# A feminist dialogic encounter with refugee women

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## ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine (1) how refugee women who have experienced violent displacement manage the resettlement process and negotiate new identities in unfamiliar settings, and (2) explore ways in which social work practice can be involved in refugee women's lives more effectively and sensitively in accordance with feminist dialogism. Although extensive research on violent displacements exists, little is known about the women fleeing sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Self-reported effects of violent displacement on women and how to address its consequences adequately have yet to be given much attention in social work research. My dissertation pioneers a theorization that builds bridges across knowledge systems by mediating between European and certain aspects of African perspectives to facilitate the resettlement of traumatized and vulnerable refugee women from the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Informed by a feminist dialogical approach to qualitative research, my dissertation presents a detailed analysis of ten in-depth, loosely structured interviews with eight participants in addition to my extensive field notes. As power shifted from my voice, the researcher's, to the diverse voices of the participants, the process necessitated the adoption of a qualitative approach. I make the case for an approach that views the world as "multi-voiced" and takes into account participants' perspectives, transcends fixed assumptions and embraces points of view that embody collective voices.

A feminist dialogical approach to social work research and practice regards the face-to-face encounter as a site of ethical responsibility towards the *other*. Such a theorization implies that the relationship between *self* and *other* underscores responsibility as central to a justice oriented practice. Using Bakhtin's concept of *otherness* and Levinas' "infinite" *other*, I created

dialogic spaces to foreground my ethical responsibility to the *other*. Notions of the infinite *other* and *otherness* allowed me to pay attention to silent voices while acknowledging the limitations of my conceptions and knowledge claims. The proposed approach is well-suited to working with diverse communities that include various underrepresented *others* such as the African *other*, woman as *other* and the refugee *other* from the Great Lakes region. The methodology can also be used to understand peculiar experiences of displacement and identity reconstruction for women who fled other non-European conflict zones, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, which shares many characteristics with the Great Lakes region.

## DEDICATION

In loving memory of my mother Maria Nandigya Nalongo.

You left footprints of determination and perseverance in our lives.

You shall not be forgotten.

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My completion of this project could not have been accomplished without the support of my children Angela, Jeem, Junior, Maria Nandigya, Kyaterekera (Kyate) and Sylvia Sirivar. Your encouragement and support when times got rough are much appreciated and duly noted. I cannot forget the email that started it all:

> "Mom, I googled you. You are everywhere. Your name and your position and the division of aging pop up all the time. It is all so impressive. I can't help but feel you need to add the name of the conferences and papers on your résumé. I feel like I need to tell someone, like we need to record all this good stuff. Maybe a PHD application."

Indeed, a couple of months later, I submitted an application to a PhD program and for that, I am eternally grateful.

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**CHAPTER FIVE**

# CHAPTER ONE
# INTRODUCTION

Historically Canada has been recognized as a country that has made significant contributions to the resettlement of Government Assisted Refugees (GARs), and every year a substantial number of resources are allocated to its Resettlement Assistance Program[1] and related services (planned budget for 2014-15 is $54.9 million (CIC, 2014)).

There are three categories of refugees in Canada: Government Assisted Refugees (GARs), privately sponsored refugees and refugee claimants. This study focuses on GARs, specifically women. Being resettled within communities completely different from their own is difficult for immigrants and refugees but even greater for those who have experienced extreme forms of trauma, which many refugees have (Khanlou, 2010). Funding cuts to resettlement programs, as when in 2011 federal contributions to national settlement programs (excluding Quebec) were cut by more than 5% (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, 2014), have further undermined successful integration and engendered additional negative health outcomes for refugees. These challenges to the resettlement process are the starting point for this dissertation.

## Research Objectives

Through the case example of women who have fled the Great Lakes region of Africa – that is, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – this study

[1] Resettlement assistance is provided by the Government of Canada to Convention Refugees Abroad and, in some instances, to members of the Country of Asylum Class who have been identified as refugees with special needs and who have been admitted to Canada as government-assisted refugees.
http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/outside/resettle-assist.asp

examines how refugee women who have experienced violent displacement[2] manage their resettlement[3] and negotiate identities in unfamiliar social, economic, geographic, cultural and political settings. Secondly, I explore ways in which social work practice can be involved in refugee women's lives more effectively and sensitively in accordance with feminist dialogism. I make recommendations on how existing practice responses can be improved.

The complexity of refugees' resettlement is given shape by several factors. First, while health and social services are available to them when they arrive in Canada, these services were designed for refugees and immigrants who fled western countries. The needs of refugee women from the Great Lakes region are significantly different from their Western counterparts mainly due to ontological and racial differences. Taking these differences into account is integral to a justice-oriented practice which pays attention to the particularities of the service users, in this case, refugee women from the Great Lakes region. In terms of trauma and related mental health services, as an example, Canada is ill-prepared to care for the unprecedented sexual brutality many refugees from the Great Lakes region have endured, brutality that has been recognized as the worst in the world (Jewkes, 2007; Keralis, 2010).

Second, research indicates that refugee women fleeing more recent conflict zones have fewer resources to heal and rebuild their lives than men do (Hyndman & Walton-Roberts, 2000; Martinez, 1997). Many refugee women come from countries in which access to education is limited, and consequently, are unlikely to have been employed outside of their homes prior to displacement. Even those who were previously employed have skills that are not easily transferable to an industrialized work setting (Goodkind & Deacon, 2004).

[2]The terms "forced displacement" and "violent displacement" are used interchangeably in this dissertation.
[3]Resettlement as used here refers to a process of adjusting to Canada's socio-economic environment by refugee women from the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Furthermore, in the absence of familial social networks, refugee women from the Great Lakes region resettle in communities where they remain strangers, often with an increased sense of isolation and marginalization.

Third, for refugee women from the Great Lakes region, trauma from violent displacement is often aggravated by their social positioning as racialized, African refugee women coming from countries with a history of colonization. Refugee women from the Great Lakes region are faced with a double-edged sword because they are fleeing state violence (war, rape and dispossession) and male violence. In addition, they are fleeing poverty often brought on by their inability to participate fully in the economic opportunities of their countries of origin. Upon arrival in Canada, they face new challenges such as lack of language skills and racial discrimination, factors that have negative consequences on how they resettle in their new country (Haragues & Nsubuga, 1996).

**The Research Problem**

Existing research on refugee women from the Great Lakes region who are in Canada is generally disjointed and often fails to advance a nuanced understanding of their special needs and the unique strengths and resources they possess. Given that countries in the Great Lakes region share historical features and general socio-economic characteristics, a region-wide focus for this dissertation was deemed appropriate. Such an approach contributes to an in-depth and nuanced understanding of how these historical and socio-economic features combine to influence refugee women's identity reconstruction and resettlement experiences. Furthermore, the similarity in the experiences of refugee women across the four countries of origin justifies a

theoretical examination of gender and a feminist dialogical approach to identity reconstruction during resettlement.

Although extensive research on violent displacements exists, little is known about women fleeing the Great Lakes region. Some research has been done on women fleeing the wider region of SSA.[4] In some instances, research has focused on an ethnic group or a particular country: Somalia (Bokore, 2013), Rwanda (King, 2011), the Romos of Ethiopia (Kumsa, 2006), Sudan (Hayward, Hajdukowski-Ahmed, Ploeg, & Trollope-Kumar, 2004), or Ethiopia (Danso, 2001). Along with Loughry (2008), I note that self-reported effects of violent displacement on women and how to adequately address its consequences have yet to be addressed in social sciences or social work research. For this reason, my study employs a feminist dialogical perspective to respond specifically to refugee women's experiences of resettlement and identity reconstruction in new settings. As discussed in chapter six, this approach assists in mitigating power relations within a face-to-face encounter and seeks to bridge knowledge systems.

Using a feminist dialogical methodology, my dissertation is driven by the following research question: How do refugee women who have experienced violent displacement manage the resettlement process and negotiate new identities in Canada? The "how" of this question calls for an examination of comprehensive social processes through a flexible conceptual framework that captures the delicate interplay of identity reconstruction and resettlement in Canada as outlined by Kumsa (2006). An analysis of participants' narratives reveals some of

[4]Historically, SSA has not been a region of interest to the Canadian government and researchers. Since the 1994 genocides, the Government of Canada and other European governments have invested a substantial amount of resources and conducted research in the region. My efforts to get the numbers of women who came from SSA to Canada in the last five years have been unsuccessful.

the techniques that refugee women use to manage their resettlement and negotiate new identities, and how existing structures and social services assist or hinder them in this process.

**Structure of the Dissertation**

In Chapter One I discuss the armed conflict in the four countries that constitute the Great Lakes region and discuss the gendered nature of violent displacement. This is followed by an overview of refugee protection in Canada and Canada's current Resettlement Assistance Program including the Women at Risk Program[5]. Next, I turn to the various factors that affect identity reconstruction for refugee women throughout their journey as refugees and resettlement: gender, colonialism, race and racialization in Canada, and social and spatial environments. The discussion of gender and violent displacement throws light on the traumatic effects that violent displacement engenders. Chapter One ends with a discussion of epistemological and theoretical frameworks that inform this study. More specifically, a feminist dialogical epistemology of both qualitative research and identity reconstruction anchor the dissertation and provide the analytical lens through which I examine my data. I shall present life story as conducive to informing theory and to complementing a feminist dialogical approach to identity reconstruction during resettlement in Canada.

Chapter Two describes the methodology and research design of this dissertation. It details the research process, sampling and transcription techniques, as well as the approaches and the techniques used to generate data. I then outline the steps taken during the transcription and review stages as a way to examine a dialogical approach to the analysis of qualitative data.

[5] Women at-Risk Program: http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/ref-sponsor/section-3.asp

Data reduction helped to ascertain the discursive features that each participant employed and the naming of key utterances and/or moments. Consistent with the selected methodology, the final section outlines measures taken to ensure that participants' voices are included in the text. The chapter ends with discussions on dialogical subjectivity, ethical guidelines to conducting research with refugee women, and the limitations of the study design. As used here, subjectivity refers to an aspect of a person's psyche by which she identifies herself and her place in the world (Davies & Hare, 1990).

In Chapter Three I introduce the eight study participants, their narratives and observations selected from my field notes. These are refugee women who fled the Great Lakes region, met the UN Convention for refugee designation, and were resettled in Canada five to ten years prior to my research. I create a profile of each woman with details of when she arrived in Canada and demographic information, such as age, marital status, and number of children in her care.

Chapters Four and Five constitute the heart of the dissertation, and in them I am primarily concerned with identifying and analyzing extracts and quotations from research participants' narratives. I use the following four themes to delineate key moments and/or utterances: being a refugee, resettlement, belonging and recognition, and identity reconstruction. Analyzing the data allowed me to establish participants' responses to the following research question: How do refugee women from the Great Lakes region manage the resettlement process and reconstruct new identities in Canada? Data extracts were meticulously selected not only because they addressed the research question, but that they raised interesting issues, brought out new insights, and helped illuminate the entire data set. This analytical process made it possible to discern a participant's own voice and/or differentiate it from the

voices of others, such as public discourses —a key feature of a dialogical approach to data analysis. Chapters Four and Five detail key features of a feminist dialogical approach to subjectivity**.**

In Chapter Six, I examine ways in which a feminist dialogical approach to social work practice can contribute to the face-to-face encounter between a social work researcher and refugee women. To achieve this goal, I discuss three features that constitute this approach: mediating ontological or differences in world views, mitigating differences in power relations, and adhering to the ethics of responsibility to the *other,* including how these features impact existing social work practice. To situate the proposed approach within social work practice, I provide a brief summary of the challenges faced during resettlement as expressed by study participants, and provide an outline of a few practice models currently being used to address these challenges. Next, I make the case for a feminist dialogical theoretical approach as most suited for working with refugee women from non-Western conflict zones. I make several recommendations that could be used in the design and delivery of future social work interventions for refugee women fleeing non-Western conflict zones.

In its entirety, the dissertation brings together narratives of violent displacement and identity reconstruction, and elucidates the structural forces that not only underlie, but shape refugee women's identities in flight and during resettlement. Notably, none of the participants told their stories in a chronological sequence, that is, from beginning to the end. Rather, each participant began her story at a point where she felt most comfortable. In a similar, non-linear fashion, I weave together specific and poignant aspects of the stories and experiences to which I have become a trusted witness.

**The Great Lakes Region of Africa: Shared Features**

In this section I describe the social, economic and political contexts of the Great Lakes region and the conditions under which refugee women have lived and from which they have fled. (See Appendix A for a map of the Great Lakes region.) The four countries that comprise the region, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and the DRC, are marked by several common characteristics: a history of colonialism with its racist policies, armed conflicts perpetuated by both internal and external players, the political and economic dominance of one ethnic group, dictatorial regimes, the militarized extraction and plunder of natural resources, a history of human rights abuses, sexual and gender-based violence, and genocides (Donovan, 2008; Jewkes, 2007). These factors converge to create conditions that force women to flee their homes. Many of those who manage to cross international borders have little or no access to formal education, employment, safety, stability and the relevant cultural knowledge that would prepare them for life in a new country.

To justify my research focus on the Great Lakes region, I examine three salient features that bind the four countries together. The features of interest include a shared history of colonialism, armed conflict perpetuated by both internal and external players, and generalized brutality against women. These factors combine to cause massive refugee situations. While the specifics of these features vary from country to country, how they impact communities and individuals is what constitutes commonalities among social groups. For example, the impact that colonialism has had on indigenous social and political systems can be viewed as a commonality or a shared experience. Notwithstanding differences in the colonial experience, each region managed it either by becoming more French because of France and Belgium's policy of assimilation, or roaming the Anglo Saxon/indigenous divide that the British allowed.

My examination helps to illuminate the complexity of the four countries' social and political realities that were forged during their initial contact with Europe. These relationships continue to ferment discontent among people resulting in massive and forcible displacement of people.

### *A history of colonialism – Creating ethnic divides*

Colonialism as I use it, refers to a "direct territorial appropriation of another geo-political entity, combined with forthright exploitation of its resources and labor and systematic interference in the capacity of the appropriated culture (itself not homogeneous) to organize its dispensations of power" (McClintock, 1994, p. 88). Such endemic violence in the region has prompted an examination of the deep ethnic divide created by the racist politics of hierarchical divide-and-rule established during the colonial period (Mamdani, 2001; Rwamatwara, 2005). Drawing on the works of Prunier (1995) and Destexhe (1995), Kenyan journalist and human rights activist Koigi wa Wamwere points to the discursive formation that European colonial agents of the 1920s used to cement a particular group's hegemonic superiority as follows:

> A Mutwa had a monkey-like flat face and a huge nose . . . quite similar to the apes who he chases in the forest, while the Hutus were generally short and thick-set with a big head, a jovial expression, a wide nose and enormous lips . . . extroverts who like to laugh and lead a simple life. At the top of the ladder, the ethnic superiority of the Tutsi was confirmed. . . . His features are very fine; a high brow, thin nose, and fine lips framing beautiful shining teeth. Batutsi women are usually lighter skinned. . . . Gifted with a vivacious intelligence, the Tutsi displays a refinement of feelings, which is rare

among primitive people. He is a natural-born leader (Wamwere, 2003, pp. 57–58 as quoted from Prunier, 1995)[6].

According to Mamdani (2001), colonial discourse transformed such provocative language into ethnic differentiation. Physical attributes and other generalizations about language and tradition were used to label and decide which of the ethnic groups would be assigned leadership roles on behalf of the colonizing country (Daley, 2006; Dolan, 2011). For example, the Tutsis in both Rwanda and Burundi became the exclusive beneficiaries of bureaucratic positions, land, and educational opportunities, whereas the marginalized groups—Hutus and Twas—endured long-standing and gross misrepresentations of their personal and collective identities (Mamdani, 2001; Smith, 2004). Immediately after the 1933–34 census in Rwanda, the Belgians issued official identities designating individuals as Hutu, Twa or Tutsi, a process that naturalized a constructed political difference between ethnic groups (Newbury, 1998). Twa, Hutu and Tutsi identities acquired new meanings that transcended economic and political categories, and social relations became more rigid and mostly biased against the Hutus and Twas (Mamdani, 2001). In other words, precolonial identity categories were racialized, ethnicized and embued with a racist doctrine that justified Tutsi supremacy (Destexhe, 1995; Mamdani, 2001). Cementing and perpetuating the superiority of one ethnic group while simultaneously debasing others worked to enhance or diminish an individual's life chances in education, employment and well-being. Invariably, the increased disparities perpetuated by colonial governments between people resulted in resentment between ethnic groups (Berkeley, 2001; Mamdani, 2001). The Tutsis have continued to hold political influence over large populations throughout the region (Mamdani, 2001).

[6] Original sources: Rapport Annuel du Territoire de Nyanza, 1925 in Jean Rumiya, 1992:140 quoted in Prunier, 1995:6; (Ministère des Colonies, 1925:34 in Harroy, 1984:26 quoted in Prunier, 1995:6).

As the newly strengthened "tribal"[7] structure was enforced, it extended imperial rule into the hinterland, not only to divide, but to control millions of people across a vast expanse of land (Berkeley, 2001). By using indigenous social structures, colonial governments (Belgium, France, and Britain) exerted a great deal of influence by delegating powers to kings down to chiefs who maintained order and enforced subservience at a local level (Newbury, 1998; Reyntjens, 2005). In this way cultural differences were exploited, turning them into antagonisms in order to extract natural resources and to dominate the indigenous inhabitants (Berkeley, 2001).

Ethnicity and "tribe" have become central features of group identity throughout the Great Lakes region (Daley, 2006; Smith, 2004). They can be manipulated for political gains and often times they are used to incite violence. Scholars in the field hold the view that the endemic violence in the Great Lakes region continues to be perpetuated by the political and economic dominance of one ethnic group and attempts by other marginalized groups to transcend that domination (Jewkes, 2007; Smith, 2004). This was aptly demonstrated during the Rwanda genocide.[8] On April 1994, the plane carrying two heads of state, Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi (both Hutus), was shot down as it prepared to land in Kigali, Rwanda. The Hutu leadership in Rwanda ordered the killing of Tutsis as a result (Dallaire, 2005), and within a hundred days between 500,000 and 1,000,000 people are believed to have been killed (Destexhe, 1995). While Twas were not directly

[7]"Tribe" as used here refers to African societies that had well-established economic and political systems before European contact. Anthropologists, such as Bodley (1997), state that the term is usually avoided in Africa because in modern political circles "tribe" is used pejoratively to imply backwardness and ethnic division. The term is also rejected on technical grounds since tribes as political divisions were created by colonial administrators.

[8] Genocide refers to a "coordinated plan that aims to destroy national groups, in whole or in part. This part includes not only physical destruction in the form of mass murder, but also the destruction of the groups' culture and collective identity" (Turner, 2006, p. 240).

targeted in the attacks, many of them were also killed (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, 2008). The intensified violence from both within and without the country, prompted "an exodus to the DRC and other neighboring countries of approximately two million Hutus fearing retaliation" (Prunier, 1995, p. 132).

### *Armed conflict and violent displacement*

Armed conflict has characterized the post-independence period of many countries in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) including those in the Great Lakes region, and it is singled out as the principal cause of violent displacements of civilian populations, mostly women and children (Verwimp, Justino, & Boyd, 2009; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2006). Several factors coalesce to incite armed conflict in the Great Lakes region: the role of resource predation (Salahyan, 2008); policies (e.g., structural adjustment programs [SAP]) of institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank; and efforts to protect the economic interest of local elites (Verwimp et al., 2009), including current leaders' incessant efforts to build a Tutsi empire.

### *Causes of armed conflict in the Great Lakes region*

Resource predation. Castles (2003) views armed conflict in SSA as a result of neo-colonialism and the relentless pursuit for capital accumulation that goes along with it. This observation is more than salient for the Great Lakes region. The DRC provides an example of this. It is the world's largest producer of cobalt, industrial diamonds and copper (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2006). It also has petroleum deposits, fertile farmland and great hydroelectric potential (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,

2006). Prior to the current armed conflict, Western countries "increased the inflow of weapons into the region" (Giles & Hyndman, 2004, p. 3) to protect the extensive mining reserves of cobalt in the eastern and southern parts of the country. Because this area is of crucial importance for the United States' defense industry (Reyntjens, 2005), the United States and her allies employed "militarized commercialization," which refers to "situations where stronger states deploy their military might in weaker neighboring countries, supporting the sovereign power in exchange for access to profits" (Reyntjens, 2005, p. 598). This new form of politico-economic imperialism took shape when the United States armed and trained the Tutsi-led Rwandan army to "use force to acquire and maintain control over mines and help negotiate mining contracts with local elites in the DRC" (Chossudovsky, 2003, p. 2).[9]

Structural adjustment policies. The IMF and the World Bank have also been blamed for creating conditions for conflict through SAPs and related policies in which massive budget cuts in the health, education and agricultural sectors have been implemented in Africa (McClintock, 1994).[10] Reductions in public spending brought on by SAPs increased poverty levels and exacerbated inequality between individuals and social groups. Heidhues and Obare (2011) argue that these conditions helped to ferment conflicts because the social dimensions of

[9] In the case of mineral resources, the entire SSA (inclusive of the Great Lakes region) is a major exporter of gold, uranium, chrome, vanadium, antimony, coltan, bauxite, iron ore, copper, manganese, chromium and platinum (USGS.gov). Guinea supplies 33% of the world's bauxite. Zambia is a major producer of copper while the DRC produces coltan with at least 80% in proven reserve (Molango, 2008). South Africa, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Guinea, and Mali produce 30% of the world's gold, while Niger, Namibia, and South Africa produce 49% of the world's diamonds (Molango, 2008). In 2008 Ghazvinian estimated that 25% of North American oil would come from SSA by 2015, ahead of the Middle East.
The second scramble for African resources is being carried out by Europe and emerging economies, such as India and China, in spite of the fact that Africa has only 10% of proven oil reserves, less than the Middle East (Ghazvinian, 2008).

[10] SAPs "emphasized anti-inflationary macroeconomics stabilization policies and pushed the private sector and free market development, controlling budget deficits, privatizing public sector companies and services, dissolving parastatals, eliminating subsidies and cutting public support for social services" (Heidhues & Obare, 2011, p. 58).

development were ignored when SAPs were implemented. This issue was recognized by the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in his 2003 report on the subject in which he advocated for "a peace-friendly structural adjustment program and pleaded with international financial institutions to ease the conditionalities that normally accompany loans" (Chimni, 2004, p. 71).

Building a Tutsi empire. Since the 1990s, each of the four countries of the Great Lakes region has been involved in interstate armed conflict with resulting human rights abuses and sexual and gender-based violence (Donovan, 2008; Lunn, 2006). This situation has created a unique opportunity for local elites to push the building of a Tutsi empire. The details of attempts to build a Tutsi empire are described in the following section on the history of GL conflicts particularly in my discussion of the First Congo War.

### *A selected history of armed conflicts*

The First and Second Congo Wars. Like the DRC, Uganda encompasses a diversity of ethnic groups and political systems. It has a history of generating excessive numbers of refugees and continues its perennial attacks and invasion of its neighbors including Rwanda (before Kagame) and the DRC (Lomo, Naggaga, & Hovil, 2001). In the 1980s, Tutsi refugees who had resettled in Uganda, Tanzania and the DRC joined forces, bringing Museveni to power in Uganda. In return, Uganda played a key role in the invasion of Rwanda when large numbers of its Tutsi soldiers joined the ranks of the Rwandan Patriotic Army (Chossudovsky, 2003). This led to Kagame's ascent to power in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide (Mamdani, 2001). Immediately after securing Uganda and Rwanda, the combined Tutsi forces began supporting local Tutsis in the DRC, a strategic plan designed to create a Tutsi empire across the Great Lakes region (Ikaze, 2014). It is expected that as "natural-born leaders" (Wamwere,

2003), the Tutsis leading the DRC government would extend Tutsi rule and ensure mining contracts for the United States and her allies. Thus, the military training that took place in both Uganda and Rwanda helped prepare for a showdown that culminated in the First and Second Congo Wars (1996–2003).

The massive exodus of refugees known as the Great Lakes refugee crisis (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2010) was sparked by the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Of those who fled Rwanda during this crisis, "about 1.5 million settled in eastern DRC" (Reyntjens, 2005, p. 45). This new wave of refugees increased the destabilization of the already weakened state of the DRC with its volatile demographic balance (Jacquemot, 2010). These conditions are believed to have created fertile ground for the First Congo War (1996–1997). With military support from Uganda, Rwanda and local DRC Tutsi forces, Laurent Kabila (a Luba from Katanga Province), overthrew Mobutu's government in the DRC in 1997.

After ascending to power, Kabila dismissed his Rwandan chief of staff, replaced him with a native Congolese, and ordered the Ugandan military forces to leave the DRC. Local Tutsis were alarmed by these actions causing the fighting to continue. Kabila sought help from Namibia, Zimbabwe, Chad and Angola, an alliance that marked the beginning of a "multisided" war. This collaborative force not only saved Kabila (Prunier, 2009) but helped to curtail Tutsi forces in gaining control of the DRC and beyond.

In 1998 the Second Congo War or the Great War of Africa began (just a little over a year after the First Congo War (Zapata, 2011). Nine African nations were directly involved in the deadliest war in modern African history: Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola, Chad, Sudan, Libya, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. In total about 20 armed groups were involved

(Reyntjens, 2005). In 2001 Laurent Kabila was assassinated and replaced by his stepson Joseph Kabila (a Tutsi) as the president of DRC.

The Second Congo War ended in 2003 but devastation continued. By 2008 as a result of the war and its aftermath approximately 5.4 million people died, "mostly from disease and starvation making the Second Congo War the deadliest conflict worldwide since World War II" (World Without Genocide, 2012). Millions more were displaced from their homes or sought political asylum in neighboring countries (Reyntjens, 2005); the revolving-door type of refugee movements within the Great Lakes region and neighboring countries constitutes a unique characteristic of this region.

Rwanda and Burundi. Unlike Uganda and the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi are inhabited by only three ethnic groups: Twas, Tutsis and Hutus (Eggers, 2006). Present-day Rwanda and Burundi became a European colony known as Ruanda-Urundi in 1924 (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2014). While Germany and Belgium allowed the two colonies to continue with their kinship dynasties, a series of colonial policies and practices caused deep and long lasting divisions among the three ethnic groups (Weinsten & Schrere, 1976). In early 1959 Burundi requested Belgium to dissolve the Ruanda-Urundi state, a push motivated in part by ethnic persecution in which "Hutus in Rwanda massacred thousands of Tutsis, many of whom fled to Uganda and Burundi" (MacDonald, 2001, p. 60). After independence in 1962, the names of the two countries were changed from Ruanda-Urundi to Rwanda and Burundi respectively (Cook & Bewes, 2004).

In 1965, Burundi experienced its first major interethnic violence when a Hutu prime minister was assassinated, prompting a series of attacks on Tutsis. Two major events that can be characterized as genocide include the mass killings of Hutus by the Tutsi-dominated army in

1972 and the mass killings of Tutsis by the Hutu populace in 1993 (United Nations Security Council, 2002). The assassination of the Burundi president in 1993 set the stage for yet more years of Hutu-Tutsi violence in which an estimated 300,000 people, mostly women, were killed in the years following his assassination (Daley, 2006).

### *Brutality against women – Gender-based and sexual violence*

Thus far I have attempted to show that Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and the DRC are intertwined economically and politically, albeit in convoluted social and political ways. I have argued that these relationships were established in the history of political and economic colonialism, followed by contemporary economic postcolonial exploitation. The perennial armed conflicts and insurgences will continue to have grave consequences for women: sexual violence, increased levels of poverty, poor or limited access to health care, forced displacement and being used as weapons of war.

My dissertation's focus on women is informed by current evidence that points to gender-specific vulnerabilities that exist in conflict situations that often make women more susceptible to certain dangers (Coomaraswary, 2003; Hovil, 2012). Burundi is one example. Burundi's history of upheaval and instability created by ethnic tensions between Tutsis and Hutus has had direct social and economic consequences for women. Despite its abundant natural resources, such as uranium, nickel, cobalt, copper and platinum, Burundi is one of the world's poorest countries (Eggers, 2006). This means that poor living conditions have had devastating effects on its people and women are particularly affected by these conditions. Burundi has an inadequate legal system, lacks economic freedom and access to education, and has a high incidence of HIV/AIDS. Approximately 80% of people, a majority of whom are

women and children, live in rural areas and are poor (Eggers, 2006). Famines and food shortages are common throughout the country, and 56.8% of children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition. Access to health care is minimal when compared to other countries in the region (World Food Programme, 2008). These are some of the conditions that have been exacerbated by armed conflicts, causing violent displacement and sexual violence against women.

It is perhaps in the brutality to the body as a site of violence that the most marked gender differences occur during armed conflict, according to Hovil (2012). Other scholars point to ways in which armed conflicts target the "finest spatial scale; that of the human body, a site always marked by relations of gender, class, 'tribe,' race, caste, religion, and geographic locations" (Giles & Hyndman, 2004, p. 5). Thus, men and women die "different deaths and are tortured and abused in different ways during wars because of the physical differences between the sexes, as well as the different cultural meanings ascribed to the male and female body" (Blackstock & Crosby, 2004, p. 36). Such vulnerabilities are not only a result of biological differences between men and women, but are engineered by social factors that privilege men over women (Li & Ming, 2005). Morbidity differences in gender are also strongly influenced by the socio-political contexts including the positions that men and women occupy in society, the access each gets to services and the kind of medical care each receives (Hovil, 2012).

In the Great Lakes region, women's experiences of violent displacement involve having lived amidst sustained and intermittent assaults, extending into prolonged periods of insecurity caused by numerous indiscriminate violent tactics such as killings and torture (Keralis, 2010). Women also flee their homes when men in their families are killed. Countless women and girls continue to live in fear and in total absence of safety and security. Women's narratives reveal

horrific experiences, such as being taken captive for days, tied to trees, and repeatedly raped (Donovan, 2008; Holmes, 2010). In northern Uganda, women were frequently abducted by rebels, while others were being taken away and gang raped by the army that was supposed to protect them (Dolan, 2011; Hovil, 2012). Dolan (2011) theorizes that the war in northern Uganda was a form of mass torture that purposely forced entire populations within conflict zones into subordination. The Ugandan government achieved this objective by using deliberate tactics of human rights violations, dread, embarrassment, dependency, debilitation and humiliation that were carried out on a mass scale (Dolan, 2011; Hovil, 2012). Such conditions are believed to affect mortality rates through the destruction of economic systems resulting in widespread homelessness and dilapidated public health infrastructure with minimal access to sanitary water supply (Li & Ming, 2005). These conditions can also "contribute to shorter life expectancy and increased mortality rates for women" (Li & Ming, 2005, p. 473) since many women affected by poverty resort to selling sex with its associated risk of HIV/AIDS (Dolan, 2011).

The cumulative effects of these atrocities on women are both physical and psychological (Jewkes, 2007; Keralis, 2010). This kind of psychological distress can engender a "specific form of post-traumatic stress that involves responses, such as fear, hopelessness, horror, causing impairment in daily functioning" (Li & Ming, 2005, p. 474). In "Social torture: The case of northern Uganda, 1986–2006," Dolan (2011) provides a poignant example of the intense psychological stress faced by many women, too often resulting in severe physical symptoms and tragic behaviors. Dolan reports that high numbers of women committed suicide because they feared that they were HIV positive. He gives the example of a woman who committed suicide because she was afraid "because her husband had slept with a woman who

was suspected of being HIV positive" (Dolan, 2011, p. 207*).* The stress of the idea alone triggered such a drastic action. Other self-evident psychological stressors can include "physical hardship, loss of livelihoods, loss of relatives, shelter, livestock, repeated displacements, sleeping in the bush, constant fear of abduction and land mines, and trying to buy security by selling children to soldiers" (Dolan, 2011, p. 184).

The violence that has been perpetrated in Uganda since the 1980s civil war (the Ugandan Bush War) is a stark example of gendered violence. (See Rubongoya (2007) and Tripp (2010) for the history of the Ugandan civil war.) This war marked the beginning of massive human displacement across the country when almost the entire population in some parts of the country was forced to flee their homes. The Luweero District in Buganda (central Uganda) and many parts of Northern Uganda were particularly affected, and they became the sites of unprecedented human suffering for women (Dolan, 2011; Hovil, 2012). Liebling-Kalifani and colleagues inform us that this war was fought on women's bodies through rape and related sexual violence. Many women were "tortured during the war, and 54.4% suffered sexual violence, abduction, including forced marriages to warring abductors" (Liebling-Kalifani, Marshal, Ojiambo-Ochieng, & Nassozi, 2007, p. 2).

Museveni's reign following the Bush War has also been marked by violence and has meant a dramatic setback for the majority of people in Northern Uganda. By 2006 nearly 90% of the population of Northern Uganda was internally displaced (Dolan, 2011) or had become refugees across international borders. Hovil (2012) argues that Uganda had a deliberate "counter-insurgency" policy that specifically targeted women through sexual violence. Dolan's (2011) study also reveals how women's dominant memories focused on physical harm, killings

and abductions of relatives and loss of property, experiences that put into perspective the destruction of their social and cultural cohesion and material security.

### *Conclusion*

Hitherto, I have recounted the ways in which a shared history of colonialism and ongoing armed conflict, coupled with internal and external political and economic interests, combine to construct a hierarchy of group identities that are exploited to foment resentment resulting in refugee-producing situations, in which women are impacted in specific ways. This means that identity reconstruction for refugee women from the Great Lakes region evolves from a processual, gendered interface between culture, historical context, armed conflict and violent displacement. These factors continue to be critical to refugee women's health and well-being and affect their resettlement. Existing literature documents a need to gain a deeper understanding of the particularities of female refugees' experiences of resettlement in Canadian society (Loughry, 2008). I do this on the following pages by examining gender and identity reconstruction. But first I discuss the assistance Canada provides to refugees.

## Refugee Resettlement in Canada

### *Canada's Refugee Assistance Program*

The international community, led by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), views a refugee as having secured a solution to her/his plight if she/he finds safety through one of three options: voluntary repatriation to the country of origin in safety and dignity, integration in the country of asylum (a country where a refugee first lands

after flight) or resettlement to a third country, usually a country which selects from those whose refugee status has already been determined (Presse & Thomson, 2007; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2006).

In any given year, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) determines the number of refugees to be resettled, including those to be cared for under the government-assisted refugee program. As a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees, Canada works closely with the UNHCR to select those who meet the criteria of its Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA). Since the enactment of the IRPA in 2002, Canada has waived the financial security requirement and the "perfect" health status as part of its selection criteria (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011a; Vasilevska & Simich, 2010). Instead, emphasis is now placed on "the need for protection over the ability of a refugee to become established in Canada" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011b, p. vii).

Historically, the overarching goal of Canada's resettlement policy has been integration, generally understood as a process designed to foster positive outcomes for refugees and host communities. When viewed as a capacity, resettlement entails the acquisition of information and access to resources necessary to function effectively in a new society. Through its public institutions, such as education, health, and service agencies, Canada is expected to meet refugees' needs for social and economic participation in their new communities (Frideres, 2008). Through service provider organizations, CIC delivers essential services to GARs through its resettlement assistance program (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011b). Essential services include providing temporary accommodation, orientation to systems and resources such as employment and language

training, access to emergency medical care, interpretation services and income support for a period of one year (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011b). Canada's Resettlement Assistance Program also assists GARs to overcome short-term transitional challenges and to develop awareness of Canadian social norms (Hyndman, 2011).

### *Gendering resettlement: Canada's Women at Risk Program*

Historically, Canada had accepted refugees while paying attention to gender equality (Pittaway, 2001). In 1993 Canada implemented Gender Guidelines for refugee claimants growing out of the Women at Risk Program (Spencer-Nimmons, 1994). The aim of the 1988 Women at Risk Program was to secure priority selection for women who would have been ineligible under Canada's general selection criteria (Spencer-Nimmons, 1994). Women were considered to be at risk if their security could not be protected by the authorities in the country of asylum and if they experienced harassment in refugee camps (Boyd, 1999). Both initiatives resulted in a notable conceptual modification to how Canada resettled refugee women (Pittaway, 2001). In particular, the Guidelines provided gender-sensitive comment to statutory interpretations, including how the Convention's grounds of race, religion, sexual orientation, nationality and political opinion could be mediated by gender to produce situations in which women would be at risk of persecution (Newland, 2004; Spencer-Nimmons, 1994).

Scholars such as Hyndman and Walton-Roberts (2000) have documented the multiple challenges that refugee women face during resettlement which impact their mental and psychological health. Chief among them are health problems and difficulties associated with negotiating new identities within complex social systems (Danso, 2001).

Identity dislocation resulting from cultural upheaval and personal trauma can create complex and stressful experiences especially for those who have suffered the death of their partner or children, or when family members are denied admission to Canada. Cultural trauma is a "dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (Alexander, Eyerman, Giesen, Smelser, & Sztompka, 2004). On reaching Canada, refugee women are reported to realize a sense of dispossession amidst multiple and conflicting roles, limited occupational skills (Hyndman & Walton-Roberts, 2000) and shifting gender and power dynamics, including sexism within both their own communities and in the larger society (Goodkind & Deacon, 2004). Combined, these experiences provoke personal and collective cultural identity upheaval. The intention of this study is to account for existing knowledge as well as produce new knowledge about how both personal and cultural identities are renegotiated (Kumsa, 2006) within new settings.

## Factors in Identity Reconstruction

### *Gender*

The historical context of violent displacement in the Great Lakes region and beyond throws light on male and female relations across the region. McSpadden and Moussa (1993) reveal ways in which preflight differentiated gender identities continue to affect participants' attempts to rebuild lives and reconstruct identities in new settings. Violent displacement ruptures an established social order that governs social relations and alters previously internalized power differentials between men and women.

Furthermore, refugee women's experiences in flight, asylum and resettlement produce tensions and ambivalence about their identities (Kumsa, 2006). As personal survival became

threatened, so too, was the sociocultural and gender basis of their identity. Rousseau, Rufagari, Bagilisha and Measham (2004) contend that "for those who have experienced trauma, this process may be particularly difficult if they need to hold on to well-defined roles in order to rebuild their identity" (p. 1096). As a result, refugee women are torn between long-established gender roles and their individual aspirations for the future in new environments (Kumsa, 2006). The economic and sexual brutality prior to displacement, flight, and challenges related to resettling in new environments, all combine to shape new identities, especially for those who experienced deep ruptures in their lives (McSpadden & Moussa, 1993).

According to my personal observation, there are considerable cultural differences that underpin gender relations in Great Lakes region and Canadian social norms. To understand identity reconstruction for refugee women from the Great Lakes region, forethought was given to the interplay of gender ideals in both regions because male and female roles are interdependent, and by implication inter-defined in Africa (McSpadden & Moussa, 1993).

To provide a context for this discussion, I theorize structural forces that underpin identity reconstruction for refugee women in the Great Lakes region prior to and during flight and during resettlement in Canada. These structural forces highlight ways in which factors such as colonialism and racism, both as political structures and as discursive formations, profoundly impact identity reconstruction processes for refugee women from the Great Lakes region.

### *The colonial encounter as identity fractures*

The term "colonization" has come to describe everything from the most evident economic and political hierarchies of power to the production of a particular cultural discourse about Africa (Cesaire, 1972) and other colonized countries (Hall, 1994). At a structural level, it was about the seizing of place, draining it of its resources, its history and the meaning attributed to it by its people and to its people (Dunn, 2004; Mbembe, 2002). As a result, colonized spaces were rehistoricized (Mamdani, 2001; McClintock, 1994), rewritten, reterritorialized, and in this way, reduced from their original territorial sizes (Rwamatwara, 2005), and perhaps most importantly, renamed in fundamental ways (Wamwere, 2003). Here I use Foucault's (1986) notion of discontinuity by which he means the various institutional, physical and administrative mechanisms and knowledge claims that augment and maintain the exercise of power in society.

Hand in hand with colonialism, Christian influences have not only degenerated African belief systems but have supplanted the indigenous ways of knowing (Mbembe, 2002; Wamwere, 2003). The new world order, instituted and represented by European governments and religion, disrupted and reconfigured Africa's social and political systems (Mbembe, 2002). These systems ruptured social cohesiveness and the smooth functioning of the state through the introduction of Western modes of administration (Castles, 2003). Through its religious emissaries such as missionaries, colonialism distorted personal conduct in religious matters, which demonized African forms of spirituality (Mbembe, 2002). The extended family system, which was the pillar of African traditions, was fragmented through the introduction of an individualist social system. The imposition of European social and economic systems has created a vacuum that has proved impossible to fill because Western philosophy lacked an

ontological communal or intersubjective sense of being that characterize social structures in Africa. As a result, a confused and alienated political leadership runs the region with impunity (Salehyan, 2008), and rigid class and gender structures based on the philosophy of individualism have been introduced with detrimental effects on African extended family networks (Kiyimba, 2008).

### *Violent displacement*

Mbembe (2002), an African philosopher and political scientist who grounds his theories in the African experience, argues that violent displacement in SSA is a cultural experience that shapes identities just as any other social experience does. He describes violent displacement as sudden and abrupt events and movements in which "one leaves one space and establishes oneself in another, only to be dislodged by terror, confronted by unpredictable circumstances, and forced to resettle once again where one can" (p. 267). He theorizes that violent displacement generates forms of "radical uncertainty"—situations that cause inconsistent occurrences swirling from different directions. Given the frequency and uncertainty of violent incidents in SSA, life can take sudden and unbearable turns, thereby transforming an individual's original identity (Mbembe, 2006). Under such circumstances, reality can be erased and recreated at any of those turns, whereby the effects of such events can be integrated within a refugee woman's identity by weaving the memory of rape, malnutrition and torture into her body (Mbembe, 2006). Consequently, a SSA subject learns to manage not just a single cultural identity, but several of them, which she negotiates as required (Mbembe, 2002). This way she can "fragment" her identities and represent herself as the ever-changing persona who encounters different voices and who experiences identity reconstruction as intensely dialogical

in order to function in a variety of situations and within different power relations. This means that such extreme forms of uncertainty contribute to radical transformations of people's original identities.

### *Race and racialization in Canada*

Through a historical complicity with colonialism, Canada has tied the notion of who is eligible for Canadian citizenship to race (Dua, 1999). Consequently, skin colour has become a central marker of who could belong to the Canadian national formation (Dua, 1999). Thobani (2007) argues that nation building in Canada demanded the repression of difference in pursuit of a standardized national identity that was white. This brings us to an understanding of how the discourse of race is constituted through knowledge, culture and the imperative of imperialism, and filtered through power and agency (Dua, 1999). Scholars such as Schalge and Rudolph (2007) conceptualize the discourse of race "as a worldview, a body of prejudgments that distort ideas about human differences and group behavior" (p. 13). Central to the discourse of race is racism, described by the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2008) as a "belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities, and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race."

Consequently, racialization as a cultural process draws attention to the way some people are classified as different and then treated as subordinate. In other words, racialization signifies and values racial differences among people. Inevitably, when political and cultural processes combine, they reveal the dynamic biological expressions of race relations and how these determine the historical and contemporary locations that people of colour occupy in Canadian society (Dua, 1999). As a central and integral part of nation building, racialization is

used to determine who is entitled to belong to Canada, who is from elsewhere and different, and therefore, who is part of mainstream society and is perceived as the norm (Dua, 1999). Race operates according to what Foucault (1986) called a "system of exclusion." For the purposes of this discussion, "exclusion" refers to a process through which people are denied the relative opportunity to participate in civil society, are denied an acceptable supply of goods and services and are unable to contribute to society or acquire the normal commodities expected of citizens (Raphael, 2001).

To illustrate a specific mechanism of social exclusion, Dua (1999) cites daily language usage in which the expression "immigrant women" is commonly used to indiscriminately refer to either Canadian-born women of colour, women who do not speak English well, or immigrant or refugee women from non-European countries. Such linguistic structures make those who are white (including those who are not Canadian born) appear as native, while women of colour including First Nations women appear as outsiders (Dua, 1999). Schalge and Rudolph (2007) argue that even for other non-English- or French-speaking groups who are already in the country, race is real and rests on perceived biological differences between groups of people. Thus racism has tangible and devastating social, historical and economic consequences for racialized people in Canada. Similarly, the stereotype of who is and who is not a Canadian works to reinforce the historical processes by which indigenous, African, and other women of colour occupy marginal positions in Canadian society (Dua, 1999). Consequently, when a refugee woman from the Great Lakes region resettles in Canada, she is presented by mainstream discourses as ignorant, uneducated and oppressed (Dunn, 2004; Razack,1998). This perspective creates a priori psychological and socio-economic barriers

because she must work much harder to prove that she is a thinking, rational human being fit to live in Canada (Dua, 1999).

For its part, the media offers simplistic messages presenting one group of refugees as more deserving than the other, a misrepresentation that shapes and influences how particular refugee groups are received and understood by Canadians. In particular, those from non-Western countries are oftentimes castigated as illegal immigrants and economic migrants (Razack, 1998) and therefore unworthy of Canada's protection. The deliberate orchestration of the "anti-Third-World" refugee discourse by the media in Canada creates a climate that depicts a refugee as an adversary, a rival and a competitor who is a threat to prosperity, culture and the Canadian national identity (Nyers, 1999; Pittaway, 2001). Knowledge produced through these discourses has often turned the presence of refugees into a political problem. To illustrate, in a critique of the Ontario government's reinstatement of basic temporary health care for refugee claimants, the *Toronto Star* published a condescending piece that drove a wedge between Canadians and refugees in Ontario. Christina Blizzard, the journalist wrote: "we don't have the money to pay for Ontarians, but we provide care to refugees. Let them hold bake sales for their health care" (Jabir, 2013).

Dunn (2004) argues that the Western gaze has often required fixing Africans in both spatial and temporal sites. Those on the move, both spatially and temporally, are often seen as threatening the Western-established images of Africa. An extract from Turner (2006) captures the colonial representation of an African woman, which has become the accepted truth in Western societies and helped to shape her image. She is "a savage and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants . . . the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child . . . mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar" (p.

4523). Such static depictions of African women influence how Canadians understand refugee women from the Great Lakes region (Dunn, 2004). Razack (1998) points out that the West produced a discursive apparatus which successfully entrenched notions of Western superiority and African inferiority, and within this discursive production, the imperial subtext of a naïve, child-like, Black African woman. Africa is particularly targeted because the media draws extensively on colonial racist discourses that engender the othering of Africa and her peoples, including the ongoing upheaval in the supposedly "chaotic" Great Lakes region and more widely in SSA which creates refugee situations. As Western media and governments distance themselves from the upheavals, they are able to obfuscate their involvement and contributions to armed conflicts in the region.

Razack (1998) paints a picture of an official discourse about refugees as serving the purpose of control, that is, it justifies limiting the influx of refugees or controlling who can or will be sent back and under what conditions. These types of restrictive measures, coupled with negative representations of particular groups of people, are designed to deter movements of people from undesirable geographic regions (Lacroix, 2004). For example, movements from Africa are understood through the European narrative as the outcome of Africa's "underdevelopment" and its incapacity to manage its own affairs (Dunn, 2004). This is a discursive formation informed by stereotypical notions of Africa and her peoples. The media in Canada portrays refugee movements from Africa as chaotic, producing the displacement of large numbers of peoples who must be contained, policed and regulated by the state (Razack, 1998). Such discursive practices embedded within a legacy of colonial discourse play a key role in shaping resettlement for women fleeing the Great Lakes region. How the media represents Africa and its people shapes Canadian attitudes and views that in turn influence

identity reconstruction for refugee women by intensifying their sense of loss through violent displacement and marginalization in their new country.

Lacroix (2004) explains that the development of the discourse on refugee crises and chaos has often been an intentional practice by states to control the sources and volume of refugees arriving at their borders. Colonial and racist discourses constitute a social and political space articulated through relations of power and systems of governance. However, the ontological basis of these systematic statements of practice contradicts the overt political view of humanitarianism, which welcomes "real" refugees (Lacroix, 2004; Razack, 1998). Such systems of practice engender uncertainties about refugee women's new ways of being and the types of identities that suit this type of social and political environment.

This discussion has shown how race as a discursive formation contributes to knowledge production as well as to systematic statements that inform the resettlement and identity reconstruction of refugee women in Canada.

### *Social and spatial environments*

Danso (2001) argues that the resettlement process involves adjusting to different ways of living in a community, a process that alters and reshapes refugee women's cultural and personal identities. The process also involves getting accustomed to a different sense of place and home (Smyth, Stewart, & Da Lomba, 2010). Danso (2001) points out that the initial experiences of resettlement are crucial for African refugees starting out in industrialized and liberal societies. This means that the move from *there* to *here* can create "spaces of friction" and conflict between the host community and a refugee woman, including tensions within her

own culturally constituted notions of self because it juxtaposes two different ways of experiencing space/place and identity.

One of the most pressing problems for refugee women from the Great Lakes region is living in a world completely different from the one they ontologized and into another in which they have been ontologized. Mendieta (2003) argues that at any given moment, individuals do not simply negotiate their localities or positions vis-à-vis race, class, gender, sexual orientation or nationality, but also vis-à-vis geopolitical systems. A major part of what shapes our sense of self is our sense of place—home, an environment to relate to, and a community that accepts us as valuable members. While in Canada, refugee women's realities are not simply that of displaced people who are unable to define themselves in relation to place and time. In addition, refugee women operate outside clearly defined categories of space. They appear to be awkward and uncomfortable when engaging in two mutually exclusive spaces and time schemes in which a Canadian *here* clashes with an African *there* (Mohanram, 1999). Mohanram (1999) explains that the notion of space is also important to a sense of identity because the culture in any given space contains and situates its subject in a particular structural space. As a result, subjects internalize their relationship with the landscape that surrounds them, a "relationship which shapes their bodies and perceptions, forms their knowledge and informs their sense of aesthetics" (Mohanram, p. xii). Mohanram's analysis reveals how individuals carry with them different ways of knowing, contributing to an understanding that place and landscape are not inert, but integral to identity reconstruction.

### *Trauma and violent displacements*

Sexual violence and other forms brutality against women are universal in the context of violence displacement, in spite of differences in how they are experienced in different cultures (Caprioli, 2005; Gardam & Charlesworth, 2000). Violent displacement engenders gender-specific ruptures and discontinuities resulting in trauma for those who survive. This means that refugee women from the Great Lakes region would require woman-refugee-sensitive approaches to social work practice. For example, in cases where a refugee woman has experienced extreme forms of trauma and is the sole caregiver in her family, how she copes and manages resettlement affects the whole family, especially her children. It is therefore very important that social work practitioners understand the challenges that refugee women and their families face (Vargas, 2007).

Caruth (1996) defines trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the events occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (p. 11). People remain captive to the past and often relive the horrendous events for years every time a sensory trigger such as a smell or a noise reactivates the experience (Caruth, 1996). Trauma can also be understood as an event set aside from other life problems, "outside of the range of human experience" because it generates "continuous background noises that produce many people walking wounded" (Brown in Caruth, 1995, p. 104).

The devastating effect of trauma can be affected by social discourses and by how others perceive the trauma, because the interpretation of the event determines the extent of its effects. In Canada, refugee women often relive these traumatic experiences as they come in contact

with different world views, racism, different cultural norms and values, poverty, and other forms of injustice.

### *Trauma and identity reconstruction*

Identity reconstruction for traumatized individuals depends on the gaze that the *other* who knows directs toward those who have experienced a traumatic event. Cyrulnik points out that "if you feel disgust, pity, or horror of what has happened to me, it is your view that will transform my ordeal into trauma" (p. 13). In other words, the extent of the impact of trauma depends on the perception and meaning the affected person attributes to the event and how it is perceived by others. Thus, the "story of trauma becomes a narrative of a delayed experience that attests to its endless impact on life, including the unbearable reality of having survived the ordeal" (Caruth, 1996, p.3). For example, the traumatic experience of torture can lead to distorted identity reconstruction where "certain subject-positions may become especially prominent . . . wherein one is 'possessed' by the past and tends to repeat it compulsively as if it were fully present" (Caruth, 1996, p. 3).

Hajdukowski-Ahmed (2008) writes of the psychological concept of "self-splitting" as a significant manifestation of trauma. A split self results from repressing an undesirable part of the self, such as a woman's experience of rape. It is a condition that creates a breach between the real self and lived experience—a distancing from that experience—and can manifest itself in various ways, including remaining silent or refusing to talk about the experience (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008).

While trauma may not be reversible, it can be repaired, key factors being inner resources or resilience and having a supportive environment after the ordeal (Groskop, 2009;

King, 2011). Groskop (2009) points out that we knit ourselves together by using the resources in our emotional and social environments. The concept of resilience signifies an individual's ability to overcome a catastrophic event and to continue to live a normal life (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2011).

Resilience as a concept has acquired legitimacy within the field of refugee studies, particularly as it relates to refugee mental health (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2011). Silencing a person because her story is too difficult to hear prevents healing and can lead to further mental health problems. Put simply, resilience is about integrating the imprint of the past and reshaping a healthy self-definition through the various processes of negotiation (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2011). In these processes, "body and mind are dialogically intertwined because our bodies live in relation with the world, with others, and with verbal language that can also harm or heal" (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008, p. 8). When refugee women experience somatization and/or flashbacks, these conditions speak into existence the "dialogical struggle in a 'push-pull' manner with their present until the past is successfully integrated in their psyche" (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008, p. 9). Important is the affirmation that the refugee identity is not one of a victim who is transformed into a survivor. Rather, she is a victim who is "continually engaged in a dialogical interaction with the survivor" (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008, p. 9). Dialogism exposes the struggle between the sides of a split self, and between the dissenting voices within a single utterance. Cyrulnik (2008) reminds us that trauma does not define an individual and "a person should never be reduced to his or her trauma" (p. 13).

### *Trauma and the long-term needs of survivors*

The devastation caused by violent displacement affects women and their communities in all aspects of daily living, including physical, emotional, economic, social-cultural and political dimensions (King, 2011). Drawing on liberal psychologists such as Martin-Baró (1994), cross-cultural psychologists and other transcultural psychiatrists, King argues that trauma theory as conceptualized within Western settings is ill suited for non-Western populations because it is "too individualistic and [related interventions] tend to 'silence' the voices of the very people they seek to help" (King, 2011, p. 12). King (2011) links individual suffering to the social world and seeks intervention models that go beyond individualistic-based approaches. She does this because the impact of violence in non-Western communities is "closely linked to systemic forms of oppression including racism, scarce-recourses, gender-based violence, chronic diseases, and extreme forms of poverty" (King, 2011, p. 26). I agree with King's opposition to a broad application of individualistic-based models across different knowledge systems, in part because it has left African groups who share the ideals of an intersubjective worldview worse off than they were, particularly in the area of mental health.

My research focused on refugee women who fled a non-European conflict zone and have been resettled in an individualistic socio-economic environment that shapes the services and care they receive. This means that the devastation that caused their forcible displacement is theorized within Western-based trauma theories and paradigms. My dissertation addresses this conundrum by pioneering a theorization that builds bridges across knowledge systems through mediating between Western and certain aspects of African perspectives to facilitate the resettlement of traumatized and vulnerable refugee women. The proposed approach allows the practitioner to create a space in which a research participant or a service user can foreground

her worldview, including how she views the world around her. Muwanga-Zake (2009) argues that research among Bantu peoples necessitates articulation of their lived experiences within the *Ubuntu* philosophy to ensure effective and valid conclusions.

Dialogic encounters hold the promise of integrating the socio-cultural, historical and political understanding of distress at both the individual and community levels and resonate with King's (2011) observations. My interest in dialogic social work practice links the question of how practitioners can think openly and genuinely to create a new kind of space in which the needs and challenges of the service user are addressed and resolved in spite of ontological differences or tensions between them. A feminist dialogical perspective, which shares affinity with Ubuntu philosophy, is discussed in Chapter Six.

**Theoretical Framework**

> There is a story in every line of theory, not in our capacity to theorize. . . . It takes a great deal of work to erase people from theoretical discussion.
>
> Lee Maracle, "Oratory," p. 236.

My research is informed by a comprehensive theorization based on a feminist dialogical epistemology and research methodology which validates experiential knowledge, refugee women's voices and situated bodies. It includes storytelling and uses qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and field notes. Combined, these approaches provided a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the gendered nature of violent displacement in the particular context of the Great Lakes region.

### *Introduction to feminist epistemology*

An overarching feminist epistemology is generally understood as "a mode of analysis, a woman sensitive method of approaching life and politics and a way of asking questions and searching for answers" (Nash, 2008, p. 12). I have chosen feminism because in all its iterations it takes seriously the centrality of gender relations within power structures and how they are reproduced in social, political, cultural and economic contexts throughout the world. Moreover, the central tenet of feminist epistemology is that of a situated knower (Lennon, 1997) who derives knowledge from experience. This situatedness "affects knowledge and influences the knower's access to information and the terms in which the knower represents what she knows" (Brooks, 2006, p. 61). Self-reported experience as a methodology can strengthen self-awareness and self-worth, elicit new knowledge and uncover issues that could be overlooked through other modes of investigation. It is particularly relevant and useful when conducting research with underrepresented/underprivileged social groups such as racialized refugee women.

Historically, women's experiences have been used in feminist analyses to elucidate the macropolitics of global restructuring and the effects of this on women (Riley, Mohanty, & Minnie, 2008). Such analyses reveal the embeddedness of the local and the particular in the global and general, which points to the need to conceptualize questions of justice and equity in transnational terms (Riley et al., 2008). In particular, a cross-border feminist theorization underscores the militarization of economic, social and political spaces (Giles & Hyndman, 2004; Reyntjens, 2005) such as the one that characterizes the Great Lakes region.

### *Dialogism,* Ubuntu *and qualitative research*

Dialogue is a conversation between two or more persons who exchange ideas on a particular issue. Dialogism is a two-way communication between persons who hold different worldviews with a goal of learning from each other about the subject at hand (Wegerif, 2013). It requires difference within the individual as well as within a relationship. Rupert Wegerif, a philosopher and educator, has earned international acclaim for his work on dialogic pedagogy. He featured his theorization of a dialogic space within learning environments in *Dialogic: Education for the internet age* (2013). As a research tool, dialogism contributes to the face-to-face encounter that explicitly links the embodied thinking and feeling subject to language. This approach is premised on the understanding that knowledge is constituted through dialogue, that language is imbued with personal values and that judgments can lead to a nuanced understanding of a particular experience (Sullivan, 2012). By expressing their views and assumptions, individuals can revise other peoples' ideas if and when they enter into conflict with each other (Sullivan, 2012).

Dialogism also suggests that people depend on the ideas of others to give them a sense of who they are (Sullivan, 2012; Taylor, 1994). Eze's (2008) theory of identity reconstruction, similar to dialogism, is embodied in the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*, which elucidates the intersubjective and communal nature of life:

> A person is a person through other people, strikes an affirmation of one's humanity through recognition of an "other" in his or her uniqueness and difference. It is a demand for a creative intersubjective formation in which the "other" becomes a mirror (but only a mirror) for my subjectivity. Humanity is a quality we owe to each other. We create each other and need to sustain this otherness creation. "I am" is not a rigid subject, but a

dynamic self-constitution dependent on this otherness creation of relation and distance (Eze, 2008, pp. 190–191).

In this study, *Ubuntu* dialogical philosophy is central to conducting research with refugee women from the Great Lakes region because study participants came from communities that subscribed to the ideal of a shared subjectivity that is very different from the Western individualistic philosophy expressed as "I think therefore I am" (Eze, 2008). The intersubjective nature of participants' lives in many areas became apparent during the interviews, particularly in respect to how significant parts of each of the stories I heard raised concerns about someone else's well-being, and not about the participant's immediate concerns and needs; they talked at length about their children, their parents (deceased or alive), their cousins and nephews, a sister-in-law left behind, and others scattered around the world. Each participant felt a need to situate herself within an elaborate social and cultural context. I understood that the extended family network (not necessarily all blood related) was an important part of a participant's identity, as well as her psychological and emotional well-being.

The *Ubuntu* ideal of "I am because we are; and that since we are therefore I am" sits well with Levinas's (1978) ethics of responsibility for the *other.* It reveals a responsibility to those left behind who are still suffering in their respective countries of origin. Listening to their stories, I felt that participants were involved in a continuous struggle to mend broken parts of selves because these blood or social relationships were intricately embedded in participants' identities. As a researcher, my role was to remind the participant that she was still an important part of those social networks. Only then did a

participant turn her attention onto the self and thus proceed to narrate how she had worked to reconfigure these relationships.

### *Dialogical voices: A feminist dialogical approach to identity reconstruction*

Drawing from the philosophy of Bakhtin and the subsequent works of Hermans and Kempen (1993), Hajdukowski-Ahmed (2008) views identity reconstruction as dialogic because it is formed through language in a process of social interaction. This means that identity is constructed in contexts of difference. These encounters are "not innocuous, as the *self* is engaged in a continuous dialogical confrontation between voices as they represent differing points of view" (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008, p. 1). Bakhtin (1986) posits that dialogism is premised on the idea that a subject cannot remain voiceless, and therefore its cognition can only be dialogic. Hajdukowski-Ahmed (2008) explains that we "have a core *I* constructed through our various dialogical encounters with other voices and worldviews or *Me* voices, which enter into a dialogue with that *I*" (p.1). When the "*I* voice meets a different voice, it enters a lifelong dialogical process of reacting, absorbing, or recoiling from it, rejecting it, or reshaping it" (p.1). The various "voices embody collective meanings, cultural representations and values, to which the *I* adds her own voice" (p.1). A dialogic definition of the self implies a "continuous interlocution between the *Me* positions absorbed and fused into *I,* while being grounded in historical time, in specific locations, and within power relations" (p. 1).

Furthermore, a feminist dialogical approach acknowledges conflicting worldviews as normal life situations where spaces can be created to hear the different voices in their historical contexts, including within power relations (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008). "Voicing" is organic in nature; it has a pitch and a tone, it conveys emotions, pain and valuation, it is a form of

embodiment which connects the body with the self (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008). This approach differs from postmodernism and poststructuralism because it "moves toward a teleological open horizon and does not block collective action and solidarity" (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008, p. 1).

A feminist dialogic approach to identity reconstruction for refugee women acknowledges the complexities that characterize the refugee journey by creating a dialogic space through which an embodied and a skillful subjectivity can continue to negotiate new identities in new social and political settings. Trueba (2004) argues that the ability to function within multiple cultural identities in different settings is a form of cultural capital that extends beyond the individual and contributes to cultural production in new settings.

Similarly, participants' accounts revealed how they applied various identities to multiple affiliations, including the fact that they could become different selves within each of them: a refugee, a visible minority, a single mother, etc. Ultimately, the reconstructed identities make affixing special meanings to the experiences of violent displacement and resettlement possible because a feminist dialogical approach to practice does not perceive differences to be contradictions. Therefore, in order to capture the voices of participants from the Great Lakes region, one needs to design a specific methodology that encompasses all aspects I have described. Consequently, in the next chapter I shall outline the methodological design of my study, which is intended to be one of my original contributions to research.

### *A feminist dialogical epistemology and the researcher's subject position*

In conducting qualitative studies, researchers are the principal means through which data is collected (Creswell, 2007). They can significantly influence the research process

(Reissman, 2002). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) view data collection as "a site where power, gender, class, race intersect" (p. 47). This means that "who one is and what one's relationship to the subject under investigation [is] are issues that determine one's questions and, to some extent, one's answers about the subject" (Agnew, 1996, p. 5). Therefore, it is important that I examine my subject position and the influence it has had on the methodological choices I made for my dissertation.

My family and I fled Uganda 32 years ago, sought political asylum in Kenya and were finally resettled in Canada in 1983. Official discourses in Canada have constructed me as the *other*: Black African, middle-aged woman, single mother and member of an ethno-cultural minority group. This positioning evokes a fluid and dynamic sense of the multiplicity of *selves* that I occupy in Canadian society. Within the various discursive practices, special meanings are attached to each of the subjectivities that I simultaneously occupy. This means that negotiating identities within a Canadian social and political context engenders an intimate knowledge about and unique insights into being a refugee and resettlement in Canada. I acquired this knowledge by being actively involved in community organizing and cofounding two organizations for immigrants and refugees. I have volunteered at settlement agencies, holding positions of varying degrees of responsibility. In this regard, I have an informed understanding of social inequality and how it relates to the inherent power asymmetries that exist in Canadian society. Such power imbalances become obvious in the ways in which race, gender, age and class intersect to impact an African refugee woman's access to resources and employment, including how she copes with workplace discriminatory practices. Similarities in social positioning such as the experiences of dislocation, racism, and barriers to employment, together with a feminist dialogical approach to qualitative research were instrumental in

formulating collaborative and trusting relationships with research participants. Participants who shared their stories began to tell others about what became known as "our study," indicative of the relationships that were built during dialogic encounters between the participants and myself in spite of the initial reluctance on the part of some of the participants. The connection was, in part, due to similarities that characterize our life journeys through displacement, material dispossession and social transformation.

### *Life as a story for theory*

Life as a story for theory signifies the exploration of the various ways stories function in our lives, including how we function as stories (Kenyon & Randall, 2001). From an ontological perspective, human beings are storytellers and story listeners. That is, as human beings, "we think, perceive, feel, decide, and act on the basis of stories because our life stories have cognitive, affective, and volitional dimensions" (Kenyon & Randall, 2001, p. 26). Bamberg (2010) reminds us that when participants tell their stories, they position characters in space and time, which help them to organize and make sense of what happened or what they imagined had happened. Telling stories helped them understand themselves as "social beings who are multiply defined by gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual culture" (Singer, 2004, p. 438) and sexual orientation.

Stories can validate refugee women's identity when they choose how to tell them and select those aspects of the self that they wish to expose to the listener (Roberts, 2004). In this respect, storytelling becomes a selective narration of events of the past in ways that make the most sense to the storyteller (Chase, 2003). In so doing, she can reconstruct her subjective realities about what happened, what is and what she hopes for the future (Singer, 2004). As

refugee women's lives change, so do the meanings and the types of connections in their lives as stories, which are interpretations of actions that have occurred in a particular sequence throughout their journey.

A story is a narrative that binds events together and makes sense of the journey. As a tool for identity reconstruction, storytelling is concerned with how individuals seek to make sense of their lives. It positions an individual in relation to the discursive resources available (Brown, Stacey, & Nandhakumar, 2008) while enforcing an understanding that the socially constructed identity is the storyteller's identity (Kenyon & Randall, 2001). Nolin (2006) argues that as participants draw on memories to construct stories, they in turn, reconstruct shattered lives while piecing together an existence in new settings. Therefore, to understand the process of identity reconstruction for the refugee women from the Great Lakes region I interviewed, it became necessary to recognize how they crafted their experiences of resettlement, how they told these stories to themselves and to others, how they negotiated dialogical tensions between worldviews, and ultimately, how they applied these stories to their knowledge of self and to the world around them.

# CHAPTER TWO
# METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This chapter is divided into four main parts. In the first section I discuss sampling and data collection techniques and their relevance to a feminist dialogical conceptual framework. A feminist dialogical approach to data reduction, the selection of key moments and data analysis are discussed in the second part of the chapter. In the third and fourth parts, I discuss ethical issues and concerns specific to conducting research with vulnerable groups such as refugee women from the Great Lakes region, as well as the study limitations.

## Data Collection

### *Access and recruitment*

The processes of publicizing my research with refugee women from the Great Lakes region involved making telephone calls and scheduling meetings with immigrant and refugee resettlement and service organizations in the Ottawa region. The purpose of targeting these organizations was to promote and create awareness of the study in sites that are familiar to refugee women. It was also through these interactions that I sought permission to post flyers on their respective bulletin boards. I had meetings with two counselors from two different welfare offices, and a church minister whose congregation constitutes a significant number of refugees from SSA. I also met with three executive officers of immigrants and resettlement agencies. Before posting my flyer on bulletin boards at Carleton University, I was required to submit documents to its ethics review board, and approval was granted a couple of weeks thereafter. (See Appendix B for university ethics approvals.) One contact person, who had a professional

interest in the social work field, requested a longer conversation with me. We set up a time and place for the conversation and I provided her with a consent form at the time of the interview.

To access and recruit refugee women/participants for the study, I used a combination of publicity materials and snowball sampling. A flyer was posted on bulletin boards at a local university, community centers, faith-based organizations and resettlement organizations (Appendix C). I included my contact information (telephone number and e-mail address) in publicity materials.

As a result of my extensive publicity campaign, seventeen women from SSA contacted me. A feminist dialogical examination of how refugee women who have experienced violent displacement manage the resettlement process and negotiate new identities in Canada involved numerous visits and negotiations with women, many of whom did not meet the sampling criteria. My initial plan was to introduce and explain the purpose of the study by telephone, however all women preferred face-to-face meetings. This resulted in a considerable amount of time being spent screening those who had expressed interest, but only eight met the criteria and agreed to proceed with an interview. We arranged the time and place for the interview later by telephone. All but one participant wanted to be interviewed in her home. I made a point of scheduling one interview per day to ensure that a participant had ample time to tell her story.

During these interviews I explained the goals of the study and responded to questions, some of which were complicated by the fear and mistrust that some participants had of me, that is, my motivation and ethnic affiliation. The mistrust resulted from a history of tensions between ethnic groups. Others had lived in social and political environments in which their group identities had become major liabilities for them. In instances where a participant's ethnicity was not obvious to me, I introduced nonrelated and general topics about the country

of origin until she became comfortable enough to speak candidly about her life. Because I wanted to be sensitive to the issues of ethnic identity, the initial meeting involved building trust which resulted in long and sometimes uncomfortable conversations. On average, the meetings lasted 1.5 hours. In instances where it was appropriate, I involved the participant's husband in the initial meeting because the refugee women's participation depended, to a great extent, on their husband's approval.

To make sure that a participant could verify the authenticity of the study I provided sufficient information about the study. As the women became comfortable, I talked about the content of the Letter of Introduction and consent form (Appendix D), highlighting key components of the consent form such as the voluntary nature of their participation, confidentiality, and where and how long the data would be stored. After extensive discussion, I asked the participant to sign the consent form. At the end of each session participants were asked to provide names of others who they thought might be interested and met the sampling criteria.

### *Sampling*

Sampling criteria included women 18 years of age or older, who had fled from Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda or the DRC, had come to Canada as convention refugees and had lived in Canada for more than five years. My initial intention was to interview refugee women who had arrived in Canada between the years 2003 and 2008 because I wanted to identify how policy and program changes resulting from the enactment of the Canada Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) in 2002 affected refugee women. As the interviews progressed, it became clear that participants were reluctant to express personal opinions about the different

aspects of their resettlement experience. Instead, they overplayed and praised, perhaps excessively, the services they received. This phenomenon, referred to as "strategic essentialism" by Spivak (1987), is used by marginalized groups as a negotiation tool when they are caught up in unequal power relations. Accordingly, my hope of eliciting recommendations regarding policy and program changes had to be set aside. I made the necessary adjustments by changing my sampling criteria to include convention refugee women who had lived in Canada for more than five years. I was able to get three participants who had come to Canada before the enactment of the IRPA and had had time to reflect on their experiences of resettlement and identity reconstruction in Canada. Taken together, participants provided different but complementary data to adequately answer my research question. The final sample size consisted of eight participants and I conducted full feminist dialogical analyses of these eight interviews.[11]

### *The iterative data generation process*

To explore identity reconstruction and resettlement processes for refugee women from the Great Lakes region, a feminist dialogical qualitative research design comprising field notes and loosely structured in-depth interviews provided the needed research data. These techniques of data generation were well suited to capture participants' self-reported experiences because of their "discursive nature" (Soss, 2006, p. 134), and the importance of voice and agency in my study.

With permission from participants, lengthy in-depth interviews were conducted in English and audio recorded, as suggested by Patton (2002). The interviews were conducted in

[11] The thesis committee accepted the sample size in recognition of the multi-dimensional nature and complexity of a dialogical approach to the analysis of qualitative data.

English (even though three participants spoke French better than English) because I do not know French. All research instruments, including the interview guide, were prepared in English. Furthermore, all participants and myself spoke Swahili and Luganda, languages widely spoken in the Great Lakes region. These two languages provided a degree of flexibility for women who wanted to refer to them, if needed.

Six of the eight participants preferred to meet only once. This meant I had to take as much time as was needed to cover everything, instead of meeting three times as I had initially proposed. On average, these interviews lasted 2.5 hours. The other two participants opted for two separate interviews. Conducting long conversations with each participant in which we sometimes returned to a previously discussed topics allowed me to analyze the different aspects of their narratives. In other words, key utterances were explored in detail while I simultaneously adhered to the key feminist principle of developing rapport and meaningful relationships with participants, as well as being emotionally engaged and empathetic. Through these processes, strong connections between myself and the participants were forged.

Using the interview questions I had developed to guide the conversation, I asked participants to "tell their story" to the extent that they were comfortable doing so, specifically, the story of how they came to Canada (see Appendix E). From a dialogical feminist perspective, the engagement between the researcher and participant is particularly important because it requires the researcher to hear the participant's narratives and to understand them as acts of engagement in the production of knowledge (Frank, 2005). The researcher not only gathers information, but instigates self-reflection through questioning which can lead to a transformation of the researcher and the participants as opposed to them merely reporting the data (Frank, 2005). Frank cautions researchers to avoid focusing too much on themes that fix

participants in identities that fit a particular typology. For my part, I encouraged each participant to choose what and how much she wished to share, while I decided on appropriate timing for breaks. Towards the end of each session I invited participants to give me their critical reflections on the interview and used this as an opportunity to wind down the conversation by focusing on those areas that a participant considered significant and worthy of further discussion and/or elaboration. To conclude the interview, I gave each participant a thank-you card in recognition of the time and effort she had expended.

Recording the interviews digitally allowed me to focus on a participant narrative and to pay attention to possible stressful moments that could arise during the session. Although I had prepared an interview guide, each conversation was different given the uniqueness of each participant and the details she was willing to share. This type of flexibility is central to a feminist dialogical approach to qualitative research because it mediates significant interruptions during conversations with *selves* and with the researcher.

### *Personal research diary*

Recording thoughts and ideas was a major component of the research process because by doing so I was able to pay attention to methodological and analytical aspects of the study. While it was not always possible to take extensive notes, I jotted down personal reactions and assumptions, descriptions of settings and feelings expressed. Key words and thoughts, or "sound bites," were also added to the data set. In other words, I was engaged in an ongoing dialogue with self and participants' expressed thoughts, reflecting on my own transformation, paying attention to concepts that participants used, itemizing completed tasks and figuring out how to move to the next stage of the research.

While recording my research experience, I was also mindful of participants' body language such as posture, lowered gaze and/or fidgeting, particularly body language that spoke of trauma and related mental health issues. Telephone calls, cancelled appointments, unresolved problems and plans for action were also recorded and attended to. The notes were expanded at the end of each session. Emmerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) argue that field notes contribute to the trustworthiness of qualitative research. My field notes provided material for a feminist dialogical analysis in that I was recording my own and participants' reactions. (Selected researcher's observations are included in participants' profiles in Chapter Three.)

## A feminist dialogical approach to data analysis

A feminist dialogical approach requires using multiple techniques to bring participants' voices and the nuances of what they say into the analysis. These techniques included preparation of summary tables, identification of sound bites and undertaking comprehensive analyses of select extracts to ensure that participants' voices entered into dialogue with each other. Furthermore, literature reviews of the four themes that constitute the research question (on being a refugee, managing resettlement, dialogism and identity reconstruction and longing for belonging and recognition) were conducted to contextualize the analyses.

### *Transcribing the dialogue*

Sullivan (2012) recommends a less detailed transcription style since "validity of the analysis depends on how the transcript works together with the other features of the analysis rather than the details in the transcript" (p. 69). This requires avoiding complicated signs and symbols when transcribing the data. I was mindful of the reader's reaction to the analysis and made decisions about data presentation style, which included a graphic representation of data

reduction and analyses processes (see Appendix F). The transcription stage started with reviewing digital recordings and comments. The next round of review involved listening to recordings and paying attention to the different dialogic exchanges within the data set, delineating key discursive features and identifying emotional register/intonation, time-space, and the context in which the utterance took place. These steps were individually conducted for each interview. I then started the data reduction process by identifying and selecting key moments.

### *Data reduction: Identifying and selecting key moments*

Using key moments as a data reduction method helps the researcher to focus on an utterance as the basic unit of communication (Sullivan, 2012). An utterance is a unit of meaning and can be a statement, a question or a type of speech. It is designed to reflect the social context in which it is articulated (Dadey, 2003). To be considered a key moment, the utterance must capture a significant part of the interaction within an interview. In terms of content, the following criteria were used to select key moments: responses to themes in the interview guide, the importance that participants placed on particular concepts and participants' expectations about resettlement and their future in Canada, including their reflection on identity transformation. The selection of these features was informed by my own curiosity and desire to understand identity transformation in place and time. Using key moments for data reduction makes the feminist dialogical approach different from other approaches because of the emphasis it places on an embodied subjectivity (Dadey, 2003; Sullivan, 2012) and on data collection as a process imbued with fluctuations, tensions and transformations. Subjectivity,

according to Davies and Hare (1990), refers to an aspect of a person's psyche through which the individual identifies herself and her place in the world.

### *Identifying discursive features*

When speaking about refugeeness, for example, we speak of it as an object of knowledge because it is a "thing" we construct and which contains an ideology. This means that the way we talk about it influences how we act toward and respond to people who become refugees (Turton, 2003). This is how language and practice form a discourse that constructs refugeeness so that we can begin to understand it, what it represents and why refugees come to our country (Razack, 1998). The effect of language related to refugeeness suggests that refugees are people who are simply passive victims of circumstances and have limited rational thought (Nyers, 1999). Such representation has devastating effects on refugee women because its dehumanizing effects get carried through into social work practice. The combination of language and practice is what Foucault (1994) referred to as discourse or discursive formation, which generates meaning and produces knowledge or power.

According to Lacroix (2004), discourse can also refer to "any regulated system of statements derived from legislation and administrative regulations" (p. 154). Such regulated discourses contribute to knowledge claims that permit a characterization of refugees as "massive flows of destitute people from 'Third World' countries," and suggest that refugees from non-European countries "constitute a political and poverty class of excess people" who are "classed as foreign, dependent and poor, and in need of entry level jobs and of health care" (Muecke, 1992, p. 520). Such analyses illustrate how othering and racialized discourses create differences between groups of people and the subsequent power to categorize, exclude and

subjugate them (Golberg, 1993). This type of representation speaks to the violence that such discourses engender in shaping our understanding, not only of how particular refugee groups are treated, but of how it jeopardizes their prospects for the future. Foucault (1986) conceives of discourse "as a violence that we do to things, or at all events as a practice we impose upon them" (p. 7). Despite the negative representation of refugee women, Turton (2003) believes that to "flee" when applied to human beings, implies some degree of agency, of independent will which suggests visibility of those who find themselves forcibly displaced.

### *Discursive formations and refugee women*

As they move into different spaces and cultures, refugee women's identities become dialogically iterative. However, official discourses about them remain static, and as a result, their voices are muted, and their agency severely curtailed (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008). As remnants of colonial and imperial violence, these official discourses have constructed refugee women from non-European countries as powerless, uneducated females (Mohanty, 1988). Such official discourses are authoritative—monological—because they reject difference, multiplicity, complexity and context. However, a discourse from a feminist dialogical point of view is viewed aesthetically because it has the power to shape *selves*, including how *selves* respond to the shaping (Dadey, 2003). This means that a dialogic discourse can represent many speaking voices which can counter or respond to anticipated judgments when a speaker articulates a particular point of view (Dadey, 2003). For example, voice gives a specific intonation to being a refugee in Canada. By designating an intoned point of view, voice resonates with personal values, which give a discourse a "textured" feeling of comfort or discomfort as it gets transformed into lived experience (Bakhtin, 1984; Sullivan, 2012). Thus,

the power to shape *selves*, including how selves respond to the shaping, is what gives a dialogic discourse its texture (Dadey, 2003). In such instances, subjectivity is also social because it relates to *self* as well as to *others*.

In a dialogic discourse there are different power relations and many voices, including that of the speaker (Dadey, 2003). However, some discourses can be dominated by one voice, which intones and shapes the *other* (Sullivan, 2012). In such a relationship, the *other* has "no agency to disagree with the speaker or to introduce his/her own intonation and point of view into the discourse" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 44). The speaker "moves the *other* from the outside world into the center of her own discourse where the *other* becomes saturated with the speaker's own intonation" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 46). This is when a singular truth is privileged. Such discourse is referred to as an **outside-in** discourse, one in which the *other* is a silenced or spoken-for subjectivity (Sullivan, 2012).

In contrast, an **inside-out** discourse allows the *other's* voice to escape from within the speaker's intonation to retain its own intonation. Bakhtin (1984) argues that an inside-out discourse is both internally and externally dialogical. As a consequence, it is characterized as a **double-voiced** discourse, one where the authoritative speaker receives a response from a lurking voice of the *other* within the same discourse (Bakhtin, 1984). A double-voiced discourse allows the *other* to agree with or destabilize the speaker's intentions thereby allowing the existence of multiple truths.

At the core of an aesthetic aspect of a dialogic discourse is the issue of "non-identity." This is when the "self is not identical with itself, but relates to itself as well as to others" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 45). For example, our own discourse, "that which is felt as uniquely ours—may admit (willingly or unwillingly) the *other's* inside it and gives it a 'voice,' and wrestles

with its internal presence while simultaneously addressing an outside *other*" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 45). In this respect, a dialogical approach to subjectivity involves looking at the difficulties that *selves* encounter when deciding "what is my own voice here," difficulties that can be detected through analysis. As a researcher, being cognizant of these nuances in voicing enabled me to conduct a comprehensive and complex analysis of the stories, differentiate between voices and identify fluctuations to avoid authoritative (monological/outside-in) discourses that silence a research participant.

### *The organization of time and space*

More than other approaches, a feminist dialogical approach accords a great deal of importance to the transformative aspect of discourse as it relates to time and space, such as how women negotiate identities before and during resettlement. I shall draw attention to refugee women's crisis-ridden movements in time and space, including how such ruptures transform identities, "an aspect that is usually overlooked by other approaches to the analysis of qualitative data" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 165).

### *The* self-other *axis*

The *self-other* axis assumption allows the researcher to identify changing boundaries between voices. It also leads to a focus on the "emotional and moral connection to what is being said" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 168). However, what falls into the categories "*other*" and "*self*" is amenable to change because what constitutes *self* and *other* may also change in time and space. This dynamism reflects the distinction between outside-in discourse (monological) where the language is grounded in the certainty of the speaker's discourse, and inside-out

discourse (dialogical), where the *other's* discourse ambivalently interferes with and changes the speaker's discourse (Bakhtin, 1984; Sullivan, 2012). Sullivan argues that the objective of the dialogical method is to enrich the interpretation of the narrative by engaging what the other has to say.

### ***Dialogism: Concern for the anticipated* other**

Dialogism is particularly concerned with the *self-other* dialogue. This is a double-voiced discourse which exposes the crisis-ridden subject of a Bakhtinian dialogue, bringing to the fore a distinct competitive aspect of anticipated and real responses within a given discourse. As Bakhtin (1986) explains, a real or anticipated response does not have to be from a person, it may come from a regulation that governs practice. The anticipation of others' judgments can reflexively be reworked into the structure of discourse when the anticipated *others* "exacerbate, embellish or exaggerate the 'sore-spot,' paranoia and suspicion with which selves approach each other" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 170). In this respect, the researcher has a responsibility to listen and respond to both what is being said and the tone in which it is said, because dialogism behooves us "to linger over the responses of others, particularly in moments of crisis" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 170).

Methodologically, the anticipated interlocutor spilling out and into our dialogue with concrete *others* is oftentimes unrecognized in other qualitative approaches to data analysis (Sullivan, 2012). Through its focus on double-voiced discourse, a feminist dialogical approach foregrounds a multileveled experience with diverse competing *others* and responses, including that of the more self-confident, authoritative *other*. This means that through dialogue, the researcher can explore a complex and conscious subjectivity in process.

### *The tables and their contents*

In this section I outline the steps taken to identify the various components of the utterances. The identified features of each utterance formed a matrix to display the data, and the discursive features were collated into tables representing eight key moments or utterances. The initial steps I took in naming each key utterance involved identifying subject matter discourses, discerning emotional registers, time-space elaboration and the context in what is being said, including how they all relate to subjectivity. The eight key utterances are presented in Tables 1.1-1.8 which represent abridged versions of participants' narratives. (See Appendix F.)

The tables were used to delineate and determine the different features of an utterance. In doing this I uncovered differences between key moments resulting from the various ways participants chose to tell their stories and the emphasis that each put on particular aspects of her story. The types of discourse used in the analysis were inside-out discourse, outside-in discourse and sound bites, direct and indirect speech, word with a sideward glance, hidden dialogue, etc. – features central to a dialogical approach to the analysis of qualitative data. In addition, a subjectivity type was assigned to a participant according to the following characteristics: authoritative and dialogic. These were determined by the kind of discourse and tone that characterized a participant's style or manner of speaking. As discussed before, using analytic tables as data reduction techniques helped to capture thoughts, feelings, emotions and the context of the key utterance. As such, the technique brings the analysis into contact with Bakhtian's theorization of an embodied subjectivity. Time-space elaboration captures the moment-to-moment interaction and the distance between a participant and the researcher, while

the contextual component of the analysis guides the researcher to the actual naming of the key utterance excavated, as it were, from each data set.

Table 2 demonstrates the way in which participants can indirectly dialogue with each other through 'sound bites'. Specific to feminist dialogical analyses, sound bites are used to introduce different sets of voices as participants speak in varying ways, albeit, within a common theme. A sound bite is thus a tool for bringing more intertextuality into the analysis which in turn becomes dialogical (Sullivan, 2012).

## A Feminist Dialogical Approach to Ensuring Quality in Qualitative Research

According to Reissman (2002), ensuring quality in qualitative research is how we make claims for the trustworthiness of our representations. A feminist dialogical methodology assists "in catching nuances, contradictions and fluctuations in the process of knowledge creation and dissemination" (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 1998, p. 648). This means that "significant temporal and emotional investments are required when contrasted with methods that rely on quantification of productivity" (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 1998, p. 649). It is thus the emergence of a pattern through reiteration that constitutes the value (truth) of the analysis, undertaken together with the participants throughout the research process. Furthermore, Hajdukowski-Ahmed (1998) argues that "the validity of the instrument of knowledge does not depend on extrinsic criteria (verification by a control group or random selection of participants) or its perfectibility…, but rather on its usefulness in transforming the situation according to the participants' experiential input" (pp. 648–649). Other feminist approaches also emphasize centering participants' voices. They require hearing their life histories and understanding participants as coproducers of knowledge (Brooks, 2006; Nash, 2008).

Standards for evaluating rigor and the quality of this study were based on how dialogue was created within text and the space allocated to participants' voices, including how the analysis drew attention to the discursive organization of subjectivity. According to Sullivan (2012), a good intertextual analysis strives to be polyphonic—creating dialogue between different voices: between the researcher and participants or between participants and social discourses. Voice here is understood as "a point of view" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 40). Following Sullivan's suggestion, polyphony or multiple voices were achieved by attending to the following two points: the space allotted to participants' voices in the text and the discursive organization of subjectivity.

***The space allotted to participants' voices in the text***

Reissman (2002) identifies three kinds of coherence when analyzing narratives: (a) the overall goals a participant is trying to accomplish by sharing her story, (b) the structure of the narrative and (c) the use of recurrent themes in the interview. Generally scholars have resorted to **thick** description to demonstrate that an interpretation is coherent. Thick description is a technique used to describe, interpret and explain the data and create thick meaning for participants and the researcher (Ponterotto, 2006; Reissman, 2002). The approach involves presenting detailed, contextual and emotional data while keeping participants' voices, feelings, actions and interactions alive (Ponterotto, 2006). It also requires paying attention to body language, facial expressions and silences (Ghorashi, 2007). Reissman (2002) encourages the researcher to review her initial assumptions about participant's beliefs and goals (global coherence) in light of the structure of particular narratives (local coherence) and recurrent themes that unify the text (thematic coherence).

In a similar vein, the goal of a feminist dialogical approach to qualitative analysis is coherence and persuasiveness. Coherence is achieved through polyphony, creating dialogue between different voices. This entails extensive use of summary tables together with quotations to give space to participants' voices in the analysis. Arguably, extensive use of quotations minimizes risks of under-analysis associated with the use of isolated quotations. In regards to coherence, summary tables contextualize the quotations and related analyses. Since summary tables represent "reported speech," the quotations allow the reader to recognize links between the original text and its interpretation (Sullivan, 2012). Furthermore, summary tables situate participants' quotations in give-and-take, that is, reciprocal relationships between quotations and interpretations, between the researcher's voice and the reader, as they enter into dialogue with each other (see Sullivan, 2012).

***The discursive organization of subjectivity***

Another evaluative feature of a feminist dialogical approach is an interpretation that portrays particular aspects of subjectivity, such as transformative experience, doubt, uncertainty, fluctuations, distance and closeness to others (Sullivan, 2012). While the entire dialogical approach involves interpreting participants' assumptions, beliefs and points of view, it nonetheless brings out their points of view through anacrisis and syncrisis. Anacrisis is a process of allowing others to express their point of view on the subject in terms of how it connects to their lived experience. Syncrisis, on the other hand, involves juxtaposing different points of view (Sullivan, 2012). In respect to coherence, I created dialogues between different sound bites to establish anacrisis and syncrisis while being mindful of participants' conflicting and perhaps even conflicted views.

Reissman's (2002) pragmatic approach to the analysis of narratives measures the extent to which the study spurs the production of more work. A researcher's "craftsmanship" entails applying techniques such as continuous questioning and theorizing interpretation of data (Kvale, 1995). A feminist dialogical approach to persuasiveness is well aligned with Reissman's (2002) pragmatic approach, Denzin and Lincoln's (2008) dependability criteria, as well as Kvale's (1995) approach to ensuring quality in qualitative research. This alignment relates to viewing persuasiveness as a measure of how the study engenders debate, questions and new insights and methods of doing research (Sullivan, 2012). In this study, persuasiveness was ensured by adhering to a systematic procedure of itemizing activities and tasks with details not only of how interpretations were made, but of how the outlined processes were used to compile the data. Finally, and for the purpose of improving the quality of the analysis, I also received and incorporated extensive feedback from my dissertation committee,[12] as suggested by Sullivan (2012).

**Ethics: Conducting Qualitative Research with Refugees Women**

Ethics are the questions that must be considered when involving human subjects in research (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Feminist ethical demands on the researcher include ensuring confidentiality, no deception, reciprocity, and maintenance of relationships after the study. In addition, I followed York University's Code of Ethical Principles from the Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. These include ensuring that participants were well informed and consented to take part in the study, and that they were free to withdraw at any time without consequences (York University, 2013). I discussed the benefits versus risks associated with their involvement in the research, including how data and their identity will be protected with

[12] Thesis supervisor, Luann Good Gingrich, Susan McGrath and Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed.

the participants. The feminist requirement for establishing meaningful relationships with participants was realized by conveying empathy and attentively and carefully listening to participants' responses to my questions. Moreover, the feminist approach is aligned with the ethical dimension of dialogue, which posits that "we ought to linger over *otherness* attentively so that the personality we 'bestow' upon the *other* emerges out of a deep understanding of their particularity" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 4). To be sure, I lingered over the *other* for a much longer time than would normally be expended in quantitative research. I was also mindful of how my own cultural bias and ethnic affiliation could result in discrepancies. Given the similarity of my cultural background and that of the participants, I was able to identify nuances and silences that revealed new and original identity traits, including concerns and wishes for the future.

In his article "Face-to-Face: Ethics and Responsibility," Aidani (2013) draws on Levinas's analysis of ethical responsibility to discuss the ethics of conducting research with refugees and asylum seekers. The notion of ethical responsibility is derived from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's famous phrase: "We all are guilty for everything, for everybody and before everybody, and me more than everyone else" (Aidani, 2013, p. 207). Aidani theorizes that the relationship between *self* and *other* underscores that responsibility as central to ethics. What then is the responsibility of the researcher to the participant? How is responsibility towards the participant enacted? Aidani (2013) responds to these questions by discussing how the researcher can reflect on the ethics of face-to-face relationships with participants and to understand that trauma and violence have social and political dimensions.

My face-to-face relationship with participants was an intersubjective exchange of experiences and memories, resulting from a cultural and historical attachment between us. This attachment was formed not only on the basis of me being an empathetic researcher but founded

on a shared history and language. As a result, the encounter became a two-way recognition of specific histories of persecution, trauma and violent displacement. Aidani (2013) informs us that it is this exchange of memories that makes it easier for participants to tell their stories of loss and talk about the indignities of violent displacement. Levinas (1978) posits that "we are not asked to feed the hungry and destitute with a gift of the heart but rather of the bread from one's mouth, of one's own mouthful of bread" (as quoted in Aidani, 2013, p. 213). Aidani goes on to suggest that participant stories of trauma and suffering are limited if the researcher is not informed by a cultural memory of their narrative. In other words, an inside-outsider positioning helps to understand the *other.* We are also reminded that one must commit to the other by having the other-in-one's-skin. This relationship, I suggest, can only be established in an ethical manner when the researcher answers to the call of the *other.* Aidani (2013) cautions researchers not to become lost in their own compassion, but to ask this existential question: What can/must I do? The researcher's ethical responsibility can be summed in the following manner: "You are perfectly free to leave the book on the table. But if you open it, you assume responsibility for it" (Aidani, 2013, p. 214). In this regard, conducting research with refugees compels us with a responsibility of ethicality because

> ethics is no longer a simple moralism of rules which decree what is virtuous. It is the original awakening of an *I* responsible for the *other*, the accession of my person to the uniqueness of the *I* called and elected to responsibility for the *other* (Aidani, 2013, p. 214).

This is a type of responsibility through which a researcher finds her ethical self (Aidani, 2013). In other words, ethics originates from the face-to-face encounter between the researcher and participants or between practitioner and service user, and it is the power and hierarchal

inequalities in these relationships that define the *self* and its responsibility towards the *other*. In such encounters, the researcher/practitioner is advised to see and respond to the other's suffering not just compassionately, but also socially and politically justly. This way, the researcher/practitioner can render ethical linkages between compassion and social justice, and by implication, recognize the political dimension of trauma and violent displacement.

Conducting research with those "who have lived in war, been forced to flee their homes, and live a life of marginality as an ethnic minority, and as women without a nation" (Goodkind & Deacon, 2004, p. 725) requires the development of an awareness of gender roles in specific cultural contexts, including their potential to influence how a participant responds to a given question. My inside-outsider positionality was useful in that respect. While the focus of the study was on gender, I was mindful of other axes of inequality, such as ethnicity, class and sexual orientation, which may have compounded differences in how participants responded to the questions at hand.

**Challenges and Limitations of the Study Design**

My initial apprehension about the degree to which refugee women would invest themselves in the study grew out of an understanding that engaging in a research project of this magnitude was a new experience for many women. For many, their concerns were expressed in the questions they asked and difficulties they had in understanding written material. This is in spite of my ability and willingness to speak Luganda, Swahili or Kinyarwanda - languages widely spoken across the Great Lakes region.

Using a feminist dialogical approach to qualitative research presented three major limitations: these processes were costly and a significant amount of time was required to

collect, transcribe, and analyse the data. The third limitation concerns issues of confidentiality and anonymity which could easily be compromised when presenting findings. For example, participants could be identified from data extracts or quotations, and depending on how a given 'subjectivity' was presented, a participant could be dismayed by how her style of speech was characterized (monological or dialogical). These and other issues concerning confidentiality ought to be considered and addressed during the signing of the consent form.

Although qualitative research designs allow for theoretical generalization, recommendations from this research will not necessarily represent all or even the majority of Great Lakes refugee women in Canada. However, a feminist dialogical approach to research and social work practice can be generalized to benefit researchers and refugees from elsewhere who have experienced violent displacement and other forms of trauma.

# CHAPTER THREE

# FINDINGS PART I: THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research participants through data extracts complemented with field observations. I provide demographic information (age, marital status, date of arrival, etc.) and capture some memorable moments throughout their journey to Canada. To protect their identity, pseudonyms have been used.

## Monica (DRC)

Monica is a 20-year-old university student. She was born in Goma, North Kivu Province, DRC. She arrived in Canada in 2005 when she was 10 years old. She is the oldest of seven children all of whom reside with both parents in Canada. In 1997, Monica's father fled the war in the DRC and took refuge in neighboring Tanzania leaving his entire family behind. At about five years old, Monica and her 16-year-old cousin joined her father in Tanzania. Within four months of their arrival in Tanzania, they accompanied him to South Africa. Monica remembered her father leaving them again for Burundi in search of work and the two children were left with friends who had left DRC before them. Her father returned to South Africa after failing to find work in Burundi. At this point, he made arrangements for his wife and their four other children to join him in South Africa. Six months later, the family was reunited and found temporary shelter near the family that had cared for Monica and her cousin.

In 2000, Monica's father decided to move the family to Namibia, where a significant number of refugees from the DRC were settled. The family was granted political asylum and Monica attended elementary school until grade four. She described her life in Namibia as playful and happy. She occasionally helped out with household chores. Four years after

receiving political asylum in Namibia, Monica's father applied for permanent residence in Canada. In 2005, five years after their arrival in Namibia, the family's application for permanent residence in Canada was approved and they flew to Canada later that year.

Monica remembered waiting in a room at the Ottawa airport on their arrival and watching as her father signed the necessary documents. Her recollections of the initial resettlement experience focused on her preparations for entering school, including the tests she wrote. Although she had been in grade four in Namibia, she was placed in grade seven instead of five, which she felt contributed to her hardships in high school. To overcome these challenges, Monica participated in a book club where she was able to improve her English language skills. Monica was not comfortable disclosing why she was placed in a higher grade.

Monica is a proud Congolese woman and passionate about her cultural identity. But she spoke of how differences between cultural traditions and religious values created tensions that had an impact on how she adjusted to her new life in Canada: "The issues, such as, having boyfriends and mixed marriages—traditionally they are not wrong, in religion they are not wrong because God said love each other, but culturally they are wrong!" Furthermore, Monica referred to a time when her father was angry with her for inviting a Tutsi friend to their home. She was surprised that her father, a Christian, held this prejudice. Monica's story reflects the mistrust that her family has of particular groups from the Great Lakes region.

***Observations***

Monica was one of the participants who responded to the flyer posted at Carleton University, Ottawa. For our first meeting, I arrived about 15 minutes early and waited in the food court at the university. Using text messaging, Monica described herself as she entered the

area. I went over to her and introduced myself. She wore black jeans with a white tee shirt and appeared enthusiastic about our meeting. She spoke with confidence and pride of her family, especially her father, a successful businessman before he was displaced from the DRC. In our first meeting we spent some time going through the Letter of Introduction and set dates for the first and second interviews. The first interview went very well, but given that her family had moved extensively across SSA, I was left with many questions.

During the second interview, I sought clarification on some aspects of her story and other issues that arose during the first interview, particularly about travel. Monica explained that her father had always travelled extensively because he was self-employed. However, after displacement, he continued to move from one country to another until he and his family were finally resettled in Canada.

Two sessions with Monica were sufficient because we were able to cover all the themes I had hoped to get to. However, when I asked whether she knew anyone who might be interested in participating in the study, she said that she had no friends, and the people she knows do not want to identify themselves as refugees. She explained that other refugees feel ashamed of having come from conflict-affected countries and choose to hide within the black diaspora population.

**Anna (Rwanda)**

Anna is a 51-year-old mother of three. Before the conflict in Rwanda, Anna had a pleasant life. However in 1999, four years after the Rwandan genocide, Anna, together with her husband, three children, and her nephew fled to Uganda. She was careful not to divulge personal information, including the reasons why she left Rwanda, saying only that family

problems led to their departure. For five years the family lived in a refugee camp on the Ugandan-Rwandan border where Anna taught mathematics in the camp's elementary school, and her husband worked as a store clerk. The family later moved to Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. Life in Uganda was pleasant until her husband fell ill and died of an undetermined illness. Immediately after his death, Anna applied to immigrate to Canada. In 2006, six years after fleeing Rwanda, she and her children secured Canadian permanent residence status and came to Canada.

At the Ottawa airport the family was met by representatives of the Catholic Immigration Centre. They were taken to a reception house where they lived for four months before they moved into their permanent home. Anna described her experience of resettlement as very positive. "It is important that people have someone to talk to and show them around. I was very lucky because I got a job in a nursing home within just six months." I understood this statement to refer to ways in which Anna felt about loneliness. Anna left the nursing home and at the time of the interview, she was providing child care services from her home.

***Observations***

Anna heard about the study through her work place. She called me to inquire about the study but was uncomfortable speaking English. I assured her that she could use the language of her choice, including any of the languages spoken in the Great Lakes region, and we agreed to meet at her house. During the interviews she opted for my mother tongue, Luganda, but intermittently drew on English. I arrived at her house just after dinner. Due to the looming thunderstorm, I had wanted to cancel the meeting, but she insisted that we meet on that day since the weather was better near her home.

The house was neat and well organized. There were African paintings hanging on the wall and floor mats folded and stuck in one corner of the living room. Our initial conversation focused on her daily activities, which are structured around church activities and babysitting. Later on in the conversation, Anna explained that keeping busy kept her from thinking too much about the past. She was warm with a pleasant personality. She is a hard-working, religious woman, and a generally happy and proud mother—proud of what she has accomplished and of her positive outlook on the future.

**Sauda (Central Uganda)**

Sauda is a 63-year-old divorced mother of four. She grew up in rural Uganda where her daily tasks included fetching water, cooking and collecting firewood. At night she lit a kerosene lamp to do her school work. Due to widespread violence, including indiscriminate killings of civilians, Sauda escaped with the help of missionaries and arrived in Canada in 1999. After graduating from a Canadian university, Sauda married a university professor. The couple had four children. At the time of our meeting, Sauda had been a single mother for five years.

I had the opportunity to speak with Sauda at a meeting hosted by a community organization in Ottawa. After a lengthy discussion, Sauda became excited about the study and agreed to meet with me in her home. She contributed useful data based on her unique experiences as a mother, as a teacher with access to many refugee women and as a director of programs in a nonprofit organization. She also serves on regional committees related to cultural identity and homelessness issues.

Given Sauda's extensive work in the community, she has reflected on her early reactions to cultural differences, including the ways in which her cultural identity was challenged and/or misunderstood. Her subsequent experience teaching immigrants and refugees has also allowed her to reflect on the construction of the *other*. In particular, she was concerned about media images of the Uganda of Amin several decades ago and the ongoing human rights abuses and brutality in the country. She made it very clear that this was not the cultural identity she claimed, nor was it the image she wanted Canadians to have about Uganda.

Although she spoke fondly of her cultural identity as a Muganda, she professed undivided loyalty to Canada. Sauda believes that changes in Canada are possible. For her part, she was committed to live by Canadian laws: "I go overboard to live by the laws of Canada and that trait should be rewarded. It is not simple to say that I choose to follow the law because [we] refugees have lived in lawlessness." As Director of Programs for a nonprofit organization, she viewed political participation as important for visible minorities because it gave them a platform to voice their concerns. She further suggested that Canada ought to create mechanisms through which refugee women could be accepted as valuable members of society.

***Observations***

After the interview, I graciously accepted Sauda's invitation to stay for dinner. She has a beautiful home in a suburb east of Ottawa. A picture of the current King of Buganda hangs on the wall in the living room. As Sauda showed me around the house, she shared more about her life growing up in Uganda and the special relationship that her parents had with the Buganda Kingdom. The conversation moved on to our lives in Canada as first-generation,

black African women from the Great Lakes region. I used this opportunity to debrief and revisit issues that had come up during the interview. I am very grateful for Sauda's contribution to this study, which included providing me with names of two women who also met the study criteria. She is a gracious and kind woman and considers her life in Canada to be a blessing from God.

**Rose (Northern Uganda)**

Rose is a 46-year-old wife and mother of two. Her sons are 22 and 9 years of age. She arrived in Canada in October 1998. She described herself as a typical African girl growing up in rural Uganda. She fetched water, climbed trees and ate wild fruits. She took care of cattle, daily walked a seven-mile stretch to school, prepared millet and simsim sauce, and together with friends, looked forward to fun-filled market days. She remembered her mother being tough when it came to household chores. At the age of fourteen, Rose went to a boarding school and returned home only during holidays. After high school, visits to her home village stopped because she accompanied her father to Sudan where he had been appointed to Uganda's foreign service. In Sudan, Rose attended university and graduated with a degree in food sciences. She persevered and achieved not only a degree but became fluent in Arabic.

As a woman from the Northern Uganda, Rose did not feel safe to return to Uganda because the war in Northern Uganda had created massive and generalized violent displacements in many parts of the country. Thus, Rose followed other displaced people who sought and applied for political asylum in Egypt. After acquiring political asylum in Egypt, she applied for permanent residence in Canada. While waiting for a decision on her application for residency in Canada, she worked as a public relations officer for two years. Rose described

Cairo as more difficult than Sudan because it is where she experienced racial discrimination for the first time. This is how she narrated this experience:

> It was in Egypt that for the first time in my life I felt discrimination. I did not expect that and they do it in a very interesting way. They call black people "Samara" which means chocolate and you think chocolate is a beautiful thing but it has demeaning connotations. They sing songs about you as you pass by in the streets. So, that was the first place I felt different, which was very odd for me because I always managed to live with everybody even when I was in Sudan.

Like other participants in the study, Rose had many expectations of what life would be like in Canada. She thought that upon arrival in Canada, everything would be "good." She started looking for work immediately hoping to find employment in her field, nutrition, but opportunities were scarce. She quickly realized that her degree from Sudan had little value in Canada. She eventually found employment in hotel management, and worked seven days a week. She remembered being the only black woman working at the front desk, although there were a few working in the kitchen. After three years of being in Canada, she began to take courses in information technology, specializing in software development. During her studies, Rose sought assistance from the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa to take care of her son while she was in school.

In 2010 she ran for municipal political office. She came to the realization that she had the political conviction and skill to succeed. Rose almost won her riding. She explained that she was lucky to have had the support of seasoned and influential politicians who believed in her political view of "small government and people doing things for themselves." She explained that many people were surprised that a first-generation refugee woman from the GL

would not only have the courage to run for political office in Canada, but would do so on a conservative ticket.

Her only disappointment during this process was that immigrants did not vote for her. She was baffled that she won in the white neighborhoods but lost in the immigrant community. Rose had expected visible minorities to understand that their communities need to be represented at the municipal level. As she awaited the 2015 municipal campaign, Rose was focusing on her children and was heavily involved in church activities. She wanted to impart to her children the kind of discipline that had propelled her to success. She also revealed to me that she felt more attached to Canada than Uganda.

### *Observations*

I came to know Rose during her political campaign in 2010. For the purpose of our interview, I made an effort to get to know her better by spending close to an hour with her before our scheduled interview. We spoke about life in Canada in general and our experiences as black Africans, including raising children and our many common trials and tribulations. I carefully changed the conversation by asking her to let me explain to her the Letter of Introduction and informed consent before we started the interview. She agreed and went on to sign the consent form. The interview itself lasted for three hours because Rose had plenty to say and appeared happy to share her story.

## Edna (Southern Uganda)

The fourth of nine children, Edna is a 59-year-old mother of three. She came to Canada in 1990 and first settled in Toronto, where she lived until she moved to Kingston, Ontario. In

1999 Edna separated from her husband. In 2009 she remarried and now lives with her second husband in a suburb in the southern part of Ottawa. She was referred to me by a colleague of mine who thought that her contribution to the study would be significant and worthwhile. After numerous telephone and e-mail exchanges, Edna agreed to a conversation that lasted for two hours. Over the years, Edna has contributed to the African community in various capacities, including running a private practice specializing in individual and group counseling. She reflected on her struggle to make sense of the challenges she encountered during one of Uganda's brutal civil wars, her subsequent violent displacement and her resettlement in Canada. My interactions and interview with Edna were some of the most difficult I experienced, but Edna was eager and happy to contribute to the discussion about women's struggles for recovery from violent displacement.

At 20 years of age and two weeks after giving birth to her first child, the insurgents bombed Edna's village including her home, resulting in massive population displacement. She spoke about how the people around her paid little attention to her new baby because they were devastated by the war. Edna's ex-husband fled to his hometown in Northern Uganda. While she was hesitant to accompany him, there was nowhere else to go. She travelled with him for two months, accompanying him to Northern Uganda and then on to eastern DRC. They lived in a refugee camp in the DRC for five years.

Edna remembered how scared she was because she had never before left her village, let alone travelled to another country on foot. As tears rolled down her cheeks, she described the indignities of living in a forest with no food and using tree branches for shelter. After living in the DRC for three years, she was offered a nursing job in a health clinic. It was during this period that she witnessed atrocities being committed against women. She described how

women, some pregnant and others very young, were killed by armed thugs while collecting firewood or fetching water. She witnessed the cutting and burning of women's body parts while other pieces were left hanging in trees to frighten and immobilize others. After five years in the DRC, Edna planned to leave for Khartoum where she had been accepted into a veterinary science program when she heard about Canada's willingness to resettle Ugandan refugees.

Edna spoke of the excitement induced by the possibility of coming to Canada. She talked about how "there was no failing that interview!" She was well prepared for it but disappointed that she was asked only one question. She could not fathom how that one question could lead to the opening up of so many opportunities for herself and her children. She attributed this success to the way she "responded, the voice, the energy, the determination, the intonation, I don't know!" She explained that refugee women were often not able to express this kind of energy (agency) in the Canadian social context because there was no space and leadership to guide it: "We end up being followers and in our becoming followers we lose that energy. We lose who we are and that's where I am."

Edna would like Canada to remain a peacekeeping country instead of a fighting force because she has seen enough conflict in her own life and doesn't want to see more suffering. In her practice she has seen many veterans who suffer years after they return home: "I lived it. I don't want to watch and cheer somebody else going down that path." Edna spoke about how she took a stand against the Canadian War Museum because it was a misrepresentation of what she wants Canada to be—a peace-keeping nation. Thirty years after leaving the DRC, Edna still copes with the debilitating effects of trauma, including serious health complications. She assured me that she did not need to speak to a counselor as a result of our conversation because she works with two psychologists who are available to her should she feel the need to talk.

Later on during the interview, Edna confessed that our conversation was her first attempt to recount her ordeal to anyone. Edna had kept silent for more than thirty years! As she told her story for the first time, she realized that she had been detached from her emotions for a long time. Looking back, Edna acknowledged that displacement had been difficult, especially as a 20-year-old: she had never before lived in a war zone, had no money, knew nothing about life, had no prospects for the future, and felt abandoned—experiences that rendered her numb for many years.

***Observations***

At the end of our time together, Edna showed me around her office. She invited her husband, who had been in another room, to meet me over a cup of tea. As she walked me out of the house and to my car, we ended up walking to a park. This walk gave us an opportunity to debrief and for Edna to return to her initial frame of mind.

**Zara (DRC)**

Zara is a 56-year-old widow of mixed heritage from the DRC. She has six grown children, five sons and one daughter, whose ages range from 18 to 33 years. Zara was born in a small village in 1957. Zara described her family as white and rich because she had a Tutsi/Hima/European background. Her grandmother was a Tutsi who married a British man. The couple had one daughter, Neru, Zara's mother. Zara's father was Belgian. A month after her birth, he returned to Belgium and was never seen or heard from again.

When Zara was ten years old, her mother died, leaving her under the care of her grandmother. As soon as she turned eighteen, Zara married Musa. They had a happy and

comfortable life until the war broke out in her home town some time in 1998–2000. Musa was killed by armed thugs as he lay in a hospital bed. Zara remembered how "after my husband died, they do not like me. I was always frightened." Zara described the DRC as a pleasant country, apart from the armed conflict. She loved Congo and when she left for good, she cried because Congo was her home. Zara and her children obtained political asylum immediately upon arrival in Uganda where they lived for seven years. It was also during this period when she applied to be resettled in Canada. In early 2007, her application was granted. "I was accepted. . . . Just like that!" she said. Later that year Zara, five sons and one daughter arrived in Toronto. The family was driven to Ottawa where they were immediately taken to a refugee reception house.

Zara and her children endured great hardship because of the war in the DRC. Zara and her sons were tortured in the DRC and one of her sons, 14 years old at the time, fought with rebels, a fight that left him with serious physical and mental health problems. Although very young after their arrival in Canada, Zara's daughter tried to talk about her experiences of the war at school, which made the teachers and students very uncomfortable and many did not believe her story. All told, these experiences caused a great deal of suffering in Zara's family leading to serious mental health problems for the entire family. Two of the older sons are struggling with severe mental illness that can be attributed to trauma. Taking care of two grown sick children has taken a toll on Zara's overall well-being. She cannot take on work outside of the home because her two sons require constant and ongoing care.

***Observations***

When I arrived at Zara's house, I was not expecting a white woman to open the door. Obviously, this had to be a mistake—I got the address wrong, so I thought. As she opened the door, I apologized and wondered whether she could point me to the address I had written down on a small piece of paper. With a smile, she said: "No! It's me. I am Zara." She then led me inside. There were two couches in the living room but the rest of the furniture was still in boxes. Zara explained that three months before my visit, she has been evicted from her house for nonpayment. The family moved to a shelter for the homeless until a subsidized unit became available. At the time of our meeting, she and her family had lived in the house for two weeks and were pleased that they had gotten a place of their own. I sat on one side of the couch facing her and introduced myself and the study. Zara appeared frail and exhibited signs of chronic trauma, such as being startled when the telephone rang. She was nervous and shy and apologized for her not-so-good English. I asked if she preferred to use Swahili or Luganda since she had lived in Uganda for seven years. She opted for English.

As I turned off the recorder, Zara appeared relieved that the session was over. She offered me tea and then pulled out several magazines with photographs of soldiers who she said were taken to the International Criminal Council in The Hague. I understood this as Zara's effort to convince me that her and her family's experience was true and real. I reaffirmed my trust in and support for her account of her experiences.

**Sabina (DRC)**

Sabina is a 54-year-old widow and the mother of five children whose ages range from 8 to 22 years. Before coming to Canada, she and her family lived in eastern DRC. She was a housewife and occasionally worked as a seamstress. Her husband had joined the Congolese

army and was killed in an ambush. Sabina fled the DRC and sought political asylum in Uganda where she lived for five years.

To obtain UNHCR assistance, refugees were expected to live in a refugee camp. Sabina, however, preferred to live off-camp and found an employer who provided her with room and board, an opportunity that she narrated with ease. At the same time, she inquired about opportunities to resettle in Canada. Her application to immigrate to Canada was approved in 2008, and later that year, Sabina and her children arrived in Montreal.

After about two years, Sabina and the children moved to Ontario where she hoped for better opportunities. On moving to Ontario, Sabina had to learn English. It was not easy but she was grateful for how she was received, including all the assistance she and her children received from the government. She was particularly appreciative of the efforts of some teachers who taught her English. However, Sabina spoke of the difficulties she encountered when trying to follow instructions from service providers. She acknowledged that she did not know how to live in a country such as Canada because she was not familiar with its customs and languages. She found Canadian French to be very different from the French she knew.

Sabina spoke of how her suffering led her to be more religious than she had ever been and that she used prayer to deal with bad memories and the challenges she faced in Canada. She believed that religion and its practices provided structure and guidance for her and her children.

Armed conflict resulted in untold suffering for people in the DRC. Sabina claimed that animals in Canada were better protected than women in the DRC. She cited examples of women being gang raped and kidnapped while on their way to the market or to fetching firewood.

Despite her past, Sabina has had some positive experiences in Canada. At the time of our interview, she was attending school and spoke both English and French. She had also learnt to drive, use a computer and manage her personal finances, skills that she would have never acquired as a housewife in the DRC. Sabina indicated that in Canada she has been afforded the freedom that many in the DRC desperately desire.

### *Observations*

On my first attempt to visit Sabina, I waited on her doorstep on a rainy day expecting her to come home. After waiting for half an hour, I decided to leave. I was able to meet with Sabina two days later. Her children were home from school and were coming in and out of the house. This noise and the fact that she received several phone calls meant we were regularly interrupted. When we finally sat down to talk, she apologized for missing the appointment and explained that the exams she had been writing at a local community college lasted longer than she had anticipated. Our conversation was uncomfortable at first, but she relaxed when she talked about Uganda and the places where she lived, smiling as she mentioned them by name, one by one. I wanted to hold on to that moment because I was taken back in time and place with warm memories of Uganda, my first home. Both of us having been put at ease, I explained the purpose of the study. Sabina disclosed that the person who made the referral had already informed her that this was "our study and a very important study concerning refugee women." I agreed and thanked her for putting it in those words. She signed the consent form and the conversation about *our* study began, lasting 2.5 hours.

**Ronda (Rwanda)**

Ronda is a 47-year-old Rwandan woman, married with five children. She was born in Rwanda but her family moved to Tanzania in 1989. After the 1994 Rwanda genocide, she returned to Rwanda, leaving her children with their grandparents in Tanzania. Ronda and her husband went back and forth between the two countries because the situation was still tense: "People were still scared and suspicious, and killings continued even after the genocide." Although Ronda and her husband wanted to settle down in Rwanda, living together as a family was impossible as hostilities and suspicions within the country were becoming unbearable. Because Ronda had lived as a refugee her entire life, she struggled with uncertainty and had a desire to secure some degree of permanence. This led her in 2005 to apply to immigrate to Canada. Her application was approved in 2006. She described the resettlement experience as positive, although she was lonely at first because her husband and three of her children stayed behind. Ronda believed that her positive resettlement experience contributed to her studying social work and she was grateful for the help she received. Ronda holds a graduate degree from an Ottawa university but has yet to find employment. "But I said I have to be strong. I have to go to school because I wanted a better job but also wanted to have that confidence in me that wherever I go I will go with my education."

Speaking in general terms, Ronda disowned the difficulties that she experienced brought on by changing gender roles during resettlement. In particular, she spoke of dynamic exchanges between husbands and wives in respect to who makes decisions in the family. This process, she contended, exposed grievances and discontent that a husband might have about his new role in the family. Ronda was concerned that this matter was not well understood by Canadians, especially those who assist with resettlement. In her opinion this misunderstanding

led to an inadequate understanding of gender relations within particular African cultures resulting in blaming African men for spousal abuse.

Given that Ronda did not consider herself as "settled" in that she had not yet secured employment in her field, she refrained from describing who she had become because she had not had the time to reflect on how violent displacement had changed her identities. She simply mused that as a refugee woman, "life just happened to me but now I think I am happening to it." In spite of her philosophical outlook on life, I was inclined to believe that given the time and place, Ronda would be in a better position to plan for her future than before coming to Canada.

### *Observations*

My first call to Ronda was to let her know that someone had given me her name and that I would very much like to interview her for my study. She said that she would let me know the following week. That meant that I had to call her again five days later, which I did. This time she agreed. She preferred the evening because then she would have the house to herself, her husband having left for work. It was a very long session and difficult to follow because Ronda was detached and distanced from her narrative. This meant that I had to figure out whether she was telling her own story or someone else's story.

In this chapter, the eight research participants—Anna, Monica, Rose, Zara, Sabina, Ronda, Sauda, and Edna—have been introduced through data extracts. These sketches lead into the analyses and interpretations, which I explore in Chapters Four and Five.

# CHAPTER FOUR
# FINDINGS PART II: REFUGEENESS, RESETTLEMENT AND IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION

In Chapter Two I discussed a dialogical approach to the analysis of qualitative data and outlined data reduction strategies, such as summary tables used to delineate the different discursive features within each of the eight utterances. Building on that analysis, in Chapters Four and Five I analyze extracts from participants' narratives to determine their responses to the research question. As indicated before, the extracts were selected not only because they speak to the research question, but also because they raise interesting issues and contribute to a fuller understanding of the entire data set.

My research was designed to encapsulate participants' unique perspectives about how they managed the resettlement process and constructed new identities in Canada. To this end I examine four themes: on being a refugee (refugeness), managing resettlement, dialogism and identity reconstruction and longing for belonging and recognition. (The first three are discussed in Chapter 4 and the final theme in Chapter Five.) From the extensive qualitative data I collected, and following Sullivan's (2012) approach to data analysis, I delineate key discursive features—key moments—paying special attention to time-space and emotional registers, including how the themes that constitute my research question are perceived differently when intoned by different participants. The discussion will throw light on some of the difficulties that *selves* encounter when trying to discern their own voices from those of *others*. Moving from reported speech to fragments of voices presented in sound bites, I analyze the data extracts. The discussion of discursive features and emotional intonation and how these relate to subjectivity illustrate the importance of a dialogical approach to identity reconstruction. In the

section that follows, I begin the analyses of key moments through which participants responded to the research question.[13]

## Theme I: On Being a Refugee (Refugeeness)

### *Key moment: Safety and security lead to successful resettlement*

In this key moment, Anna draws on the discourse of being a refugee to portray a tentative and cautious subjectivity. In the following analysis of an utterance, I draw attention to Anna's use of inside-out discourse to designate a dialogic subjectivity which is attentive to multiple "truths" in that it allows different "voices" to be in touch with the speaker (Bakhtin, 1986; Hermans, 2002). This is when the *other's* voice is given an independent intonation (Sullivan, 2012). Therefore, the continued presence and intrusion of the *other* voices bring into existence multiple truths in Anna's discourse as exemplified in this quotation:

> **You** cannot be ashamed of being a refugee. **It** just happened. When **I** became a refugee, I was sad because starting over was difficult. I did not know English. I was very worried. **No. You** cannot be ashamed, but **one** is stressed. If **you** are not careful, it is easy to go into depression.

There are two competing voices in the above quotation. One references mainstream discourse represented by the indefinite pronouns "you" and "one" and "it" and the "I" of the participant and refers to the shame Anna is supposed to feel according to mainstream discourse. The other voice emphasizes the status of her mental health as a refugee: stressed, sad, worried, and depressed, experiences that can incite feelings of shame. For example, before

[13] A note on formatting in the quotations I analyze. **Bold text** indicates speech where the voices of the *other* are heard wedging through, including participants' own voices. Underlined text indicates emphasis used by the speaker.

coming to Canada in 2006, Anna lived in a refugee camp for many years, moved from one country to another with small children and her husband who died half way through her journey. Nyers (2006) describes a refugee as one who is "constituted through a series of ontological omissions: whatever is present to the political subject (citizen) is absent to the refugee" (p. 3). Consistent with this characterization, to be an authentic refugee one has to demonstrate qualities associated with refugeeness such as speechlessness, fear, placelessness, invisibility and victim status (Nyers, 2006; Razack, 1998).

In this quotation Anna gives shape to what it means to be a refugee while making room for other voices to intercept her narrative when she says, "You cannot be ashamed." In this statement, Anna is rejecting mainstream discourse and affirming her own. Her intonation is tentative and cautious because she expects disagreement from the *other*. Anna's interaction with the *other* is open as different voices simultaneously intervene in the dialogue.

Being a refugee is about uncertainty—a time of crisis and a space of forced displacements. This is evident in the following sound bite: "We walked all day without knowing where to go." Walking all day became absorbing and exhausting, where time passed slowly as Anna and other refugees became invested in a walk without possible end. Anna's experiences are in line with Porter and Haslam's (2005) characterization of the refugee experience as a series of events occurring in multiple contexts, including multiple dimensions of psychopathology that persist over time. The experiences of uncertainty "transform peoples' identities into that of a refugee" (Giles & Hyndman, 2004, as cited in Hajdukowsi-Ahmed, 2008, p. 29).

Anna's own voice is also evident throughout the utterance when she comments on *others'* actions and when she makes a value judgment: "**You know**, at home in Africa, **men**

drive and buy food, but in Canada **everyone** works. **We** do not have to be lazy. **We** have to work. **We** have to go to school and feel like **you** have value." There are several voices that partake in the discourse within Anna's utterance. "You know" refers to the addressee/s (you being both singular and plural): the "unknowing" researcher and the "unknowing" Canadian audience. Both are informed about an African gendered tradition: "**men** drive and buy food." That tradition becomes invalid in Canada where "everyone" works as opposed to only the "men"; the indefinite "everyone" (coming out of the mainstream discourse, i.e., a Canadian tradition/practice) is being absorbed and/or appropriated by refugee woman, Anna, who transforms the "everyone" into "we." As a result (through work and education), Anna is in the process of acquiring Canadian mainstream value ("**We** . . . feel like **you** have value"). The interplay of pronouns is a strong indicator of the interplay between dialogical discourses within the same utterance in which spatial referents (Africa and Canada) serve to situate/contextualize those discourses. The utterance also reveals a process of internalization of a gendered mainstream discourse, that is, the outside-inside passage from an African to a Canadian mainstream practice/discourse (from **everyone**, to **you**, to **we**/**I]**).

Refugee women are often depicted monologically as victims, passive, dependent and vulnerable because they are women (Moussa, 1994). They are thus situated within unequal structures of interpretation and representation, which includes marginalization and subjugation on the basis of their gender, race, class, ethnicity and/or "tribe." Without a doubt, some of these subjugating factors may have preceded violent displacements. However, dialogism recognizes a human being as always a speaking being—each bringing her/his own unique ideological perspective and language to an utterance as demonstrated in the previous quotation.

The voices of the *others* can also be heard interrupting Anna's description of her otherwise positive resettlement experience as in the following quotation:

> Resettlement in Canada was also a learning experience. When you are in Africa**, you are** told **you** are going to Canada. **You** think **you are going to heaven**, where you will have all the money to do whatever you want. But the experience is different. **I** had to take care of myself. **I** had to figure out things without my husband, **I** did not have a job. **I was told to learn English** but **I** wanted to **get a job**—to keep busy. **It is** difficult—a **person** can commit suicide.

Anna grew up in a wealthy household, surrounded by a large extended family and hired help while she concentrated on being a "good" wife. The death of her husband and violent displacement took all that away from her. She spoke of the difficulties of having to take care of herself and to learn to live alone in new social and political environments. Observe the dialogical passage from an outside-in discourse to an inside-out one ("**you"** versus "**I"**) which contrasts the collective belief in Africa that Canada is paradise to the personal reality of the struggle of living in Canada. Here "you" (the African collectivity) is situated between the indefinite "everyone"/"a person" and the experiential "I" that posits an autonomous subjectivity arrived at by the participant in the process of resettlement. A recurrent theme throughout the interview, "a person can commit suicide," sums up the challenge of being a refugee and brings to the fore the embodied nature of a traumatized subjectivity.

Bakhtin (1981) explains that any utterance takes shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment. In the extract below, Anna, when she makes reference to being older and the importance of schooling for herself and the children, is forced to consider the social and historical voices that populate her discourse. (At this historical

moment, i.e., when she is speaking, Anna is less concerned about her age and sitting on a small school chair than she would have been earlier because in Canada it is possible for old people to go to school, which was not the case when she was growing up in Rwanda): "When my children are finished with their schooling, **I** will go back to school. **Even though** I am old I will sit on the school chair and will start with English" [laughter]. We can see an active dialogical process in her utterance: characterized by competing worldviews.

The "word-with-a-loop-hole" is a type of discourse in which the speaker thinks in two different directions at once (Sullivan, 2012). It is used when the speaker wants to escape from a definitive statement. For instance, when Anna complains about a small house, she is also hoping for concurrence from the *other*: "I found the house to be **very small** and I am not used to small houses or **small beds**. It had only two bedrooms and we were five. **It** was hard, **but we were happy** because we got what we wanted [coming to Canada]." Her desire to escape from a definitive criticism of the house is illustrated when she concludes the statement with "but we were happy." The transition to life in Canada for Anna was hard because she had to adjust to a standard of living that was less than she had enjoyed while living in Rwanda and Uganda. She contrasts emotional value and well-being with material comfort.

With respect to time and space, the safety and security utterance projects a much better future than what Anna had before she came to Canada albeit an uncertain one. Safety and security are indicative of Anna's memorable moments as well:

> I see they [memorable moment] are many. Every time **I speak <u>about</u> security**, I remember what I went through. While I had a job in Uganda, but when my husband became ill, I stopped working, **had to take care** of everything **on my own**. In <u>Canada</u>, I have a job and can look after myself. <u>Canada</u> is very good for me.

In the preceding quotation, Anna engages in a dialogic reflection of how the different encounters have affected her agency, including being able to secure a job in Canada. This quotation exemplifies how "the concept of identity reconstruction is foundational to an understanding of refugeeness because in every encounter, identity is reconstructed and affects ones' agency and well-being" (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008, p. 28).

### *Key moment: Traumatic experiences of violent displacement*

According to Hermans (2002), there are "two intrinsic features of a dialogical *self*: intersubjective exchange and social domination" (p. 147; emphasis original). These features are played out during dynamic interactions between multiple *I*-positions which allow some voices to be heard as others recede in the background (Hermans, 2002). The *I* can also move from one spatial position to another as time and situation change. This means that a dialogical *self* is multi-voiced because it is capable of participating in a variety of intersubjective conversations and within different power relations (Dadey, 2003; Hermans, 2002). In other words, a dialogical *self* is "involved in oppositions, agreements and disagreements, contradictions, negotiations and integration" (Hermans, 2002, p. 148). In the analysis that follows, I examine Edna's utterances of her experience of refugeeness, including trauma induced by violent displacement, in this light.

An inside-out discourse brings enduring traumatic experiences of violent displacement to the center of Edna's discourse. Specifically, the discourse illuminates the participant's ongoing struggle with the multiplicity of debilitating effects of violent displacement and the challenges she encounters as she negotiates new identities. Here is Edna's description of her 1990 arrival in Canada:

> [I was] **disassociated,** I had **numerous** sleepless nights and nightmares. I was having somatic pain **all over** my body. My hair was **falling off**. I could not digest anything and was hospitalized a **number of times** because my digestive system shut down. **In addition**, **there were pressures** to be **everything else** but **yourself. You don't even know who you are anymore**! I had no idea how **I survived**. But I did, and that's when everything changed for me. How can **you** make sense of the future when you don't even know where you are going to be tomorrow? You have a new baby in the world, and you don't even have any money!

This quotation is particularly poignant because the outer and inner space between *self* and the world is emphatically emphasized. Edna's discourse depicts a heterogeneous subjectivity constituted by a disintegrating *self* because she cannot cling to contested views of violent displacement. It is also a conscious subjectivity because it relates to *self* as well as to *others* (see Sullivan, 2012). It is complex because it draws from history, tradition and power as it anticipates the ideas and judgments of *others* (see Sullivan, 2012) and faces a multiplicity of symptoms. When subjectivity is shaped by an inside-out discourse, it reveals the crisis of self-awareness which is not always easy to resolve. The inside-out discourse "centers multiple truths including numerous voices that make contact with the self" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 60). This means that the *other* is given a significant place when she challenges the *self* to be an equal who deserves a response (see Sullivan, 2012). Through this process, the *other*, especially the social worker, can transform the *self* by listening to various truths available and can therefore revise taken-for-granted assumptions (Sullivan, 2012). In terms of time and space, the present moment takes center stage.

Through Edna's discourse, the principle of non-identity becomes apparent. This principle posits that the *self* is not identical with *itself* but is rather related to *itself* as well as to *others*, creating a space of potential transformation (Sullivan, 2012). This means that a speaker such as Edna can allow another voice to wedge through her own views and convictions, even if silently. She wrestles with its internal presence while simultaneously addressing an outside *other* (Sullivan, 2012). In her utterance, the struggle is also expressed through the use of different pronouns: the indefinite "everything else" related to social pressures, the generalized "you," a form of personalized "one," and the struggles and reactions of the "I" to the external pressures and/or voices. The following excerpt illustrates this point:

> I am very proud to be a Canadian. I love Canada **and it is true there is no place** like Canada. **But**—Is my spirit completely thriving in Canada? The answer is "no." Am I blossoming? **Is my inside consistent with my outside in Canada?** The answer is "no." It took me a long time to arrive at the point of becoming a Canadian. It was **a struggle** inside me. It had to come out, **you know**? You can have **anger inside you**. You want to **explode**, but how can the anger that refugee women have **come out constructively**?

Sullivan (2012) points out that outside-in and inside-out struggles can occur when we feel uncertain as to what our own voice is amidst the authoritative voices of intruding *others.* As Edna wrestles internally with anticipated judgments and values, she is able to shape her own truth about who is Canadian and her place in Canada. As the internal struggle continues, her intoned responses to the *other* are sometimes divided, contradictory and complex as expressed in the following extract:

> I have friends, but I typeset myself to fit in, but that is not me. When **someone tells** me, you look fake Edna, **you know**? Of course, I have to be **fake** because I have to fit

somewhere. **We** all **fake** things to survive in the work place, and to have someone to "hang out" with. Otherwise, you are **an outsider**.

Here, time and space is represented in the act of "faking it," thinking, being cautious and reflexive. In this time and space, refugee women such as Edna "typeset" themselves to "fit in"; otherwise they stay on the "outside." So far, the cultural identities that Edna has negotiated are not working because they do not represent who she is. They are fake identities, which imply a recourse to strategic essentialism as a survival mechanism, and as a safe and transitional identity while waiting for a time and place to express her own voice, her authentic *self*—when the inner *self* coincides with her outer *self*. Edna spoke of a space of faked values and inhibition and a time with a hopeless future because she had yet to see the value of a faked *self*. Despite the inherent struggles and related contradictions, Edna is engaged in a creative and constructive transformation process. In the interview extract, Edna paints these time-spaces vividly and explains how the efforts to belong have not facilitated recognition. (The concept of recognition will be discussed further in Chapter Five.)

Bakhtin (1984) describes such struggles as "active double-voiced" discourse. When a discourse is active and double-voiced, it pays attention to other voices that lurk within the speaker's discourse, although this can sometimes happen against the speaker's will (Sullivan, 2012). In Edna's case, this led to a justification of her behavior: "I have to be fake because I have to fit somewhere." Interestingly, the *other*'s voice is equally present as opposed to being subjugated to Edna's intentions: "**someone tells** me, you look fake Edna, **you know**?" This type of discursive feature can also be a "sore spot" exposing sensitive parts in Edna's consciousness—a place where she does not wish to look, but revealing an awareness of the possibility that she might indeed be fake.

Another type of discourse that is relevant to Edna's discourse is the word-with-a-sideward glance. This is the "active presence of other voices, pushing their way into the speaker's voice from outside" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 53). Such a speech is also marked by a tentative quality, and is interrupted by reservation and hesitation in anticipation of disagreement and judgment from the *other* (Bakhtin, 1984). Sullivan (2012) points out that the *other* can penetrate self-consciousness at various levels, structuring both what is said and how it is said. Such a moment occurred during the interview when Edna paused for a long time followed by a statement that she worded very carefully:

> **I** talked about the **absent voices** of non-Caucasians in Canadian **power structures** such as the parliament. The higher one goes in the public system, the more the void becomes apparent because **the few** who are there have **disowned who they are—even though** the body is there, the **spirit is dead**. This is proof that the **Canadian space** is not inclusive. This is particularly true if you speak English or French with **an accent**. But it is this **strong accent** that makes me who I am. That's the **difference** between one black person and another. The accent shapes who you are and where you come from. **Am I a** Ugandan? **Well [pause]** Uganda is my old country.

Edna's words are indicative of a tentative and reflective subjectivity. The internal critic, that aspect of the *self* that allows us to question and doubt our own attitudes and experiences, can "divide the *self* against *itself* when it takes on the perspective of the other" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 54). In other words, an individual's thinking process relies on her capacity to engage in internal dialogism and the merits and demerits of contradictory and sometimes different viewpoints, such as in the following extract:

> The key point **is** that this kind of **energy** [agency] is not expressed in the Canadian context. There is **no space** and leadership to **guide that energy**. We end up being followers, and in our becoming followers, **we lose** who we are and that's **where I am.** Yes. I am Canadian. **But**—my voice has not come out because my story has not been heard.

As refugee women from the Great Lakes region respond to "being a refugee," a feminist dialogical approach to identity reconstruction not only illuminates the different features of a dialogical *self,* but maps out the transformative struggles within the *self* and the new society. This is reflected by how participants simultaneously referred to place and time in their countries of origin and to their new home in ways that made a complete detachment from and temporal separation between *there* to *here* difficult to discern. Participants awaited a time and place when they would stop walking with no end in sight—a transformative process in which they expected to blend their original identities with those that allowed them to function effectively in Canada.

***Key moment: Suffering leads to strong religious beliefs***

In Sabina's utterance, suffering takes center stage in the discourse, resonating with an inside-out discourse to designate a dialogic subjectivity:

> In **Canada** animals are more **protected** than **women in Congo**. People who God created! **See! I know we are happy** for being in Canada but **our people** are suffering. A child can wake up in the morning with nothing to eat until it goes to bed. **Our people** are suffering and **we are** doing nothing to help them. **You** cannot tell anyone about the suffering because **they say** it is a lie.

Sabina spoke of the suffering in Congo including the fact that she had done nothing to help those she left behind. She was also conflicted about her emotional and mental status because she was supposed to be happy now that she was living in Canada, but she often felt sad when she thought about the people she left in Congo. The word-with-a-sideward-glance discourse is also relevant because the voices of *others* actively disrupt Sabina's own voice from within as she anticipates a response from the *other* ("**They say**").

In the extract below, Sabina responds to a doubting but silent *other* when she speaks about the experience of gang rape and kidnapping. This is how Sabina gives voice to what she experienced:

> **One by one**, men can rape a child in front of the parents. It is **true** because I was **there**. In Canada, sometimes **people think** that it is not true, but it is true. **Yeah true, true, true**! **Women** are suffering. **People** are suffering!

This narrative is particularly poignant because it reveals the effects of trauma in regards to identity reconstruction. At this point in her life, Sabina was not ready to share this particular experience with me, the researcher. Instead, she recounted the ordeal indirectly through third-person speech. She distanced herself from the ordeal by making a generalized statement about how "men can rape" and then quickly mentioned that she witnessed it in an undisclosed location ("there"). Sabina plead for the ordeal to be recognized by insisting that "it is true" and then switching back to a generalized statement: "people, women."

Suffering has forced Sabina to turn to religion and its practices. She spoke about how she uses prayer to deal with the "bad" memories and the challenges she encountered during resettlement. Since her arrival in Canada in 2008, Sabina has immersed herself in prayer because it provides structure and guidance for her and the children. By praying, she was able to

divert her attention from thinking too much about the past: "We pray to God because with God everything succeeds." As Khanlou (2010), Rousseau, Rufagari, Bagilisha and Measham (2004) recognize, religion ameliorates pain and suffering arising from violent displacement in that it provides a "source of emotional and cognitive support, a form of social and political expression, and a vehicle of community building and group identity" (Gozdziak, 2002, p. 172). Such was the case for Sabina.

***Key moment: The indignities of violent displacement***

With its anti-authoritative characteristics, the inside-out discourse allows different voices to make contact with the speaker. In this way Zara's narrative foregrounds the indignities of violent displacement. Some of the indignities of violent displacement that populate Zara's narrative include torture, dispossession and social upheaval. Before she was forcibly displaced, Zara and her family had a good life, but this ended as soon as her husband died as a victim of the war:

> We had a nice house; big farm, and everything. The Tutsis have money and nice houses. They have a good life and that is the problem. **We** lost everything after my husband died. The **people** who killed him as he lay in a hospital bed also went to my house. My second and third sons were inside. They shot my third son and now one of his arms is bigger than the other and my second son was beaten, leaving him with big scars on his back.

Zara experienced extreme forms of trauma and other mental and physical illnesses. Since her arrival in Canada in 2007, she has been in a state of constant fear and anxiety, even years after fleeing the conflict zone. As she deals with her own health challenges, she is also

providing care to two grown men (sons) whose suffering started when one of them came back from being taken as a child soldier:

> At 14 years old, **my son** fought with the rebels. After that fight my son was **never the same** again. When **I** talk about that **I cry** because it is very painful. I have **bad memories** of Congo because of the suffering we have endured. In **Canada**, I am very happy because **I sleep well** and have friends.

Zara attributes her ordeal to her being white:

> It was **terrible** for me because **I am white**. My children are also white because my husband was also mixed. **In Congo**, people used guns to knock on my door every night. I was very scared for my life because **I am white**. They said, "**You are rich.**" They want the money and I did not have any money. My husband had died one month earlier. They insisted that **my husband had money**. I said, "No, I don't have money." They took my first son and they pulled him out of the house and beat him. He was very sick for a whole month. After that incident I decided to leave the country.

Historically, being white in the DRC meant having access to far more social, economic and political privileges than a majority of nonwhite citizens. Class, gender and racial identities were shaped by the politics of white supremacy and its function within colonial settings. For Zara, whiteness ensured safety, security and unfettered material possessions. hooks (1984) agrees and argues that race and class identities create differences in quality of life, social status and lifestyle and that such differences are rarely transcended. Furthermore, Zara had a Tutsi heritage, providing additional privileges and protection for her family. Whiteness together with a Tutsi identity conferred unprecedented privileges to Zara and her family. However, perennial wars in the DRC reversed this privileged positioning unleashing extraordinary suffering for

Zara and her children. The interplay of race, class and "tribe" continue to inform public voices and discourses leading to the incessant harassment that Zara's family endured. As a woman, she was also targeted because she had lost the protection of a man—her husband—despite her adamant insistence that she had no money, "No, I have no money".

### *Conclusion*

In the above examples I have tried to show how oratorical features of double-voiced discourses, such as a word-with-the-sideward glance and sore-spots foreground the *self-self* and *self-other* relationships. A feminist dialogical approach to subjectivity is dynamic and bound up in social relations and is responsive to different sets of social or discursive relations. Such dynamism can fill the discourse with a complex set of different voices.

So far, the analyses of narratives of refugee women from the Great Lakes region reveals that their human experience is complex because they are "embodied" and are continuously building strategic relationships with both the *self* and *others* in society. Taken as a whole, a dialogical *self* is multivoiced which allows a refugee woman to engage in a variety of intersubjective conversations, including during the resettlement process. In the next section, I discuss how refugee women from the Great Lakes region manage the resettlement process.

## Theme II: Managing Resettlement In Canada

A majority of refugee women come to Canada as dependents of their male relatives (Simich, 2003). As a result, the effects of violent displacements on women can easily be obscured and their unique migration experiences can be shrouded and overlooked by policy makers (Vasilevska & Simich, 2010). "Good" mental health, or the ability to function well in

daily life, is a key outcome of successful resettlement but the experience of flight and resettlement combine to threaten refugee women's well-being particularly because their mental and emotional health problems continue to be misunderstood (Bokore, 2013; Vargas, 2007; Vasilevska & Simich, 2010).

Acute stressors that accumulate during preflight, flight, and resettlement include factors such as socio-economic disadvantage, loss of social support and "cultural bereavement" (Wilson, Murtaza, & Shakya, 2010). Added stressors related to racialization and family dislocation include pressure to function as well as other Canadians who are familiar with the social norms. Postmigration stressors can range from "racism, family instability, psychosocial distress in the family to unemployment" (Beiser, 2010, p. 117). The resettlement process also involves learning a new language and different ways of doing things, facing new forms of health challenges and navigating opportunities for knowledge exchange about health and related issues (Beiser, 2010). In addition, reconstructing identity in a new community, linked to mental well-being, can also be challenging. Hayward, Hajdukowski-Ahmed, Ploeg, and Trollope-Kumar (2004) in their study of refugee women from Sudan found that factors such as loss, economic hardship, climate, space, living in limbo and raising children in Canada undermined the women's sense of self (identity) and mental well-being.

***Key moment: Hard work leads to successful resettlement***

Like other participants, Rose hoped to secure employment upon arrival in Canada in 1998. But things did not go as planned: "I did not think about how to find a job, and when I got here I became disoriented." She accorded political and professional success center stage, saturated with a heavily intoned utterance. This type of centering resonates with an outside-in

discourse where issues of successful resettlement through hard work leading to professional achievements are positioned within an authoritative discourse. The intonation of courage, perseverance, personal strength and bravery is markedly obvious. Rose credited personal courage and determination for her success in Canada as illustrated in the following extract:

> I am never satisfied with the status quo. Nothing comes to me easy. I work hard for it. I am always **re-engineering** myself. I am always **strategizing**. I am always learning. Education is very important, actually because it taught me how to learn. I would say that hard work is very important but you **have to strategize**; you have to know yourself well and know where you want to go and always **re-invent** yourself.

Rose's style of speech organizes outside-in discourse by privileging a singular and controlling voice. Her "I" is emphasized through an anaphoric rhetoric and tone accentuation at the beginning of each sentence. In this instance, the utterance is a monological discourse of a powerful individual of representational capacity due to her accomplishments in Canadian society. The future is certain as long as she and other refugee women pass the endurance test as Sullivan (2012) puts it. Successful resettlement in Canada is constructed as guaranteed as long as the individual invests in hard work and is capable of reinventing herself.

Rose also creates a multivoiced narrative that shifts from the general to the specific. In the specific voice she asserts herself against a general discourse—people who tell her it is not possible—but goes on to advise others on how to find helpful networks:

> **Many people** told me that it was impossible to find employment in Canada. **One** needs to find networks of people that will not keep telling **you** it's not possible. That will guide you towards the tools that you need to make it here, **you know**, because **I** did it

by being **tough headed**, but I wish I had people to guide me. **Nobody** was there to help me.

In this extract, Rose illustrates how all "knowers" are located and embodied by constructing an intersubjective, dialogic relationship with the *other*.

In 2010, Rose ran for political office but was disappointed about the absence of the immigrant vote. This is how Rose expressed her disappointment with the immigrant community:

> **You would think** that visible minorities would vote for **you**! That surprised me. Yes. **It** hurts. Because I said: How come **you don't understand**? How come **you are not educated** enough to know that **you** need somebody at the table to represent **your voice**? Who in Canada would talk about **black peoples'** needs? Nobody.

Rose employed an authoritative (monological) style to express her disappointment with the immigrant community. Given its singular truth characteristic, the monological style makes it impossible to listen to other voices. Thus, it was notable when, for the first time, Rose drew me, the researcher, into the conversation by employing the pronoun "you" during the utterance. This reflected her uncertainty about the *other's* judgments.

Ronda, on the other hand, spoke generally about the challenges that refugee women face during resettlement and described a time/space of always being "on the move." Ronda, who arrived in Canada in 2006, argued that some aspects of the resettlement process can retraumatize refugee women, as illustrated in the following extract:

> **You** come across **stereotypes** on which services are based. Someone has already determined what refugee women need, but **not everyone is the same**. There are women who **came with trauma**, and there are **those who do not**. Resettlement is also

> traumatic because refugee women just go to places, churches, and many of them do not even know why they are going there. **They just go**. They are then expected to become accustomed to writing and reading and what not.

She goes on to state:

> Even if educated, refugee women from the Great Lakes still depend on **word-of-mouth** as a way of communication. **You** ask her to read and she would say, **just tell me where I should go. You know**, instead of asking them to read the whole list of family doctors, many of these women **prefer to be told where to go.**

Ronda's use of the pronoun "you" in this excerpt indicates a dialogic exchange with myself, the researcher, as well as her own internal dialogic struggles with different points of view. By using an inside-out discourse, Ronda gave shape to the varied experiences of acquiring information and new knowledge in Canada. As in previous analyses of quotations, here I am interested in the link between dialogism and subjectivity. How do they relate to Rose's more authoritative voice which emphasizes individual courage and self-determination, even though she acknowledged a need for support and guidance during resettlement? When compared to Rose's abstract conception of personal drive framed in terms of self-determination and courage, Ronda's narrative brings forth deeper, more reflexive and pragmatic dimensions of refugee women's acquisition of information and knowledge by bringing these experiences back down to a practical level and to recognize that refugee women need to pause from moving and making decisions.

***Key moment: Finding solace in Canada***

Despite the indignities experienced as a result of torture, Zara found solace in Canada after all. After living in Canada for seven years, she was happy and very grateful for the attention and care she and her children received, intoned emotionally in the following manner:

> **Oh! My God**! Everything was very nice. They put my kids in school. One of my sons and the daughter go to university. I am **very happy**. They gave me money for one year. I forgot everything about the war. This is a **very helpful** government.

As a widow and single mother, Sabina also found a comforting end to violent displacement when she received a warm welcome to her new place and new home in 2008. In her effort to repay what she received, Sabina assured me that she was doing her best to learn new things, such as Canadian culture, and she was slowly getting used to the geographical climate changes. Obviously, Sabina was very pleased and grateful for how she was received in Canada six years ago:

> **You know**, we don't know anything when we first come to Canada. We just went and found **people waiting** for us at the airport! When I came out, someone **called my name**. It made me **very happy** for someone in Canada to know **my** name! It's good **you know** when you are new because you have **to learn many things**, social life, the weather is bad, and we are trying to do the best.

While unimaginable suffering led Sabina to strong religious beliefs, she recognized that Canada had given her the freedom that many in Congo could only dream about. She now has uninterrupted sleep and wakes up to a day without war. She has access to food and drink and nobody steals from her. Sabina informed me that she does not care much for material things as

long as she has a peaceful existence. But of course, she worries about people in Congo. Here are Sabina's own words:

> When **I** came to Canada I live in peace. **I sleep in peace**. **We** wake up in peace and there is no war. I eat and drink what I like. In Canada, even if I do not have things, such as a car, it does not matter. **The best thing is peace**. We have **peace in Canada** that is true. You can walk as you like [move around freely]. No one asks where you are going. Bring your identity card, or do that and this. Give me that phone. No one steals from you. We **appreciate the freedom**. Of course, when we speak with those who are still in Congo, **they cry**. They have nothing to eat. **They live like animals**. If we compare animals with our people, **animals in Canada have more value than people in Congo.**

In the above extract, we see a combination of double-voiced discourses in which Sabina is genuinely happy about the peace and safety she is accorded in Canada. There is a constant dialogism between *here* and *there* which never ends, creating anxiety, mental anguish and loneliness for her. The situation tempers the happiness of living in Canada because Sabina knows that there is still tremendous suffering in Congo and she has not done anything to help those she left behind.

Sabina also spoke about the difficulties she encountered when interacting with service providers and attributed these challenges to their accents, which prevented her from comprehending their instructions. In her view, service providers' accents are intoned in ways that are different from how her own accent is intoned and therefore difficult to follow. Sabina explained that she spoke French before coming to Canada but found it hard to understand the French spoken in Canada. She spoke of how African accents engender differences in comprehension including how what is said is interpreted. For example, many service providers

spoke very fast with no pause or did not take the time to ensure that refugee women understood the instructions being given. As a result, refugee women were afraid to ask for fear of being deemed stupid. This resonates with Razack's (1998) argument that given the historical relations of power, nonwhite women are seen as victims of their own oppressive cultures who must be pitied and rescued by white men and women.

Furthermore, Sabina explained that oftentimes a different accent/intonation can give an utterance a different meaning and insisted that she "knows and understands differently." I understood Sabina to be referring to regional/geographic differences in how a language is used. Given her accent and/or intonation, her understanding of what was being said could differ significantly from what the service providers intended:

> Sometimes service providers **call you** and **tell you** to go there and there and they **give you the time**. **You** do not know how to get there. **You ask**; most times **you get lost**. When you are late, **they get angry with you**.

Refugee women from the Great Lakes region brought with them a way of understanding time and space that directly conflicts with how these concepts are understood in Canada. In Canada, they experience fragmented time, such as scheduled appointments. Public and private spaces are individualized, controlled, and monitored by the state through the police and child protection services. These factors contribute to the stress and anxiety they experience during resettlement, as articulated by Sabina: "when you are late, they get angry with you. You see you get stress; too much stress in this country". Sabina was eager to point out that people who come to Canada are different, and that she is different, but all she wanted was to learn about how things are done in Canada. Sabina explained that she always felt very sad when service providers became angry with her: "I try to explain but **they say, 'No, madam**. **You**

have to learn. **You are not** the only one who came here.' **You see**, you get stress, **too much** stress in this country, especially **when you are alone with children**."

***Key moment: Intergender and intergenerational dialogism***

Sabina was very aware of the difficulties experienced as a result of encountering new gender and intergenerational roles and how these affected dynamics with her teenage children. Sabina's life has been one of movement and transformation from being a stay-at-home wife and mother to managing an entire household, but also functioning in the public sphere (keeping appointments, shopping, etc.), which she aptly described in the following extract:

> **You know nothing.** Everything is hard because **in Congo, women stay at home**. **We look** after children, prepare food. **You** do not go to the market to buy food. **You** wait for your husband to do that **for you. You go to church** and that's it! But, **in Canada**, **you** have to go to appointments**. You** have to go shopping. **You do this and you do that**. **You have to** move a lot.

Time and space are characterized by children being in school and her worrying about their future—it is uncertain. She was particularly concerned about the impact that the newly acquired rights would have on her children who have never known what freedom looked or felt like. She felt that her parental role to provide guidance to her children had been eroded by the state in that "they [representatives of the state] give them rights." In addition, the "the bad mother" label worried her. She was fearful and invoked the discourse of suffering resulting from anxieties and tensions created by fears that the police and/or child service agencies can apprehend her children:

> Children **change** because **they give them** rights, and once they have rights, it becomes **difficult again. You** cannot discipline them. **They do whatever they want**. **You** become the bad one. **They call** the police. When someone calls the police in Congo you know that you can be killed. **They say** you are a bad mother. That is **why we suffer** and it is difficult to give **family education** for our children in Canada.

A refugee journey designates a space and time that are uncertain. Sabina did not know where and how her journey would end which resonates with Anna's walking without knowing where to go and Edna's "faking it." In Sabina's view, her children did whatever they wanted. This meant that her children did not respond to structure and guidance that she as a parent was expected to provide. Sabina's own understanding of how children ought to be raised was confronted by the new culture, creating spaces and times of anxiety. There are differences between Canada and the Great Lake region—even a divide—which has implications for resettlement.

## Theme III: Dialogism and Identity Reconstruction

### *Key moment: Negotiating different traditions*

Refugee women negotiate and co-construct new identities through every day dialogic discourse as they interact with the world around them. Similarly, study participants used their accumulated past experiences to negotiate new identities in Canada. When Monica started elementary school in Canada, this is how she was represented:

> The teacher pointed at me and said, "**She is a slave.**" To me that was the most insulting thing I ever heard. I wanted to tell her that there is a difference between the slave and

people from my tribe. **You** have to get that. **You need to open your eyes. [People from Africa] calling us slaves is an insult.**

Monica's utterance refers to how differences in traditions and beliefs create tensions during both identity reconstruction and resettlement. Monica adopted a discourse that echoed an inside-out discourse in which she appropriated someone else's words to make them her own. This way, she was able to put a new "value" to these words, and in the case of double-voiced discourse, the sound of both values competed and sounded simultaneously (Sullivan, 2012); Monica's voice came out as outraged for being described as a slave while the teacher's reference to slavery was normalized as a routine reference to black pupils. This way, the discourse engendered a simultaneous, multivoiced, multi-accented utterance because such an utterance crisscrossed two or more different styles and corresponding worldviews (Bakhtin, 1981). In this case, Monica's perspective was mediated by an *other's* view thereof, which she incorporated to render her discourse dialogic rather than monologic (see Bakhtin, 1981). The *other* (teacher) was then exposed as ignorant through humor and exaggeration.

In an inside-out discourse, the speaker's perspective can also be fragmented and dispersed in different and competing directions (Sullivan, 2012). For example, Monica's resettlement experience involved acquiring Canadian ways of life faster paced than her parents. She demanded that she pay for household utilities but her father resisted because allowing his daughter to pay for utilities contravened his role as a provider for his family.

**I** wanted to pay for utilities but **my father refused** because it is an insult to him. <u>In Canada</u> my parents are being open. What will not change is intermarriage. There is a difference between tradition, religions and culture. There is **that tension**, such as the issues of boyfriends. **It** is not religiously condemned, not traditionally forbidden, and

**yet** it creates a lot of **tensions**. That kind of thing **affects my life**. What if Christianity did not come to Africa? We could have been able to do all this stuff.

Monica's defiance can be understood as an effort to deride the authoritative demands of her father. At times her objections sounded humorous rather than serious. At other times her objection to parental authority was dynamic and double-voiced with a potential for active resistance and transformation. For example, her insistence on paying utility bills indicated both an internal and external struggle to acquire cultural norms that are necessary for resettlement in Canada.

Having been raised in a Christian household, religious beliefs and values constituted significant parts of Monica's identity. However, negotiating the identities required to live in Canada involved adhering to less rigid values and beliefs systems than she was used to before coming to Canada. Hence, her concern about the tensions created by culture and religion, and her imagining a time and place in which Christianity would become less relevant in her life. She drew on ideals of a precolonized Africa to emphasize the confusion that characterized her experiences of reconstructing new identities, and was waiting for a time and space when the issue of boyfriends, as an example, would not create such tensions.

At times, the conflict, interaction and movement within Monica's utterance represent a monological discourse because she described a way of living informed by a singular truth. For example, she erroneously attributed the problem of homelessness in Congo to mixed marriages:

The conflict between tribes is affecting everybody, **even here in Canada**. Mixing tribes is never a good thing. If you look at Tutsis, they do not mix. **In Congo**, many of the

children who do not have parents live on the streets because many of them are of mixed heritage. They move into towns; sometimes they get killed by the government.

Monica's discourse is also double-voiced because the *other's* voice is pulled from inside her intonation and is given an intonation of its own (see Bakhtin, 1986; Sullivan, 2012). Monica was not only conflicted about her identity, but interrupted by the *other* lurking within the same discourse who destabilized her understanding of who she really was, hence her emphatic response to the identity question:

> I am Congolese from the Democratic Republic of Congo. All of us identify with where we came from. **You can never say you are not a Congolese.** When **they** ask you, "**Really**, where are you from? Are you from Nigeria?" **Do I look Nigerian? No**. I am not Nigerian and when we start questioning, I start realizing I am more interested in where I came from.

In terms of subjectivity, there was closeness between the *other* and Monica's discourse because she was aware of critical voices that questioned her identity, rendering her conscious and social because she allowed other voices to penetrate her own discourse. In respect to time and space, the present moment took center stage of who Monica was—not Nigerian but a Congolese woman. Monica's utterance characterized moment-to-moment interactions with myself, the researcher, and while describing life experiences, intoned with hope within an uncertain future.

In her articulation of tradition, Monica revealed the significance of ethnicity and nationalism in her reconstruction of identity. This was a candid elucidation of a life filled with contradictions and tensions caused by the interplay of culture, religion and traditions, including their cumulative effects on an individual's identity. As she negotiated new identities, cultural

and religious tensions inadvertently complicated the process of marrying her cultural beliefs with Canadian liberal values of liberty and freedom. To illustrate the conflicts: Monica lived with her parents because it was customary in the DRC for young women to do so until they got married. In a liberal society, on the other hand, Monica was expected to be independent and free herself from tradition. In this sense Monica's utterance was an inside-out discourse, one in which Monica gave voice to the reality of straddling two worldviews by highlighting tensions inherent in negotiating identities within different traditions.

While time and space are not fixed, a dialogical analysis is concerned with how mockery of the *other'*s voice interacts with subjectivity (Sullivan, 2012). Monica may not have been able to change what went on around her, but she was able to talk about oppression and make sense of it by ultimately giving it a ridiculous dimension. In a meandering web of identity reconstruction, Monica struggled to integrate the two worldviews, although she was more inclined to identify with her place of origin. Unlike Zara, who was a Congolese in Congo and was now a Canadian in Canada, Monica used a back-and-forth identity reconstruction process rather than a simultaneous process that focused on both cultures and the identities they engendered.

Anna, on the other hand, struggled to find a solid response to the question "How do you identify yourself?"

> Who am I? **It depends** on where we meet. **I** respond to whatever she asks. **But I cannot say I am not Rwandese; that is a taboo**! I like Uganda because they allowed me to stay in their country even if my husband died, Uganda did not kill him. My children had good education. Yes, **I am a Canadian and am very** happy, because I can sleep. In Rwanda no safe, even in Uganda not safe, but here it is 100 percent safe. I am

happy and I pray for Canada. Yes, I am a Canadian and am very happy because **I can sleep.**

Anna's discourse reveals internal conflicts when she tried to describe her cultural identity as she resettled in Canada. Most importantly, she was a Canadian because of the security and safety she and her children enjoyed here.

The extract below portrays a certain future, one where changed values and priorities have led to a transformed subjectivity. As Rose alternated between the pronouns "I" and "you," she was careful to articulate achievements and personal courage with the "I" pronoun. These traits are valued in Canada and signify a successfully resettled refugee woman. Changes in time and space were also fixed because Rose was "a Ugandan at heart."

> But **I** surprised myself when **I** was running for office. I felt more Canadian. Uganda is my home, although I am **less attached to it as time goes** by. I am **conflicted**, but **I am going to live here** and want to **be buried** in this country. Reaching that decision made it very clear to me that **I am more assimilated** than I want to believe. I am detaching myself from Uganda. **I have** different expectations now than I did before and I do not fit in. Your ways are different. **Your e**xpectations are different. It is very difficult to fit in the Ugandan environment as well. So you are sort of left with a situation where you know **this is more comfortable**.

Conversely, Ronda was reluctant to speak about her identity. She nevertheless, offered the following general observation: "You cannot describe something [identity] unless you have **taken time to think** about it. I <u>have not thought of who am</u> I. **I let the life go as it goes**. **You wake up and try**, and the next day you try again, **just keep trying**." Trying meant that Ronda

was open to change in spite of the instability that had come to characterize her resettlement and identity reconstruction.

## Conclusion

In Chapter Four, I have discussed three organizing themes: on being a refugee (refugeeness), managing resettlement and dialogism and identity reconstruction. These discussions have provided partial responses to my research question that seeks to understand how refugee women from the Great Lakes region manage the resettlement process and construct new identities in Canada. In Chapter Five I continue with this analytic process and examine the fourth and final organizing theme: longing for belonging and recognition.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# FINDINGS PART III: BELONGING AND RECOGNITION

In this chapter, continuing with a feminist dialogical methodology, I examine narrative extracts and field notes that speak to the belonging and recognition theme. Similar to my previous analysis, I select discursive features in the women's utterances while paying attention to time-space and emotional intonation and how they relate to subjectivity, including how the speaker's voice intones the discourse with her own particular "truth."

To provide a context for the analysis of belonging and recognition theme, I draw on Honneth's (2003) theorization of recognition as a concept of self-realization which stipulates that

> we owe our integrity . . . to the receipt of approval from other persons, and that experiences of degradation are related to forms of disrespect, to the denial of recognition. Such behavior is injurious because it impairs these persons in their positive understanding of self—an understanding acquired by inter-subjective means (pp. 188–189).

Other scholars, such as Fleming and Finnegan (2008), observe that the reproduction of social life is governed by intersubjective recognition. This means that an individual develops a positive relation-to-self from the perspectives of *others* during personal interactions. Struggles for recognition can create opportunities for addressing personal and cultural denigration, and to theorize justice in ways that recognize difference as a positive characteristic.

Recognition is believed to underpin one's moral consciousness through which social values are developed in respect to the response one receives from others (Taylor, 1994). It allows for the harmonious coexistence of diverse peoples by providing insights into how

individuals relate to each other. This theorization is suited to a feminist dialogical approach to social work practice given the importance attached to the relations of power, recognition and respect.

As an ethical framework, recognition assists in understanding the nature, scope and legitimacy of multiple worldviews and social realities. However, Taylor (1994) explains that the moral sources of social discontent are anchored in *mis*recognition which can denigrate particular life forms. Misrecognition inflicts harm because it can keep an individual captive in a false and distorted sense of being (Taylor, 1994). Misrecognition can also lead to denial of opportunities for social participation as well as to other forms of oppression (Skeggs, 2001).

For philosophers Taylor (1994) and Honneth (2003), recognition is an important concept that encompasses the recognition of rights, cultural appreciation and the claims of love. They both consider denial of recognition as a justice issue because a person's integrity is tied to being recognized by others. This means that "the development and realization of individual autonomy is only possible when all subjects have the social preconditions for realizing their life goals without unjustifiable disadvantages" (Honneth, 2003, p. 161). By theorizing recognition as a means for social justice, these philosophers agree that recognition of "difference" in society takes place through intersubjective interactions. This is when individuals learn to re-affirm each other in respect to their specific sense of self as discussed above.

Refugee women from the Great Lakes region come with their own understanding of *self*, grounded in Ubuntu, an African philosophy which encourages an ideal of shared subjectivity to promote a community's good through unconditional recognition and appreciation of the Other (Eze, 2008). In Canada, they are confronted with individualist notions

of *self* leading to integrated, albeit complex, subjectivities. Fleming and Finnegan (2008) identify three phases of the struggle for recognition within a Western worldview, which include the demand for love as the basis of self-confidence, the demand for rights as the basis for self-respect and the demand for recognition as the basis for self-esteem. Therefore, even from this individualistic framework, recognition of difference is not only a moral imperative but a vital human need because it is tied up with the process of identity reconstruction. In other words, intersubjective recognition plays a key role in identity reconstruction for refugee women starting out in a new society. In the following section, I examine how study participants conceive of and conceptualize belonging and recognition in a Canadian sociopolitical context.

## Theme IV: Longing for Belonging and Recognition

### *Key moment: Longing for belonging and recognition in Canada*

Sauda, who arrived in Canada in 1999, believes that courage and commitment are sufficient traits for a refugee woman to be recognized as a Canadian:

> It was my proficiency in the Greek language that mesmerized the Orthodox Church. I go overboard to live by the laws of Canada to prove that I am **transformed.** If I should do this, I should be a Canadian and that trait should be rewarded. It is not simple to say that I choose to follow the law because **we have lived in lawlessness**.

In this utterance, Sauda used a monological or an outside-in discourse to bring the issue of longing for belonging to the center, dominated by a singular authoritative voice. Given its singular voice, the *other* is not able to introduce her point of view in the utterance. Sauda is an individual with a very high level of formal education—a symbol of authority and privilege (power). Her discourse is intoned by admiration, respect and strength of character for those

who are viewed as successful. Sauda's monological style designates a particular feature of subjectivity that is organized along the line of a test of her "readiness and determination" to achieve recognition as a Canadian. In Sauda's view, refugee women must ignore the difficulties they encounter during resettlement and show determination and personal courage as the only necessary course of action required to be accepted as a Canadian.

Sullivan (2012) argues that the potential to organize and give shape to subjectivity is much greater within a monological discourse. A monological style is therefore much more evident and commonly exercised within the Canadian socio-economic context because it reflects liberal values of a self-confident and self-directed subject who is destined to succeed irrespective of existing structural challenges. Participants who adopted a monological style mimicked the exercise of power and privilege in Canadian society. The expectation is that successful resettlement is premised and dependent on acquiring many of these intoned traits. While time and space are also abstract, the participant undergoes fixed changes as described in this extract by Sauda: "**I was** a devout defender of Buganda although **I embrace** the Canadian identity. **I see myself as a Canadian**. I say born and raised in Uganda."

In respect to her previous subjectivity, Sauda resented the negative media portrayal of her country of origin because it was a misrepresentation and caricature of her cultural identity. As a result, she "tend[ed] to exaggerate the other identity, the Muganda identity."

The Muganda identity can also be understood as transitional until such a time when the identity accepted in Canada can be acquired—perhaps one without an accent. Kumsa (2003) reminds us that the desire to become Canadian does not result in belonging to the nation because even as participants became citizens, the nation itself remains elusive. This is because Canada is an intensely disputed space that "even a toehold of membership is protected with

emotionally charged discursive practices" (Kumsa, 2003, p. 247). The more unattainable the nation becomes, the more desperately Sauda, Edna and other participants long for Canada to embrace them and heal their wounds. For the purposes of this discussion, healing involves repairing physical and psychological damage, including the disordered social relations that characterize refugee women's lives. Kumsa (2003) further explains that refugees long for a secure symbolic attachment to their previous identities while they wait to be recognized as Canadians. The more they long for their previous identities, the more they idealize and idolize them (Kumsa, 2003), a point that is aptly articulated in the following sound bite by Monica: "I realize that now I am more interested in where I came from."

Sauda was uneasy about the constant renegotiation of new identities, which she believed prevented her from acquiring a solid and consolidated subjectivity—a monological subjectivity. Although she envisaged a certain future as a result of her transformation, she continued to develop programs to assist in the building of a cohesive society. She warned that the process would require "our readiness and eagerness to embrace each other as Canadians, despite the fact that we come from different parts of world." Sauda spoke of "fine-tuning" our views to bring about "social cohesion" as part of our shared destiny. Frideres (2008) agrees and makes the point that for Canada to continue thriving as a cohesive nation, refugees must be woven into its social fabric. This means that a successful resettlement that engenders a sense of belonging through recognition is beneficial to Canada's vitality, to counteract negative experiences that can create alienated citizens who neither belong *here* nor *there*. The mental anguish of misrecognition prevents healthy and positive transformation, which can lead to lack of purpose, hopelessness and mental health problems (Beiser, 2010). Frideres (2008) argues that such situations can create forms of permanent temporality that can last for generations.

However, the dialogic belonging to *here* and *there* is a significant component of refugeeness in general, because it requires the simultaneous straddling of multiple worldviews. I am suggesting that this is identity transformation par excellence, because it engenders identity reconstruction negotiated between time and space and within different worldviews. A dialogical identity reconstruction across time and space is believed to be central to notions of bicultural competency, the ability to function effectively in more than one socio-political setting (Trueba, 2004).

Edna's experience of belonging, in contrast to Sauda's, reveals a great deal of ambivalence and uncertainty inherent in a double-voiced discourse. To be sure, Edna acknowledged that she was a "very proud Canadian. I love Canada **and it is true there is no place like Canada. But**, my voice has not come out because my story has not been heard." Edna made it very clear that she was fond of Canada, but she was also disconcerted by its cultural practices that engendered misrecognition of the *other.* Hers was an intensely outside-in discourse, one in which she gave shape to being a black African Canadian woman with a passionate admiration for Canada and an emotional detachment because there was very little room for non-Caucasian voices. It was a *self* divided by *itself* where the Canadian side of Edna's identity was hardly actualized while previous identities had been rendered dormant. Edna's anticipatory tone created space for *other* voices to respond to her interpretation of what it meant to be a refugee woman from the Great Lakes region in Canadian society. The intonation (accent) also revealed a degree of uncertainty; she was unsure given her African accent**,** that she would ever be considered a full-fledged Canadian.

In the language of the discourse, a time-space was created, not one of faking it, but a space where Edna's life became an act of both participation and resistance. In the interview,

she painted these time-spaces vividly and explained how she took a long time to decide to become a Canadian citizen. She was disappointed with the prospect of never being recognized for who she truly was—a dedicated admirer of Canada. The time-space was characterized by sadness and regret for having lived a difficult life, but she was also saddened that her story was not part of the national narrative. Edna did not see herself as belonging to Canadian society until her story became an integral part of its national narrative. It was thus an anxiety-provoking space and a time filled with anticipation and longing for belonging and recognition if only for her intense love for Canada.

In contrast, in the monological style that drove Rose's and Sauda's discourses discussed earlier time and space were organized in abstract terms where hard work was valued and guaranteed success—something to strive towards, to reflect upon afterwards with admiration. As such, a monological style reflects a more strategic subject who negotiates the feelings, struggles and pressures of the outer world, such as passing a character test for success (Dadey, 2003). As an illustration of this point, Rose's discourse below exposes a strategic subject who managed her daily life in ways that promoted her personal and professional success in Canada:

> **I** am now taking French classes. It makes **me happy** because in the end I know I am going to **get something out of** it because I am a **goal** oriented person. **I don't do anything for free**. I don't do anything that I don't think is going to bear fruit, you see what I am saying? Even if I am sitting with a friend, **it's not for nothing**, you know! Everything that I do, **there is a reason I do it and every single day** that's how I go about my day. I wake up in the morning; **I try to figure out what I need to do for the day that is beneficial to me. My time is never wasted.**

***Key moment: Changing gender roles create confusion***

Similar to other inside-out discourses within dialogism, in Ronda's narrative changing gender roles were given a central place in the discourse. As an anti-authoritative discourse, dialogism allows different voices to wedge through the speaker's discourse (Sullivan, 2012). Ronda's narrative revealed a disappointed self in spite of an otherwise positive resettlement experience. Her intonation was filled with confusion characterizing the destabilizing effects of changing gender relations for both men and women.

Before coming to Canada in 2006, Ronda was never expected to make difficult decisions; her husband and other men in the family made those decisions. Her household responsibilities were limited to visiting relatives, overseeing and supervising hired help who prepared meals and took care of children. However, in her new life in Canada, she has had to take over many of the chores previously done by hired help, leading to tensions within the household which can be attributed to changed gender roles. Taking on these responsibilities has often meant making difficult family decisions that were previously made by men. As tensions mounted between herself and her husband, negotiations about who should make what decisions were initiated. Increasingly, the situation fostered tension in the family, leading to unhappiness in the home.

In particular, Ronda expressed concerns about issues, such as domestic violence which she believed was not well understood given the general preoccupation with how African men abuse women:

> **I think** we need to **look beyond** woman abuse. We cannot focus on being feminist and say man against woman. In the system we left behind, a man cannot be a good husband if he is not able to provide for his family. He cannot be appreciated and respected. He

> feels ashamed. **How do they [women] expect that man to be strong**? Then, **who is abusing who now**? We are all being abused and we are hitting heads against each other, **blaming each other**. But if everything was normal, the way it was supposed to be, in the end, the husband will do his part and keep everybody **in their right place**. So, refugee women are under a lot of pressure from different directions. **Sometimes it is like wanting to be accepted.**

In the above quotation, Ronda suggests that we need to look beyond "woman abuse" because the issue tended to be culturally decontextualized leading to misunderstandings. She explained that refugee women were not helped by feminism which she described as "woman against man" ideology. In her opinion, the system she left behind had clearly defined gender roles and provided structure for both men and women. Here, we observe a dialogical encounter between two different cultural visions of the roles of men and women, and also between two different conceptions of gender relations and feminism as she understood it.

Ronda went on to suggest that men and women were all being abused. I understood this statement to mean that both men and women are victims of violent displacement and that men should also receive some kind of care especially during times of crisis. In her view, such incidents have the potential to retraumatize the entire family—men, women and children—because everyone is a victim of circumstances. Ronda argued further that if they had not been displaced, men (husbands/partners) would have performed their roles as they were intended to do which "keeps everyone in his or her place."

Regarding the absence of assistance for male refugees who are also new to the country, Ronda described this situation as follows: "**Men do not get that chance** of being picked up [women get assistance in times of crisis] even though men are also **new t**o the country. They

do not get help in **establishing themselves**." Ronda could be entangled in an ongoing renegotiation of ways to re-establish continuity in her life with a hope that if husbands/refugee men could access services similar to those available to refugee women, such help would mitigate family break up and facilitate some form of continuity in her life. Rousseau, Rufagari, Bagilisha and Measham (2004) argue that resettlement involves coming to terms with the many losses that each family member has endured. This process makes it difficult for families to re-establish balance and cohesion. Moreover, it is during resettlement that tensions between husbands/wives/partners begin to emerge and gender roles begin to be redefined (Rousseau et al., 2004). Simultaneously, changes in body and mind and in one's perspective occur for refugee women and men because they are exposed to new ways of being. Becoming aware of these changes can be sudden and often times traumatic for those who are slow to embrace them leading to loss of self-worth for both men and women (Rousseau et al., 2004).

In their study "Re-making family life: Strategies for re-establishing continuity among Congolese refugees during the family reunification process," Rousseau et al. (2004) found that refugees sometimes exhibit displaced inner conflict by engaging in a systematic denigration of the new culture or their own culture of origin. For example, when Ronda disparaged feminism she could be adopting a confrontational strategy to help her externalize internal tensions to prevent a family break up or to avoid further losses in her life. Ronda was very much aware that as refugee men lose their social status, they also lose their identity and the respect of their communities. In line with Rousseau et al. (2004), Ronda felt betrayed by refugee women who decided to endure more disruptions in their lives while she would prefer some degree of stability and continuity in her own life.

In the following quotation, Ronda blames women for men's loss of strength and respect: "Refugee women should **keep their men strong** by respecting them instead of **running** to shelters for abused women." Using third person speech, Ronda spoke about women who "pick[ed] up" other women and women who waited to be "picked up" to illustrate her view on gender relations in Canada. I understood Ronda to be referring to women who help abused refugee women find housing and shelters, and refugee women who require such services. Distanced from this experience, Ronda did not see herself among this group of women, especially those who were "looking to be picked up."

Ronda's discourse reveals elements of "false consciousness" which refers to an attitude held by members of the class that may not reflect their objective position (Horkheimer (1992). Similarly, her narrative portrays how class, gender and other structural factors can contribute to a person being comfortable with her own oppression (hooks, 1984). While the effects of these structural factors could be relevant, I view Ronda's position on gender relations as a point in a journey which entailed a complex and elaborate adaptation of new knowledge with which she tried to make sense of her new environment. In other words, Ronda struggled with the complex cultural processes that brought feminism to bear, and her own on-going efforts to comprehend the effects it has had on refugee women and their families. How does it compare with the system that she had lived in and understood? She sought new knowledge while negotiating it to ultimately integrate it into her understanding of gender relations in Canada. The "open future" that characterizes dialogism made room for Ronda to explore different ways of being by wrestling with conflicting knowledge paradigms as she reconstructed new identities as crucial and necessary parts of resettlement in Canada.

Within an outside-in discourse, Ronda gave shape to her understanding of the world of gender relations in Canada. Time-space was created by her strong opposition to refugee women going to shelters; where time passed as Ronda reacted to what she considered an abdication of social values. It was thus a space filled with anguish, anger and fear because Ronda did not know where and how her journey would end. Ultimately, identity reconstruction for refugee women from the Great Lakes region involves weighing the benefits of the two systems they have come to occupy. The old system Ronda knew had protective factors resulting from her privileged class and "tribal" positioning, including an extended family network that minimized and oftentimes removed her from the debasement and life of drudgery that a majority of women in the Great Lakes region experience.

In any case, Ronda recognized the pressures that underlie resettlement for refugee women from the Great Lakes region. These pressures range from adapting and/or adopting Canadian mores to acquiring new knowledge and transforming some of the values of their former lives that are ill-suited to the new world, to creating some sort of social network for survival. While acknowledging the need for recognition and belonging, Ronda suggested that refugee women needed time and space to reflect on where they have been to create a foundation on which to build new identities that would contribute to successful resettlement:

> Because the new life is like trying to fit size 9 foot into size 7. It is the shoe that you have and it has to fit whether you like it or not. **You can't forget what you had** but at the same time you can't apply it here. Had you had the time to **reflect** and take the good from the past, and see what you can apply to reconstruct your new life in Canada. Do you get time to do that? **I don't think so**. Problem is, when things are not going very

well, **one** tends to start digging up the past, but when things are going well, **you** may not even think about them.

In this extract, Ronda speaks of not being able to forget what she had, but which cannot be applied in Canada. I understood Ronda to be referring to the values she had before coming to Canada which did not serve her needs here. This meant that she would have to decide which of those values are adaptable in Canada and which should be discarded or forgotten because they are not needed in her new socio-economic environment. Ronda's discourse expressed an inconsistency that is characteristic of an internal conflict. She was responding to silent voices wedging through her discourse—possibly expectations and obligations from family and community ("You can't forget what you had")—and the pragmatism of abandoning values and practices that no longer served any adaptive purpose.

"Not forgetting" is a recurring theme in this dissertation. From an intersubjective perspective, "not forgetting" is rooted in a widely held fear that research participants expressed about losing their identity and their sense of belonging. As discussed elsewhere, the Ubuntu philosophical outlook promotes the ideal of a shared subjectivity. This means that for refugee women to feel human, they have to belong to something or somebody: a husband, father, brother, family, clan, or country. In this sense, Ronda's discourse links subjectivity and the theme of being a refugee, including how they both relate to her current position in respect to changed gender roles in a new country. In a feminist dialogical approach, such inconsistencies or paradoxes are considered logical because they reflect her dialogic understanding of feminism as a new way of being that includes changed gender roles in her own household. This understanding is, in of itself, a form of identity reconstruction because these changes have resulted in her questioning existing knowledge claims and reacting to new modes of gender

relations in Canada. In other words, the paradox points to a dialogic internal/external struggle, and to some extent, also to disappointment that other refugee women had abandoned "what they had." Wegerif (2013) informs us that dialogism is at play when the discourse involves a reciprocal interrogation of *self* and holds more than one irreducibly different perspective together in tension. Ronda may or may not be able to resolve her tension, but in the meantime she continues to question the validity of changed gender roles and worries about possible ruptures that disorganize men's and women's positions. Here, time and place are filled with anxiety and anticipation due to an uncertain future.

Study findings from this research have overarching implications for refugee women's mental well-being and social work's ability to mediate differences (knowledge and worldviews) that hamper meaningful resettlement. In this respect, the shoe-size metaphor illuminates the dialogic encounter of the *here* and *there*, and therefore has practical and theoretical implications for the social work field. In the section that follows, I examine a feminist dialogic understanding of subjectivity for refugee women from the Great Lakes region.

**Making Sense of a Dialogic Subjectivity**

Refugee women from the Great Lakes have lived through ruptures of violent displacement yet have managed to bring together an existence in time and space and to function in multiple social locations. This means that refugee women adapt and adopt new and different ways of living in an ongoing way. Identity reconstruction is a significant part of this process. Rousseau et al. (2004) argue that identity reconstruction for many refugees begins in the mind, as they remember their life and the family as they were, and begin to visualize it as it

might be in the new environment. In terms of subjectivity, the process begins after displacement, although resettlement may continue for a long time. In this study, participants described how they negotiated new identities by adopting new techniques and ways of viewing the world that were completely different from what they knew and practiced.

Monica's narrative is an example of how research participants appropriated the *other's* discourse and gave it a different intonation—Monica's mocking expression of what she perceived to be a misrepresentation of her cultural identity. When compared to Monica's utterance, Edna's embodied a deeper, more reflexive dimension to a life story and how she viewed the world around her. Although Edna was cognizant of racial disparities, she was careful not to name racism because it could cloud issues related to the traumatic experience of violent displacement. By foregrounding her subjective experiences as a visible minority woman who was physically alive but "dead" in spirit, Edna deconstructed these experiences in order to expose them, revealing the contradictions and pain she had come to embody.

Unlike Sauda and Rose, Edna's exploration involved a reciprocal interrogation of *self* as she questioned her own role and motivation in the act of longing for belonging and recognition. She wondered if continuing to work with like-minded Canadians would promote a more responsive society. This double questioning voice created the possibility of a divided, double-voiced *self* as discussed earlier. One voice was cautious, feeling and disappointed, while the other was questioning and contradictory and introduced doubts that perhaps her aspiration for recognition would never lead to acceptance in Canada. This second voice is reported here indirectly and, in this sense, it is a form of double-voiced discourse: "Is my spirit thriving in Canada? Am I blossoming? Is my inside consistent with my outside?"

As she questioned the authenticity of her renegotiated identities, Edna was mystified as to why her story was not part of the national narrative: "**You** want to explode, but the anger that **refugee women** have can come out constructively." While part of the anger could be attributed to her failed aspirations for recognition, there were other equally devastating anger-provoking experiences of loss and trauma that Edna had kept silent for nearly thirty years. A feminist dialogical approach to practice considers "silence" to be a rational response to mistrust of authority and fear of torture. Torture comes from a need to control and sustain power and can be inflicted on the individual or his/her entire family. By creating an atmosphere of fear and powerlessness, torture affects its survivors far beyond the experience including during resettlement. In other words, torture affects the self, the family, the body, the community, and the experience of time and space through prefixes: *dis*-: as in *dis*connection, *dis*integration, *dis*location, and/or *dis*memberment (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2003). Felman in Caruth (1995) reasoned that silence becomes a means to express the "breakdown of the word" (p. 42) caused by power differences or the necessity to survive.

Silence can also be self-imposed by an internalized discourse that "seeks to produce subjects according to explicit and implicit norms" (Butler, 1997, p.133). As a counter-discourse, it enables survivors to reclaim their agency by demonstrating unwillingness to engage verbally, either with their oppressors or later on with authorities in the new country. Hajdukowski-Ahmed (2003) theorized silence as a flicker of freedom and the locus of creativity for the individual who, consciously or unconsciously, expresses his or her dissent. Through non-verbal forms of communication, such as "silence", dialogism reveals the fissures in a monological world-view of an authoritarian power structure.

Despite her disappointment, Edna took responsibility for all refugee women from the Great Lakes region which forced her to transform her anger constructively. The double questioning voice created the possibility of a divided, double-voiced *self*—a questioning voice that was ultimately subservient to Edna's deep desire to belong to Canada.

While attempts to reject original identities were vehemently challenged, negotiating a new identity and the pursuit for recognition were celebrated as important values that could lead to successful resettlement. Qualities such as hard work, commitment, passion and love for Canada were also highly valued. Study participants contrasted these qualities with the potential for laziness and/or lawlessness, characteristics that could hamper recognition and the ultimate goal of being accepted as full-fledged Canadians.

**A racialized subjectivity in Canada**

Sauda, Sabina, Monica and Edna's accounts of longing for belonging and recognition were linked to "accents that make us different" (Sauda). Participants spoke at length about the role that accents played in intensifying their sense of loss and misrecognition in Canada. They also spoke of times when they do not understand service providers' instructions. While research participants avoided naming racism, nonetheless, they framed challenges during resettlement with the language of discrimination and misrecognition based in discourses of identity reconstruction as *othered* refugee women. In other words, "No matter how much we struggle, skin color makes us different" (Sauda).

Refugee women from the Great Lakes region have paid attention to the shifting and fluid nature of the discourse on racism and have learned that the act of naming racism is regarded as an affront to Canadian hospitality. The women are aware of the price that can be

paid for such transgression. In the work place, for example, they may be isolated or ostracized, get little or no work assignments or see their advancement curtailed. For the women I interviewed who received social assistance or required mental health and trauma services, it was simply prudent that they did not in any way jeopardize their future prospects in Canada. In an article entitled "My class did not trump my race: Using oppression to face privilege," DiAngelo (2006) argues that racism is "a deeply embedded, multidimensional, and internalized system of thought and patterns of behavior" (p. 57) at both the individual and collective levels. It permeates every part of society and our beings and is reinforced every day, oftentimes in unconscious ways. It is thus not a list of specific acts that individuals do or don't do (DiAngelo, 2006). In the excerpt below, DiAngelo describes a cultural process in which racist beliefs are transmitted from one generation to another:

> From an early age I had a sense of being an outsider; I was acutely aware that I was poor, that I was dirty, that I was not normal, and that there was something wrong with me. But I also knew that I was not *black*. We were at the lower rungs of society, but there was always someone on the periphery, just below us. I knew that "colored" people existed and they should be avoided. I remember many occasions when I reached for candy or uneaten food laying on the street and was admonished by my grandmother not to touch it because a "colored person" may have touched it. The message was clear to me; if a colored person touched something it became dirty. The irony here is that the marks of poverty were clearly visible on me: poor hygiene, torn clothes, homelessness, hunger. Yet through comments such as my grandmother's, a racial *Othe*r was formed in my consciousness, an *Other* through whom I became clean (2006, p. 53).

Anti-racist scholars, such as DiAngelo (2006), Dua (1999, Kumsa (2003) and Razack (1998), hold the view that since stereotypical beliefs are entrenched in social systems and institutions, those who do not experience their effects vehemently deny their existence. In respect to refugee women from the Great Lakes region, racism cuts across resettlement and identity reconstruction because it is integral to the social context in which they resettle. In line with this, Edna narrated her experience with a Canadian employment center as follows:

> I wanted to do nursing. I then went to a Canada employment center. The counselor told me that there were no jobs, and I said there has to be some hospitals around here. The counselor replied that if they are there, "I do not know how you can get a job in that area. If this is what you want to do, then you will have to do an aptitude test." I did the aptitude test and failed. He then said, based on the test results, "your aptitude, intellectual and mental functioning capacity is so low that you cannot even work as a house cleaner." Talk about ways to push ones' <u>self-esteem down—that even as a cleaner, I would have to be supervised to be at work!</u> I never went back to that employment center.

The quotation above reveals how social structures of class, colonialism and race intersect and overlap to influence how an African black service user is perceived. In this case, Edna could only become a house cleaner because she was deemed incapable of doing jobs that required thinking and brain power, in other words, she was just a *body* suited only for the physical work force.

The dialogic event described above appears, on the surface, to involve only two people: a research participant from my study and an employment counselor at a Canadian employment center. However, government policies and practices also play into this exchange because they

determine how these policies are to be interpreted and applied. They set the parameters of who qualifies and who does not qualify for a specific service and under what conditions. In Edna's case, it was employment services. Arguably, the "voices" not only of the counselor and the service user were present, but of many silent speakers who presented their views and perspectives indirectly, including those who designed the aptitude test. All these voices are embedded in this exchange but the employment counselor was the conduit through which the dominant race's and class's interests and entitlements were maintained and protected. In Edna's case, the employment counselor was a white male endowed with cultural and political power. He authoritatively interpreted test results in a way that rendered a service user unemployable across time. His determination of what the service user could or could not do was final and fixed, and as a result he erased any hope that Edna had in getting into the field of nursing.

The employment counselor's social positioning, his authoritative and patronizing tone, contributed to shaping Edna's identity and future actions: "I never went back to that employment center." She was humiliated, and her dreams of having a career in nursing were shattered by a person who was put there ostensibly to help her. Her future would be fixed and certain if she took up employment as a supervised house cleaner. The aptitude test and the employment counsel were the means by which a service user was denied an opportunity to seek employment in the field of her choice. It is also through the aptitude test that her intelligence and mental competencies were "scientifically" confirmed and sealed. At the core of race relations in Canada is the requirement that those being excluded must prove that they have been discriminated against. Indeed, how could Edna claim discrimination on the basis of race if she had failed the aptitude test?

A feminist dialogical perspective is cognizant of the effects that "words" have, in a social service setting for example, and their ability to provoke re-traumatization accompanied by intense physical reactions, such as stomach cramps or headaches.

Here is another example of covert race relations, as experienced by Sauda:

> I tell my own children, if you don't break the law you have nothing to worry about. So, **you can imagine** when they do not break the law, and yet **someone thinks** that they have done something bad, that is almost like **a betrayal**.

In this quotation, Sauda makes reference to racial profiling as a life experience based on stereotypical beliefs about the criminal intents of members of certain social groups in Canada. In terms of subjectivity, the *other* ("**someone thinks** – or main stream social discourse") is given a central place in the utterance which provokes feelings of "**betrayal,"** an intonation that gives the discourse a specific "texture" of sadness emanating from what is perceived as betrayal**.** It is thus a multi-voiced discourse with multiple speaking voices anticipating different responses and value judgments from the *other* in the form of "**you can imagine."**

**Refugee women's experiences of time and space**

Mohanram (1999) reminds us that place and space and the dramatic display of violent displacement are saturated with relations of power (determined by race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.) which are relevant to the construction of identity. Sauda and other participants like her consider the ongoing categorization and naming of their subjectivities—Muganda, African, black, visible minority—to go beyond classification of race. These terms contain within them the historical relations of colonialism in both social and economic terms. As markers of place and time, such categorization demonstrates how race relations are structured

and managed in Canada. To illustrate this point, I draw on Rose' Canadian workplace experiences as follow:

> I was the only **black girl** working in the restaurant because that was a big deal—if you checked in other places, you wouldn't see a black waitress because there was money to be made. Blacks worked in the **kitchen**.

Here, space, economic opportunity, class, race and gender are interrelated in the space of the kitchen. Through dialogism we can begin to understand how Rose struggles to negotiate time and space as revealed in the following extract:

> I figured that I am not doing anything **here** or **there** and decided to pick **one** or figure out a way to go back **home**. I decided to stay **here**, put my children in French school, be a full-fledged **Canadian**, participate fully in the system, but **my heart** is still in **Uganda**.

In Chapter Two I described an outside-in (monological) discourse as one characterized by a singular, profound truth that shapes an experience. Evidently, being a refugee and its effects on subjectivity is a social positioning that participants cannot change as quickly as they would like but one they have to learn to dialogue with, to ridicule for relief, to negotiate with, and/or to integrate in their overall understanding of Canada and their place in it. While some participants gained employment, their experiences were not straightforward, and their stories of success were never constituted outside of power relations based on race and other forms of misrecognition. In a journey characterized by trauma and displacement, time and space are uncertain. Dialogic subjects express uncertainty because they cannot foretell the future. Similarly, sound bites, such as "walking all day without knowing where to go," describe a journey that is continually changing with unknown encounters on every step of the way.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the fourth and final organizing theme of my dissertation: longing for belonging and recognition. I have argued that recognition is foundational to personal agency and resilience during resettlement and identity reconstruction for women fleeing the Great Lakes region. Research participants linked their being misrecognized to accents and skin color, illustrating how race, class and gender intersect to affect their sense of belonging in Canada. I have suggested that identity reconstruction for refugee women from the Great Lakes region involves simultaneously holding multiple worldviews, which is a significant feature of being a refugee. Further, I have demonstrated how gender roles change over time and throughout a refugee journey, as well as during resettlement. Taken together, findings from this study speak to overarching implications for refugee women's mental well-being and social work's ability to mediate the differences that hamper successful resettlement in Canada.

# CHAPTER SIX

# IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

I conclude my dissertation with an examination of a theoretical perspective that seeks to mediate ontological differences by working across knowledge paradigms between population groups, including refugee women from the Great Lakes region who subscribe to intersubjective worldviews. Intersubjective world views such as *Ubuntu,* an African philosophical outlook, are in direct contrast to liberal and Western philosophies founded on individualism. I make a case for a feminist dialogical approach to practice because it takes into account the service user's views, transcends fixed assumptions and embraces points of view that embody collective voices. As a research tool, a feminist dialogical approach brings to existing theoretical and methodological perspectives three critical elements (to which I return at the end of the chapter): 1) the existential insistence on an anticipating self, 2) the emphasis on "truth" as lived truth and 3) otherness and mystery which can be built into the fabric of the conversation. The other equally important part of this feminist dialogical approach is the way it facilitates identity reconstruction by helping social work practitioners understand a refugee woman's journey and its impact on her resettlement in Canada.

The lives of Great Lakes refugee women typically include traumatic experiences such as flight, displacement, torture, material dispossession, homelessness, grief, social isolation, single parenthood, financial hardships, psychological and mental health problems and fragmented and dispersed families. These experiences constitute significant parts of the narratives of the refugee women included in this research. Occupying a precarious position in society affords little or no opportunity for refugee women to be heard because their stories may be too difficult for those in positions of privilege understand, let alone to hear. Threatening to

exacerbate that silencing is "a quotidian violence that comes from non-recognition, turning away from witnessing the refugee's predicament, disparaging or trivializing it or co-opting it for local political gain" (Kirmayer, 2013, p. viii).

This study provided research participants with an opportunity to tell their stories to a researcher who, as an empathetic inside/outsider, could bear witness to their experiences of violent displacement. However, given my subject position as a researcher, I could be considered someone who benefits from such opportunities by co-opting refugee women's suffering, in my case, gaining a degree and professional advancement. After all, I have turned their painful experiences into "rich data." My goal, however, is to mitigate, through a critical self-awareness, the effects of the inevitable power differential even though it cannot be totally erased. Aidani (2013) theorizes that as an "insider" in a position such as mine shares indelible traces of suffering in her memory. Hermans (2003) describes the phenomenon as "cultural trauma," an experience that manifests itself in the collective consciousness and stays in the collective memory and ultimately alters identities. This commonality has motivated me to undertake this study and attempt to "represent, mediate, and give space to the voices of those who are marginalized, neglected or actively silenced" (Kirmayer, 2013, p. viii).

The ultimate goal for refugee women who have experienced extreme forms of trauma, such as women from the Great Lakes region, is to begin the healing process by addressing the physical, psychological and social damage they have experienced including their fragmented families and social relations. This goal can only be achieved with the assistance of improved and justice-oriented social work responses. Giving space to their voices leads me as a scholar in social work to evaluate current practices so that refugee women's expressed needs can be addressed, and as an empathetic insider/outsider who has undergone similar experiences, my

goal is to contribute to social work practice in such areas as research, policy and the face-to-face encounter for the benefit of refugee women in Canada.

**Organization of the Chapter**

I begin this chapter with a discussion of a feminist dialogical epistemology, and propose this as the most suitable theoretical framework when working with refugee women from non-European conflict zones including those who have fled the Great Lakes region. In order to situate a feminist dialogical approach to social work within existing practice models, I then provide a summary of challenges as expressed by study participants, followed by a brief review of three practice models that are most commonly used in Canada to address some of these challenges. Next, I examine ways in which a feminist dialogical approach to social work practice might contribute to the face-to-face encounter. To this end, I discuss three features that constitute this approach: 1) adhering to the ethics of responsibility to the *other*, 2) mediating ontological differences and 3) mitigating differences in power relations. The ethics of responsibility is important because it lays the foundation for a justice-oriented practice with vulnerable populations such as refugee women from the Great Lakes region. Next, through the use of a case study, I offer a series of specific recommendations for the design and delivery of social work interventions and social work practice in general.

In the second part of the chapter, I share my experiences and insights gained from using a feminist dialogical approach in qualitative research with particular focus on how to pay attention to an embodied subjectivity during a face-to-face encounter. Characteristics that could be shared by other racialized refugee groups in Canada include: trauma resulting from violent displacement, poverty, and challenges related to their inability to speak Canada's official

languages. The chapter ends with a particular focus on a feminist dialogical practice model that creates space for identity reconstruction as a process for trauma healing.

## Working with Refugee Women: A Feminist Dialogical Epistemology

Refugee women from the Great Lakes region encounter social work and other human service practitioners in a wide range of settings, such as resettlement service agencies, social assistance agencies, schools, hospitals and health clinics, child protection services, and employment services. Working with refugee women from non-European conflict zones requires rethinking practice in ways that cross the usual boundaries of social and health care provisions (Bokore, 2013). These efforts involve embracing complementary or alternative forms of practice based on consciously formulated approaches that aim at transforming praxis with vulnerable groups in Canada. I propose using a feminist dialogical response because of the importance it places on utterances made expressing a worldview or belief system, drawing attention to how "words" add or subtract value to the *other* in the different aspects of daily living (Wegerif, 2013). The underlying linguistic implication is that words have a performative function by their ability to assign a particular identity to an individual, and utterances are speech acts that have the potential to harm, heal, transform, encourage or stifle new ideas and initiatives. Importantly, refugee women from the Great Lakes region encounter Canadian society, its institutional policies and practices not as "blank pages" but as individuals who carry with them past experiences, who come from different cultures and who have been shaped by different social practices and expectations.

Perhaps more importantly is that the approach accounts for power differentials. A feminist dialogic response is particularly attuned to the hierarchal inequalities inherent in

practice interactions, and being attuned in this way helps build bridges between knowledge systems. In respect to identity reconstruction, a feminist dialogical response creates a space in which multiple and fluid subject positions engage and shape one another. As discussed elsewhere, equality from a dialogical perspective is premised on the *self* and *other* enriching each other (Aidani, 2013; Sullivan, 2012). In other words, the researcher-participant and social worker-service user occupy a central place in the encounter to form a subject-subject relationship. Such an approach derives from the principle that dialogism is "imbued with an ethics of recognition of the *other*, and of answerability because each participant is viewed as unique, invested with historical agency and responsibility, and as such, transforms and is transformed" (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008, p. 31).

Hermans (2003) informs us that such a dialogical social work practice can create spaces for the voice from an individual's culture of origin to speak from a particular point of view. It is informed by Bhaktin's dialogical epistemology formulated around the *I-Thou* (subject-subject) relationship (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008). When the interaction is experienced within a subject-subject mode, it is "relational, direct, unique, an unrepeatable event in which the *other* is encountered as an embodied person and not as an idea, or an objectified/reified person" (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008, p. 2).

By rejecting the one-size-fits-all approach to practice in this way, a social worker informed by a feminist dialogical approach treats each service user as different from the one before. Such an approach respects and encourages the manner in which a refugee woman from the Great Lakes region views her world and her sense of *self.* The emphasis is placed on the individual's lived experiences with a commitment to understanding the experiences that have

shaped her life from *there*—which has shaped an identity embedded in African history and space and a historical experience of war and violent displacement—to *here*.

While existing social work practice often encourages a focus on reflective consciousness, a feminist dialogical approach helps to equalize the exchange on a plane of existential reflection when a speaker anticipates a response (Sullivan, 2012). Such equalization is achieved when practitioners examine how thoughts, feelings and emotions are conveyed in linguistic tones including how a particular intonation may hinder or create a dialogic space. The practitioner seeks to give shape and value to *others* as well as to *self* through language (Sullivan, 2012). Such active mindful listening involves listening to what is said and how it is being said. It is active listening because the practitioner is also a "searching" practitioner pursuing optimal understanding. A searching practitioner redirects established power structures within the face-to-face encounter in order to make room for new ways of communicating knowledge for the benefit of both the service user and the practitioner (Chambon, 2008). The approach brings a reciprocal transformation, and the social worker's function is not merely to assist a refugee woman to adapt to Canadian systems and society but to engage in a kind of empathetic listening (such as taking the time to uncover layers of issues) elicited by an interest in the experience of the *other*, which is requisite to a justice oriented practice, as well as policy and program deliberations.

Most significantly, dialogism accounts for the transformative function that the voices of *others* have on the *self* of the listener. This dynamic is also how social worker practitioners not only contribute to refugee women's transformation but are also transformed and can in turn transform policies and practices designed for refugee women fleeing conflict zones such as the Great Lakes region.

***Resettlement challenges as expressed by study participants***

Women's narratives reveal that refugee women are challenged by the extra layers of responsibility and hardship in resettlement, such as becoming heads of households while working outside of the home, raising children single-handedly, upgrading their own levels of education or offsetting their deskilling in Canada. Barriers to a successful resettlement among the participants ranged from financial hardship, to chronic unemployment or underemployment, to having to deal with racist and discriminatory practices, to language issues preventing refugee women from understanding instructions. Research participants spoke French or English before coming to Canada. Thus, the issue was not about knowing a language spoken in Canada, but about understanding these languages when how they were spoken in Canada differed from how they were spoken in their countries of origin. Women reported the difficulty they had in understanding instructions when service providers spoke with a different intonation or accent than what they were used to and how this made accessing important health and social service information difficult.

Difficulties became more pronounced when making health-related decisions given various complicating factors: confusing and sometimes conflicting health information from the internet, demanding self-care regimes for chronic disease such as diabetes and navigating complex health and social systems. To overcome some of these challenges, refugee women, as made evident in participants' narratives, relied on each other through "word-of-mouth" to share vital information because they were afraid to ask for information from the service providers. The consequences of not asking can be dire: women may make ill-informed decisions, health conditions may go unchecked, questions go unasked or remain unanswered and refugee women may not get the services they need.

Women's narratives reflected a need for practice responses to focus not only on the material aspects of resettlement but also on how power is exercised within the encounter. They also need to take into account differences in worldviews including understanding how these intersect to affect refugee women's overall well-being. Findings also point to the need to revise interventions that are designed from the perspective of a singular "truth" with the intention of applying them across knowledge systems. I argue that one-size-fits-all approaches to interventions are ill-suited to meeting the unique needs of refugee women and their children. In line with Badwall (2013), I discuss three social work practice models that are commonly used to address the challenges that service users face, including refugee women from the Great Lakes region. This discussion will also show how a feminist dialogical approach to social work practice can promote a mutually beneficial experience by mediating between individualistic and multivoiced perspectives during the face-to-face encounter.

### *Coping with trauma*

Cardinal trauma symptoms can range from "a process of splitting, of dissociation, between thoughts and feelings" (Agger, 1992, p.7) to withdrawal, anxiety, flashbacks, insomnia, somatisation (stomach aches and headaches), self-mutilation, nightmares, phobias, anger, and silence. Traumatic memory can function as 'reliving the event' rather than remembering it (Agger, 1992).

How refugee women from the Great Lakes region cope with trauma has significant implications for social work practice because trauma can alter and sometimes affect both identity reconstruction and resettlement. Theirs had been a world filled with uncertainties engendered by catastrophes. At every point in their journey from *there* to *here*, the

participant women awaited yet another catastrophe. They knew neither from where the catastrophe would come nor when it would come. Their lives were marked by "radical uncertainty" (Mbembe, 2002, p. 267) which is central to contemporary processes of identity reconstruction for the refugee women because suddenly life in the Great Lakes could take unbearable turns from the crudity of the brutality which transforms the original identity and its referents. Coping mechanisms, as described by the participants, ranged from engaging in prayer and religious practices to keeping busy. As they shared information amongst themselves, refugee women relied on others to know what to do. These experiences point to traumatic symptoms of loss of agency and refugee women's inability to perform particular activities which can be understood as a form of mental rest. This state of being can explain a fatalistic belief in God to take care of things, as many participants testified. As a woman surrenders, a day passes and then another until she is able to secure psychological help that repositions her disordered cognition and view of the world and allows her to safely regain her own agency and make her own decisions.

**Conventional Social Work Practice Models**

Practitioners in the field have a number of practice models to draw from to work with traumatized individuals. Some of these models cross ideological and political boundaries. I will address three models that are described in the literature to be prevalent in clinical social work practice in North America today.

I begin with cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) as one of the most popular models used in social work practice (Badwall 2013; King, 2011). The model can be used for the treatment of various forms of mental illness and provides specific guidelines and a process for effecting

change in an individual (Ottawa Institute of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, 2014). It is a structured, objective and collaborative treatment option with specific focus on present difficulties as opposed to past distress. In trauma therapy, for example, the therapist can help the individual identify patterns of seemingly "self-destructive" thoughts and behaviour by focusing on the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviors (Ottawa Institute of Cognitive Behavior Therapy, 2014).

The strength-based approach, on the other hand, offers language that challenges discourses of pathology usually ascribed to the marginalized *other* **(**De Jong & Miller, 1995). The model can therefore be used to neutralize negative representation and capture a person's subjective experiences. Effecting change in a strengths-based model requires consolidating a client's subjective experiences including her/his inner strengths and resources to solve presented problems and recover from harmful experiences.

The client-centered approach (CCA) has become the gold standard for social work practice to which many practitioners aspire in their interactions with service users (Badwall, 2013). According to Rogers (2000), CCA emphasizes an individual's ability to organize and manage his or her own problems. When key principles are strictly followed, CCA produces a predictable process capable of rendering similar outcomes from one user to the next, expressed in the following terms: "We know how to initiate a complex and predictable chain of events in dealing with the maladjusted individual, a chain of events which is therapeutic, and which operates effectively in problem situations of the most diverse type" (Rogers, 2000, p. 7). For their part, social work practitioners are expected to bring a supportive, compassionate and empathetic collaborative presence to the face-to-face encounter. They are also expected to

equalize power relations, to the extent possible, by decentering their experience so that the service user can direct or control the therapeutic process (Badwall, 2013; Rogers, 2000).

I argue that a feature that is common to these three practice models – and to most, if not all, approaches commonly used in clinical social work practice – is a focus on the individual in assessing and treating the challenges and problems encountered by service users. As a core ideal of liberal philosophy, individualism (enshrined in the Canadian Charter) plays a central role in influencing social work practice in Canada. In that personal interests are ethically paramount, in individualism all values, rights and duties originate from the individual, leading to expectations that each person can independently determine, control and solve all his or her problems. In "Beyond individualism: Social work and social identity," Houston (2014) states that "through a range of creative methods individuals are exhorted to exercise choice, independence and plan for alternative tomorrows" (p. 6). Thus, individualism as a philosophical lens places the consequences of structural inequalities on the individual (Houston, 2014). Furthermore, such a discourse leads not only to a "privatized, fractured and frail identity" (p. 4), but to identities removed from their social environments (Houston, 2014).

Liberalism is premised on the natural goodness of human beings and the autonomy of the individual, who is expected to pursue his or her self-interests in a free and fair society (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). It favors civil and political liberties, government by law with the consent of the governed, including protection from arbitrary authority (Kymlicka, 1995). Liberty and equality are achieved when citizens enter into a legal relationships with the state, where both the law and the state are viewed as neutral and benevolent (Kymlicka, 1995). This means that each individual is an autonomous entity and that all are equal and treated equally in a nondiscriminatory manner. However, the substantive equality afforded by rights and freedoms

does not take into account difference as a complex phenomenon with a long history that continues to influence social relations in Canada today (Moosa-Mitha, 2005) because problems and challenges are viewed as individual deficits. In Canada, liberalism has a hegemonic influence over other epistemological perspectives. Boggs (1976) describes hegemony as the ideals, values, beliefs and attitudes that function within the existing structures to govern and enforce power relations in society.

Consequently, individualistic practice models are ill-suited to respond to the multivoiced and intersubjective worldviews of refugee women from the Great Lakes region. Importantly, Lundy (2004) argues that "although commitments to social justice address wide scale injustices, the site of intervention remains the individual who is helped at personal levels as opposed to the structural levels of intervention" (p. 56–57). Healy (2005) agrees by arguing that such individualistic practice models tend to place the burden not only of trauma care but also the recovery upon the individual by focusing on consciousness-raising and empowerment. This is in spite of the fact that "no action is free from structural influences or the influence of governmental discourse" (Houston, 2014, p. 6).

Inherent in individualistic practice models is the assumption that all service users have equal access to the resources needed to recover from their ordeal. Power differentials within these sites are not acknowledged. As the social work practitioner and the service user are positioned in fixed relations of power and given the "modernist conception of power as a commodity, the powerful-powerless dualism does not always do justice to diverse experiences" (Healy, 2005, p. 135). In other words, the powerful-powerless arrangement cannot make space for the multiple subject positions that shape the identities of both the social work practitioner and the service user (Badwall, 2013). Furthermore, individualist models focus on static themes

within limited time schedules in which a final and last word about the person is uttered (Frank, 2005). Frank (2005) contends that individualistic models serve "to understand a person as fixed in their representation of [their] words" (p. 967) and experience. In "What is dialogical research, and why should we do it," Frank (2005) argues that "speaking about the *other* is both an empirical illusion of objectivity and an ethical failing of responsibility" (p. 967). Similarly, practice models that utter final words about a service user are harmful since individuals continually form themselves, leading to transformed subjectivities. Such transformative processes are, however, fully acknowledged by a feminist dialogic approach to social work practice.

## A Feminist Dialogical Approach: Its Contribution to the Face-to-Face Encounter

In chapter 4, as part of a feminist dialogical approach, I analyzed discursive features such as inside-out and outside-in types of discourse. In this section I continue developing this feminist approach by delineating differences in subjectivity. This requires the practitioner to pay attention to feeling *other* by creating a dialogic space in a face-to-face encounter. I discuss the ethics of responsibility that arise in the creation of a dialogical space and the two main goals in creating such a dialogic space: 1) to mediate ontological differences for optimal comprehension and 2) to mitigate differences in power relations (Wegerif, 2013).

### *Adherence to the ethics of responsibility to the* other

A feminist dialogical approach to social work practice regards the face-to-face encounter as a site of ethical responsibility to the *other* (Aidani, 2013). Drawing on Levinas, a philosopher who developed an ethics of *otherness*, both Sullivan, (2012) and Aidani (2013)

consider the "face" as representing the demand for a response that is initiated in the face-to-face encounter. In "Unsettled social work: The challenge of Levinas' ethics," Rossiter (2011) is concerned about generalized theoretical frameworks that fail to take into account the singularity of the *other* (in this case, the service user). Drawing on Levinas, Rossiter argues that the representation of the *other* is never adequate because some "things" about the *other* inevitably remain elusive to comprehension and conception. When we represent a person to ourselves we "pull that person into our system of concepts which takes the *other* into a 'totality' instead of her particular 'singularity'" (Rossiter, 2011, p. 7). Thus, practitioners must be mindful of that which cannot be represented because this mindfulness can become a protective element of the *other's* particularity (Aidani, 2013; Rossiter, 2011).

As a site for ethics, the face-to-face encounter embodies a demand for a response even when the response is turning away (Aidani, 2011; Wegerif, 2013). In light of the history of violence that marks human interactions, including the fact that not responding is insufficient, what then is the nature of an ethical response to the *other*? Rossiter (2011) postulates that Levinas seeks an understanding that puts at risk all universalizing philosophies and knowledge claims that pursue a "total" understanding of the *other*. As an alternative to universalizing discourse, Levinas searches for an encounter with the *uniqueness of the other*, or infinity. To engage with the "infinite other", as described by Levinas, involves paying attention to the embodied self, silent voices and silencing during the encounter [Sullivan, 2012; Wegerif, 2013]) This is consistent with a feminist dialogical approach, as a dialogic face-to-face encounter requires refraining from "treating the *other* as an extension of our own categories, theories, habits or learned ways of perceiving the *other*" (Rossiter, 2011, p. 6). When these categories are implemented to "know" the *other*, she is treated as an extension of our knowing,

a practice that destroys her singularity by forcing her to fit into pre-existing conceptual schema (Aidani, 2013; Rossiter, 2011). This kind of representation can engender social control and misrecognition, a process that "reduces the *other* from a 'who' to a 'what'" (Perpich, 2008, p. 7, in Rossiter, 2011).

Rossiter (2011), however, says little about how to find the way out of the "dividing practices" of social work, suggesting only to aim for "unsettled practice" that "accepts the impossibility of resolving the practice dilemma that the 'violence' of social work representations exist in inescapable tension with the need for justice that requires it" (p. 980). Thus, the theorization of a dialogical space within social work practice is significant because it offers a way to encounter one another while maintaining dignity of the *self* and the *other*. A dialogical space results when *otherness* (as conceived of by Bakhtin) and the infinite *other* are combined. This theoretical approach will be demonstrated in my consideration of a case study that I have entitled "Hilda and Her Babies" in a subsequent section of this chapter.

### *Mediating ontological differences*

Dialogism is theorized to be a "theory of being as well as a theory of knowing" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 5), blurring the distinction between epistemology and ontology. As an ontology, dialogism suggests that people depend on the values of others for self-affirmation. As an epistemology, Sullivan (2012) asserts that "true knowledge of the most important issues comes from personal participation as one enters into dialogue with the ideas of others" (P. 5). Mediating ontological differences (world views) would therefore involve bridging knowledge paradigms within the face-to-face encounter. This can be achieved by bringing together two or more opposing perspectives for optimal comprehension and mutual learning. Such a practice

also involves acknowledging differences brought about by the social structures of gender, race, class and sexual orientation between *self* and *other* during an encounter. Mediating ontological differences can also involve identifying ways in which dialogism influences or contradicts existing social work theories and practice models. Praxis is influenced by an understanding that a "dialogical self is a) spatially structured and embodied, b) populated by other people's voices, c) decentralized with highly open boundaries, and d) historically and culturally contextualized" (Hermans, 2003, p. 90).

In the face-to-face encounter, a feminist dialogical approach involves examining a dialogue between two or more different worldviews for optimal comprehension (Wegerif, 2013). It is listening in a manner that takes into account the emotions and cognition embodied in the utterance of the *other* (Sullivan, 2012). Thus, the practitioner "listens and responds to both what is said and the tone in which it is said" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 171). In writing this dissertation, I am also aware of myself listening as a woman with a self and differences in experience that have been gender-constructed in time and space. So in listening to Sabina negotiating identities in time and space, this is what I heard intoned:

> **I** am a Congolese and happy to be Congolese. Even if we had war every day, I am happy to say I am Congolese. I am here now a citizen but my **real, real** culture is Congolese. **That one I cannot change** but now I am in Canada and **I am happy to be a Canadian**. **We** have to know where we come from. Even if life is good here, **we have** to think about our relatives. **They are suffering**.

### *Mitigating power differences*

As an opening to different ways of knowing, a dialogic space brings together two or more dissimilar perspectives in a creative tension-filled dialogue. To illustrate, a dialogic space can be described as a "social event" of verbal interactions. It functions as a site of struggle between different social languages and ideological belief systems in the pursuit of shared social meanings (Wegerif, 2013). A dialogic meaning is likened to "an electric spark that occurs when two different terminals are connected together" (Wegerif, 2013, p. 31). In line with Aidani (2013) and Wegerif (2013), I understand the analogy to refer to a site where social meanings are negotiated in a space in which *selves* move cautiously toward jointly conceived understandings of the world within a specific spatial-temporal context but which is open to further transformation. This space is also referred to as a dialogic gap (Wegerif, 2013). Bakhtin (1986) argues that meaning is only possible in the context of a dialogic gap. Therefore, dialogism is at its most effective when gaps and differences arise since dialogue on its own does not account for such slippage. Difference becomes visible in consciousness when one begins to make sense of the experience of the *other* (Wegerif, 2013).

Wegerif[14] (2013) describes a dialogic space and its contribution to optimal engagement and learning as follows:

> It is not a physical space but a shared space of potential meaning and a space in which one learns to think. Learning to think is not just about constructing cognitive schemas it is also about learning how to deconstruct all our schemas so that a space of possibilities can open up allowing a creative solution to be imagined and formed. In other words, dialogism allows us to expand the space of dialogue, to bring more voices to bear and to draw more apparently fixed

[14] http://www.rupertwegerif.name/about.html

> background 'stuff'' into the transforming aspect of dialogue. Becoming dialogic involves an increasing identification with the process of dialogue or dialogic relations. Dialogic relations are ultimately not just relationships with this or that other voice but also with otherness in general. Otherness in general or Infinite Otherness, is not a bounded thing but denotes the capacity we gain through dialogue to stand outside of ourselves and to question. Identifying with dialogue is about **learning to feel safe and comfortable in a situation where there is multiplicity, uncertainty, constant undermining of every ground and yet also an unbounded potential for creativity.** [Emphasis added]

The goal of creating a dialogical space within a face-to-face encounter is to mitigate differences in power relations. Hermans (2002) informs us that a dialogic interaction is based on equality in which the speaker seeks to understand, respect and appreciate the arguments advanced by the other person irrespective of the power the speaker wields. We can also speak of dialogue between different embodied worldviews in which difference cannot be resolved into unity. As such, dialogism is different from dialectics due to the fact that "I cannot become you and you cannot become me" (Wegerif, 2013, p. 2). A feminist dialogic encounter allows the practitioner to take the *other* into account without losing self-awareness (Wegerif, 2013). Bakhtin (1981) adds that such difference in dialogue functions as a conduit through which meaning is organized. Together with service users, social work practitioners need to create spaces for reciprocal agency in which they become historical co-agents of transformation. This is a space where reciprocity is both modeled and expected, an engagement that has the potential to increase opportunities for a unique dialogic experience for the service user and the practitioner. While all dialogues are different when experienced from within a dialogic space,

they share an infinite potential of self-questioning and reflection which can allow infinite voices to penetrate through the dialogue (Sullivan, 2012). At this juncture, one is reminded of the ethics of responsibility to the *other* in the mitigation of power relations.

## Developing a Feminist Dialogical Approach to Social Work Practice

The following case study reminds social work practitioners to be mindful of how they respond to service users who are different from them by ensuring that they focus on their particularities shaped by worldviews, racial background and life experiences such as trauma that are significantly different from theirs. It can also help them understand the importance of paying attention to embodied subjectivities during an encounter, one of the key features of a feminist dialogical approach to practice.

### *Case-in-point: Hilda and her babies*

Hilda's story was related to me in a conversation with a key informant, an employee of a resettlement agency in Ottawa. I met with the contact to discuss my research and to inquire if she could advertise my study among refugee women from the Great Lakes region. She described her caseload and some of the unique cases that were assigned to her as the agency's social worker. Hilda was one such case. (I use a pseudonym to protect her and honor confidentiality requirements by deliberately providing scant details of the case.) With full informed consent, I reproduce the story as it was narrated.

Three years ago, 23-year-old Hilda was resettled in Canada with her nine-month old son. As a child, Hilda had been sexually abused by her stepfather and by age 14, she was roaming the streets in one of the cities in the Great Lakes region. In Canada, a health

practitioner arrived at Hilda's house midmorning and found the baby in a wet diaper. Child Protection Services decided to apprehend the child who was permanently taken away from his mother.[15] A year later, Hilda delivered twins, unaware that Child Protection Services had instructed attending physicians to apprehend any child that Hilda bore in the future.

Two days after giving birth to twins, the police and an agent of Child Protection Services took Hilda's babies away from her. She cried a bit but the tears dried up sooner than expected. She went outside, sat on the hospital balcony and started to pray in her mother tongue. Despite her difficult past, she was dedicated to prayer. After monitoring her movements and noting that they did not understand her language, hospital staff called the police. Hilda was handcuffed because of her seemingly incoherent speech which was seen to be evidence that she had lost her mind. As she was driven to the detention center, the police contacted social services at one of the resettlement agencies and requested the services of a social worker. The informant was contacted because she was one of the few social workers who handled such difficult and unusual cases. The contact explained that her role turned into one of cultural interpreter. After four months of intense negotiations and advocacy, the twins were returned to Hilda.

There is no doubt that this is a condensed version of what transpired during a series of critical events in Hilda's life, but it points to a need to rethink social work responses to unfamiliar situations and related differences, including trauma and violent displacement.

[15] My interview did not include information about the process that led to the apprehension of Hilda's first child. For the purposes of this discussion, Hilda's story is intended to question not only the timing but also the choice of interventions that were deemed appropriate in her case.

### *A feminist dialogical analysis of the case study*

Without a doubt, there are many Hildas who get lost in Canada's social service and health systems. Here I am concerned with the choice of interventions that were deemed appropriate for Hilda, a refugee woman who had experienced sexual violence and had met the refugee designation before arriving in Canada. I argue that the tools used to determine the appropriate course of action—calling in the police without her knowledge, her being handcuffed based on an erroneous belief that she had lost her mind, taking her into custody only two days after giving birth to twins, and the absence of a supportive individual throughout these incidents—were flawed, unjust and excessive. They were flawed because they permitted an interpretation of child protection guidelines without considering Hilda's acculturation and integration level or her particularities. Those who were in charge of this case objectified Hilda, and she was given no opportunity to challenge or counter the official narrative. I argue that this was a monological representation of the *other* because it focused on a singular truth—the practitioner who holds power.

In contrast, practitioners using a feminist dialogical approach to Hilda's situation would have maintained her human dignity by paying attention to her particularity and singularity as part of their ethical responsibility to the *other*. In a dialogical approach to practice, Hilda would have been recognized as an embodied subjectivity with a voice of her own. She would have been given a space to speak in her encounters with Child Protection Services, the hospital staff and the police. Such considerations are important because the efficacy of interventions, program cost considerations, the practitioner's ethical responsibility to the *other* and basic justice need to be considered in these moments. In applying screening and assessment tools, the singularity of her experience would be taken into account, and the role of the practitioner

would pay attention to her story in a non-threatening setting and ensure that her case was judged in the light of her own circumstances and her resettlement progress. As discussed above, dialogic exchanges assist in mitigating power relations and bridging epistemological gaps, the failure of doing either being at the root of Hilda's problems in her encounter with service agencies in Canada.

**Recommendations for Social Work Practice**

In this section, I discuss ways in which a feminist dialogical approach to social work practice could facilitate the resettlement of traumatized refugee women from the Great Lakes region in Canada. As research participants narrated their experiences of violent displacement, they also spoke about the attacks on their homes, the humiliation resulting from living under inhuman conditions, separation from family, and witnessing the raping and killings of loved one. Drawing on these narratives and from Hilda's case study, I provide some concrete examples that could be useful during social work practice deliberations.

To put a feminist dialogical approach into practice, for example, resettlement programs for refugee women would be designed in ways that recognize and integrate issues related to the traumatic effects of violent displacement and women's need for healing. Programs would aim to ameliorate pain and support women in restoring control over their lives. Agger and Jensen (1996) consider the healing process to be one in which individuals "establish their relationship to reality in a process where they regain their history and the capacity to relate to other people, and where they again have a vision of a meaningful future" (p. 105), and de-privatizes the experience. Refugee women would undergo a reflexive transition period that extends beyond the one-year resettlement period to two years to correspond with what is accorded refugees

dealing with adjustment difficulties. CIC provides assistance for skill development for refugees and other newcomers to Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014).

The healing process requires designing spaces that give feelings of safety and encourage "speaking" about traumatic experiences (Brahm, 2004). A safe space within an encounter permits the unspeakable "truths" to be told in detail and to allow memories to be incorporated into life stories. Through safe spaces, participants could raise questions about their experiences and explore feelings, such as fears and hopes for their future in Canada. In addition, refugee women could use this time to grieve, reconnect with their children, and make sense of the numerous discontinuities that characterize their life journey, while forming new attachments in Canada. Participants' accounts elaborated on children suffering when mothers were grieving the loss of loved ones or dealing with the debilitating effects of trauma; such refugee women tended to be dissociated and not attuned to their children even while breastfeeding. In many instances, refugee women have been known to remain in survival mode for a long time, a condition that adversely affects the concentration levels required for effective parenting. For those with partners, an extended period would provide more time to reconnect with partners who may also need to learn about differences in gender roles within the Canadian social setting. An extended transition period designates safe spaces to work on issues related to 'dissociation' while negotiating with reconstructed identities suited for a culturally diverse and complex society.

While research is needed in this area, findings from this study point to a need to revise existing practice models to cater to refugee women's expressed needs—including those from the Great Lakes region who hold a non-European worldview. Suggestions to address participants' expressed needs include: ensuring both universal and diverse approaches to

accessing services; designing gender- and culture-sensitive interventions; creating awareness of the roles and mandates of child welfare agencies by providing context-sensitive or "embedded" learning opportunities to promote safe and anxiety-free resettlement experiences for refugees; providing orientation and training opportunities; including time-sensitive program designs. Below is a discussion of these recommendations.

### *Ensuring universal and diverse approaches to accessing services*

Universality and accessibility are two of the five principles set out in the Canada Health Act of 1984 (Madore, 2005, Chapter 17, p. 1). The accessibility principle, which is geared toward ensuring access to health services without financial or other barriers, is not realized for refugee women from the Great Lakes region. This is particularly evident in the area of mental health and trauma care for refugee women, the majority of whom spent considerable time in refugee camps before they became permanent residents of Canada. This situation means that such women often require specialized medical and psychosocial care during resettlement. Furthermore, the one-size-fits-all approach to policy formulation and the concomitant service delivery mechanisms are not able to take into account differences and tensions resulting from knowledge systems that refugee women bring to the resettlement process. A feminist dialogical approach to practice is proposed to mediate such tensions, and to ensure that existing practice models focus not only on mainstream population groups, but include those who do not fit that configuration due to language, culture, country of origin, race, and life experience (Dumbrill, 2008; King, 2011).

Given the diversity of needs among refugee women, universal policies and programs ought to be flexible, dynamic and sensitive to their unique challenges, such as mental health

and trauma care. In addition, culture- and gender-sensitive program designs should be considered given that refugee women's health issues intersect with gender (Vissandjee, Desmeules, Cao, Abdool, & Kazanjian, 2004). In the following section, I discuss key elements in designing refugee-gender sensitive policies and related interventions.

### *Designing gender- and culture-sensitive interventions*

Drawing on professional experience and reflections on their respective turbulent pasts, participants considered ways in which gender-refugee-culture sensitive approaches to the treatment of trauma could be designed. Dialogic informed interventions focus on verbal, non-verbal forms of communication (NVFC), behaviours, and the senses to designate an embodied subjectivity. NVFC are used to augment verbal expression or stand alone to "exchange information through non-linguistic signs" (Poyato, 1987, p.1). These could be presented as: "facial expressions, movements, and postures, and encompass a range of cultural expressions, such as clothing, gestures, tattoos, body piercing and scarifications to displaying particular objects, etc." (Poyatos 1987, p. 3). Others are demonstrated through performance codes such as body and hand movements, facial expressions; a spatio-temporal code, including how different cultures experience time and space differently; mediatory codes such as fashion; a paralinguistic code, such as extra-verbal elements associated with speech and tone (Hadjukowski-Ahmed, 2003). Thus, the meanings attached to any of these codes are gender- and contextually specific to an individual, interpreting them requires informed reading and empathy.

By paying attention to the dynamic interplay of dialogism and trauma, the social work practitioner can avoid retraumatization of those who live in "two different worlds for a long

time: one of everyday life and that of trauma" (Caruth, 1995, p. 177). Often, such dynamism brings to the fore the dialogic tensions between verbal and body language in which an individual verbalizes positive responses while the body trembles with fear. In other words, the body functions as a site of meaning and discourse by retaining memories of pain, such as sexual or physical violence, dismemberment and disconnection. These memories could resurface in various forms to affect refugee women's resettlement experience. For example, survivors take on NVFC when their memories are disjointed from existing schemas. Caruth (1995) explains that healing occurs when disjointed memories are transformed into stories that bestow coherence and meaning. Hajdukowski-Ahmed (2003) agrees and argues that survivors reconstruct new identities when "memories" dialogically struggle with the healing forces of remembering, relocating and reconnecting. Similarly, refugee women's bodies enter dialogical relationships with their past environment and the silencing forces of power during resettlement such as when they are confronted with Child Protection Services (Sauda) or racist services at employment centers (Edna).

If the body is a memory of gendered social norms (i.e. keeping the body contained as prescribed by social norms), it is also a creative site of resistance, since "no act of speech can fully control or determine the rhetorical effects of the body that speaks" (Butler, 1997, p. 155). When writing about the indivisibility of the body and meaning, Bakhtin (1985) rejected the dichotomous epistemology which overvalues verbal communication and obliterates cultural, historical, and therapeutic richness of non-verbal forms of communication for both European and non-European cultures. In light of such reasoning, a feminist dialogical approach to the analysis of qualitative data determines the meaning of an utterance, not only by its linguistic forms, but also by its non-verbal material elements conveyed through intonation and related

body language signs, including silence which was aptly demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis.

Participants' narratives revealed ways in which the resettlement process can instigate its own forms of silencing, such as racial discrimination and barriers related to language, which further discourage refugee women from sharing their experiences of trauma. When refugees have a limited knowledge of Canada's official languages or a limited access to language training – as it is the case for many women – non-verbal forms of communication offer a more accessible and less stressful way to interact. Given the numerous effects of violent displacement, the socio-cultural contexts that refugee women occupy intersect to make the verbal telling of traumatic experiences difficult, hence their recourse to non-verbal forms of communication as discussed above.

Differences in Canadian and the Great Lakes region cultural norms with regard to the perception, treatment, and coping with trauma, expose tensions between the two worlds. Consequently, tensions exist between a woman who is at the same time a victim and a survivor, between refugee women's past and present, and between reliving and integrating trauma into their "normal" memory. Both explicit and implicit tensions create unpredictable and serious misunderstandings, and refugee women could be perceived as "difficult and unappreciative clients". In such instances, social work practice must endeavour to decipher and respond appropriately to the various forms of communication that a refugee woman brings to the encounter.

### *Creating awareness of the role and mandate of child welfare agencies*

Designing programs that are sensitive to gender and culture would minimize anxiety during resettlement and build refugee women's trust in institutions, such as Children Protection Services and the police, by incorporating information about their roles. In other words, the ways that refugee women experience their resettlement and negotiate new identities are, to a great extent, influenced by encounters with these institutions (Dumbrill, 2008; Stalker, Maiter, & Alaggia, 2009). These encounters are affected by the worldviews and the corresponding cultural practices of refugee women, and the meanings they attribute to these services. This latter point is significant when women have had horrendous experiences in the past with state agencies in general (Stalker et al., 2009).

Refugee women have overcome considerable hardships in order to protect their children and preserve what remains of their families. Despite these achievements, they sometimes come into conflict with child welfare systems over parenting styles and related child protection issues. Dumbrill (2008) explains that refugees do not always understand child protection obligations or mandates from a Western point-of-view, which results in anxiety-filled relationships with social workers (Earner, 2007). Child welfare agencies may also find it difficult to address child welfare issues or lack a forum to do so with people who are dealing with a host of challenges, including language and cultural barriers, without a natural support network (Dumbrill, 2008). Furthermore, the services that refugees receive are compromised by negative and sometimes hostile attitudes that intersect with public discourses portraying refugees as a threat to national security (Razack, 1998). Dumbrill (2008) argues that social

workers sometimes exhibit “harsh and discriminatory attitudes” (p. 147) towards refugees and promote a deficit discourse that portrays them as needy and a drain on the host society (Dumbrill, 2008).

Such challenges have led some refugees to claim that child protection systems fail to meet their needs; at times, these agencies are even viewed as having detrimental effects on children (Dumbrill, 2008; Earner, 2007) such as subjecting children to separation and further displacement. In my study, participants felt judged and misunderstood by child protection workers. Study participant Sabina testified to such an experience:

> You give up on raising your children the way you know how. You become the bad one. The people who do not know them are the good one[s]. They call the police. **They** say **you** are a bad mother; that’s why **we** suffer and it is difficult to give family education for our children here. It becomes useless because they do not listen to you. **It** is very difficult for parents. It gives **you** too much stress and you are alone.

Situations such as the one Sabina described require integrated interventions and orientation programs to help refugee women from the Great Lakes understand the role of children services and police intrusion in their private lives. Dumbrill (2008) also supports interventions that bring child protection agencies and child welfare policymakers together with refugee communities. Such linkages can be useful in creating joint problem-solving strategies for refugees and their children. Collaborative strategies can be used to review and plan with refugee families the best ways to protect and promote the well-being of children in their communities (Dumbrill, 2008).

***Providing orientation and training opportunities***

Orientation about the role of child welfare could be embedded in training programs, such as language instruction for newcomers (LINC), not simply its adversarial role of apprehension of children but its positive role of providing support where needed. I am suggesting that dialogic spaces ought to be created for refugee women to ask and exchange ideas about child-rearing practices in general. Such spaces would bring to the fore opportunities for addressing aspects of child protection that trigger fear and anxiety among refugee women from the Great Lakes during their resettlement in Canada. The proposed training spaces could also be used to assure refugee women that child welfare services are intended to prevent circumstances that put children at risk of abuse and harm (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2006). A case in point is the caution to practitioners laid out in the Ontario Child Welfare Handbook to "not misuse the guidelines through too rigid or too literal interpretations" (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2006, p. 10). The handbook also states that such practices can result in screening out legitimate cases of children who need protection. The "Hilda and her babies" case study reveals the obverse "screening in" of an unreal case.

Training programs could be used to exchange information about rights and equitable workplace policies, and explore differences in family and gender relations between the Great Lakes region and Canada. Such programs must include discussions of differences between individualism in Canada and the intersubjective social norms that characterize the Great Lakes region. A feminist dialogical approach to training recognizes differences in worldviews and helps bridge existing knowledge gaps and paradigms.

While research in this area is needed, social work practitioners could experience vicarious trauma as they enter into dialogical relationships with service users or within themselves. This is a specific area that social work education might address.

This research enriches the design of social work curriculum in many areas. In particular, an embedded curriculum includes a range of topics relevant to refugee women's immediate information needs, provides information on gender relations, and creates general awareness of the effects and symptoms of trauma. This kind of information exchange provides opportunities for interaction and reflection on the information participants collect from the various sources including the internet.

### *Time-Sensitive Program Designs*

As previously discussed, working with traumatized refugee women brings to the fore the significance of "time" as assigned to an encounter particularly given differences in how it is conceptualized within European and African world views. Flexible and unrestricted time schedules give social work practitioners the time to identify, understand dialogical tensions, decode non-verbal forms of communication, and take note of how the service user moves from silence to expression, while being mindful of trauma triggers. Triggers, that precipitate unpredictable and strong reactions in an individual, range from smells, unwanted or unexpected touch, the colour of walls, the sight of a person in uniform, of a microphone, of a taping device, of a bright artificial light, the sounds of a thunderstorm, of fire crackers, to a particular voice.

Building trust and working through issues of safety and confidentiality also take time. In this regard, trauma healing is predicated on the availability and adherence to flexible and unrestricted time schedules because individual circumstances vary. How they express these

circumstances also differs depending on their world view, and the interventions deemed appropriate must be tailored to the individual.

Without a doubt, social work practice with refugee women from the Great Lakes region brings to the fore the dialogical interface between theory and practice, between a European approach to mental health and an African standpoint to wellbeing embodied in Ubuntu (intersubjective) philosophy. As discussed elsewhere, Ubuntu designates what maintains human dignity and wellbeing in a community by promoting a shared subjectivity through unconditional recognition and appreciation of the *other* (Eze, 2008). Paying attention to the tone and intonation, verbal and non-verbal forms of communication, calls for the formulation of meta-theory frameworks that authenticate holistic dialogical and interdisciplinary approaches to social work practice with those who have experienced extreme forms of trauma.

In the following section I share my experiences in adopting a feminist dialogical approach to qualitative research in social work.

**A Feminist Dialogical Approach in Social Work Research**

The purpose of a feminist dialogical approach to data analysis is not only "a cognitive and visceral understanding of the relationship between particular contexts, [but] peoples' experiences and the ways in which their world of meaning is felt and thought through" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 153). Therefore, using a feminist dialogical approach to data analysis, I was able to understand refugee women's life histories that drew on oral traditions because the stories brought out the culturally specific ways in which they were told. By identifying the different types of discursive features, I was able to create a consistent and verifiable process which involved "compiling all the key moments, emotional registers, time-space elaboration,

and the context in which the interview took place" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 174). Following Sullivan's approach, I examined the data for the various voices contained in each key utterance. The narratives accounted for violent displacement, resettlement and identity reconstruction within the context of refugee women's experiences.

Furthermore, power differentials between participants and myself as the researcher were mediated through a "relativized, de-privileged language that [was] cognizant of competing definitions of what [was] being said" (Dadey, 2003, p. 110). This approach is in direct contrast to a nonrelational (monological) language, such as quantitative data analysis, which pays little attention to the specificity of the *other's* response (Dadey, 2003). I used the approach to select discursive features that spoke to a particular worldview including tensions and apparent contradictions. Notable is Hajdukowski-Ahmed's (2011) assertion that such complex thinking processes and their embedded ethical standpoints come into existence through dialogue.

Adopting a feminist dialogical approach to my study allowed me to pay particular attention to participants' contributions to knowledge production through their respective worldviews including how they felt about and experienced violent displacement. Through such an approach, I was able to devise encounters imbued with respect within spaces of reduced power differentials and practice active listening. While the approach resonates with other deductive theories and methodologies as previously discussed in Chapter 2, it has three distinctive features that make it different from other methodological approaches.

### *The existential insistence on an anticipating* self

As discussed above, *self* and *other* are theorized as anticipative of each other. This means that both the researcher and the participant are recognized as "knowers" who are capable of interpreting their own ideas and judgments (Sullivan, 2012). During an interview setting, for example, the researcher creates a dialogic space that helps her listen to silenced voices, experience embodiment through more than one encounter, and highlight areas in which the voices of the infinite *others* penetrate the speaker's own voice.

In addition, a dialogic space within interview settings shifts the positioning of *selves* to engender active engagements with infinite *others* (Wegerif, 2013).[16] This positioning turns the exchange into what Bakhtin (1986) refers to as *Great Time* where meanings are constantly transformed over time (Wegerif, 2013). This can be illustrated by the different meanings that have been attached to the concept of "refugee" beyond the contingency of the "here and now" of the research experience and of the event. Therefore, one of the goals of creating dialogic spaces during interview sessions is to make room for learning new ways of being and understanding of what is being communicated while remaining open to the possibility that your views and practice may be transformed. For the space to function as dialogic, the histories and truths of the *selves* interacting within this space must be acknowledged and taken seriously. The social worker must also be willing to engage in conversations that push the boundaries of her/his comfort zone and realize that no word can be the last word and that social work practice is transmutable.

[16] To demonstrate the infinite nature of dialogue, Wegerif (2013) draws on Bakhtin's experiences as a 20th-century Soviet theorist who entered into constructive dialogue with the voices of philosophers as varied as Socrates, Kant and Heidegger despite significant cultural and historical differences between them and between his own theories that have fluctuated over his lifetime.

Ensuring that adequate time is allotted for the conversation is important in any face-to-face encounter with a member of a vulnerable group but especially important during interview sessions such as I engaged in because the participants need to know that I have the time to hear what they have to say. Unrestricted time is required if a research participant is to dig into her past because disclosure takes a long time. In other words, unrestricted time schedules have to be taken into account to allow refugee women who are accustomed to a different concept of time to divulge traumatic experiences. This means that quick in-and-out research practices have the potential to limit the emergence of new knowledge and can produce incomplete data (Muwanga-Zake, 2009). In my study, time became a salient aspect of the research process because participants were given sufficient time to tell their stories in ways they felt comfortable.

A dialogic research experience can also be transformed into a shared space where *selves* reflect and create solutions in the interstitial space—the dialogic gap—by listening and permitting the voices from outside the encounter to penetrate the exchange. In my study, this shared space was opened by way of silence, pauses, unique use of particular phrases and the rephrasing of certain statements. These are moments when fixed images of *self* bound in opposition to the *other* are discarded in the pursuit of a dialogic exchange (Wegerif, 2013). Expanding and deepening the space of reflection involved questioning and listening to both the *other* and to the *self* speaking from inside a participant's own representation or subjectivity. When dialogic space is chosen as a research tool, it inevitably turns into a call to suspend prejudices and assumptions.

A dialogic space can also be viewed as a virtual landscape within the dialogue, one that makes reference to the past and the future including distant places (Wegerif, 2013). In other

words, a "dialogic space engages in dialogue not only as a means to an end, but as an end itself" (Wegerif, 2013, p. 33). The research participant chooses the meeting place and is a co-researcher allowing space for self-reflectivity, transformation and learning based on storytelling and narrative. In my study, participants learned about Canadian social norms and I learned about other ways of understanding the world and my profession.

Chambon (2008), who conducted a study with a team of researchers, describes how refugee women's contributions to their study created "a crisis of learning—a sense of cognitive dissonance and emotional disorganization" (p. 107). The researchers realized that refugee women's perspectives brought forth "the transnational political realm [which] intersected with, and [was] transposed into the local, institutional culture of [practice] —a mode of transmission of knowledge" (p. 107).

I now turn to the second distinctive feature of a feminist dialogical approach to qualitative research in social work.

### *The emphasis on "truth" as lived truth*

As we have already seen, universal truth is not the objective of a dialogical approach. Dialogism emphasizes lived truths to signify a person's investment in a belief that others may resist or engage (Dadey, 2003; Sullivan, 2012). By focusing on lived truth, the researcher can explore different truths with different levels of personal investment in respect to how they shape *self* and *other* (Sullivan, 2012). The implication is that the researcher is not seeking a singular truth but many that come into play during the encounter. A focus on lived truth foregrounds the aesthetic dimension of a discourse in which both researcher and participant give form and shape to each other (Sullivan, 2012). The aesthetic dimension is demonstrated

through Bakhtin's language in action, a theorization that signifies the expression of "an embodied subjectivity" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 43) entering a dialogic space to receive the utterance and point of view it expresses (Sullivan, 2012). A detailed illustration of an aesthetic dimension of discourse can be seen in Appendix E (Tables 1.1–1.8).

The third and final distinctive feature of a feminist dialogical approach to research is its constructive quality.

### *Otherness and mystery built into the fabric of the talk*

This is a feature in which emphasis is placed on the actual addressee and a response to a real *other* while simultaneously, attention is paid to the anticipated judgment that reflexively interrupts and sometimes alters the speech (Sullivan, 2012). Methodologically, emphasizing the anticipated response requires paying special attention to the borderlines between *self* and *other* and to the various direct and indirect utterances in a discourse (Sullivan, 2012). To realize this principle, I sought to analyze the different types of discourses that participants employed in utterance. The impact of dialogism on methodology became more apparent during the coding stage when participants engaged in dialogic exchanges with each other through the discursive feature of sound bites.

In the next section I explore identity reconstruction processes through a feminist dialogical lens and how the proposed approach can assist social work practitioners in understanding a refugee woman's journey and its impact on the resettlement process in Canada.

**Feminist Dialogism and Identity Reconstruction: A Process of Trauma Healing**

Experiences of violent displacement work to reshape, alter and reconfigure women's identities and agency. A feminist dialogical approach to identity reconstruction promotes an understanding of lives that have undergone radical transformation through trauma and upheaval including resettlement in new social settings (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008). As research participants told their stories, it became evident that they were complex subjectivities with agency even when they lacked a political space in which to exercise that agency. Hajdukowski-Ahmed (2008) qualifies each practice encounter as a source of identity transformation because "it provokes questioning, reaction, re-positioning and through a woman's unique historical agency, encounters which affect relationships within new environments" (p. 32). On an ongoing basis, refugee women renegotiate new identities for survival and healing.

As illustrated in this dissertation, healing from traumatic experiences involves reconstructing new identities. My previous discussion of Mbembe's (2002) theorization of identity reconstruction in SSA is particularly useful for social work practice because it brings to the fore the intensity of traumatic events that characterize a refugee journey. Mbembe argues that violent displacement in SSA is a cultural experience that shapes identities and that such experiences have become integral parts of refugee women's identities. For example, he describes the unpredictable movements caused by terror, which can lead to a subconscious need to always be on the move. Such extreme forms of uncertainty underpin the types of radical transformation of people's original identities. This type of transformative process can also lead to identity fragmentation including the ability to function within and across multiple identities and within different power relations. Therefore, recovery and public participation for

refugee women who have experienced extreme forms of trauma call for recognition of their dual or multiple identities. Social work responses must be flexible and comprehensive enough to address the complexity of refugee women's realities so that their adaptation to new socio-cultural environments and new roles can be facilitated (Zou, 2002).

Participants' narratives indicate that refugee women can, in any given situation, embody simultaneously the characteristics of a refugee, a single mother or a visible minority woman—identities that affix special meanings to their experiences of displacement and resettlement. Social work practice will have to recognize that identities change in time and space leading to apparent contradictions but also to varying degrees of personal and collective transformation. By referring to their brokenness and the need to stitch their lives back together, research participants imagined a space and time in which they would be able to incorporate particular aspects of their past into the new elements of their transformed subjectivities. Even as they spoke fondly of their past identities, participants continued to hope that Canada would satisfy their need for belonging despite their racialized identities.

My study also revealed that refugee women from the Great Lakes region work through a range of intersecting forces—racism, deskilling, poverty, physical and mental illness and trauma—in order to reconstruct new identities. The presence of an insider researcher created the opportunity for participants to hear themselves talk about their lives in ways they were unaccustomed to. As they became the center of this investigation and the self-reflective process, participants turned into active agents of their own healing. Women spoke about how they were now able to sleep, which is significant given that one of the long-term effects of trauma is a sleeping disorder. Although further research is needed on how a feminist dialogical

approach might be used in clinical social work settings, this finding could be used to assess the level of progress towards physical or psychological healing that a refugee woman has attained.

As racialized refugee women from the Great Lakes region, these participants' "accents" shape and determine their place in Canadian society, a place that reflects not only their identities but also a history of European colonial relations with the Great Lakes region. The new knowledge derived from participants' lived experiences contributes to existing research in the areas of mental health, trauma and language skills with special emphasis on accents that are believed to create barriers for employment and access to social and health services. These findings mean that service providers must pay attention to how they communicate with service users, the types of instructions they give, how their viewpoints differ from service users' and service users' specific needs for healing.

**Summary and Conclusions**

My thesis contributes to social work practice with non-European populations with a special focus on those who have experienced extreme forms of trauma. I have made a case for a theoretical approach that views the world as multivoiced since every individual has his/her own perspective which must be taken into account in a dialogic encounter. I have demonstrated how a feminist dialogical approach differs from authoritative exchanges informed by liberal scripts of critical reflexive practices that fail to acknowledge the *other* as an embodied thinking person. I am suggesting that refugee women from the Great Lakes region have the potential to instigate change even within the social work field itself. Such transformative forces were revealed through shared spaces in the interviews which opened unique relationships with the researcher.

I have suggested that client-centered care, empathy and critical self-reflection are just the beginning of a justice-oriented practice. The feminist dialogical approach to practice completes the skill set. Critical and self-reflexive practices enable practitioners to consider the complex ways in which power operates within any given social work encounter. However, parameters drawn around existing critical and reflexive skills tend to foreground a discourse that denies the *other's* point of view as demonstrated in the case study "Hilda and her babies." Consequently, power differentials within such encounters remain intact. Within existing social work perspectives, the practitioner is proficient if she is self-critical and conscious of power relations. Even if the practitioner remains conscious of such power differentials, however, no project or tool is available for actively addressing them in practice. Dialogism offers both a project and a tool to help a conscientious practitioner exercise her consciousness, empathy and compassion to the service user.

A feminist dialogical perspective helps transcend fixed assumptions and embrace points of view that embody collective voices. Collective voices constituted significant parts of participants' narratives. My role was to "transcend [these collective voices in recognition of] the broader historical and social community" (Hermans, 2003, p. l05). This methodological approach provided a better understanding of the cultural and communicative significance of the research process because it opened up spaces in which difference was conceived in ways that catered to an embodied subjectivity. This investigation has contributed to social work practice by illustrating the dynamic interplay of identity reconstruction and the resettlement process with specific reference to refugee women who fled the Great Lakes region. Specifically, I have demonstrated how refugeeness as a lived experience can sound and feel different from one

research participant to another, and how these experiences are intoned differently to reflect each participant's particular truths.

My intention was to examine how social work practice could be improved by diving into the untested theoretical and practical territory of a feminist dialogical perspective and the face-to-face encounter. The key concern centered on social work practice with specific reference to non-European refugee women. I believe that a feminist dialogic face-to-face encounter will continue to require robust interrogation as to its effectiveness if the bridging of knowledge paradigms is to be realized. The disjuncture stemming from ontological and epistemological differences have tended to create significant challenges as the "Hilda and Her Babies" case study reveals, as well as other service gaps in refugee women's lives. More research is needed in this area in order to understand how research outcomes that focus specifically on refugee women from the Great Lakes region can be used to enrich knowledge and practice responses for other non-European refugee groups.

Other suggestions for further research include the development of a guide to a dialogical approach to social work practice with refugee women from the Great Lakes region in Canada: Theory and Practice. The purpose of this work is to identify and discuss the various contexts in which refugee women come into contact with social work practitioners, and begin to address issues that arise from this dissertation, such as determining appropriate time schedules suited to working with traumatized refugee women.

It is my hope that my thesis contributes to knowledge production and social work practice through a combination of accumulated knowledge and theoretical and methodological choices as discussed above. This knowledge forms the basis of a nuanced and ongoing understanding of the experience and identity reconstruction for refugee women who have fled

the Great Lakes region. Empirical conclusions can be used to inform practice responses most suited to addressing refugee women's unique needs and facilitate the production of a more robust and responsive resettlement program for those fleeing conflict zones. Theoretical conclusions can also inform social work practice with women of other refugee groups within SSA by formulating frameworks for negotiating new ways in which future resettlement programs and services are designed and delivered.

A dialogical transformation does not only benefit refugee women from the Great Lakes region but also saves time and money by reducing some of the unnecessary deployment of both children protection and police services. In particular, resettlement programs such as LINC can act as conduits for refugee women's transformation, and social work practitioners should work closely with these programs for reciprocal exchanges and benefits.

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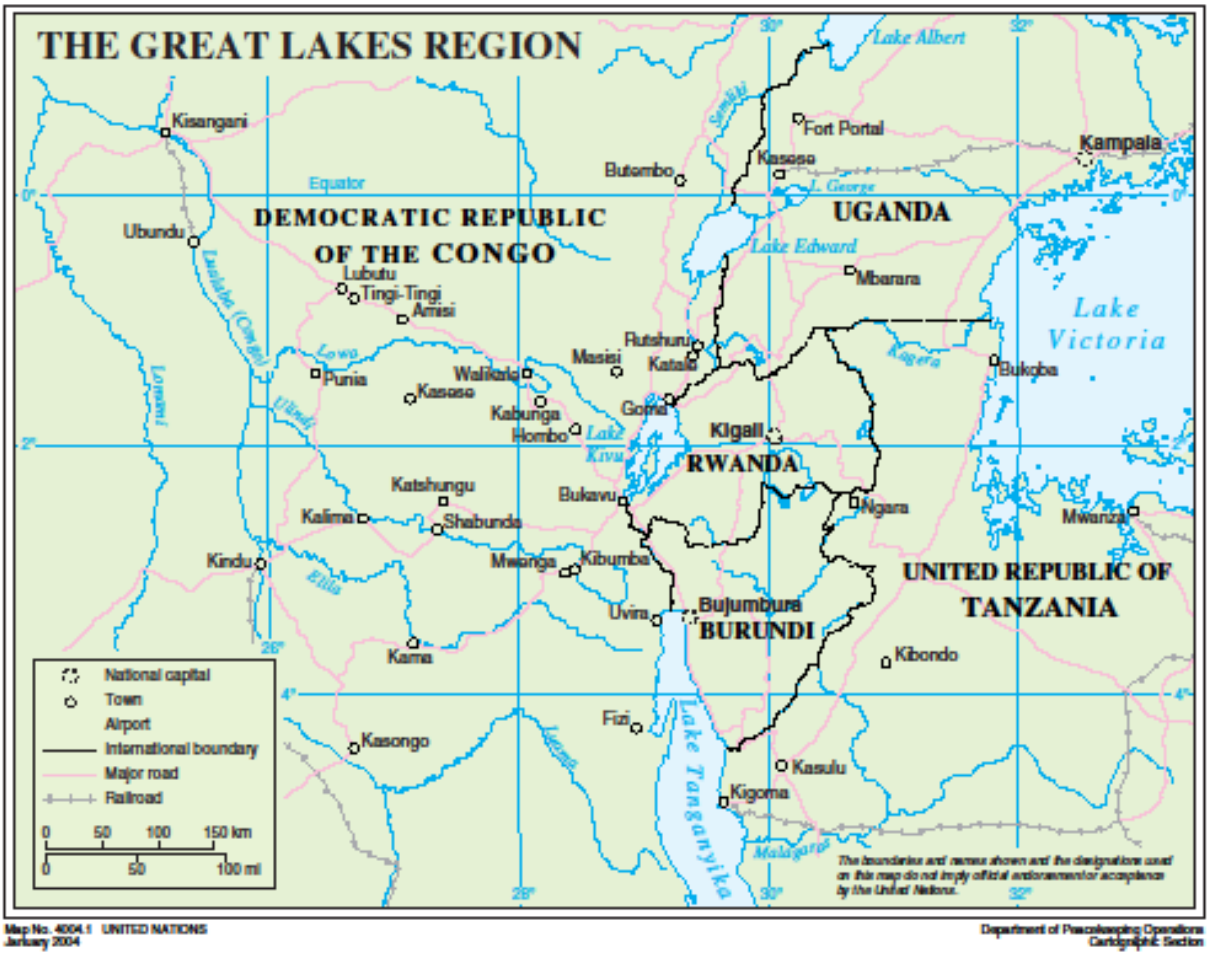
## APPENDIX A

## Map of the Great Lakes Region of Africa



**APPENDIX B**

**University Ethics Approval**

YORK
UNIVERSITÉ
UNIVERSITY

# Memo

**OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS (ORE)**

5th Floor,
Kaneff Tower,
4700 Keele St.
Toronto ON
Canada M3J 1P3
Tel 416 736 5914
Fax 416 650 8197
www.research.yorku.ca

To: Christine Nabukeers, Department of Social Work.

From: Alison M. Collins-Mrakas, Sr. Manager and Policy Advisor, Research Ethics *(on behalf of Duff Waring, Chair, Human Participants Review Committee)*

Date: **Friday, July 05, 2013**

**Re: Ethics Approval**

**Examining refugee women's experience of resettlement and their sense of self to enhance social work practice in Canada**

I am writing to inform you that the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee has reviewed and approved the above project.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Alison M. Collins-Mrakas M.Sc., LLM
Sr. Manager and Policy Advisor,
Office of Research Ethics

## APPENDIX C

### Flyer

### Research Participants Needed

I am a PhD Candidate at the School of Social Work, York University. I am conducting a study to examine how refugee women who have experienced violent displacement manage the resettlement process and negotiate new identities in unfamiliar social contexts. Your participation will provide knowledge that can facilitate the production of a strengthened resettlement program for refugee women fleeing newer conflict zones.

I am interested in talking with you if:

- You are a woman 18 years of age or older
- Your country of origin is one of the following four countries: Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, or the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
- You came to Canada between 2003-2008
- You are a Convention refugee (GAR), and
- You speak English

Participation involves: participating in 3 in-person interviews, to take place in a setting of your choice. Interview sessions are expected to take approximately one and half hours. I would like to talk with you about your experiences as a new comer to Canada.

In recognition of your time and effort, a gift of $20 per interview will be offered.

**Thank you for your time and consideration** and if you know someone else who fits the criteria, please feel free to pass this information to her.

## APPENDIX D

## Letter of Invitation/Informed Consent Form

Christine Nabukeera, Ph.D. Candidate
**Thesis Supervisor**
Dr. Luann Good Gingrich
School of Social Work, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies,
850 Room, Researcher Tower
York University, 4700 Keele Street,
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M3J 1P3

Dear (informant),

I am a PhD Candidate at the School of Social Work, York University. I am examining refugee women's experiences of resettlement and their sense of self in Canada, including how new identities are constructed in new social settings. The results of this research will provide insight into refugee women's experiences and will form the basis of recommendations for policy and resettlement programs.

If you agree to participate, I would like to interview you about your work with refugee women from the Great Lakes region of Africa. The interview is expected to last for at least forty-five (45) minutes. I will be happy to meet at a time and place most convenient for you. I will be using a digital recorder to ensure that I do not miss important information you provide. Should you wish to stop the recording, I will do so. You can also review the transcript and delete what you no longer wish to share.

Your participation is voluntary. This means that you can withdraw consent and stop participating in the study any time without giving a reason. You are free to keep or delete what you said. You are also free to refuse to answer particular questions the researcher might ask.

In recognition of your time and effort, a stipend of $40.00 will be offered to those who participate.

All the information you provide will be held in strict confidence and your personal details will not appear in any report, publication or transcript of the research. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to this information. The tapes will be destroyed two years after completion of the study. The results of the research will be published in a research paper and presented at professional meetings.

You are welcome to ask questions during and/or after the interview. An executive summary with the proposed recommendations would also be made available to you, should you wish to view them.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Subcommittee (HPRC) of York University and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact, The Graduate Program Office at the School of Social Work, Ross Building, York University, Telephone, 416-736-5226 or email: lapssowk@yorku.ca or the Manager, Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University, telephone 416-736-5914 or email: ore@yorku.ca

I, _____ (name, please print clearly), have read and understood the above information. I consent to participate in the study *Refugee Women's experiences of resettlement and their sense of self in Canada* conducted by Christine Nabukeera. I have understood the nature of this study and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Guide

1. Describe research study and interview process
2. Explain how confidentiality will be protected

Can you describe your life before armed conflict in your country of origin?
- Did you live in a city, town or village?
- What was a normal day like in terms of work and responsibilities?

Can you please describe a time when you were very scared for your life?

Can you explain how you came to Canada?
- Did you go through another country?
- Who else came with you?
- Who met you at the Airport or border crossing?

How do you describe your resettlement experience in Canada?
- What were some of the challenges you faced when you arrived in Ottawa?
- How do you feel about the experience you describe?
- What are some of your memorable moments during this time?

Do you consider yourself religious?
- If yes, how did religion help you during the resettlement?
- How is it helping you now?

When someone asks you, how do you identify yourself, culturally?
- Do you think you see yourself differently now than you did when you first arrived in Ottawa?
- Can you describe those changes? How have you changed: as a mother, wife, or daughter?
- Do you remember when your view started to change?
- How do you feel about being a refugee?

Is there anything else I may have left out that you think I need to understand about these issues?
- What lesson would you share to help other refugee women dealing with the experiences you describe?

**References**: people to contact for further interviews or key informant

## APPENDIX F

## Tables

### Tables 1.1–1.8: Analyses of Key Moments (KM)

### Table 1.1 – Key Moment 1: Safety and security lead to successful integration (Anna)

| Subject Matter of Discourses | Emotional Register | Time-Space Elaboration | Context of Key Moment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Safety and security given a central stage in the discourse<br>•starting over was difficult<br>•keep busy working two jobs<br>•hard work makes valuable<br>•experience physical and mental health problems<br>Being a refugee affects physical and emotional health<br>**Identity**: respond according to situation "Although I cannot say I am not Rwandese—that is a taboo."<br>**Sound bite**: "We walked all day without knowing where to go." | Humour, confident<br>Praise and love for Canada<br>Lonely, lucky, safe<br>Feels valued<br>Loss of social status | Moment-to-moment interactions<br>Moving closer to researcher<br>Uncertain future but hopeful<br>Future is good because of safety<br>Reconstruct bygone days by keeping busy | Description of violent displacement |

### Table 1.2 – Key Moment 2: Traumatic experiences of violent displacement (Edna)

| Subject Matter of Discourses | Emotional Register | Time-Space Elaboration | Context of Key Moment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mental and physical illness given a central place in the discourse<br>Have the potential to speak to uncertain openness<br>Personal story not integral to national narrative<br>The absence of voices makes us outsiders<br>**The concept of non-identity:** The self is not identical with itself nor with others<br>**Identity:** Loss of authentic self and other<br>•Struggles between self and other<br>•"Accents" part of identity<br>The body is alive but the spirit is dead<br>**Sound bite:** I have to act and look fake because I have to fit somewhere | Hurt and disappointed<br>Praise and love for Canada<br>Physical pain and trauma<br>Silent and numb<br>Anger ready to explode | Threshold moments<br>Time full of potential and uncertainty<br>Open future<br>Vulnerable to internal crisis<br>Closeness between speaker and other<br>Construct bygone years<br>Create distance from past subjectivities<br>(My old country) | Description of the effects of violent displacement |

**Table 1.3 – Key Moment 3: Suffering leads to strong religious beliefs (Sabina)**

| Subject Matter of Discourses | Emotional Register | Time-Space Elaboration | Context of Key Moment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Suffering takes centre stage in the discourse; Been gang-raped,<br>**Sound bite**: Animals here have more value than women in Congo<br>Resettlement: Being a single mother adds other layers of challenges; not knowing how to live in a country; changed gender roles and family dynamic;<br>Accents affect comprehension.<br>**Sound bite:** Understand differently<br>Instructions from service providers not always clear<br>Children also change; police are called<br>Creates more suffering and insecurity<br>"They say you are a bad mother"<br>Positive experiences: "There is peace and nobody is stealing from you".<br>**Identity:** Even if we had a war every day I am happy to say I am Congolese" | Pride in her heritage<br>Worry about children's future in Canada<br>Tensions caused by different parenting styles<br>Love and gratitude for Canada's help<br>Considerate and reflective | Moment-to-moment interactions<br>Moving closer to the other<br>Uncertain future | Description of violent displacement |

**Table 1.4 – Key Moment 4: The indignities of violent displacement (Zara)**

| Subject Matter of Discourses | Emotional Register | Time-Space Elaboration | Context of Key Moment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Violent displacement and suffering given a central stage in the discourse.<br>The indignities of displacement<br>Trauma due to rape and torture<br>Mental and physical illness<br>Resettlement: Positive experience<br>Hardship due to taking care of sick children<br>Ongoing mental health problems<br>**Identity:** I was Congolese in Congo, now I am Canadian | Praise and love for Canada<br>Feels safe here<br>Anxious and lonely<br>Frail and exhausted<br>Grief and loss | Moment-to-moment interaction<br>Moving closer to researcher<br>Uncertain future but hopeful | Description of violent displacement |

**Table 1.5 – Key Moment 5: Hard work leads to successful resettlement (Rose)**

| Subject Matter of Discourses | Emotional Register | Time-Space Elaboration | Context of Key Moment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Professional accomplishment given central place in discourse<br>Resettlement: dashed hopes and expectations, unrecognized academic credentials<br>Disappointed with absent immigrant vote<br>Hard work leads to ultimate success<br>Lyric praise: Good political future<br>**Identity:** Ugandan first but feels more assimilated; less attached to past subjectivities<br>I am here and want to be buried in Canada<br>Sound bite:<br>I do not do anything that I do not think is going to bear fruit. Even if I am sitting with a friend it is not for nothing | Luck; met people of influence<br>Humour, confident<br>Hurt and disappointed; no immigrant vote<br>Loss of social status<br>Chronic stress<br>Love for Canada<br>Life in Canada more comfortable. | Future is certain as long as the individual perseveres<br>Changes in time are fixed<br>Creates distance from the *other*<br>Does not fit in in Uganda<br>Constructs bygone era; will be buried in Canada<br>Assimilated | Description of resettlement experiences |

**Table 1.6 – Key Moment 7: Negotiating different traditions (Monica)**

| Subject Matter of Discourses | Emotional Register | Time-Space Elaboration | Context of Key Moment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Challenges during resettlement<br>Went straight to grade 7 instead of 5<br>ESL not helpful in high school<br>They ask you, really, where are you from?<br>**Direct speech:** "Do I look Nigerian? NO."<br>Pays for household bills but it is an insult to father<br>Changed gender and family relations<br>Negative discourse about Africa<br>Why? She pointed to Me: "She is a slave."<br>Different traditions create tensions<br>Tensions between religion and culture<br>Mixed marriages an issue: mixing causes suffering<br>**Sound bite:** "I realize that now I am more interested in where I came from." | Love and pride in her heritage<br>Tensions and anxiety caused by the interplay of tradition, culture and religion<br>Joyful and confident<br>Love for Canada<br>Funny | Moment-to-moment interaction<br>Moving closer to researcher<br>Uncertain future but hopeful<br>Create distance from other | Description of resettlement experience |

**Table 1.7 – Key Moment 8: Longing for belonging and recognition in Canada (Sauda)**

| Subject Matter of Discourses | Emotional Register | Time-Space Elaboration | Context of Key Moment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Longing for belonging are given central place in the discourse<br>**Identity:** Cultural misrepresentation and its effects on subjectivity<br>**Sound bite**: Skin colour and accents make us different<br>Ongoing renegotiation and assessment of subjectivity<br>Other challenges notwithstanding, changes in Canada are possible<br>Decided to live by the laws despite previous lawlessness<br>The trait (lawfulness) should be rewarded in recognition of a transformed subjectivity | Loss, cultural pride, royal<br>Obsessive; going overboard<br>Disappointed by incoherent/conflicted subjectivity<br>Pride and love for Canada<br>Polemic exaggeration | Past and present subjectivities clash<br>Future certain<br>Constructs bygone years ( I am here to stay)<br>Creates distance from the *other* (live by the law) | Description of resettlement challenges |

**Table 1.8 – Key Moment 9: Changing gender roles create confusion (Ronda)**

| Subject Matter of Discourses | Emotional Register | Time-Space Elaboration | Context of Key Moment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Changing gender roles given a central stage in the discourse.<br>**Resettlement:** Services are not always what refugee women need. They may have other pressing issues<br>Written communication is not always appropriate, even if literate in the language; word of mouth preferred<br>Police involvement is more destructive to refugee women and children<br>Sound bite:<br>As a refugee, life just happened to me but now I think I am happening to it. | Detached<br>Unhappy about being unemployed<br>Grateful for being in Canada<br>Loss of social status | Moment-to-moment interactions<br>Extensive use of third person speech<br>Uncertain future | Description of resettlement process |

**Table 2 – Sound Bites: An Overview**

| | On being a refugee | On identity Reconstruction |
|---|---|---|
| Participant1 | We walked all day without knowing where to go. | I cannot say I am not Rwandese—that is a taboo. |
| Participant2 | | Have to type-set myself to fit in but that is not me.<br>"Fake" identities because we lose who we are. |
| Participant3 | In Canada, animals are treated better than women in Congo. | I cannot change being a Congolese.<br>I understand differently. |
| Participant4 | Covered my body with charcoal to disguise the colour of my skin. | I was Congolese in Congo, but here I am Canadian. |
| Participant5 | I do not do anything that I do not think is going to bear fruit. Even if I am sitting with a friend it is not for nothing | I feel more assimilated than I would like to think. |
| Participant6 | | I realize that now I am more interested in where I came from. |
| Participant7 | I go overboard to live by the laws of Canada to prove that I am transformed | No matter how much we struggle the skin makes us different. |
| Participant8 | As a refugee, life just happened to me but now I think I am happening to it. | I have not stopped to think of who I am. |