

FORCED MIGRATION OF COLOMBIANS

Colombia, Ecuador, Canada

CANADA

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PREFACE

Pilar Riaño Alcalá
Marta Inés Villa Martínez

Colombia faces one of the most serious humanitarian crises in the world today. Various sources agree that today approximately more than three million Colombians have been forcibly displaced from their place of origin, and nearly 300,000 Colombians have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, such as Ecuador, and in more distant countries, such as Canada (Acnur, 2006; US Committee for Refugees, 2006). This makes Colombia one of the countries with the highest levels of forced internal displacement in the world. This forced displacement is directly related to the armed conflict that has extended across the country, and has been particularly strong since the 80s. Despite the expansion of this phenomenon and its impact on various sectors of the population (including campesinos (small scale farmers), indigenous communities, and Afro-Colombians), displacement, and all that it implies, has not been adequately recognized by either the state or society.

Ecuador and Canada rank as the top receiving countries of Colombians seeking international protection. Since 2000,

Ecuador has received the greatest number of Colombians seeking refuge, both across the Americas and globally. Ecuador, unlike other border states such as Panama and Venezuela, is a country with a humanitarian tradition that offers protection to those who seek asylum. Yet the number of refugee petitions had traditionally been low, and the country was not prepared to respond to the sudden increase in refugee claims by Colombians, nor the massive displacement of another even larger group of Colombians, who out of fear or ignorance do not seek refugee status, but live in similar conditions across Ecuador.

Canada, a country with a long humanitarian tradition, offers refugee to nearly 15,000 Colombians, and as such ranks second in the world in number of Colombians with recognized refugee status (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006). In 2004 Colombia became the primary source of refugee claimants in Canada (Immigration and Refugee Board, 2004; US Committee for Refugees, 2003), but the implementation of the Safe Third Country Agreement between the United States and Canada had an adverse and

disproportionate impact on Colombians who sought refuge in this way, as it required that any person seeking protection who passed through the United States seek refuge there, and did not allow them to do so in Canada.

The exodus of Colombians, within their territory as well as to other countries, speaks to a similar context of expulsion characterized, internationally, by the increase of immigration flows and the exploitation of this labour, the closing of borders and the restriction of humanitarian protection regimes. At a national level is characterized by violence and poverty for a significant segment of the population; by an armed conflict in which diverse armed groups fight with state forces over national sovereignty; by the impact of drug trafficking on the economy, politics and society in general; and by the presence of large macroeconomic interests linked to the dynamics of the armed conflict. Overall, this is a context which puts into question the development model, in which all of these components are implicated, and the true existence of a “social state based on the rule of law” (as described in Colombia’s constitution), which would not only have a monopoly on arms, but which would protect the life and guarantee the rights of its members

Despite this common context, one cannot speak of migration as a homogenous phenomenon. There is a large spectrum of migration that happens under coercion, that is to say, pressure by an external actor through specific actions that lead to the loss of goods, land, and cultural practices and which put life at risk. In Colombia forced migration is directly linked to the armed conflict (threats, assassinations, massacres, kidnappings, extortion, among others), as well as to a context of poverty and exclusion in which people are unable to find neither safe conditions nor a means of subsistence that allows them to live with dignity.

This research project, “Forced migration of Colombians: a comparative study of fear, memory and social representation in Colombia, Ecuador and Canada”, looks at the specific issue of the forced migration of Colombians, and aims to increase understanding through an analysis of two types of migration: international refuge and internal displacement. Its aim is to identify how the social fears, historical memory, and social representations of refugees and the displaced influence both their integration into a new social environment and the responses of receiving populations to this population. The research illustrates the differentiated characteristics of this migration process according to the border that is crossed, the local context of the receiving society, displacement and refugee policies, and the ways these are implemented, and the life experience and individual and collective resources of refugees and displaced persons. Therefore, three social spheres in which interpretations, narrations and practices regarding internal forced displacement and refuge are produced are analyzed here: that of the displaced population, of the receiving society and of public policy. For the analysis of these types of forced migration and their variations research was carried out in three locations within each country. In Colombia research was conducted in the department (province) of Antioquia, one of the departments with the highest rates of both expelling and receiving displaced people, at three locations that are exemplary, in numbers and characteristics, of forced displacement in Colombia: the regions of Urabá and the Oriente Antioqueño and the city of Medellín. In Ecuador the research was carried out in Quito, the capital, which takes in nearly half of all Colombian refugees; Ibarra, the capital of the province of Imbabura, a city with strong ties to the

economies of departments in the south of Colombia; and San Lorenzo, in the province of Esmeraldas, on the border with the Colombian jungle along the Pacific coast, a location with one of the highest levels of poverty in all of Ecuador. In Canada research was carried out in three cities: Vancouver in the province of British Columbia, London in Ontario, and Sherbrooke in Quebec. There are regions with a high concentration of Colombian refugees and range from the East to the West of Canada. Given Canada's federal system, they also reflect the different policy frameworks for refugee settlement in each province.

The following methods were used to carry out the research in each country: a) migration patterns and the history of forced migration in and from Colombia were analysed, and a socio-demographic profile was developed of forced migrants in each country; b) individual interviews with refugees and displaced persons were conducted which explored their daily experiences as they tried to understand and adapt to the new society; c) workshops were held with refugees and displaced persons, in which they reconstructed their experiences of forced migration and their arrival to the new receiving society; d) participant observation was conducted of events and activities of refugees and displaced persons; e) discussion groups were held with service providers, both governmental and non-governmental, policy makers, as well as with residents in each location; e) a

critical analysis was done of relevant public policies regarding protection, settlement and integration in each country.

This document presents the results of the first phase of the research in each of these countries. It is made up of three volumes, Colombia, Ecuador and Canada, and each includes an analysis of the contextual factors influencing forced migration in each country and the socio-demographic profile of Colombian refugees and displaced persons; a description and analysis of the legal frameworks and the ways in which public policies regarding refuge and displacement are implemented; and an analysis of the ways in which refugees and displaced persons attempt to rebuild their lives and their processes of integration in each country and in the regions and cities in which they currently reside.

With the dissemination of the research results, the researchers and institutions participating in this study seek to contribute to the understanding of this issue in Colombia and internationally; to offer material for an academic debate on the differences between displacement and refuge, voluntary, and forced migration; and to enrich the public debate on displacement and refuge policies which is now being held in the three countries, with the participation of various governmental and non-governmental actors. We hope that all of this contributes to the recognition of refugees and displaced persons as subjects with rights and therefore, to their social and political affirmation.

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the 90s Canada has received nearly 15,000 Colombian refugees, which makes it the second largest receiving country of Colombian refugees in the world¹. Canada's legislation regarding immigration and refuge, its settlement and integration policies, and the characteristics of this Northern country as a bilingual nation that promotes a policy of multiculturalism within a framework of integration of immigrants, offer a singular context for studying the settlement and incorporation experiences of Colombian refugees in Canada, and for comparing their experiences to those of the internally displaced within Colombia and Colombian refugees in Ecuador. The analysis of the wave of Colombian migrants, particularly refugees, to Canada also allows for the exploration of a decisive period of change in migration policies (at the end of the nineties and early 2000s as national security agendas and the fight against crime/fraud dominate the immigration debate and justify the hardening of immigration regulations, particularly in relation to the "war on terror").

During the years with the largest flow of Colombian migrants (2002-2005), Canada implemented a new immigration law, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), which transferred the authority to receive refugee petitions at the border

from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) to the new Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA), and implemented accords such as the Safe Third Country agreement which sought to control applications for refuge being made at the U.S. border. These changes, put into effect during the period of greatest migration by Colombians, will have a direct effect on this group (particularly those seeking refuge in Canada), which in 2003 was the largest group of refugee claimants in Canada.

This document presents the results of the first phase of research on forced migration of Colombians to Canada, which is part of a broader research project on forced migration of Colombians. A Comparative Study of Fear, Historical Memory and Social Representations in Colombia, Ecuador and Canada. Data collection and analysis was carried out from the end of 2004 (with a pilot project in the city of Vancouver) through the end of 2006. The results presented here take into account the explanatory contexts of the dynamics

1. According to UNHCR (2006), the primary countries receiving Colombian refugees are the United States (19,967 in 2005), Canada (13,511), Costa Rica (9,470) and Ecuador (9,851). In Ecuador the number of Colombians living in refugee like conditions is actually much higher, but in terms of convention refugees accepted by the Ecuadorian government, the number is less than those accepted by Canada. Accessed June 9, 2006, www.unhcr.org/statistics

of migration by Colombians to Canada, the socio-demographic profile of Colombian immigrants to Canada, and public policies regarding immigration and refuge that inform and directly affect the protection and resettlement of Colombian refugees. In particular the results of three case studies, carried out in London (Ontario), Sherbrooke (Quebec) and Vancouver (British Columbia), are presented. These look to settlement experiences and the use of memory and the fears experienced by refugees as they remake themselves as social and political subjects, at the forms of association and social networking that are developed and their experiences of integration or exclusion in these societies.

The Canadian case offers very interesting lines of comparison with those of Colombia and Ecuador because of its characteristics as an affluent “developed” Northern country, with a long humanitarian history of refuge and a strong institutionalization and regulation of humanitarian protection and the resettlement of refugees. In contrast with the Colombian and Ecuadorian cases, Canada is a country whose nation-building project is founded on immigration. Immigration and immigrants are one of the most controversial and mandatory items on political, social and demographic agendas, given that the country depends on immigration to maintain demographic growth and keep its labour pool stocked. But the Canadian immigration project has, since its beginnings, faced profound contradictions between demographic and economic objectives, and its founding myths and visions of itself as a nation rooted in the languages, racial characteristics (white) and traditions of the two majority ethnic groups: Anglo-Saxon and French.

The analysis presented here of Canadian policies highlights this tension, and examines another series of issues as it considers the humanitarian tradition of Canada in the

light of immigration and refuge policies that use as a selection criteria the ability to successfully resettle in Canada, and that are being ever more influenced by national security agendas, the closing of borders, and anti-terrorism measures. This analysis also notes the impact on immigration matters and integration policies of the unique status of Quebec within Canada, the French-speaking province to which the great majority of Colombian refugees arrive.

This research on forced migration of Colombians to Canada examines primarily two general types of forced migration: a) Colombians who sought protection while outside of Canada and were resettled from Colombia (source country) or Ecuador (country of asylum) as refugees sponsored by the Canadian government from abroad; and b) Colombians who solicited refugee status once inside Canada and who, in the main, presented their asylum petition at the U.S.-Canada border. The study of forced migration of Colombians to Canada looks at a mode of refuge that has been little studied in the Canadian context: that of refugees sponsored by the government who have

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2. The source country class applies to those persons who are still in their country of citizenship when their refugee petition is accepted. It includes those persons who are being seriously and personally affected by a civil war or armed conflict and those who have a well founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular group, or political opinion. It also includes persons who have been detained or been in prison and those suffering a serious impact on their right to freedom of speech, right to dissent, or right to belong to a labour union and participate in union activities. The Canadian government determines the countries designated as “source country” based on an evaluation of the situation in the country. This takes into consideration whether there are residents of this country who live in conditions similar to that of a refugee as a result of civil war or because of a violation of their human rights. The other two criteria that are considered are possible risks to the security of the operation of the visa office, its employees, the embassy or the petitioner. Likewise, whether the conditions in the country justify humanitarian intervention by Canada is taken into account. At the moment there are six countries designated as source countries: Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Guatemala, Sierra Leona and Sudan. Colombia was included as a source country in 1997 (CIC, 2006a).

been resettled directly from their country of origin, referred to in Canadian legislation as “source country class”², and who have, therefore, not gone through refugee camps nor another country in their search for asylum. As this report shows, this shapes different dynamics and processes, as much in matters of social integration as in the ways in which policies, programs and services do or do not respond to the profile of this group.

Alongside this difference in the mode of migration which characterizes Colombian migration is the heterogeneity of Colombian refugees, who can not be grouped under any common criteria of ethnicity, social class or region of origin, nor can they be grouped under a common reason for their forced migration, given that this has very diverse origins and circumstances that can be explained by the plural and multi-polar nature of the Colombian conflict and the displacement dynamics associated with it. The study of Colombian immigration to Canada in the context of global changes in immigration and security processes, and the particular and heterogeneous characteristics of the migratory flows of Colombians and the profile of Colombian refugees, can offer an understanding of the impact these global forces and political turns are having on wide groups of people who find themselves in a situation where their rights are highly vulnerable, as well as illustrate the variety of experiences of refugee integration.

This study turns to three Canadian cities, Vancouver in British Columbia, London in Ontario and Sherbrooke in Quebec, to advance research on these two types of immigration. The site selection took into account the expanse of a country that is more than ten million square kilometres in size (the second largest country in the world after Russia) and geographic, linguistic and social differences among the diverse regions in the country. The cities were selected so as to represent areas with high concentrations

of Colombian refugees and a geographic distribution that would include Eastern as well as Western Canada. Given the federal system of Canada, the presence of different legal and political frameworks for integration in the three provinces was also considered. British Columbia has a liberal government that has been cutting social services and programs for immigrants and refugees. Ontario is the Canadian province to which the vast majority of immigrants of all types arrive, and where the greatest number of Colombians is concentrated. In Quebec, Colombia is one of the main sources of new immigrants, and the province has the second highest concentration of Colombians after Ontario. The case of Quebec is also distinct given that the province manages its immigration matters separately, including the selection of immigrants, and its immigration and integration policies are established within the framework of cultural convergence.

In the Canadian case three levels of public policy affect the process of seeking refuge and settlement in Canada. First, there are the immigration laws that regulate the admission of voluntary as well as forced migrants. Secondly, there are refugee policies that regulate Canada’s humanitarian protection. Finally, the settlement and integration policies that make up the set of norms and regulations through which the Canadian state supports the social and economic settlement and integration of migrants, including refugees. For the Canadian government, the strategy of integration aims to support the rapid settlement, adaptation and integration of those newly arrived with the goal of their becoming, “contributing members of Canadian society”. Most agreements emphasize that integration is understood as a two way process that requires adjustments by both the newcomers and the receiving society (CIC, 2002; 2006b).

The selection of cities within these provinces was done on the basis not only of the concentration of Colombian refugees in these cities, but also the possibility of analyzing forms and specific types of forced migration, and the way in which federal, provincial and municipal policies interact differently in each city. The city of Vancouver, then, presents us with the case of a large coastal city in a province with a high proportion of immigrants, one which receives the largest number of Colombian refugees on the Canadian west coast, but a number which, in comparison to those received by Ontario and Quebec, is a much smaller proportion. Refugees in Vancouver come to Canada primarily as refugees sponsored by the government or, in much smaller numbers, arrive privately from abroad. The presence of Colombian refugees who have filed their claim inside of Canada is very low in Vancouver.

London, in the province of Ontario, is an intermediate size city that has the highest concentration of Colombians in all of Canada. It is a city that, though it does receive immigrants, has not generally been an important destination for them. The majority of Colombians in London arrived as refugee claimants at the U.S.-Canada border, and an important number of them had applied for refuge in the U.S., or were living undocumented there. The London case allows us to explore the dynamics of a border city, as well as the influence that social networks have on decision-making processes and the immigration dynamics of refugee claimants.

Finally, the case of the city of Sherbrooke in Quebec allows us to analyze the dynamics of a city in the French-speaking province which begins to transform with the regionalized immigration policy of the Quebec government, and where the vast majority of its new residents are refugees and Colombians. The city of Sherbrooke is

one of only two Canadian cities, the other being Winnipeg, with a municipal policy of welcoming immigrants and refugees. The vast majority of Colombian refugees in Sherbrooke arrived through the source country class, as refugees sponsored by the government. There are also some who came through private sponsorship (primarily by churches). Given how close Sherbrooke is to the border there are also cases of refugee claimants, but they are a smaller percentage.

Across Canada a total of nine memory workshops were held with refugee men, women and youth; 20 in-depth interviews with refugee men and women; 14 interviews of officials and community workers in the field of immigration and settlement; four focus groups with members of the receiving society and with officials and community workers; two community consultations and three report-back sessions to discuss the first stage of research results. The topic of forced migration and the reconstruction of refugees' experiences, as well as that of immigration policies and the attitudes of receiving societies towards immigrants, pose challenges as to the most appropriate and ethical way to carry out research. With this in mind, the selection as well as the participation process was structured so as to facilitate informed participation and decision making about their participation. At the beginning of the workshops and interviews people were asked to review a written consent form which described the research and explained what their participation would consist of, as well as the rights of participants and the commitments of the researchers. Finally, principles (ground rules) were agreed to in each session that governed participation and contributions (including those of facilitators and researchers). The intent was to create an atmosphere of basic trust in which stories and points of view could be shared.

This document is divided into three overall sections. The first presents the reader

with the explanatory context of immigration processes in Canada. This part includes a brief historical context of Canadian immigration, and a characterization of the waves of Latin American immigration to Canada. A detailed analysis is presented here of the profile of Colombian immigrants to Canada that answers the questions of: who are they, when did they arrive, as what type of immigrant, and where did they land. The analysis of Colombian refugees in particular provides a more in-depth description of these characteristics, and includes a socio-demographic and socio-economic profile.

The second part of the document is an introduction to public policies regarding immigration and refuge. This section covers the changes that have been made to immigration and refuge laws and the legal framework of rights and responsibilities of refugees in the context of federalism, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the constitutional consecration of Canada as a bilingual country and Quebec as a distinct society, and the policy of multiculturalism.

The last overall section of this document contains the three case studies of Vancouver, London and Sherbrooke. That section analyzes the experiences of Colombian refugees as they attempt to reconstruct their lives in each of these cities, and how they face and negotiate the process of settlement and incorporation into Canadian society. In contrast to internally displaced Colombians and Colombian refugees in Ecuador, Colombians who have been recognized with the status of refugee in Canada (with differences between those who petition inside the country and those who are sponsored by the government from outside of it) have access to the public health system, social assistance, free English or French classes, free public education for their children, and the opportunity to receive some sort of employment training. Refugees sponsored by the government or sponsored

privately who arrive from abroad receive, along with their refugee status, permanent residency in Canada. Though this gives them a certain economic and social security, which contrasts with the instability of internally displaced Colombians and Colombian refugees in Ecuador, Colombian refugees in Canada face another series of difficulties which have to do with the ways the forced migration regime operates, specifically settlement programs, the difficulties of access to information regarding rights and services, and their attempts to re-establish their lives in a country that is so distant geographically as well as culturally and linguistically. The documents included in this section reflect the challenges they face and the perspectives of Colombian refugees in these three cities.

The refugees that participated in the research in Canada represented a wide spectrum of Colombians that have been forced to leave Colombia. They included women, men and youth from various regions of the country (the Atlantic coast, Antioquia, Santander, Cundinamarca and Caquetá) who left Colombia between the end of the nineties and 2005 and who, in the main but not exclusively, came from the urban centres of the country and fled Colombia due to selective threats or attempts against them or a member of the family, for the human rights, humanitarian, professional or community work that they did, or due to generalized threats against inhabitants of a certain region. Each case study includes a description of the receiving city, as well as an analysis of the information gathered through workshops, interviews and fieldwork regarding the process of forced migration (exit, route, arrival, and the process to date); the way in which social fears and memories shape their experiences and the ways they reconstruct their lives; the self-representations and positionings of refugees in Canada, taking into consideration, for each of these, differences according to gender, ethnicity and age.

PART ONE

CONTEXTUALIZING THE REFUGE OF COLOMBIANS IN CANADA

Pilar Riaño Alcalá
Patricia Díaz Barrero

Though Colombian immigration to Canada began in the fifties and continued with a constant flow in the following decades, Colombians are a minority group within Canadian immigration statistics. The migratory flows in the first years of the 2000s, nevertheless, show a radical change in this migratory pattern. By the year 2005, Colombia was one of the 10 top countries of origin of new immigrants to Canada, and the primary source of refugees (CIC, 2005c; see Appendix 1)³. Between 1995 and 2005, more than 26,000 Colombians immigrated to Canada as permanent residents. Of that total, 53% were refugees and 34% were economic migrants (primarily skilled workers)⁴. The increase in migration of Colombians began at the end of the 90s, during which time most were skilled workers and professionals. Though this type of migration continued throughout the first five years of the 2000s, it was later surpassed by the growing number of refugees, a growth that began in 2000.

The migration of Colombians to Canada occurs in a context of a country with a high annual influx of immigrants. For example, between 1999 and 2004 Canada received on average 200,000 immigrants a year. The primary mode of immigration in those years was economic, with nearly three of every five immigrants who entered Canada entering in that category (CIC, 2005c). In contrast, approximately 12% of all immigrants in those years arrived to Canada as refugees (CCR, 2005a). This section presents a contextual analysis of Colombian immigration to Canada, with a specific focus on forced migration. Taking into account the principles and practices that guide the immigration and refugee policies of the Canadian state and the historic evolution of Latin American immigration to Canada, the periods of immigration are outlined, as are the characteristics of migration between the two countries, the socio-demographic profile of Colombian refugees and the places of settlement within Canada.

LATINAMERICAN IMMIGRATION TO CANADA

Throughout the history of Canada, the priorities and objectives of immigration have varied in response to the perception of national imperatives, social and economic changes, and the influence of external pressures. Sometimes demographic issues have been given priority over economic imperatives. At other times the emphasis has been on humanitarian or social considerations (Andras, 1991:43).

Throughout history Canadian immigration policies have responded to the ideology to populate Canada with white immigrants and to demands produced by economic changes of capitalism. According to Jakubowski (1997) immigration policies have been determined by three competitive factors: the desire to populate Canada with British people, economic factors and the need to

respond to concerns of the international community. These three considerations are crucial for understanding the nature and transformation of Canadian immigration policies and programs. More recently, the emphasis on security, criminality, and fraud have become the fourth element shaping

3. For the preparation of this section we relied on the dedicated collaboration of Catherine Guzik, Christina Campbell, Martha Colorado, and Katie Lo, who worked on compiling information, organization, analysis and the preparation of graphics for this chapter.

4. The statistical information on Colombian migrants to Canada presented throughout this report is based on statistics supplied by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). These cover the period 1995 to 2005. The statistics come from the Refugee Branch of CIC, the International Division, and the Office of Research and Evaluation. When CIC information was obtained from its website or publications, these sources are included in the bibliography.

immigration policies, with their emphasis on border control and the updating of exclusion policies (Pratt, 2005).

Though policies dealing with humanitarian protection and refuge primarily flow from Canada's commitment to the international community, the other three factors have historically played an important role in the establishment of priorities and emphases in humanitarian protection policies and resettlement programs. So, for example, various social groups and researchers have noted that the selection of refugees under the refugee program for persons who are

outside of Canada (in refugee camps or a country of asylum) has used the criteria of the economic migration program (ability to integrate, educational credentials) to grant refuge to those who have a greater potential to contribute to the Canadian economy (Dauvergne, 2005).

Refugees represent an important portion of permanent immigrants (Richmond et al, 1989). In Canada the participation of women in the annual immigration flows is ever greater, in part because of the family reunification policies, but also because of specific labour needs.

LATINAMERICAN IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE WAVES (1950-1980)

The immigration of Latin Americans to Canada has not been a matter deeply studied and today there are still many gaps in both qualitative and statistical analyses. Fernando Mata argues that Latin American immigration is related to countries' specific political situations and the responses that Canadian immigration policy developed to respond to those situations (Mata, 1985:28). According to Mata, the immigration of Latin Americans to Canada is divided in waves, each related to a crisis in the sending country or countries (Mata 1985 , 28). This argument is supported by Alan Simmons, who argues that the waves are also related to international circumstances favouring entry to Canada (Simmons 1993, 282). In order to understand why Canada became an option for Latin American immigrants, Simmons states that this has to be understood within the hemispheric migration system:

Within this system, migrant and refugee flows from Latin America to Canada depend on four main factors: (1) social, economic, and political

conditions in the sending countries; (2) social, economic, and political conditions in the various potential destination countries in the system, including Canada, (3) Canada's immigration and refugee policies; and (4) migrant social and kin networks (Simmons 1993, 284).

Fernando Mata has conceptualized the immigration of Latin Americans to Canada in four major waves through to the 80s. From his perspective these waves are: 1. the Lead Wave, 2. the Andean Wave, 3. the Coup Wave and 4. the Central American Wave (Mata 1985).

The first wave took place during the 50's and 60's, when immigrants came from the most industrialized countries of the continent, such as Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Venezuela and Uruguay. These immigrants were primarily white Latin Americans, with ethnic links to Europeans who were themselves European immigrants or immigrant's children, such as Italian-Argentines, Polish-Argentines, German-Chileans, Portuguese-Brazilians and Dutch-Mexicans.

They were generally professionals or skilled workers. This wave was the result of the implementation of the Immigration Act of 1952, which privileged immigrants with European links or ancestors (Mata 1985, 35-36).

The second wave took place after the immigration amnesty in 1973, which included all visitors entering Canada before November 30, 1972. Although the Amnesty included all Latin American nationalities, it particularly benefited Colombians and Ecuadorians in Canada, many of whom had been living in the country for a long time, as they were able to regularize their status. Immigration from Colombia and Ecuador counted for 30% of the total 20 country inflow during 1973 and 1975. These immigrants were mainly skilled and unskilled labourers with strong motivations for social mobility (Mata 1985, 37). The early 70s also witnessed the second largest international population movement in the Americas after that of Mexican to the United States', that of Colombians to Venezuela (Simmons 1993, 292)

The third wave, or the Dictatorships wave, also took place in the 70s, influenced by the military coups that were rampant in the Southern Cone which caused a humanitarian crisis of refuge seekers. The initial mass exodus began after the takeover of Pinochet in 1973, when the Chilean dissident intelligentsia was dismantled by the military (Mata 1985, 38). In the best cases they were exiled, in the worst murdered. An important factor that contributed to the consolidation of the Chilean wave was the fast organization of different solidarity groups (Simalchik, 2004:53). The pressure exercised was so strong that the Canadian government sent a diplomatic delegation to travel to Chile to bring the first group of refugees to Canada in January 1974 in a Canadian government airplane (Simalchik 2004, 53).

The fourth wave refers to those immigrants and refugees coming from Central America in the 80s after a series of civil wars in Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador. Mata describes these immigrants as, "a mix conglomerate of individuals who fear reprisal from political enemies or suffered severe social losses (job, housing, etc.) during the strife" (Mata 1985: 40). In general terms Mata observes that the educational level of the Central American refugees was lower than the Southern Cone, and had less skill specialization than the Chilean refugees. However, he also underscores the Central Americans high political awareness and high organizational skills (Mata 1985: 40).

In summary, it was only during the late 60's that the immigration from Latin America to Canada dramatically increased (Durán 1984, 2). Furthermore, in a study of immigration Bourne states that, "since 1981 only 15% have arrived from Europe. Over 70% of immigrants to Canada in the last decade have come from countries in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America" (Bourne May 1999: 4). This has represented a dramatic change in make up of Canadian population, where the ideal of a "white Canada" had to shift to a multicultural Canada. The following sections suggest a new wave of immigration from Latin America that can be referred as the Colombian wave, and which is related to the humanitarian crisis, the worsening of the armed conflict and the economic crisis that the country experienced in the 90s.

REFUGE AND THE CANADIAN IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

The passage of the Immigration Act of 1976 confirmed the opening of Canada to immigrants from diverse regions of the world. New regulations established three

categories for prospective immigrants, granting more points according to level of education, competencies and qualifications considered necessary for Canada (Conseil des Communautés Culturelles, 1993:4). The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act of 2001 maintains these principles and their three components: economic migration, family reunification and the humanitarian component (refugee protection).

Canada's system of refugee protection through the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program aims to maintain Canada's humanitarian tradition through resettlement of convention refugees and persons in similar refugee-like situations. Refugees are individuals who require protection, and whom, from either outside or inside of Canada, seek refuge because they fear returning to their country of origin or habitual residence or because there are no lasting solutions⁵. It is important to note, in this regard, that the category of refugee within the program covers those who have been recognized as convention refugees as well as individuals who need protection but do not fit the international definition of refugee (Dauvergne, Ángeles and Huang, 2006). In the case of Colombia, the widening of the definition of refugee within the Canadian framework is important, given that the majority of Colombian refugees do not fit the Convention's definition of refugees and are considered protected persons. To understand the forms of forced migration of Colombians to Canada it must be clarified that the resettlement program for refugees has two components:

Refuge and humanitarian settlement for persons seeking protection from outside of Canada. A person is considered and accepted as a refugee for resettlement in Canada if they meet the definition of a Convention refugee or those stipulated under the

humanitarian category of the Canadian system. Under the Canadian system, refugees accepted into this program can be sponsored by the government (Government Assisted Refugee, GAR) or come under private sponsorship.

In 1997 Canada established the classes of "country of asylum" and "source country." The country of asylum class applies to those persons who are outside of their country or origin or residence. The source country class, through which the great majority of Colombians have arrived, applies to those who are still in their country of citizenship. The Canadian government determines the countries designated as a "source country" of refugees based on an evaluation of the situation in the country⁶. At the moment six countries are so designated: Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Guatemala, Sierra Leona and Sudan. Colombia was included as a refugee source country in 1997. The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act formalized the category of source country. The inclusion of Colombia on the list is a result of the documentation work and pressure exercised by non-governmental human rights organizations and organizations of refugees and immigrants in Colombia and Canada, as well as the recognition and documentation by the Canadian embassy in Bogotá of the critical conditions in the country.

The process of protection and asylum for persons seeking refuge in Canada. Under

5. See <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/you-asked/section14.asp>

6. This takes into consideration whether there are residents of this country who live in conditions similar to that of a refugee as a result of civil war or because of a violation of their human rights. The other two criteria which are considered are possible risks to the security of the operation of the visa office, its employees, the embassy or the petitioner. Likewise, whether the conditions in the country justify humanitarian intervention by Canada is taken into account (CIC, 2006a).

the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), a person inside Canada can claim status as a convention refugee or status as a person who needs humanitarian protection. Convention refugees are persons who are outside of their country of nationality or residence and cannot or do not want to return to that country because they have a well founded fear of persecution. A protected person is one who would face possible torture, a risk to their life, or suffer cruel and inhuman punishment if they were returned to their country of nationality or residence (Legal Services Society, 2004). In this document the category refugee is used to cover the variety of modes of protection described in this section. The mode of government assisted refugee (GAR) within the source country class, and the petitioning for refuge from within Canada (at the border with the United States) are the two dominant forms through which Colombian refugees have arrived in Canada.

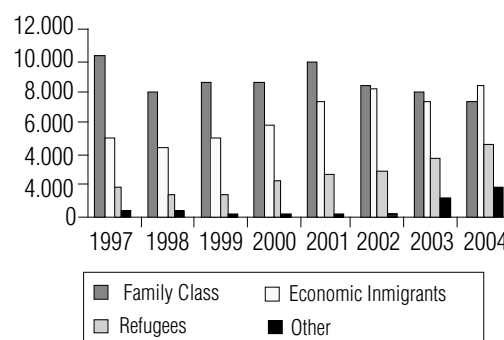
COLOMBIAN MIGRATION IN THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

The Colombian wave began in the mid 90s and throughout 2000s, with a significant increase in the number of Colombian immigrants in all immigration categories, but particularly that of refugees. The characteristics of this wave of migration are different from those of earlier Latin American waves, given that it involves a combination of modes and motives of migration and a heterogeneous profile of immigrants. The increase in Colombian immigration towards the end of the 90s results from a combination of factors such as the humanitarian crisis Colombia faced in the 90s and throughout the 2000s, the change in strategy by armed actors towards

hegemonic domination of the territories that they controlled, the worsening of the armed conflict which caused massive exodus of the population, and the economic crisis that happened at the end of the 90s. In this section the flows and modes of Colombian migration to Canada are analyzed in the context of regional Latin American migration for the period between 2000 and 2005, which saw the most significant increase in migration of Colombians to Canada.

As can be seen in figure 1, between 1997 and 2004 the category with the highest number of landings from South and Central America was that of family reunification. Nevertheless, the proportion of immigrants under this category has been decreasing. In contrast, the category of economic immigrants shows a steady increase since 1998, and since 2003 this has been the primary mode of migration for Latin Americans. The profile of this immigrant is very similar to that of the Latin American immigrant of the 60s and 70s, that is to say, skilled workers and professionals who are seeking social and economic mobility through migration.

Figure 1. Permanent Resident from South/ Central America



Source: CIC, 2004

The growth of the proportion of economic migrants from Latin America, with respect to the other categories, is congruent with the national trend in the 90s, when the

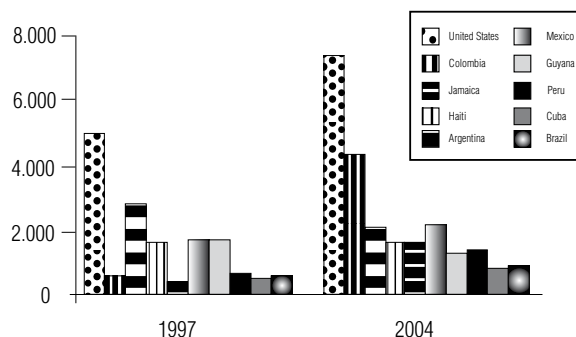
proportion of the first surpassed the later (Picot, 2004). This tendency is a result of migration policies and priorities established by the Canadian government, which seek to attract highly qualified/educated immigrants based on the understanding that the human capital of these immigrants, their abilities and initiative, will generate economic growth (Picot, 2004). The changes in the nature of migration are also influenced by dominant political and economic forces in the context of the consolidation of the neoliberal model and the hardening of immigration policies which result in greater control of borders, and the imposition of restrictions on humanitarian protection (Kazemipur and Halli, 2001).

Amongst all of the countries of the Americas, Colombian migration to Canada has shown the greatest rate of growth. A total 29,236 Colombians immigrated to Canada and obtained permanent residency between 1990 and December 1, 2005. Of these 66% did so after 1998. The number of Colombians who migrated to Canada in these years is, nevertheless, even greater, given that this number does not include those who are considered temporary residents (which includes those who are waiting for a decision on their refugee claim or their humanitarian case, or those whose refugee claim has been accepted but who have yet to receive permanent residency). On December 1, 2004, 5,204 Colombians were in Canada as temporary residents (including temporary workers, students and protected persons) (CIC, 2004). Refugee claimants (3,271) were 63% of this total (IRB, 2004).

Between 1997 and 2004 Colombia passed from being the eleventh to the second largest country of origin of immigrants from the region in all immigration categories (see Figure 2 and Appendix 3). In the Latin

American region, the three countries from which the vast majority of immigrants came in the 2000s are, in order: Colombia, Mexico and Argentina (CIC, 2004).

Figure 2. Permanent Residents from South/Central America & USA



Source: CIC 2004

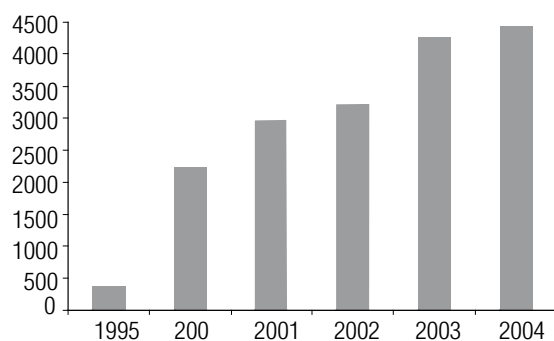
Since 1999, the number of refugees from the region has grown steadily, with Colombia being the primary source of refugees. The proportion of refugees has increased (see Figure 1), in contrast to the national tendency of a sustained decrease in the number of refugee claimants. In the specific case of Colombian migration, there are variations from the Latin American tendency towards predominantly family and economic class immigration. During the period between 2000 and 2004, the family category shows a marked decrease. In 1995, 59% of Colombian who immigrated to Canada belonged to the family class. This percentage decreased to 14% in 2000 and 8% in 2005. This national tendency has become an issue of public debate, given that it exposes the contradictions and weaknesses of a migration system whereby family reunification⁷, though it is a primary goal, is impeded by

7. The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act stipulates as one of its primary objectives "family reunification within Canada" (CIC, 2002).

immigration priorities, procedures and the establishment of goals per immigration category⁸ (CCR, 2005b).

Though the economic category shows a decrease in 2003, this form of migration has maintained a steady growth, and its acceptance rates are higher than those in the family and refugee categories (see Appendix 4). The increase in the number of Colombian immigrants who arrived in Canada under the economic category between the end of the 90s and the first few years of the 2000s is related to the Colombian economic crisis of the 90s, during which high numbers of professionals, skilled workers and the middle class left the country. This increase also coincides with the Canadian government strategy of promoting the immigration of professionals and skilled workers to Canada from different Colombian cities. Figure 3 shows the described increase in Colombian immigration in the 2000-2005 period, and contrasts it to that of 1995.

Figure 3. Colombia - Permanent Residents, 1995 & 2000- 2004

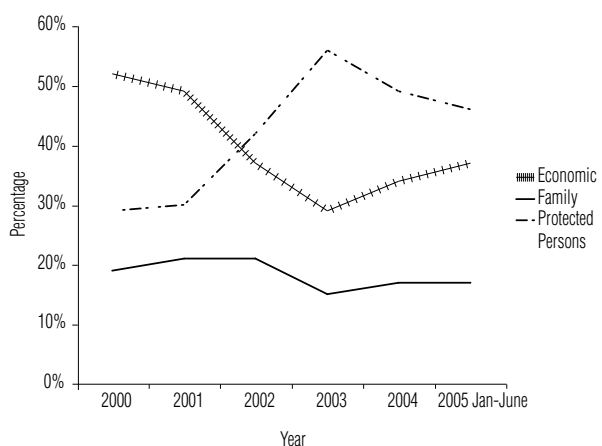


Source: Statistics provided by CIC

The category of economic class immigrants represented slightly more than half (52%) of all immigrants in 2000 and 2001 (see Figure

4). Since 2002, the proportion of economic immigrants, in contrast with that of refugees, has diminished by 37%, and that of protected persons has risen to 42%. In 2003 56% of the visas issued in Bogotá were for the protected persons class and 29% for the economic class (see Figure 4 and Appendix 3).

Figure 4. Visas

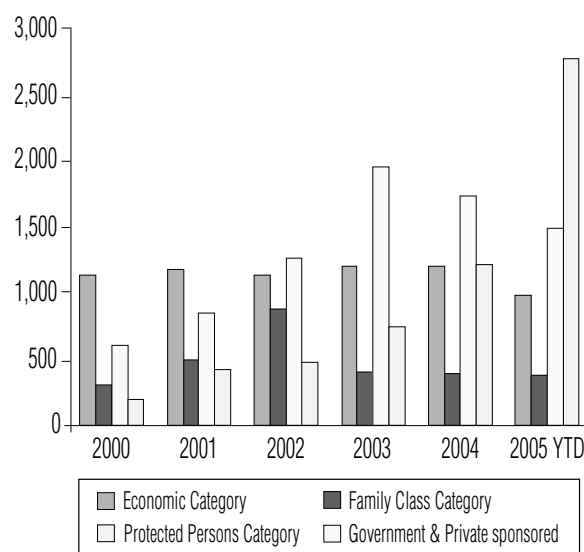


Source: Statistics provided by CIC

Comparing figure 4 to figure 5, which shows the total of all persons of Colombian nationality who immigrated to Canada (2000-2005), one can see an even greater difference between the economic class and refugees. Figure 5 includes Colombians who filed refugee claims in Canada and those who were resettled from other countries. Once these are added to the refugee total, the proportion of refugees in relation to other classes rises dramatically and this can especially be seen from 2001 on.

8. The Canadian government gives priority to economic immigrants, and this is reflected in the percentages that are established as goals for each of the immigration categories. In 2005 60% was established for economic immigrants and 40% for those coming through family reunification (CCR, 2005a).

Figure 5. Total Colombian Landings by Category, 2000-2005



Source: Statistics provided by CIC

The statistics of the Canadian Census of Population of 2001 indicate a total of 15,505 Colombians in Canada (this figure includes those who are citizens, as well as those who have permanent residency but not citizenship) (Statistics Canada, 2003). Taking into consideration that since 2001, 20,847 Colombians immigrated to Canada (see table 1), it can be concluded that there are more than 36,000 Colombians residing permanently in Canada. As has already been noted, the number of Colombians is even greater if one considers those with the status of temporary residency.

Table 1: Canada, number of landings by source country: Colombia

Source Country	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005 (Dec 1)	Total
Colombia	2.964	3.218	4.273	4.438	5.954	20.847

Source: CIC, 2004, 2005d, Statistics provided by CIC

COLOMBIAN REFUGEES

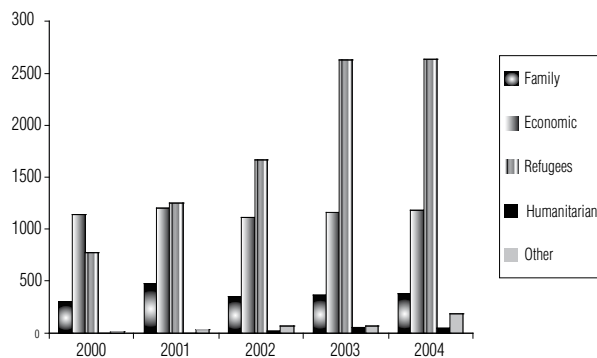
According to statistics from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 14,333

Colombians were recognized as refugees or persons needing protection between 1990 and 2005, of whom 97% arrived in Canada after 2000. An additional 1,943 were waiting for the decision on their refugee claim at the end of 2005 (IRB, 2005), which allows us to conclude that nearly 15,000 received refugee status in Canada. Colombian refugees primarily (57%) arrived through the refugee resettlement program, coming from abroad as refugees sponsored by the government, and as protected persons (43%) who made a refugee claim in Canada. This section analyzes the migratory movement of Colombians to Canada in the refugee category. It includes refugee claims that are presented at the Canadian embassy in Bogotá, as well as those that are presented in Canada at the United States border, in airports, or at the offices of Citizenship and Immigration Canada. As well as these types of refugee claims there is that of resettlement, which is used when the claimant is outside of their country of origin, be it in a refugee camp or another country. Those Colombians who come to Canada through the resettlement program come from Ecuador or Costa Rica. Since 2003, the UNHCR has established resettlement units in each of those countries and an agreement with the Canadian government to resettle Colombian refugees who continue to face security problems in those countries. In the case of Colombians in Ecuador, the Canadian government accepted 230 for resettlement in Canada between 2003 and 2005.

According to the world survey of refugees (U.S. Committee for Refugees, 2004), Canada harboured nearly 70,000 refugees and refugee claimants at the end of 2003. Since 2001, Colombia has ranked as one of the primary source countries for said refugees, from outside as well inside of Canada, and it became the

primary source of refugee claimants in Canada in 2005. Figure 6 shows the growth in the number of Colombians who immigrated to Canada as refugees.

Figure 6. Landings from Colombia per category, 2000- 2004



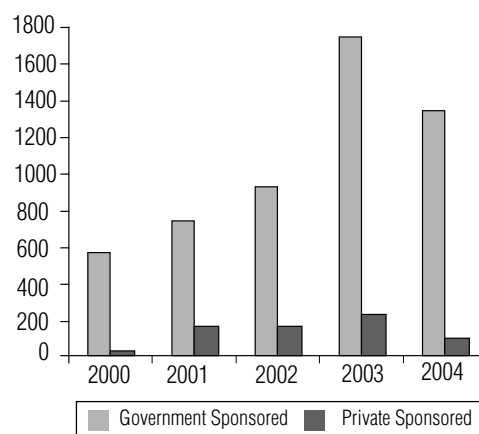
Source: CIC

Persons seeking protection from outside of Canada

The most dramatic rise, of 27%, in the refugee category occurred between (and including) 2001 and 2003 (see figures 5 and 6). This increase coincides with one of the highest peaks of internal displacement in Colombia, and with the increase of the exodus of Colombians to neighbouring countries such as Ecuador, Venezuela and Panama, and to others that are more distant, such as Costa Rica, the United States, and Canada. The pattern that has been seen since 2003, and which became more acute in 2004, is of a decrease in the number of applicants at the Canadian embassy in Bogotá and an increase in Colombian refugee claimants in Canada, and particularly at the border with the United States. Although there is not specific documentation to explain the decrease in applications at the Bogotá office, one has to consider that during this period the Canadian government ended the agreement it used to have with various human rights organizations, with the

Attorney General's office and labour unions, through which these organizations referred refugee cases to the Canadian government. This coincided with revelations of corruption and trafficking in refugee visas in the Colombian Human Rights Office of the Senate (Semana, 2005).

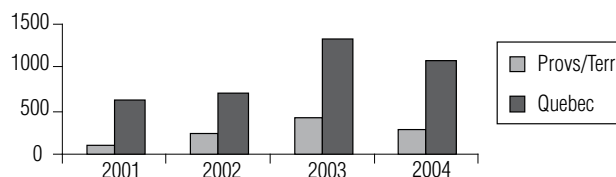
Figure 7. Visas issued by the Bogotá office: all destinations



Source: Statistics provided by CIC

The province of Quebec received the vast majority of refugees sponsored by the government (see table 3). In terms of percentages, between 65 and 70% of the Colombians who have arrived in Canada in the last 5 years as refugees sponsored by the government go first to the province of Quebec (see figure 8).

Figure 8. Visas issued from Bogotá: Government Sponsored Refugees



Source: Statistics provided by CIC

The high number of refugees destined for Quebec is due to the Canada-Quebec Accord, by which this province has the power to select which immigrants it receives, and the direct responsibility for managing immigrant

integration services. One criteria that is used in these cases is placement in provinces where it is considered that there is a higher likelihood of successful integration, given language and culture. In the case of Colombian refugees it is considered that there is a greater cultural closeness and ease of integration into French speaking society.

Refugee claims in Canada

Since 1995 there has been a steady increase in the number of Colombians who have sought refugee in Canada. At the border with the United States, Colombia and Pakistan were the primary source countries for refugee claims filed between 2002 and 2004 (CIC, 2005c). Towards the end of 2004 Colombia became the primary source, with 3,664 applicants, the highest number of applicants in the last 10 years (see table 2) (IRB, 2005). This number reflects the imminent implementation of the Safe Third Country agreement between Canada and the United States, which is described below. The final statistics for 2005, which show a total of 4,496 Colombian refugees accepted into Canada, reflect this increase.

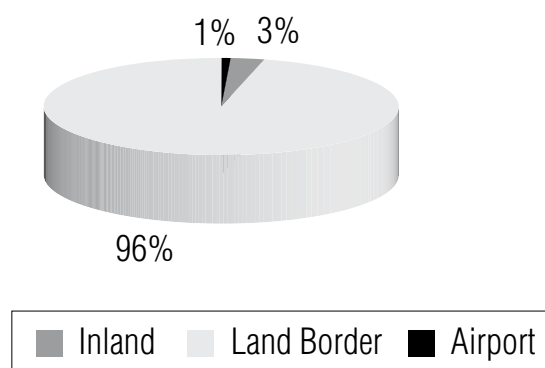
Table 2: Applications referred and finalized, Refugee Protection Division

Applica- tions	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005 Jan-Sept.
Referred	621	1,072	1,846	2,713	2,152	3,664	1,164
Accepted	154	463	744	1,084	1,963	2,628	1,944
Rejected	105	154	130	204	304	414	431
Abandoned	23	16	17	21	49	18	22
Withdrawn/ Other	30	55	55	104	106	199	78
Finalized	312	688	946	1,413	2,422	3,259	2,457
Percent accepted	49 %	67 %	79 %	77 %	81 %	81 %	79 %
Pending	549	933	1,832	3,123	2,854	3,271	1,943
Rank	10	8	5	3	3	1	3

Source: IRB, 2004 and 2005.

The majority of refugee claims were filed at the United States border (84% in 2002, 90% in 2003, 96% in 2004) (see figure 9), 8% were filed within Canada and 2% were filed at an airport. The acceptance rate for refugee claimants from Colombia is high (with an average 80% acceptance rate in the last three years) and contrasts with the low acceptance rates of Colombians in other countries such as the United States, Ecuador and Costa Rica. In 2004, 97%, or 3,522 Colombian refugee claims were filed at the border, and 88% of all claims were filed in Ontario.

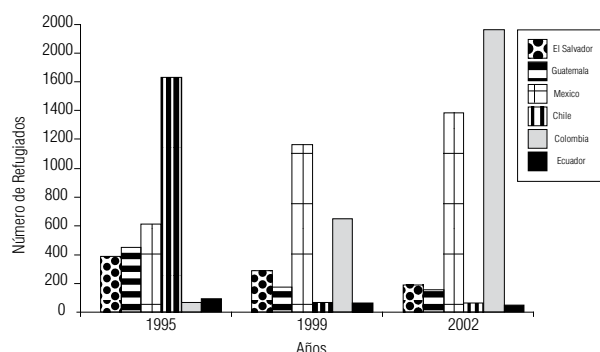
Figure 9: Refugee claims by Colombians within Canada and by port of entry



Source CIC, 2004; statistics provided by CIC

Comparing these statistics of Colombian refugees with the flow of refugees from six Latin American countries, one can see that there has been a steady increase in refugee applicants from Colombia and Mexico, while those from other countries such as El Salvador and Guatemala (who had a high number during the 80s and 90s) have decreased (Da, 2002a, 2002b). Figure 10 shows this historical pattern. Though refugee claims from Mexico show a steady increase, the acceptance rate for Mexicans is low (26% in 2004), and contrasts to that of claims from Colombia (82% in 2004) (Da, 2002b).

Figure 10: Refugee claimants from six Latin American countries, 1995-2002



Source: Da, 2002a, b

This refugee claim pattern changed when the Safe Third Country Agreement went into effect. This agreement established between Canada and the United States went into effect in December of 2004. As a result, authorities in both countries can return those refugee claimants who try to enter Canada through the United States, or the United States through Canada. This agreement is especially significant for Canada, as more than 50% of refugee claimants to this country come through the United States. It has a direct impact on Colombians since, as has been previously noted, between 2002 and 2004 more than 90% of claims for refuge in Canada were made at the United States border. As a result of the implementation of this agreement, refugee claims to Canada decreased drastically. In the first six months of its implementation (January to June of 2005), refugee claims fell by nearly 50%, in comparison to the number of claims filed at the border in the first six months of 2004 (CCR, 2005c). In the case of Colombians, claims filed at the border in the first six months of 2005 decreased 70% in comparison to the claims filed in the first six months of 2004. There were 1,164 refugee claim cases of Colombians in Canada referred to the Immigrant and Refugee board between January and

September of 2005. In that same period of 2004, there were 2,496 claims (IRB, 2004; 2005). This reduction is significant not only for its material implications in terms of protection and security, but because in 2004 Colombia was the primary source country of all refugee claims in Canada. The chapter on public policies analyzes the impact that this agreement had on refugee claims by Colombians in greater detail.

Where Colombian refugees land and where they live

On a provincial level, Ontario and Quebec are the primary destination provinces, with 80% of Colombian immigrants in all immigration categories. Disaggregating the information for the refugee category, and comparing government sponsored and privately sponsored refugees with those who requested and accepted their refuge while in Canada, different patterns can be observed. In the case of government sponsored refugees, the primary destination is the province of Quebec (see table 3). The province of Ontario receives a very high percent of protected persons (see table 3).

Table 3: Resettlement by province of destination: government sponsored and privately sponsored refugees: 2000-2005

Total Government and Private	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005 present
Settlement by primary destination	608	854	1,271	1,959	1,742	1,494
Ontario	83	69	174	313	316	238
Alberta	74	98	128	120	94	140
Quebec	403	615	740	1,286	1,179	951
British Columbia	35	51	96	96	69	52
Other	13	21	133	144	84	113

Source: CIC

Table 4: Protected persons category: by province of destination

Protected persons category	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005- present
Principal destinations	196	428	477	751	1,221	2,783
Quebec	63	112	133	114	157	234
Ontario	117	277	310	590	964	2,369
British Columbia	15	33	28	15	48	68
Alberta	1	5	6	13	45	88
Others	0	1	0	19	7	24

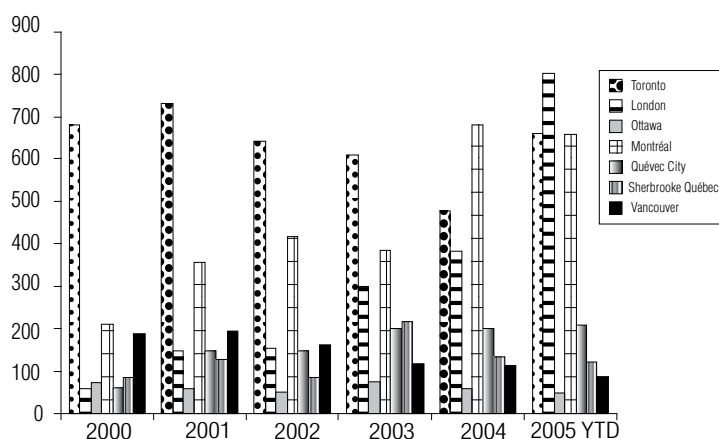
Source: CIC

Four provinces – Ontario, Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia – contain nearly all of the rest of the protected persons (refugee claimants in Canada), while refugees resettled by the government or privately are distributed across a greater number of provinces. This difference can be explained in part by the strategy of regionalization of immigration of the Canadian government, but it also has to do with the presence of social networks and communities from the same country in certain established urban centres, such as Toronto, Montreal, and, more recently, London.

Disaggregating the information by city one can see marked differences and contrasts between large, medium and small cities. Figures 11, 12 and 13 show cities where the majority of Colombians are concentrated, by mode of migration. If one considers the destination cities of government assisted or privately assisted refugees, a city such as Toronto holds a very low percentage of the total (7% in 2002 and 2003, 4% in 2004) of refugees resettled in Canada. When one looks, for the same city, at the number of

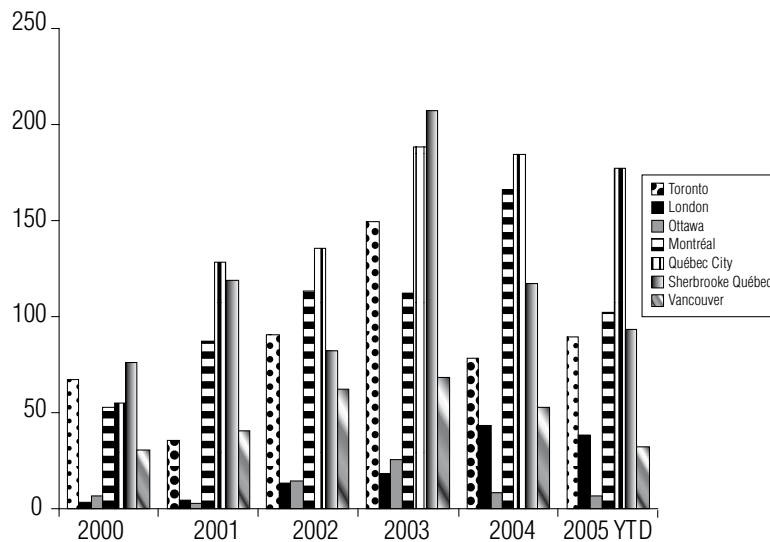
persons in the protected persons category (those who petitioned for and received refuge while in Canada), it is clear that it is one of the cities in which this category of refugees is concentrated. Within the province of Ontario itself, a middle-sized city such as London has a different profile, given that it is the city with the highest number of refugee claimants. Since 2000, London has registered the highest number of Colombian refugee claimants, and Colombia is the primary source country of new immigrants there (see figure 13). In 2003, 37% of all Colombians who were accepted as refugees in Canada listed London as their city of residence.

Montreal, Quebec and Sherbrooke in the province of Quebec also have high concentrations of Colombians (see figure 11 and 12). Close to 25% of all Colombian refugees settled from outside of Canada go to one of these three cities. In contrast, when one considers the category of refugees who sought refuge from within Canada (protected persons), these three cities hold less than 10% of the population.

Figure 11. Total landings by all immigration & Destinations, 1995 & 2000 - 2005

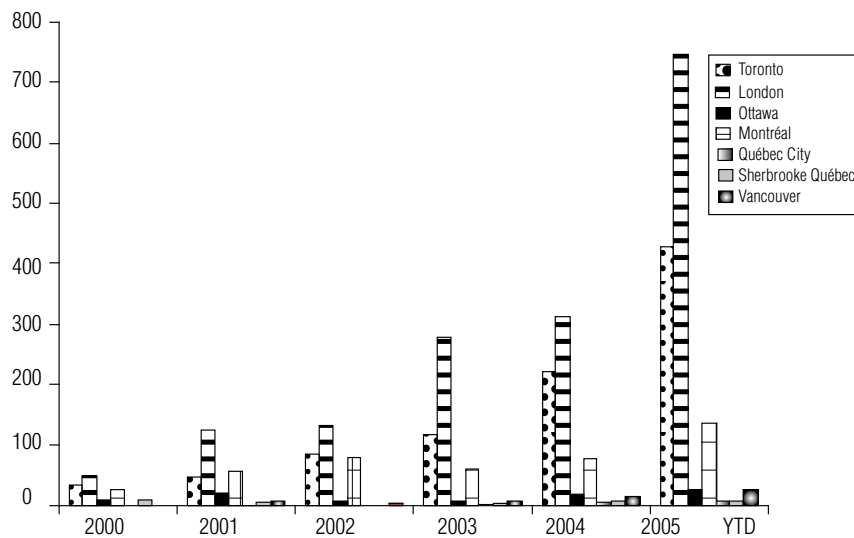
Source: Statistics provided by CIC

Figure 12. Landings by Government & Private Resettlement & Destination, 2000-2005



Source: Statistics provided by CIC

Figure 13. Landings by protected persons Category & Destination, 2000-2005



Source: Statistics provided by CIC

Considering the size of each of these cities helps us to understand the impact of these numbers, and allows us conclude that although Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver continue to be the Canadian cities with the greatest number of Colombians, there has been a shift in their destinations, and an

ever greater number first settle in middle-sized cities such as London and Sherbrooke. The distribution of Colombian refugees by city also indicates certain stratification by category of refugee and city, and the presence of defined settlement patterns.

Socio-demographic profile

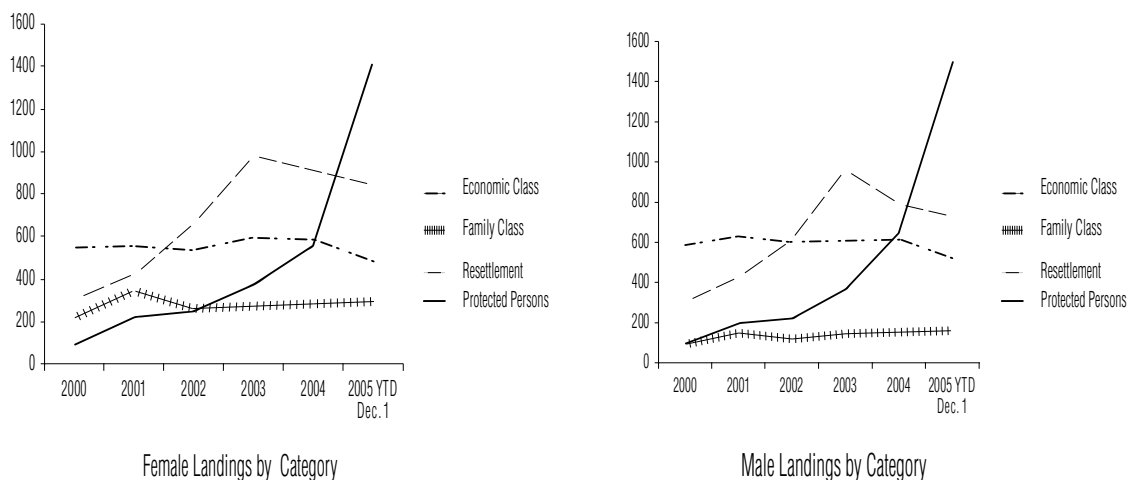
One aspect that should be taken into account in the statistical analysis is that refugees resettled by the government of Canada from abroad are granted permanent residency at the same time as they are recognized as refugees. But in the case of those who request refuge from within Canada or at the border, residency is only requested once their condition as convention refugees is recognized. Given this, the analysis of social integration of refugees, their use of resources and social networks, access to services, participation in the labour market and levels of poverty tend to disappear in the numbers, given that this information, in the main, is not disaggregated by the category of refugee. This blind spot in the statistical measurements has begun to be recognized as a serious limitation to the analysis of socio-demographic patterns and the

understanding of poverty dynamics, social networks and social inclusion/exclusion of refugees (Center for International Statistics, 1998).

Characteristics by gender, age, marital status and level of education.

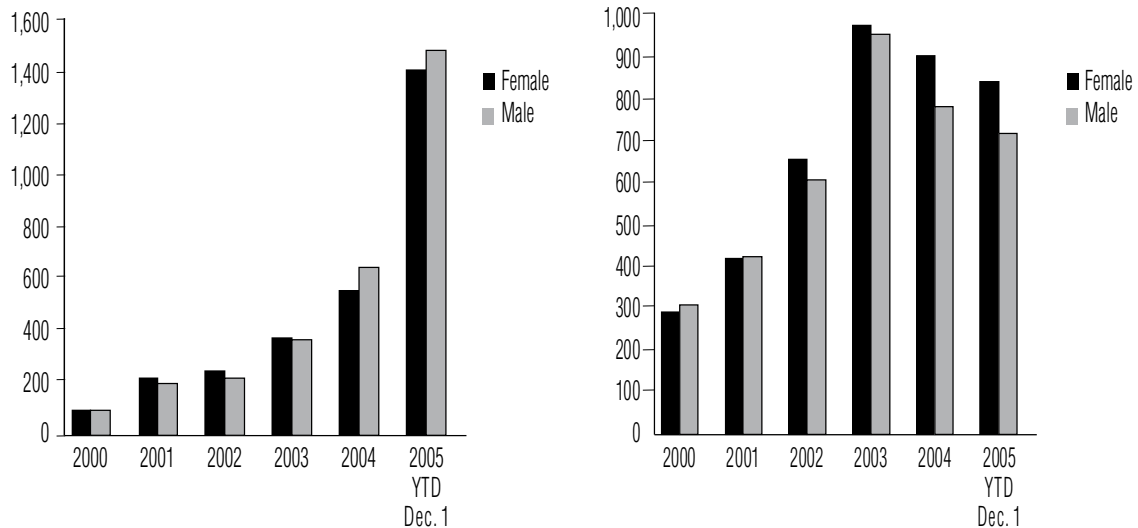
Gender. There is no significant difference in the proportion of men and women in the total of Colombian migrants in all immigrant categories. Women have a larger representation in the total, with an average of 51% between 2000 and 2005, while men represent an average of 48% (figure 14). Nevertheless, in the case of refugees there are more marked differences. Amongst refugees in the resettlement program outside of Canada (figure 15) there is a larger proportion of women, and a trend towards increasing numbers of women (from 48% in 2000 to 53% in 2004 and 2005).

Figure 14: Total arrivals to Canada by gender and immigration category, 2000-2005



Source: Statistics provided by CIC

Figure 15: Total arrivals to Canada by gender, 2000-2005



Source: Statistics provided by CIC

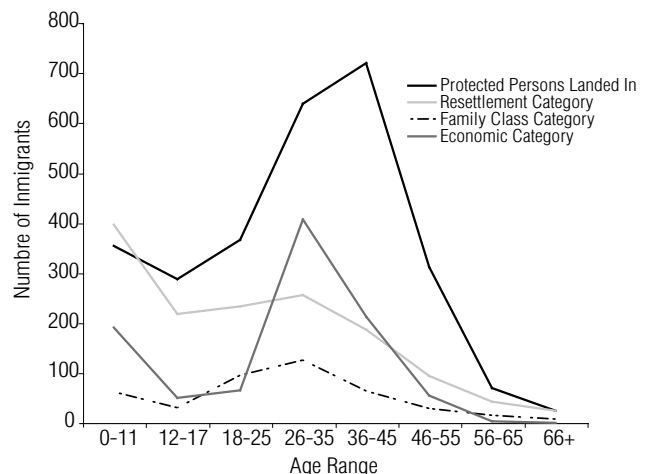
There are more men than women amongst Colombians whose refugee claim was filed in Canada (figure 14), but this difference was only seen since 2004, when they represented 54% of all protected persons in Canada. As can be seen in figures 14 and 15, gender differences are not very significant. This relative balance in the gender distribution of Colombian refugees contrasts with the national trends in which an average of 56% of refugees were men, and 44% were women (between 1992 and 2002). In the case of persons who sought refugee in Canada and were accepted, the difference is even greater, with 59% being men and 41% women (Dempsey and Yu, 2004).

Age

As far as age distribution amongst Colombian refugees, there is a marked difference between those who arrive in Canada through the resettlement program and those who seek refuge in Canada (see figure 16). In the first type there is a larger proportion of children and youth under

18, while in the second the age group of 25 to 44 predominates. The profile of the Colombian refugee claimant is closer to the general profile of refugees in Canada in that nearly 50% of refugees are in the 25 to 45 age group (Dempsey and Yu, 2004).

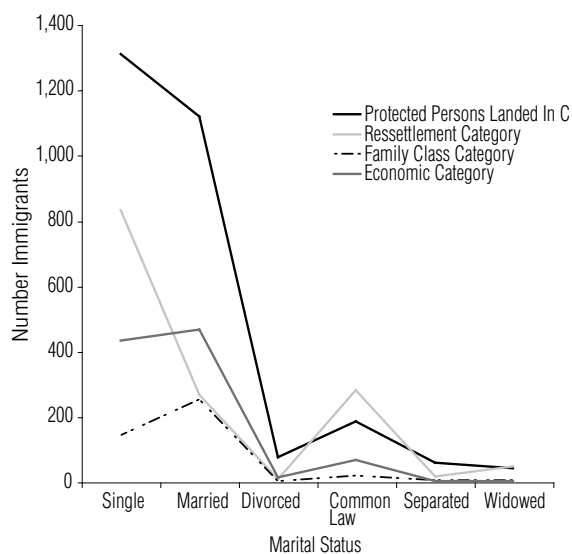
Figure 16. Age at Landing All immigrant Categories, 2005



Source: Statistics provided by CIC

Marital status. In contrast with Colombians in all of the other immigration categories, the marital status of single predominates amongst Colombian refugees (figure 17). This difference, nevertheless, is minimized by the high proportion of children and youth amongst refugees that arrive through the resettlement program. Taking 2003 as the year with the highest number of single persons listed, and combining marital status information with the number of refugees under age 17, of the 1009 persons who listed their marital status as single, 755 were under the age 17.

Figure 17. Marital Status All Immigrant Categories; 2005

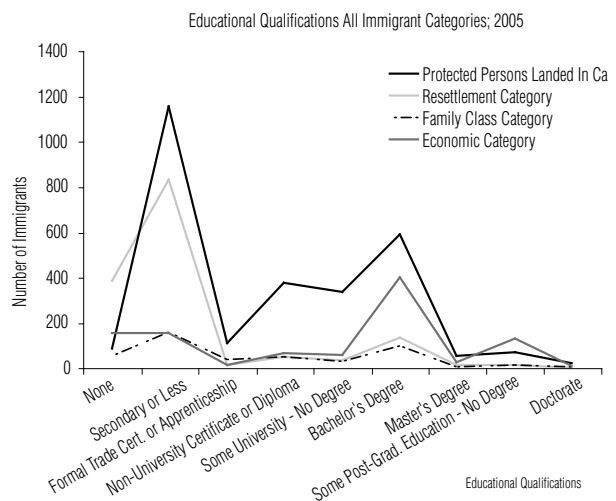


Source: Statistics provided by CIC

Level of education. Figure 18 shows that Colombian immigrants tend to have a higher than secondary level of education, but in the case of refugees secondary or less predominates (close to 50%). Once more here the impact of children and youth in this category should be considered. Considering this factor and taking into account the portion of this population that is under the age of 18, it can be concluded that among refugee adults there is a significant percent of persons with a university education (44%).

This conclusion is reinforced by information from local agencies that are contracted by the government to offer initial settlement services to refugees. For example, information from the Cross Cultural Learner Centre in London and the Immigrant Services Society in Vancouver indicates that Colombian refugees tend to have a higher level of postsecondary education than the refugee average, with a high percentage of professionals in the areas of health, engineering, law and human rights (including union organizers) from urban areas (ISS, 2006; CCLC, 2005). A recent study of Colombians in Toronto confirms this professional and urban profile of Colombian immigrants. Of the 40 participants in this research, 65% had received a university education in Colombia and 47.5% were from three cities: Bogotá, Medellín and Cali (Ramos, Neme and Rubio, 2006). Likewise, in the workshops done for this research in Vancouver, 62% of participants had received a university education in Colombia

Figure 18. Educational Qualifications All Immigration Categories, 2005



Source: Statistics provided by CIC

Socioeconomic profile: poverty and employment amongst refugees

This section provides a general analysis of the economic situation of refugees in Canada and their participation in the labour market. It is argued here that this profile applies to the situation of Colombian refugees, given that upon arriving in Canada they have access to the same resources, receive the same sort of assistance, and find themselves in similar situations as far as financial assistance and access to basic services in terms of housing, health and learning an official language. Nevertheless, it is important to note the weight that factors such as the knowledge (or not) of one of the official languages and the presence (or absence) of social networks (friends or family) in Canada have on the wellbeing, economic situation, and integration of Colombian refugees.

Recent publications on the economic wellbeing of immigrants in Canada point to the deterioration of their economic situation during the 90s and beginnings of the 2000s, and a tendency towards a concentration of poverty in the immigrant and refugee population (Picot, 2004; Kazemipur and Halli, 2001; deVoretz, Pivnenko and Beiser, 2004). From this literature it can be concluded that refugees are over-represented amongst poor Canadians, that their participation in the labour market is low, and that there is a dependence on social assistance as the only source of income, even after five years of living in Canada.

The first element to take into consideration has to do with the tendency towards the growth (between the 90s and the 2000s) of the economic class category as compared to all other categories of immigration (Picot, 2004). Despite the high

educational levels of immigrants during this period, new immigrants show a lower than projected economic performance (Kazemipur and Halli, 2001), and the gap between the income of new immigrants and workers born in Canada has increased. Picot argues that the gap can be explained by the change in the mother tongue of new immigrants and the country of origin (particularly with immigration from Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America), and should be correlated to factors such as ethnic discrimination in the workforce. Kazemipur and Halli (2001) also argue that the concentration of poverty in the immigrant population has a distinct ethnic and racial profile, and that factors such as linguistic ability and education do not have a significant impact on the income level of immigrants, from which one can conclude that certain ethnic traits are being penalized in the labour market.

Studies on the income and poverty of refugees have shown a constant decline in average income over the 90s (Center for International Statistics, 1998; deVoretz et. al., 2004). According to these studies, economic poverty is portrayed as a growing and endemic problem amongst refugees. The analysis put forward by deVoretz et al (2004), based on the Longitudinal Immigration Database in 2002, shows that only 52% of refugees between ages 20 and 64 are employed, and that the rest are receiving social assistance and have an income far below the low income line (at 70% of the level defined as low income). This situation can be found even after seven years of residence in Canada.

The dependence on social assistance as a primary source of income in the case of refugees is characteristic of the first few years, given that the resettlement program offers assistance as one of the

mechanisms for assisting the initial process of resettlement. Nationally, 54% of all refugees report social assistance income during their first year in the country. After a year, the proportion of refugees receiving social assistance declines, but according to Dempsey and Yu (2004) there are drastic differences amongst different types of refugees. Sixty-two percent of those assisted by the government report social assistance income, while 44% of those who claimed refugee status from inside Canada report this type of income and 11% of those who are privately sponsored do so.

Taking into account that the vast majority of Colombian refugees have entered Canada between 2000 and 2005, it can be concluded that a large majority live in conditions of poverty and report social assistance as a primary source of income. One indicator of this is the use of food banks. The annual survey of food bank clients in 2005 indicates that hunger is a problem that is seriously affecting immigrants, and that nearly 50% of users in the province of Ontario are immigrants who arrived in Canada in the last four years. Colombians make up the immigrant group with most frequent use (10.2%) of food banks, followed by those from Jamaica (9.4%), Mexico (7.2%) and Russia (5.6%). Of immigrants who use food banks, 60% have a university degree or a specialized trade certificate (in contrast with 36% of those clients born in Canada) (North York Harvest Food Bank, 2005).

Another indicator of poverty levels is the quality of housing and the percentage of income spent on it. According to a survey done by the Immigrant Services Society (ISS, 2006), 60% of refugees interviewed in the Vancouver Lower Mainland are spending 30% or more (up to 60%) of their income on rent. This organization has been able to document the creation of a type of “ethnic

enclaves” in certain areas of Vancouver, with low quality housing that does not meet basic standards and is in high risk areas. The result of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants in Canada show that 40% of refugees report living in overcrowded conditions, and more than half expressed serious difficulties finding housing.

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<http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=97F0010X2001001>

APPENDIX 1

Immigration by Top Source Countries (Principal Applicants, Spouses and Dependants)

Country of Last Permanent Residence	2004						2005						Difference 2005 / 2004
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total 2004	2004 Rank	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total 2005	2005 Rank	
China, People's Republic of	9,409	10,199	9,358	7,463	36,429	1	10,843	11,684	11,160	8,604	42,291	1	16%
India	5,047	7,254	7,506	5,769	25,576	2	5,469	10,327	9,143	8,207	33,146	2	30%
Philippines	3,113	4,159	3,604	2,427	13,303	3	2,808	5,677	5,353	3,687	17,525	3	32%
Pakistan	2,806	4,066	3,423	2,500	12,795	4	2,685	3,827	4,187	2,877	13,576	4	6%
United States	1,832	2,071	1,867	1,737	7,507	5	2,233	2,553	2,514	1,962	9,262	5	23%
Colombia	1,139	1,290	1,094	915	4,438	11	1,283	1,275	1,911	1,562	6,031	6	36%
United Kingdom	1,320	1,739	1,710	1,293	6,062	7	1,354	1,555	1,685	1,271	5,865	7	-3%
South Korea	1,033	1,325	1,695	1,284	5,337	9	1,732	1,523	1,564	1,000	5,819	8	9%
Iran	1,500	1,739	1,872	952	6,063	6	1,039	1,384	1,846	1,233	5,502	9	-9%
France	1,021	1,404	1,585	1,018	5,028	10	1,243	1,699	1,594	894	5,430	10	8%
Total - 2005 YTD Top Ten Only	28,220	35,246	33,714	25,358	122,538		30,689	41,504	40,957	31,297	144,447		18%
Total - Other Countries	26,692	31,996	31,864	22,734	113,286		25,749	32,966	34,990	24,084	117,789		4%
Total	54,912	67,242	65,578	48,092	235,824		56,438	74,470	75,947	55,381	262,236		11%

Source: Statistics provided by CIC

APPENDIX 2

Permanent Residents from South/Central America & USA by Top Source Countries (Rank)

Source Countries	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
United States	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Colombia	11	7	6	3	2	2	2	2
Jamaica	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	4
Haiti	6	4	4	5	4	4	4	5
Argentina	14	13	13	13	11	10	5	6
Mexico	5	3	3	4	5	5	6	3
Guyana	4	6	5	6	6	6	7	8
Peru	8	11	10	10	10	9	8	7
Cuba	12	9	8	8	7	8	9	10
Brazil	10	8	9	9	9	11	10	9

Source: CIC 2004:35

APPENDIX 3

Applications Received from Bogota Office and Visas issued: Number of Persons by Category (Destination: Grand Total)

Category	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Skilled Worker Application Received Visas issued	1,880	1,835 1,515	1,308 977	934 1,046	1,355 1,122
Business Applications received Visas issued	0	0 2	0 3	36	34 25
Provincial Nominees Application Received Visas issued	0	15 15	0	5	8 1
Total Economic Class Applications received	1,881	1,850	1,308	975	1,397
Family Excluding FC4 Application Received Visas issued	677	754 505	576 409	608 407	624 486
Parents/Grandparents (FC4) Application Received Visas issued	211	236 139	236 156	249 149	80 89
Total Family Class Applications received	888	990	812	857	704
Government Sponsored Refugees Applications received Visas Issued	1,808	2,217 742	3,997 935	4,578 1,749	1,876 1,373
Private Sponsored Refugees Applications received Visas issued	135	201 170	161 170	335 239	123 104
Total Refugee Class Applications received Visas issued	1,971	2,503	4,209	5,074	2,131

Source: CIC 2004

APPENDIX 4

Colombian Claims Referred and Finalised. Refugee Protection Division

Claims	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005 Jan to Sep
Referred	621	1,072	1,846	2,713	2,152	3,664	1,164
Accepted	154	463	744	1,084	1,963	2,628	1,944
Rejected	105	154	130	204	304	414	431
Abandoned	23	16	17	21	49	18	22
Withdrawn/Other	30	55	55	104	106	199	78
Finalised	312	688	946	1,413	2,422	3,259	2,457
Percentage Accepted*	49%	67%	79%	77%	81%	81%	79%
Pending	549	933	1,832	3,123	2,854	3,271	1,943
Rank	10	8	5	3	3	1	3

*The acceptance rate is calculated by dividing the number of accepted claims by the number of all claims finalised (accepted, rejected, abandoned, withdrawn)

APPENDIX 5



Source: Ministry of Finance, Ontario <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/english/demographics/dtr0207.html>

PART TWO

PUBLIC POLICIES REGARDING REFUGE IN CANADA

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This section reviews the legal framework that shapes the selection, resettlement, and establishment of refugees in Canada. Taking into consideration the profile that has been presented of Colombian refugees in Canada, it examines those components of the law, its procedures, and programs which particularly affect the processes of welcoming and incorporation of refugees in three provinces with different migratory, political and social dynamics: British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec. This comparative analysis of public policies regarding refuge, and the processes and experiences of integration of Colombian refugees in Canada, takes into account Canadian federalism and the interaction of the following factors.

Responsibility for immigration matters in Canada is shared by the federal and provincial governments, who have concurrent legislative powers regarding migration. Nevertheless, the federal government has primary responsibility for migration to Canada. Within this framework, it can establish agreements with each of the provinces regarding the management and control of immigration, and under the 2002 Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act, it must consult with the provinces on matters such as the numbers of immigrants accepted each year and policies and programs for integration of immigrants. Accords signed between the Canadian government and the provinces at the

beginning of the 90s establish that provinces may select independent immigrants who meet their own economic and demographic objectives, and that provinces are responsible for the policies and programs to welcome immigrants and help them get established. It could be argued that these are a resource over which provinces can exercise choice.

Canadian residents are, by law, equal (independent of whether or not they are citizens). The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects and guarantees the right of all Canadian residents to freedom of conscience, thought, assembly, association, and particularly mobility (entering, staying and leaving Canada, and establishing residence in any of its provinces). It also establishes equal status, rights and privileges for each of the two official languages, English and French.

Multiculturalism is a cultural policy of the state which erects the socio-cultural diversity of Canadian civil society as one of its primary emblems and seeks to promote equality of rights, respect for fundamental liberties, and the social and political participation of individuals from across the diverse histories and cultures that make up Canadian society. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms states that the charter should be interpreted and applied in such a way as to preserve and realize Canadians' multicultural heritage. Though multiculturalism is not part of

immigration law, it provides a context for it, and is one of the principles that guides the processes of integration of immigrants and refugees, including the promotion of the recognition of their cultural diversities.

Bilingualism and Quebec's special status within the Canadian confederation. Quebec is recognized as a distinct society with jurisdiction over its migratory affairs and a specific vision of the processes of integration of immigrants and refugees in the context of a cultural policy of cultural convergence¹. This policy invokes unity and the primacy of the French cultural tradition, and fosters relations and processes of social integration through convergence around the majority French culture, with an eye to achieving a collective project.

The approach taken here towards forced migration public policies understands these as a set of attitudes and actions taken by state institutions with the aim of having an impact on the phenomena of displacement and refuge (Villa, 2007). It necessarily looks at government actions to understand policies as a result of interactions and transactions between government actors, multilateral institutions, and sectors of civil society, amongst others, who have different, and indeed sometimes antagonistic, ways of understanding the issues as well as the strategies and aims that they hope to achieve with such policies. Therefore, policies are examined as a result of negotiation processes that are sometimes explicit and visible, and other times not so much, but in any case as a social product (Mármora, 2002).

The first part presents elements of context that will explain the particularity of the refuge regime in Canada and the process of incorporation of refugees. The second section will critically explore aspects of immigration policy that directly or indirectly

affect Colombian refugees. Taking into account the three moments in the refuge process (application, resettlement and integration), specific aspects of immigration and settlement policies are analysed and questioned in the light of the experiences of refugees who participated in the study. Finally, we look at a set of aspects of immigration policies which operate at a provincial level, and focus on settlement and integration programs and language learning. This review does not cover all areas of settlement in areas such as health, employment, education and housing. It concentrates on those areas where the case studies illustrate gaps or problematic areas of policy and program development in light of the refugee experience.

CONTEXT

Immigration Laws: the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act

The Federal law on immigration issues is the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), which went into effect on June 28th, 2002. The IRPA defines who is a refugee, and is based on the Geneva convention, 1951, its Protocol, 1967, and the Convention Against Torture, 1974. There are also federal laws which, though they were not designed specifically to regulate refuge in Canada, affect and impact refugee claimants, as well as recognized refugees. These include the Antiterrorist Act and the Public Safety Act. The Antiterrorist Act went into effect on December of 2001, and was put forward as a comprehensive government

1. The policy of cultural convergence in Quebec is aimed at fostering cultural integration of new Quebecers (immigrants) into French Quebec culture, while it recognizes the rights of minorities to maintain and develop their own cultural interests.

response to the terrorist threat in the areas of intelligence, foreign policy, immigration and customs, through the implementation of measures such as preventative detentions and detention and deportation based on secret evidence. The Public Safety Act also allows the government to amend other acts to advance the fight against terrorism. It was by this means that IRPA was amended, and a provision was included which impedes a refugee claimant from continuing with the process if they are a member of an “inadmissible group” (Adelman, 2002:8).

The IRPA regulates all aspects of immigration and refuge in Canada. It is known as a “context” law, whose primary function is to provide general principles regarding immigration and refugee, and grant sufficient power to the government to develop laws using their legislative power. In the text of the IRPA, the refugee claimant is considered an individual in need of protection, as per the humanitarian tradition that has characterized Canada in the international arena. On the other hand, under the IRPA the refugee claimant is also seen as a potential immigrant, and as such a clear relationship is established between the refugee and their ability to successfully integrate into Canadian society. Therefore, the immigration officer who decides on a refugee’s claim also takes into consideration their ability to successfully establish themselves in Canada. At the same time, the IRPA establishes protection as a central selection principle, and, in contrast with the previous Act (1978), gives priority to the principle of protection over the ability to establish oneself, which has allowed those who are considered “vulnerable” to be exempt of those requirements. This includes women who enter the “Women at Risk” program².

In an antithesis of this, the IRPA veers towards the securitization of issues of immigration and refuge, and as such the refugee claimant can also be a potential terrorist or present a security risk. This can be seen in increasing powers of detention, and the increase in the use of Security Certificates that give the government the ability to detain persons considered inadmissible based on evidence that is kept secret for supposed national security reasons³. Refugee claimant rights have also been restricted given that, to date (November 2007), the Appeals Division has not been implemented for those claimants who are denied, and hearings for refugee claims are heard by only one member of the Immigration and Refugee Board rather than two, as was the case in the previous Act (see Appendix 1, Refugee claim process).

In the area of gender, the most important advance in the current legislation is the implementation of the Gender Analysis, whereby Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the Immigration and Refugee Board and the Canadian Border Services Agency are required to present an annual report to parliament on the impact of the Act on women. A recent report, nevertheless, indicates that the IRPA’s commitment to a gender analysis has not been achieved, and efforts have been limited to the

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2. The Women at Risk program was introduced in 1988 to offer women claimants access to more equal opportunities for resettlement than had existed in the past, ensuring that the evaluation of their ability to successfully resettle took into account their circumstances. These may be women without the normal protection of a family unit, who find themselves in a precarious situation where local authorities are unable to insure their safety. It includes women who have experienced significant difficulties, such as abuse by local authorities or by members of their own communities.
 3. In February of 2007 the Supreme Court ruled that security certificates violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but suspended the nullification of the certificates for one year to allow Parliament to modify the law. Therefore, during this period the government can continue to use security certificates.

planning phase (Dauvergne, Angeles and Huang, 2006). In regards to the Canadian refugee system, it is important to recognize advances on gender issues, such as the implementation of the Guidelines for Women Refugee Claimants fearing Gender-Related Persecution, and the implementation of the Women at Risk program which, for example, has been applied in the case of the resettlement of Colombian women who were living in a refugee like situation in Ecuador. The advances in the act, nevertheless, have not had a significant impact on the wellbeing and protection of refugee claimants, which leads Dauvergne, Angeles and Huang (2006) to conclude that persons who request refugee status in Canada in 2006 find themselves in a worse situation than those who applied prior to this legislation.

Quebec as a Distinct Society

The recognition of Quebec as a distinct society within Canada, with a different language, culture, traditions and values than those of English heritage, is consecrated in the constitution. As we shall see, this has a direct influence on immigration issues. This singularity of Quebec, and its vision of itself as a province with a unique cultural and linguistic identity and a nationalist political history, constitute the background for the processes and variations of Colombian refugee experience in the province. It has, then, geographic and cultural characteristics that differentiate it from the rest of Canada. Its French origin shaped its laws, traditions, a good part of its cultural traditions, and made French the primary means of communication. In this way, Canada is recognized as a bilingual and federal nation, and Quebec as a province with a special status, different from that of other Canadian provinces (Fontaine, 1995).

In the 70s several factors influenced the government of Quebec to take a new stand on immigration. The strengthening of the provincial government inside the federation and its modernization are two of these factors. The shift to being a state-province and the transformation of social and political relationships that characterized the period is known as the “quiet revolution”, and was accompanied by a change in Quebec nationalism, which became more open but also more assertive inside Canadian federalism. It was also a time of reformulation of identity, this time more explicitly circumscribed to the space of Quebec.

The desire of the provincial government to get involved in the development of immigration policies, as well as being based on the conviction that immigration represents an economic, social and cultural contribution, should also be understood in the context of these broader transformations. The emergence of a Quebecois neo-nationalism, which broke from traditional nationalism, is tied to the economic stabilization of the middle class and the formation of a Franco-elite in Montreal which would become a jumping off point for the mobilization of Quebecois for a more egalitarian redistribution of power between French-Canadians and English-Canadians, and the end of the primacy of the English language in Montreal (Bilge, 2003).

The steps towards cultural pluralism in 1977 were the beginning of a very particular way of managing the different migratory flows that entered the territory of Quebec. Since the beginning of the century, the province had been demanding a role in the selection of its immigrants, in a way that would allow it to develop adaptation and

integration activities. This management has differentiated it in part from the rest of Canada and the policy known as multiculturalism. The government of Quebec does not grant political citizenship but, since 1990, it has defined certain parameters of national belonging, attempting to define a citizenship that is anchored in the Quebecois project of seeking a cultural identity and the individual adhesion of its residents to the traits of the cultural majority population and a contract that defends its interests.

Though the province does not have complete management of its immigration and integration policy, its various public policies have explicit demographic, economic, linguistic and humanitarian objectives. Since 1968 the province of Quebec has participated in a much more concrete and active way in the determination of the migration of immigrants to the province.

The Canadian and Quebec governments issued a series of legal and social measures as part of the adjustment to cultural pluralism to insure better integration of immigrants. But this pluralist project, in the context of a nationalist vision and a cultural identity accented as “French”, has faced resistance and obstacles, much as multiculturalism has in the rest of Canada. Since the 90s, studies of immigrants have confirmed that this population faces social adjustment difficulties (Sharma, 1980). Men, women and children face prejudice, discrimination, and inadequate public services. The weakness of these policies in this sense is that they do not appropriately consider the multidimensional nature of this process, and therefore the government does not dedicate the necessary resources to promoting the full participation of these groups in the diverse spheres of collective life.

SELECTION, SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES

Humanitarian Protection and Borders: The Safe Third Country Agreement

In recent years Canada implemented a series of measures which created barriers for those seeking protection, such as refugees (Harvard Law School, 2006). The Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA) signed between Canada and the United States which went into effect in December of 2004 is the most recent example. By means of this agreement Canada and the United States mutually recognize each other as a safe third country and agree that authorities in each country may return those asylum applicants who attempt to enter Canada through the United States or the United States through Canada. The principle under which it functions is that if a person seeks refuge in another country, but has first passed through a country considered “safe”, that person should file their claim in the first country through which they pass. Those who have family members in their country of destination are excluded from this act, as are unaccompanied minors, those who have a family member with a pending refugee claim before the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board, and those who have current visas.

The Canadian government had been seeking an agreement such as this for several years, given that a third of its refugee claimants (up through 2004) came through the United States (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2005). To Canadian officials the refugee problem in Canada is, in part, economic – based on the high number of claimants awaiting their decision and the

cost the country thus incurs (Rashid, 2006). On the other hand, there is also a generalized perception, frequently used as an argument to justify the establishment of stricter controls and criteria for accepting refugees into Canada, that the system is the victim of abuse and is used as a way to immigrate to Canada (according to the Fraser Institute, as a 'self-selection program for immigrants') and enjoy the benefits that it offers (for example, permanent residency, employment, health care) and get involved in criminal or terrorist activity (Gallager, 2003).

The Canadian Council for Refugees (2005b), Amnesty International and the Harvard School of Law argue that the agreement puts refugees in danger of being denied access to fundamental rights. It also restricts access to the Canadian system of protection, deprives individuals of the right to decide where to file their refugee claim, and obliges potential claimants to do so in the United States.

Once the treaty went into effect it meant that after the 29th of December, 2004, the passage of potential refugee claimants who attempted to enter Canada from the United States would be controlled and restricted. Rumour circulated amongst them that "the border was going to be shut down", which led to a massive move towards it, especially at the Buffalo (US) – Fort Erie (Canada) crossing. This is how the situation was described by Colombian women who crossed the border in those days on their way to London:

María: It was traumatic because we all got there at the same time, there was no space, there was no where to walk, the woman (who was attending at Vive la Casa) had a very big heart, but she couldn't take us all in. [...] It was truly traumatic, people were coming through

fast and it got really backed up then [...] We were all Colombians. There were a very few Africans, but we were all Colombians.

[...]

Lucía: (...) they shut it (the border) down, and there were like 1,000 people there at the border.

Gloria: You mean like a thousand people weren't able to get through?

María: They sent some people back, they sent back 50, immigration got them and sent them back (...) I knew a family that was coming from Los Angeles (...), my friend called from Los Angeles, saying, "how is it possible that they were advised to go to the border and at the border they turned them back and they were caught", she said that they had to help her or she would sue them. Through her they got attorneys and that was the only family that didn't get deported, the rest were all deported. (...) It was like it was the end of the world because everyone was shoving. In the family I was telling you about the mother broke her foot because everyone wanted to get through, like in the movies.

Gloria: What happened was that when people got there they wouldn't give them service, because there were so many people. And when they sent them back United States immigration grabbed all of them and deported them, because they could no longer live in Vive la Casa because they didn't have documents. And if they did have documents it didn't matter because they were on American soil, and it was obvious that they were undocumented (...). There were a lot of them, like 1000 people, there were 1,000

people trying to pass at a time when there were only two people working at immigration. (Women's memory workshop, London)⁴.

Though there has indeed been a drastic reduction in the number of Colombians who file refugee claims, Colombia continues to be, in 2005 and 2006, one of the top source countries of refugees at Canadian borders. At the Fort Erie port of entry in the East of Canada, 42% of refugee petitions presented in 2005 were from Colombians (Peace Bridge Newcomer Centre Handout, 2005) and according to Immigration Canada, 49% of the applicants came from the Americas, with Colombia in first place.

The accord obliges Colombians who have come through the US to file a refugee claim in that country, which has dramatically reduced the possibility of filing a successful claim. While the acceptance rate for Colombians in Canada used to hover between 78 and 81% between 2003-2004, in the United States it was low (45% when an asylum claim was filed and 22% when the case was presented before an immigration judge). The refugee law in the United States has a much more restrictive definition of refugee, and a series of provisions that particularly impact Colombians (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2005c, 2006; Harvard Law School, 2006). For example:

- *No access to the protection system.* In the US refugee system a one year limit of residence in the US is established during which one must file for asylum, a measure which is incompatible with international refugee laws, which establish that one's application can not be excluded from review because one does not meet the formal requirements (Harvard Law School, 2006).

- *The "Real ID Act"* approved by George Bush in 2005 denies refugee status to

persons who have provided material aid to a terrorist organization, without taking into consideration whether an individual was forced to do so (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2006). In the case of Colombians this affects those who have been forced to pay "taxes" (vaccinations) to the guerrilla or the paramilitaries, a common situation in the country, as this is one way these armed groups finance themselves and is one of the general reasons that ranchers and farmers abandon their lands. The act also places new requirements on applicants, demanding that they present evidence of their persecution, and gives judges the discretion to judge the credibility of the applicant based on factors such as their demeanour, behaviour and inconsistencies in their testimony.

- *The detention of asylum applicants* and their inhumane treatment in the country's jails.

These shifts in refugee policy will have repercussions on the means used to cross the border by those who are seeking asylum in Canada, and promote a dangerous and illegal atmosphere at the border (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2006; Harvard Law School, 2006). What is anticipated is that contraband, human trafficking and coyote routes (the contracting of the services of smugglers) will increase, and that those who seek asylum will use these mechanisms, which present various security risks. The most recent report on the accord presented by the Harvard law school affirms that attorneys and community workers are

4. The comments of these women coincides with that of a York University student and members of the Canadian Council of Refugees who distributed an email documenting the chaos and confusion at the border during the last few days of December, 2004. This resulted from the large number of people who had to wait for many hours in the cold, and because instructions were given only in English and the majority of those there were Spanish-only speaking, with only a few French speakers.

hearing more frequently about attempts to illegally cross the border and the use of coyote routes. Likewise, during fieldwork in London and Sherbrooke we heard of the increase of these means as a last resort among those who find themselves in the US and are seeking refuge in Canada.

The Harvard law school data search concluded that in March of 2006, after 15 months of STCA implementation, it had not met its goals of making the border more secure, but rather quite the opposite, that the accord was putting asylum applicants' lives at risk and threatening the security of the US and Canada. This same conclusion has been documented and affirmed by the Canadian Council of Refugees, who, along with Amnesty International, the Canadian Council of Churches, and a Colombian refugee applicant in the United States, filed a legal challenge to the agreement in Canadian court. The CCR also appealed to the federal cabinet to annul the status of the US as a safe country, given that diverse elements of its refugee policy threaten the safety of refugees and violate international protection standards.

Canada is part of a general trend on the part of those countries that have characteristically been refugee recipients towards restricting and raising obstacles to asylum applicants' access to refugee determination systems (Rashid, 2006). According to Rashid (2006), these barriers or agreements treat all immigrants equally, and therefore do not recognize those that seek asylum as a unique group who have to flee their country of origin because their government is incapable or unwilling to protect them from the persecution or threat that they face. The Safe Third Country agreement has the potential to completely and effectively close off Canada as a country of asylum for those refugees, such as Colombians, who can not arrive at its borders without passing through the United States.

In conclusion, and as has been noted in previous reports, the STCA operates as a mechanism to impede or prevent the arrival of potential refugee claimants to Canadian borders. As such, the asylum and protection program for refugee claimants inside of Canada has been weakened, while the pattern of an ever greater reduction in refugee claims inside of Canada continues. According to the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) in 2006 the second lowest number of claims was filed in the entire history of the IRB⁵.

The impact of the closing off of refugee opportunities also had repercussions inside Citizenship and Immigration Canada, whose refugee office had its personnel and budget cut. On a provincial level, the system of support and services for refugee claimants that nonprofit organizations offered in a province such as British Columbia practically disappeared when the provincial government did not renew financing to agencies that provided information, support and orientation for refugee claimants. As one of the service providers notes, refugee claimants are not seen by any part of the government, or even by ethnic communities, as "a kind of a sexy group to be helping". These agencies have continued to operate with reduced budgets and personnel. As a result, their ability to help refugee claimants has been seriously affected.

The Federal Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP)⁶

The Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) is a program of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), through which

5. See http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/dpr-rmr/0506/IRB-CISR/irb-cisr02_e.asp

6. Francisco Vidal assisted with the collection and analysis of information for this section of the document.

the federal government selects and supports refugees abroad for their immigration to Canada as permanent residents. CIC contracts organizations, generally non-profit organizations that provide services to immigrants, to administer and provide direct services to government assisted refugees (GAR) and those who have mixed government/ private sector sponsorship.

In 1974, a Cabinet decision directed the Department of Manpower and Immigration to undertake the full responsibility for reception, settlement (including employment), accommodation and information regarding services. As a result the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP) was established in 1974, which formalized the funding of community agencies for the provision of settlement services that were culturally appropriate and offered in the native language of immigrants and refugees.

Once refugees arrive in Canada, immigrant service agencies are responsible for providing welcome, information and settlement services to GARs. Refugees under this program receive economic support from the federal government during their first year in Canada, and in special needs cases for up to 24 months. The program functions under the responsibility of the federal government, and its services include reception at the airport, temporary housing and orientation on life in Canada, in the native language of the refugee. These services are to be provided during the first six weeks of the refugees' arrival in Canada, and at the end of that time it is expected that he or she will have a social insurance number, assistance for finding permanent housing, a health insurance card, be registered for the child tax benefit, have a bank account and have received a general health check-up at a local community clinic. Refugees are also eligible for English classes.

With the implementation of the IRPA, the number of individuals considered "special needs" has increased, given that the program now gives priority to the need for protection over the criteria of ability or experience to successfully integrate in Canada. Although this is a positive step towards recognizing the criteria of protection as a priority over the ability to integrate, programs such as RAP are caught in a debate between a political vision and the design of the resettlement program. The integration services under the RAP were designed before the new immigration law went into effect, and do not reflect the profile of the new refugees that are arriving in Canada. Neither the program's budget nor its design has been modified to insure that they adequately serve refugees. According to the local agency that assists government sponsored refugees in Vancouver (Immigrant Services Society, ISS), there has been an increase in refugees with mental and physical health problems, torture survivors, persons who have lived in refugee camps or been displaced for an extended period of time, and those with low literacy or who are illiterate in their native language⁷. At the same time, these agencies find their ability to provide adequate and personalized services compromised by cutbacks in hours and the CIC's emphasis on results.

According to the CIC RAP manual, successful integration of a GAR is defined as "the ability to contribute, free of barriers, to all aspects of Canadian life, that is, economic, social, cultural and political" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1997:9). Nevertheless, RAPs mode of operation, budget and services are a far cry from promoting successful integration.

7. Interview with the settlement services coordinator of ISS, April, 2006.

Agencies contracted by the Canadian government consider that the program has vision and operation problems, and they have been indicating that the emphasis on receiving a greater number of refugees with “special needs” without increasing the budget is contributing the widening of the gap between policy objectives and what is actually achieved. In various conferences and forums, organizations such as the Immigrant Services Society have documented these gaps and the growing marginalization of this group of refugees in terms of access to adequate housing, food security, stable employment, occupation training and language learning.

An evaluation of RAP carried out in 2001 (pre-IRPA) found that the greatest difficulty for beneficiaries of the program in the province of Ontario were the totals assigned for financial assistance (Power Analysis Inc., 2002). Social assistance amounts are calculated for Canadians or permanent residents who are familiar with the labour market, know how to access services through the use of English or French, and have abilities that allow them to be ready for employment. Even so, there is ample documentation across Canada of the inadequacy of those amounts, which have been declining, and which rather than aid in the search for work and insertion in the labour market tend to push those who are on social assistance towards the very low income labour market, and therefore perpetuate an endemic cycle of poverty and social exclusion (Klein and Long, 2003). The aim of income assistance is to provide temporary stability to the user, so that they can seek and obtain employment. Nevertheless, refugees in the main are not familiar with the resources that exist in their cities, nor are they ready to work, given that

most of them do not speak the language and frequently lack certain abilities needed to compete in the Canadian labour market.

The limitations of this income support are aggravated in that GARs arrive in Canada with a large debt to the federal government, given that their transportation to Canada is paid for by a loan offered by the federal government through the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Refugees find that they have to pay back these loans with what they receive as social assistance, or run the risk of falling into default with the federal government. The consequences of falling into default on their immigration loans range from being ineligible to sponsor a member of their family from abroad, to not being eligible for federal student loans. In this sense, refugees resettled from abroad arrive in Canada with huge disadvantages in relation to other immigrants. The political vision emphasizes the goal that government sponsored refugees integrate into Canada during their first year after arrival, but this is an unrealistic vision given the inadequate levels of material income support, and the limited time and support offered, and the limitations of integration and orientation services. A public service provider in the city of Vancouver described the limitations of this vision:

(...) this case it's just referring to GARs type of refugees. that we should put in place a more comprehensive reception kind of a program rather than just say well we supported you for the first year – with language or settlement or whatever and allow me to speak frankly about that because really it's always an issue for me – I mean even regular landed immigrant takes longer than one year to learn the ropes and everything to get on – if you're someone who has the kind of experi-

ences as refugees you can always assume there's a lot more to do – so the one year is barely to get just to the basic level – to get information and try to get a sense of stability and what not and to move on. I think we really need to put in place a kind of a more comprehensive program, and if that's in the works I'd like to hear.⁸

Although Colombian refugees who arrive as GARs do not generally fit the profile of refugees with “special needs” and, as was noted in the socio-demographic profile section, tend to have a higher than refugee average level of education and training⁹, their difficulties are not different than those faced by other government sponsored refugees during the first few years of their stay in Canada. Workshops, interviews and fieldwork with Colombian refugees who received settlement services through this program complement and support the previous description of barriers, and specify other types of obstacles and difficulties. Before summarizing some of these, it is important to note that these refugees arrived directly from Colombia and that before they left the country only a few received a general orientation regarding life in Canada. Most received very little or none at all.

A total of 34 Colombians who participated in the research in the city of Vancouver received support under this program. They noted, for example, significant inconsistencies in airport welcomes, particularly in regards to the presence of someone who spoke Spanish, in the transport to the temporary shelter, and in some cases the assignation of temporary residence apartments where they found themselves having to share with persons who perceived them as associated with certain political sympathies or affiliations opposite to their own, or having to share

space when they were sick or injured. Being welcomed by someone who spoke Spanish was important for those who received it, but for those families who did not it generated a great deal of confusion and disorientation.

The arrival and stay in the shelter or welcome house presented a series of challenges that, as noted by community workers and coordinators of these services, reflect the very design and vision of these programs. These tend to rationalize and instrumentalize support services and modes of delivery of information to refugees, but end up not acknowledging their state of disorientation and the difficulties that refugees face in understanding the accumulated new and complex information. Any new immigrant faces this, but it is particularly difficult for those who have passed through exodus, violence, trauma and forced migration.

Finally, it is important to extrapolate the implications of the use of concepts such as “vulnerable victim” and person with “special needs” that are used in IRPA and materialize in programs such as the RAP. The use of this type of terminology has a historical pattern that has been documented by Pupavac (2006), in which the political image of the refugee that characterizes the post World War II period is transformed from the “heroic as well as intellectual figure as a political fighter for liberty and justice” into a “feminized, traumatized victim”. A young refugee commented on this:

(...) with the people who work with refugees ..., one of the things that I've seen is that they expect that if you're a refugee,

8. Focus group in Vancouver, July 2006

9. According to the Longitudinal Study of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC), 34% of refugees who arrive in Canada have a post-secondary education. In the case of Colombians, the percentage is approximately 44%.

they have to have killed your family, you have to come from a refugee camp, and of course they expect that if you're going to tell a story and count on them, the story (has) to be a dramatic one, out of the movies, and then once again there's the "oh you poor thing, everything you've been through".

The use by managers and workers of images, as described by this youth, of who fits their idea of a "true refugee" has had direct impacts on some Colombians, who, in social assistance offices, immigration or at their employment have faced questioning, doubts and suspicion about their status, based on superfluous elements such as the clothes they use, their mannerisms, and their confidence in themselves and the initiative that they show.

In this sense, GARs marginalisation and weak access to services and the difficulties that they face in the first few years of their integration process are a result of the design of the program, more than an increase in the number of vulnerable or special needs persons. It operates with a fragmented short-term vision which does not take into account the dynamics and conditions of those who have been the victims of displacement, war or violence, nor their ability to respond to accumulated information, demands and expectations regarding their future in Canada.

Settlement and Integration Policies and the Provinces¹⁰

Since the middle of the nineties, the restructuring of the Canadian welfare state adopted a strategy of turning programs and fiscal responsibility over to provinces, under the neoliberal logic that this would control the national deficit (Creese, 1998). The federal government announced during those years its intention to delegate to

provinces the responsibility for integration of immigrants and refugees, and specifically its settlement and English instruction programs. Currently six provinces and one territory have signed immigration and refugee agreements with the federal government.

All of the provinces examined in this study, that is, Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia, have signed bilateral treaties with the federal government regarding immigration. In the case of Quebec the agreements with the federal government allow it to progressively widen the scope of its intervention and increase its powers in immigration matters. The first agreement, Entente Cloutier-Lang (1971), concedes an information role to Quebecois agents who work abroad, and their representation in the Canadian embassy. The Bienvenue-Andras agreement (1975) expanded this role such that these agents could issue their, non-binding, decision regarding the choice of any candidate to settle in Quebec. The third, Couture-Cullen (1977), gives the province the power to define its own immigrant and refugee selection criteria for those who are abroad, and provides for collaboration between the two governments on decisions regarding migratory flows.

In 1991 the Canada-Quebec treaty was signed. It is the most complete immigration treaty signed to date between the federal government and a province. The accord recognizes the distinct character of Quebec society, and the province's exclusive responsibility for selecting immigrants in the independent category, as well as refugees selected abroad and other persons in need of protection. What is more, it also confers relative control over welcoming, and the linguistic, economic and cultural

10. Sherman Chan and Ayesha Haider collaborated with us on the information collection and analysis for this section.

integration of newcomers. Final admission decisions remain in the hands of the federal government. The federal government retains the responsibility for national norms and objectives, and determines admissibility to Canada after carrying out health and safety checks. Refugee and family reunification claimants continue in federal jurisdiction. The Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement, was signed on November 21, 2005. This five-year agreement signals a shared desire to optimize the economic benefits of immigration and ensure that immigration policies and programs respond to Ontario's social and economic development and its labour market priorities. The Agreement breaks new ground since it lays the foundation for the two levels of government to work collaboratively with Ontario municipalities and official language communities to improve the social and economic integration of immigrants¹¹. As of 2004, British Columbia is responsible for the settlement of its immigrants and refugees. An agreement between the province and the federal government gives the province primary responsibility for the design, administration and implementation of settlement and integration services for immigrants and refugees, and permits BC to control migration and maximize its economic and social benefits (CIC, 2004).

The settlement and integration needs of immigrants and refugees include immediate needs, such as housing and health care access, as well as long term needs, such as finding employment in one's area of expertise. The means by which Canadian public policy operates, nevertheless, tends to ignore the fact that the process of getting established and integrated has several stages and involves various public policy areas (Wayland, 2006). So while the federal government is responsible for immigration

policies, human rights legislation and the National Health Act, provincial governments have jurisdiction over those services most used by immigrants: health, education, social services, legal assistance and the professional associations that regulate professional practices. These jurisdiction problems lead to incoherent policies that create systematic barriers in diverse settlement arenas (Wayland, 2006):

Jurisdiction over immigration is shared between the federal government and the provinces and territories. Municipalities, which have very little jurisdiction, receive the vast majority of immigrants and are out front in terms of trying to accommodate the needs of immigrants. In addition to the constrictions of vertical jurisdiction, horizontal jurisdiction between departments and ministries means that policies created to respond to different aspects of settlement, for example health, or human capital development, tend to be fragmented.

This can be seen in the fragmentation of jurisdiction and responsibility for migratory matters as much as in the budget area designations, which are based strictly on quantitative criteria (number of immigrants), in the separate products expected of these programs which emphasize results measurement, and in the short duration of settlement and language learning programs. This vision creates numerous obstacles to the incorporation of immigrants and refugees, which frequently contradict the very principles stipulated in laws and agreements, such as the incoherence and lack of coordination of public policies and particularly their programs and procedures.

As a result of this complexity many governmental agencies have not assumed their

11. <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pub/annual-report2006/section2.html>

responsibility for settlement matters, even when a significant percent of their users are recent immigrants. The responsibility has fallen on Citizenship and Immigration Canada, provincial governments, and non-profit agencies or organizations financed by the government to carry out settlement programs and language learning (Wayland, 2006). Leaving immigration matters and the implementation of immigration policy to organizations that are considered specialized in the matter has various implications. So, for example, ministers such as the Minister of Human Resources who is in charge of labour matters and the creation of employment, the Minister of Social Assistance (at a provincial level), or the very Minister of Canadian Heritage (who deals with issues of citizen participation and multiculturalism) do not consider the process of settlement and integration of immigrants as matters within their domain, nor have they made the organizational or systematic changes needed to become organizations which include and do not discriminate against new immigrants and refugees, in their programs as well as in their hiring practices.

Public policy regarding settlement, at a national as well as a provincial level, focuses on the first few years after arrival to Canada and does not establish differences (in terms of programs, services, or integration expectations) between immigrants and refugees. Programs for immigrants financed by provincial governments, for example, only cover immigrants who have been in the country for less than three years. This policy management assumes that immigrants and refugees no longer need assistance once they have acquired Canadian citizenship, and that their process of incorporation into Canadian society is resolved during the first three years of their stay in Canada (Wayland, 2006). Agencies that work with immigrants and

refugees consider this criteria for access to their services to be highly inappropriate and emphasize the importance of understanding that the settlement and integration process are long term and that the needs of immigrants, and in particular of refugees, are more extensive and complex than those considered by governmental programs. In essence, the criteria and expectations of a settlement and integration process that is achieved in a period of three years does not match the process that an immigrant to Canada actually has to go through to establish themselves, not only in matters of employment, but also in matters of language and stabilization in terms of housing and education.

Settlement, Information and Welcoming Policies and Programs

The Canadian immigration policy goal of “successful integration” of immigrants is primarily channelled into the funding of welcoming and language learning programs, which operate with variations across the provinces. In each of these areas the Ministry in charge of immigration issues in each province contracts with service agencies to carry out the programs according to pre-established policies and procedures. This is done through open bidding in British Columbia and Ontario. Under these programs, immigrant and refugee service agencies receive funds for the provision of orientation services, information, and referrals to other services. These programs offer orientation on a variety of aspects of life in Canada (housing, citizenship, education, employment, health, transportation, etc.), and seek to familiarize new immigrants with how the Canadian system functions and existing community resources, as well

as aiding them to connect with resources, programs and institutions that can assist their “integration and adjustment” process, as well as knowledge of existing laws and resources.

In general terms, settlement of new immigrants can be understood as a process of different stages of adaptation, adjustment and integration into the new society. The programs and services that the individual and family require at each stage can be different, but at any rate, a mastery of the language and social and economic participation is necessary (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, 1999:16).

In Quebec, the term “adaptation” in the administrative vocabulary refers to the learning by immigrants of how public institutions function in Quebec and their ability to use institutional resources. “Integration” refers more to the interventions that aim to evaluate the mentalities, behaviours and attitudes of the groups and individuals of all cultures, thereby assuring social cohesion (Fontaine, 1993:59).

Quebec

The Ministry of Cultural Communities and Immigration, Ministère des Communautés Culturelles et de l’Immigration (Gouvernement du Québec, 1981), is responsible not only for managing immigration policy and the integration and adaptation of newcomers, but also the integration of cultural minorities¹² born to immigrants (Gouvernement du Québec 1990:7, translation by authors). Their program was detailed in the action plan “So many ways to be Quebecois: action plan for cultural communities”, “Autant de façons d’être Québécois: Plan d’action à l’intention des communautés culturelles” (Gouvernement du Québec, 1981). This

action plan had three objectives: 1. The maintenance and development of cultural communities; 2. Sensitizing native Quebecois to immigrants’ contributions to the common heritage; 3. Facilitate their integration into Francophone Quebec society (Bibeau, 2002).

The election of the Parti Québécois in 1994 and the “no” referendum on Quebec sovereignty in 1995 led to a new emphasis on “citizenship”. The name of the Ministry of Immigration was changed to the Ministry of Citizen Relations and Immigration, Ministère de Relations avec les citoyens et de l’Immigration (MRCI) (1996), which marks the clear desire to emphasize what unites and gathers, over the particularities of the diverse components of Quebec society (MRCI, 2000:20). Another political orientation and essential condition for integration is the “moral contract” which defines the duties and responsibilities of immigrants and the receiving society, combined with the concept of a “common public culture” as a basis for the integration process.

These values, then, become the primary referents for discourse in Quebec on the integration and interculturalism of immigrants. Equal in rights and responsibilities, citizens are invited to join a public common culture, despite their differences. That is to say that on top of the request that was already being made of immigrants to integrate in French, from now on they should also commit to respecting the set of norms and values that prevail in Quebec on issues such as: democracy, secularism, the peaceful resolution of conflicts, pluralism, respect for cultural patrimony, and equality between men and women (Labelle; Beaudet; Tardif and Levy, 1993).

12. Individual immigrants and descendants of immigrants of other than British origin who have known or know forms of socialization different than that of the cultural majority population.

British Columbia

The issue of immigration is key in BC, given that immigrants arriving to the province represent 16% of the national total, and the province in 2005 ranked as the second top destination of immigrants to Canada (Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, 2005; CIC, 2005). According to goals established between the federal and provincial government, nearly 40,000 immigrants arrive in BC each year, and of this total only 800 are refugees.

The Ministry of the Attorney General, through its Multiculturalism and Immigration Branch, establishes provincial policy and the programmatic areas under which organizations that provide programs and services to immigrants are financed. The Multiculturalism and Immigration Branch, through its Settlement and Multiculturalism Division, administers the funds and programs directed at settlement and the adaptation of immigrants, and establishes programmatic areas within each of its programs. At the moment (2007), the division manages two central programs: the British Columbia Anti-Racism and Multiculturalism Program (BCAMP) and the British Columbia Settlement and Adaptation Program (BCSAP).

After the agreement was signed with the federal government in 2004, the liberal government of Gordon Campbell introduced changes to the criteria/procedures for the funding of immigration programs, and at the same time implemented serious cuts to services for immigrants and refugees. The Ministry, arguing that it sought more open, transparent and responsible contracting for its programs, introduced a bidding system for the allocation of funds. By means of this

procedure various organizations found not only the existence of some of their programs threatened, but also their very existence as organizations. This turn to a competitive system had broad repercussions on services for immigrants, and particularly refugees, and on the dynamics of this sector, given that agencies accustomed to working cooperatively found themselves facing a system that set them up to compete amongst themselves for funds that were at the same time drastically reduced. As a result of this change, two of the only three agencies that offered specific services for refugee claimants in Vancouver practically disappeared and had to reduce their operations to a minimum, while agencies that offered information and support to immigrants in certain areas of Vancouver (generally those with the highest concentration of people living in poverty) saw their programs seriously reduced (Bcsiwa, 2005; Riaño Alcalá, 2005).

The emphasis of this system in allocating funding for programs and services is on economic efficiency (the value of dollar invested per person), in terms of the number of persons to whom service is provided. The tendency is that those agencies that are most successful are those that generally attend the greatest number of clients within the limit of hours, and it has been observed that this can compromise quality and the humanistic orientation of that service. Likewise, funding is assigned based on the number of arrivals (landings) of new immigrants per geographic area, which creates a bias towards the provision of services to economic class immigrants (given that the highest percentage of immigrants in BC fall into this class) and clearly disfavours refugees (Riaño Alcalá, 2005).

A review of these two areas of the provincial immigration program indicates serious obstacles and limits for the provision of adequate services, not only because funding is not sufficient nor stable, but because the design of the programs tends to foster the fragmentation of services between agencies who compete for the same resources, limited communication between agencies, and between services areas and governmental agencies, continuous changes in funding criteria, and little recognition of the particularities of the processes faced by different immigrants, and particularly by refugees (Abrahamson, 2005; Bcsiwa, 2005; Taviss and Simces, 2004). So, for example, the design of these programs and the way in which they are structured basically responds to the needs of adult immigrants and government sponsored refugees, but presents orientation and systematic obstacles to access for refugee claimants. What is more, there are limitations in the time of service and duration of programs and a lack of recognition of refugees as a group whose profile requires adaptations to programs that are ever more lacking, as much for settlement policies as for orientations and visions of the criteria for bidding and funding of settlement programs. One of the conclusions were presented in the evaluation of this program is that since 2002 a dramatic erosion has been observed in the infrastructure, community capacity and support systems that aid in the integration of immigrants.

Ontario

The Ministry in charge of immigration issues in this province is the Ministry of Immigration and Citizenship of Ontario. It is in charge of the administration of the Newcomer Settlement Program, through

which the ministry supports organizations that provide settlement, orientation, employment search and other direct settlement services. The ministry is also responsible for implementing and codifying the Immigration Canada-Ontario Agreement, as well as coordinating the development of provincial strategies for meeting Ontario's immigration and settlement goals.

Immigration is fundamental for a province such as Ontario, which each year receives more than 125,000 new immigrants (Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Ontario, 2005). More than half of the population that immigrates to Canada annually settles in Ontario, whereas as Quebec receives 17% and BC nearly 16%. Eighty-four percent of new immigrants settle in the greater Toronto area (GTA), and approximately 50% in the city of Toronto. Currently immigration supplies 70% of the net increase in the labour force.

Given all of the above, on November 21st of 2005, the government of Ontario signed a formal agreement with the government of Canada with the aim of increasing the financial investment, as well as identifying mechanisms and methods for increasing the attraction, settlement, training and retention of immigrants and refugees to Canada (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, 2005). This investment could significantly address the financial burden of the province, which currently spends approximately \$109 million (CAD) annually in welcoming, settlement, language training and employment search services for new immigrants.

The primary settlement programs are offered by the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), that is to say, by the federal government. These programs are 'Host' and

the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP), and provide direct services to immigrants. On the other hand, the provincial government, through the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, administers the Newcomers Settlement Program (NSP), which provides funding to community agencies for them to provide settlement services. In this way basic settlement services are provided by the federal government through school boards, community colleges, and agencies or organizations that provide services to new immigrants. In Ontario, the ISAP is an initiative of the federal government that was launched in 1974. The primary objective of the program is to aid in the settlement and integration of new immigrants into Canadian society so that they can actively participate in it.

In the specific case of Ontario, in the mid 90s the sector providing services for new immigrants was threatened due to the cutbacks in the budgets of the agencies that provided these services and the adjustments that they had to make given the implementation of the federal plan known as Settlement Renewal. A study done by the University of Toronto in 1996 by Dr. Usha George found that 84% of the agencies she studied were affected by budget cuts (George, 1996a). This dramatic budget cut caused many of the programs for new immigrants to disappear. Agencies also had to take on administration of settlement programs, as required by the Federal Settlement Renewal plan. This plan had as its primary goal transferring responsibility for the provision of settlement services to lower levels of government and/or local coordinators (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, 1999:15).

These changes in the sector created a feeling of urgency and necessity on the part of agencies, workers and academics to lobby and to develop research which demonstrated the risk of the sad state of the sector, given that the fear was that budget cuts would compromise agencies' ability to respond to the needs of new immigrants (Sadiq, 2004:1). As a result of the changes in 1995, both the federal and provincial governments abandoned direct service provision to new immigrants and became contractors with those in the non-profit as well as the for-profit sector who provided these services to new immigrants. Subsequently in Ontario, CIC directly finances 79 agencies through its regional office Oasis. This system has created a disparity between service providing agencies, in which a "select" group of agencies (those that are larger, have greater capacity, and offer different services) win the contracts with the government (Sadiq, 2004). On the other hand smaller agencies, which are generally ethno cultural organizations, are not able to compete with the larger ones. This has led to some being dependent on others and vice versa, as the larger agencies need the ethnic agencies for cultural matters and the ethnic agencies need the larger ones to gain access to government funds (Sadiq, 2004).

The orientation of Canadian immigration and settlement policy stipulates that all immigrants are to be treated equally and offered the same services. This criteria of similar treatment has had a negative impact on groups such as refugees, who generally require different services and whose needs or situation frequently require a greater dedication of time, the consideration of multiple aspects of their settlement process, and a different sort of attention. With the

imposition of a bidding system for project funding this tendency has gotten worse, given that those agencies who provide services to refugees tend to invest more time in those groups, which puts them at a disadvantage in bidding since they can not show efficiency in the number of persons served. Likewise, those agencies that win the bidding may consider that services for refugees block them from meeting their goals and thereby deny them services or inadequately provide them.

Language Learning Policies and Programs

The Canadian government has considered the learning one of the two official languages as a central strategy in the immigrant integration policy. That is to say, it is seen as a mechanism for facilitating the “successful integration” of the immigrant not just because he or she learns to speak one of the official languages, but because during that learning, citizenship values are promoted and immigrants are familiarized with Canada’s social, geographical and cultural aspects. Therefore since the 90s English and French classes have emphasized language learning for integration¹³. According to Derwing and Thompson (2005), the tie that binds the Canadian integration policies through language learning is the consideration that language learning aids in integration and that learning citizenship values is intrinsic to Canadian nation building and is beneficial for immigrants.

Free language learning programs are developed with federal and provincial funds and in cooperation with Community Colleges, School Boards, and immigrant service organizations, and in Quebec also with universities. The programs are aimed at new adult immigrants and include convention refugees, but do not cover

refugee claimants (with the exception of British Columbia). In most provinces this program is known as Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), which includes both English and French instruction. In British Columbia this program is known as English Services for Adults (ELSA), and in Quebec it is known as Francisation and is financed by the Ministère des relations avec les citoyens.

In Quebec, the strategic plan established by the MRCI in 2001 defined eleven strategic orientations for the 2001-2004 period. The primary goals were to increase the volume of admissions from 40,000 a year to 50,000 and the proportion of francophone immigrants from 44% of the total to more than 52% in 2004. The policies for French language learning and socio-economic integration were reinforced, and a reform of French language teaching was put forward. These services began to be offered at educational sites, primarily colleges (Cegeps) and universities, in conjunction with the community sector. The conception and implementation of *carrefours* (centralized integration centres) has been the key element of this reform carried out in 1999-2000.

A study carried out by Friesen and Hyndman (2005) on settlement services and language learning in Canada indicates that BC is the province that spends the least money per capita on English instruction, although in 2003-2004 it was the third highest recipient of new immigrants in the country. During this period BC’s per capita budget for English instruction was \$477 Canadian dollars, in Saskatchewan it was

13. Previously language learning classes emphasized aspects related to employment, and had little content related to social issues in Canada. In the 90s the concept that citizenship ideas and Canadian values could be taught in introductory language classes was taken up again (Derwing and Thompson, 2005).

\$1,083, in Ontario \$655 and in Quebec \$834 (Friesen and Hyndman, 2005).

In BC this service area has also suffered serious budget cuts and changes in the selection criteria of service recipients and the levels of English that are financed. In Quebec the language learning programs have also been affected by the low increases seen in the first years of the 2000s in federal transfers for integration programs¹⁴.

One element to take into consideration in the way in which transfers and budget assignments happen federally is that provinces retain part of the budget destined for specific programs. In the case of the budget assigned for English language instruction in BC, the province retains 48% of the federal funds within its general income fund, and also makes decisions as to the quantity of funds that are directed to each of these programs. In 2004, for example, the government of this province cut English language instruction services by 7%. BC is also the province which fund the fewest levels of English instruction (level 3), which means that new immigrants receive free instruction only up to a low intermediate level that teach basic English (known as “survival English”), but is not enough to enrol in academic studies, nor for employment, much less to discuss and understand complex issues of citizenship, participation, rights and responsibilities in Canada. Additionally, in cities such as Vancouver where immigrants are concentrated, there are waiting lists of up to six months, and much more if one needs child care (Friesen and Hyndman, 2005). Across the country, refugee claimants face this problem much more critically given that they do not have the right to intensive free English classes, as indicated by this worker of Ontario Works, the government agency in charge of social assistance in Ontario:

Probably the largest initial frustration for an individual who is a refugee claimant, if there were any delays on any of the immigration paperwork, at one point in time it was difficult then to register for ESL... now you having to sit and wait that was an obvious sense of frustration, the individual whose family usually wanted to start the day before in the program. So again, I’ve always hated generalizing, but I would say there were no exceptions to this.¹⁵

In 2004 the two ministries in charge of administering language learning services for new immigrants in BC contracted out an evaluation of their programs, including the ELSA program. The results of this evaluation indicated that the most serious problem in service provision resulted from the low funding level of classes for illiterate students, and the funding of English instruction only up to the low intermediate level. This is one of the areas where the goals established for immigration in Canada are clearly inconsistent with the way in which these programs are administered and the way budgeting and cutback decisions are made. Language learning experts also argue that it is unrealistic to think that with introductory and lower intermediate levels students will gain the linguistic ability to participate and integrate into society (Derwing and Thompson, 2005).

Likewise, during focus groups with public officials and community organization workers, as well as during workshops

14. While in the rest of Canada the federal government significantly increased the financial support for integration programs (in 2006-2007 the budget of Citizenship and Immigration Canada for integration programs went from 241 million dollars to 401 million), the transfer of federal money to Quebec for integration of immigrants under the Canada-Quebec accord was calculated at 224 million dollars, that is to say an adjustment of only 26 million dollars more than the previous year (TRCI, 2007).

15. Focus Group London, June 2006

with Colombian refugees in London and Vancouver, it was noted that the current design of English service provision does not recognize different learning styles among students. That is to say, these programs do not adequately consider the differences between, for example, those who have a high level of education, which makes learning a new language easier for them, and seniors, who, along with having a slower learning process, have different integration and English needs, nor the differences for young adults and persons with disabilities.

During focus groups and interviews with public officials and non-governmental organizations, and in workshops with refugees, numerous examples were given of ways in which the design of the policies and programs for language learning presented serious challenges to refugees and did not consider the implications of the experiences of forced migration, trauma and war on language learning processes and the ability of refugees to understand and retain new information. One of the Colombian women who participated in the London workshop summarized some of these elements:

Having been a teacher all of my life, I really feel for the situation of people who arrive past a certain age, say after age 45 ... and the language schools prepare people who are going to continue on with formal studies. But what they need is language for daily use. So there should be linguistic studies of how to teach English to people who are not going on to university, but need to be able to communicate. There are people who show difficulty in learning the language, be it because of age, culture or problems (...) (they) need a methodology and a different English than what is taught in the school.

Another element is the relationship between suffering and trauma and the

learning of a new language. As a supervisor of one of the BC language learning programs explains:

I have had a number of contacts with Colombian students over the past few years and then cases of conflict in some cases and also cases of kind of learning problems related to trauma.., and you know I've had conversations with those students – I mean learning problems relating to trauma – I think this is actually something we need to really pay attention to, but we have students who seem to be perfectly capable people.. you know they have the background [...] and I know they're competent people but they're not learning and they themselves identify it as trauma and I think people know there's been a lot of violence in their lives and many of the families who have come here have experienced some pretty terrible violence [...] I'm aware of this population of Colombian students as being a group who have experienced a really significant amount of violence.

The relationship, or rather the disconnect, between these learning problems and provincial policies is articulated by another member of the focus group, who is an administrator of programs for immigrant students in schools:

I think it hits a policy level and it's provincial policy – it's certainly education policy, it's Federal policy and it's related to the timing after arrival of certain kinds of services and you know within the first year people can get this and that, there's enough research that has been around since Morton Bieser did his

landmark work years ago at looking at the relationship between attempting

to learn prior to having dealt with the trauma and it doesn't work; the trauma needs to be dealt with first, the emotional stuff needs to be dealt with first in order for good effective long term learning to occur. I think that historically we have been working our various systems backwards, we have not adequately taken this into account.

Refugees also mentioned their difficulty with English language learning and their emotional state, and indicated that to be able to learn English they needed a certain level of emotional stability. This is something that many do not have, given that particularly during the first year in Canada they suffered emotional instability, periods of depression and a loss of hope. Two women, one a single mother in Vancouver and the other an adult woman in London, highlighted these aspects:

Well, I didn't stop studying, I kept studying, but still, I didn't do anything. I was just taking up space there, eh? And the first year went by and I had no English, none. I started off well, because I did all right at the first level and I think I advanced a good bit. But then the second level was so much that I couldn't do it anymore.

(...) I think that to study you have to have a bit more calm, I mean, have emotional stability. And the main problem is that I've had a lot of ups and downs, I'm good one day, bad the next ... I have so many things going around in my head that I feel like I'm stuck with English and I'm really upset, I'm going through a rough time, but (...)

But at the same time they recognize that if the atmosphere is right, English or French classes and the relationships that are made there can become an important source of emotional support and support for the initial

settlement process, as noted by this woman in Sherbrooke:

So it turns out that here, then, I go to learn a language. And when I get here, it was a group of seventeen Colombians (...) so I felt like I was learning French in Colombia (...). I was with people from Baranquilla, Bogota, Antioquia, wherever, (...) I mean, for me that time between eight and three in the afternoon, well, they have to speak for themselves, but for me that was like my number one therapy, and they'll tell you, I laughed, talked about dumb stuff, and we butchered French, whatever, we made ourselves understood between French and Colombian (...) for me it was, it wasn't a French class, it was free counselling, in Canada (...) to lower my level of anxiety.

The case studies that are presented in the third part of this document illustrate this set of issues related to second language learning when one has lived through forced migration, as well as the impact that this has on the other ways in which subjects attempt to reconstruct their worlds in a new social environment. In terms of language learning policies and programs in the three provinces, we have highlighted incongruencies between the objectives outlined for immigrants/refugees to integrate into the labour market and exercise citizenship, the levels of language learning that are financed, and the absence of specific programs which take into account refugees' unique situation.

Conclusions

Canadian public policies regarding refugee and its associated programs make up a social and political arena in which various state and nonstate, national and international actors interact. This chapter examined the historical, institutional and juridical

contexts in which Canadian refugee policies are developed and operate, as well as the background and characteristics of the current Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act which regulates all aspects related to the selection, welcome and resettlement of refugees in Canada.

A critical reading of the policies, agreements and programs in this field highlights the greater emphasis on security in migratory affairs and a focus on a crime-security-immigration connection in Canadian immigration laws which creates a situation of greater vulnerability for potential refugees and restricts the possibilities for seeking refuge in Canada. This policy tendency is strengthened by the prevalence of representations of refugees as vulnerable victims with special needs, and at the same time as potential national security threats. The analysis of the Safe Third Country Agreement illustrated this trend and the reduction of refugee claimants at Canadian borders as a result of the restrictions and obstacles to refugee claimants' access to the refugee determination systems.

Although the IRPA presents advances in terms of gender and establishes protection as a central principle in refugee selection, over the ability to successfully settle in Canada, we have noted weaknesses and inconsistencies in the implementation and application of these directives. These inconsistencies point to the gap that exists between policies on paper, signed agreements, and their implementation in each case of selection and settlement of refugees.

This analysis of the policies and programs for the welcome and settlement of refugees, federally as well as provincially, has highlighted that the potential for these programs to support and accompany the process of incorporation and settlement of

refugees is weakened by the inconsistency between public policies in these areas (federal, provincial and even municipal), the creation of systematic barriers to settlement and the fragility and lack of development of information systems and mechanisms through which refugees could learn of their rights and gain a sense of entitlement on the resources and the programs to which they have access. This analysis has also highlighted the difficulties and impact that the three years from arrival limit for programs has on the refugee integration process, and how this does not establish differences (in terms of programs, services or integration expectations) between immigrants and refugees.

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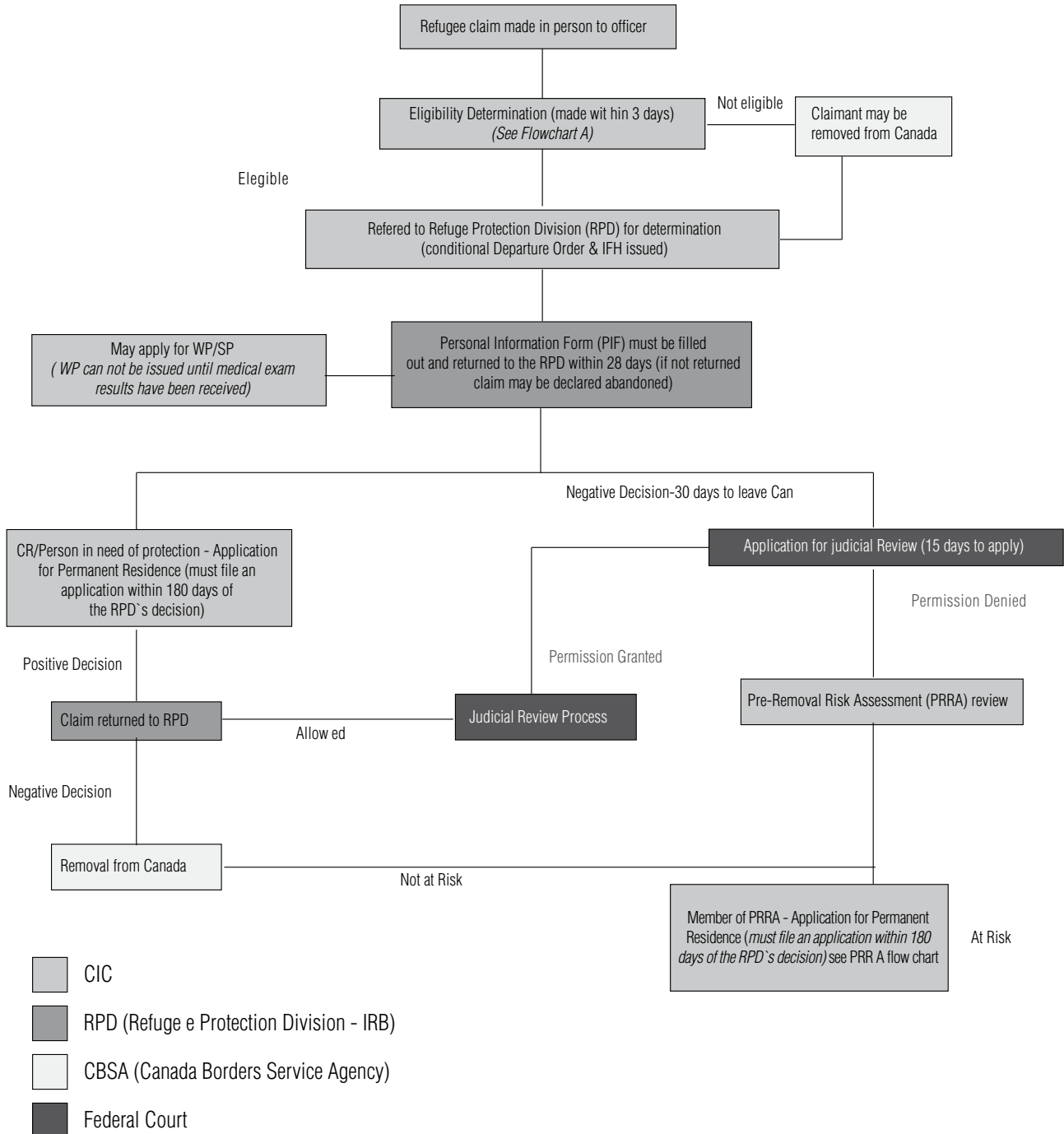
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Appendix

Refugee Determination Process



Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada

PART THREE

REFUGEES' EXPERIENCES OF REFUGE

This section presents the case studies of Colombian refugees' experiences of integration in three Canadian cities: Vancouver, London and Sherbrooke. Fieldwork and data collection was conducted in these three cities using the methods described in the introduction. The results are presented as case studies, that is to say the experience of refugees in each Canadian city are discussed as a case that is more broadly illustrative of practices and relations of Colombian refugees, and that at the same time offers the singularity of the experiences of the refugees in each of these three receiving contexts, marked not only by differences in geographical location

but by linguistic and political differences. In each of these cases we present an analysis of the local context in terms of its social, economic, urban and public policy dynamics. The immigration dynamics, particularly the presence of Latin Americans are also described for each city. The central focus of each case is an in-depth look at the reconstruction of the life plans of Colombian refugees, examining how fear, memory and social representations permeate these processes, as well as looking at the attitudes and perceptions of residents in the receiving society in these cities, and how these influence refugee's processes of reconstruction.

REFUGEES IN VANCOUVER

Martha Colorado
Pilar Riaño Alcalá

INTRODUCTION

In Vancouver we carried out the pilot project for this research, which allowed for fieldwork over two years (2004-2006). This is a synopsis of the most significant results of that experience, in which we present the characteristics of Vancouver as a receiving society, a profile of refugee participants in the project, and their experiences and memories of their departure from Colombia, the

journey, and arrival in Vancouver. We then turn to fear, memory, and relations with the receiving society, and the diverse aspects that affect the reconstruction of their life plans.

The testimonies and experiences of refugees included here reflect a transitory moment in their lives between the end of 2004 and 2006. We emphasize this because we find that their positions and reflections on the refugee experience and their relations

with the new society can change in the space of months, for this is a foundational moment in their existence in the sense that they have to re-make themselves as subjects. This is

why the metaphor of “being reborn”, which appears in the stories of the majority of the refugees, becomes an emblematic phrase that vests the collective experience with meaning.

VANCOUVER AS A RECEIVING SOCIETY

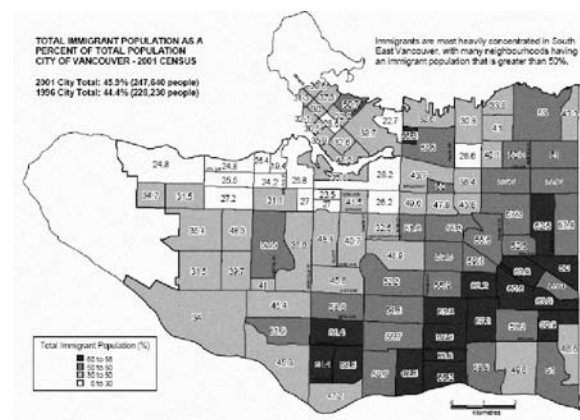
Vancouver is the most important city of the province and of the Canadian Pacific coast. It had a population of more than a half a million inhabitants (578,041) in 2006¹ and it is one of the three Canadian cities (together with Toronto and Montreal) that for many years have received the greatest number of immigrants. According to the information provided on the official web page of the city of Vancouver, based on the census carried out in 2001, 49% of the total population are “visible minorities” (those who are not of Caucasian descent and not white) and 45.9% of the total population are immigrants (those not born in Canada).

Cultural diversity is also expressed in the diversity of languages. It is common for schools to have students that speak more than 20 different languages and have diverse ethnic origins. This cultural diversity tends to be sustained according to the trends outlined by the 2004 study conducted by the Multiculturalism and Human Rights Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage with the objective of projecting the ethnic-cultural diversity of the Canadian population to 2017.

Vancouver has been cited as one of the best places in the world to live, but it is also considered an expensive city that faces critical social issues. Issues of homelessness, income disparities and the growing gap between the rich and the poor affect the city. This tendency is outlined in a document prepared by the Social Planning Department of the City of Vancouver on the social

indicators for the city. This documented illustrates how educational levels are segmented in the city by the economic status of inhabitants, and how those sectors with residents of a higher economic status (the West side of Vancouver) have higher educational levels compared to those sectors with poorer residents (the East side). The immigrant population is concentrated in the East side of Vancouver, as can be seen in the map in figure ¹, and new immigrants are settling in areas where a majority of residents are living at some level of poverty, areas which also have residents with a lower educational level.

Figure 19. Settlement patterns of new immigrants



Source: City of Vancouver, 2003

1. 2006 Census, Accessed at: <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/profiles/community/>

Defined as “low income cut off”. This is precisely the area where the majority of the Latino population lives, as well as the majority of Colombian refugees.

This is confirmed by researchers Picot and Sweetman (2005), in their study on the deteriorating quality of life of immigrants. They conclude that there is a growing deterioration in the quality of life of the most recent immigrants, and that the gap between new immigrants and non-immigrants (those born in Canada) is becoming ever more noticeable. According to the sources consulted, this tendency is visible in Vancouver and will continue to be so if we consider that after 2001 a series of socio-economic measures with serious effect on the poorest sectors have been implemented, such as cuts to social assistance (limited to a maximum of two years), cuts in housing subsidies, child care subsidies, scholarships and financial aid for postsecondary education, etc. (see the analysis of public policy section of this report).

The affluence of the Latino population in Vancouver reached its greatest height during the seventies and eighties, when refugees from Chile and Argentina arrived due to dictatorships in the Southern Cone (Recalde, 2002). Between 1995 and 2005, nearly 2,000 Colombians arrived in Vancouver as residents, and Colombia was the second largest source of Latin American immigrants after Mexico (CIC2, 2005). Of this total, 62% came as economic class migrants (skilled workers) and approximately 27% as refugees. The great majority of these refugees came directly from Colombia, as government assisted refugees (GAR).

According to the report published by the Immigrant Service Society (ISS, 2006),³ between January of 2003 and December of 2005, 175 government assisted refugees from Colombia arrived in Vancouver. Of

these, 67% had been previously internally displaced in Colombia and others were resettled from Ecuador. In comparison with other refugee groups, Colombian refugees have higher levels of postsecondary education - many were attorneys, doctors, union leaders and professors who were living in the large cities of Colombia. Yet at the same time, between 15-20% come from rural areas and farms, and have low levels of education.

REFUGEES IN VANCOUVER: EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES

Profiles, exit, and journeys

The refugees who participated in this study arrived in Canada after 2000, and when the memory workshops were held they had been in Vancouver between six months and five years. A total of 39 Colombians participated in memory workshops and in-depth individual interviews. Most, 34, of them (87.2%) arrived as government assisted refugees (GARs); among these, four had arrived with ministerial visas and two were resettled from Ecuador, five (11.8%) arrived as refugee claimants and filed their claim at the US border, in the province of Ontario or in one case at an airport in the province of Quebec.

The adult participants ranged in age from 25 to 50 years, and the youth, 8 in total (20.5%) ranged from 15 to 22. All of the adults arrived with their families. Six of them were single parents (five women and

2. Citizenship and Immigration Canada. <http://www.cic.gc.ca>

3. Immigrant Services Society (ISS) is the organization in Vancouver that has the contract with Immigration Canada to welcome and assist refugees who arrive through the government assisted refugee program. This organization also administers the Welcome House, which is where Colombian refugees normally live temporarily while they obtain housing.

one man are single heads of household). Most of these refugees (95%) arrived without knowing the language, and 62% of the adults had university degrees and had worked in their profession in Colombia⁴. This group included human rights workers, union leaders, university professors and merchants.

Research participants came from middle and large cities in 13 Colombian departments: Bogotá, 6; other cities in Cundinamarca, 4; Cali, 5; other cities in the Valle, 2; Tolima, 4; Santander del Norte, 3; Santander del Sur, 2; Caldas, 3; Nariño, 2; Huila, 1; Meta, 1; Caquetá, 1; Magdalena, 1; Quindío, 1; Antioquia, 1 y Cauca, 1. This heterogeneity of cities of origin illustrates the reach of the conflict and violence across Colombian territory.

Figure 2 Places of Origin Research Participants



The most common reason for fleeing into exile was having been threatened. In some cases there were assassination attempts, from which they escaped injured or lost a family

member. Some fled because they were witness to massacres, and others to avoid forced recruitment of themselves or their children by armed groups. One family was also affected by kidnapping. In some cases people had lived in a climate of constant intimidation, faced the assassination of members of their family, faced having to make denunciations of corruption, and were residents of the demilitarised zone where negotiations between the government and the FARC guerrillas were held between 2000 and 2001. More than half of participants had to displace internally within Colombia as a means of protection, and in these cases, the family was temporarily separated (seven cases).

For several of the refugees, the refugee claim is experienced not as a legal process that gives them rights defined in international laws of humanitarian protection, but as “a refuge”, understood as a place where they can be protected “until the storm passes in Colombia”. When these refugees left Colombia and arrived in another country with that underlying feeling of it being transitory they felt like temporary visitors, and it was much more difficult for them to reconstruct their life plans in the new place. Several hold on to the idea of returning to Colombia as a dream or future project. Eduardo, a 20 year old youth who arrived with his mother says, “.. My arrival .. was really complicated by communication issues (not being able to speak English) and I was always thinking of my country. Always in my mind I was here somehow or other against my will, and well in my mind I was always thinking about my country, about going back and doing something for my country” (VTJ).

4. This percentage is higher than the national Colombian immigrant average (across all immigrant categories). According to the information provided by CIC (2005), 48% of Colombians are older than 18 and have arrived in Canada between 1995 and 2005, have some degree of university education, some with specializations or diplomas, others with professional degrees, masters or doctorates.

Figure 3 “I was always thinking about my country”



This same feeling of transitoriness is expressed in the words of Fernando, 33, who spoke of how he left as if “for vacation” because he considers his departure temporary, and that later he will be able to

go back: “My path was somewhat simple, but like very traumatic because I left Colombia without thinking about it. So I left as if I were going on vacation, but with the trauma that my wife was a bit sick ...” (VTH).

Most participants arrived directly from Bogotá on flights that stopped in Mexico or a city in the United States (Dallas, Miami and Atlanta were mentioned); some also made stops in Montreal and others in Toronto. Two of the families first landed in the United States, where they lived for several years, and from there entered Canada through Ontario and sought refuge. After living in Ontario (London and Toronto) they secondarily immigrated to Vancouver.

Figure 4. Migration Routes



One family arrived at the Montreal airport, sought refuge there, and later moved to Vancouver because they had a family member in the city. Two women were first accepted as

refugees in Ecuador, one of them first arrived in Ecuador directly through the Rumichaca bridge to Quito and the other through Lago Agrio, where she lived for a short period of

time, and then immigrated to Quito, the city from which both were resettled to Canada. One family of participants first left for a European country and from there came to Canada as government assisted refugees.

Uncertainty and memories of leaving

Uncertainty is a dominant feeling for refugees from the moment they are forced to migrate, and it becomes greater in the face of not knowing the place where they will arrive. In the case of government assisted refugees, the Canadian government decides where to place them. Not knowing where they will arrive puts them in a situation that is outside of their control, since most of them were not informed of the process they were going to go through, nor what their life would be like in Canada. This was discussed by several attending the workshops:

Man 3: The problem of lack of information is very serious.

Man 2: They don't explain anything to you at all ..

Woman 1: I say, all right, I'm getting ready to go. So I start to look into what it's like there, what city I'm going to, and I have only the most basic information, and only because I searched it out. But you don't even know where the hell they're going to send you, or where you're going to end up. You don't even have the most basic information. So that's also a difficult process. In the face of all of your difficulties, well it's different, but the unknown, well you have no idea. The worst is when you don't know something at all.

The departure and the migration journey is something that is not planned, that can

not be imagined, and that refugees even do not really believe that they are living through. According to the stories told by several, the different events that they lived through in that period led to a loss of control in their lives that they were not able to rationalize, nor were they able to give meaning to at that time. In that process their subjective world is completely shaken by the happenings that have forced their departure and the uncertainty of the path that they are beginning to walk down. The lived experience is one of incredulity, as Constanza describes: "I got on the plane, and I didn't believe it, I was there with suitcases and all and on the plane and I was all: 'But where are we going?'" It's like, like you can't believe it". At the same time, Nidia describes her lived experience as a "roller coaster of scary emotions" (VTM2).

Arrival: uncertainty and disorientation

The arrival is dominated by a general feeling of disorientation in which the person can't find herself, feels lost, and unsettled, as can be seen in Irene's words: "I got here and it was like I couldn't land" (VTM2). This disorientation is also expressed in idiomatic expressions like "getting here totally blind". In some cases the person's spirit does not lift (with the connotation of falling and not being able to get up), other people talk about being lost. These phrases illustrate not only a spatial disorientation, due to having to forcibly migrate from the place where they lived, but also a subjective disorientation, for refugees are unable to process the ruptures and experiences they have been forced to go through. Carlos, 15, tells of his experience: "... you get here like you're adrift. Where am I going? Where do I ask? How do I do this? Without language .. totally blind ..." (VTJ).

Figure 5. The arrival “like you’re adrift”



Along with the feeling of disorientation there is also uncertainty, because they had no idea what was waiting for them in the new place. This disorientation is tied to not feeling like subjects, as Constanza, 45, recounts: ‘I felt like cattle being pushed off of a long journey, I didn’t know which way was North, which way was South’ (VTM2). This image of feeling like an animal (“like a cattle”, “like a dog”) was expressed by various participants, and has to do with being forced to leave, not knowing where they will arrive, and the little control that they have over their lives, all situations which leave them feeling dehumanised or objectified by their circumstances.

Fear in the experiences of refugees

In the stories told by participants in the memory workshops and the interviews about the reasons they were forced to flee there figure acts by various armed groups who arrive and abruptly interrupt the daily life of families. The communities they belong to live in a climate of constant intimidation and fear, be it by paramilitary groups or by the

guerrilla. There is also a atmosphere heavy with tension due to threats or assassinations of family members, in which they do not know if they will be the next to die. There is also anguish because they do not know if they are going to wake up alive the next day. Constanza recounts her experience: “The day you least expected it was when it had already happened ... that they had already broken in to get him. That’s when it started to get to me ... I said: ‘Oh dear God, could it be that I’m next, because now they’ve killed my brother, well I’ll be next’ ...”(VTM1).

Generally when the incidents are more shocking or painful they do not want these events to be named, they are not spoken of, or if they are spoken of they ask that they not be recorded as testimony. This was the case with Primavera, she told us what happened like this: “I left Armenia from the farm of a brother-in-law because of problems. I’m not going to reveal the problems that forced me to leave. I just knew that I had to leave, that I had to get my kids out of there” (VERP).

The fear that lives in the body, as a result of living the war in Colombia as a daily reality, frequently makes people immune to it, and it seems that they do not see it or feel it. As Laura puts it: “... Once you’re here you take off the bandages little by little. There it’s like you’re blind, because I don’t think it’s bandages even, but it’s like you never see anything, you’re there with your eyes open but you never see anything, what a traumatic thing, it’s delicate, very delicate!” (VEAC). In Colombia, fear becomes normalized, and it immunizes the subject such that they do not feel it. This is a fear denied, but it is there. Laura reflected on why in Colombia people do not see the fear:

People adapt so much to their way of life there ... It’s like you’re bandaged ... so

bandaged that people live like everything seems like it's just there, like you get used to the pain ... it's like you're bandaged, like you're drugged, like you're a puppet, like a puppet, you're not yourself, it's like when you move your finger and it moves you over there and over here, it's like you dance around like that. Do you understand me? It's like a panic, it's like if I look at you I don't know what your reaction will be, so I just prefer to keep my head down. (VEAC).

In the face of this situation of not seeing or feeling the fear, Laura, as well as her son Sebastian, say that it was only when they got to Canada that they took off the bandages, opened their eyes, and felt the fear. Only once they were in a safer situation could they learn to see and recognize the fear. Fear has stayed as a mark on the body and continues as a memory that impacts their lived experience, even leading to doubts that it will ever disappear, even if they are living in a different society:

...And we feel it like fear. Now she did have fear, when she got here she learned to feel fear. It was like she got a fear attack, like everything seemed to her, now the fears and the traumas of Colombia, that she wasn't feeling there, here she did ... it was like now the person realizes ... the fear it's like it stays in your veins and it's like "could it be, dear God! Could it be that I can live here?" It's like now the fear drills in, now that it's a different country ... (VEAC).

The fear lived by refugees while in Colombia as a result of being victims or witnesses of violent acts is heavy baggage that they bring to Canada. This is expressed in the stories told in memory workshops and interviews, which show that refugees

carry in their memories the fear caused by their lived experiences, a fear that is rooted in the body and the mind, which continues to be expressed along the journey taken to reconstruct their life plans.

In Canada the fear that refugees feel is ambiguous. The fear that comes from the circumstances they lived through in Colombia transforms into an intangible fear, which is a scar on their memory and appears now as a vulnerability in the face of challenges they are forced to face, such as assimilating the accumulated uncertainty that comes from arriving to a new country like Canada, with its totally different geographical, cultural and linguistic reality. This more abstract fear is activated by daily occurrences and interactions, continues to act latently, and is fed by the disorientation produced by arriving in a new place, by not knowing, by uncertainty, and by the loss of control that the subject feels over their life and their closest interactions.

The polarization produced by the armed conflict in Colombia, added to the experience of fear/terror lived by refugees, leads them to not trust others. They feel fear because of the possibility that there might be persons in the city with connections to various armed groups in Colombia. The suspicion or imposition of associations with those groups generates a distrust of going to places where there might be other Colombians. They themselves confront this distrust, suspicion and fear that they carry, though confronting it does not free them from it. This is how Jacinto, 48, described it in a memory workshop:

We often get here and continue to be equally intolerant. And that intolerance generates distrust here. I've noticed here, to put it like this, that when you come from a certain region they immediately put you into a box and associate you with

a certain armed actor in Colombia. Fear is what has made many Colombians not accept each other, the fear, the wariness we all come here with, the truth is that wariness is ... (comments by other participants). (VTH).

When Colombian refugees meet in English classes, churches, food banks, these spaces feed the rumour mill about who it is that is arriving. Some say that members of paramilitaries are arriving, or guerrillas, or the Colombian armed forces. This situation reinforces the feeling of being in danger and of distrust, for they think that they can be marked and associated with specific political interests in Colombia. This type of rumours serve as an obstacle to building social networks and seeking the support of others in the same community (Riaño-Alcalá y Goldring, 2006).

Refugee's lack of knowledge of the refugee process, the state, Canadian laws and the new culture, generates uncertainty and distrust, and as a result also leads to fear and anxiety. In this way, an imaginary of an all-powerful and omnipotent state is constructed, one with which they do not feel able to relate or mediate, and to whom the power to decide about the life and future of the refugee is attributed. These visions and difficulties are stimulated by the actions of officials of the Ministry of Human Resources, of the Ministry of Children and Families or Citizenship and Immigration, and by the rumours that circulate amongst refugees. This is expressed in phrases such as "someone put immigration on to us", and "they put a social worker on to me", which refer to their negative experiences in which they understand, or fear, the intervention of government agents in matters of their daily life as a means to judge or budget the care of their children, the supposed use of physical

violence, or the misuse of social assistance money.

This fear and distrust of institutions and of the state is based on their lived experiences in Colombia of corruption, clientelism, injustice and impunity. Fear in the face of institutions in general can be seen reflected in Pablo's apprehension when he was interviewed: "I'm afraid to talk about my life. I trust you, but I have an enormous distrust of institutions, be they the Attorney General's office of Colombia, the University of British Columbia, or the government of any country. I don't know what else to tell you about myself because it would be like giving away who I am and the reason I don't have part of my family here, I'm not in my country, and don't have my job" (VEP1).

This fear is also influenced by their living in a society that they do not understand, with a system and laws that they do not know. They are aware that in Canada there are greater levels of democracy and justice, but at the same time they do not manage to put together the puzzle pieces, because the information they get is fragmented, which does not allow them to understand how the system works, or how they can access programs and services. Jacinto expresses this fear of not knowing the laws:

And it's the problem of the laws that there are here in Canada and a lot of the time ... right now I'd say I don't know even 5% of Canadian laws. So this is another risk: that a lot of times you act or don't act for fear of having a legal problem here with the state. (VTH).

Memory and the Intertwining of Time and Space

The migration journey is lived as a limit event that cuts and radically marks the lives of subjects and their histories. In this sense,

the lives of refugees and their memories have suffered a rupture, a discontinuity marked by the forced nature of the departure and the magnitude of the losses suffered. Discontinuity and loss migrate with the refugee, given the impossibility of working through or healing the harm suffered, which leads to feelings of rootlessness and the difficulty of getting reestablished in the new country.

This temporal and spatial rupture seared in their memory is linked to emotions such as fear, pain and deep sadness. The events of war and terror that were lived through are told of as ‘events’⁵ (acontecimientos) or as extraordinary acts (even though they may have been lived for a long time), because of the painful impact they had on the lives of people, the marks they left and the losses they have had to face. These ‘events’ erode self-esteem and confidence in one’s self, in others, and in the social milieu. This affects the dynamics and bases of social cohesion in the community where the ‘events’ occurred, amongst those who stay, as well as for those who leave - refugees, who also find themselves having to re-construct themselves as subjects in a new society and re-construct trust in others like them.

In the face of these memories of the past, the immediate reaction is not to want to speak of them, not to want to be asked about them, and in many cases, silence. Laura, an Afro Colombian woman, said that she did not like people to ask her about her story, and if any member of her family was going to speak, she had to be present because it is a shared story. “It’s Our History”, she said, expressing a sense of protection and vigilance of a memory that she guards carefully, “because I don’t like that, that’s why when you said to me (here she’s speaking

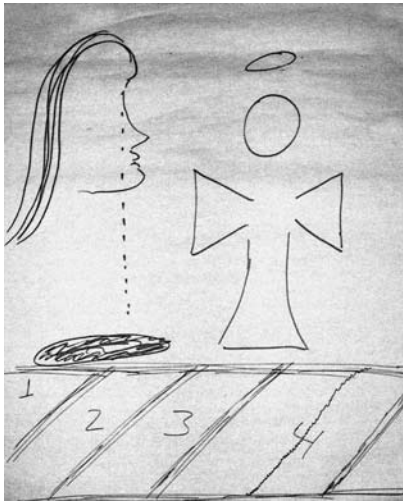
to her son) that you wanted me to be there (at the interview) I said: ‘oh no’, and I didn’t pay much attention to it because I said: ‘now they’re going to ask about our lives and I don’t really like that ..’, but it’s all right. If I hadn’t been there, that wouldn’t be all right, for me that’s not all right, because it’s OUR story ...” (VEAC).

Some of them, then, are careful with their personal history, because it is painful and sparks memories and emotions. For them, touching memory is like opening Pandora’s box. That memory that is put away and you do not want to touch is also mentioned by Lucero, 18: “Sometimes you say ‘refugee’ and people say: ‘Oh? Why? What happened? And then you have to tell your story to the whole world and these are things that you want to leave waaaaay away so people can’t be talking about them all the time, because they’re sad ... No, I pretty much don’t like to talk about that ... I hide all of that away and hope that they don’t talk about it because that’s no good ...” (VERL).

Some of them also construct metaphorical figures as they remember, as happened with Fernando who sees himself as someone who has had to “cry tears of blood” for all of the losses he has suffered: “And so the tears are not just tears of blood for the blood that she spilled, but because of the homesickness, for leaving the country in the circumstances we were forced to leave it, because I never wanted to leave the country, I was simply forced to” (VTH).

5. Event (acontecimiento) as used here is an event that happens at a certain time. It is characterized by a rupture or transition in the course of events and by its relatively ephemeral character, though it may have future repercussions. In a general sense, a happening is what happens that is unusual, even exceptional.

Figura 6 “Cry Tears of Blood”



When the memory exercise is done in a group, one memory is tied to another. In the case of Jacinto, 48, the memories that are tied to the story of one his workshop-mates are not just any memory, but a memory tied to painful acts in Colombian history, such as is the massacre of Bojayá⁶, which he witnessed as a paramedic. “At least you say, even if I crash a thousand times, and you see the houses ... I don’t know if you remember the case of Bojayá. Two years ago I got called to that emergency and that was really traumatic .. very traumatic to have to ... (voice breaks) pick up cadavers, pick up children ...”.

When those who have been forced to immigrate are pushed to find refuge in another country and face their present, they constantly remember the past. The past in which those events happened, and the painful experiences that fear has left marked on their memory, continue to be present, and this is why they constantly debate between being here (the present) and there (the past), which is a relationship in which the spatial dimension (here-there) is constantly intertwined with the temporal (past-present). The attempts to build a here and

now that are part of the struggle to rebuild their lives are constantly interrupted by memories of the past, and by the awareness of everything they have been forced to leave behind. War and terror are marked in their memory, body, and daily life, and influence their way of living the present, the process of immigration, and the relationship they establish with the past and their country of origin (there). It is precisely this relationship/ lived experience of a past of terror and fear carried as a memory in the body and in the mind that makes the immigration experience of the refugee different/unique, because it creates obstacles to attempts to make sense of the present (Green, 1999; Riaño-Alcalá, 2006).

Memory and fear

The embodied memory of the lived terror/ fear/loss is reactivated by a smell, a sound, something that is seen or heard, and it is immediately felt as a threat before the subject can rationalize it. Or as several of them describe it, it is something that is activated, whether they want it to be or not, by sounds, by a smell, by something that they see, as happened in Irene’s experience, “I tell you, I’ve been here for four years and three days ago I smelled gunpowder on my way home and I was looking in all directions as if someone had shot me. But why, after four years? What’s happening to me? There are things that stick with you” (VTM2).

6. During this massacre, the town church was destroyed by a bomb made with a gas cylinder – like those used with kitchen stoves – and launched by FARC guerrillas during combat with the Elmer Cárdenas block of the AUC paramilitaries. One hundred civilians who had sought refuge inside the church died in the attack, including 47 children. The Human Rights Ombudsman, the United Nations Office for Human Rights in Colombia, and the Catholic Diocese of Quibdó had warned national authorities days earlier of an imminent confrontation in the town. These warnings were ignored.

The trauma lived due to the circumstances faced in Colombia is seared into memory, and the shock or collision between the life that was left behind and the new life that they are trying to build is one of the causes of depression. This is how Sebastian, 20, expressed it, “And that’s where the depression comes from ... and it comes all at once, remaking the new life and leaving the other life you had, that other part of your life, and then it’s like a crash! Like an accident ...”. Sebastian adds, “They’re things that build up inside people ... they’re traumas and things that build up and build up and later they interfere a lot in being able to remake your life a different way” (VEAC).

In the stories told in memory workshops and interviews references were made to “staying behind”, like staying in the past because they remember the lived pain, or long for what they once were. To move ahead is to accept “being here” in the present, and facing a possible future in this new place. Despite there being many ruptures between the past and the present, between here and there, traumatic memory continues to be here and now in each person, in a continuity that determines what they do in the present. As Lina, 45, put it: “But if you keep staying behind it’s difficult, you don’t get up. I still haven’t been able to do it, the truth is there are times when I do it and others when I don’t ...” (VTM2).

The forced displacement lived by refugees and produced by the abrupt presence of violence with socio-political connotations, as is the case of Colombia, generates a crisis of confidence in subjects, for it rips away from them everything that was known and safe (Daniel, 2002). That safety that they felt thanks to what was theirs, and known, allowed them a way of being in the world where they felt in control of their surroundings and their lives. Now that they have been forced to migrate they are also forced to begin a new life, to face

a new reality, and to see the world in a different way (Daniel, 2002). That reconstruction of their life plans as a radically new start is lived and explored by several refugees in their stories when they talk of “starting over”, which they describe metaphorically as “being born again”. For Arcadio, 46, originally a campesino (small farmer), “being born again” is beautifully illustrated with the idea that his family is, in this new country, a garden that has the chance to flower, whose hope is reborn after having been lost in Colombia.

Figure 7. Being Born Again



...And to have that homesickness of going by and seeing all of those abandoned villages, all destroyed ... Here there is the hope of flowering again, there we were dry trees, here we’re not .. Here the trees look like that, but there’s the hope that they will flower again and all that, eh? Not in Colombia! In Colombia a tree that’s dry like that, is just taken (hand motion) for wood, for burning. That was the situation we faced in Colombia, eh? In my situation, I was a dry tree. My family and me, we were really trees that were done for, ready for being turned into ashes. We’ve come here to Canada and we’ve been born, we’re a garden, here we’re a bouquet of flowers, especially my children. (VTH).

This “being reborn” appears amongst some as the chance to be alive, for others it is seen in the process that begins when they learn to speak again, “starting over again from zero”, “like children, in kindergarten”. One of the women relates it to the experience of death and being able to live again. As Primavera put it, “It’s like you die and are born again, you have to start over again from zero, eh? That’s what I see, that’s what I’ve felt. You leave everything behind and start all over again” (VERP).

During their first years in Canada, refugees have a vision of time as something that moves “very slowly”. This vision is related to the urgency they feel about reconstructing their life plans. This is a non-chronological sense of time, a subjective time that is consistent with all that is happening in their lives, where time seems to stand still. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note how people’s lives and positions change when it is a moment that is fundamental to their existence, in the sense that they have to create their own selves. This is why the metaphor of “being reborn” that appears in the majority of the stories is not gratuitous. This is a time in which they have to be re-born, re-construct themselves, re-settle not only in a physical place, but also re-make a place for themselves as subject. This process is generally quick, for they are on a permanent search for knowledge, understanding, relationships, language learning, and employment. This could be seen when they were contacted again after a few months or a second interview was done, for generally important things had happened in their lives, including changes in attitude, reflections, and activities.

Nevertheless, to understand the process as something that happens quickly is an interpretation of the time from outside of the lives of refugees. What appeared in their own

stories is that for them time moves slowly, it’s a very slow time for those who come with the dream of being able to quickly learn the language and find a job. Fernando expresses this feeling, “You get here with a certain work rhythm and you want to help out here and you get involved in this group and you see that things move slowly here ... everything is so slow, after four years I ask, ‘How many more years will I have to wait before this starts to bear fruit?’” (VTH).

In the testimonies collected, the future is still a slippery ground for most. Opinions vary, because processes are diverse and each lives them at a different rhythm and with different personal resources. In some cases the idea of a possible future in Canada surfaces, but several others do not see it like that. For some the idea of transitoriness is underlying, and the idea of returning to Colombia persists.

This idea of transitoriness, of not getting used to the idea of a possible future, in some cases could be seen as having to do with the short length of stay that has not yet allowed them to build a new life, but on the other hand, there is a sense of the future as something complex and confusing, because the memories that are relived still remain anchored to the past, and because the struggle for survival and for making a life here in the present does not leave room for envisioning a possible future. It is because no sense can be made of events that were lived, and they can not be worked through in a way that would allow the subject to truly “leave them behind”, that they can not live calmly in the here and now and plan what they want for the future. This series of ambivalent lived experiences, and the feeling of transitoriness in the new society, leads some to return to Colombia, after two or three years, even risking their personal security, with the hope of “finding their way again”, or that things have changed.

When some speak of the future, they do so with pessimism, scepticism, and at most, the idea of a future for their children (sacrificing themselves for them), but not for the adults. Fernando speaks of this idea of staying here for the children, and that feeling of transitoriness: “After four years I see that we, well, what we have is family and that we had to make a sacrifice, or I don’t know if it’s a sacrifice or the spirit of giving, or what it is, with our children, but many times, I’ve thought, I want to go back to Colombia, and sometimes I would rather die there in body than die here in spirit” (VTH).

In some of the stories it appears that they were unable to think of possible futures, but could only try to stay alive, which is something that one can do in the present, and they leave thinking about what to do next until later. This vision appears in the story Pedro, 45, shared in a workshop:

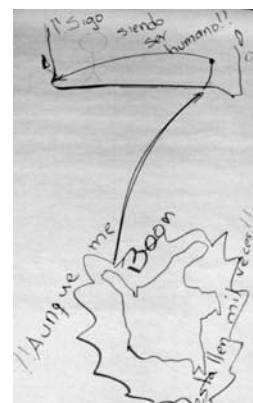
So a lot of us here don’t even have an idea of what kind of future we might be able to live in Canada or in Vancouver, we were just looking for how we could live wherever, how to survive somewhere, how we could not be assassinated somewhere. That was all. And on that basis you figure out what you can. I mean, a lot of people came like that, because the way it is there the most important thing is the dream, or the issue of the past, but no, the most important thing is the present. The issue of refuge leads to that, in truth the issue is personal salvation, saving your own neck. (VTS).

For some the future appears as something positive that includes plans and projects. For example, in Fernando’s comments he speaks of plans and a future in Canada tied to the possibility of studying, “But I’m very positive and I have a lot of aspirations and I think that I’m going to achieve great things, eh? So that I don’t leave the impression of ‘oh bro,

I’m really suffering’, or all that ... No, no! I’m really positive and I think that ... I’m studying and I’m thinking of the future and how to make things come true” (VTH).

In refugee’s testimonies, reparation, rather than a discourse or a coherent proposal that they have stopped to think about, is a something that they are sceptical about and feel impotent to speak of as a real possibility, for they don’t believe that it is possible given current conditions in Colombia. In the experience of this group of refugees one can speak of being frozen (in an indefinite wait), without the possibility of working through the memories that they still have not found a dignified way to signify and articulate in a vision of the future where their stories make some sense as part of the history of Colombian society and no longer as just individual dramas or those of just a group of people. Refugees feel uncertainty in face of the possibility that their past could be re-signified and reworked, in a way that would allow them to really put it behind them.

Figure 8. “I continue to be a human being, even if they blow me up a thousand times over”



In those cases where the idea of possible reparation surfaces, it appears in relation to Colombia, the armed conflict, the war, and the losses suffered in it, individually and socially as Colombians. Pablo expressed this,

“It would be very interesting as a testimony and memory to speak of my friends, my city and my family so that in the future no other person in Colombia has to live through the tragedy that I’ve had to live through. But ... processes are still open and ... and I can’t express what I’d like to” (VEP1). Pablo relates the idea of possible reparations to guarding memory, to being able to give testimony of what happened so that others do not have to live the disgrace that he did, so that his children can keep their roots and justice be done in Colombia.

That possibility of reparation, which refugees still do not see in Colombian reality, has to do with the drama that they suffered in Colombia, along with having been forced to migrate. For this to be recognized as part of the national and social drama is a task which is not individual but collective for Colombians: to construct a historic memory that does justice, assigns responsibilities, and reconstructs a narrative that articulates these individual or group histories within a national narrative which would recognize the losses, abuses and violence to which those who have been forced to migrate have been victim.

Memory, fear and forced migration: effects on physical and mental health

Amongst the participants in workshops and interviews the topic of health was an important one: ten people mentioned that their lives as refugees have involved the depression of a member of their family. One’s emotional state is changeable, as Primavera puts it, “ ... my emotional state has been normal, there are times when you get depressed, I have a lot of days where depression tries to get me, it’s like you don’t have any energy, you don’t want to do anything. That’s my emotional state, there are days when all I do is cry” (VERP).

Some participants mentioned that, along with depression, they have had other general health problems, such as headaches, backaches, stomachaches and knee pain, as well as other pains. Pablo, 45, put it like this, “I got pneumonia, I got everything then, and it was just keep going, keep going, keep going. What made it worse was that I couldn’t be in the house, I was afraid to be in the house, I had to be out” (VTH).

Blanca, 39, speaks of suffering a pain that moved from one part of her body to another, “In the first year I was depressed a lot. And I always had a pain here and a pain there. My knees hurt a lot here. I would go to the doctor and they would say that was depression ... everything was depression. My head hurt a lot” (VEB1).

Several people who spoke of these issues were critical of how they were treated with antidepressants, which they felt did not help them with the process they were living through. Pablo also expressed criticism of the health system, which fragments the subject and does not take into consideration the connection between physical and emotional symptoms, for family doctors are only allowed to address one symptom,

My family doctor here doesn’t let you talk about two things, you can only go in for one thing. Very kindly they’ll ask, -- Why are you here to see me? -- Doctor, I’m having trouble breathing. -- Ah, okay. They’ll check you and ask, -- How long have you had it? -- For so long, and doctor, there’s also ... --- No, no, no we’re talking about your breathing. And you don’t get to tell the doctor about your diarrhea ... (VEP2).

Through these experiences we can see how the mental health system tends to frame the problem of depression in refugees as an individual and a medical problem that needs to be treated in psychiatric terms and with

antidepressants. This vision does not see this sort of problem as part of the experience of uprooting, as social suffering, that is to say, as the result of the impact that larger social forces (in this case forced migration) have on experience, bodies and social relations (Kleinman, Das and Lock, 1997). This social suffering becomes one more expression of a collective drama suffered by persons from other countries where there are various forms of violence, and which as such also requires collective work which relies not only on a psychological or psychiatric vision, but a community vision. Some of the questions that could be asked from this perspective are: What are the processes that could help to heal and reconstruct the social fabric of a community that has been affected by war and violence? How can these processes help to build spaces for working through griefs and losses suffered? How can these community spaces help to overcome loneliness and a broken sense of self and support in the world?

The Process of Building a New Life

The process that refugees live through to rebuild their life plans entails complex tasks such as learning to interact in the new society and city, make a new territory their own, find a place to live, learn the language and build relationships and social networks that accompany and at the same time support these tasks. At the same time, those individuals face a series of subjective processes of reconstruction that allow them to rebuild the meaning of their life and their identities. The following section turns to these experiences.

The process of learning a new language takes time and effort for refugees. In the first few years language limits their ability to build social ties and influences family

relationships (see the section on changes in subject position). One of the difficulties that they face in this first period is that they have to wait several months to begin studying English.

Figure 8. Chicken!



This becomes a key fact that marks the experience of the first years in Canada for refugees. Language is the means through which one learns the culture and can communicate. As Pedro, 44, put it, it is through language that, “you have access to the community” (VTS). Learning to speak a new language then is a condition for having a place in the culture, in society, as speaking subjects and as productive subjects, as well as the possibility of working, of having a dignified life, and of making a new place for yourself in the world. Several of them also mention that their ability to learn English was affected by their emotional state. They needed more emotional stability to be able to learn, and this is something that many did not have during the first two years.

Having access to a job was noted by many refugees as something that allows them to have a new life in Canada, but in the first few years they face various obstacles that they called a “vicious cycle”. On the one hand, they do not speak the language, which is generally necessary to get a better job, but they also find that to get a job they need Canadian experience. What is more, people

with a professional degree who practiced their profession in Colombia find themselves frustrated by difficulties, not only in learning the language and finding a job, but also in having their professional experience recognized and their Colombian degree recognized as its Canadian equivalent.

So to be able to get a better job they need English, and to continue studying until they can better speak the language they need social assistance support, and many times they do not get it because there are multiple pressures for them to get off Social Assistance, even if they do not speak English. In the words of Jacinto: "They kick you off violently, 'Go see what you can do, I don't care where you come from, if you're a political refugee, if you are or aren't, that doesn't matter to me'" (VTH).

That search for survival and those interactions with Social Assistance were also expressed by Juan, 22, who argues that the Canadian government places many restrictions, but does not offer enough survival guarantees. This is another vicious cycle, it is an ambivalent and contradictory situation and an inconsistency in the system that refugees go through when they arrive.

... it really affected us when we got here, how little money they give you for rent, for a family of five it was \$700, which is nothing, it was only enough for two rooms. So it was like a dilemma to think that it's like the government puts a lot of restrictions on you, but at the same time they don't give you the tools to survive. So, of course, the survival instinct of everyone that gets here ... you look for how to scrape something up wherever you can ... I remember lining up for gifts for the kid because we didn't have any money. The little gifts at Salvation Army, at the Toy Bank, lining up in that horrible cold at the Food Bank each week. The first year everything was like that ... (VTJ).

The refugee process also leads to a change in social status and in quality of life. For people of campesino (small farmer/rural worker) or Afro-Colombian origin, or refugee claimants, the ability to be admitted as refugees, the way they are welcomed, and to be able to live in Canada, are things that they value and see as great gains. However, those who had a professional or middle class status and had a degree of social participation and recognition in Colombia, and the majority of government assisted refugees (GARs) focus more on their losses. Leticia refers to these changes, "At first, well it's really hard, really hard because you had everything there. Everything in the sense of work, social life, and an already established economic stability. And you leave with empty hands, you leave everything by the wayside, everything, everything, everything, work, family, friends, everything" (VTM1).

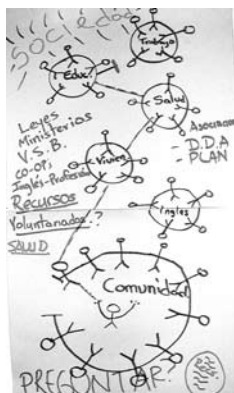
Building social networks

Only one of the 34 government assisted refugees participants in the project had family members in Vancouver who had arrived a few years earlier, also as refugees. However, two families who petitioned for refuge once in Canada made a secondary migration to Vancouver because they had a family member in the city. In those cases, having family ties had a positive impact and eased the process for the newly arrived, for those persons served as tutors and guides who shared information, helped them to learn the system, and shared social networks that they had previously created (Riaño-Alcalá, 2006).

When refugees arrive they feel lost, a situation that they try to overcome by meeting up with other Colombians. Such meet-ups can help, since they can exchange information about schools, scholarships and services, they can accompany each other

to seek help, go to food banks, sign up at schools to study English, etc. But one of the characteristics of those ties of support and solidarity, that are formed in those first few years after arrival, is that they are temporary ties.

Figure 9. Social Networks



In the Vancouver fieldwork an effort by Colombians to build organizations was noted, but there is a weak sense of ownership of these organizations, and a high degree of mobility among their members. The fact that Colombians are a community without a long history in the city of Vancouver has an impact on this. In 2006 the existing organizations or groups are weak and do not play an important role in this population that would allow us to speak of a Colombian community as something that plays a role in the welcoming and orientation of newcomers. One of the initiatives which must be highlighted is the Colombian Canadian Community of British Columbia (CCCBC), founded in 1996.⁷

These initial attempts by Colombians to come together are marked by fear of the origin and political affiliation of persons, but also by the distrust and caution created by classist attitudes or those that mark social status (either that one considers oneself to have a higher social status or that one sees others as people whose class difference is marked). Primavera describes it as there

being Colombians who “see others as being beneath them” or put on “airs of grandeur”, “they make others feel like they’re the most important, or better than you are” (VERP).

Relationships with people in the receiving society are difficult to establish because of the feelings of strangeness they produce. This is related to cultural differences, but also to the distrust around relationships with unknown people that refugees bring with them. There are perceptions of the new society as a complex one, that they have yet to make sense of. In the words of Jacinto, it’s like “a spider web, with so many paths, that at first you feel alone” (VTH).

Figure 10. Loneliness



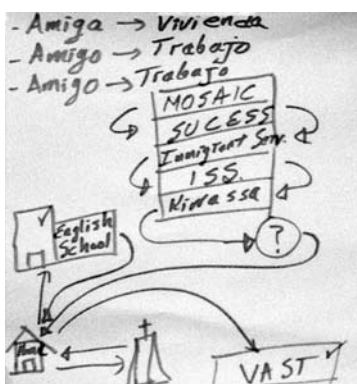
Loneliness and the need for company and for finding meaning in the process they have lived through lead to churches playing an important role for a significant number of Colombian refugees. This role has two facets: The church as place of refuge and of spiritual protection. Various Christian churches and the Catholic church are essential spaces for weaving community ties around religious practices and congregational gatherings. In churches, refugees find a regular and permanent spiritual space and

7. In 1996, Colombians formed the Colombian Canadian Community Association of British Columbia which sought to support integration of the Colombian community in British Columbia and the development of linkages with the Canadian society to “promote Colombian culture and the “good name” (el buen nombre) of Colombia.”

mutual comforting. Some churches reach out to refugees when they arrive at the Welcome House, and begin their work with newcomers. Some also see churches as a manipulative. Several refugees told of negative experiences with churches, and expressed that churches in Vancouver were a type of “business” and were “shopping for souls”.

At the same time, refugees recognize the role of institutions in the task of building relationships and social networks, including various multicultural agencies and immigrant support agencies who facilitate these by offering information that allows them to navigate the vast system of institutions, services and resources. Some institutions help to fill out applications, give information as to where to find various things, and offer short-term assistance with the process of adaptation. Amongst these institutions particular mention was made of the Canadian government, Citizenship and Immigration and organizations contracted out to provide programs and services, such as the Immigrant Services Society (ISS), MOSAIC, the Mennonite Refugee Centre, English schools such as Vancouver Community College (VCC), and community centres that offer youth and other programs. For some Colombians the Vancouver Association of Survivors of Torture (VAST) has played an important mental health role, helping to process griefs and traumas.

Figure 11. Social Networks



What is certain is that, despite the diverse array of organizations and services, the complexity of the system that has to be faced is such that the fear refugees bring with them is reactivated by the anxiety it causes them to have to deal with language difficulties, trying to understand and access this complex system and the programs and resources available for new immigrants and refugees, and by the role that the state and resettlement agencies have in controlling their daily life.

Changes in subject position

For youth, leaving the country was something imposed on them by family conditions. If their families leave, they have to leave with them, and leave behind everything they had been building. The experience of forced migration means that they have to take on responsibilities that they did not have previously have. First of all, young people can more easily learn a new language, and they begin to be the mediators of the family's communication with the outside world. They refer to this responsibility as a heavy weight... I'm the youngest, and I have the responsibility of calling to have the phone connected, for paying bills, and all that, I mean, it's a responsibility that I don't want, that I was forced to take because it's something that has to be done, eh? But I would have liked it not to be like that" (VTJ).

In several cases youth take on the responsibility of working and helping out the family, and become an essential source of family income. This is a task they take on top of interpreting and translating for the family, studying, and learning English. Having to work and take on new responsibilities gives them more autonomy, independence and maturity. This was Juan's experience,

I felt a bit responsible for supporting the family so I started to work and I stopped

studying for a while, I'm still not studying ... I do the work of immigrants, that is, cleaning and washing dishes, meeting people, and learning English. That's more or less the story ... And so it's like you have to see that either you get into learning the language and live in that circle or you're no one here. (VTJ).

They also reflect on how youth become more independent, and mothers and fathers become more dependent on their children. Youth participants recognize that the process is more difficult for older adults, because youth have an easier time assimilating the new culture and building relationships. Hernando, 19, argued,

I think it's been harder for parents because after all we're kids, it's like we were starting our lives and we can fight and get ahead. You get what I'm saying? But I think that our parents who have already studied and had already gotten ahead and have to come somewhere new and start all over again as if they were in preschool ... It works against the ego, and, I don't know, I think it's like easier for us to learn a language and you don't have, like, a way of helping them ... it's easier for us to take in new cultures than for a parent who comes home and is all, "son, you won't believe what I saw today!". (VTJ).

The diverse challenges that refugees face, uncertainty, as well as the changes they have lived through, are like a cauldron for tensions and conflicts in couples and families. This process is lived and understood differently by women and men. For women there are certain gains in being in a society that offers rights and opportunities that they did not have before. Meanwhile, many men go into crisis over losing their role as providers that gave them a sense of identity as men in certain cultural patterns.

Women say that the process that refugees live through when they get to Canada is harder for men and easier for them because they are closer to their children, and that close relationship with their children and the responsibilities involved mean that they have to be all right. Silvia, for example, says that having to sustain family life and take care of the children keeps her from letting herself get depressed. Constanza also notices this: "... Women overcome and adapt very quickly for the kids. I mean, you're not just one, your kids fill you up, you live for them. And men get more depressed than women do" (VTM1).

They are witnesses to the fears and crisis that their partners face, and they help cheer them on to get ahead. Women appear to have great strength, they are the ones who cheer others on, and name the depression, the loss of self-esteem and fear of their partners, who sometimes themselves don't realize, or at least do not name it. Consuelo, for example, narrates how she is witness to her partner's fears of "going out and looking for work because he feels like his English is not good enough", another refers to how her husband "feels like he turned into a house husband because he's started to share domestic responsibilities and child care". They take on the responsibility of helping their partners to regain self-confidence because their family dynamics depend on it.

Women's strength is also evident in Blanca, a single mother who takes on her stay in Canada as a personal challenge that she can overcome: "And what can I say, I feel chained, I don't know. Sometimes I say: 'I don't think I can handle it, I can't do it' and then: 'No, that way I'll never make it. No, Canada is not going to be too much for me. I can do it, I can do it, I am not going to leave this place" (VEB2).

Some of them think as a female 'we', as women who have lived through similar experiences. Leticia, 47, expressed this collective sentiment this way: "As I said, she's not the same person who left Colombia, and I think none of us are the same. The fact that we have had to change quickly because of circumstances means that one thing happens and then another, but anything can happen" (VTM2). This "not being the same" is very clear in the case of one Afro Colombian woman, who has lived in Canada for nearly six years and who arrived affected by social and domestic violence. The process she has lived through in Canada has changed her position not only with respect to herself, but also her relationships with men and her attitude towards violence and abuse: "Yes, because the things that I let happen, I wouldn't allow in this country, even if I were born again" (VEAC).

For their part, men express greater worry about the family and their children's future. They have not had the chance to personally reflect on what is happening to them in regards to gender. What they express is more of a critical reaction to moving to a place where the privileges they previously had are difficult to sustain. The aspects that some of them managed to express in a workshop were that, "in Canada laws protect women from verbal abuse" and how in that sense, "we can't keep managing things like we did in Colombia." Other participants mentioned that in Canada they had felt discriminated against for being men, referring to the fact that there are services for women that they don't have access to as men. This nonconformism also came through in jokes and comments.

Identity: how do they see and position themselves?

To take on one's role as a refugee affects one's personal positions, needs, what others expect of you, and the way society sees

refugees. Given this, some self-identify as refugees depending on the circumstances, depending on how others relate to them, and some identify as exiles and are proud to be refugees. When refugees respond to the question, "what do others expect of me" they identify as refugees or as permanent residents depending on who they are talking to. This can be seen in Primavera's comments,

I identify however the other person wants me to identify. If the other person wants me to identify as a refugee, I do that. If they ask me my status, "how did you come here", if I have to tell them, well I do, because I have no reason to deny it ... I have Canadian friends and they know that I'm a refugee, and I've never felt discriminated by a Canadian. (VERP).

In other cases, it's a practical matter. The role of refugee is one that is taken on as matter-of-fact, "because it's what we faced". Another position is that of being proud to be a refugee, because otherwise they would have been killed in Colombia. Leticia exemplifies this with her position, "I am a refugee and I'm proud to be a refugee here in Canada, because I'm a permanent resident" (VTM1).

Subjectively there are various responses to being refugees. One is to position oneself as a subject in loss, that is to focus on what one has lost and left behind. Some feel they are part of a larger we that is suffering a collective drama, as a way of seeing that what they are living through individually others like them are also facing. Nidia told of how her husband felt: "In the second year he started to see: 'Hey, but here everyone's like me, bored, depressed, and today that's how he is'. He sees himself as part of a depression, as part of a larger group that is feeling what he's feeling. And that's why he's so bored, and it's been a difficult integration process for him, difficult" (VTM1).

The idea of a disempowered subject also arises, out of the circumstances and treatment by the receiving society. This is expressed with the phrases “feeling under utilized”, “here I’m nobody”, “here, depending on your temperament, they make you lose your confidence in who you are, what you’re capable of ... they make you lose your confidence, you get to the point where you say, ‘Could it be that I can do this? Could it be that I can go back to work?’ and you doubt yourself because they wrap you up this idea that you can’t, that oh poor you, that you’re restricted, you don’t know, you haven’t done it” (VTM2).

One of the youth, who identifies as a refugee, speaks critically about the invisibilization of refugees in the receiving society, “And that’s the image I have, that people here live in their world and people really don’t pay attention to refugees, you get here and you’re a nobody, you go to school and school keeps on being the same, there’s no recognition that something has happened in someone’s life, that something has happened that has changed them forever” (VTJ).

Another of the youth refers to how to make a place for themselves in this society and not be undervalued or seen as “squirts”. They express the difficult process that they face to be accepted and insert themselves in the social circle, they struggle to get ahead in the midst of social demands and to get into “that circle”, “... what can I do so that people don’t look at me like, what’s up with this guy? this squirt’. To get in, to feel accepted, is something you’re always looking for” (VTJ).

We also found that some women see being a refugee from the perspective of the gains they have made in their life in Canada.

This is the case of Laura, the Afro-Colombian woman, who came from an experience of discrimination and racism in Colombia. The process she has lived through in Canada has allowed her to changed her subject position in a way that she speaks about with pride, “The thing is that that’s one of the problems that you face there (in Colombia), that you start to sell yourself from a young age, when you’re little you start to sell yourself ... that guy has his money, but that doesn’t matter to me ... Here I’ve been able to survive and with poverty and all I’ve managed to get my kids where they are today” (VEAC).

Patricia also positions herself by the gains that she has made during her stay in Canada. She refers to achieving Canadian citizenship as one of her best gains in this process. There is a recognition of the position that Canadian citizenship offers her, and the privilege that it gives her:

I remember the first day that I said: And what is this citizenship good for? And that was the first day that I felt like being a citizen was like a privilege, because in the United States they treated us differently when we came in as Colombian. So then I said: “wow! Being a citizen is worth something” Most of all that on trip through the United States it seemed like it to me ... and when we got to Canada they told us: “Welcome to Canada!”. (VELP).

When we speak of subject positions, we are referring to how refugees see themselves. It can be seen that refugees begin to construct complex identities, which are based not so much on the longing for what they once were, not the country they came from, but on the complexity of feeling part of several realities and histories at the

same time. In these situations transnational identities and belonging start to surface, in Canada as much as in Colombia. This is the case for Patricia and Laura. Patricia had the experience of migrating inside of Canada (she travelled first to Toronto and then to Ottawa), and then returning to Colombia for a year, and from there returning to Vancouver. She says that she feels “part of here and of there”, “So then what happens to me is that sometimes I don’t feel like I’m from there or from here. So that’s affected me now, now I feel like: Where am I from? What do I want to do? Like what plans can I make to live like this, if I don’t feel comfortable, neither there nor here? And later, well you miss things from here and you miss things from there” (VELP).

To be able to “have both worlds” is the way Laura, 40, expresses a feeling similar to that of Patricia’s, referring to feeling part of both realities. As a Colombian who lives in Canada, and who positions herself on the basis of the gains she has made, she compares the two societies and realizes that she has identities and things that are hers in the new society, even as she maintains others from Colombia “That’s why you have to be like really strong, strong willed ... I don’t even have a way to say it, to be able to get up, because it’s a tricky thing, it’s tricky, eh? That’s why you understand, I at least give thanks to God, that at least now I have both worlds” (VEAC).

The relationship with the receiving society

When participants are asked about how they perceive they are seen, we get some idea of their view of how their condition

is perceived and represented in their surroundings, be it as refugees, as Latin Americans, or as immigrants. Canadians or people of other nationalities send messages that give a sense of how they see Colombia, Colombians, Latinos, and people from the South who have come to a country in the North. Refugees get the sense that Colombians are seen as “looking to get ahead”, and they’re recognized for their ability to feel happiness despite tragedy. Carolina said, “That’s who we are, under everything we’re sad, but well, what happens is ... here it’s the opposite, here we’ve got it all really good, but people can’t manage to be happy” (VTS).

The youth referred to feeling watched for being Colombian, even by other Latinos. Daniel told of his experience with this, “Here Colombia is seen as just coca and coffee, and some Latinos see us as drug dealers and drug addicts” (VTJ), which they consider discrimination. Others refer to their experiences in schools, “So they think that you come here to live the American dream and just to grub for all the money there is here” (VTJ).

The youth also expressed that because they are refugees they are seen as “poor little things”, because there is an image of the refugee as “disempowered”, “needy”, deserving of pity, and as someone with a dramatic story that some want to hear. There are stereotypes of what it means to be a refugee, and many times Colombian refugees don’t fit this image, be it because of level of education, way of interacting, or of dressing. Juan refers to his experience with these stereotypes and what is expected of a refugee,

The people who work with refugees ... they expect that if you're a refugee, they have to have killed your family, you have to come from a refugee camp, and of course they expect that if you're going to tell a story and count on them, the story (has) to be a dramatic one, out of the movies, and then once again there's the, "oh you poor thing, everything you've been through" (VTJ).

Constanza, for example, said that Canadians "can't make sense of refugee who has a certain level of economic class or qualifications". For others the idea is that refugees are those who have nothing and come here just to see what they can get, and some feel pity for them because they had to leave their country and everything and start over from zero.

Antonio reflected on the discrimination in Canada, in comparison with that he felt in the United States, given that he lived there for several years, "... Discrimination, as they call it ... I mean ... there's much more in the United States, but it exists here too. They don't reject you or say anything to you because they respect the law. But they don't take you into account" (VTH).

How does the receiving society see them?

The focus group with officials and community workers, the community consultation, the meetings with the research advisory committee at a local level, and the interviews with English as a second language teachers and public officials from ministries and the Colombian government allow us to trace an initial map of some of

the perceptions and images that circulate in the receiving society, and particularly amongst those members who have or have had contact or relations with Colombian refugees.

Officials and community workers share an image of Colombian refugees as "more educated" than other refugee groups. An official from the Canadian Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration explains, "in terms of the question that someone had posed about the demographic profile the immigration officers that are RAP officers - resettlement assistance program officers who are working directly with them - their impressions of Colombians is that they're more highly educated than other groups that we've referred to; that's my generalization and what we've been seeing but that's impressionistic I mean we don't have - we don't get all that information." This perception is combined with a recognition of a certain heterogeneity amongst refugees, with "different employment backgrounds - social backgrounds" and of the class consciousness that comes with it.

One of the representations that was most frequently put forward was that of Colombian refugees as self-sufficient, independent, and committed to their goals in Canada. For example, in terms of language learning Colombian students are seen as, "really involved in the class and engaged in learning" (English teacher) and they participate, "It may sound superficial but I enjoy Colombian students; they are quite oral, like to talk. They participate in class" (English teacher). This independence and commitment is also reflected in their use of services,

Community service agency coordinator:

the impression is that with Colombian claimants we've been working with we actually do a little bit less with them or have a bit less involvement because it's more like giving them the information and they tend to go out and work on it and then come back so they're quite independent bunch – now that's not going to be the same for every individual but that's a bit of a sense about them and I think it's partly having the educational background.

Nevertheless, this willingness and strength is affected, according to officials and workers, by the trauma that they carry which is reflected as a certain aggressivity, "There are a lot of people with a lot of aggression, a lot of bitterness", according to a Colombian-Canadian who works with immigrants. Community workers note in this context the distrust and wariness amongst Colombians, that they even have with social workers. One worker who accompanies refugees in the initial process of soliciting refugee upon arriving to Canada affirms, "Comments are made about what side of the conflict this or that person comes from. I would add that a lot of those who come don't want to know anything about other Colombians, not even to have them mentioned. It's interesting to see how a lot of people express their memory and fear, for example, they don't want anyone Colombian to serve as their interpreter",

The written comments of one of the officials who participated in the focus group summarizes the set of representations that circulate regarding Colombian refugees and, as can be seen, various perceptions are at odds: intelligent, proactive, traumatized, frustrated, courteous, aggressive, demanding, generous, funny, super sensitive, appreciative,, honest, wary, determined, desperate, class conscious, friendly.

Conclusion

The process of integration and setting up a new life plan for Colombian refugees who arrive in the city of Vancouver is affected by the persistence of a latent fear born of painful experiences lived in Colombia, and by memories of a painful past that caused a rupture that is difficult for them to forget and overcome. That fear is continually relived, and leads to a distrust of other Colombians and others in general, which means that the relationships and social networks that are built are weak and temporary. This fear and distrust is reactivated by various circumstances, such as rumours or experiences which lead to an accumulation of uncertainty. These include interactions with the institutions of the Canadian state, which they see reflected through the incomplete and fragmented information that they receive regarding services or resources to which they have rights, as well as the behaviour of officials such as those of the Ministry of Children and Families. These experiences of relationships with the receiving society are also affected by difficulties in communication due to initial language learning, not knowing how the system works, and by experiences of discrimination, which also revive doubts and uncertainty regarding institutions which they do not know if they can trust. This sustains a continued uncertainty, because they do not yet feel included or recognized, nor do they have a feeling of belonging or identity such that they can say that Canada is their new home. So for the first six years the process of resettlement is something that takes most of the energy of Colombian refugees, as they have to learn a new language, navigate the system, almost alone, and get used to the way of life in this new country. As such, for many refugees there is a disjuncture between the painful, marginal and solitary process of integrating into the new society, and the actions which allow them to maintain ties to their country of origin. Maintaining these ties is easier than integrating.

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COLOMBIAN REFUGEES IN LONDON: EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES

Patricia Díaz Barrero

Introduction

This chapter attempts to capture the voices and experiences of some of the Colombian refugees who have chosen the city of London as their permanent home. It begins with a brief description of the context and political system of the city followed by the profiles of refugee claimants who arrive in the. It continues with aspects regarding the departure from Colombia, the journey, the arrival to the city, and some important issues of the process lived to date, such as the search for housing, entering the labour market, studying English, depression and sadness, and dreams and expectations for the future, amongst others. A review is also offered of the resources and strategies that Colombian refugees use to get established and integrate into society. The part concentrates on the fears and memories of participants, and offers a brief review of the principal barriers that they face. The last part emphasizes the particularities of the immigration process and social integration for men, women and youth.

This research project was done with the direct collaboration of the Cross Cultural Learner Centre (CCLC). The director, Mary Williamson, not only opened the doors of the centre for workshops, focus groups and report-backs, but also generously shared statistical information and her deep knowledge and analysis of refugees, and

particularly Colombian refugees, in London. Likewise, other members of the Colombian community in London collaborated on different aspects of the project. We would like to especially thank all of those persons who helped us: Mary Williamson, director of the Cross Cultural Learner Centre, and all those who so generously gave of their time, knowledge, effort and energy to carry out this research project, but especially the Colombian refugees, who shared parts of their lives with us, sharing both laughter and tears. To all, many thanks.

London: the City

London is a city in the southern part of Ontario, approximately 200 kilometres from Toronto, the capital of the province. In general terms it is a medium-sized city, with an approximate area of 421.77 km² and a population of 432,451 people in the metropolitan area and 336,539 within city limits, according to the Canadian census of 2001, which ranks it as the tenth largest city in Canada. It lies within Middlesex County, and serves as its capital.

As far as its economy, London generated 13,988 jobs between 1981 and 1991. According to the Corporation for Economic Development of London, the strength of the economy resides in its industrial sector, and it is extremely diverse, which has been useful in an era when certain sectors are

depressed, and has also provided a good base for expansion. The level of unemployment is approximately the same as that of the province of Ontario as a whole, near 6% (Statistics Canada and London Chamber of Commerce, 2001), and the projection is that this percentage will decline (Clayton Research Associates Limited, 2003:49). Despite the positive growth of the London economy, poverty also affects the city, and is an area of concern for the municipal government. For example, it has a higher percentage of people with low incomes (15.2%) than the province of Ontario as a whole (13.1%). Likewise, it has a higher percentage of children between 0 and 14 who live in poor families (17.6%) than the rest of Ontario (13.4%) (Mayor's Anti-Poverty Action Group, 1997:10).

In general terms, the city of London does not stand out as a particularly multicultural city. Indeed, authors such as Leo Driedger cite it as a city that has historically been the heart of British settlements, loyal to the crown, and where the white middle class population predominates (Driedger, 2003, cited in Pozniak, 2005:19). It is also the city in Canada with the third largest proportion of people of British Descent, after St. Jones and Victoria (Pozniak, 2005:19). The ten ethnic groups that predominate in London are of European origin (Statistics Canada, 2001). According to a study by Clayton Research Associates Limited, in the last 10 years the natural rate of population growth (calculated by birth and death rates) of Middlesex county has declined substantially. If this tendency persists, it is expected that the net natural contribution will tend to become marginally negative (Clayton Research Associates Limited, 2003:46). The increase in the immigrant population in London between 1991 and 2001 contributed to a total population growth of 24% (Social Research and Planning, 2005:3). Of its total

population, 19% of residents were born outside of Canada, and 9% are from minority groups or visible minorities. The census of 2001 shows that the five minority groups that predominate in London are: African Canadian, South Asian, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. Latin Americans, a visible minority, were in ninth place that year (they represented 1% of the total population), but this statistic changes significantly given that the immigration of Colombians occurs after 2001. According to Canadian government statistics, in that year there were 975 Colombians in London. Nevertheless, between 2001 and 2005 1,760 Colombians acquired permanent residency in London, according to the Cross Cultural Learner Centre. Approximately 14% of the immigrant population of London are "recent immigrants". As defined by the Canadian government this includes all those who acquired their permanent residency between 1991 and 2001 (Social Research and Planning, 2005:3).

Organizing efforts by Colombians in London

By 2002 the presence of Colombians becomes very visible, and this is when the first organizing attempts begin. Various initiatives were launched, the oldest of which is the Canadian Colombian Professional Association (CCPA), which was based on an idea developed in Toronto and which opened a chapter in London in 2002. The association has primarily concentrating on offering workshops, courses, lectures and conferences which aid Colombians in entering the labour market. Over time the association has had to redefine itself and include activities directed a non-professionals, such as technical workers.

The other association of Colombians that has remained active is a finance cooperative, whose aim is to offer mortgages at low interest

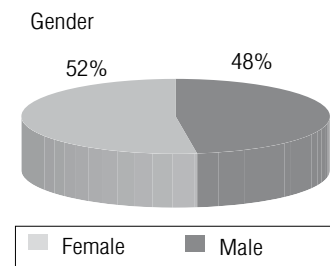
to its members. There are also organizations for specific professions, such Cofila, which is the association of Colombian doctors, and those that were formed to celebrate the 20th of July (Colombian Independence Day). Amongst the cultural activities is the film festival “Made in Colombia”, which is held each year and shows Colombian films as well as forums and lectures. This festival was begun in 2003. Another form of organizing amongst Colombians has been around music and dance. Another project is that of a group of Colombian youth who put out an annual Spanish language agenda that offers information that a new immigrant might need in their adaptation process. It is also important to mention organizations of a broader Latinamerican character in which Colombian participate, and often lead, including the Latin American Career Development Centre (LACDC), Latin American Networking, and the Latin-American Solidarity Association” (La Casa). Individual initiatives include an online gazette called Colombia in London.

In general terms it can be said that the community of Colombians in London is a new community that has attempted different forms of organizing. On the basis of field observations it can be affirmed that it is a fragmented community, with tensions due primarily to personal conflicts between individuals, and anecdotally it has to be said that it is frequently said that there is a good deal of distrust amongst them. In the opinion of the two leaders of two of these organizing initiatives, the Colombian community in London lacks political maturity, but at the same time it has gone through a process where initially there was a need for a group and organizations that would address the need for obtaining information, but that need has now passed.

Profile of participants

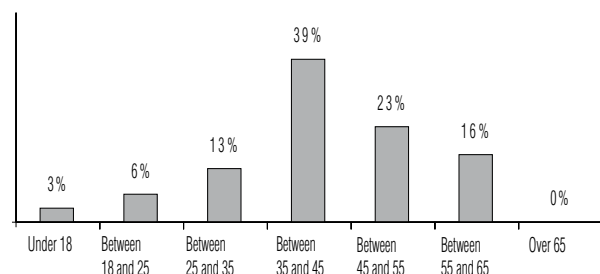
The Colombian refugee population that participated in the memory workshops and in-depth interviews were 31 persons in total. Of these, 15 were men and 16 were women, see table 6.

Table 6. Research Participants in London by Gender



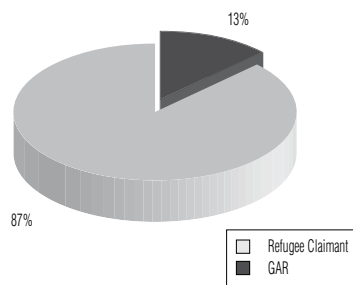
The range of ages of the participants were the following: an 18 year old minor, 2 between 18 and 25, 4 between 25 and 35, 12 between 35 and 45, 7 between 45 and 55, 5 between 55 and 65 and none over 65. The majority of participants then, 39% of the sample, were between the ages of 35 and 45, see table 7.

Table 7. Age range



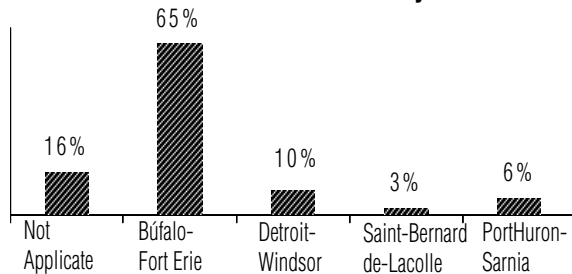
Of the total of 31 participants, 27 claimed refugee in Canada, and of those only one solicited refugee at the airport in Toronto and the rest, 26, claimed it at one of the points of entry along the Canada-U.S. border. The other four were government assisted refugees (GARs). In percentage terms this means that 87% of the sample were refugee claimants and 13% were government assisted refugees, see table 8.

Table 8. Type of refugee



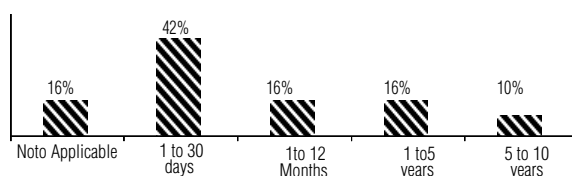
The predominant point of entry was the Buffalo-Fort Erie crossing, where 20 of the 27 refugee claimants entered. The second point of entry was the Detroit-Windsor crossing, where three passed, followed by Port Huron-Sarnia, where two passed. In Quebec the point of entry mentioned was Saint Bernard-de-Lacolle, with one person passing, see table 9.

Table 9. Point of entry



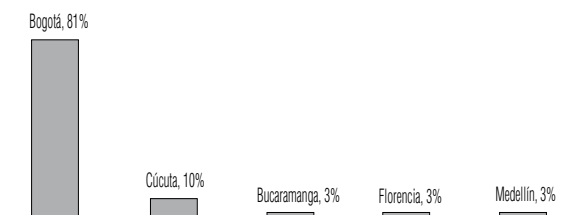
Although the vast majority of claimants came through the U.S., differences were found in their length of stay, as well as the reason for their stay or travel through that country. As far as length of stay in the US, most, 13 individuals, were there between one and 30 days. Five were there for less than a year but more than a month, five for between one and five years, and three between five and ten years (see table 10). This topic will be explored in more depth below.

Table 10. Length of Say in the United States



In terms of education, the vast majority of participants reported having a university education. In an interview with one of the founders of the CCPA this person stated that 90% of the families in London have at least one professional. Research participants mentioned the following professions: computer engineer, civil engineer, lawyer, accountant, industrial chemist, and architect. In the health arena nurse, and dental assistant were mentioned. The majority, 6 of the participants, were in business administration. Technical careers were also mentioned. This would seem to corroborate the general perception of Colombian refugees in London as highly qualified. Despite this, it is worth mentioning the anecdote that in the Colombian community itself there is reference to “Avianca degrees”¹, implying that many of these degrees are not real and that the number of Colombian professionals in London is inflated. As to the place of origin of research participants, it can be said that all came from urban centres, with most, 25, coming from Bogotá. The other cities mentioned were: Medellín, Bucaramanga, Cúcuta and Florencia (see table 11). So most are urban refugees coming from large and medium-sized cities.

Table 11. City of Residency in Colombia



Another characteristic is that the majority of refugee claimants, 14 individuals, entered Canada with their nuclear family, and 6 entered with at least one member of their family. Only 8 persons entered alone, of whom 5 were men and 3 women (see table 12). This statistic of families, or members

¹ Avianca is the largest and oldest Colombian airline.

of family groups, crossing the border into Canada contrasts with the profile of refugees, who are generally single men (see chapter 2). What is more, the presence of family members in the city is so strong that more than half of refugee claimants declare that there was a family member in London before they arrived. As well as being a movement of family groups, it is also a movement of networks: Thirty of the 31 Colombian refugees said that they knew someone in London, though it might have been a distant acquaintance or simply a name that someone else had given them (see table 13).

Table 12. Accompaniment entering Canada

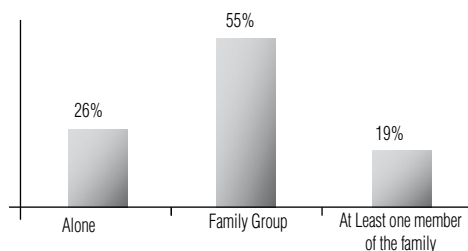
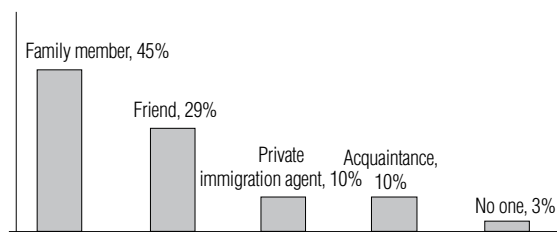
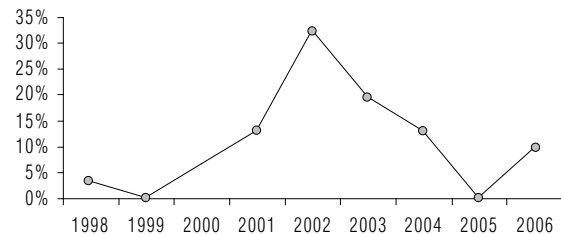


Table 13. Previous contact in London



The last characteristic to take into account is the year of entry. The greatest number, 10, entered in 2002, followed by 2003, with 6, and then 4 in 2004 and 2001. None entered in 2005, due to the impact of the Safe Third Country Agreement, as can be seen in table 14. Three entered in 2006, all under the exception that the agreement offers for claimants who have a family member in Canada.

Table 14. Year of entry



In general terms, the London sample can be represented as a group of Colombian families, refugee claimants, from urban centres in Colombia, with postsecondary education, which in most cases is a university education, middle class, who passed through the United States and entered Canada between 2001 and 2004, crossing the border by land, primarily through the Buffalo-Fort Erie crossing.

The Departure from Colombia

Fear is the characteristic that marks the departure of the vast majority of Colombian refugees, because of the risk and uncertainty that they face. This is felt by those who have been the victim of threats, assassination attempts or blackmail, who leave under danger of being assassinated before they can manage to leave the country. But it is also present for those who, without facing imminent danger, embark on this project with the fear of not knowing what will happen, the fear of the unknown, the unexpected, the uncertain future.

Figure 12. Leaving by plane



In this drawing Reinaldo represents his departure by plane through the Bogotá airport. It shows a DAS officer (the Colombian CSIS/FBI equivalent) and he has written the word “fear”. In his story he tells that he was sure that they were going to detain him, and that when he went up to that window he thought that he was going to faint.

Amongst those who shared their reasons for leaving the country, the most commonly mentioned reason was targeted threats, followed by assassination attempts and kidnapping. Each of these direct experiences with violence becomes a limit event which explains the departure in the face of the danger of death at any moment. Cipriano in a very dramatic and honest way tells of how his family was the victim of an assassination attempt:

Figure 13. Drawing by Cipriano, Men's workshop



I mean, during those two years it was just the event, let's say the shock of having lived through an assassination attempt, when there was no reason for anyone to try to kill me because I was a nobody there, but I lived through it. I mean, someone wanted to off me, like a lot of people in Colombia, but you know, in Colombia they off the corner beggar as much as the president, so I'm more like in the first category, but even so I lived

through it and it really affected me. I think that at any rate that really set off a lot of things for me to end up in this process here as a refugee (men's workshop).

Threats, kidnappings and assassination attempts can be put up with for a long time, even years, until the time comes that the person decides to leave the country, generally for the wellbeing of the family. For example, in case of Gaspar and Armando, who were kidnapping victims, they decided to stay in the country and seek some sort of protection in the hope, perhaps, that the situation would get better. When this did not happen, Armando solicited refuge at the Canadian embassy, becoming thereby a government assisted refugee, and Gaspar left the country for Panama and then Canada, where he requested refuge at the Toronto Airport.

For many research participants, the departure from Colombia was marked by the urgency of the decisions they had to make. In many cases the situation is urgent and the goal is to leave the country as soon as possible, which leaves no time to plan and arrange things. This urgency and tight room for manoeuvre in decision making is one of the difference that refugees find between themselves and economic immigrants, as Federico, a man who lived in Miami and applied for refuge there, explains:

The economic immigrant applies and he knows where he is going, because he applies under one of the immigration requirements of this country and chooses the city and all of its characteristics. But the refugee doesn't know where they are arriving, but rather, as I said, is like a person who is tele-transported, it's like they pass him out of one reality, and 'pow!' he's in another reality, in something totally different, totally opposite (men's workshop).

Most refugee claimants who arrived in London had the resources and wherewithal to allow them to purchase a plane ticket, but most importantly, they had a U.S. visa. They got to the United States and once there made a decision about how to proceed. In the case of Jacinto, a man who left Colombia leaving behind his wife and daughter, he went to the United States with a six month visa, without knowing what to do. Once he was there, and through his wife who was in Colombia, he learned of the possibility of claiming refugee in Canada. This is how he tells of his departure from Colombia:

Jacinto: I left alone, I left behind my ex-wife and my daughter. Because obviously they didn't have a visa and I couldn't leave with them.

Patricia: You left because you had a visa?

Jacinto: Because I had a visa and I went to the U.S. since I had a visa and I knew that, well, I have U.S. visa and I have to go because I can't stay here in (---), I have to do my work. I left my job, my family moved to another place for security, and I said, my only option is to take off because I can't even show my face ..., I'll go to the U.S. and see what happens.

Patricia: When you went to the U.S. did you leave thinking that you would come back? What was the plan?

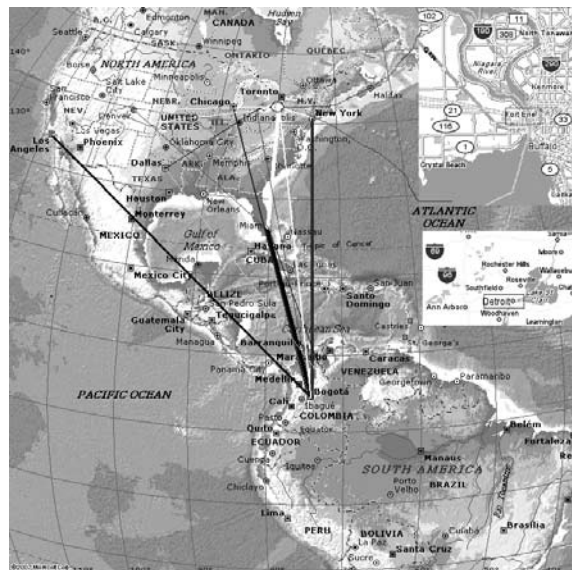
Jacinto: None, I didn't have a plan, just to get out of Colombia, no other plan. I knew that I had to leave Colombia because they could find me at any moment, I knew that I had to leave Colombia. How? it didn't matter. Where? To wherever. To do what? Whatever. I knew that everything that I had was lost. (male interview).

Jacinto's story is very interesting because it allows us to see how in the urgency to

leave having an American visa offers an alternative for leaving the country as soon as possible, and the importance of resources such as connections and communications in organizing his migration journey and the process of soliciting refuge.

The departure is directly related to the search for a better future for the person and their family, in that at least their lives will not be at risk. The search for a better future, be it to save a life, protect the life of the family, or improve quality of life, is closely tied to the decision to leave the country.

Routes and Journeys



An outline of the route refugee claimants take, from when they leave Colombia to when they arrive in London, is one of the most significant results of this fieldwork. First it is important to note that 84% of the sample entered Canada by land from the United States. Yet amongst those who came through the US, there are differences as to length of stay, migratory status, and the aim with which they arrived in that country. On the basis of these three criteria three profiles were detected, as follows.

***Objective: United States, but
“we ended up without papers!”***

This group of persons left Colombia after the mid 90s. Their aim was to stay in the United States, but when they were not able to obtain legal status they were left without papers and became part of the great many undocumented immigrants considered “illegal” by the US government. This group is the one that stayed the longest time in the US, between 5 and 10 years. The events of September 11, 2001 in the US directly affected them, given the repression and persecution of undocumented persons that followed and became more asphyxiating daily. It is in this context of fear that many of them made the decision to leave that country for Canada. For this group, obtaining legal status is very important, and marks this action. Likewise, this is a group that comes to Canada with resources, strategies and lessons gained from living in North America. They do not necessarily speak English because in the US they did not have the resources for studying and learning the language, but they do bring knowledge in general terms of the culture, cultural codes and behaviours in North America. Some of them also bring material elements that they can transport in their cars, such as household goods, etc.. In the following story Maria, a woman from Medellín, tells of her experience in the US, and how the situation became notably more difficult after September 11th:

Maria: I didn’t have to face that (being deported) because we came right away, but now I hear that the police asks for documents, eh? We started to hear that the police was going to help the government now by asking for immigration documents because before they would just ask for your license but now, the

police ... And you’re at risk on the street if a police officer stops you, for whatever reason, even if you weren’t at fault in the accident, but for any reason at all, so it’s better not to risk it. (female interview).

For María, as well as other participants such as Pura, Matilde and Lila, the need to obtain legal status is a fundamental issue, closely tied to identity, self-esteem, and self-worth. There is a longing to have a legal identity, in their own words this signifies “being somebody” again, “having a full name again” and not being at constant risk of being deported. To gain legal status is no small thing, and it is important to note that the decision to leave the US is made after having lived there for a long time. To be legal again is also a source of joy.

Objective: United States, but “let’s go before we end up without papers!”

The second group of refugee claimants that tends to arrive in London are those Colombians who arrived in the US with the aim of applying for refuge and who left Colombia at the end of the 90s and at the beginning of the 2000s. They began the process, but once they realized what little chance they had of being recognized as refugees, they began to search for other alternatives before they ended up without papers. At this point it is important to take into account that the acceptance rate for Colombian refugees in the US is only 45%, while the rate in Canada is 81%, according to the Canadian Council for Refugees.

This is the case of Berenice:

I came to Canada on December 6, 2004. I came with my husband. I came to Canada after having lived three and a half years in the US. We left Colombia on June 19, 1999, and applied for asylum in the US. The process was lengthy, and

after September 11 the situation was very chaotic and difficult for immigrants. The process kept getting stretched out, and after the hearing on October 29, 2003 our petition was denied and they gave us 60 days to leave the country. (women's workshop)

In Berenice's story we can see the intention of staying in the US through legal means, and also the anguish produced by September 11 for those who, though they were pursuing legal avenues, did not have their immigration situation resolved. One very important characteristic of this group is that on the basis of their experiencing soliciting asylum in the US they learned to manage, or at least know, the North American legal system. This knowledge becomes an advantage as they prepare for their refugee hearing, or even for understanding institutional logics when they approach the Canadian legal system, Ontario Works (social assistance) or London Housing (the housing system of London). According to local public officials, this means that one of the characteristics that distinguishes Colombian refugees is that they are well organized and do all that they have to do or that they are able to do. This is how it was described by a public servant who currently is a social researcher and planner and who was a case worker at Ontario Works: "I never met a Colombian applicant who didn't come with all their paperwork, in a folder, in order, literally in order". (Focus group with officials).

Those refugees who arrived in the US with the intention of staying, and tried to establish themselves there, describe their life there in two ways. In terms of economic possibilities, they describe life as "good", one can work, earn money, and more or less make a living, even if it is doing work that does not require credentials, "you see

the money". In terms of legal recognition, the primary problem in the US is the impossibility of getting papers, and life is described as martyrdom: "not being", "not being able to be". They also refer to the difficulties of living in the US, especially the lack of aid and support, if you "don't work you don't eat". This comparison is made after having lived in Canada, where the government offers support to refugees and their families, where the person feels like they count, that they are treated like a human, with dignity. This also leads to a sense of gratitude towards Canada. Anacleto presents the contrast this way,

As part of the process I told you that I managed to stay in the US, so I managed to get a sense of the reality there, and it's a tough reality, it's a reality where if you don't work at whatever and at whatever hour, you don't eat, unless you go there with money, like Anastacio said. so for me it was a contrast to get to Canada, and to feel that the government helps you and pays for you to study. (interview with two men).

Objective: Canada through the United States

The third profile of the refugee claimant that tends to arrive in London passing first through the US is of the refugee who leaves Colombia already with the goal of Canada as their final destination. Unlike the other two, they do not intend to stay in the US. For this group, passing through the US is the route and the way to reach the Canadian border and apply for refuge. Their stay in the US lasts only a few days, perhaps while visiting a family member, having a "last vacation", or simply trying to get to the border as soon as possible. This group comes from Colombia with information about the procedures and the steps to follow to apply

for refuge in Canada. This group lasts only one to 30 days in the US and none applied for asylum there. Amongst this group are those persons who have family members, friends and acquaintances who have gone through the process. It is also possible that they have received this information through “immigration consultants” or another type of commercial network. This issue is explored below. In the sample this group is the largest, representing 42% of the total.

Crossing the Border

Once potential refugee claimants reach the US-Canada border they have several options. In the research sample, the majority, 65%, entered through the Peace Bridge in Fort Erie, having previously made an appointment through Vive la Casa in the city of Buffalo, New York, in the US. The second most mentioned point of entry, at 10%, was the Ambassador Bridge, in Windsor, where the city on the US side is Detroit, and some of them made the appointment at Freedom House. Other points that were less frequently mentioned were the Blue Water Bridge in the city of Sarnia, 6%, with Port Huron being the city on the US side, in Michigan, and St. Bernard de Lacolle, 3%, in the province of Quebec, with the city on the US side being Champlain, in New York.

Before 2002 those persons who were in the US could appear at Fort Eries border and directly apply for refuge. However, since that year the appointment was no longer given for the same day that the person applied, but rather this appointment had to be made through ‘Vive la Casa’. This organization is based in Buffalo, in the state of New York, and is a religious non-governmental organization founded more than 21 years ago whose primary mission is to aid those who are seeking refuge.

All of the refugees claimants in our sample that came through the Fort Erie had some sort of interaction with Vive la Casa. This organization, then, becomes a milestone in their memory of the migration journey and its challenges. For example, Lucero, who was a girl of only 13 when she crossed the border with her mother, remembered in detail the interview in Vive la Casa with a worker, who assumed that her mother was taking her to Canada with the intention of getting her involved in the sex trade. In Lucero’s words,

When we were in Vive la Casa a man named X ... was helping us to fill out the forms. Then he started to talk, then he looked at my mom and told her that a lot of women come through here, single women, young women, old women, women with children, and that sex trading was a criminal offence. That was horrible because I was 13 years old and when they tell you that your mom is bringing you in ... to prostitute you, and not ... (women’s workshop)

Vive la Casa, for many Colombians, was a difficult experience, where they came to face the “other”, and where many of the racial stereotypes anchored in the Colombian and Latin American collective imaginaries are activated. But at the same time it is a place where feelings of solidarity and sympathy for others that are in the same situation are expressed. For example, María describes her time at Vive this way:

María: A feeling of, well, uncertainty, because you don’t know what you’re going to do, what’s going to happen to you, but another feeling that’s like solidarity, because the people, because its not just Colombians there, there are people from Africa, people from a lot of places. (interview with a woman).

Depending on domestic policies and international treaties, the waiting times at

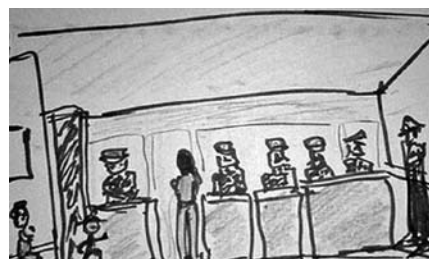
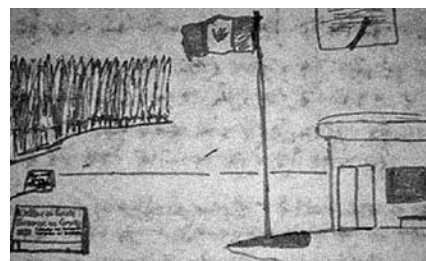
points of entry can vary from a few hours up to months. Those people who had to wait days or even months to get an appointment at the border describe this time as interminable, as an uncertain situation and of not knowing what was going to happen to them. It is a time during which people talk of their uncertainties, expectations and resources. This is more notable if they are in houses of refuge or hotels where there are other Colombians also waiting to pass. There is a lot of circulation of information, but it is very inexact; things are said, but nobody knows for sure. During these times friendships are also made and there is consideration, if it has not been previously planned, of where in Canada to go. There is a perception that the time passes very slowly, almost endlessly, and it seems that the day of the appointment will never come. This is the way Marina, a youth who came with her mother and her brother, tells of the days that they waited for the appointment, "... the days seemed endless in the hotel, staring at each other, the days stretched on forever, we played cards and watched television the whole damn day ...". (youth workshop).

For all of the refugee claimants the actual passing through the border, as well as the day they were accepted as refugees in Canada, as we shall see below, meant having passed through one more obstacle in the journey, a period that is normally full of ups and downs and many unexpected events and difficulties. They describe it as "the happiest day". At that point, although there is a lot of uncertainty, they feel joy and happiness at having overcome that obstacle. It is also the hope of a new life or the future that awaits them. This event is described with great emotion and gratitude.

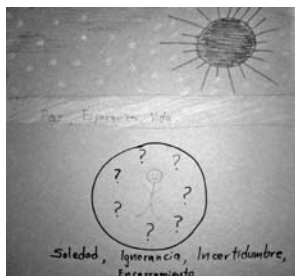
During the memory workshops the question was asked 'what was the most

significant moment in your migration journey?' The following are the drawings made by participants that are related to the moment they arrived in Canada. The first drawing is by Jeremias, and shows the window through which one can see the river Magdalena, which represents the past that is closing, in contrast to the sun on the Canadian side and the hope for a better future. Federico, in the next drawing, emphasized the wait in the immigration office, his wife sitting down and his child running around. Soledad, in the third drawing, remembers the day she came in to Canada, when the sun was shining bright and there was a great deal of snow. These two states also represent her emotional state, and she reflects this with the words "peace", "hope" and "life", on the other side of the circle with question marks she writes "ignorance", "uncertainty", "confinement" and "loneliness". In the last drawing Leandro, from the youth workshop, remembers the interview with an immigration officer where he felt, and drew himself as, extremely small in face of this figure of authority.

Figures 14, 15,



16 and 17. Arrival to Canada



Networks: an essential aspect of the journey

One of the determining characteristics that organizes the process and journey of Colombian refugee claimants up through their arrival in London is the construction and use of pre-existent social networks, especially in regards to networks of communication during the journey and networks of support that serve as such during the settlement period. These networks can be made of fragile ties, with acquaintances or people not known directly but referred by others, or strong.

Of the sample, 39% had a friend or acquaintance in London. On several occasions the efficiency of communications between Colombians was mentioned, even amongst those who did not know each other. Emails, telephone calls and contacts made through third persons were key in getting to know the process and “what needs to be done”. For example, before Anacleto got to Buffalo he had already been told what the

procedure was, “So I knew what the process was like, because they had told me what steps I had to take to ask for refuge, so I did that and then I went to the border and made contact with the house in London, I mean in Buffalo ...” (interview with two men).

On the other hand, within the social networks of London there are also strong ties, especially among those that are family relatives: 45% had a family member there before they settled in the city. Amongst the type of family members were: parents, children, siblings, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters-in-law, cousins. So, for example, Reinaldo had a son, Pura a nephew, Ofelia a cousin, Marina an aunt, and Leonidas a sister-in-law, to mention only a few examples. These strong ties are vitally important for offering information about the journey, the decision about which city to go to, and also the settlement process. Marina, a youth who arrived with her mother and brother, had two aunts and cousins who were waiting for her, “My aunts had already come here and they picked us up and then we got here and I don’t know, it was like a warm welcome because at least we had family that came to pick us up” (youth workshop).

The London case also allows us to follow the track of another type of network, that we will call “commercial networks”. These networks were initially formed by some “immigration consultants” who lived in the London, who did a marketing campaign in the United States as well as in Colombia, with newspaper, internet and email ads, with the aim of “advising” those who wanted to apply for refuge in Canada. The cost of their services varied between \$1,000 USD and \$5,000 USD. These advisers picked up refugees once they had passed through the border, where they normally charged them the rest of the fee, for those receiving the

service had to pay a first installment before being told of the process for applying for refuge. Once they were picked up they were taken to London and the next day they were simply told how to find the Cross Cultural Learner Centre.

This was the case of Jacinto who told us how, while he was working in the United States, he learned of the possibility of applying for refuge in Canada,

Jacinto: I worked there [at a hotel] for two months, what I had left of the visa. During those months I found out through my wife about the refuge program in Canada, that it was coordinated by the minister X [said in a joking tone followed by a laugh], the minister of immigration [laughs].

Patricia: How was it that your wife found out?

Jacinto: We knew that I was in the United States and we knew that I had to leave, so she (his wife) was always on the hunt for news. How do you get to the US? How do you get a visa? Where else can you go? Someone commented that they knew someone who had gone, a family member who went to Canada through the refugee program. 'What do you mean? Tell me about it' so she follows the chain, finally she chats with the person who gave her the information, the phone number, the details ... (interview with man).

One aspect that Jacinto starts to outline here is the existence of an external agent, who he ironically calls "the Minister", who acts as an intermediary and tell him how to proceed to apply for refuge.

Technically these "immigration consultants" were not breaking the laws (it was only in 2004 that the profession of "immigration consultant" was regulated).

Nevertheless, it is clear that these individuals took advantage of the situation to benefit from a group of Colombians to whom they simply sold information that was freely accessible to any potential refugee applicant, and who manipulated the refugee such that they were left with the impression that the services they were paying for included housing, health and education assistance. Once they arrived in Canada they learned that these were the right of all refugees, and they feel that they have been lied to and that their money was practically robbed. There is a great anger and desire on the part of some to denounce this situation, but a great fear of the consequences that it could bring. On the other hand, this is a critical issue within the Colombian refugee community, since no one wants to be openly associated with these practices. These commercial networks were detected first by the Cross Cultural Learner Centre, which used different means to try to stop the situation. The executive director, in a focus group with public officials and workers, spoke of it this way:

When the movement of Colombians started we became very concerned about how and why and not particularly pleased with what was happening originally but as the movement started to settle then we started seeing more and more and the reason I was disturbed was how the refugees were getting here; that there were people in the community who were taking advantage of some people who were extremely vulnerable and so we took position that we needed to inform people that they didn't have to pay anybody to get them to Canada, that they could just get here; and we did do a lot of work with the Colombians too: send information back, don't pay anything on the promise that they would get you here (working group with officials).

The last aspect regarding networks has to do with those who aid in passing people from the US to Canada. The fieldwork showed that the restrictions on immigration policies stimulated the growth of irregular crossings of the border. So when the fieldwork was begun in London in December of 2004 one would sporadically hear of “coyotes”. People spoke anecdotally of their existence, but no one knew concrete details about them. Six months later one heard more frequently about how they worked, where they could be found, and even how much they charged. Immigration changes and entry restrictions, as documented in the chapter on public policies, increased the “coyote” traffic between the US and Canada. Today there is a “coyote” business, as Anacleto mentions,

This is clear, if you don't meet the requirements, but you need refuge and you can't or don't want to live in the US, there is a very pretty institution called the “coyotes” [laughs]. And so you pass over some point along the Canadian border. I mean, I don't know how much traffic there is, I couldn't say, but a whole industry of coyotes has been built ... there are fees. Depending on I-don't-know-what, but around \$2,000 to \$5,000 dollars to get through, guaranteed, eh? (interview with two men).

In London

Arrival

Various factors affect the increase in the movement of Colombians to London, which is even informally known as “Londombia”. These include “recruitment” done by immigration consultants, as explained above. Once the first refugee claimants were settled in London, a process of immigration by network was begun, with family members as well as with friends. Another factor is that the city is only two hours from the border

with Buffalo, the point of entry for the majority of refugee claimants (see chapter two). The border nature of London also turns it into an important niche for receiving Colombians, as Anacleto explains,

Because there starts to be a support network, obviously because of the border point, that has made London become ... like a niche or something like that, and the network has been spun, even of information, solidarity, the scraping-it-together of immigrants, so you don't get to a city where you don't know anyone - somehow or other there's some reference for getting to this city. (interview with two men).

London also has previous experience with groups and waves of refugees that began after the Second World War, with the Polish, German and Italian refugees (personal communication, settlement worker of the Cross Cultural Learner Centre). The work done by the Cross Cultural Learner Centre and the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, especially in welcoming and serving refugees, by the settlement agencies in London, and its geographic location near Fort Erie, make this city an optimal place for Colombian refugees to arrive.

Once a person has crossed the border and the officer at the point of entry determines their eligibility and refers them to the Refugee Protection Division for a refugee hearing, the person arrives in London and begins the process of application and settlement (see attachment 1: “process for refugee determination”). In terms of settlement, at this stage the family, friend and community networks they have become determinant in the process of settlement. Apart from the networks of friends and family members, those interviewed also

spoke of the fundamental role played by the Cross Cultural Learner Centre (CCLC). In almost all cases this was the first place that they turned to request information and ask for the orientation and help that would allow them to live in London and, most importantly, adequately prepare for their hearing.

They describe the first few months, between their arrival in London and the hearing, as they did the wait time at the border, as a long time.

During this time they cannot work, for they have to request a work permit, nor can they study English until they get a study permit. People do not know what to do, how to occupy their time. They also describe this time as a “vacation”, but a very long vacation that starts to exasperate people. Some people start to do volunteer work, go to the library, participate in conversation groups, or study English on their own. Berenice tells of how she spent her days during that time going to conversation circles organized by the main library, the CCLS, and Luso, amongst others, “And the conversation circles were something special, because at first we didn’t have anywhere to go and we didn’t have a work permit or a study permit and we needed to learn English so we started to go to these conversation circles and it seemed to us like good help for getting started” (women’s workshop).

This period is of great difficulty, of waiting, practically of limbo, and is very disconcerting and difficult to manage. During this time people apply for social assistance, prepare for the hearing, and are assigned an attorney who is paid for through Legal Aid. The hearing in itself is a very important event also characterized

by uncertainty. Despite this, when they are accepted there is a great feeling of joy. It is at that moment that they feel that they can begin to get settled in Canada. For Justo, in the men’s workshop, the most significant memory was of the day of his hearing, this is how he drew it and told of it,

Figure 18. The hearing



This is the best memory that I have of this, my last adventure of being here in Canada, and it’s of the hearing itself. During the hearing here is the judge, the attorney, a prosecutor, the interpreter, and I. So I had come from a very long struggle in the United States, four and a half years, political asylum denied, the appeal too, I spent money, I searched for an attorney, I changed attorneys, got proof, brought it, authenticated it ... Four and a half years - it’s a huge, huge, stress, a huge one. It’s very wearing, four and a half years is a long time.

Once the hearing process is past and they are recognized as refugees or protected persons, a process of recognition and belonging begins, for those who went through being undocumented as well as for those who never lost their status, as described by Justo. The hearing is a milestone that marks the beginning of the settlement process in Canada.

Resources, Barriers and Social Practices in the Settlement Process

Once refugee claimants are accepted, they begin to reconstruct their life plans, using various resources and strategies. The resources mentioned can be separated into governmental, community, religious, family and friends. Nevertheless here we will concentrate on governmental resources and their relationship to the barriers that Colombian refugees face as they attempt to reconstruct their life plans.

Part of the economic assistance that the government provides is social assistance. In Ontario this is known as Ontario Works, and for government provides for government assisted refugees, as the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP). This is explained in depth in the section of this document regarding public policies. Ontario Works is the provincial program through which each adult without income or means of subsistence receives slightly more than \$500 CAD a month. This amount has been criticised, since in the province the rent for a studio apartment or a single room is approximately 300 or 400 dollars, leaving 100 or 200 dollars for food, transportation and recreation. Ontario Works is the primary form of subsistence for persons recognized as refugees or persons in need of protection.

According to a study by the city of London, in 2003 there were 17,700 persons receiving social assistance, who were in the main born in Canada and not immigrants. In 2003 refugees represented 10% of the total users of social assistance (City of London, 2004:34), which means that even when Colombian refugees that arrive in London receive social assistance, they do not represent a significant burden on the state. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that it was the refugees group which increased

the most in a seven-year period, for in 1996 they represented 1% and in 2003 they represented 10%.

Although state assistance is very important for the refugee, they feel diminished by receiving this assistance, and on some occasions this economic aid makes the refugee feel that they are at the mercy of the social workers that they have to deal with. For Andrea and Armando, who were resettled by the Canadian government, moving from dealing with Immigration and Citizenship to Ontario Works, because the RAP only lasts for a year, was a traumatic experience, during which they felt mistreated and humiliated by some social workers. In the following fragments they speak first of their experience with CIC, and in the second of Ontario Works:

Andrea: One of the beautiful things about the first year in Canada, unlike for those who come across the border, is the help from immigration. The service is excellent, they even call you to check and see if you've been feeling well.

...

Armando: And they give you the strength, they tell you "you are an immigrant in Canada backed up by us and you have the same rights as any Canadian, you can work and you can do things well", they do.

Andrea: And they take you to talks and conferences that are held in the Cross Cultural, so they really receive you very well in Immigration, and I think that of the institutions that I would most ... that I would give the best references of, it would be them.

Armando: They treat you with a lot of respect, which is nice. Immigration Canada is one of the best (interview with couple, Andrea and Armando).

In this second fragment Andrea and Armando talk of how the help they received from immigration -through the RAP-ended and they switched to receiving the help from the province, Ontario Works. This is how they describe this experience:

Armando: Immigration's assistance only lasts one year, and on the last check of the last month they just tell you "you have assistance until the ninth of December" and in Ontario Works come the humiliations, the malparidades (denigrating treatment) ...

Patricia: Why? What was your experience with Ontario Works like?

Andrea: There are case workers, not all of them, I want to make clear ... but there are a lot of case workers that when you meet with them they want to treat you like they treat the Canadians that are in Ontario Works, which is totally different. We immigrants are different than the Canadians that are in Ontario Works. Why? Because we're not drug addicts, or alcoholics, or street workers, or bums, but simply people that are learning to live in Canada, and they want to treat you with the same insulting attitude, and they're all drastic and exaggerated and you don't get treated with human warmth. We've had both types of case workers: the ones that treat you with human warmth and the ones that don't, the ones that treated us like, "these are bums that are living off of the government".

As can be appreciated in both narrations, these two government programs are judged as opposites. More than at the monetary amount received, which is less from the province, the complaint is directed at the way personnel treated them. In the RAP

program they felt appreciated and valued. At Ontario Works, on the other hand, they felt humiliated. In these two narratives there are two interesting implications to highlight. The first is the difference that is emphasized between them as government assisted refugees and those refugees who apply for refuge in Canada, or as she calls them, "the ones who cross the border". The differentiation between these two groups is developed below. The second interesting point to highlight is the negative and stereotypical characterization of Ontario Works recipients.

In contrast, for refugee claimants, and especially those who have lived in the US, the experience with Ontario Works is acceptable and in every case the program is evaluated as very good. This is how Federico expressed it: "For me Ontario Works has been essential. Definitely, in regards to education as well as economic support for shelter (temporary housing) and basic needs, it's essential. It gives you a base that inspires you and pushes you to say: 'All right, well now I don't have this basic problem, so now I can keep looking, looking for how I can try to get a focus in this country'. In general terms this resource was appreciated and valued.

Housing and its barriers

Another government service that was mentioned was London Housing. Two women, single mothers in the sample, managed to get housing through London Housing. The problem of finding low cost housing is a hot topic in the province of Ontario. During the focus group with public officials, a manager from this organization spoke of the difficulties that London Housing has in responding to the housing needs created by such a large immigration surge in such a short time. As he says, "...especially in housing because housing is different

than a program, a program you can snap your fingers, literally, and get change now. I can't build affordable units now. It takes three to five years. So, to react to a large immigration population with new housing at the equivalent level that we are talking about can't happen and react to that."

In Ontario, the social, or subsidized, housing system is under the Ministry of Municipal and Housing Affairs. The current government of Ontario has declared the construction of social housing to be a provincial government priority (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing). Specifically the London Housing Division, as the focus group participant mentioned, is in charge of administering and maintaining the waiting lists on behalf of the housing providers of London and the county of Middlesex. The acquisition of low cost housing in acceptable conditions of cleanliness and dignity represents a barrier for the settlement of Colombian refugees in London. This is how Matilde tells of her experience with London Housing, "We went to London Housing (after having a lot of trouble finding a dignified place to live) and there they said no problem, but that I had to wait. And I said: 'I'll wait all it takes, but I'm not going to take that house' (referring to a house in very bad condition that she had found privately)

English as a Second Language teaching and its barriers

As far as English as a second language learning, the most mentioned resource was WHEABLE, followed by St. Patrick. The library was equally mentioned, for conversation groups, internet use, and language learning books. Language learning is currently financed by the federal government through Immigration and Citizenship Canada (CIC), through the

Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program, and by the Ministry of Education for Ontario.

The most mentioned barrier by women, men and youth was the difficulty of learning and communicating in English. Language learning is essential, and many believe that they will learn it much more quickly than they manage to, leading to the frustration that is expressed by Cipriano: "We came with the certainty that in six months we're going to learn this shit and you don't learn that like that ... I have the hope that it will be four years, I've been at it three and some, here my friend says that he's going to take ten years, so that's truly a barrier. A tremendous barrier". There was also critique of the fact that there are not separate English classes for seniors, nor for those who do not need to learn it at a college entrance level, but rather for daily living.

Finding employment and its barriers

Resources that were mentioned for finding employment were Fanshaw College, a technical school where people get training, take courses for credits, and bring their accreditations up to date, and Wil Employment Connections, a centre that helps find work, gives courses on how to find work, and offers internships that help with "Canadian experience", which is one of the primary barriers to finding work. Thanks to this service, Wil, some people managed to find permanent employment; although others did their internships and did not then enter the labour force. This is how Gladis described her experience with Wil:

And then another entity called Wil helps you with the process of looking for employment. You take a course or a short course, of a month or a month and a half, and you learn to write a resume, to be interviewed,

to analyse yourself and see what you want, what your background is and if you want to keep doing the same thing or if you want to change to a different activity, they teach you to look for jobs on the internet. And most important of all, they place you in a company where you, say, a company related to what you want to do, and that's a huge help because those are two months of volunteer work, let's call it that, where you don't get any income, but it gives you first of all Canadian work experience ... (women's workshop)

Finding employment in the field that the person worked in Colombia was the second most mentioned barrier. For a lot of individuals the process of migrating means losing the ability to work in their area of specialization and having to do unqualified work or work in precarious conditions. Not being able to do the work that one is accustomed to is also a blow to self esteem, and is directly related to a person's dignity. This is especially difficult for older persons, who argue that the process can be easier for younger people. This is how Anacleto spoke of his anguish, "So then I look around me and I see cleaning jobs, pizza delivery - and not because that doesn't have status and it would affect me to deliver pizza, but because that wasn't my life project, it wasn't what I was doing, eh? So that's really hard, and I think it's not just me that it happens to, I think that's in general". The possibilities for doing the same type of work that they did in Colombia, or at least something similar, are minimal, or will take them a long time². This is a source of crisis. This phenomena is especially notable in men over 40, who feel that they have no chance of working at the same or a similar sort job. This desperation is also seen in women to some degree, but it is usually reduced by their roles with their children and husbands. The success of their

children justifies it, to some degree. Youth face the difficulty of having a better chance of entering the Canadian labour force than their parents. In the workshop that was held with youth all were studying, and the vast majority were in professional university programs.

Community resources and their limitations

Amongst community resources the CCLC was the most mentioned, in both the workshops and interviews. One important aspect of the CCLC is that the service that they offer refugees goes far beyond welcoming and extends to settlement (CCLC, 2007). Other community agencies that offer settlement services to newcomers were also mentioned, such as the Luso, the Sexual Assault Centre, and the London Intercommunity Health Centre. In these sites refugees not only receive orientation, but also do volunteer work and meet other people. In general terms there is a positive evaluation of the services that these community agencies offer, especially as far as direct treatment by community workers, who are even described as "angels". Nevertheless, the critique is that none of these centres offers specialized or different treatment that responds to the special needs of refugees, for example for people who are highly traumatized and face conditions different than those of other immigrants. Many of the research participants spoke of being physically sick: they have pain

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2. Both the provincial and the federal government currently have various programs that help immigrants and refugees access the labour market in the province. These include: employment counselling and evaluation, specialized job search assistance, research and information on the labour market, evaluation and accreditation of foreign studies and credentials, transition training, assistance with access to regulated occupation, academic updating, internships, mentoring, and employment support (Canada-Ontario, 2005, art. 6.6.2). The government of Ontario has been particularly concerned with the ability of immigrants to work in their areas of specialty.

in their back, their stomach, their gall bladder gets inflamed, they eat a lot or can't eat. In general, their physical health is affected. They also speak of emotional problems: fear, anguish, sadness, depression, "not being able to do anything", and needing to cry.

In specific terms they spoke of psychological treatment and specialized help. As Reinaldo put it:

I think that although it's true that they treat you well, there are a lot of gaps that could be filled. I think that people should not just be welcomed when they get here, but they should almost get psychological treatment, because I spent nearly a year trying to ... I mean, I got sick, literally I was sick, I was trying to do things, and I would end up here, and end up there ... (men's workshop).

Fear and the reconstruction of life plans

Without a doubt, fear is what accompanies refugees every step of the way: while they are in Colombia, the departure from Colombia, the arrival in the US, the passage into Canada, the wait for a hearing, the hearing, and the first months of settlement. The experience with fear comes from their lived experience in Colombia, related to acts like threats or kidnapping, and from events that they've lived in their journey from Colombia to London, passing through the US. Those who spoke of threats and assassinations attempts that they faced still remember those experiences today with fear and terror.

Once they get to Canada the memory of the fear felt in Colombia due to the insecurity and the constant danger turns into, for example, a reason why people stay in London. For them, this city offers them possibilities that Colombia did not, including something that was not even available in the

US: security. Justo explains it like this, "Look, excuse me, but I think that in part it is the fear of insecurity that we have in Colombia that makes us stay in calm cities like London, because what we seek for ourselves and our families is tranquillity, safety and stability" (men's workshop).

Apart from the experiences with fear due to threats in Colombia, the London case allows us to follow the trace of other types of fears or anguish related to migration journeys. So, for those who lived in the US for a long time and stayed there without status, the fear of living without a legal identity, of being deported at any moment, becomes a determining factor for leaving the US and going to Canada.

For those refugees whose final aim was to arrive in Canada, their fears are strictly related to the uncertainty of the journey and the risks that they faced. Although all had some contact that knew how to go through the process and make the journey, be it a friend, family member, or "immigration agent" that was telling them how to do it and where to go, nevertheless the fear and uncertainty is not diminished, as was the case with Casimiro. His sister-in-law had previously made the same journey, and she was telling him what they had to do. Despite that his fear was no less, as he recounts, "Because along the way as she (his sister-in-law) went through it she learned and then she would tell us about it, and we had the paperwork with us the whole time, while we decided. And she would keep passing us the information, but of course this didn't take away our fear" (men's workshop).

On the other hand, there are a series of fears associated with the process of refuge and migration to an unknown country. For example, during the process the refugee does not know what happens next after each step, although they've told them what the process is

like, at no moment can this be predicted with certainty. For example, for Federico the fear that he felt in Colombia was a known fear, but that fear is different than the fear he felt during his immigration process. The latter is associated with uncertainty and not knowing what is going to happen,

So the fear when you leave Colombia is different, because that's a known fear, because it's something you already know, but here, especially at first, it's natural for a human being to be afraid of the unknown, I mean, what you don't know ... , here they tell you that you have to go to such and such a place and that there is such and such meeting and you have to go through such and such programs and get God knows how many papers in God knows how many meetings, and that also generates a certain uncertainty (men's workshop).

This fear is also expressed as uncertainty in relation to the process of settlement and integration in the new society. The fear that is spoken of in this regard is a fear of not knowing how the system works, and of not speaking the language. In a very particular way the fear of English, as they themselves speak of it, makes it not only difficult to enter the labour market, it even becomes a fear that ends up isolating them and even caging them in their own homes. This was what happened to Lea, who after having gotten lost on the bus was afraid to catch another one, as she tells, " I got off (the bus that she had gotten lost on), I caught the bus back and went home, and since then I've been really afraid to catch buses because of the language issue" (women's workshop).

It's interesting to note that children and youth also speak of being afraid, afraid of going to an unknown place. For example, Javier Patricio, in the youth workshop, spoke of it like this: "Well, I was eight years old

and I remember that before we left, we lived in Ecuador for a while, and well the truth is that I was a bit afraid. I remember being afraid, like coming to a place that you don't know, it's like it's all a change". For this youth the fear even reached monstrous dimensions, as he described when he explained his drawing, "And this (in the drawing) is the monster of fear".

Figure 19. The Monster of Fear



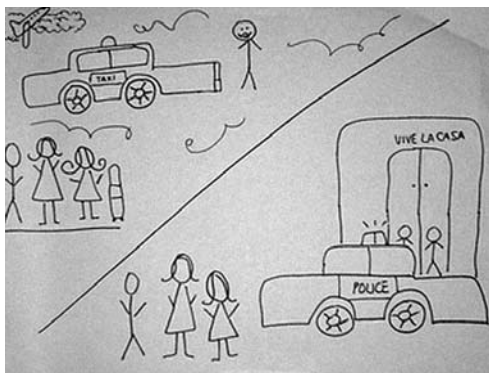
Memory and the reconstruction of life plans

One predominant memory that impacts Colombian refugees in their process of reconstructing their life plans is their vulnerability during the immigration process in the face of power and authority figures. On many occasions this also extends to the process of settlement. It is quite common to hear narrations that refer to the journey, from departure to arrival in London, in which the person is at the mercy of those who are in positions of power, such as immigration agents. This is particularly evident in airports, especially in the US and with US immigration agents.

Abuse and mistreatment are a recurring theme throughout the process of immigration and integration, abuse by US immigration officials, by workers in refugee houses, by taxi drivers, by English teachers

and by bosses when they begin to work. On many occasions, these abuses mark the first experiences that refugees have with persons who have power. These abuses are a blow to self-esteem, and afterwards play an important role in their inability to successfully integrate into society. For example, they can impede their language learning and make them more insecure. The experiences of abuse, mistreatment, being made to feel inferior, vulnerability, and the lack of power have a notable impact on their self-esteem, and have direct repercussions in that they increase their insecurities about reconstructing their life plans. In the following fragment Marina, in the youth workshop, refers to incidents of mistreatment during her journey. It is worth highlighting the analysis that this youth makes after narrating the incident, which for her is not only the beginning of a bad arrival, but an event that marked her. How it marked her, and how these events will affect her life in Canada, is yet to be seen.

Figure 20. When We Arrived



I think that when one initiates a process like the one we've all begun, when you leave what you consider to be your home, it's all a bunch of experiences and memories, but for me what probably stands

out the most is when we got to the airport in Buffalo. ... so we got into the taxi and the man got super pissed and started yelling at us and started being super rude and since my mom didn't speak any English at all she didn't understand what he was saying, and he threw our suitcases around, I mean, he got us in that taxi any which way and he was driving super fast, I mean, really badly. So, for us it was like, or personally for me, it was like a really bad arrival ... (youth workshop).

The future, dreams

Dreams and expectations for the future are related to being able to get established, get or continue in stable employment, buy a house, be able to go to Colombia regularly, and perhaps, although not for all, to some day return. These dreams are not about grand expectations, nor particularly ambitious desires. Quite the contrary, they are, generally, minimal expectations of life. This is how Anastacio describes it,

So I'd say that my goal now is not really grand, because it's simply to maintain a work situation where I can earn enough to sustain my family with dignity, to be able to offer my children a university degree, and later to be able to go back to Colombia, if that's possible. I keep thinking about that. Another goal was to buy a house, which we managed to do, thank God ... (interview with two men).

But, on the other hand, one also sees a lack of hope, of future, and the impossibility of getting established or integrated enough into Canadian society, as is the case with Lea, who is now a senior,

In my case, because of my age, I don't see a future for myself - because one of the barriers, the main barrier for me, has been the language. I know how to work with my hands But here I feel so lost, truly I don't see any future for myself, because of the language, because the language has been really difficult for me, because however much I study, this little head simply doesn't hold on to the language, I can't see myself doing it. I say: what's my future here going to be? (women's workshop)

The children, the future beneficiaries, are the essential explanation for why it is worth making the sacrifices. Men as much as women are willing to resign themselves to a life of longing, of nostalgia for Colombia, of not having power, in some cases, of putting their professional lives back on track, for the sake of their children and their children's wellbeing. Living in Canada not only represents physical security for their children, but they will also be able to have other advantages, such as living in a country in the "North", in the first world, and learning other languages, and this serves to "give meaning to the move", in the words of one interviewee. Anastasio expressed it like this,

Anastasio: My wife and I always resigned ourselves and we would always give each other courage by saying, "But we're doing it for our kids". I mean, you resign yourself and you give yourself courage thinking that the kids are going to be the ones that benefit from this. So you see the progress that they make, and that gives you strength. The fact that they pick up languages so easily, and you can see that." (interview with two men).

Social representations

London, representations of Colombian refugees

Given that the arrival of Colombian refugees to London was concentrated in the years 2003 and 2004, the city, in practical terms, had to face receiving this wave of refugees in a very short time frame. These were refugees with a very particular profile, as was detailed at the beginning of this document; one that is different than that of refugees who arrived in this city after the second world war or the refugees who came from Central America. This meant, on the one hand, that London had to adapt its community services, such as, for example, contracting Spanish-speaking community workers, and, on the other hand, that the community in general had to accept, or at least tolerate, this "new" group.

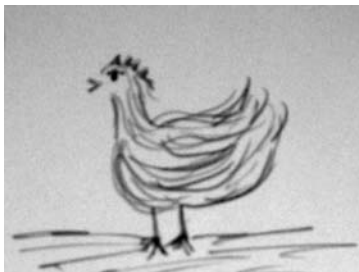
The impact of Colombian refugees has been so great in London that the media has dedicated specific spaces to the issue. In November 2005, A-Channel, the city news channel, dedicated a series of three specials to Colombian refugees. In this series Colombia is represented as a chaotic, violent society with a drug war, where the dynamic and complexity of the current situation is not even outlined in the most basic fashion, but quite the contrary is simplified into a "war on drugs" in the most stereotypical Hollywood style. In this context the Colombian refugee is defined as a victim of this war that comes from the middle class and has a university education, and who would rather be "delivering pizzas than living in Colombia". They are largely identified as having the values that are desired in the "community of London": good workers, who value family, like to enjoy life, but most of all, can become successful immigrants.

This same evaluation appears in the special series that was done by the London Free Press,

the local newspaper, which in November of 2006 did a special series on refugees in London, the first chapter of which focused on Colombian refugees. In an argument similar to that of the tv program, the newspaper emphasized Colombians as victims, but also painted them as the successful immigrants that Canadian society hopes for. Unlike the tv show, the newspaper goes further in making an effort to paint London as a multicultural community with room for different immigrants from different nationalities, and as a place with opportunities for those immigrants to achieve their dreams. In these two specials Colombian refugees are portrayed benevolently, as a group who, because of their professional education, can contribute to the community. This representation coincides with some of the representations that were mentioned in focus groups, in which the Colombian refugee is mainly seen as a successful immigrant, from the middle and upper class, with values family, music, dancing and parties. These last characteristics are more common among the population in general.

Another recurring representation is that of the highly motivated immigrant, to the point of being ambitious or aggressive, and who therefore on some occasions becomes a danger or a bother for community workers. This is how one psychotherapist put it:

Figure 21. The energy of a Rooster



The image that came to me [--] I, my perception is, you know, is that this group, is extremely driven, feisty. So I do feel the energy of the rooster, they're ready to go, they know the corn is there and they are

gonna get it!! You know, and you watch out because they know what they want. So there is a certain drive ness, there's a demanding piece that I perceive, there's times that I just go: "Oh My God!" you know, because they all want something and they come in and they say: "I know what I want from you" and I go: "Oh My God!" So, it's been a bit overwhelming for me being in the position where I am. I can really relate to your perception (talking to another participant), I've been sending people your way when I think they are ready; and they say: "I finish the sixth grade and I'm ready to go!" and I go: "wonderful, I know the place" you know, but I, that's my perception, so there is some ambivalence in the sense of you know, the high energy, there is a little bit of aggressive I would say, that possible more assertiveness, but certainly a lot of energy and a lot of wanting; They know what they want and they know that they are here to get it. That's my perception. (focus group with officials).

Colombian refugees, representations of London and Canada

In general terms, the relationship that Colombian refugees' in London have with Canada is extremely contradictory and wracked with tension. On the one hand they love, admire and are grateful to Canada. On occasions this goes as far as idolatry. Abigail, in the women's workshop, expressed her feelings as, "We definitely think that the only ones who are willing to disinterestedly help you in life are your mother and father, and then only if they have the means".

Along the same line Pura, a women who faced difficult experiences in the US, commented, "I love this country, it's fabulous. My experience in the US was not

very good. This country is fantastic, I love it, I have a lot of dreams here, I want to do a lot of things" (women's workshop). On the other hand, there is feeling that they are never going to belong to Canadian society, that they are seen as inferior, exotic, as a threat, and that they come to take jobs away from Canadians. For example, Soledad does not think that it's possible to be friends with "Canadians". In her words, "I also wanted to share than when ... you make friends, friends, I don't know how possible it is to have a true friendship with a Canadian, it might be possible, but not the general rule". On the other hand she appreciates that they make significant contributions to society. One interesting note is that children are mentioned as resources and as contributions to society, as expressed by Cipriano:

And there are times when some Canadians say to you, "How is it that Canada is giving you everything!" and "You're living off of the Canadian tax dollar" and I don't know what all, a bunch of things like that. But wait a pretty minute, in the long term our children are going to give that back with interest. I mean, already my daughter has put in over a hundred volunteer hours, and that's worth money. You get what I'm saying? (men's workshop).

In general terms there is a representation that the Canadian, an abstract individual, is kind and generous. Casimiro, a man who was a professor in Colombia, speaks of Canadians this way: "They're so generous that they accept a person who speaks the language extremely badly, who sometimes speaks without their ideas making sense, not because they don't line up, but because they don't speak the language, so much so that sometimes you put your foot in your mouth.

They listen and accept you and understand you" (men's workshop). This attitude is maintained as long as the other acts "humbly". It is not a relationship of equality. Quite the contrary, it is marked by unequal relations of power, as Gaspar mentions implicitly in the following fragment, "And so that's what we have to value in these people (Canadians), that they trust us, but its important for us to act humbly and recognize our weaknesses. If we recognize that, people value that we're capable of knowing who we are" (men's workshop).

Another critical take is related to being able to belong to Canadian society only up to a certain point, given that if a refugee tries to critique the Canadian state, this is not accepted. This was evident in the case of a Colombian refugee who wrote a letter to the editor of the newspaper protesting health care cutbacks and got the following response,

... the letter obviously said that, that she (Reinaldo's wife, who tells of the incident) is a Latin American immigrant, and that she can say this and that, and that hopefully in Canada she won't go through the terrible experiences that are lived in Latin America. The response of the Canadian was aggressive ... it was like when a Canadian responded to my wife by saying that she shouldn't be impudent, that a person who has been in Canada for two years doesn't have the right to say absolutely anything, that she should please keep quiet.

This is interesting, because with this case we can pose questions of the very project of the construction of the Canadian state: who belongs to the project of the nation-state and who does not.

Colombian refugees: how they think others see them

Jacqueline, a youth, expresses one of the perceptions of how Colombians think that the receiving society sees them, “Because Colombia is a third world country they think that we live in the middle of the jungle, or with a different type of development, but to tell you the truth Bogotá is city with a lot of culture, with a lot of things”. They feel that they are seen as inferior, and that a direct connection continues to be made between being Colombian and being a guerrilla or a drug trafficker, as expressed by Anastacio,

... and let's not tell ourselves lies, they look at us like we're from the third world, as we are, and that hurts our pride because when you're there you think you're the king of the world. We pull out the yellow, blue and red flag and yell Colombia, damn it! but then you get here and you realize that when you say “I'm from Colombia” – ‘oh, guerrillas and drug traffickers, uh huh,’ they categorize you right away ... (interview with two men).

In other cases there is a feeling that society is indifferent to them, as expressed by Berenice, who feels that Canadians aren't interested in knowing about Colombia or engaging with Colombians, “My husband started working and it has been really hard for him to have relationships with people from Canada. We don't know if it's that people in London are different, or more serious, or aren't interesting in knowing anything about immigrants ... It makes you feel sort of hurt.” (women's workshop)

When a Colombian is “confused” with a person from the Middle East, who in the current North American imaginary is, by extension, a “terrorist”, this can lead to verbal

abuse, as happened to this Colombian: “What's more, another thing that happened to me, this might happen all of the time, or be really rare, but at any rate, a man on the street hit me and split open my face and told me “you miserable son-of-a-bitch Arab, get out of here!” (Reinaldo, men's workshop). In this case, the aggressor demands that the supposed “Arab” – who represents not only the “terrorist” more specifically, but the “other”, in more general terms – leave the country. He immediately goes on to try to exterminate him, if not totally, at least partially through hitting him. In this event there is a clear expression of who, at least for a few instants, has real power over the “other”, the “foreigner”. It is also an explicit expression of racism. The refugee victim of this abuse did not file a complaint with the police.

Tensions over who is a' real' refugee

The dichotomy between the “real” and the “not real” refugee is a topic of constant tension, especially in London where, as previously explained, most of the refugees are refugee claimants. The fact that many of these refugees have arrived through the United States, in contrast with the refugees resettled from abroad by the government or privately, has created an important fracture within the Colombian community. As such, there is a discourse which considers that these refugees are “not real”, and that they actually come seeking economic opportunities. Nevertheless, during fieldwork we were able to verify that many of these refugees had filed refugee claims in the US, without success. This fragmentation, where the veracity of the histories of refugees is doubted, makes those who are going through the process feel that they have to convince different actors that their story is true and that as such they are “real” refugees. Even so, there are those who never spoke

of their “history”, for there are also histories that are taboo. This tension between the “real refugee” and the “fake refugee” also points to the phenomena of using the refugee system as an immigration mechanism, whereby the humanitarian protection system is seriously undermined and those who are in need of protection find themselves caught behind those who use the system to immigrate. The case of London points to the range of possibilities for use/abuse of the system, but at the same time to the grey areas where there is a mix of economic reasons that push residents out of certain regions and political reasons that push people to seek protection.

A different look: by gender and by generation

In general terms it is worth mentioning that the men’s workshop was an opportunity for men to speak about their feelings and fears in a very open way. They spoke and detailed the reasons they left and the direct ties to an imminent threat. In most cases they were the primary victims. In their narrations they give great weight to their familial responsibility. They feel that the wellbeing of their families is directly tied to their actions, and as such any decision they take will impact all of the members of their family. In regards to family responsibility, Ludovico said, “When you go out it’s like what you want is to go back and face it head on, but you have the counterweight of your family responsibility. What happens if things turn out badly, what will happen to my kids and my wife” (men’s workshop).

But this responsibility also keeps them from speaking about their feelings, and particularly their fears. Therefore it is not surprising that in this workshop they spoke so much about both their feelings and their fears, that a feeling of solidarity was

built amongst them, and that they offered each other support when they felt or saw themselves as vulnerable. This man spoke of the workshop this way,

“The reason that maybe we can talk here about this, and not in other meetings, is that when you’re the head of the family, and carry the responsibility, you never talk to your wife about that. Maybe she has a different type of fears, but you’re the one that has to face it, so there are that type of fears” (men’s workshop).

One of the important aspects that women speak of is the importance of their children and the opportunities that they will have in Canada. Their children justify in large part their sacrifices, and are a source of pride. They also speak of their ability to build networks and contacts that will benefit the entire family. They are the ones who go out, speak with the social workers, and know the names of the people who work in the agencies that offer services to refugees. They also talk of loneliness and of feeling lost, figuratively as well as literally.

The work with youth allowed us to directly contrast what they have to say with what their parents said in workshops or in-depth-interviews. It is important to recognize that youth also feel fear, even when they suffered the immigration experience as children. In the narrative of parents, it would seem that they do not perceive the anguish and uncertainty that their children suffer, maybe because since they are young they do not think that they can also feel fear.

Another important aspect is the change in roles seen in the family. Because children normally learn the language more quickly than their parents, this turns them into social agents for the family, as the ones who deal with the English-speaking outside world. Nevertheless, the youth are not prepared to assume this type of roles and on many

occasions resist and would like to continue to occupy their place as children and not as parent-children. This is how Marina tells of the change in her role when she and her family arrived in Canada,

And yes, when I lived in Colombia with my parents if I worked it was for myself and my things, for my savings. Back then my mom or my dad held the reins of the house, and they were the ones that said “this gets done like this, or like that”. I mean, I didn’t have anything to do with the shopping, or any of that. But all of a sudden when I got here I guess my role changed in the sense that my mom was here, but since my mom didn’t speak English and I was the only one that did, well, my brother could kind of speak it more or less, so then it was like everything centred around ‘oh we have to do the shopping, oh, we have to do this or that’ so, you know what I mean? It was like a change of role and I hadn’t planned on it, I wasn’t expecting it, and I didn’t want that role. (youth workshop).

Another aspect related to this change of roles is that on many occasions youth become economic contributors, sometimes the primary contributor, which leads to their changing from the position of submissive daughters and sons to having a voice and a vote in the family, often equal to that of their parents. This causes family tensions and conflicts that can become confrontations. Given that children did not participate in the decision to seek refuge, in many cases they blame their parents for their living situations, as expressed by Lucero, “Well the other day after I got up I went out to the balcony and thought... ‘Good God, what did my mom bring me to’. I don’t blame her, but I said, ‘We had all the comforts in Colombia, and now I have to sit on these paint buckets to eat and all of this’”. (youth workshop).

Conclusions

London has become the city with the largest number, both in proportion and in total, of Colombian refugees in Canada. Of this number, the vast majority arrive as refugee claimants, through the US. Even when the popular discourse is that “all of the Colombians in London came from the US” and that the majority are not “real refugees”, our research found that even though the majority of Colombian refugees in London did come over the US border, their experiences are varied. They are not a homogenous group, and the reasons that they left Colombia correspond to the conditions of the multipolar conflict in the country. In general terms at least three different groups of refugee claimants were identified amongst those who passed through the US on their way to London. The first group arrived in the US with the aim of staying there until the situation in Colombia improved; as the years passed they lost their immigration status. The second group got the US with the aim of staying there and filing a refugee (asylum) claim; once their claim was denied they decided to go to Canada. The third group, which is the majority, are those who went to the US with the aim of applying for refuge in neighbouring Canada. The experience of these Colombian refugees in the US makes them a particular group, because they come to Canada with lived experience of the cultural codes and socio-political systems.

A common denominator amongst these three groups was that the vast majority had contacts in London before coming to the city. They had family members, friends or acquaintances or at least “immigration consultants”. These networks facilitated their arrival as well as the settlement process. In general terms, Colombian refugees that come

to London come from big and mid-sized cities in Colombia, from the middle and upper-middle class, and with postsecondary and university education. All of the adults mentioned having an occupation and they are highly motivated to stay in Canada.

Although the Colombian population has managed to build ties with the London community, and up to a certain point has managed to insert itself into this community, it continues to face serious problems such as language learning, which was the barrier most frequently mentioned by participants, as well as the difficulty of finding work in the field that they had previously worked in Colombia. The lack of recognition of their degrees, studies and experience has meant that many of them have been unable to find work in their area.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the Colombian population has become a visible community, whose profile comes close to that of the successful immigrant. It could be argued that the Colombian community has had a tangible impact on daily life in London. They are a visible part of the community and they have inserted themselves in the labour market, as well as the social, cultural, artistic, and community arena. It can be expected that the community will continue to grow, though not at as fast pace as was seen between 2002 and 2004.

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FEAR, HISTORICAL MEMORY AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF COLOMBIAN REFUGEES IN QUEBEC

Amantina Osorio R.

To look at the migratory journeys of new immigrant groups in Quebec, as we do here with the Colombian population, is to look at the particular dynamic history of relations between the federal government and the province of Quebec, at immigration policies and models of integration, and at federal multiculturalism and Quebecois interculturalism.

Particular immigration dynamics have been consolidated over the years through measures that the Quebec government has adopted in the face of the cultural pluralism of immigration. These measures include the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, adopted in 1975, which includes the right to cultural difference in the name of fundamental individual liberties, prohibits

ethnic discrimination and recognizes the right of minorities to community life; and the Charter of the French Language, Law 101, adopted in 1977, whose primary goal is to make French “the normal and everyday language of public life”, that is to say, it gives Francophones the right to work and receive services in French, and requires the linguistic integration of immigrants (Government of Quebec, 1977). As the linguistic policy was being developed and implemented, the Quebec government in the last 30 years was also actively involved in the selection and integration of immigrants, through the signing of several different accords (MCCI, 1992) which have allowed it to select immigrants that help Quebec meet its four challenges: demographic, economic prosperity, survival of French, and opening to the world.³

The first part of this section refers to some of the most recent policies implemented by the provincial government with regards to the regionalizing of immigration. The idea is to share, across the territory and with local politicians, the task of welcoming and integrating newcomers, and to avoid a larger concentration of the immigrant population in the larger metropolis of Montreal.

Every region, and in our case the region of la Estrie and more precisely the municipality of Sherbrooke, is assigned essential services and programs for implementing the policy of regionalization. The municipality of Sherbrooke has been a pioneer in developing a municipal policy of welcoming and integrating immigrants, together with different actors in the region, which we examine below in the second part of this section. Through the lived experience of the Colombian population living in Sherbrooke we will focus on the social policies and programs offered to the population in general, and immigrants and refugees in particular.

In the final part we focus on the experiences of being displaced and claiming refuge of a group of 30 Colombian refugees who voluntarily participated in the research. We then concentrate on the experiences of welcoming and settlement in the new society, which implies a whole series of social, cultural and identity changes and transformations for Colombian men and women.

Integration Model: Quebec Interculturalism

The Regionalization of Immigration

Concerned with an imbalanced regional distribution of immigration across the territory of Quebec, approximately fifteen years ago the Quebec government implemented a policy of regionalization of immigration aimed at facilitating and fostering the settlement of immigrants outside of the greater Montreal area. The tendency for the majority of immigrants to be spatially concentrated only in the metropolitan area of Montreal, at 88% in 1991⁴, risked, in effect, producing strong long-term consequences, primarily that of depriving the regions of the benefits of international immigration and accenting the dualism of Quebec society between a multiethnic and pluricultural Montreal and the rest of Quebec as strongly homogenous (Simard, 1996).

3. Some of these aspects were detailed in Part II, in regards to the public policies of Canada, and we will not review them here, so as to concentrate on the experience of Colombians in the municipality of Sherbrooke.

4. This level of concentration of the immigrant population is the highest of the large Canadian metropolises. In the 1991 census it was 6 % for Vancouver and 59% para Toronto, compared to 88% for Montreal. In fact, of the 12 % of immigrants who lived outside of Montreal in 1991, half (6%) lived in other urban areas (Québec, Hull, Sherbrooke, Trios-Rivières, Chicoutimi, Jonquière), and the other half in the regions of Quebec. This is a sign of the huge attraction of Montreal (Statistics Canada, 1991).

The objective of this policy is to share with other regions the economic and demographic benefits of immigration that Montreal has had for some time, and to favour the integration of immigrants into the Francophone majority and increase the birth rate⁵. It was written in the context of a policy of regional development (government of Quebec, 1990:64). “Regional will” and “negotiation” guide the socio-economic accords. The state will support those projects that respond to regional needs. The existence of regional Centres for Orientation and Training of Immigrants (COFI) since 1975 has facilitated French language learning for immigrants. Regional offices of the Ministry of Immigration were also established, which allow for better services for newcomers and better coordination with different actors in the region.

The Ministry of Immigration and Citizenship of Quebec (MRCI) in 1999 signed seven specific agreements with different regional development councils: Estrie, Laval, Lanaudière, Laurentides, Montérégie, Outaouais and the national capital. These agreements allow the Ministry and its agents or regional associates to agree on measures to attract and retain immigrants to the region, and jointly offer appropriate financial support to carry out innovative projects and establish adequate infrastructure.

In the Énoncé of the 1990 policy regarding refugees selected abroad, the primary actions announced were: 1) the elaboration of tools to inform and educate the public about the situation of refugees in the world and the selection criteria used by Quebec for persons in this category and how they correspond to the ability to welcome them; 2) the promotion of collective sponsorship programs with the aim of strengthening the welcoming of refugees by organizations, groups, or persons, and placing particular attention on efforts made in each region; 3) the reorientation and development of support funds for refugees, with the aim of giving priority to support for

projects that prepare eventual candidates for settlement in Quebec and their integration (Government of Quebec, 1990).

The joint work with non-governmental organizations appears as the privileged means for facilitating the entry of newcomers, immigrants and refugees into local society. Agreement and joint work is insisted upon, as is the proposal to favour the development of core groups of cultural communities in the region so as to attract and retain immigrants. The issues of attraction and retention are, indeed, at the centre of the policy of spatial dispersal of immigrants, as are regional development and integration.

Integration means that there are possibilities for immigrants and refugees to fully participate in all aspects of society: social, economic and political. The success of integration depends on the equality of opportunities in the society and the absence of discrimination based on national or ethnic origin, but also on the characteristics of immigrants themselves and the contexts in which immigration is carried out. In this sense the Quebec government defines the rights and obligations of newcomers and of the receiving society. To do so it has developed a “moral contract” based on the following three principles: a society where French is the common language of public life, a democratic society where the participation and contribution of all is expected and encouraged, and a pluralist society open to multiple contributions insofar as they respect fundamental democratic values and the need for intercommunity exchange (MCCI, 1990).

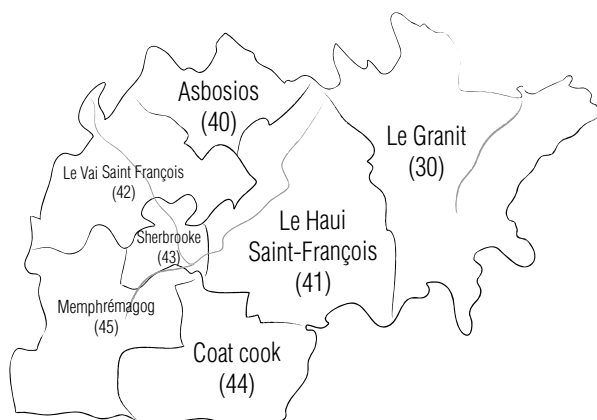
The following section presents a brief description of immigration to Sherbrooke and the welcome and settlement policies, as well

5. From 1991 to 2001, the number of persons born abroad and settled outside of the metropolitan region went from 70,670 to 85,080, which is to say a stable proportion of more or less 12%.

as of the different actors involved in the life of the city. The analysis of the social policies and programs offered to the population in general and immigrants and refugees in particular (welcome, French language learning, housing, employment and health services) will be addressed on the basis of the lived experience of Colombian refugees living in Sherbrooke.

Immigration to Sherbrooke and Municipal Policies

Figure 22. Map of the Region of the Estrie and its Municipalities

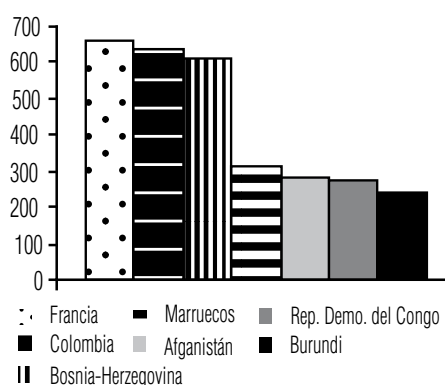


The provincial government considers immigration as part of a regional development plan, through both broad and specific agreements. On the one hand, it identifies two types of protagonists, the immigrant (and it includes different categories of immigrants: refugees and independent immigrants (workers and business people)) – and the receiving society. The policy flags two desired types of integration: linguistic and socio-economic. The overall goal is to “safeguard” Quebec’s culture and economy.

According to the census of 2005, the population of Sherbrooke was 147,426, of whom approximately 5% (that is to say, approximately 7,000) were immigrants and refugees. The immigrant population has diversified in the last few years, particularly since 1991, with immigrants coming from the former Yugoslavia, Colombia, France, China

and Afghanistan being amongst the largest groups⁶. More than 600 Colombians are counted. Between 1997 and 2004 Colombia became the second largest country of origin of Latin American immigrants in Canada, and in Quebec it moved into first place.

Figure 23. Place of Origin – Immigrants Admitted in Québec from 1996 to 2005, Region of Estrie 2007



As far as the category of immigrants in the province of Quebec, economic immigration represents more than half at 54.4% of admissions, the family reunification category 8.7%, refugees and persons in a refugee situation 5.5%, and other immigrants 4%. Nevertheless, in the regions of Quebec the refugee category predominates⁷ (between 1998 and 2003), although it is important to note that the number of independent immigrants in Sherbrooke has increased since 1999, and even more so since 2003⁸. These families tend to be made up of active young adults accompanied by their children. Nearly sixty percent of immigrants arriving

- More than 600 Colombians are counted. Between 1997 and 2004 Colombia became the second largest country of origin of Latin American immigrants in Canada, and in Quebec it moved into first place (Statistics Canada).
- Every year around 1800 government assisted refugees are sent from abroad to the regions, which represents 7% of immigration to Quebec (MRCI, 2003). Historically, the region took in a high proportion of refugees (50% in 1993, 71 % in 1994, 8 % in 1995, 75% in 1996).
- They are primarily from France and Magreb (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia).

between 1991 and 1999 who were settled in la Estrie in January of 2001 have a post-secondary educational level.

Sherbrooke brings together various businesses and a range of administrative, governmental, social and recreational-tourism services. In the last few decades it has become a university town (the University of Sherbrooke, Francophone, and the University of Bishop, Anglophone) and a city of services, with the University Hospital Centre of Sherbrooke. Nevertheless, the region continues to be largely dominated by a “traditional” economic structure.

In practice, most jobs are still in sectors such as the manufacturing of rubber, plastics and wood products. The sectors of furniture making, construction, and commerce are also present in the region. The industries of the primary sector tied to the exploitation of natural resources (agriculture, forestry, mining, fishing) employ 2.3% of the workers in the region (3,300), primarily in agriculture, and forestry adaptation and exploitation. One in four immigrants work in manufacturing, as well as in “the trades, transport and machinery” and in sales and services.

The level of unemployment is higher than the Quebec average, 9.5% in 2005. The rate of immigrant unemployment is higher still at 11.1%. The city has an aging population (more than 20% of the population is 65 or older). As Vatz-Laaroussi et. al argue (2006:81 -85), the local context is dynamic as far as the university and cultural diversity, but moribund in economic and demographic terms.

Local Social Actors and Municipal Policies

The municipality of Sherbrooke, responding to the new challenges involved in

offering services and ethnocultural diversity, in 2004 adopted a policy for welcoming and integrating immigrants. This policy was a result of various months of consultation and agreement building amongst various local actors⁹.

The main goals of this policy are: “to offer the city council and administration a tool that allows it to play a more integrated role in immigration; to exercise leadership that favours the immigrant population’s full exercise and enjoyment of citizenship; to develop the capacity of the region of Sherbrooke to welcome, integrate and retain immigrants; to prepare the population of Sherbrooke for living in a more heterogenous society and to accompany this evolution” (Ville de Shebrooke, 2003, translation by author). The axes for intervention are: access to municipal services by all immigrant citizens; to foster the representation of immigrants in all sectors of municipal activity; to favour intercultural exchange and to develop inter-institutional work (Ville de Shebrooke, 2003, translation by author). This policy seeks to mobilize all local actors in a process of sensitization and opening to ethnic and cultural diversity. During its first two years this policy was characterized by a plan of action¹⁰ which was adopted to bring it into effect and which took longer than expected.

Political involvement is another aspect that the city council reinforced through the creation of a Committee of intercultural relations and diversity, which acts as a consultant on everything having to do

9. Culturalcommunitiies,institutionsandorganizationsthatwork with the immigrant population www.ville.sherbrooke.qc.ca

10. The 2005-2007 action plan came out of an agreement with the MICC in March of 2005. Particualt attention is paid to the representation of immigrants in all municipal sectors. The municipality of Sherbrooke will serve as an example to other employers in the region, fostering, in regards to the equal access to employment program, the hiring of immigrants.

with immigration. A third aspect is the implementation of a training program for the municipal administration (Corriveau y La Rougery, 2006). This program aims to raise the awareness and education of city council members, managers and employees who have direct contact with immigrants.

An initial assessment of this policy varies according to who is doing the evaluation. Municipal experience in terms of welcoming and integration of immigrants is still very recent. Nevertheless, it has been a dynamic and evolving process characterized by a coming-together and mobilization of the actors involved. According to NGOs the city is in the first stage of consciousness raising, and this policy has not yet changed the daily life of immigrants at all. Immigrant associations¹¹ argue that it is necessary to be vigilant so that the Plan of Action reflects the real needs of immigrants, and though the policy recognizes and raises awareness of the principles of equity, social justice, solidarity and respect, in reality these principles are still far from being implemented with regards to immigrants themselves.

In Sherbrooke, as in other cities, it is mono and multi-ethnic community organizations that work with the immigrant and refugee population at different levels: front-line services (welcoming and settlement), employment, housing, French-language learning, and intercultural bridge-building. For 2005-2006, the organization in Sherbrooke associated with the Program for Accompaniment of New Canadians (PANA) of the government of Quebec, is Support Services for New Canadians (SANC), which has been in existence for five years and offers welcoming, accompaniment, and intensive support for the first stages of immigrant settlement¹². It offers support for all of the steps necessary for seeking employment. It has a large number of volunteers and offers

interpretation for several languages. Since the beginning of 1990 a dozen multiethnic associations¹³ have emerged, whose members and boards of directors are largely immigrants (Vatz Laaroussi, et. al., 2006). These associations work to defend rights, and assist with employment, and socio-cultural integration and assistance. Among the most recent are the “Colombiestrie” association of Colombians and the Argentinean association.

In the region there are also other community, religious¹⁴, and cultural organizations, who, though they do not receive funding from the ministry (MICC) but from other entities and donations, offer immigrants and refugees a whole series of supports such as free French classes, food and clothes banks, translation, and accompaniment to hospitals and clinics, etc..

All of the organizations operate basically in the social sphere, and they do not insure the political representation of immigrants. “That is where the line is drawn inside public space - between the world of organizations marked by cultural diversity, and the political world where decisions are made and the world of lobbying, both of which are still completely homogenous” (Vatz Laaroussi, et. al., 2006). In 2005 the Community intercultural roundtable of la Estrie¹⁵,

11. Arango, Juan Ovidio, (2006), (unpublished manuscript). Politique municipale et multiethnique.

12. Getting installed involves: searching for housing, buying the goods needed to set up house, enrolling youth, children and adults in schools and French language learning courses, enrolling in health and social welfare programs.

13. Examples of these associations are the Rencontre Interculturelle des familles RIFE- Centre pour femmes Immigrantes de l'Estrie, CFI; Habitations l'Équerre inc.; Fédération des Communautés Culturelles de l'Estrie -Fcce-; Actions Interculturelles de Développement et d'éducation -Aide-; and Moisson Estrie, amongst others.

14. Orthodox christian churches, evangelical groups, the association of Muslim university students of Sherbrook, the Arab and Muslim world institute.

15. The official members are: le Safrie, Aide, ColombiEstrie, la Ville de Sherbrooke, l'Université de Sherbrooke, La Ligue des Droits et Libertés

which attempts to fill this political gap, was initiated by the Intercultural Community Organization (Rencontre Interculturelle des Familles de l'Estrie).

Let us now turn to the immigrant and refugee services programs offered by the different ministries and in particular by the Ministry of Immigration. We will also introduce some testimonies that exemplify how they were perceived and experiences by Colombians living in Sherbrooke.

Social Policies and Programs

Welcoming, settlement and accompaniment programs

Some forty community organizations in Quebec offer welcoming, settlement and accompaniment services to newcomers (Pana). The organizations funded by the ministry must offer three classes of services (installation, settlement, and adaptation to the labour market). The service of accompaniment includes evaluation, orientation and follow through, with the aim of insuring that the immigrant is well inserted. This service does not include psychotherapeutic interventions nor psychosocial support for psychological or family difficulties, nor problems adapting to the new environment (Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles, 2005)¹⁶.

Once refugees selected abroad arrive in Canada, and specifically to the province of Quebec, they enter the Refugee Welcome and Settlement Program (PAIR), which funds community organization responsible for welcoming, settlement and accompaniment. In Sherbrooke this organization is called Support Services for New Canadians (SANC). This program assists with settlement and helps refugees to adapt to

their new environment, understand the way society functions, and receive services. The welcome includes being picked up at the airport or bus terminal, accompaniment to the temporary hotel where they will stay for three or four days, and intensive assistance with the early settlement paperwork and errands (eg: seeking housing, applying for employment assistance, registering for Quebec health insurance, requesting a social insurance number and a permanent resident card, registering the children for school, opening a bank account, going on a shopping trip for basics, buying clothing, enrolling in French classes or other integration services, etc.).

The experiences of refugees, men as much as women, will vary depending on the circumstances and the availability of personnel at the moment they arrive, of the agent that is assigned to them, the expectations that they have, and their emotional state when they arrive. The program lasts for five years, during which time it is considered that a person will get to know well how society and its institutions function. This is where ethnic associations and other organizations in the region play an important role.

Language learning

Language becomes of the main limiting factors for entering into and establishing new social networks. For the Colombian refugees, the wait time for enrolling in French classes varied: some were able to enter classes two weeks after arriving, while others had to wait three months. There were even some marches by immigrant families requesting more spaces or more flexible schedules.

The language barrier was experienced

16. See Micc http://www.formulaire.gouv.qc.ca/cgi/affiche_doc.cgi?dossier=703&table=0

differently by each, but the expression, “I felt mute, like a marionette” was common. There was frustration at not being able to express what they felt and wanted to say and at having to speak through an interpreter. Having to start studying from scratch, “as if I were illiterate, was horrible for me, a terrible block, drastic, beginning wasn’t easy at all, it still isn’t easy for me” (Ruby). The ethnic diversity of some of the class was noted by participants: “It was a beautiful opportunity for sharing with people of different nationalities, including even Canadians who come from the English-speaking part of the country and are learning French here, as well as those from Argentina and Peru” (Nubia).

The families who arrived with seniors noted the lack of appropriate courses. Some people cannot follow the rhythm of younger people and end up losing hope of learning the language, which leads them to depression, isolation, and illness. In Quebec, refugee claimants have to pay for French classes. Diana, who arrived with her three children and applied for refugee status at the border, describes her situation: “I had to file all of the paperwork to start studying French and pay for it myself out of what I had ... they didn’t recognize my need for childcare, so I had to pay for the childcare for my littlest.”

It is clear that language is an essential tool for getting to know the new society and making a space for oneself in it. Nevertheless, the level achieved in the courses offered by the government is basic, but not enough for people who want to immediately get a job or return to their studies. Refugees and immigrants rely on other spaces, other community and ethnic centres, and other governmental institutions (adult education) to continue perfecting it. Nevertheless, if the government is interested in refugees being

able to rapidly enter the work forces, it needs to offer specialized courses for different professions and specialities, as well as a focus on written French.

Housing

In Sherbrooke, government funded community services serve as a reference for landlords. Most of the time this works, as one of the SANC representatives told us, which is to say that landlords do not insist on co-signers as they do in some other cities. The major problem in Sherbrooke is that there is not much housing available, and less so for large families. The experiences lived by Colombian immigrants testify to the deteriorating state of some housing, “We went to the most ... the most poorly maintained building, the worst one, the one that smelled the worst if you will, that’s ranked here as the worst” (Gerardo). “My daughter started to have really strong allergies, because of the humidity, the carpet, the ‘cleanliness’ of the apartment” (Julietta).

One of the other aspects highlighted by several immigrant and refugee families was the size of housing. Several of them united to request that the government build reasonably priced social housing for large families. These families mobilized to Ottawa, Quebec and Montreal. Yolanda, a single mother of four children from the South of Colombia, participated in this mobilization, “When you would ask for an apartment and say that there were five of us, landlords would say no, the kids, the ages ...’ Two years ago I founded a housing cooperative.” Colombians started to use Sherbrooke’s offer of housing cooperatives, and several families currently live in these.

Apartments at reasonable prices are primarily available in the Ascot neighbourhood of the Mont Bellevue district, where one can find the largest apartments,

at the lowest cost, and there is a primary and a secondary school, a park, and services such as the bus, pharmacy and stores. At first immigrants and especially refugees are concentrated there, and some people comment that they are “ghettoising”. Reality has shown that as people get to know the city, the availability of services, and obtain stable employment, they diversify their use of different spaces of the territory. The SANC representatives are aware that housing is one of the most acute problems, in the regions as well as in the metropolis, and the government must intervene quickly if it wants to keep sending new immigrants and refugees to the regions. As is well known, housing and the labour market are determining aspects of the life journeys of immigrants and refugees.

Health and social services

In research done on the use of social-medical services, public lobbying stands out, but rarely do the processes of acculturation of immigrants and service personnel. An initial inventory carried out by Estrie (Vatz-Laaroussi et Rachédi, 2002) dedicated to war refugees and institutional violence points to the lack of services for psychological, social, educational and professional accompaniment. Some people mentioned the difficulty of finding a family doctor, and the long hospital wait times. Most of those who had had to use health services reported that so far these had been satisfactory.

Refugees in Sherbrooke, while they are learning the language, largely count on the SANC to send a volunteer to accompany them their medical appointment and provide interpretation. This is a comfort to them, because as Matilde says, “when it comes to my health I’m afraid to speak and not be understood and to have them do something that ends up hurting me”.

Education and job search

Of those women and men who participated in the workshops, 85% had a high school, technical or university degree, and had taken steps to validate the diplomas they had received in Colombia. This validation did not always correspond to the level granted by the receiving country. In Sherbrooke, the SANC promotes the service, recruitment and selection of persons interested in the training offered through the program of Access to Work for Immigrants Service (SATI). Different workshops are offered on the labour market and the job search. They help with designing and updating CVs, and aid in the search for internships and refer potential candidates. They also have the mandate of consolidating and developing a network of employers, primarily through individual and group visits¹⁷.

The reality that immigrants face is that of significant professional dequalification. Several longitudinal studies show that immigrants can achieve socio-economic status and upward mobility after a slow progression that lasts from three to twenty-five years (Renaud et al., 2001 ; Chiswick, Lee et Miller, 2002), during which time different strategies were put in place to compensate for this loss of status: investing again in studies, different types of poorly paid employment, working independently, etc..

In our sample, 2% were able to say that they had achieved recognition and employment thanks to experience and education that they brought with them from

17. Since 2005 immigrants have benefitted from a program supporting the integration of immigrants (Priime) which makes Canadian work experience available. <0> {0>Ninguna de las personas participantes en nuestra investigación había accedido a este programa.<0>None of the persons who participated in our research had accessed this program.

Colombia. One woman who came from Antioquia, after working as a volunteer in various places and sending out more than 70 cv's, had the opportunity at a training that was being done with business people to be able to say: " 'I know foreign trade', and the position was for a foreign money exchange office, and I told them: 'I worked for ten years in a bank, it's my career, it's what I studied, and it's the work experience that I have'. And so the bank paid for me to take private classes to improve my French" (Diana).

One of the primary obstacles that they face are professional associations, whose requirements in terms of exams, costs, and knowledge of French, are high,

When I received my equivalencies I was accepted as a dentist here, but then I had to face the professional association, and that's when I started to see the devil, for me it was a total restriction, the Order is practically impossible for me to overcome. What's more, when I finished the French classes and took the native language class in the San Michel school I felt totally ignorant at the level I ended up at. It had such an impact on me that I had no idea what to do for like six months (Álvaro).

Several refugees make efforts to continue in the same professional area that they know and have experience in. Within our sample, 30% have decided to begin or continue the process of university studies, so as to obtain a degree in Canada and therefore possibly have easier access to the labour market. The province of Quebec, unlike other Canadian provinces (British Columbia and Ontario for example), makes this process easier, thanks to the scholarship-loan program for continuing studies,

I enrolled in the university, I just do one course per semester, I go and work in the child care services, which is a way to get to know how it works. But meanwhile I need

to work to pay my debts. I got something in a restaurant and worked there for a while. They offered me a cleaning job, so I cleaned, and I work an hour and a quarter with kids, which changes your state of mind. (Estela).

Other people recognize the opportunity that they have had to finish their studies, which they would not have been able to do in Colombia. Subjectively, given the impossibility of working in the career or profession that they had in Colombia, their attitude varies according to the expectations that each had when they came to Canada: "Before I came here I had no illusions that I was coming to any sort of paradise, I knew that here I was going to have to work in whatever I could find" (Eduardo).

Another strategy that people use is to dequalify themselves. That is to say, in the face of systematic barriers, and the need to feel useful and productive, people lower their qualifications in their discourse, their actions, or on their CV's.

I analysed my resume and I said, 'Well for sure you're not going to get a cleaning job with a university degree'. I changed my resume, I took off my university studies, and left my education only through high school.. I still didn't get anything. I put the places where I had volunteered, all right. Depending on where I was sending the resume, I would either send it with or without my education in Colombia (Diana).

Some of the explanatory factors for the obstacles that immigrants and refugees face in terms of recognition of their professional experience or studies are: the lack of Canadian experience; structural obstacles or lack of recognition (access to regulated professions or professional associations; limited or costly trainings or equivalency programs); direct or indirect discrimination

(by employers as well as in the academic context); a limited support network; and the lack of linguistic competency necessary for employment.

Policies for immigrant and refugee selection and their incorporation in various social and health programs, pose the issue of the social participation of newcomers. The welcome marks an important first experience for integration in the regions. The NGOs have experience in welcoming and accompaniment, but if participation in social spheres is blocked by structural and social elements of the welcoming society, immigrants are pressured to develop alternative strategies, including mobility to other cities, regions and provinces. Family and religion are very important spaces that people turn to protect themselves from the adversities that they face in the process of social integration. Although there has been progress and more openings in different spheres for immigrants and refugees, economic, social and political changes at a local and provincial level leave doubts about the improvement in the situation of immigrants, and particularly of refugees.

Colombian Refugees in Sherbrooke: experiences and practices

The experiences of displacement, refuge, and settlement in new societies imply a whole series of social, cultural and economic changes and transformations for subjects. Fieldwork in Sherbrooke included two workshops with the refugee population, one with men (9 participants) and another with women (13 participants), four in-depth interviews and four exploratory interviews. A focus group was held with members of the receiving society, primarily twinned or accompanying families, and

other people who in one way or another had had interactions with Colombians (9 participants). Interviews were also conducted with representatives from non-governmental organizations¹⁸ that offer programs and services for immigrants and refugees, as well as with a representative from the Ministry of Immigration, for a total of 44 persons.

In the following section we present a profile of participants. We describe the journeys and strategies that they used until the situation was unbearable and they were driven into exile. The journeys, as we shall see, are marked by fear and uncertainty.

The Colombian refugee population in Sherbrooke: Profile of research participants

Some 95% of Colombians living in Sherbrooke, and the participants in our research, arrived in the context of the Canadian government's protection policies and the selection of Colombia as a refugee source country. Five percent are asylum applicants. There are other categories in Sherbrooke, such as persons who migrated through family reunification and others who are sponsored by private organizations, but they were not part of our sample. The number of Colombians who have arrived in this last wave (2000-2005) of migration is greater than 1000.

The ages of the men and women who participated in the study varied between 30 and 60 years, with a higher percentage of women in the 50 to 60 age range. As far as educational level, 85% had studied at a university level in the areas of health

18. Representantes del Service d'Aide aux NéoCanadiens SANC; Rencontre Interculturelle des Familles de l'Estrie, RIFE ; Centre pour Femmes Immigrantes de l'Estrie, CFI.<0>Representatives of the Service d'Aide aux Néo-Canadiens SANC; Rencontre Interculturelle des Familles de l'Estrie, RIFE ; Centre pour Femmes Immigrantes de l'Estrie, CFI.

(dentistry, bacteriology), social sciences (history, education, anthropology, administration), education, computer sciences, and veterinary studies. Eight percent had technical certificates from the Colombian technical institute, SENA, and 4% had not finished high school.

The province of Quebec has specific agreements with the federal government regarding immigration policies, as previously explained. Quebec directly selects refugees in their country of origin, and the federal government gives its consent after having reviewed the documents in regards to security. Officials decide the destination for these persons within Quebec, which is to say that unless those selected have friends or family in a certain province, they have no power while in Colombia over the decision regarding their destination.

In Sherbrooke there are families from nearly all of the regions of Colombia: Atlántico, Córdoba, Magdalena, Antioquia, Huila, Caquetá, Caldas, Tolima, Llanos, Valle, Cundinamarca and Urabá, which shows not only that violence has diversified, but that it has both spatially and socially invaded the country. As far as the time until arrival in Quebec, this varies between six months and six years. The average is between three and four years.

As far as family composition, 80% are nuclear families with parents and two to three children. Nevertheless, there are also larger families: one with seven children and another with nine, and some extended families with children and grandchildren, and sons and daughters in law (fifteen people). There is also a couple living with the parents of one of the spouses, and a smaller proportion of couples without children and single persons.

The Departure, Journey, and Arrival in Canada

In this section we analyse the information compiled from the different research activities, concentrating on the ways in which social fears and memories mould the experiences and ways that the refugees reconstruct their lives, and how these influence the identities and representations that they have of themselves and of the receiving society.

Both the men and the women mentioned the different strategies used by the armed actors present in the different regions (paramilitaries, guerrillas, drug traffickers, armed forces) to force displacement: threats, intimidation and terror, individual and collective assassinations, assassination attempts, disappearances and kidnappings. In their roles as union leaders, teachers, leaders and members of community organizations, defenders of campesino rights and of human rights were, among others, these Colombians became the target of threats and fled their homes.

A 45 year old man, who worked in the area of public health, said, "I managed to get a job in public health to develop what I had inside of me, that social part. But I never thought that the fact that I chose what I really wanted to do inside the health arena would end up buying me a ticket to a country that was not my own" (Álvaro). Eduardo, a university professor from the Atlantic coast, expressed, "An entire circle close to me is dead, all of those who were my comrades in student leadership who struggled for human rights, as well as my thesis adviser. Others of us are outside of the country". The ultimate aim of the mechanisms of repression used by the armed actors in the conflict is to inculcate fear in

the civilian population, such that they stop all attempts at organizing, to intimidate such that people can not act, and at the same time sow terror that paralyzes communities, or imposes a state of tension which allows them to meet their interests. It is a moment in which power is confused with arms, complicity with impunity, and impotence with the civilian population.

As Reguillo (2000) argues fears are felt individually, constructed socially, and shared culturally. Fear of death, for example, continues to be very strongly present in Colombian culture, particularly given the history of violence that Colombia has lived through. The fear that is generated by the perception of a real, supposed or anticipated threat motivates different responses, be they silencing, action, or escape (Delumeau, 2002).

Fear is a factor that appears in every story, be it from men or women, and which accompanies them, at different intensities, throughout their migration journeys. The uncertainty comes from knowing that you have to leave, leave the place where you've built your life, and leave without a set destination, to an unknown place. It is the destabilization of daily life rhythms and the rupture of the social fabric, "And it was then when my 'blessed' way of the cross began... I managed to sell my veterinary practice in like three days, almost as a give-away. They gave me part of it and the rest was left as a debt" (Jorge).

Families start to live a situation of displacement, which means instability in every sense for them: emotionally, economically and in their families. A high percentage of them go to the capital of Colombia, Bogotá, because that is where the protection resources of labour federations

and unions are concentrated, as well as embassies and state services. This is also a way for some of them to seek anonymity, and places that offer some opportunities for income generation, "I lived there for five years and during that time I lived in two hundred different neighbourhoods. I don't know how many different neighbourhoods Bogotá has because the problem that we had was that they were always looking for us" (Rosa).

This substantial change that many families have to make, of going from a house to living in a room, impacts women, who, because of their role as mothers, daughters, and sisters, are in charge of the reorganization of the family's daily life in a specific physical space, "To leave a town where you live in a house and move into a room or wherever, with four little kids, who aren't going to school or anything" (Estela). In this sense, displacement specifically affects women, given that housing, as well as being a physical space, is a symbolic space where family life is reproduced. There were some who left their city of origin and went directly into exile, and others who had lived for some time in exile (Spain, Ecuador, the US), but for different reasons had returned to the country.

The refugee population rarely alludes to the State as being responsible for what happened to them. It is generally mentioned to make manifest the feeling of being abandoned at difficult moments. Ninety-eight percent of the families with children said that their decision to leave their city and then their country was guided by their desire to preserve their life and the lives of their children, "I have my family, I have my children, because they are what is most important for me" (Esther).

As we can see, the motives and trajectories of the forced displacement are particularly closely tied to the intensity and nature of the threat, the type of protection aspired to, or the social networks that one has, to social belonging and the cultural identities of the displaced person/refuge. In all of these journeys a “climate of fear and terror”, impotence, and anxiety are present. There is a lived uncertainty, because there is an awareness of the rupture between the present and the future, for oneself as well as one’s children, and overnight they are stripped bare and left without roots.

Different researchers (Bello, 2004) argue for the importance of recognizing the weight of the experiences of terror, fear and death in individual and collective histories that have been lived by large sectors of the Colombian population and, at the same time, the importance of recognizing these experiences as part of Colombian collective memory.

Routes

Some of the people in the workshops did not give precise details about the process of applying for protection at the Canadian embassy, sometimes because that application was initially handled by unions (the labour federation CUT) or humanitarian organizations (the Red Cross International, the UN) who had agreements with the embassy to refer persons in need of protection. In the face of the humanitarian crisis being lived in Colombia, different ministries offered information and the alternative of being received by different countries (Spain, Norway, Australia), in this case Canada, as a safe refuge for them and their families. Likewise, in the face of impunity and the impotence of organizations to guarantee the life of their members, they offer the possibility of leaving the country as a last resort.

In the circumstances that families are living through, where there is no possibility for preparing and planning the trip, the decision has to be made as soon as possible and uncertainty increases even more, because they have no control over their destination. The characteristics and effects of the displacement are differentiated by gender, age, class, ethnicity and family composition, amongst others. Such heterogeneity is even more clear in situations of instability, conflict, and changes in roles and situations, which lead individuals and families to measure each of their strengths and weaknesses. This is more clearly manifested when they arrive in the new society.

All of the individuals and families that participated in the workshops arrived at the Montreal airport after making a stopover in the US or Mexico, and then took the bus to Sherbrooke, which is two hours from Montreal. Other routes taken by refugee claimants included: arriving at Toronto as visitors or passing over the border (Lacolle). Several oral testimonies and images illustrate the different feelings of nervousness and uncertainty that these persons lived through during their journey and arrival, and these were repeated in more than one testimony.

The feelings were of disorientation, uncertainty, and of not knowing where they are, or what they are going to do. Not knowing the language, the uncertainty that comes from being aware of the rupture between the present and the future, and the impossibility of predicting, on the basis of the familiar, the daily and the known, what tomorrow will be like. This is the fear, as Lechner (1998) tell us, of an uncertain tomorrow. This leads to not being able to face reality, and this is why some people feel that they are on “vacation”, they are

in what we could call a “liminal state”, as expressed by Lorena, a woman who comes from Antioquia, “When I was in the hotel I felt like I was on vacation, I couldn’t take it in ... I was still holding on to the hope that I would be able to go back, but later I realized that it was here that I had to stay”.

Figure 22. Arrival in Sherbrooke



For those who are recently arrived their welcome is one of the things that marks their first impressions of the new country. “The welcome, that was amazing! There was an interpreter and everything ... the food was great” (Estela), “It’s great that there’s a person there waiting for you, like gathering in little chicks, it’s really nice that they take you to the apartment” (Mario).

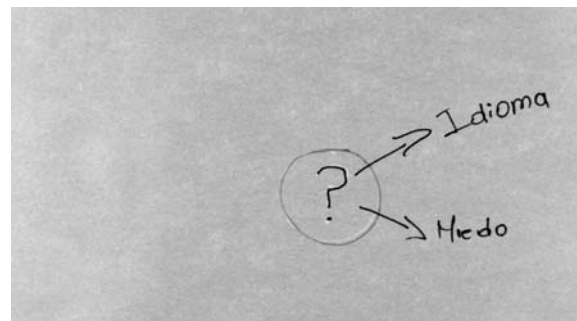
In general they recognized that their welcome had been good, there were people who welcomed them at the airport and at the city of arrival who spoke Spanish, which they found calming, given all of the expectations and uncertainties that they arrived with.

Fear in the Refugee Experience: Forms, Atmospheres and Manifestations

All of these activities of getting installed in the new society are, nevertheless, marked

by an atmosphere of uncertainty and disorientation, given the pressure generated by the number of changes that they are forced to suddenly face, without wanting to, during the process of positioning and inserting oneself into the new contexts of arrival: ‘Here in the hotel I was sick, and the kids too, strange, like zombies, I don’t know what I felt, you feel strange. The change in climate, atmospheric pressure, I don’t know what that’s called ... the cold or the heat’ (Estela). The fact that the departure is sudden is experienced simultaneously with other traumas and ruptures: the loss of loved ones, work, goods, and family fragmentation. These situations point to a huge difference that exists between immigrants and refugees.

Figure 23. Representation of Fear



For me the sadness, the new society and language, all totally stress me out and take me to the edge. I got totally blocked in the classroom, I couldn’t take in French because I was blocking myself from continuing this process, because I don’t adapt, still to this day I don’t accept it and I would rather be working in my own area (Esther).

Analysing the experiences of refugees we find that because of uprooting and the abandonment of personal history (land, work, housing, belongings, and in general everything they have built in life), they begin to experience emotional and psychological alterations that can deepen

or not, according to the new conditions that surround them: a lack of protection, threatening places or persons, different social and cultural characteristics, or places that offer tranquillity and protection. All of these changes break the structure of social and symbolic worlds and provoke a rupture of beliefs, values, practices, and lifestyles and forms. In the face of this reality, people are either defenceless and impotent, or not,

I get here and it's all uncertain: what am I going to do here, what will my life be like here. It seemed terrible to me, tied to the sadness of having to leave my family and my people and my country, my things. On the other hand, it started to snow, and so sometimes the snow would give me a bit of peace, a bit of tranquillity (Ruby).

These feelings of rupture and uncertainty in which the past, the present and the future are combined are an obstacle to the integration and reconstruction of life plans in the new society. Matilde, a preschool teacher from the Atlantic coast, expressed, "... for me the fact that they separated me from my kids from one minute to the next, because it was like that, from one minute to the next ... because if you've been preparing something that's developing that's one thing, but from one minute to the next, I dropped everything".

As a result of this break in references, ideals and goals that they had, as well as the continuation of the fears which led them into exile, there are physical and psychological alterations such as insomnia, nightmares, lack of concentration, fatigue and memory problems, amongst others. These situations show that the lived experiences of refugees and exiles can lead them to significant individual and familial pathologies (Meintel, 1998): 'I had my nightmares and I thought

that someone was going to throw me out a window and I'd say: 'there's no security here because this is the pits!', but in the middle of that anguish, well I also felt calm" (Matilde).

Walking, for some of the workshop participants, was a liberatory activity. One of the lived experiences of a woman from the Atlantic coast, when she saw a man covered with a balaclava to protect himself from the cold, was that this revived her feeling of being under threat, "He's stopping in front of the house, he's going to do something to us! I was like jelly, shaking, and I said: 'Dear God, this is scary!' In that moment I didn't understand, I just saw that man and went into a panic, I went into a panic and it was terrible".

Long periods of external danger associated with fear, anxiety and the maintenance of a state of hyper-alertness that were lived during the period previous to exile frequently continue during the first period as refugees, in a state of real or imaged threat, and of continued vigilance and monitoring.

Memory: Forms of Remembering and Forgetting

The abrupt departure, without many options for choosing either country or city of arrival, marks the way that refugees settle and establish their first contacts with the receiving society, its inhabitants, people from their own country, and with their country of origin itself.

The characteristics of the welcoming society, and of the specific locations where refugees settle, greatly influence the way that they live out their lives, as well as the construction of social memory. As we attempt to understand the symbolic and human dimensions of refuge and its forms, as well as the strategies through which

refugees make meaning of their past and present experiences, memory and history play a central role (Ballinger, 2003; Malkki, 1995).

The experience of refuge in itself has been qualified as one of multiple losses, in terms of loss of country, of status, of occupation, of cultural reference points, of social networks, and most of all, of family members. Matilde describes these multiple losses, "It has been an uprooting, first from my country, then my job. It had a big impact on me. I thought that my life as a teacher would end the same way other people's did, that at seventy-five I would be forced to retire.

Refuge implies a decontextualization of people from their normal habitat, and identity is put into question. The transformations that are produced in the readaptation of national, social and cultural identity are expressed as cultural uprooting. "When I got here my memory broke, I was professionally broken. I came ready to do whatever, but I found it to be a bit ... I identify a lot with the stations of the cross. Everything broke for me, I felt like my family was breaking, that I was breaking professionally, that everything was breaking on me" (Gerardo).

If we recognize that identity and memory are inseparably linked, the change in cultural references, lifestyles, and social supports leads to processes of disadaptation and uprooting, and therefore to identity changes. The process of mobility is made up of different states, including destruction, destructuring of universes, homogenisations, but also reorganization of identities, new forms of perception, new experiences and new ways of recognizing oneself, "For me nothing changed when I got my resident card. Having a visa, having a Canadian passport, none of that is going to take away,

how do I say it, that mark here and in my heart and my soul of seeing how my house of cards where I was, on the pedestal where I wanted to be, crashed down, and I couldn't do anything about it" (Julieta).

There exists amongst refugees the pleasure and necessity of remembering, to counteract the losses suffered in terms of personal and political projects, of elements that were part of their individual and group identity. Memory then becomes the tool for giving life meaning. Research done with other refugees (Meintel, 1998) signals that the image of a "lost paradise" figures prominently in the narrations of first generations, "There in that little corner of the world is where I had my life plans, I had my career, my job, my house, everything I needed" (Mauricio).

Given the physical distance from the country, and the processes of uprooting that they are feeling, this feeling for the country, for the problems that others there are facing, works through ambivalent emotions: from wanting to continue the struggle for a change in the situation of Colombia, albeit from abroad, to feeling impotent or guilty for having left the struggle or for having left other family members in their country of origin. This is how Mauricio felt, "I want to go back, this is not my thing, I'm not here for what I struggle for, that's there. I'm going to keep struggling to fix the country".

The expression of the cultural dimensions of identity reveal the particular importance of the immigration context, given that it allows one to see the contrast between customs in the country of origin and those of the receiving society. This contrasts generally touches on the very foundations of the process of identity, calling on individuals' deep memories, their memories of childhood and youth that mark their early socialization

in their place of origin, and which also mark contradictions: “I was taught from an early age that there were laws, that there was justice, that one had to respect, and that values could not be improvised. These are things that are taught in a family, and that you grow up with. And to get to the age of thirty and to crash into what I had been taught, to see that it was not true, and to have to accept that there is not justice in our country, that there is no law, and that in the highest ranks is where there is the most corruption, the most evil (Julieta)...

As we can see, memory, a selective memory, is in continuous dialogue with history, and evokes memories with different aims, be they familial, sentimental or nostalgic. Identity and memory are highly complimentary. Identity is a capacity that each person has of being conscious of the continuity of their life through changes, crises and ruptures (Chiva, 1992). This firm nucleus supports itself most of all through memory, which can be either individual or collective, and can influence the way in which one remembers and therefore the way personal memories are interpreted and vice versa, “We have all had an inverted curve or a pendular movement. In the sense of going from one extreme to another. For example, from rupture to construction. We got to a point where we discovered that everything was really cool, really great - we all have to go through a crisis” (men’s workshop). The anguish of the loss grows with the recurring juxtaposition of situations. There is a constant interaction between the culture of origin and the receiving culture, “I have this country that has given me a lot of opportunities, and I have to make a life here. I have Canada as my second country, like a family, and in Colombia I have another family, and that’s where my heart is. It’s

something that I have to accept, because it’s difficult to let go of your roots” (Rosa).

Another notion that is closely related to remembering is that of forgetting, which is not the opposite but complimentary, for all memory is a selection of memories. Forgetting is an indispensable complement, and at the same time is a *sine qua non* condition for continuing with life. As is memory, the responsibility to remember is always accompanied with the duty of forgetting. The refugee, with their fragmented memory, is the permanent evocation of their own instability.

Many referents have been lost, but they continue in the search of a historic experience which only appears as dispersed, in pieces, and with a feeling of an unrecoverable loss. The possibility of being able to continue ‘living together’ abroad in a satisfying way, amongst co-nationals and inhabitants of the new society, resides in the capacity and possibility that their experience of loss and suffering will be recognized by their country of origin and by the country that takes them in.

Social Representations

How do they name and represent themselves?

A high percentage of Colombians in Sherbrooke have arrived as government assisted refugees. This means that they begin to work individually and as a group on a new identity, that of being a “refugee”, which reflects their new objective reality and the loss of social meaning that exile produces. Eduardo, a man from the Atlantic coast, refers to the struggles in Colombia and being forced to leave the country, when he says, “We are a generation whose land has been taken away, and I tell myself: ‘We’re a generation of losers’”.

The possibilities for risking new options are determined by what the receiving country allows them to reach and realize. But it is not easy to assume this new category. The feelings of feeling refuted, as expressed by Julieta, a 30-year-old woman, are not easy to accept, even if the welcoming conditions have been favourable, "I continue to be very grateful to Canada, to Quebec. There are a lot of possibilities, they give us money for food, for clothing, they help you with a lot of things. But I don't want this, I don't like this, none of that is ever going to alleviate the pain, the anguish and the suffering of having to say that I'm a refugee" (Julieta).

For others this status of refugee that puts them all in the same category in the eyes of the state and welcoming organizations should allow them, as a 60 year old woman union leader says, to achieve a goal, "We were all forced to come, and that should be what brings us together, so that as Colombians we can all hold each other's hands and each lean on the other" (Nubia). Nevertheless, although they arrive with the status of refugee, the fact is that existing NGO's, especially in the province of Quebec, offer the same services to every type of immigrant, with the exception of the welcome and settlement programs specifically for refugees, "We came here as refugees, but here all of the institutions treat us as immigrants" (Gerardo). There are cultural barriers as well as social borders between the majority group and the foreign minorities. To either identify oneself as a refugee or hide it becomes part of the survival and adaptation strategies for life in the new society.

How do they see themselves today?

After the first stage of recognition that one is in a society with different customs, ways

of thinking and reacting, and once French language classes are over, new possibilities begin to emerge according to the resources, strengths and weakness that each has been able to put to the test, "At least now you can make yourself understood. At least you know that you can ask for something and they'll give you what you're asking for, and you don't have to be speaking with gestures" (Mauricio).

The first stage of isolation begins to pass and there is a desire to be in a dynamic that allows one to "... develop my life and start to have those situations where I can be and be fulfilled. I have to start to belong to a social circle, any one, I want to be a happy person, that interactive person, that person with a strong character that made me what I was" (Matilde).

Others who have given the processes another meaning feel that the expectations that they had have come tumbling down bit-by-bit, and that the difficulties are ever greater than they had initially thought. Jorge told us, "When I got here, it was all happy, I could go out on the street ... now I see grey, I start to see the landscape as black, there are good things and there are things that I don't see happening for me".

Learning the language, the desire to participate in different spaces in the new society, assume certain roles again, all of this makes it possible for some to have new visions of themselves and their perspective on the future in the new society, "I'm working, studying, I get around, anything to get integrated" (Estela). These are positive aspects, but they also point to the difficulties and negative aspects that also characterize Colombians, "The bad image that we have of Colombians here we have created ourselves. Like an envy, and egotism, and something that doesn't allow us to grow" (Julieta).

The Colombians living in Sherbrooke do not escape the fragmentation and

the creation of tensions according to the situations they lived through and the expectations that they have in the receiving country. “Be careful with Colombians!” was a warning that was given to Colombians when they first arrived. Nubia spoke of the impact that this had on her, “that is something that still today, after two and a half years of being here, I don’t understand”. This ethnic and identity dynamic continues to change in the context of the new relationships that are established, of the reactions and social interactions from which feelings of belonging emerge and are reorganized.

How do they think that others see them?

The constructed nature of identities are a product of the interactions and relationships with “others”, and are affirmed or not in contrasting situations. This implies a permanent redefinition, so as to interact with other social groups, be these other immigrants, officials, or amongst Colombians themselves, according to social class, gender or age. Let us look at some of the images or representations of “Colombians”.

There are certain references that allude to political, social and economic aspects that are part of the national history. That is why it is argued that ethnicity is not always an option that one can voluntarily choose or deny. Sometimes it can be imposed from outside (Waters, 1990). As Noemi says, “In the last level of French there was a Quebecois teacher who said, ‘Colombia-mafia’, they have an image that does not fit all Colombians”. It is a very strong representation held abroad, which is repeated time and again in all spaces, and leads to a need to justify or explain other aspects that are part of Colombian history and identity, “They talked to me about

other things. That helped me to see that Quebecois are not closed-minded, the thing is that they’re ignorant about our culture, but when they know us a bit they change their attitude, their way of thinking and their opinion” (Diana).

As they participate in activities and events, be they cultural, folkloric or ethnic, in different spaces and institutions, others being to develop an image what Colombians are, “It’s a community that I really tip my hat to, today Colombians are organized and they’ve done things quickly” (director, RIFE), “they are very well educated, we’ve noted that they’re people that are as used to consulting a psychologist as a dentist” (Director, SANC). There are also other less positive images held by some of those who work in charity-oriented organizations that attribute characteristics to them such as: “They’re dishonest, liars, thieves”. Another trait that is reiterated relates to the festive and happy aspect, “They’re people that are happy to be alive. They’re spontaneous, they like to party and dance”, “I like to see them together, the food, you see the spirit of the people” (Focus group with members of the receiving society).

This image is projected and constructed on the basis of a set of images and models that are acquired and transmitted by the group, through activities and interactions with the new society. In Sherbrooke, as in other national and regional contexts, the relationships established between “us” and “them” are closely related to history, memory, and the dialectic between majority and minority groups.

How are they seen by the receiving society?

We have spoken in general of the perception of the immigrant and of the refugee, but we know how important the

image that immigrants and refugees have of the receiving society is for their integration into the new society. That knowledge is built on the basis of personal experiences, images transmitted through services, the mass media, interaction with other groups, information and knowledge about the society, and expectations of the future. Eduardo, a history professor in Colombia, signals that, “although this country is one of the most capitalist in the world, it’s one of the ones that has built a more solid democracy, the concept of democracy is only understandable when you’re here. I think that this society is plenty generous with me, it’s giving me things that I haven’t asked of it and which my own society as not given me” (Eduardo).

The fact that Quebec is constructed as an intercultural society means that immigrants are called on to participate in its construction, “This is a society that is plenty open, but at the same time it’s a plenty conservative society”; and for Horacio: “Here there are people with very good hearts, who really want to help immigrants and have a helping spirit, just like there are others who can’t see us. There’s a lot of discrimination because it’s there, I’ve felt it, I’ve seen it on the street, when they look at you, just as there are people that see you and offer you a smile”. Other comments made about how generous the population included, “they don’t know who they’re giving to” (Matilde), “the quality of the people” and, “the possibilities that exist to have a dialogue” (Gerardo).

Ethnic and cultural identity is a social resource that is manifested through the attitudes, behaviours and discourses of individuals and groups when they are contact with each other. The carriers of a culture evaluate for themselves their

similarities and differences, amongst themselves as well as in relation to others, making clear two complementary facts of identity: similarity and difference. It is a matter of being aware of the fact that other individuals and groups think, interact or communicate differently that one self.

Networks: Colombiестrie, organizing efforts

As we mentioned in the part about how Colombians see themselves, distrust, a diversity of characteristics of those who arrive, the persistence of political violence in Colombia, and the maintenance of a political culture that has its roots in a distrust of institutions are some of the causes of the fragility of the social networks that have been established amongst Colombians.

A particular dynamic has been developing amongst Colombians in Sherbrooke through mediation activities, resolution of conflicts, consciousness raising, and organizing activities that aim to improve the relationships between members of the immigrant population and Colombian refugees and facilitate their integration into the new society. Likewise, these aim to create closer relations between the Colombian population and other immigrant populations present in the region, with the aim of maintaining the pluricultural and multiethnic spirit of a country like Canada.

At first it was not at all easy because of the lack of trust and open animosity that existed. The need for, and interest in, organizing activities that would “build trust” amongst Colombians was identified and there was the idea of, possibly in the future, having their own organization that would make it possible for immigrants to have closer relations with government institutions and

that would, as an organization, offer for support, organization and coordination of activities within the Colombian population.

Today such an organization exists, and the Cultural Association of Colombians in la Estrie, Colombiестrie, has carried out numerous cultural¹⁹, organizing, social and solidarity activities since it was founded in 2003.

Different research projects have shown the importance of associations or groups of the same ethnic origin for the integration and settlement of newcomers. Psychological and cultural support allows people to intimately define their “country” (sharing a history and common symbols), which serves as protection or prevention in the face of the anxiety generated by facing a stressful situation and new values (the context of acculturation). They can also carry out a transitory role which facilitates the progressive integration of the immigrant or refugee.

The current (2006) director of Colombiестrie, Juan Ovidio Arango, tells of other types of activities, “We have managed to do workdays with the youth in the schools, we have coordinated resources, participated in public consultations, created support networks”. These different activities have been carried out by the people who are close to the association and have attracted a larger number of people not only from the same country, but also from other ethnic groups and the receiving society. The creation of ethnic associations is even supported by the government, and for the regions it could become an element for the retention of arriving refugees.

The plans for the future are to carry out more activities in the political sphere, in association with other organizations in the

regions. As previously mentioned, a step was taken in this direction in 2005 with the Community intercultural roundtable of la Estrie, which Colombiестrie belongs to.

Conclusions

Fear and what it produces (paralysis, action or flight) accompanies refugees throughout their journey through the process of migration. It will take on, nevertheless, other facets and intensities as they arrive and get settled in the new society. New fears and uncertainties, together with those that forced them to leave, create difficult situations. Not knowing the language become a serious obstacle for understanding social and cultural codes in their new environment, and at the same time causes a great deal of uneasiness. They feel deaf and dumb, because they do not understand what is being said to them and the same time cannot express what they think in the new language.

The departure from the country of origin, without having been worked through or prepared, marks the first years of settlement. This working through, done later in moments of anguish, stress and loneliness, can cause illness for many, as well as physical and mental pains that get worse when one does not accompaniment, which is essential.

The reactivation of family, social and political memory with different objectives, be they emotional, nostalgic, or other, allows for a contrast between lived experiences and the new experiences that are faced in a search for identity that allows for an

19. {0>Celebración de la fiesta nacional; el 7 de diciembre las velitas y la novena de navidad; fiesta de fin de año el 30 de diciembre; participación en festivales con grupo de danzas y platos típicos.<}0{>The celebration of the national holidays: the day of candles on the 7th of December and the Christmas novena, ne years, and participation in festivals with dance groups and typical dishes. <0}

awareness of the continuity of life through all of these changes, crises and ruptures. The losses suffered in all aspects of individual and collective life leave refugees without the possibility of reparation, given the impunity that reigns in Colombia and the invisibility of their experience in the new society.

Immigration, in Quebec and Canada at large, has created a culturally and socially diverse society. Yet the social policies aimed at the integration of immigrants and refugees do not always reflect this complexity. There is a utilitarian vision of immigrants, and the particular needs of certain groups are not taken into account, as is the case with Colombian refugees. This situation becomes more complex when the refugees are resettled in geographic and economic contexts that do not always have the resources and services that are essential for them to truly fulfil their potential. Individual and family strategies are necessary to overcome the different obstacles that they face, which range from incomplete information from the get-go regarding access to services and the rights that they have, to a complete ignorance of the experiences and qualifications necessary for study and work, which aggravates the psychological, economic and moral situation of refugees, which is already quite deteriorated. Alternatives are found, it is true, but at times at a very high cost.

One aspect to highlight in Sherbrooke is the existence of a monoethnic association, which is not easy to achieve because of the very characteristics of the Colombian conflict, and which has allowed for the Colombians to rebuild trust amongst themselves and recreate collective identities on the basis of re-grouping a certain number of Colombians around cultural and social activities, which at the same involve the local and regional population. It has also served to offer support

and information at different levels in the welcoming and settlement of newcomers.

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CONCLUSIONS OF THE CASE STUDIES

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Given the questions that this research posed regarding refugees, memory, fear and social representation in terms of their incorporation into the new society, we can say that the process lived by refugees that have arrived in the cities of Vancouver, London and Sherbrooke in the years 2000-2006 are critically affected by the following aspects:

The latent continuance of the fear generated by the painful situations lived in Colombia, which transforms into a bodily fear that is no longer as tangible, but which remains as a scar on their memory. This fear generates vulnerability for facing the challenge they are forced to face of assimilating the accumulated uncertainties generated by arriving in a new country like Canada. Fear is reactivated by diverse situations that imply anxiety and uncertainty, such as the search for resources and services, entering schools to learn a new language, and also by the presence of other Colombians who remind them and bring present the history, events and circumstances which forced them to migrate from their country. Fear and painful lived experiences have an impact on the physical as well as the mental health of refugees, but at the same time generate a sort of social wound or social suffering that affects members of the community.

In the experiences of some refugees in Vancouver and Sherbrooke, who left Colombia directly for Canada as government assisted refugees, their embodied fears are reactivated by the rumours that circulate about the arrival of people who are potentially associated with one or the other actor in the Colombian armed conflict, but also when they hear certain sounds, a smell, something that is seen or heard. Refugee claimants that arrive in Canada after having passed through or lived in the US, as it the case with

Colombians who live in London, learn and confront other fears during their migration process. For some, the passage through and residence in the US as undocumented immigrants generates uncertainties and constant fears of authority figures. These feelings, and living with uncertainty and lack of legal status, become an important factor that leads them to set off on a new migration journey and face new risks.

The persistence of painful memories of experiences of fear and terror mark the lives of refugees. These experiences are lived as a limit event which marks the life, history and body of subjects. Their persistence obstructs the reconstruction of their world and their present. Based on the experience of the majority of this group of refugees, we can speak of a “being frozen” (in an indefinite wait), without the possibility of reparation nor the elaboration of these memories which they still do not see how to signify in a dignified way as part of the history of Colombian society, from which they were forced to immigrate, nor in the receiving society where their lives are invisibilized in the face of the ignorance, indifference or lack of understanding of the situations or conditions that they had to escape from.

But these experiences and memories of the past do have their place in the present, and in a view of the future in which for some refugees there is a chance to reconstruct their lives and their identities in a safer context. Refugees in Sherbrooke, for example, contrast the losses suffered in terms of personal, social and political projects with the new possibilities that the society offers them. In this process of reconstructing themselves and their worlds, identities are transformed and are based most of all on memory to give a new meaning to their lives. But in this work with memories, these

are fragmented and dispersed, given that there is not a resolution to the feeling of an irreparable loss.

The lack of trust and the wariness with other Colombians, and others in general, creates barriers for meeting up, relating to others and building long term ties, and of forming social networks that could be a catalysing factor and support their process of reconstruction of new life plans and their incorporation into a new social context. This wariness and lack of trust when establishing relationships is marked not only by fear/terror, suspicion and caution regarding the origin and political affiliation of other people, but also by the presence of hierarchies of class and status, factors that make the social networks that are built weak and temporary. For some, the lack of trust and wariness go beyond simply other Colombians, but in some cases also affect closeness to and socialization with people from other nationalities that live in cities like Vancouver, where services and accompaniment for refugees tends to function in a fragmented way with little coordination between the different governmental and non-governmental institutions that implement programs for welcoming, information and support for refugee resettlement.

Although this situation of distrust has also been seen in Sherbrooke, a particular dynamic led by governmental, academic, community and ethnic actors has allowed it to be overcome and has allowed for the development of important connections amongst Colombians themselves, and the recreation of collective identities around certain cultural and social activities, which at the same time involve the local and regional population. It has also served to offer support and information at different levels in the welcoming and settlement of newcomers.

The difficulty of communication, resulting from not knowing the language, as is the case with the majority of refugees in the three cities, becomes a fundamental challenge that marks the early years and is accompanied by a certain sense of disorientation and uncertainty. It should be emphasized that in several cases this learning process was affected by emotional states and depression resulting from previously described circumstances.

The fragmentation of information about the resettlement process and resources and services, given the mechanisms by which organizations that offer services to refugees in the city of Vancouver function, in which each organization offers information and services separately, with no communication between them, makes services a labyrinth that is difficult to access. This is much more so if one does not know or does not speak the language well, as is the case of refugees during their first few years of resettlement. There is frequently a gap in information as to their rights, responsibilities, and what power the Canadian state has over their activities, the management of resources, the care and discipline of their children, etc. The first impressions of the receiving society are shaped by the quality of interactions with community workers, officials and institutions in charge of welcoming programs. The relationship and support that refugees in Vancouver received from some community agency workers in charge of the resettlement program affected their early impressions and even their attitudes toward the receiving society.

In cities such as London, where one community agency brings together various welcoming and resettlement support services, this agency becomes an extremely important centre of information that Colombian refugees turn to. Some of them

only maintain this relationship during their initial orientation, but others maintain a long-term relationship with the centre. The importance of this type of resource is seen by refugees as a fundamental support that orients them on legal issues as well as resettlement and recreation.

In Sherbrooke refugees rely on the support of a community agency that becomes the primary point of reference for all sorts of information, from daily to legal questions. People turn to it according to their needs, more intensely in the first few years and occasionally through the five year period stipulated by the Ministry of Immigration for the accompaniment of these persons by organizations. People expressed the importance of the welcome of newcomers in their native language, as well as the role that this agency has in the process of integration. The city has a series of other organizations and persons (religious) that have played an important support role (material and spiritual) for refugees.

Refugees have an ambivalent view of institutions and the state because, on the one hand, they carry their memories based on their lived experiences in Colombia where they remember the practices of institutions, of corruption, injustice and impunity; and on the other hand, they are living in a society whose laws they do not know or understand. They are aware that in Canada there are greater levels of democracy and justice, but at the same time they perceive a system which puts restrictions on them to be able to survive. In the context of little information and the cutback of services that has been seen in a province like British Columbia, refugees feel fear and distrust when they think that the Canadian government could take away their children, their social assistance, or could even deport them. These

visions and difficulties are stimulated by the actions of officials of the Ministry of Human Resources, of the Ministry of Children and Families, by Immigration, and by the rumours that circulate amongst refugees.

The representations that circulate amongst Colombians and people in the receiving society in Quebec refer to an opening to diversity in the society, the possibility of dialogue, but at the same time the obstacles that refugees face to be able to participate more actively and productively in different social spheres. Obstacles that, we could say, are found in other Canadian cities, but which in the face of the specific and more self-protective nature of the different professional associations that exist in Quebec, make it harder for refugees to offer to society the experiences and studies they bring from their country of origin.

The regional, ethnic or other co-national organizations that could offer support and information to new immigrants, helping them to move through and manage the system and know what services are available to them, are weak. The weakness of the Latino community plays a role in this, for they represent less than 2% of the immigrant population in Vancouver. So too does the weakness of the Colombian community, which is relatively new, given that this wave of refugees begins in the year 2000, and that the wave of Colombian economic immigrants happened at the end of the 90s and the beginning of the 2000s. One of the effects of this is that newcomers do not receive a welcome, which is why during the first months or years refugees depend primarily on the fragmented information they receive from governmental non-governmental organizations, and temporary information networks amongst refugees and immigrants. This situation in Vancouver contrasts with that of the city of London.

Family and co-national networks that provide information and support for the initial resettlement process in the city of London play an essential role in the decision to settle there as a city from which to apply for refuge, as well as in orientation during the first few months after arriving in Canada.

The weak connection of Colombian refugees with Canadian solidarity and human rights organizations is an experience that contrasts with that of previous waves of Latin American refugees. In Canada, solidarity groups and organizations have played an important role in the welcoming and support of Latin American refugees since the country, in the 70s, signed the 1951 Geneva Convention and began to formulate policies and procedures. The arrival of Chilean refugees in the 70s mobilized a broad support amongst ecumenical and solidarity organizations, and a series of alliances and exchanges amongst refugees, their organizations, and Canadian organizations. In the 80s, the arrival of refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala mobilized solidarity work around the situation in those countries and a certain local mobilization for the welcome and support of Central American refugees (Landolt y Goldring, 2007). Despite

these traditions, the arrival of Colombians has not been accompanied by the same type of mobilization of resources and networks by civil society organizations, and the initiatives for alliances between Colombians and solidarity organizations are few. Although this lack of connection is related to the same fragility that has been noted with respect to Colombian organizations, it is possible that it is also related to the complexity and multipolarity of the Colombian conflict, which makes it difficult to take a position on it and identify who are the victims and who the victimizers. The lack of support and relationship with this sort of organizations deepens the fragility of the practices, networks and connections between Colombians and the receiving society.

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