a living in a new country and language acquisition is thus a "prerequisite for active involvement" in society (Forbes 137, 2004).

Forbes extensive research on refugee women offers much insight into the trauma endured by women as she demonstrates in her research its impact on women's ability to forge their way in a new country. While her research on refugee women covers an array of common issues facing women such as language barriers, recognition of credentials, isolation and family separation, her portrayal of refugee women as exercising agency, despite their difficulties during flight and integration, counters the negative images of women. Her research also provides important information for community, international and government agencies about refugee women's needs so that such bodies can help to foster refugee women's integration. By illustrating the concerns of refugee women and the ways in which women cope, her research demonstrates that women have the ability to

affect their own lives and to participate in society if they are provided with the appropriate support and resources. Therefore, her findings raise awareness of the many challenges and opportunities facing women and has the potential to advance research on refugee women.

Challenges to Integration

Some studies have emerged which attempt to contextualize the integration experiences of refugee women and recognize their multiple and subjective experiences. Lindgren and Juliene (2004), conducted qualitative interviews with several Afghan women living in Northern California. This study focused on Afghan women's community participation and suggested that their ability to integrate was largely determined by their participation in their community. This particular group of Afghan women chose to settle close to other family members which, in turn, revealed that close proximity to family is significant and crucial for integration as it enables individuals to maintain social interactions with individuals who have shared language, religious beliefs and similar food preferences (Lindgren and Lipson 123, 2004). However, while this study captured the spirited nature of Afghan women living in California it was also revealed the vulnerable situation of these older Afghan women. These women struggled with learning about various social systems, searching for employment and faced serious language barriers to their integration.

The issue of the lack of recognition for foreign credentials and difficulties to become licensed were also inhibiting factors for the study participants. It was also uncovered that employment was key to enabling women to integrate thus allowing them to learn more about the health care and social system. As a result, such women were able

to assist other Afghan community members to access such services (Lindgren and Lipson 126, 2004). Within this study, it was also found that tensions exist between Afghan parents and their children as there are “fears about the youth losing their culture and decreasing respect to the elders” (Lindgren and Lipson 128, 2004). This research on Afghan women offers much insight into the importance placed on family ties and the collective mentality that is common among Afghans. What is especially insightful about this research is the emphasis placed on women’s integration and sense of fulfillment through community involvement. The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the factors which incite some Afghan women to become involved in their communities and draws the readers attention to the needs of both elderly and youth, groups who are not always addressed in studies on refugee women. What is compelling about this research is the links made to women’s community and involvement and the retention of cultural value among the younger generation, the fear of loss of language and culture incites many women to become involved and to pass their knowledge down which in turn introduces new ways of understanding the factors affecting Afghan women’s agency and community involvement.

Another study, by Helene Moussa (1993), explores issues affecting women’s ability to integrate such as significant life experiences prior to flight. She also presented women’s own definitions of the causes and events that led them to flee their homes and country and uncovered the many obstacles facing women during flight. This study also highlights the opportunities and obstacles encountered throughout their integration which in turn revealed the positive and negative aspects of integration (Moussa 28, 1993). A similar study by Atsuko Matsuoka and John Sorenson (1999), explores the impact that

forced migration has on household structures and addresses the issues of family separation, which can impact on women's integration. This study also found that as a result of gender inequality in many refugee-producing countries, refugee women might be less likely than their male counterparts to be educated and have a work history. In some instances, literacy rates among refugee women are lower due to restrictions on their education in their country of origin (Matsuoka and Sorenson 200, 1999). This reality may further hinder refugee women's integration, their ability to find employment and develop language skills. This is especially the case for Afghan refugee women as many were restricted from working or seeking an education for many years. It has also been found that a number of individual factors affect women's labour market participation but unemployment and women's inability to have their credentials recognized have a detrimental impact on their economic integration and social inclusion (Bloch, 2004).

A study Helen Ralston (1988) further reinforces that the integration experiences of women differ from those of men, as women must overcome obstacles which are based on their gender. The women interviewed in Ralston's study were relegated to the home to care for the children and as a result felt isolated. However, those women in the labour force felt doubly and triply burdened as a result of the demands of both family and work which were further intensified as women also had the responsibility of maintaining the cultural retention of the younger generations- all of which were a result of the expectations and responsibilities placed on such women to be the keepers of culture while maintaining the family unit (Miedema and Tastsoglou 2, 2000). Kabahena Nyakbwa and Carol Harvey's (1990) research further supports these findings in their research on the adaptation of Black immigrant women to Canada, in which they document the stress

experienced by participants by not being able to find appropriate employment and the racism which many non-white refugee and immigrant women face. In a similar study on immigrant women, Cindy Rublee and Susan Shaw (1991), found that lack of English and French fluency were significant barriers to women's integration in Canadian society. Furthermore, their research uncovered that the lack of daycare deterred women from participating in social and leisurely activities which are key to integration in turn jeopardizing the well-being of women (Miedema and Tastsoglou 2, 2000).

Factors Facilitating Integration

Interestingly enough, a common theme in many of the studies discussed until now is the empowering experiences that some women have throughout their integration. This discussion recognizes that such women have many contributions to make to their host country. The factors which foster women's successful integration have also been identified by feminist scholars as well as the resources and tools necessary for women to achieve their desired level of integration.

While Forbes has identified several barriers to refugee women's integration in industrialized countries, she also suggests self-help groups for women, skills and language training and entrepreneur projects for women as ways to counter some of the difficulties facing women in their integration (Forbes 143, 2004). Improving women's confidence and offering retraining are effective methods to achieving full and active participation in society. Similarly, the findings from Lindgren and Lipson's (2004) study on Afghan women suggest that some Afghan women chose to be "active, involved or to participate" in their communities, all of which entailed creating a place and roles for

themselves and other Afghan people in their communities so that they can live and prosper together.

Miedema and Tastsoglou (2000), examined community involvement as an avenue for women's integration. The findings from their interviews with forty immigrant women who recently arrived in the Maritimes, suggest that community involvement, which involved activities within the women's own communities and outside such as volunteering for social justice groups, enabled the women to be involved in civic, cultural and political life. Becoming involved within the community also enabled some of the women to break their isolation as they began communicating with others and had been afforded a great deal of support and a sense of fulfilment. It was also found that a number of women who participated in this study became involved in their communities in order to bring about social change. For many of the study participants, their participation provided them with a sense of belonging and that they were making a difference. In addition, women's activism in a multicultural society enabled them to develop spiritually and intellectually as revealed by one of the participants, "I had never met somebody from Kuwait, Korea or Iraq or other countries" (Miedema and Tastsoglou 5, 2000).

Nonetheless, it was noted that integration through community involvement is a long and demanding process as it takes time and requires women to have a positive attitude. This study also found that making new friends, learning idioms and the language can be draining and consumes a great deal of time but are all crucial to achieving a sense of belonging which facilitates integration (Miedema and Tastsoglou 6, 2000). This study showed the benefits of community involvement and the findings are therefore instrumental in understanding the need for some refugee women to become involved in

community groups as it opens many doors and presents women with a great deal of opportunity for development and growth. This research also demonstrates the means by which some women achieve a sense of self-worth and belonging.

For some immigrant and refugee women, forced migration entails confronting new gender demands in order to survive and support their families. As Matsuoka and Sorenson found, these demands can simultaneously create stress and anxiety but can also present new gender roles which can be empowering and lead to the renegotiation of other roles, beliefs and familial responsibilities (Matsuoka and Sorenson 227, 239, 1999). Therefore, it is imperative to be open to taking on new roles as many opportunities can surface which can lead to a greater sense of autonomy.

While the above studies focus on women's ability to shape their integration outcomes, Maja Korac, in her study, examines the absence of integration policies and how the lack of action on the part of the host country to establish healthy and inclusive policies can shape the attitude and ability for newcomers to integrate. Therefore, the onus not only lies with the immigrant or refugee women but rather the host country also plays a leading role in shaping one's integration outcome. Her research did reveal that younger women were able to find jobs as domestic workers as a result of the labour needs in Rome. All of the women who were nannies or live-in housekeepers described their experiences as being "prison like" but contended that since they had been unemployed and were not working in their area of expertise they viewed their employment as a step forward as gave them more freedom and autonomy (Korac 405,2003).

As previously mentioned, research on migration is becoming increasingly women- centred and gender sensitive. Monica Boyd has attempted to counter the

“invisibility” of women in migration theory and attempts to explain the ways in which women experience integration differently than men. She asserts that integration outcomes are determined by many factors which include, women’s entry status which impacts the ability to integrate, which involves women arriving as dependants; labour market participation and the migration outcomes of men and women as they do not experience integration in the same manner (Boyd 3, 2004). She also notes the positive and negative aspects of integration and believes that migration has the potential to offer women more social mobility, economic independence and autonomy. Women’s economic responsibilities can also alter the power dynamics within the family which in turn can lead to greater autonomy for women and decision-making roles such as control over family resources.

Some of refugee women’s needs during integration have also been identified in the literature and are seen as playing a significant role in women’s ability to integrate into society. These include but are not limited to public transportation, childcare services, family and cultural support, settlement support programs such as community support networks, culturally and linguistically responsive services, income support for single mothers; and language training including strategies to foster and improve women’s language skills. Housing, safety and security issues have also been identified as well as health care support for refugee women and their families in accessing hospital and health services. Employment was also an important factor as was the need for intensive job search assistance, credential assessment and information on licensing procedures (UNHCR 246, 2002).

The studies discussed in the aforementioned section dealt specifically with immigrant and refugee women and issues of integration which demonstrates a shift from traditional immigration discourse which placed more emphasis on the male experience of forced migration. These studies include an array of issues and perspectives. However all of them have common characteristics which include the voices of their research participants. A common theme throughout all of the research was the emphasis placed on women's ability to act.

The findings elicited from these studies have been instrumental in uncovering various dimensions of immigrant and refugee women's integration. Moreover, feminist contributions to understanding the migration experiences of women have the potential to advance our understanding of what integration means and how it can be achieved. More importantly, a feminist analysis of integration recognizes women's voices which have been absent from mainstream discourse. In this way, research into the experiences of immigrant and refugee women has the ability of challenging mainstream literature and the potential to create insights into the everyday lived experiences of women.

Chapter IV

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

While feminism contains many forms, subgroups and has relationships to other social movements, it has been considered an ideology and political movement which aims to promote the advancement of women, transform oppressive relations and to put an end to gender bias (Mandell 5, 1998). Through a gendered lens, feminists have produced new bodies of knowledge and ways of thinking about concrete issues affecting women's lives. Throughout the decades, feminist literature has broadened to include various dimensions of race, class and ethnicity. While there have been significant strides made within feminism that recognize the diversity in women's experiences and accounts for differences along lines of race, class and ethnicity, it has been argued that feminist reforms have not been shared equally by all women. This suggests that there is still a need for a critical feminist theory which attends to socially and historically structured inequalities while recognizing the intersections of gender, race, class and ethnicity. Feminist standpoint theory is an example of such a critical theory which proposes an alternative to the universalistic feminist ideology of the past which did not recognize women's differences in women's experiences. Moreover, feminist standpoint theory honours voices and recognizes diversity in women's experiences, their agency and can thus serve as a vehicle for social change.

Women's Agency

The concept of agency is couched in feminist standpoint theory and both are premised on achieving social change for the betterment of women. This concept of agency stems from the study of sociology and has been defined as the ability of individuals to act and to change institutions and structures in which they live and therefore involves one's capacity to make choices (Dictionary of Critical Sociology). This concept also recognizes women's capacity to intervene in their life circumstances. Moreover, agency as it is discussed within feminism, views women as active agents of change rather than passive subjects of structural forces but also recognizes that human beings are also influenced by such forces (Messer-Davidow 25, 1995). It is important to recognize that agency is created and conditioned by structural circumstances and is therefore not independent from structure. The concept of agency, which lies at the core of feminist thought, was used in this study to describe the ways in which structural forces have influenced women's potential to integrate and has prompted women to change their circumstances. However, it is important to note that women's agency is constructed within certain societal confines yet women remain active subjects capable of utilizing their own human agency and capacities to resist oppressive relations. The notion of change is an essential element of agency and is realized through decisions and actions and helps to explain how "actors act" (Messer-Davidow 25-27, 1995) and how women are able to "negotiate autonomous spaces inside systems of power relationships" (Zurndorfer 1, 1997). Therefore, women are able to resist oppressive structures while operating within the confines of such structures. According to Arlene Mcleod (1992), "women are both active subjects and subjects of domination" and agency most often

occurs in the context of power relations. Therefore, recognizing the circumstances which incite women to assert their agency must be also be deconstructed. This process is what bell hooks strongly encouraged in her work, simply put “let’s talk about why we see the struggle to assert agency” (Gardiner 6, 1995). Consequently, making the connection between agency and struggle is imperative for uncovering what sparked the desire to act. Interestingly enough, Nelson-Kuna and Riger (1995) suggest that despite the reality that women’s agency takes place within dominant structures, examining women’s experiences of agency within such structures will reveal the ways in which marginal status shapes opportunities for women to act. Recognizing the multiplicity of ways in which women resist within repressive societal institutions and practices such as employment inequities, gender division of labour, and exclusionary policies, to name a few, will undoubtedly illuminate women’s agency, which are also central to feminist standpoint theory and will be discussed in the proceeding section.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

In order to develop an understanding and appreciation of the experiences of Afghan women and the factors which have influenced their integration in Canada, I chose to employ the basic tenets of feminist standpoint theory as a framework from which to theorize women’s experiences of integration. Feminist standpoint theory offers an alternative way of viewing women’s reality and as such has the potential to illuminate women’s agency, a concept that is central to my study. The term standpoint is used in my study to describe the voices and opinions of Afghan women as well as their awareness about their social location and position in society (Swigonski 390, 1994).

Feminist standpoint theory was developed during the second wave of the women's movement in North America and continues to be an influential theory within academia. Early feminist standpoint theory was influenced by Marx and Engels, but was borne out of the lived experiences of women. It has since been further developed and promoted by feminist scholars in numerous disciplines such as Nancy Hartsock (1983, 1987), Sandra Harding (1986, 1991 and 1993), and Dorothy Smith (1987, 1991). This feminist theory continues to be instrumental by offering an alternative viewpoint which is informed by women's experiences and actions.

A central component of early feminist thought which remains very strong in contemporary feminist theories is the underlying challenge to dominant discourses that perpetuate the subordination and silencing of women. It attempts to counter the silencing of women by encouraging them to speak about their circumstances and life conditions, in turn confronting so-called experts who tended to be primarily white males. Feminist standpoint theory is not only used as a tool to theorize and interpret women's experiences but it calls into question the limitations of the researcher's knowledge in their study of women's lives and issues (Maynard 23, 1994). Moreover, this type of research addresses issues of power and privilege inherent in the researcher-participant relationship and encourages reflexivity on the part of the researcher.

Feminist standpoint theory draws upon the everyday lived experiences of women and posits that there are a multiplicity of perspectives and standpoints from which knowledge is produced and as such it attempts to give validity and perspective to those suppressed by the dominant class (Maynard 19, 1994). As such, it "begins where women have been and are still generally located, outside the ruling apparatus" (Smith, 1986).

Including the voices from those on the margins of society is a central tenet of feminist standpoint theory and as such this approach rejects additive approaches to women's oppression (Hill-Collins, 222, 1990). According to Hill-Collins (1990), by placing excluded groups of women in the centre of analysis, feminist standpoint theory creates new possibilities for recognizing the lived experiences and struggles of others and provides a conceptual framework from which oppressive and dominant factors can be explored and challenged (Hill-Collins, 224, 1990). In this sense, feminist standpoint theory has greatly contributed to recognition of different perspectives which had previously been largely absent from previous feminist discourse (Ellis and Foop 1, 2001).

According to Harding (1991), starting with women's lives at the centre of analysis will reveal that women's experiences are "multiple and contradictory" (Harding 1991, 173). Moreover, this theory recognizes that women are not a monolithic group and therefore attends to differences among women and in their experiences. It also recognizes that economic conditions, race, class, sexual orientation and ethnicity greatly contribute to women's roles and position in society.

Basic Tenets of Feminist Standpoint Theory

A central tenet of feminist standpoint theory is the assertion that a woman's experiences inevitably structure her understanding of life. Moreover, that the experiences and input of marginal groups have been long ignored. Feminist standpoint theory attempts to counter women's silencing by beginning from the life experiences of marginal groups of women with the view that this perspective has the potential to decrease distortions in research. Some examples of the benefits of centering research from the lives of women has brought many issues to the forefront of social concern, such

as incest, abuse, rape and sexual harassment to name a few. It was only by beginning from the vantage point of women who have had experiences with such issues and were recognized as experts that social change and progress on such issues were initiated. Standpoint theorists such as Harding (1986, 1991) and Hartsock (1983) further support this claim that individuals who have “lived through the experiences on which they claim to be experts are more credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences” (cited in Swigonski 391, 1994). Often times, traditional paradigms and earlier feminist work reflected women as “victims” which was used to explain women’s circumstances which undermine women’s resistance or coping strategies. In this way, feminist standpoint theory attends to women’s agency and recognizes women’s abilities to change and challenge oppressive forces in society (Swigonski 391, 1994).

Feminist standpoint theory also asserts that individuals from the dominant class and those from marginal groups will undoubtedly have conflicting views and understanding of the world. Moreover, “it is the dominant groups interests to maintain, reinforce and legitimate this dominance and understanding of the world, regardless of how incomplete it may be” (Collins 1990 cited in Swigonski 391, 1994). According to various feminist scholars (Nielson, 1990 and Rich 1980) much can be uncovered by making central the perspectives of marginal groups as such populations have less interest in maintaining a social order that works against them and therefore have less reason to justify the status quo than dominant groups. As a result of having “less to lose”, the marginal group’s perspective has the ability to generate insight and a critical stance regarding current social and economic systems which support oppressive ideologies such as capitalism, racism, sexism and homophobia (Swigonski 391, 1994).

The perspective of the “other” which most often tends to be a viewpoint from the margins of society allows for assumptions, stereotypes, misconceptions and other irrationalities to be deconstructed, exposed and thus become clearer and better understood. One example of this clarity can be found in research conducted on the domestic work of African American women who were primarily employed in white, upper-middle class households in the United States. This research into the lives of such women enabled study participants to “demystify white power” as it allowed them to exercise agency by speaking out about their treatment which in turn rendered their experiences of racism visible (Swigonski 391, 1994). A remarkable example of this can be found in Sojourner Truth’s infamous speech and quote “Ain’t I a Woman?” whereby she presented her experiences of the “other” and as a result challenged assumptions of women of colour as passive and frail victims (cited in Collins, 1990). This standpoint as asserted by Truth was instrumental in raising consciousness and continues to be an unforgettable expression of women’s human rights. When marginalized voices and perspectives emerge, they become less isolated, take on new meaning and can serve as a resource to uncover other standpoints from the margins (Hundleby 150, 2001). In addition, this type of inquiry allows the world to see intimacy, respect and care, which is exercised by the marginalized groups for its members-relationships which are not visible in dominant discourse.

Feminist standpoint theory is becoming pluralized with the emergence of various standpoints, all attempting to be more inclusive and to attend to women’s differences. However, like other feminist theories, feminist standpoint theory is

not without its criticisms. It has been repeatedly charged with essentialism, whereby it views even those marginal groups as sharing a single position (Hundleby 28, 1997). In addition, feminist standpoint theorists such as Harding have been criticized for attempting to separate the world into two distinct groups consisting of the oppressed/marginal groups and the dominant/powerful groups without recognizing that marginal groups can also be dominant within their marginal structures. As a result, feminist standpoint theory overlooks the inherent power differences that exist within marginal groups and fails to adequately address the various forms of oppression operating with those groups (Hundleby 28-30, 1997).

While there is some merit to these criticisms, nevertheless, I would argue that feminist standpoint theory remains an insightful feminist theory which has the potential to inform rich and diverse research and continues to make significant contributions to understanding differences in women's experiences along lines of race, class and ethnicity. While its shortcomings should not be forgotten, it is also important to recognize its central strength in its insistence on voice. It is this recognition that makes it a central framework to my research on the lives of Afghan women. The underlying principle of voice was key in my research with Afghan women and allowed me to bring women who have been at the margins of research to a central point of focus. Feminist standpoint theory has also been employed in other research which seeks to validate the standpoints of minorities and has also proved to be supportive of the struggles of many other marginalized groups (Sui-Fun Fong 95, 2000). Providing women with an opportunity to be heard in their own voices and reflecting their own interests, enables research to be transformative in nature as women's interests and issues are recognized and advanced.

Chapter V

Methodology

This section includes a detailed discussion on the methodological approach and the research methods that I employed to gather and analyze the findings from ten interviews conducted with Afghan women living in Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. There were five women interviewed in Montreal, three women interviewed in Ottawa and two women interviewed in Toronto. In this exploratory study of the factors influencing the cultural, social and economic integration of Afghan women in Canada, I used a qualitative approach. The following section will include a discussion on the relevance of qualitative research to my study, the importance of feminist research and the feminist qualitative principles I employed throughout the study, as well as the strengths and limitations of my methodology.

Feminist Qualitative Research Approach

In order to achieve my research goal, to capture the experiences of integration from the perspective of Afghan women, a qualitative approach was used. It has been found that employing a qualitative research method in the study of integration has the potential to reveal a great deal of insight into the economic, social and employment issues of immigrants and refugees (Castles and al. 136, 2003).

A qualitative methodology allows me to define the women's experiences in their own words and to reflect upon their own experiences. This objective was achieved through a semi-structured interview guide in one-on-one interviews with Afghan women. I attempted to incorporate some principles of feminist research when conducting my interviews and analyzing my data. A feminist perspective is premised on the idea that

women's lives should be placed at the centre of the study and requires the researcher to 'give voice' to women who have been marginalized within dominant discourses and structures of society (Ardovini-Brooker 2, 2002). Moreover, a feminist approach moves women from the position of "subject" to one of "participant", whereby they have authorship of the research. While there are many principles underlying feminist research, the central focus is to understand women's lived experiences as a, "starting point from which to build explanatory frameworks" to advance social change (Burton and Regan 27, 1994). What is especially refreshing about feminist research methods is that it permits a collaborative and, "interactional process" throughout the interview which consists of inputs from the participant and researcher. This allows for both parties to come to an agreed conclusion of what was said which in turn creates quality and genuine interpretation of the data and content. This process also allows for "reciprocity in the research relationship" (Holland and Ramazanoglu 135, 1994).

According to Kvale, the underlying purpose of a qualitative interview is "to describe and understand the subjects' experiences, to describe the meaning of central themes in the life world of the subjects, and to interpret the feelings and nuances of the experiences being expressed by the participant" (Kvale 32, 1996).

The semi-structured interview guide with Afghan women facilitated the kind of open and flexible communication required for gathering the women's personal experiences and narratives. Since the interviews involved a great deal of personal information, a comfortable atmosphere was needed. My interviews with Afghan women took the shape of an informal conversation as opposed to a forced or uncomfortable encounter. As a result, we were able to enter into a respectful dialogue as the participants

guided me through their experiences, aspirations and struggles. I was able to achieve this balance by allowing the women to speak at their own pace while listening to them and validating their comments. Viewing the women as the primary authors of the research also helped me to “sit back”, listen and refrain from interruptions, which facilitated a genre of storytelling.

I made sure to involve the women in the research by making the results, analysis and transcripts of their interviews accessible to them. Nonetheless, I did encounter some challenges with regards to maintaining a balanced interview, as some of the participants would ask me if their answers made sense or needed to be expanded. This created an air of awkwardness in some instances, as I did not want to lead the participants to provide answers based on my research needs. Therefore, I began by validating what they had said by summarizing their points and then proceeded to comment that “it is up to you, just let me know if there is anything to add or leave out”. My response was well received as some women proceeded to another comment, while others retracted the initial comment and took some time to think about their answers. In order to counter some of these difficulties, following Phoenix (1994) suggestions, I deflected some statements and key ideas back to the participants for further clarifications or additions to what they had said earlier, so that they were completely comfortable with what I recorded. My choice to conduct individual interviews with Afghan women, as opposed to other methods such as a focus group, was to ensure anonymity, privacy and to enable the women some degree of control over the time, location, date and interview procedures.

I used a semi-structured interview guide, which provided the women with an opportunity to describe their experiences in their own words (see Appendix C). The semi-

structured interview guide allowed for more in-depth answers and flexibility for the participant to proceed at her own pace and provided a narrative form which elicited a non-directive conversation.

Moreover, a gendered lens requires researchers to move through each part of their study with careful attention to detail, content and context, and to account for the gendered nature of the study subject. (Patton 227, 2002). For example, when creating my interview guide I reflected a great deal upon the issues facing newcomer women throughout their integration and consulted the literature on gender and migration. As well, I referred to my personal experiences and drew from my knowledge of working with newcomer women. This reflection enabled me to think in-depth about the challenges and opportunities facing women and guided me through the creation of my interview guide, as well as in the interpretation and analysis of the findings. My readings on feminist research were also instrumental throughout the research process, as they provided me with a framework from which to explain and rationalize my findings and advance my analysis.

When possible, I liaised with the women prior to the interviews so that I could answer their questions about my research and so they could also learn more about my personal and cultural background. In some instances, the participants would ask me where I was born, where my parents were from and about my religious beliefs. My own background was often discussed during the interviews and was helpful for getting acquainted during the initial contact with participants. My involvement with the participants also extended into spending time talking with them after the interview most often over a cup of tea and meeting their families and friends.

Selection Process

The selection process consisted of criterion sampling which involves the researcher identifying specific criterion as a basis for identifying potential participants (Mertens 320, 2005). This type of sampling is especially useful when attempting to identify information rich cases that may not be generalizable but “contain dimensions of diversity, which are pertinent to the particular study” (Mertens 317, 2005). I conducted interviews with women from Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa. These cities have a reasonable number of Afghan women and settlement agencies working with Afghan women and families. My knowledge of demographics of Afghan women in these three major cities resulted from my experiences working as a social worker with newcomers in Ottawa and my professional and personal networks. In addition, these three cities were in close proximity to me.

I contacted settlement agencies and women’s organizations in three cities and asked for their assistance in locating Afghan women who have resided in Canada for 3 years or more. My initial contact with the women was through settlement workers and counsellors currently working with the Afghan community in Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. My decision for selecting criterion sampling to locate participants was due to my limited network and accessibility to various Afghan communities in Toronto and Montreal. I encountered fewer obstacles locating Afghan women in Ottawa, as a result of my professional involvement in the area of settlement and personal affiliation with many Afghan women in Ottawa. It also proved to be less problematic and non-threatening for the women if a service provider with whom they are familiar with and trust contacted them.

The settlement workers in the three cities contacted their Afghan women clients and once they confirmed their participation I was given their email addresses and phone numbers so that I remained in contact with them before the interview. All of the women contacted participated in the interviews. Some of the women phoned me and emailed me several times, and as a result, we were able to become familiar and comfortable with one another before the interview. Once I received confirmation, I delivered the invitations to the settlement workers via email, fax or mail so that they could distribute them to the participants. The letter of invitation and consent were translated by a professional translator from English to Dari, which was the language spoken by the participants (see Appendix D and E).

All of the women that were selected for interviews had resided in Canada for more than three years. I deliberately chose to interview women who have resided in Canada for more than three years in order to allow for more comments on language issues, employment and their experiences of accessing social services; all of which are central factors to integration. The women's length of time in Canada ranged from three and a half to thirteen years and all of the women were refugees in a first country of asylum. These countries included India, Iran, Turkmenistan and Pakistan and their length of stay ranged from one to twelve years. The majority of the women interviewed who had received formal education were originally from urban areas in Afghanistan. The participants were either Canadian citizens or permanent residents at the time of the interview and all identified as being Afghan Muslim women.

While the sample of women interviewed was small, it enabled me to achieve an intimate and personal connection with each of the participants. According to Patton

(2002), a small number of participants can be extremely valuable especially for “information rich cases” (Patton 244, 2002). Moreover, interviewing a small number of women afforded me the opportunity to capture in-depth stories about Afghan women’s experiences of integration. However, had I been granted more time to undertake the study and financial resources I would have aspired to interview more women in various cities.

Data Collection

After an extensive review of the existing literature on refugee and immigrant women’s integration, I designed an interview guide, which was used throughout the interviews as a means of information gathering. Prior to conducting my interviews and during the initial stages of the creation of my interview guide, I conducted a pilot interview with an Afghan woman in order to test the interview guide. My rationale for conducting this preliminary interview was to gain some insight and feedback about the interview questions, test my interview techniques and approach, and to determine revisions and areas for improvement. The pre-testing of my interview guide enabled me to improve the design of my questionnaire. I also informed my pilot participant that I was interested in her reactions to questions and encouraged her to provide feedback at the end of the interview. I also asked her if the questions were clear and if she had any suggestions for improvements. This pilot proved extremely useful as there were some issues raised with regards to the use of a tape recorder which I had not anticipated. The pilot respondent’s reluctance to be recorded made me attuned to the fact that recording participants could create some discomfort. As a result, I was extremely cautious to ask participants more than once for their consent to tape record the interview. The pilot

participant provided me with invaluable feedback which helped me to make clear my questions and to be sensitive to the comfort levels of the participants.

The interview guide (see Appendix C) consisted of three sections organized around cultural, economic and social integration. In order to elucidate the complexity of the meanings that participants attached to their specific experiences and ideas, I asked probes when answers appeared vague. This method enabled me to gain insight into women's sense of integration which encouraged both the participants and myself to discuss a wider range of issues relating to integration which would not have surfaced had I not relied on open-ended series of questions.

The interviews with Afghan women lasted between 45 minutes and 2 ½ hours and took place in locations chosen by the participants which consisted of women's homes, place of work and outdoor public spaces. Some of the women interviewed could only devote a limited amount of time due to such things as employment, education commitments and familial obligations. Seven of the women interviewed were comfortable being tape-recorded, while three women preferred that I take shorthand notes. In addition, six women requested that an interpreter be present at the interview. Taking short hand notes did to some extent detract my attention from the emotions and non-verbal cues taking place throughout the interview. However, I attempted to reconcile this by making eye contact and wrote comments down quickly and in abbreviated form so I could pay attention to the participant as much as possible. Nonetheless, this exercise proved to be challenging especially when attempting to write down exact quotes. However, those women who did not wish to be recorded were extremely cooperative and often repeated their comments so that I could make note of their comments.

I transcribed all of the interviews, which enabled me to become familiar with the data and thus gain a better understanding of the analysis which helped when identifying emerging themes and differences in experiences. As English was the second and often the third language of all participants, basic grammatical editing was performed. However, I proceeded with discretion and caution as not to compromise or detract from the true meaning of the statements and asked for clarifications from participants and interpreters when necessary. While there were interpreters used for more than half of the participants, for those who chose not to use an interpreter more editing was required. The interpreters were contacted by settlement agencies and women's organizations.

In addition, before and after the "formal" interview there were some informal discussions sometimes over snacks, lunch and refreshments. This act of sharing food often encouraged in-depth discussions as the participants and I became more comfortable with one another. This also enabled us to achieve a level of intimacy, which is sometimes not achieved when the interview is "on". Moreover, the act of sharing food broke down barriers and in many ways served as a silent tribute to their cultural norm of hospitality. This narrowed the distance between the participant and myself and, as a result, the conversation would often exceed the time requested which most often occurred when conducting the interviews in women's homes. As a result of the rapport and closeness achieved from the sharing of food and conversations before and after the interviews, we had further open and honest discussions on their experiences of exile.

Half of the interviews were conducted in the women's homes in their living rooms with family members present who were tending to their daily routines and activities. On some occasions, younger children were present sitting alongside their

mother which had the potential to spark conversation about children and generational issues. However, having children and other family members present may have also prevented some women from disclosing some information or providing specific details pertaining to their experiences. As a researcher, I was attuned to the surroundings and some of the factors encouraging and inhibiting discussion. While there appeared to be some limitations to having family members present, all of the women interviewed in their homes appeared to be the most comfortable and at ease. This made me conscious of the considerable benefits of conducting interviews in women's homes. Interviewing women in their homes also created a friendly atmosphere, which reinforced the level of intimacy between the participant and myself. Moreover, it enabled me as the researcher to converse with women in a natural setting whereby they did not have to make special arrangements for such things as daycare or transportation.

Throughout all of the ten interviews, I assumed a conversational rather than a more formal approach as I obtained such standard information, as the woman's age, how many children she had, and the age of her children, her current marital status and her level of education. It was important to obtain this information in a way that was not interrogative or impolite. The informal conversational style also enabled me to identify with greater sensitivity the feelings of the participants as each question arose, especially while they were in the process of disclosing their experiences of living in Afghanistan. This interview style also enabled me to respond and observe not only the participants' verbal communication, but also their non-verbal communication. This included moments of sadness, happiness, and anger during which time I would refrain from asking certain questions when there appeared to be an air of discomfort. This also allowed me to

achieve and to maintain respect for the women's personal boundaries and to avoid placing women in an uncomfortable situation.

Data Analysis

Throughout the analysis of the interviews I employed a series of sequential steps for qualitative analysis which included coding notes and observations, and noting personal reflections and comments (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In addition, I sorted through the data in order to identify similar phrases, patterns and themes, as well as distinct differences. Once I compiled all of the data from the interviews, I then proceeded to elaborate on my findings from which many themes emerged, such as women's experiences in the country of first asylum, barriers to integration, factors enhancing women's integration and more specifically information such as, integration through employment and education. I also reviewed all of the participants' responses to each question and extracted significant statements and key words such as, community, family, education, learning the system, freedom, autonomy and security-all of which were identified as factors influencing their integration. I also immersed myself in readings on gender, migration and other studies relating specifically to women and integration, which in turn helped me to examine and to learn from the ways that other researchers compiled their findings. This exercise of constant reading and reflecting on the data elicited many ideas and themes which may not have surfaced without linking theoretical explanations to my findings.

I also listened to the tape recordings of the interviews several times and read the transcriptions numerous times, which allowed me to identify silences and gaps in the data. By paying special attention to silences, laughter and emotional expressions, I

realized that such factors must all be accounted for in the analysis, as they are crucial in order to begin to understand and interpret what the women are attempting to communicate about their experiences. This also led me to an on-going critical reflection of the research process and enabled me to see the many standpoints which emerged from the interviews. For example, it was not until I was conducting the analysis that I became aware of the magnitude of concern regarding intergenerational issues facing some women which turned out to be a reoccurring theme throughout the interviews.

Ethical Considerations

An ethics application was completed and approved in which all of the ethics requirements of the Carleton University Ethics Committee were fulfilled. I was extremely conscious of the ethical implications of my study, therefore at the beginning of each interview I informed the participants of the purpose of the research and disclosed the fact that this research would be published. Participants were also informed that their participation in the research was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Prior to each interview, I explained the objectives of the study and asked the participants to read both the letter of invitation, as well as the consent form, which were also translated in Dari for those women who requested translators (see Appendix D and E). Each participant was asked to sign the consent form before the interview commenced, which indicated an agreement to participate in the study. In order to avoid any deception, the potential participants were informed through a letter of invitation and discussions prior to the interview of the purpose of the study and how the information would be collected and used in the final report. In addition, I asked for permission from each participant to use verbatim quotes in my analysis and in my final report. I also provided

ample opportunity for the women to ask me questions about my research and offered to provide the women with a final draft of my work for their records.

Informed Consent

The letter of invitation contained specific details pertaining to the purpose of the study, the value of their participation, commitment required, and information regarding the honorarium and reimbursements, time, location and contact information. I promised anonymity to the women being interviewed. In addition, I requested a confidentiality agreement from each interpreter and prior to the interviews (Appendix F and G).

Risk and Safety Issues

I made arrangements for the women to be provided referrals free of charge should the participants require counselling after the session. However, the need for such counselling did not arise. In order to secure the data, all interview materials were locked in a secure filing cabinet when not in use and all information on my computer was stored on my desktop which is password secured. It is also important to note that one year after the completion of my study I will destroy interview materials and anything else that would reveal the women's identity.

Factors Enhancing the Study

As a professional social worker presently working with immigrant and refugees on settlement issues, I have first-hand knowledge of the barriers and factors affecting the integration of refugee women. As the daughter of immigrant parents, I also have an understanding of intergenerational issues facing most of the participants, as I have witnessed first hand the difficulties and frustrations experienced by immigrant parents and children. Being the daughter of immigrant parents as well as my cross-cultural

interview skills and experiences, greatly assisted me throughout my sessions with each of the women. Having previously had helping relationships with Afghan women I am attuned to the cultural nuances and special intricacies of Afghan culture and employed to the best of my ability culturally sensitive interviewing techniques throughout the interviews.

In addition, my upbringing has made me knowledgeable about rich and diverse Afghan culture, religion, history, tradition and geography which were especially helpful during my interviews and during informal discussions. My understanding of the importance of hospitality and respect for older persons in Afghan and South Asian culture were extremely helpful in all of my encounters with the women as I greeted the women appropriately upon arriving and leaving their homes. These gestures created a comfortable feeling before and after the interviews. This level of understanding also enabled me to be attuned to what might be considered impolite questions. For example, I refrained from asking intrusive questions with regards to relationships with family members, marriage, and political or religious affiliations unless otherwise disclosed by the women. Moreover, I was respectful of the participants disclosure or reluctance to share information and did not pry for details on taboo subjects during the discussion of intergenerational and issues facing youth.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

My study of the factors influencing the cultural, economic and social integration of Afghan women in Canada is the first study and academic discussion. Although, there are a number of studies that deal specifically with immigrant and refugee women's integration in Canada, it is hoped that this study will spark further interest in Afghan

women. While I am the primary researcher for this study, I feel that the pages of my study serve as a space for Afghan women to voice their concerns, hopes, fears and aspirations. It is not my research alone that will fuel further studies but rather the voices and testimonies of Afghan women which can encourage other women to undertake similar research or participate in other studies dealing with immigrant and refugee women's integration.

However, it must also be noted that this study was somewhat limited by language and cultural barriers, especially when I had to work with an interpreter who has the ability to modify or censor information during the interpretation. Nonetheless, this limitation was offset by the fact that the women were given the opportunity to express themselves more fully in the language with which they feel more comfortable. All six of the women who had interpreters present at their interviews appeared at ease with the interpreter as there was many warm gestures exchanged between the interpreter such as smiling, laughing, nodding, and hugs upon leaving which suggested that the women were appeased at the presence of the interpreter.

While the selection of a small number of participants does not allow for generalization to an entire population, it does allow for the production of rich data from which the researcher can learn about issues of central importance to the study and thus provide valuable insights into the topic under investigation. While my study tended to focus on the experiences of educated urban women from Afghanistan, it could be used as a starting point for research on women who fit other demographic profiles; hence, I do not claim that this research provides a representative cross-section of Afghan women

living in Canada. However, the qualitative nature of this study highlights the need for further statistical and quantitative research on this subject.

My social location as a researcher was also something that encouraged but also hindered the discussion at times. While I shared religious and cultural values with the participants, our social locations did differ as I am Canadian born and have not personally experienced integration, this was raised at least three times during the interviews upon finding out that I had always lived in Canada. During one of the interviews, a participant was explaining her experiences with the immigration system with reference to the length of time it takes for sponsoring family members and asked me how long I had resided in Canada. Upon finding out that I was Canadian born, she said, “oh you wouldn’t understand then” alluding to the fact that I had no experiences with the immigration system. However, on several other occasions, women experiencing intergenerational issues asked for my advice as they knew of my cultural background and that I was the daughter of immigrant parents and were thus curious to find out how my parents dealt with issues of cultural retention and integration. As I have experienced first-hand the struggles facing immigrant parents and their children, I was able to relay my understanding of certain issues such as curfew, socializing with the opposite sex, and respect for elders which were issues often raised throughout our discussion of children. While I was careful not to impose my experiences or views, I did share some insight where I felt it was appropriate. For example, one participant asked me about my parents’ views on dating which I disclosed and in turn led to more discussions about her coping strategies with regards to intergenerational issues. This sharing of information and open nature of the interview enhanced the quality of the data as the women became more

comfortable as I shared some of my experiences and was thus able to contribute to the discussion. Often times the women would say, “as you know” or “you must understand” when making references to their children, cultural values and the importance of family. Therefore, my understanding of their feelings and beliefs with regards to such issues created an atmosphere of trust and openness.

Chapter VI

Analysis of Data

This section includes a detailed discussion and analysis of various themes and sub-themes, which I have extrapolated from the interviews. Major themes that have emerged from the interviews relate to the factors influencing the cultural, economic and social integration of Afghan women. The proceeding pages will highlight barriers to integration, resources supporting integration and women's efforts in overcoming their challenges to integration.

The section begins with a demographic profile and the characteristics of the study participants, as well as a discussion of women's experiences in their country of first asylum. The differences and similarities in women's integration experiences will also be discussed throughout this section, as they illustrate the individual and unique experiences of each participant. Following will be a discussion of major themes including, integration as a work in progress, sense of belonging, and fundamental rights and freedoms in Canada. Next, barriers to integration will be discussed, which will include language issues, credential recognition. The emotional impact of the loss of status with regards to employment and the impact of intergenerational on integration will also be discussed. Lastly, support systems and learning the Canadian social system will be presented, which will also include a discussion of the women's recommendations for facilitating employment integration such as, retraining workshops.

A remarkable feature of the interviews was that the participants identified several outstanding barriers to their successful integration; however, they also simultaneously offered practical solutions to some of the obstacles, thus illustrating that they were aware

of the impediments to integration. From the participants' recommendations, the inherent desire to be active agents in their integration and to overcome various barriers became apparent.

Characteristics of Participants

The participants consisted of ten Afghan women, who at the time of the interview, lived in Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. While the age of all the participants was not known, it is believed that most of the women were between the ages of 30 and 50, and all had come primarily from urban areas in Afghanistan. The group comprised women from various educational backgrounds, some had completed secondary education, while others attained graduate degrees in areas such as engineering, law, medicine, teaching and administration. Eight of the ten women had children, and eight were married and had come to Canada with their spouses. Most of their children were born either in Afghanistan or in their country of first asylum, with the exception of two women who had given birth to their children in Canada.

All of the women had previously lived in another country before coming to Canada. In their first country of asylum (India, Iran, Pakistan or Turkmenistan), all the women were considered to be refugees. The total time spent living in these countries varied considerably among the participants, ranging from one to twelve years. Some had been employed in their first country of asylum, while others were not permitted to work due to their status as refugees. Their length of stay in Canada also varied from three to fourteen years and some women were citizens or permanent residents at the time of the interview. Four out of ten respondents are currently employed in Canada, while the others are unemployed, and working towards upgrading their language skills or are staying at

home with their younger children. At the time of these interviews, all of the respondents lived with their spouses and children or extended families. With such an array of past and present experiences and circumstances, the women interviewed appeared to be in quite different stages of their integration and were adapting to life in Canada at a different pace. For example, it was found that women's length of residency in Canada facilitated their knowledge of resources and services needed to meet their integration needs such as job search workshops, interpreting and health care services.

Integration As A Work In Progress

Several factors emerged that predominantly influenced the integration of the interviewees. The length of time spent in Canada, past and present employment status, and language proficiency, all had a strong impact on their integration into life in Canada. It became clear that the longer a woman resided in Canada, the more familiar she became with "the way things work", i.e, accessing programs and social services that are offered. As one woman commented, "I could never compare the first year with the second or third year", which revealed her ability to see her progress from one year to another. Another participant stated that she, "feels like the stress is gone and that [she] is happy now" and she added that these feelings were not easily achieved and that it took her time to adjust. While discussing her goals to pursue higher education, another woman discussed her personal progress in her integration when she commented that, "maybe five years ago I would not have thought this way". She also revealed that during the initial stages of her arrival to Canada, she did not have the motivation or feel as positive as she presently does.

Another woman, when reflecting about the early stages of her arrival to Canada said, “initially it was very hard, I was scared to walk at night alone...I used to feel a sense of uncertainty in my life”. She also discussed how these feelings changed for her over time as she continued on to say, “now I am very open to trying new tasks, challenges and taking on new responsibilities”. As she said herself, she did not feel this way “overnight” but mentioned that finding employment helped her overcome some of her sadness as she was able to keep busy while generating an income at the same time. Another woman commented on the, “cold winters and gloomy weather” which took her a lot of time to adjust to. She went on to say that in time she learned to appreciate the winter and participated in outdoor activities with friends and family. However, the same participant said that it took her many years to feel comfortable living in Canada. Therefore, in many ways, such comments illustrate that integration is a “work in progress” and that some of the women imagine themselves to be on a journey.

While all of the women interviewed experienced some hardships when they initially arrived, they were able to trace positive aspects in their own progression whether it was having a more optimistic outlook on life, being reunited with family, becoming involved in their community, or finding employment. All of these factors enabled the women to push through the difficult periods of their integration-a point which will be discussed in further detail in the proceeding pages.

Sense of Belonging

When the women were asked questions pertaining to achieving a sense of belonging and acceptance in Canada, all of the women responded with extremely positive answers indicating that they had in fact achieved a desirable sense of belonging. Some of

the women expressed that they did feel accepted and believed that community involvement, multiculturalism, and their own efforts to integrate were all contributing factors to achieving acceptance and membership into larger Canadian society. However, four participants stated that their reception to Canada was not always so pleasant, as they had in fact encountered racism and discrimination in certain instances.

Multiculturalism And A Tolerant Society

When asked what they thought had enabled them to achieve a sense of belonging in Canada, at least half of the women mentioned living in a, “multicultural society”. They felt welcomed among so many cultures. As one woman said, “[Canadian] society belongs to everyone...everyone has the right to feel comfortable”. Another woman commented on the various cultures and languages that make up the country, but asserted that Canada’s diversity is what truly makes her feel comfortable, “Canada is an international country, there are so many people and cultures, I really enjoy and love that”. Some of the women also identified the open-minded nature of Canadians as contributing to their sense of belonging and felt that the kindness of people such as their neighbours and ESL instructors were factors which led to their feelings of comfort and acceptance.

However, one reported that she felt insecure about her accent as she had been targeted with racial slurs and comments indicating that her accent was not acceptable. On one occasion she was yelled at by a man on the phone whom had insulted her by saying that she was hard to understand and sounded “stupid with [her] Asian accent”. She said this insult, was extremely hurtful and made her feel inferior. The same participant said that while she does not wear a head scarf, many of her family members and friends do, and have a very difficult time as they feel subjected to gross stereotypes and

misunderstandings, or are made to feel that what they are wearing is wrong by some of their neighbours. She expressed that she was concerned for their safety, as some of them had been insulted and yelled at by strangers driving by. Despite these incidents, she reported that she felt a sense of belonging and acceptance by others but was conscious of racism that exists in society.

At least four of the women mentioned a heightened awareness of negative stereotypes and discrimination after September 11, 2001. One participant shared her experiences; and said;

I had a negative reaction from someone in my class upon telling him where I was from, he asked me why are [all] Afghans terrorists. I felt very sad. The images that [are] shown of Afghans [in the media] are not good.

Another woman revealed that she had received some negative comments after 9/11 but said, “such comments will not impact on my progress here...I [just keep] going!”.

Integration as a Two-Way Street

Most participants considered that their gradual integration to Canadian society was part of their personal responsibility and therefore, placed some of the onus on themselves. While some of the women discussed how Canada had enabled them to achieve some of their goals through access to education, providing social services and language classes, they also felt that they played a primary role themselves in their own integration. Three of the women interviewed explained that it is not merely the support and kindness of others that had assisted them in achieving a sense of belonging, rather it was also their own ability to be open minded, tolerant and respectful of other people and

cultures. One woman said that, “being open minded and having a positive attitude”, as well as a “readiness to adapt and to integrate”, are important factors in determining one’s integration outcome. As one woman said, “this is [our] country, we need to adapt, adjust, accept the values, the rights, the law and the regulations [as well as] enjoy it and use it”. While most of the women interviewed had an overwhelming sense of gratitude towards Canada, this sense of gratefulness created a reticence about expressing negative feelings about their integration to Canada. This point is apparent as the majority of participants’ responses were extremely positive.

Fundamental Rights and Freedoms

A remarkable finding was the identical responses provided by all ten women when asked what they appreciated most about life in Canada. All of the women mentioned autonomy, freedom and security. At least half of the women interviewed emphasized the importance of having a basic understanding of civil rights and freedoms in Canada, as it would lead to a better understanding of the rules and regulations in Canada. As one woman said, “in Afghanistan, women and girls do not have freedom”. She went on to comment that, “women have so many rights in Canada and that they must learn how they can use their rights to achieve their goals”.

Peace and Security

When asked what life in Canada enabled the women to do which they would not have been able to achieve had they stayed in Afghanistan or their first country of asylum, remarkably all of the women identified obtaining a safe and secure environment for their children and themselves. As one woman revealed;

I was very concerned back home about the safety of my children, but I am very happy here. There is no more war, no ruckus or gunshots...no bombs. Very often

I felt it was the last time I was going to see a person because you didn't know if you would be alive the next day" to see [them again].

This underlines the very dangerous situation facing women in Afghanistan and for many women living in refugee camps; their futures were precarious as violence and war evaded every aspect of their lives. All of the participants felt that the sense of personal security and freedom enabled them to do many things. For example, one participant said that she felt safe walking on the streets and taking the bus in her city. Prior to her arrival in Canada, she said that she did not feel safe leaving her home alone. Therefore, her new found sense of security and safety granted her the necessary autonomy to move freely. This freedom of movement is necessary for such things as searching for employment, attending school, participating in community activities, going to medical appointments, job interviews and enjoying leisurely activities, all of which this participant disclosed she had been not able to do before. This suggests that a sense of security is uplifting and enabled her to participate in a broader array of activities, which are important to all aspect of her integration.

Two women specifically mentioned that they were free from the Taliban and the Mujahadeen and did not have to worry about rape or torture, which were common fears for women during those eras. Nine of the ten women interviewed, revealed that they feared for their daughters, as violence against women and rape was rampant. Some of the women discussed their sense of trust in the police force in Canada. One woman said, "you must have trust in the police, you should not hide yourself from the police, back home we had to hide from them". This statement exemplifies the situation facing many Afghan people, as it was difficult to trust the authorities since they were often perpetrators of large scale human rights abuses.

Several participants revealed that many Afghans were subject to forced repatriation, despite the continued instability and conflict in Afghanistan. By coming to Canada, women were able to escape the constant fear of being sent back to Afghanistan. One participant said, “In Iran we were under the threat of being repatriated...we always felt threatened”.

Autonomy

More than half of the women interviewed were aware of their rights and opportunities in Canada. As one woman stated during a discussion about her time in her country of first asylum, “we couldn’t do anything, the authorities were [always] watching us”. Some of the participants disclosed their experiences of living in refugee camps in their first country of asylum and revealed that there was little freedom of personal choice. But as one participant mentioned, “In Canada we have freedom for girls, freedom for my daughter and sisters to choose their destinies”. Another woman made reference to the strict dress code imposed upon many women, “we were forced to cover from head to toe in black clothing”.

Civil and Political Rights

As previously mentioned forced repatriation was a common concern for the women. One woman stated, “In Pakistan, as a refugee, it was very uncertain when you could be here or deported back into Afghanistan”. She went on to say that, “here you know that you are respected and as a permanent resident the government has granted you rights, and as an individual you have various rights and freedoms”. Half of the women interviewed emphasized their appreciation for the rights and freedoms which are enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. One of them revealed;

I really value and love [the] freedom I have to talk to people and freedom to choose what I want to do with my life. I feel secure about my future. In Pakistan I had only one child because I wasn't sure if I could bring another child into the world only for her to [have an] uncertain future...what would her future be? I think she would have a miserable future.

One participant discussed at great length the situation she was facing while living in Afghanistan. She said that basic “social, political and lifestyle choices were not a concern but rather survival and feeding the family”. In addition, the lack of human rights often jeopardized women’s access to such things as health care and the right to a fair trial. Knowing that in Canada they have many rights and freedoms enables the participants to conduct themselves without fear of reprisal. For many of the participants, the ability to exercise their rights, for example equality and voting rights, enabled them to feel like contributing members of society.

Right to Education

For all of the women interviewed, previous access to education was limited and not considered as a fundamental right, rather it was treated as a privilege in Afghanistan. Therefore, for most of the Afghan women who participated in this study, the right to an education was deeply valued and they took every opportunity to immerse themselves and their children in higher learning. When asked about their positive experiences since coming to Canada, seven women made mention of their positive outlook on the education system and were very forthcoming about their experiences with languages classes or their plans for future schooling for themselves and their children. The majority of the women interviewed mentioned that their right to an education in Canada had afforded them many opportunities. As one of the participant’s revealed in reference to education, “I want to show people that we have the ability to do [well] but we didn’t have the opportunity in Afghanistan”.

There were also some participants who expressed their happiness at being able to take language classes for free and hope for their children at being able to attend school. One of them said, “if you want to study here, no one will stop you. I see no obstacles to education, before we had no [opportunity], to work or to study”. In the first country of asylum, there were strict policies which prohibited them from working or attending school, as one woman revealed, “when we were in Iran, we had no permission to work or study and so we had to work illegally”.

Another finding was that all of the participants expressed their feelings of hope for their children’s education. One woman shared her experiences of living in Iran where due to restrictive policies her son was not able to attend school and she feared he would become illiterate. When she arrived in Canada, she had a renewed sense of hope for her son who graduating from his primary school with honours. She said, “ in [Canada] no one will stop you!”. Most of the participants identified that education offered them and their children’s many opportunities and a better quality of life. However, it was also mentioned by two women that while there are many educational opportunities for women in Canada, they are not always able to benefit as tuition fees are not affordable and resources are scarce. This led to a discussion for the need for subsidized education programs for foreign professionals.

The Importance of Language to Integration

All respondents believed that fluency in English is a fundamental necessity to their integration in Canada. The degree of English language skills was linked to their ability to secure employment, especially in their respective fields. One woman expressed her thoughts about finding employment and said, “for good jobs you have to know the

language”. She continued with, “language is a big barrier [for me]. I cannot explain things and my accent is a problem when communicating, this is a huge problem”. For this participant, her inability to speak English fluently was greatly hindering her ability to find, what the majority of the women referred to as, “a good job”—one that is related to the women’s previous field of employment and study.

Overall, six of the women expressed concern that their lack of English language skills was an impediment to finding employment. As one of them explained, “It is impossible for me to work in an office because I don’t know the language and I don’t know what I will do”. She also revealed that she is not able to work in a manual labour job as she suffers from a medical condition and expressed the wish that “employers would give [her] a chance to work” but then went on to say “I can’t even explain myself to employers”. This statement exemplifies some of the frustrations felt by the participants and uncertainty about employment prospects that can occur as a result of weak language skills. During the interviews, the majority of the women alluded to their weak English language skills and often made comments such as “my English is not good”, “my English is very bad” or “do you understand me okay?” These expressions all point to the fact that for the women interviewed, fluency in English not only presents obstacles with regards to employment but also extends to their ability to communicate effectively, which as one woman said, “I need to improve my English so that I will be confident”.

The importance of learning English for employment, self-esteem, and communication was stated by the majority of the participants. One woman revealed that knowing three languages (English, Urdu and Dari) helped her to find a job working in her community shortly after her arrival in Canada. However, this was not the case for the

majority of the women who appeared to be struggling to learn English. One participant revealed that family obligations kept her from upgrading her language skills she said, “ I have a lot of problems because I am taking care of my children and the family, it is very difficult for me to attend school”. While she showed an eagerness to attend ESL classes she considered her familial responsibilities a priority and hoped to resume studies at a later time. Therefore, for at least one of the participants, obligations at home did not permit her to improve her English. For those women who are fighting multiple barriers to integration, language seems to be the most difficult to overcome. As one participant articulated, “[my] biggest barrier to [employment] is language, I am sick and so it is difficult to find work.”

There are several aspects to language as a survival skill which is crucial for functioning and daily living. One participant mentioned that proficiency in English would enable “women to learn and to articulate their rights in Canada”. Another woman who is fluent in English added that she believes that “knowing the language will help women to communicate their needs, especially within the health care system”. It was also pointed out by some of the women interviewed who were more fluent in English or attending ESL classes, that language training can be an empowering tool for them because the classes have improved their ability to communicate and to become active participants in society. In addition, most of the members of the group interviewed believed that language skills could bring a sense of personal and professional fulfillment. Several participants expressed that attaining a comfort level with the English language is an accomplishment that will enable them to overcome some of the difficulties they have articulating themselves in job interviews and in day to day activities, such as going to the bank.

As the above discussion has illustrated, learning English has the potential to lead to women to fulfillment, well-being and successful integration. The participants understanding of the sheer necessity to learn English also exemplifies their desire and determination to improve their integration into Canadian society. Participants perceived that learning English was essential for survival and asserting their opinions, rights and participating in larger society.

Barriers to Employment

Nine out of the ten women interviewed had been formally educated and certified professionals in some capacity while living in Afghanistan or in their country of first asylum. The lack of recognition for their credentials and work experience in Canada was a significant factor impeding their economic integration which in turn affected their morale and sense of self-worth. This was a group of highly educated women who have studied law, education, medicine, engineering and business administration. The issue of credential assessment and the lack of recognition for foreign trained qualifications was a severe concern for all of the participants with the exception of one participant who fled Afghanistan at a young age and was thus educated in Canada. With this single exception, all of the other participants viewed the issue of foreign credentials as an obstacle to achieving a desired level of integration.

While learning English was a major factor that contributed to women's unemployment, the women also attributed overly stringent government policies and the regulations of professional associations and licensing bodies as significant impediments that kept them from working in their respective fields. Some of the women articulated that their inability to work made them feel as though they were not adjusting to life in

Canada. Five of the participants who were teachers with previous degrees in education, commented that they had considerable difficulty trying to become certified as they are required to “start all over again from high school”. Some of the participants discussed how embarrassed and unintelligent they felt when having to undergo years of secondary school training which some had completed nearly fifteen years earlier.

One woman said “when I came here, everything stopped...I stopped...because we have no equivalency here”. The participant felt frustrated with her inability to be a productive member of the workforce. As one participant commented, obtaining Canadian equivalency is “a long process and [costly] too...I loved to teach but now I cannot. What can I do?”. Her inability to become certified in her profession created feelings of despondency as she said she would have to settle for any form of employment. One woman felt that she was becoming de-skilled and feared that she would never find employment as a teacher as it has been decades since she last taught. This sense of despair was also felt among other participants who had opted for alternative employment but again were faced with difficulty as at least half of the participants had gaps in their employment or lacked Canadian experience. Another woman, reacting to the lack of recognition for her degree as a teacher said, “starting all over again is not easy, it can really keep you down”. This participant expressed a great deal of sadness at not being able to teach as she recollected her time as a teacher and told stories about her duties and classroom activities. Another participant, a doctor, discussed the paralysing financial costs of physician examinations and retraining and fears she will not be able to continue because of the costs. This participant viewed the qualifying regulations for

foreign-trained physicians as being overly stringent and believed that she could achieve her goals of practising as a physician in Canada if she was provided with more financial support to cover the examinations. Barriers relating to the recognition of credentials stand in the way of the participants' integration. This clearly points to the need for more action and reforms in this area on the part of licensing bodies and professional association who are responsible for regulating professions, setting standards, and administering licensing examinations.

Re-training and financial assistance from the government and professional associations were identified by the study participants as a potential solution to counter unemployment and underemployment. Another participant said that while there are refresher and retraining courses for physicians and health care professionals, these programs are not readily accessible due to the fees and the amount of time one must invest prior to sitting for an exam, which is a daunting task for those women with younger children. From the women's experiences it becomes evident that stakeholders such as the licensing bodies and professional associations do not recognize the limitations of their policies, nor do they consider the factors facing foreign trained professionals who have families to support or who are not financially capable of incurring the examination fees.

Foreign-trained doctors are required to take special examinations to qualify for a residency, while foreign-trained teachers must complete a Bachelors of Education, both of which are usually quite costly. As one woman said, "not having to start all over again" would help to combat some of the low morale and depression felt by many Afghan men and women who are unable to find employment in their respective fields. According to

her, “people need more resources and financial support from the government for special training courses”. While this participant was alluding specifically to physician retraining, other participants in the areas of education and law also contended that there needed to be some reforms in retraining and certification. From their suggestions of ways to counter barriers to employment, most of the participants showed an eagerness and knowledge of the current accreditation process in their respective fields, which in turn demonstrates their desire to continue working in their fields. In addition, their critical awareness of the regulations and policies of licensing bodies is an indication that the women have an understanding of how their employment needs can be met.

Emotional Impact of the Loss of Socio-Economic Status

What is perhaps most alarming is the degree to which some of the participant’s morale had suffered at not being able to work in their professions and the sense of defeat that some of the participants expressed at the loss of their professional status. The lack of recognition of foreign credentials has had a devastating impact on some of the participants which became apparent through their reluctance that they could not work in their profession and would therefore not be able to achieve the level of economic and social mobility which they once had. For some of the participants, the downward mobility they experienced as a result of not being able to work and practice in their fields, was weighing heavily upon their sense of self-worth and self-esteem. As one woman said, “I have nothing and I do nothing”. This sense of despair illustrates the indignities that the women suffered at not being able to find employment. Another participant who was a doctor in Afghanistan spoke about the profession she loved and revealed that she had always defined herself through her work as a doctor. She felt a tremendous loss at not

being able to practice as a doctor in Canada and she said; “I feel angry and upset that this is happening to me. Before, people would come to me and respected me, now things are different, I helped so many people before”. She is currently grappling with low morale from her loss of status, and while she is working in her community and is respected by others, she feels a great loss in terms of her status and responsibilities as a doctor. She also expressed the far-reaching implications of such despair as she asked, “if parents become depressed, how can they become positive role-models for their children?” She went on to say that she has a difficult time staying positive given the mounting obstacles she has to face with regard to her employment situation and the uncertainty about her entitlement to practice as a physician in Canada. Therefore, finding employment is not only important to integrate economically, rather it becomes integral to one’s sense of dignity, morale and sense of self-worth.

The majority of the women did not want to settle for just “any job” and felt it was necessary to locate employment in their field of training. One participant mentioned that finding a job in one’s respective field would increase the morale and confidence of women and could very well counter some of the depression felt by some Afghan women in her community at their loss of professional status. As one woman said, “for me, it was my livelihood, I really liked working, I felt happy”. For some of the participants’ finding a survival job which entailed working in a store or restaurant with minimal hours, was their only means to sustain themselves financially but these types of jobs also presented a new set of challenges for women. As one woman commented about the conditions of her survival job, “I [had] very unpredictable hours, I didn’t know how long I would be working, sometimes one hour or the whole day and so this [uncertainty] was very

stressful for me, I didn't know how much money I would be make". She went on to say that those feelings have long since subsided as she was able to find a stable working environment which reduced her precarious situation and lessened her anxiety related to her financial situation. While some of women were working in areas not explicitly related to their fields, they really valued their current positions as they were respected by their colleagues, had financial security, and thoroughly enjoyed the tasks and duties they were responsible for. This in turn illustrates that employment outside one's respective field can also be rewarding as the position may have desirable characteristics which make a "good job".

When asked about the biggest adjustment made since coming to Canada, three participants expressed that their "loss in professional status" was the most difficult to come to terms with. These participants had been working in their professions for over eight years and had undergone extensive training and held post-graduate degrees. From their experiences, it becomes evident that finding employment in one's respective field means more than simply having economic security and is extremely complex as it involves a sense of pride, self-worth, productivity and achievement- feelings which are important to one's overall well-being and perspective on life. It is also important to note that all of the participants with the exception of one expressed that they all wished to one day work in their respective fields but were not sure that it would become a reality.

Despite the far-reaching implications that the lack of recognition for their credentials presents, most of the women used various strategies to improve their labour market suitability. They did this by obtaining Canadian qualifications, by attending college and university programs or by obtaining Canadian experience, through volunteer

work, or working for multicultural organizations. Interestingly enough, while most of the participants expressed some degree of dissatisfaction over their employment situation, their determination to one-day work in their field illustrates their ambition. Their ideas, skills and talents should be utilized. As one participant so eloquently said as she began a new career in social work, “I realize that I am [suited] to the field of social work and this is now my ambition, I have a lot to contribute from my experiences”.

Other Barriers to Economic Integration

Some of the participants also discussed what they perceived as a “penalty” for having a gap in their employment histories, as most of the women interviewed, had gone several years without employment due in large part to restrictions imposed upon them in Afghanistan and in their first country of asylum. All of the women interviewed with the exception of one, had gaps in their education and employment which prevented them from upgrading their education and finding employment, as their professions require new training and skills development. Only three women were able to work in their country of first asylum and in their respective fields. These three women believed that this increased their ability to find employment in Canada in fields which were relatively related to their interests and educational backgrounds. However, the lack of “Canadian experience” was also identified by women as a barrier to finding employment, as employers often did not recognize or value the women’s related experience as it was obtained abroad.

At least two of the women interviewed revealed that they had disabilities which prevented them from finding employment. As a result, they felt as though they had little options or hope for any employment at all. One woman explained that she had been

dismissed from a job due to her inability to undertake certain tasks as a result of her disability. She went on to say that she wished that employers were more “understanding and sensitive to people with disabilities” as she was not accommodated. Her dismissal from her last position had greatly impacted her confidence when searching for a job as she said, “there isn’t much for me”.

Intergenerational Tensions

Numerous studies dealing specifically with immigrant and refugee parenting, have indicated that integrating into a new culture and society not only impacts the individual but the family unit as a whole (Tyyskä, 2005). Often times, new roles and family expectations create further challenges to one’s ability to integrate. The women spoke about the ways in which their families negotiate two cultures, Afghan and Canadian. Most of the women interviewed highlighted the challenges that surround parenting, while seven of the women articulated what they perceived as their pressing concerns over intergenerational tensions, particularly with regards to retaining the parents language and cultural practices.

The women shared their concerns over peer influence, the acquisition of undesirable aspects of the new culture, and the fear of loss of language and cultural values. One woman said, “children are very critical to our lives and community”. To them, maintaining vital aspects of Afghan culture were integral to the integration of the entire family. As one woman said, “when one element of the family is shaken, the entire family is affected”. While her comment was in direct reference to her daughter’s behaviour, her statement described the family unit as being interconnected and when one member is experiencing problems, all members are affected. This example points to the

importance of family harmony and balance that is characteristic of Afghan culture. It also illustrates the collective nature of Afghan families, which can be challenged in face of a new culture with values, and customs which do not reflect their family system. The latter preoccupation kept some participants from carrying out their daily activities. One participant revealed that she worries so much that sometimes forgets her appointments or her errands. However, the participants' recognition of the shift in their children's behaviour was evident. Nevertheless, the participants were aware of the dilemmas facing her children, which could have the potential to incite them to be more sympathetic to some of the challenges facing their children. One woman expressed they are, "caught between two different worlds".

The study participants often take issue with behaviour which they believe their children are acquiring at school, mostly among peers. One participant whose son graduated from elementary school with honours was proud of his accomplishment but feared that he would pick up "bad habits" from other children. At least six of the women expressed a serious concern over their children acquiring undesirable aspects of the new culture. One woman mentioned the fear of her daughter dating and contended, "she will not be able to have [the same] freedoms as other children, she will not be able to have a boyfriend". Therefore in many ways, these mothers fear that the Afghan cultural values, which they are trying to instil in their children, will be compromised if they exemplify disrespectful behaviour.

Despite their concerns, the women wanted their children became more a part of Canadian culture. One woman said "I want my daughter to have friends and to integrate" but she also wanted her daughter to "understand her limitations". One woman made the

following remarks which reflect her anxieties about her children losing their Afghan culture;

I am scared my children are losing the language...There is no school for them to practice. There are some mosques... but a lot of them ask for money for the lessons, we cannot afford it...I am so worried.

From these responses, it becomes clear that the participants have identified areas of concern with regard to their children's socialization which are centred around retaining and respecting cultural values, and maintaining strong family ties. While the women did not provide detailed descriptions about the specific issues facing them as parents, they did allude to some issues such as dating, staying out late with friends, and lack of knowledge about their religion.

What becomes increasingly important in these discussions with women about parenting is that their concerns about their children's upbringing are sometimes painful to cope with, most of the participants were integrating along with their children, as they attempted to retain their values while acquiring new parenting techniques. Similarly, their children are embracing mainstream Canadian values yet are trying to retain their parent's cultural and religious values. However, in some cases it appeared that their children were integrating at a faster rate so it is no wonder that there would be some clashes in values.

One woman said "the relationship between parents and children was a lot different back home...the children are not listening to us...they are not accepting us" and went on to say that something needed to be done to resolve the situation. However, some of the participants were aware of the inevitable compromises that they would have to make as a parent. One woman summed it up saying, "I want my daughter to be able to

come to me with all of her problems and trust [me]. I want to change myself to help my daughter”.

Reconciling the Cultural Divide

The participants who expressed concern over their children’s behaviour and retention of Afghan cultural values, went into great detail about the need for coping mechanisms such as classes and support groups to deal with some of the intergenerational issues. It was believed by some of the participants that programs such as parenting classes, youth groups and violence preventions seminars could help to ease families through their transition to a new culture while maintaining family harmony by providing strategies for dealing with difficult parenting situations and contemporary issues facing children in schools.

Some of the women interviewed also stressed the importance of utilizing and locating parenting resources and believed that Afghan parents need an outlet where they can share their fears and frustrations in a comfortable environment that recognizes and respects their religious and cultural values. One participant believed that parents need to find ways of coping and countering some of their difficulties in the face of the challenges of raising their children and stressed that some degree of change is inevitable as she said “we are changing with our children”. The participants recognized that they must “meet the children half way” and that learning about new parenting strategies and coping mechanism would help them to understand the pressures that come from trying to integrate into “two worlds” can have on their children. Interestingly enough, one participant compared the expectations placed on her children to retain Afghan cultural and religious values while taking on a set of Canadian customs and beliefs with her initial

arrival to Canada where she too was expected to retain while taking on new aspects of Canadian culture. Her recognition that her children's struggles were similar to her was in some ways refreshing as she explained that over time she was able to achieve and maintain the balance or preserving her Afghan culture while accepting a new way of life. This in turn provided her with hope that her children in time would be able to overcome their struggles and would "find their space".

The idea of youth and parenting workshops was thought to lead to a better understanding of the issues both parents and youth are facing. From the above statements, it becomes evident that these women are also integrating with their children and are trying to maintain their beliefs, while attempting to take on ways of parenting.

Support Systems and Integration

Participants were asked questions pertaining to their support systems such as family, community, friends and sponsoring groups. This question was asked in order to gain a sense of whether if any support systems were facilitating women's integration. It was also asked in order to uncover if there was a lack of support and to identify areas where women needed more assistance. The majority of the participants made reference to support, which they received from their families, communities, sponsoring group and social services.

Most of the participants believed that they needed to take steps towards facilitating their own integration. However, as the interviews progressed, it became evident that they viewed support systems as necessary to integrate. While cohesiveness among ethnic groups can be a source of support and comfort which is necessary for integration, interacting with members outside is also important as it enables newcomers

to gain some insight into the host countries customs, values. Also, interacting with others has the potential to open up new avenues for such things as employment, social services, networking, improving language level or becoming familiar with various aspects of the host society-which are all integral to integrating into a new country.

The participants interviewed had been living in Canada from three and half to fourteen years, however participation in the larger Canadian society appeared limited. For example, five of the women revealed that they had no "Canadian friends" and that they preferred to interact exclusively with other Afghans. A number of women explained that their lack of Canadian friends and their participation outside of their communities was due to their limited fluency in English. At least three women mentioned that they felt more at ease and comfortable with Afghan people, as a result of shared language and mutual cultural values. One participant said that she wished she could have more friends but her "English is not good".

Another woman said that "her family was priority", revealing that she preferred to invest her time supporting and nurturing her family as she did not have much time for socializing "outside". Three of the participants identified Canadian friends, most of whom were made up of neighbours and work colleagues. Most of the participants who stated that they did not have Canadian friends, faced serious language barriers while those with Canadian friends were employed and had a greater degree of fluency in English. Once again, it becomes clear that language presents serious challenges to women's integration as it becomes difficult for them to interact with those outside of their communities.

While family appeared to be a common support for all of the participants, some of the women drew support from other spheres such as counselling and legal services, health care and assistance with immigration related issues. For the majority of participants a strong family presence which supports cultural values and traditions coupled with formal and community support, was a means of integrating as their needs were being met within various circles. These factors are discussed below.

Family as a Source of Support For Integration

In Afghan culture, there is a strong emphasis placed on family which includes extended family. Traditionally, Afghan people are very family oriented and collective in nature and draw a great deal of support and strength this sphere (Lindgren 124, 2004). As one woman said, “family is important to us, we need to be connected with our family and extended families”. Another woman said in reference to her family, “we are happy here, we have our independence... we live here together, we started life here together and we rely on each other’s support”. In fact, when asked to identify which groups or individuals the women turned to when in need of support, all of the participants mentioned that their families were their primary support and offered them emotional support and understanding. As one participants said in reference to her family, “I feel comfortable with my family, they accept me and make me feel good”.

As it was clearly stated by the majority of participants, their family unit is a major source of support however, when that support is not in place it can create serious challenges for some women as it seen as an absence of crucial support. Some of the women felt a great sense of despair at being separated from their family, and found it difficult to cope: “It was [so] hard being alone, I think a lot about my family back home.”

Being away from family was identified by some of the participants as being one of the most difficult adjustments to living in Canada. While the majority of the participants had various supports in place, the issue of family reunification was seen as an impediment to successful integration. This was especially the case for women who had been separated from their families for many years. Family reunification entails the reunion or joining of family members from abroad. Some of the women discussed the difficulties they faced as a result of the absence of their family members. One woman made mention of her family members who continue to live in asylum in Pakistan, "I am happy here but most of the time I am thinking about my family, [I wish] that I could go and see them but [economic] problems don't allow me to go". Another women spoke about how she "felt lonely and depressed" without the support of her family.

The participants who identified family as integral to their integration received much more than emotional support. As one woman explained that simply being in the presence of family members gave her a sense of familiarity and comfort that she really missed. She went on to say that when she arrived to Canada alone, she rarely left her house and would often cry because she missed her parents and siblings. While some of her feelings of sadness have subsided, she continues to feel a void. Three of the participants remain separated from their immediate family and are currently attempting to be reunited through sponsoring and immigration program which deal with family reunification; however, as these participants have disclosed, it can take many years.

From this discussion on the importance of family to women's integration, it becomes clear that for the participants, the weakening of their primary network of support has created major barriers to their integration as some of the participants continue to feel

a loss at not being reunited with their loved one's. As the participants responses suggest, their integration is inextricably linked to the maintenance of their family. Some participants expressed feelings of emptiness at being separated from their family members and revealed that they were often preoccupied as many felt a void and were therefore unable to achieve their desired level of happiness which can adversely affect one's outlook on integration.

Afghan Community Support as a Means of Integration

As previously mentioned, the majority of participants are actively involved in their communities which are made up primarily of Afghans. While the women make great contributions to their communities they also draw support from their fellow community members. The majority of the women interviewed expressed the comfort and support they received from their communities. The women who were involved in their communities, spoke so often about the emotional support they received while participating in initiatives such as Afghan festivities and important religious celebrations. This was especially the case for women who had been separated from family and found comfort in taking part in activities with individuals with shared values and beliefs. As one participant mentioned, "we have so much in common, our religion, our food and language".

The range of support varied among the women interviewed. Some participants received financial support from their community, while others received emotional support in the form of visits, large gathering and events, where the women could interact with other Afghans. At least eight of the women interviewed contended that community affiliation was important to them, as they were not familiar with the city in which they

first arrived and had a limited number of friends. As one participant revealed upon her arrival with her family, “the community reached out to us and made us feel comfortable and [enabled us] to see that we were not alone and helped us the whole way through”.

This support made their initial transition smoother. Another woman said, “our community helped us a lot, drove us around and helped us to find a place to live.

The women who received support from their communities were very willing to return the kind gestures and believed that their community involvement was instrumental in shaping their positive outlook for their future and wanted to share this with others.

One participant for instance said, “we can be examples for others and share our experiences”. The community spirit that was alive in many women provided them and their families with a sense of belonging and for many a renewed sense of hope and comfort that they knew they were not alone. For at least half of the women interviewed, their rapport with their community enabled them to feel “a connection with other Afghans” which was important especially in the beginning when, “everything was new and foreign”. Therefore, community participation was key to improving the well-being of the participants and the community as a whole. When discussing community involvement, the majority of the participants spoke with passion and a sense of pride about their community. As one participant said “our community is very strong and we help each other to achieve our goals”.

For at least three of the participants, their involvement with the Afghan community led to employment opportunities. Through their work with the Afghan community the women learned how to access social services, education and the health care system, and have since, formally and informally, passed this knowledge and their

experiences to assist other Afghan men and women in Canada. For at least two of the participants, their involvement in settlement agencies which provide specific services for Afghan people, has enabled them to facilitate workshops and discussions for Afghan women aimed at familiarizing them with basic information to help in their integration, such as accessing social services and information about other community agencies.

Another channel of support which half of the participants discussed was in relation to their sponsoring group who had made a commitment to sponsor them from their first country of asylum and are responsible for helping the women transition. At least five of the participants mentioned that relatives and the Afghan community in their cities had sponsored them. All five of the participants who had been sponsored mentioned that the initial assistance that was provided by their sponsoring group was key in their initial integration. Some women revealed that their sponsoring groups had also helped them to find employment, housing, and access social services which familiarized women with the range of service available to them. One woman felt particularly indebted to her sponsoring group and believed that they were instrumental in her integration as they helped her to build her confidence and provided her with on-going encouragement and support during difficult times when she was separated from her immediate family. As a result of their positive experiences with their sponsoring groups, four of the participants expressed that they were inspired to provide other families with the same hospitality and support they have received. As one participant who had been sponsored said in relation to her involvement in the community “this makes me feel good that I can help my people”.

Religion was also identified as an outlet for support and inner strength by two of the participants. When the participants were asked to which group or individuals they

turn to during difficult times, two women mentioned religion, and commented that their Islamic faith had provided them with hope and peace of mind. For these participants, their religious convictions instilled in them a sense of optimism to overcome their challenges and as one participant said, “our religion has helped us a lot to see a clear path and to move [ahead]”. Therefore, support and encouragement is not only found in people or groups but can also be found in one’s religion.

Support through Social Services

Another interesting finding was that while family and the Afghan community were sources of support for the most of the participants, for some women their support systems had expanded since coming to Canada. At least three of the women interviewed mentioned that social services, including subsidized daycare were provided to them, enabling them to continue language courses or search for employment. Three women who at the time had been experiencing challenges in finding a safe and affordable place to live specifically mentioned social housing. As one participant expressed with regards to subsidized housing, “it would help us to become financially stronger for [our] children”. Translation and interpreting services and counselling were also important factors to facilitate Afghan women’s integration, especially when women are in need of advocacy, legal assistance and referrals. Special reference was made to such services during medical and legal appointments, as it would appear that some women were not comfortable communicating to doctors and would prefer to have interpreters present during consultations.

The same women also expressed that, “interpreters can help break the isolation” facing many women who are reluctant to access social services for fear that they will not

be able to communicate their concerns. As these women mentioned, interpreters enable women to articulate their problems in a comfortable manner, which allows them to begin to advocate for themselves. For precisely that reason, it becomes apparent that social services including interpreters are crucial for women to access services needed to remedy some of their challenges so that they are able to move forward with their lives.

Social workers also play an important role in providing support and advocacy, which some participants said greatly assisted them during difficult times in their lives. For example, for some women locating financial resources such as welfare and subsidized housing presented serious challenges. Moreover, the need to rely on such provisions invoked a sense of embarrassment, as the women had never had to rely upon such services in the past. It was apparent through the interviews that some participants found it difficult to talk about the financial support they received as two women emphasized that they did not want to rely on social services to survive “but had no choice”. One woman revealed the shame and sadness that she and her husband felt at having to rely on social services but contended that her social worker was kind and understanding which alleviated some of her embarrassment so that she did not feel like a “charity case”. Another participant shared a story about her first year in Canada during which time she was not legally entitled to work and so her husband was the sole provider. However, he sustained serious injuries and was unable to work, therefore she received an emergency check from social services. She went on to say that when she arrived home with the check “my husband was crying, not because of the pain from the injuries but [because] he was ashamed that he could not help us” or provide for the family.

Four women expressed their gratitude towards women's organizations and settlement agencies, which often assisted the participants with immigration related issues, such as sponsoring family members, applying for citizenship and permanent residency. Six women mentioned that they received services from settlement agencies and women's organizations such as interpreting, translations, counselling, advocacy, referrals which increased their accessibility to social services and health care. Another participant commented on the assistance she received from a local women's organization, "they helped me a lot but now I know where the services are". It was also revealed by two participants that women's organizations also contributed to women's personal development by providing computer training, job search workshops, self-esteem workshops and organized outings for women. Therefore, these agencies were involved in helping women to become familiar with their community resources and in boosting their confidence, which lead to greater autonomy for some participants.

While most of the participants alluded to having positive experiences with social service providers, there were some participants who expressed that the long waiting lists for subsidized housing made it difficult for them to sustain their families financially, as they struggled to pay rent they cannot afford. Another two women expressed that they felt uncomfortable accessing the health care system and must go to walk-in clinics with "different doctors all of the time" which is as a result of the shortage of family doctors. One woman said, "we want some consistency and would like to have the same doctor but there is a waiting list". It was also revealed by two women that as a result of waiting lists, their health and mental health issues went unattended. Another participant mentioned that while she did have a family doctor, "he is too busy". When asked what made her feel

that her doctor was too busy, the participant disclosed that appointments are short and did not make any further comments. The hesitation by some participants to access the health care system raises serious concerns over the women's well-being and whether the health care system is being responsive to the needs of refugee and immigrant women.

While there was some frustration in accessing social services, particularly from participants who had negative encounters with the health care system, most of the participants appeared to be content with their ability to access services. Therefore, for most of the participants, their traditional support systems took on new meaning and were replenished to include social services, social workers and interpreters, who could help the participant's along their journey of integration.

Learning The System As A Means of Integration

Seven of the ten women interviewed acknowledged the importance of having a good understanding of the Canadian system, which according to them includes legal rights and obligations and social services. There was a great deal of emphasis placed on "learning about the system" as it would provide women with the necessary tools needed to advocate and empower themselves and to gain an awareness of their rights and privileges in Canada. One woman, commenting from her personal experience remarked, "no one tells you about the system" implying that women must learn the structure on their own.

However, language barriers were identified as an impediment for half of the participants in accessing the system and learning how to survive within it. Just as some women struggled to learn English, they also struggled to learn the system, which can be daunting given the complexity of Canada's social security and legal system. One

participant stated that after ten years living in Canada she is still “unclear” about all of the program, services and provisions that make up the Canadian system. Nonetheless, it was refreshing to see that while there were some language difficulties, these women continued to inform themselves by trying to find out more by asking community members and social service providers.

Learning which services are available and rights as residents of Canada were identified as being crucial to successful integration. The participant’s recognition of the importance of knowing the systems points to the need for more dissemination about the programs and services available under the Canadian government but also information about rights and responsibilities. For many participants, learning the system equipped them with the necessary knowledge and resources they require to meet their needs and those of their family.

Chapter VIII

Conclusion

Introduction

This qualitative study has explored some of the factors influencing the cultural, economic and social integration of Afghan women living in three major cities in Canada. The intent of this study was to examine Afghan women's perception of their experiences of integration and to identify factors which facilitate and inhibit integration. This study also seeks to raise awareness of the plight of Afghan women in Canada as there is no existing studies which focus on their experiences of integration. Therefore, the aim was to create a new piece of research, which included the voices of Afghan women. This study also highlighted the complexity of integration and pinpoints some of the shortcomings in dominant discourse and immigration literature. As I have suggested throughout this research, dominant models used to explain integration have rendered invisible the complex nature of integration and women's experiences.

The findings from this study do, however, resonate with some of the findings in the immigration literature on immigrant and refugee women's integration. As the findings from this study have revealed, there are many factors influencing the cultural, economic and social integration of Afghan women living in Canada. As discussed by all of the participants, language barriers presented the most serious obstacles for women who, as a result of their limited language skills, were without employment, unable to communicate effectively with others and had difficulty in understanding the system. In addition, their lack of English language skills appeared to have affected their morale and self-esteem.

Finding employment was also identified as being key to integration. More than half of the participants were not able to find suitable employment due to factors relating to the lack or recognition for foreign credentials, lack of Canadian experience and gap in their employment history.

All of the participants reported that they had many supports such as family, community, friends and social services, which continue to assist them in adjusting to life in Canada. However, it would appear that despite the many mechanisms in place to facilitate women's integration, most of the women interviewed made great efforts to confront the obstacles before them by seeking alternatives and opportunities for themselves and their families. For instance, some of those who were not able to work in their fields decided to pursue other professions and have identified their transferable skills. This is not to say that their obstacles have ceased to exist, but rather that the women interviewed have a renewed positive outlook, which enabled them to turn some of their challenges into goals. For example, some of the women interviewed expressed that a language barrier was excluding them from the workforce. However, they did not concede but rather discussed their long-term goals of achieving a better level of English and were working towards their vision.

None of the women interviewed gave any impression that they saw themselves as helpless or passive victims. To the contrary, all of the women interviewed expressed an overwhelming desire to overcome their obstacles and acknowledged the dire need to "move forward" with their lives. As one woman revealed when dealing with the absence of her family and unemployment, "I had to learn how to make myself happy". The participants described various methods that would enable them to move beyond or to

work through their situations, whether it was attending more ESL classes, job search workshops, parenting classes, or obtaining their driver's license. It was obvious that the women's desire to change their immediate situation and to integrate was a priority. In fact, more than half of the women interviewed had well thought out plans of action to achieve certain goals. For example, some of the women identified their lack of transportation as constricting their movement and thus increased their dependency on others and public transportation. However, they aspired to get their driver's license, which would enable them to drive around to get groceries and help the family. As one woman said, "this is a big accomplishment for me". Obtaining a driver's license led her to a greater sense of autonomy for herself and her family. In addition, the women set feasible and realistic goals for themselves and appeared to be quite informed by the processes involved in such things as re-certification or enrolling in a new program at school and were eager to be involved in such initiative or had already begun the process and were well on their way towards a career path. According to one participant, "you have to have goals, you have to go forward, not backwards" which again shows the resilience and strength of women to move beyond their obstacles.

Another remarkable finding from the interviews was that the women interviewed predominantly spoke of their experiences of integration in a collective manner using "we" instead of "I". For example, when I asked the women what life in Canada had enabled them to do or to achieve, the majority of the participants answered with such comments as, "we are free here", "we have more opportunities" and "we have access to health care and education". It was also observed that the women's experiences extended beyond the family unit and into the community with close friends who for most of the

participants were considered family members. At least five of the women interviewed revealed that their local Afghan community in Canada, family members or close family friends had sponsored them from abroad. As these findings suggest, integration is not an individualistic experience as portrayed in a great deal of the literature and in models to explain integration. In fact, it would appear that participants viewed themselves as integration alongside family and community members. Therefore, this study highlights the collective nature of integration, which opens up new ways of thinking about the ways in which newcomers adjust to a new country.

Another participant revealed, “it is my dream to return back to Afghanistan to work again as a doctor alongside [my] people”. This participant is determined to realize this goal once her children have grown up. Another participant said, “I am not afraid of trying new things, I am very open to challenges and [I am] always looking for ways to solve issues”. While this statement was articulated by one woman it was in the testimonies of other participants who also identified the importance of having a positive attitude and an eagerness to learn from others and to be open trying new things. Despite their hardships, most of the women interviewed appeared to have kept their hopes and aspirations alive and were proactive in their pursuit of their dreams and goals.

These findings also suggest that integration is not a linear process and does not occur at the same rate for all individuals. Moreover, an individual may be integrated in one aspect of their lives but not in other areas. For example, some of the participants expressed that they had achieved a level of belonging, which would facilitate their social integration, however, due to employment barriers their economic integration has suffered. This type of analysis is lacking in much of the immigration literature. Therefore, the

findings generated from these interviews challenge dominant models of integration and shed light on the need for more inclusive models which recognize the complexity of newcomer integration and that take into account the gendered nature of integration. These findings also suggest that length of time in Canada impacted women's potential to integrate. For example, it was found that the longer women were in Canada, the greater English language fluency and understanding of system, all of which are crucial to women's integration.

In addition, intergenerational issues appeared to be an impediment to the study participant's peace of mind and well-being which was also raised in other studies. Interestingly enough, these tensions between children and parents encouraged some of the participants to change and to adopt new parenting techniques. Another significant finding was women's difficulties securing employment in their respective fields as a result of the repressive employment policies in Afghanistan, which kept women out of work and school for many years. The gap in employment and education common among all of the participants makes it increasingly difficult for women to upgrade or to pursue higher education. This in turn affects women's ability to integrate economically and socially as their moral suffers as a result.

Nonetheless, most of the participants found comfort and support within various support systems. However, family appeared to be the most important support resource for the study participants. Community involvement also facilitated the participants' integration as they were able to contribute to their community, gain a sense of belonging and support. Nonetheless, some of the participants were accessing other support systems found in social services and were able to experience support through new means. The

findings from this study also illuminate women's agency and resilience despite the many barriers they face with regards to integration.

From the literature reviewed and interviews conducted with Afghan women, this study suggests the need for a holistic approach which views immigrant and refugee women's integration as a long-term process and avoids placing all women in a predictable model. An increased understanding on the part of service providers and health practitioners of the past experiences of Afghan women is also needed with special attention to their issues of employment as they have been intensified due to years of repressive policies which forbade women to work and to attend school. This recognition of women's past experiences has the potential to render services more receptive for such women, which will result in more Afghan women accessing services which they often need to address some of their difficulties.

The stories and experiences shared by the study participants make it clear that immigrant and refugee women cannot be assumed to be a homogenous group. Therefore, a greater recognition for women's individual experiences is required in order to provide specialized services for women instead of assuming that all the needs of immigrant and refugee women are the same. The contributions which this research make to understanding Afghan women's integration in Canada include the overwhelming sense of concern over women's inability to have their credentials recognized and the loss of status incurred as a result of barriers to employment. Another remarkable finding from this research involves the issues facing Afghan women and their families around intergenerational conflicts. This study recognizes the importance of considering women's pre-flight and experiences in their first country of asylum as it can reveal a

great deal of insight into Afghan women's present circumstances and integration outcomes.

This study also challenges negative stereotypes of immigrant and refugee women as passive or docile as often portrayed in the media. Even more astounding is the persistence the participants showed in coming up with new innovative ways to counter their obstacles be it family conflicts or language barriers. This perseverance on the part of the majority of participants points to the fact that while many of the participants were not employed and did not have English fluency, they were attempting to reconcile some of their challenges. In this way, many study participants, especially those who were unemployed or lacked language skills, were postponing their goals but not abandoning them.

The study participants made several recommendations, which would help them throughout their integration such as increased language training, financial assistance for retraining courses and self-esteem workshops. Mentoring programs for women would also prove to be beneficial in order to facilitate women's transition into their respective field. In addition, licensing bodies and professional association should be proactive in facilitating Afghan women's integration and other immigrant and refugee women by putting measures in place which would act as solutions to their gaps in employment and education. It was also suggested that immigration policies pertaining to family reunification be reformed, especially processing times.

In order to foster effective measures to assist Afghan women throughout their integration it is imperative to continue research in this area. It is only through academic undertakings such as this study that the needs of such women can be made visible and

their voices heard. A critical understanding of the factors influencing Afghan women's integration will lead to much needed changes in services and policies that affect key aspects of integration for Afghan women.

Bibliography

Afghan Women's Organization (2002). "About Afghan Women's Organization" Homepage
<http://www.afghanwomen.org/aboutus.htm>
 Retrieved: May 10, 2005

Ager, A. (1999). "Perspectives on the Refugee Experience." In Refugees: Perspectives on the Experience of Forced Migration. ed. A. Ager, New York: Cassell. pp. 1-23.

Amir, Rina (2002). "From Pawns to Principals: The Future of Afghan Women" in Shattering Myths and Claiming the Future: Women for Afghan Women ed Metha, Sunit. Palgrave Macmillan: New York. p.p 204-210.

Antonowicz, Anton, (2002) "Zarina's Story" in The Mirror June, 20, 2002

Ardevini-Brooker, Joanne (2002). "Feminist Epistemology: The Foundation of Feminist Research and its Distinction from Traditional Research" in Advancing Women in Leadership Journal Vol 20 Spring.
<http://www.advancingwomen.com/awl/spring2002/ARDOV~CG.HTM>
 Retrieved: May 25, 2005.

Becker. G. (1994) Human capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis With Special Reference to Education. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Boyd, Monica (1994). "Canada's Refugee Flows: Gender Inequality" in Canadian Social Trends 32 p.p 7-10.

Boyd, Monica (2003). "Women and Migration: Incorporating Gender into International Migration Theory" in Migration Information Source
<http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/print.cfm.ID=106>
 Retrieved: November 10, 2004

Camino, Linda and Krulfeld, Ruth (1994). Reconstructing Lives, Recapturing Meaning: Refugee Identity, Gender and Culture Change Washington :Gordon and Breach Publishers

Canadian Council for Refugees. State of Refugees in Canada.
<http://www.web.ca/~ccr/state.html#Integration%20program>
 Retrieved: October 10, 2004

Canadian Council for Refugees (2001) International Conference on Refugee Women Fleeing-Gender Based Persecution Conference Proceedings, Montreal.

Canadian Council for Refugees (2003). General of Canada, Chapter 5, Citizenship and Immigration Canada - Control and Enforcement
<http://www.web.net/~ccr/AGresponse.html>

Retrieved: November 9, 2004.

Canadian Council for Refugees (1998) Best Settlement Practices: Settlement Services for Refugees and Immigrants in Canada

http://www.web.net/%7Eccr/bpfinal.htm#N_12_

Retrieved: December 20, 2004

Castles, Stephen, Korac, Maja, Vasta, Ellie and Steven Vertovec. (2002). Integration: Mapping the Field. Oxford: University of Oxford Centre for Migration and Policy Research and Refugee Studies Centre.

Catholic Immigration Centre (1998)

Afghanistan: A Cultural Profile Ottawa: Catholic Immigration Centre.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2002) Immigration Overview: Facts and Figures

<http://www.cic.gc.ca>

DeVault, M. (1990). 'Talking and listening from women's standpoint: feminist strategies for interviewing analysis'. Social Problems 37, p.p.710-721.

Iowa State University (n.d) "Dictionary of Critical Sociology"

<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~rmazur/dictionary/a.html>

Dupree, L. (1980). Afghanistan. Princeton University Press.

Dupree, Nancy H. (1998a). The Women of Afghanistan. Swedish Committee for Afghanistan. Geneva: United Nations

Dupree, N.H. 1998b. Afghan Women Under the Taliban in Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban (Ed. Maley, W.). New York: New York University Press.

European Council on Refugees and Exiles

http://www.ecre.org/eu_developments/future/untow1.doc

Retrieved November 7, 2004.

Forbes, Susan (1995). Refugee Women. London: Zed Books Limited

European Council on Refugees and Exiles (2002) "Position on the of refugees in Europe"

<http://www.ecre.org/positions/integ02.shtml>

Retrieved: October 23, 2004

Gardam, Judith and Jarvis, Michelle (2001). Women, Armed Conflict and International Law. Netherlands: Kluwer Law International

Garnder-Keagan Gardiner (1995). Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice. Illinois: University of Illinois.

Greatbatch, Jacqueline (1989) "The Gender Difference: Feminist Critiques of Refugee Discourse" in International Journal of Refugee Law

Harding, Sandra (1991). Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Hartsock, N. C. M. (1983). Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism. New York: Longman.

Hill-Collins, Patricia (1990). Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Holland J, Ramazanoglu, C (1994). "Coming to Conclusions: Power and Interpretation in Researching Young Women's Sexuality" in Purvis J, Maynard M (eds.) Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective. London: Falmer Press.

Hulewat, Phyllis. (1996). "Resettlement: A Cultural and Psychological Crisis" in Social Work Vol 41(2). p.p 129-36

Hundleby, Catherine (2001). Feminist Standpoint Theory as a Form of Naturalist Epistemology Ottawa: National Library of Canada, Canadian Theses Series

Hundleby, Catherine. 1997. Where standpoint stands now. Women and Politics 18 (3), p.p 25-43. .

Hirji, Faiza (2003). The Woman Behind the Man: Politicized portrayals of Afghan Muslim Women in Wartime. Ottawa: National Library of Canada, Canadian Theses Series

Immigration and Refugee Board
http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/media/speeches/1997/cba_e.htm
 Retrieved: November 20, 2004.

Indra, Doreen (1998). Engendering Forced Migration: Theory and Practice. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Jackson, Andrew and Smith, Ekuwa (2002) Does a Rising Tide Lift All Boats? The Labour Market Experiences and Incomes of Recent Immigrants 1995-98 Canadian Council on Social Development: Ottawa

Janson, G., Davis, R (1998) "Honoring voice and visibility: Sensitive-topic research and feminist interpretive inquiry" in Affilia 13, p.p 289-311

Kage, Joseph (1962). With Faith and Thanksgiving: The Story of Two Hundred Years of Jewish Immigration and Immigration Aid Effort in Canada, 1760-1960. Montreal: Eagle Publishing.

Kazemipur A. and Shiva S. Halli. (2000) "A Poverty: The Ethnic Dimension" in The New Poverty in Canada: Ethnic Groups and Ghetto Neighbourhoods Toronto:Thompson Educational Publishing. p.p 99-123.

Korac, Maja. (2003) "The Lack of Integration Policy and Experiences of Settlement: A Case Study of Refugees in Rome" in Journal of Refugee Studies Vol. 16(4), p.p 398-421.

Krulfeld, R.M. (1994). "Changing Concepts of Gender Roles and Identities in Refugee Communities" in Reconstructing Lives, Recapturing Meaning: Refugee Identity, Gender and Culture Change. New York: Taylor and Francis.

Kvale, S. (1996). An introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing. California: Sage.

Lanphier, Michael (1983). "Refugee Integration: Models in Action" in International Migration Review. Vol 17(1).

Li, Peter (2003). "Deconstructing Canada's Discourse of Immigrant Integration" in Journal of International Migration and Integration Vol 4(3), p.p 315-333

Lipson, J. G., & Miller, S. (1994, May-June). "Changing roles of Afghan refugee women in the United States" in Health Care for Women International, 15(3), p.p 171-180.

Lipson, J. G & Lindgren, T. (2004). "Finding a Way: Afghan Women's Experience in Community Participation" in Journal of Transcultural Nursing Vol. 15(2), p.p 122-130.

Mata, Fernando (1994). "The Multiculturalism Act and Refugee in Canada" in Refuge. Vol 13(9), p.p 17-20.

Malkki, Liisa H (1995). "Refugees and Exile: From Refugee Studies to the National Order of Things" in Annual Review of Anthropology Vol 24, p.p 495-523.

Macklin, Audrey (1995). "Refugee Women and the Imperative of Category" in Human Rights Quarterly p.p 213-277.

Matsuoka, A and Sorenson, J. (1999). "Eritrean Canadian Refugee Households as Sites of Gender Renegotiation". in Engendering Forced Migration. Oxford. Berghahn Books, p.p 218-241

McSpadden, L.A and Moussa, H. (1993). "I Have A Name: The Gender Dynamics in Asylum and Integration of Ethiopian and Eritrean Refugees in North America". in Journal of Refugee Studies 6, p.p 203-225.

Mensah, Joseph. (2002). "A Blacks and the Canadian Labour Market" in Black Canadians. History, Experiences, Social Conditions. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing

Mertens, Donna (2004). Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods. 2nd Edition California: Sage Publications.

Tastsoglou, Evangelia and Miedema, Baukje. "Immigrant Women and Community Development in the Canadian Maritimes: Outsiders Within?" in The Canadian Journal of Sociology 28(2). p.p. 203-240.

Olson, Jeanette (2004). Women Refugees and into U.S Society: The Case of Women from Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia who Resettled in the United States. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia.

Opoku-Dapaah, Edward (1994). "Landed Refugee Claimants in Canada: Toward an Explanatory Model" in Refuge Vol 13(9), p.p 10-15.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods. California: Sage Publications

Perry, C. M., Shams, M., & DeLeon, C. C. (1998, Winter). "Voices from an Afghan Community in Journal of Cultural Diversity 5(4), p.p 127-131.

Polachek, Solomon. (1990) "Human capital and the Gender Earnings Gap" in E. Kuiper and J. Sap Out of the Margin: Feminist Perspectives on Economics London: Routledge.

Povey, Elaheh Rostami. (2003). "Women in Afghanistan: Passive Victims of the *borga* or Active Social Participants?" in Development in Practice Vol 13(2/3) p.p 266-277

Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan-RAWA (2002). "Shoulder to Shoulder, Hand in Hand: Resistance under the Iron First in Afghanistan" in Radical History Review 82: p.p. 131-140.

Tang, Ning (2002)
"Interviewer and the Interviewee Relationships Between Women" in Sociology 36(3): p.p. 701-721

Seu, B. (2003) The Woman with the Baby; Exploring Narratives of Female Refugees in Feminist Review Vol 73(1) pp. 158-165

Stein Barry N. (1981). "The Refugee Experience: Defining the Parameters of a Field of Study," in International Migration Review, 15:1 (pp.1-2).

Stein Barry N. (1979). "Occupational Adjustment of Refugees: The Vietnamese in the United States" in International Migration Review 13:1(pp. 25-45)

Sultan Barakat and Gareth Wardell (2001) Capitalizing on Capacities of Afghan Women: Women's Role in Afghanistan's Reconstruction and Development. Recovery and Reconstruction Department: Geneva

Sui-Fong Fun, Josephine (2000). Silent No More: How Women Experience Wife Abuse in the Local Chinese Community
National Archives: National Library Thesis Series

Swigonski, Mary. (1994). "The Logic of Feminist Standpoint Theory for Social Work Research" in Social Work Vol 39(4), p.p 387-393

UNHCR (2002). "Chapter 3.2 'Taking Account of Gender'" in Refugee Integration: An International Handbook To Guide Reception and
<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/tehis/vtx/home>
Retrieved: October 15, 2004

UNHCR (2001). "From the Foreign Land" Poland: Vol 14
http://www.unhcr.pl/english/newsletter/14/kryzys_w_afganistanie.php
Retrieved October 15, 2004

UNHCR (2000). The State of the World's Refugees. Oxford University Press. Oxford.

United Nations High Commission for Refugees
<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/tehis/vtx/home>
Retrieved November 5, 2004

UNHCR (2004). "Refugees by Numbers"
<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/tehis/vtx/home>
retrieved January 5, 2005

Rubin, Barnett R. (1996). "Afghanistan: The Forgotten Crisis." in Refugee Survey Quarterly 15 (1), p.p. 57- 78.

Rumbaut, Ruben G (1991). "Migration, Adaptation, and Mental Health: The Experience of Southeast Asian Refugees in the United States." in Refugee Policy: Canada and the United States, ed. Howard Adelman, Toronto: York Lanes Press.

Sushil, Raj. ISIL Year Book of International Humanitarian and Refugee Law 2001
<http://www.worldlii.org/int/journals/ISILYBIHRL/2001/9.html>
retrieved November 2, 2004

Valtonen, Kathleen (2004). "From the Margin to the Mainstream: Conceptualizing Refugee Integration Processes" in Journal of Refugee Studies Vol 17(1), p.p 70-96

Walker, Bridget (1995). "The Question of Gender" in Forced Migration Review

<http://www.fmreview.org/rpn202.htm>
Retrieved: October 15, 2004.

Appendix A

Map of Afghanistan



Source: Embassy of Afghanistan, Ottawa ON
<http://www.afghanemb-canada.net/en/geography>

Appendix B

Public Execution of an Afghan Woman



Source: Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA)
<http://www.rawa.org/murder-w.htm>

Appendix C

Interview Guide

Economic

Can you please tell me which country you were in prior to your arrival in Canada?

How long were you living there?

Can you please tell me if you were employed prior to your arrival in Canada?

If employed, can you please tell me which position or occupation you held before coming to Canada?

Are you currently employed?

If yes, can you please tell me about your experiences of finding employment in Canada? (probes: How did you find your job? Who helped you find it?)

If yes, what are some of the things that you believe have enabled you to secure employment in Canada (learning languages, networking, training or mentoring programs, job search workshops, financial assistance for upgrading skills and credentials)

If no, can you please tell me what you think has contributed to your difficulties in finding employment? (Lack of recognition for foreign credentials, being deskilled or out of the labour market for a long period of time, language barriers, household and familial responsibilities)

If no, what are some of the things you believe will help you to overcome some of your employment challenges?

Cultural

Reflecting back on your experiences of being an Afghan woman in Canada, do you think that you have been accepted and respected by people around you and services you have accessed? (health care, social services and neighbours?-pertaining to dress, language, and beliefs)

If yes, in which ways/what do you believe has enabled you to achieve this level of respect and belonging by others?

If you have found support by these means, how have these groups/individuals played a part in welcoming you to Canada? Can you provide me with an example?

If no, can you please elaborate the reasons for this?

If no, what do you think is hindering your ability to achieve a sense of belonging?

In your opinion, what would help you to achieve a sense of welcome and belonging in Canada?

Can you please tell me about some of the cultural adjustments you have made since arriving in Canada? (learning new language, generational issues with children, changes in status, different communication styles)

Have you ever experienced negative reactions to being an Afghan woman living in Canada? Please elaborate on your experiences.

In your opinion, have you had positive experiences since your arrival to Canada?

If so, can you please tell me a little bit about those positive experiences?

In your opinion, what has been the most significant adjustment you have had to make since coming to Canada?

Social

Can you please tell me about some of things that have helped you to adapt to life in Canada? (learning languages, community groups, friends, family, attending classes, religious membership or women's support group).

In your opinion, what are some of the positive things that you have experienced since your arrival to Canada? (attending university/college, children have a better education, more autonomy/independence)

In your opinion, what has life in Canada enabled you to do, which may not have been possible prior to your arrival here? (higher education, health care, employment opportunities, stable income/security and personal safety).

Can you please tell me about some of the difficulties you have had to make since coming to Canada (difficulty finding employment, daycare learning a new language)

Can you please tell me how you have coped with such difficulties? (family, friends, community, women's groups, religious groups)

Can you please tell me to whom or to which group do you turn to when you are in need of support? (family or religious members, women's group or friends)

Can you please tell me how [some of these people/groups have] assisted you during your time in Canada? (please provide me with an example)

Do you have any Canadian friends?

If no, in your opinion what are the reasons for not having Canadian friends?

If yes, can you tell me how many Canadian friends you have?

If yes, how did you become friends? (attending social events, mutual friends, school, neighborhood or work)

In your opinion, what are the most important factors that would assist you in adjusting to life in Canada? (Accessible transportation, daycare, adequate housing, employment, learning the official languages or family reunification)

General Questions

Can you please tell me how long you have been in Canada? _____ years.

Which level of education did you attain prior to your arrival in Canada? (secondary, college or university)

Do you have any dependants? _____ yes _____ no.

Appendix D

Letter of Invitation/Introduction for Persons to be Interviewed

DATE

Dear (potential interviewee's name),

My name is Natasha Beg and I am a Master's of Social Work (MSW) student from the School of Social Work at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario. As a requirement to obtain my Master's degree in Social Work, I have decided to undertake a thesis on the factors influencing the cultural, social and economic integration of Afghan women in Canada.

You have been identified for your valuable insight and experiences and have been referred to me as a potential participant by _____ (*name of settlement worker/agency*). I am seeking Afghan women of various ages, religions, ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds who have resided in Canada for at least three years or more. Through this study, I hope to identify significant issues affecting the integration of Afghan women in Canada. I also hope that this study will incite further studies in this area and will help to inform service providers, community members and policy makers about the integration issues facing Afghan women.

The interview will take place at a time and location suitable to you and will take no longer than 90 minutes. I would like to tape record the interviews with your permission but you are free to request that the recorder be turned off at any time during the interview. If you would rather not be tape record, I will ask your permission to take short hand notes only.

I will ask questions pertaining to your educational background and employment situation. There may be some risk in this project as you may be uncomfortable with some of the questions and recollection of experiences that I will ask you. Your participation is voluntary, you do not have to answer questions that make you uncomfortable, and you may end the interview at any time. Should you end the interview I will not use the information you have disclosed. Should emotionally difficult issues arise, support is available to you and I will provide you with all of the details on how you can access a female counsellor and referral services. In addition, you will have the option of having a trained cultural interpreter present throughout the interview to translate and explain the series of questions.

I may ask for your permission to use quotes in my final report. However, you will remain anonymous in the final report and your experiences and comments will be identified using general terms and themes. I will conduct the transcription and analysis of your responses to my questions. These notes will be written up and maintained in a safe computer file and the tapes will be locked up. At the end of my study, I will destroy all notes and tapes. I will also ask that you sign a letter of consent which will outline in detail the process of the interview session. If you prefer you may give oral consent. Please note that you will be reimbursed for daycare and transportation costs incurred

Appendix E
Informed consent form for Interviewees

I, (signature of participant) have agreed to take part in an interview, on the factors influencing the cultural, social and economic integration of Afghan women in Canada. I understand that this interview is being conducted by Natasha Beg from the School of Social Work as part of the requirement for her Master's in Social Work.

- I understand that the interview will last no longer than 90 minutes.
- I understand that I will be granted anonymity and none of my personal or identifiable information will be disclosed in the final report.
- I agree to be tape recorded
- I do not agree to be tape recorded

- I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time by advising the researcher.
- I understand that there may be some risk to my participation because some of the questions may make me uncomfortable, or I may be asked to recall some unpleasant experiences.
- I understand that to limit this discomfort I am not obligated to participate in the session should I feel uncomfortable with the topics, subjects or comments made by the researcher.
- I may decline to answer questions.
- I will be provided with a cultural/language interpreter if the need arises
- I will receive a small gift for participating in the session
- I will be compensated regardless if I decide to leave the session before the anticipated end time.
- I may be asked for permission to include quotes in the final report, however, I understand that I may decline this request. These quotes will not contain any identifiable information such as names, dates, locations and a pseudonym will replace my name.
- All interview materials including notes and tapes will be destroyed no later than March 2006
- A report of the interview findings will be presented in the final copy of Natasha Beg's thesis and during her thesis committee.
- I wish to receive a final copy of the research results (contact information provided below)
- I do not wish to receive a copy of the final research results
- I understand that a report of the final copy of the thesis will be to the public.