REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT AND SENSE OF WELLBEING IN ST. JOHN'S,

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

by

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A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment of the

requirement for the degree of

Masters of Science in Medicine

Division of Community Health and Humanities, Faculty of Medicine

Memorial University of Newfoundland

May 2015

St. John's   Newfoundland and Labrador

ABSTRACT

Most research on refugee resettlement occurs in large urban centres, and the experiences of refugees resettled in small urban centres are yet to be fully explored. Using field observation and in-depth interviews, this study explored how resettling in a small urban centre (St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador) influences refugees' sense of wellbeing. The study examines the contextual factors that support or detract from resettled refugees' sense of wellbeing. The results demonstrate that aspects of the built environment, natural environment, demographics, and history of Newfoundland and Labrador provided both supports and challenges to refugees. In fact, participants often experienced supports and challenges that arose from the same aspects of the context. Additionally, participants experienced acts of microaggression that challenge their sense of wellbeing and belonging in St. John's. In response, they used acts of everyday resistance to cope, assert their place in St. John's, and achieve a sense of wellbeing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

In the name of the Creator, the most generous and the most merciful.

This work is dedicated to my mother, Taghreed, who first taught me about resilience and compassion.

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List of Abbreviations

CIC   Citizenship and Immigration Canada

GARs   Government Assisted Refugees

NL   Newfoundland and Labrador

RAP   Resettlement Assistance Program

RIAC   Refugee and Immigrant Advisory Council

UNHCR   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, high-income countries have increasingly adopted

exclusionary immigration policies. These exclusionary policies are borne out of narratives

of foreign threat and danger. Refugees and asylum-seekers, in particular, are associated

with 'threat' in many forms; they are considered a threat to a wealthy nation's economy,

security, national identity, and the 'freedoms' of its citizens (Olsen, El-Bialy, Mckelvie,

Rauman, & Brunger, 2014). As a result of such narratives, high-income countries like

Australia, Canada, and members of the European Union have created exclusionary policies

that limit refugee resettlement and criminalize asylum-seeking (Squire, 2009). In Canada,

recent changes to immigration policies have unduly affected refugees and asylum-seekers,

reducing their access to healthcare and other basic rights. The former Canadian minister of

Immigration and Multiculturalism openly acknowledged that the purpose of these policy

changes is to reduce the number of refugees and asylum-seekers entering the country

(Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). Conversely, the Canadian province of

Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) has emphasized, as part of its provincial population

growth strategy, a need to attract and retain more migrants in the province, including

refugees. Since 1992, NL has suffered from population decline due to the continuous

outmigration of its residents, an aging population, low birth rate, and the low retention rate

of immigrants and refugees who come to the province.

There is a significant gap in the literature regarding the experiences of refugees who

are resettled in places with comparatively low ethnic diversity. Most research in Canada

that examines refugees' sense of wellbeing is conducted in the three large cities of Toronto,

Vancouver, and Montreal (Hansson, Tuck, Lurie, Mckenzie, 2012). In this ethnographic

study, I examined the resettlement experiences of refugees and asylum-seekers who came to the small urban centre of St. John's, the capital city of NL. The primary research question guiding this study was, "What factors influence (positively or negatively) refugees' sense of wellbeing when they are resettled in a small urban centre such as St. John's?" The purpose of the study was to explore how refugees' resettlement experiences are shaped by characteristics of St. John's, and how their experiences have influenced their sense of mental wellbeing.

This thesis was formatted in a manuscript style, with Chapters 2 and 3 written as stand-alone manuscripts ready for journal publication. Chapter 1 provides information that contextualizes the study, including details of the research context, reflections on the research process and on the researcher as instrument, and a discussion of the literature and theoretical debates relevant to this study. The brief literature review provided in the 'Research and Theoretical Background' section is complemented by the more focused reviews of the literature in Chapters 2 and 3. In Chapter 2, I use 'place' as an analytical lens to demonstrate that characteristics of the resettlement context can be both detrimental and supportive to refugees' sense of wellbeing. Indeed, the results presented in Chapter 2 indicate that challenges and supports can arise from the same aspects of the resettlement context, namely, its built environment, natural environment, history, and socioeconomic context. In Chapter 3, I draw on the psychological theory of microaggression and the sociological concept of everyday resistance to illustrate refugees' experiences of exclusion and belonging in St. John's. In that chapter, I argue that acts of everyday resistance help resettled refugees attain a sense of wellbeing and assert their right to belong in St. John's, despite frequent exposure to microaggression. Finally, Chapter 4 contains a discussion of

the results presented in the previous two chapters. In that final chapter, I consider the implications of these results for refugee retention and services in St. John's.

The Research Context

NL is the most eastern province in Canada. Newfoundland stands as an island in the Atlantic Ocean, and Labrador is connected to mainland Canada at the northeastern edge of Quebec. Ninety-two per cent of the province's population lives on the island of Newfoundland (Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, 2014). Forty per cent of the provincial population resides in the capital city of St. John's, while the remaining residents are scattered across small towns in rural and remote areas (Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, 2014). In 1949, NL was the last province to join Canadian Confederation. Most current residents of Newfoundland claim primarily Irish ancestry, and allegiance to Britain has remained strong throughout much of the island's history. Newfoundlanders resisted joining the Canadian Confederation, voting against it in 1869 and again in 1895 (Hiller, 2014). When NL finally became the tenth Canadian province in 1949, it was by a small majority of only 52 per cent (Schwartz, 2005). To this day, NL's historical narrative is one of having a culture that is distinct from the rest of Canada, referred to simply as 'the mainland' in common parlance. References to the 'Republic of Newfoundland' and its pre-confederation pink, white, and green flag are common in public spaces and popular culture.

The cod fishery was the primary driving force behind NL's economy for centuries. The closure of the fisheries to commercial harvesters in 1992 had a devastating impact, resulting in an estimated 35,000 residents losing their livelihood (Mather, 2013). The closure of the fisheries led to a massive out-migration of labourers from NL to other parts

of Canada and the world in search of employment. Since 1991, the province has seen a net population loss of more than 74,000 people due to out-migration (Newfoundland & Labrador Statistics Agency, 2014). In the years ensuing, NL became known as Canada's poorest province, contributing to a sense of separation from the rest of the country. Stereotypes of the 'simple' Newfoundlander that circulate in Canadian popular culture exacerbate Newfoundlanders' sense of marginalization (Byrne, 1997). Facing these stereotypes in other provinces and at home has contributed to Newfoundlanders' sense of separation from the rest of Canada (King & Clarke, 2002). As a result, Chafe (2003) writes that in the current national narrative of NL, there continues to be an anxiety and fear of assimilating into Canada.

There is a sense of cultural homogeneity in St. John's that is remarkable considering the active flow of people in and out of the province. Large numbers of Newfoundlanders work seasonally in Alberta and Ontario, returning home every few months. Moreover, the largest post-secondary institute in the province, Memorial University, has an active recruitment strategy for international students. As such, the in- and out-flow of people on the island is significant. In spite of this, there is still a strong sense of social and cultural separation from mainland Canada. Anyone who was not born in NL, regardless of how long they have lived in the province, is called a 'Come From Away' (CFA). This category is so widely used that in a recent 'Best of St. John's' survey by a local arts and culture newspaper, one of the voting categories was 'Best CFA transplant' (The Overcast, 2014).

Although NL's provincial government is officially supportive of increasing the influx of immigrants and refugees, there remains a public wariness of outsiders. For example, Newfoundland journalist Stephen Nolan criticizes the government's promotion of

immigration as a strategy for population growth. He argues that this approach takes away from efforts to bring back Newfoundlanders who left the province (Nolan, 2007). The assumption behind this argument is that bringing Newfoundlanders back to NL from other provinces is a higher priority than bringing in 'outsiders.'

If there is suspicion of outsiders in NL, it is due to a long history of outsiders – Portuguese, French, and British colonizers as well as 'Canada' – exploiting the island's natural resources and its residents (Hiller, 2014). In a letter to the editor in the St. John's newspaper *The Telegram*, a resident argues against 'accommodating outsiders' in the following manner:

> "Haven't we lost our Grand Banks and local fishery because of government accommodation of foreign fisheries? Isn't there turmoil in our courts when certain ethnic groups refuse to remove face covers when being cross-examined, thus weakening the possibility of justice there? Haven't we taken prayer out of our schools to accommodate other factions? Do we not have to provide expensive space in our places of work especially for those who wish to pray several times a day, to say nothing of the slow-down of production?" (Murphy, 2012)

The argument against accommodating 'others' begins with an appeal to a history of having the province's natural resources exploited by outsiders. This is an example of how current hostility and suspicion towards outsiders draws on what historian Jerry Bannister calls a 'historical narrative' of Newfoundland's oppression by outsiders (Bannister, 2002). Bannister describes one version of this historical narrative:

"Rather than triumphing over their history of oppression, according to this view, Newfoundlanders are haunted by it. We are not free from our past but trapped by it, forced to endure seemingly endless cycles of economic failure and social misery." (p. 84)

Another part of NL's historical narrative is that of a people who are uncommonly generous and kind. Nellie Burke, the former executive director of the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism in St. John's, evokes this aspect of Newfoundland's historical narrative as part of her argument that the province is an ideal place for immigrants to come:

'This is the place where as a result of the events in New York on September 11, 2001, the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador cared for over 14,000 stranded airline passengers from around the world, many of whom still visit the province today. This is the place where local residents invited stranded passengers into their own homes, treated them as special guests, even lent them their cars.' (2008, p. 31)

In the province's past, this national self-image of generosity and hospitality has manifested itself in communities helping refugees and asylum-seekers. In the following section, I offer a brief history of the arrival of refugees and asylum-seekers in NL.

Refugees in Newfoundland and Labrador

Arguably, people have been seeking asylum in NL since Irish settlers fled economic hardship in Ireland in the 18th century and established permanent settlements on the island (Gilad, 1990; Mannion, 2000). In the last century, there have been several moments when there was a large influx of refugees and asylum-seekers in NL. Nearly 350 asylum-seekers were sponsored by private groups or the federal government with the arrival of

the Vietnamese 'Boat People' in 1979-1981 (Gilad, 1990). Then, from the mid- 1980s until

1993, defectors from Soviet bloc countries as well as Cuba sought asylum in the city of

Gander, where airplanes landed during flights between Cuba and Eastern Europe to refuel

(Gilad, 1990; Oziewicz, 1992). Those flights were discontinued in 1993 (Associated Press,

1993), and since then the numbers of asylum seekers in NL has declined dramatically. For

instance, there were only 24 asylum-seekers in 2012, and that is the highest number in

nine years (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). NL receives a very small number of

government-assisted refugees (GARs) compared to other provinces. In fact, the number is

so small that Citizenship and Immigration Canada reports the number of refugees arriving

to Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island together: only 153 in 2012 (Citizenship and

Immigration Canada, 2012).

The residents of NL primarily trace their ancestry back to the European settlers, but

there are sizeable groups of Inuit and First Nations living in the province, especially in

Labrador. The Inuit peoples of NL include the Inuit of Nunatsiavut and the Southern Inuit of

NunatuKavut (formerly known as the Labrador Metis), who live on the north and south

coasts of Labrador, respectively (Hanrahan, N.D.). There were 15,985 individuals of Inuit

ancestry in NL in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2013). The First Nations include the Innu of

Labrador and the Mi'kmaq who live all over the island of Newfoundland (Hanrahan, N.D.).

There were 29,295 individuals of First Nations ancestry in NL in 2011 (Statistics Canada,

2013). The number of Aboriginal Peoples currently living in NL is scant compared to the

historical demographics of Aboriginal groups in the province. Archaeological evidence

shows that Aboriginal Peoples have lived in Newfoundland for the past 5000 years and in

Labrador for the past 9000 years (Pastore, 1997). The Aboriginal People of Newfoundland,

the Beothuk, were able to coexist with European settlers for about a hundred years, until year-round settlement of Europeans began in the 17th century. English settlers denied the Beothuk access to the resources of the sea and competed with them for trapping in the interior of the island, leading to the extinction of the Beothuk in the early 19th century. The last known Beothuk, Shanawdithit, died in St. John's in 1829 (Patore, 1997).

Currently, NL has relatively low ethnic diversity: only 1.36% of the province's population identified as visible minorities in the 2011 National Household Survey, compared to the national average of 19.07% (Statistics Canada, 2013). The provincial government of NL (2007; 2005) has identified a problem with retaining immigrants and refugees who come to the province. A report published in 2010 found that NL had the lowest immigrant retention rate amongst all Canadian provinces (Okonny-Myers, 2010). Most refugees who are assigned by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) to be resettled in NL eventually move to other provinces. Other provinces can offer a refugee more employment options, greater ethnic diversity, and more services operating within a culturally-sensitive framework (c.f. Sarma-Debnath & Kutty, 2006). The province's limited retention of incoming refugees and immigrants was the primary reason that St. John's was chosen as the site for this study.

There are limited services available in St. John's that operate within a culturally-sensitive framework, which involves the awareness and accommodation of different cultural backgrounds. There is a single resettlement agency in the province, which primarily serves government-assisted refugees. The resettlement agency offers English classes for permanent residents, the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) for the first five weeks after arrival, and some opportunities for social networking including youth and

women's groups (Association for New Canadians, 2010). There is also a community-based program led by students and faculty members in the Faculty of Medicine at Memorial University, the purpose of which is to connect newcomer refugees with medical services in the city (Brunger, Duke, & Kenny, 2014). Finally, there are two non-profit community organizations that offer various employment, language, and social support for refugees and immigrants: the Refugee and Immigrant Advisory Council [RIAC] and the Multicultural Women's Organization of Newfoundland and Labrador [MWONL].

There has been little research conducted on the experiences of immigrants in NL, and still less research focusing on the experiences of refugees. Studies examining the experiences of immigrants in St. John's demonstrate a great need for culturally sensitive services for mental health (Reitmanova & Gustafson, 2009), maternal health (Reitmanova & Gustafson, 2008), and long-term care (Mullings & Gien, 2013). One study examining the experiences of school-aged refugees in St. John's demonstrated that they face overwhelming racism and discrimination in the school environment (Baker , 2013). Considering the important ways that St. John's differs from other Canadian cities where refugees are resettled, there is a need to understand how refugees' experiences of wellbeing are shaped in this city.

Research and Theoretical Background

This study investigated the resettlement experiences of people who came to St. John's as refugees or asylum-seekers, with a focus on how their resettlement experiences influenced and continue to influence their sense of mental wellbeing. In this thesis, I use the term 'mental wellbeing' to refer to a subjective feeling of contentment, including "life

satisfaction, affect (happiness), and coping abilities, considered in a social, political, and psychological context" (Whittaker, Hardy, Lewis, & Buchan, 2005, p. 179). I decided to use the term 'mental wellbeing' as a way of aligning myself with scholars who have criticized the medicalization and pathologizing of refugee experiences (e.g., Gozdziak 2004; Summerfield 2004; Tilbury & Rapley 2004; Wellman 2000). By using the term 'mental wellbeing,' I join the current movement of scholars in refugee studies who are adopting a holistic, resource-based approach to refugee health and wellness (e.g., Beiser 2009; Kuyini 2014; Ryan, Dooley & Benson 2008).

Resettled refugees and asylum-seekers are exposed to various forms of persecution and suffering throughout their displacement. In their countries of origin, they may have been exposed to physical and sexualized violence, poverty and deprivation, and loss of friends, family, and material possessions (Pumariega, Rothe & Pumariega 2005). Some may resort to using smugglers to help them reach a country where they can seek asylum, exposing them to exploitation or human trafficking (Berman, Giron, Marroquin 2006; Freedman 2008). Moreover, experiences of adversity do not stop once a refugee is resettled. Refugees undergoing resettlement face many challenges to their wellbeing, including low incomes, language barriers, social isolation, loss of cultural and religious supports, as well as culture conflict or culture shock (Tilbury & Rapley 2004). Additionally, resettled refugees often have limited access to higher education and secure employment, and frequently face discrimination and prejudice (Pumariega et al. 2005).

Traditional research has attempted to place refugee experiences within a psychiatric or biomedical framework, and this has been criticized for promoting a 'medicalization of human suffering' (Summerfield, 2004). Medicalization is a concept first

introduced by the sociologist Irving Zola (1972), who argued that medicine has become a form of social control. Medicalization is defined as "the way in which medical jurisdiction now encompasses many problems previously not defined as medical issues" (Gozdziak 2004, p. 149-150). In the area of refugee studies, medicalization appears in the work of those who maintain that refugees are vulnerable to mental illness during resettlement. Proponents of this approach often estimate very high rates of mental disorders among refugees (Di Tomasso, 2010). This view has been criticized for removing human suffering from its social, political, and historical context, and constructing the individual refugee's mind as pathological, thus absolving external socio-political causes of their influence (Gozdziak, 2004; Kleinman, 1988; Summerfield, 2004; Tilbury & Rapley, 2004; Wellman, 2000).

As a result of these critiques, research on refugee wellbeing has shifted towards a salutogenic or health promotion approach, which focuses on the conditions that promote wellbeing in the face of adversity. The salutogenic model of health was proposed by Aaron Antonovsky (1979) and it "emphasizes the origins of health and wellness" (Strumpfer, 1990, p. 263). Whereas the biomedical approach assumes that risk can and should be avoided, the salutogenic approach assumes that people are constantly exposed to risks and situations that have the potential to adversely affect health and wellbeing (Antonovsky, 1996; VanBreda, 2001). Because of this difference in fundamental assumptions, the biomedical approach inspires research that examines the factors that make people sick, whereas the salutogenic approach inspires research into the conditions that promote people's health and wellbeing in the existence of adverse situations (VanBreda, 2001).

Morton Beiser's (2009) ecological model of refugees' mental wellbeing during resettlement had a strong influence on the way I designed and approached this study. Beiser's model identifies both the factors that negatively impact refugees' mental wellbeing and the factors that support it. The model has influenced a large body of literature that focuses on refugees' health and wellbeing during resettlement (e.g., Chen, Lau, Tapanya, & Cameron, 2012; Kirmayer, et al., 2011; Maximova & Krahn, 2010) . The model acknowledges the pre- and post-migration losses and challenges that have an adverse effect on resettled refugees' wellbeing (Beiser, 2009). Importantly, the model also identifies sources of support that promote wellbeing during resettlement despite these challenges. These sources of support include personal strengths, such as language fluency and personal beliefs, as well as social resources, such as those of family, community, and the larger society. Beiser's consideration of the factors that support wellbeing *as well as* those that compromise it reflects a larger shift in refugee health research: from a traditional biomedical/ pathogenic approach that focuses on risks only to a health promotion/ holistic approach that focuses on protective factors and the attainment of wellbeing.

The holistic and salutogenic approach of this model is well-fitted to the aims of my study; in the following manuscripts, I contextualize individuals' narratives of distress and wellbeing within the social, historical, economic, racial, and geographic contexts of their experiences. I consider not only the challenges that negatively impact participants' sense of wellbeing, but also the supports and strengths that helped participants cope with challenges and attain a sense of wellness. It is important to highlight the fact that those who participated in this study constitute a small minority of all the refugees and asylum seekers

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who have come to NL. As mentioned earlier, most refugees and asylum seekers who come

to the province eventually leave. Those who participated in this study are those who have,

for various reasons, decided to stay. Importantly, they have found ways to cope with the

challenges they experienced during resettlement, so that they were able to build a

meaningful life in St. John's.

Researcher as Instrument

Acknowledging that it is not possible to eliminate bias or personal values from

research, qualitative researchers engage in a reflexive practice of making explicit their

historical and personal baggage that may have influenced data collection, analysis, and

interpretation (Brodsky, 2008). Rew, Bechtel, and Sapp (1993) write:

> "The inherent value of human beings and their intersubjective experiences
>
> underscore the significance of the use of self-as-instrument in qualitative inquiry.
>
> No other entity could fully capture the multidimensionality and intricacy of the
>
> human experience." (p. 301, as cited in Rager 2005).

In this section, I will identify my personal background that directly or indirectly

influenced the research process, including a discussion of how I brought my self into the

research. Then, I will reflect on the emotional toll of being the research instrument.

An entry in my field notes journal dated March 16, 2014 lists the aspects of identity

that I had expected, at the start of the project, to be relevant to my role as the researcher: a

woman, racialized (Arab, but often perceived as South- Asian), a first generation immigrant,

and living away from immediate family (parents and siblings). In that entry, I then list the

aspects of my identity that, during the course of research, emerged as important to my role as a researcher: heterosexual, young (under 25), married, childfree, and Muslim.

As demonstrated by the first of these two lists, I began the research process with some awareness of the aspects of my social identity that might affect my interactions with participants. During the initial meeting I had with potential participants, I introduced myself as a Master's student and a first generation immigrant, and explained that I was interested in understanding what a refugee's experience is like in Canada. My intention was to illustrate that I had some experience of migration that might help me understand their stories, while indicating that I do not presume to know what a refugee's experience might be (since I have never been a refugee).

The first indication that aspects of my identity that I did not expect to be important were indeed important came from the first participant. She interrupted me mid-introduction, and asked, 'Where are you from?' I told her that I had been born in Egypt, but that I consider Edmonton home. She immediately asked, 'So are you Muslim?' I said that I am, hesitating because of my awareness that she was a devout Christian and uncertain regarding whether religion was implicated in the conflict that occurred in her country of origin. Despite my concern that my religious affiliation could compromise her willingness to trust me, I felt obligated to answer truthfully. Cynthia Stuhlmiller states that

> "To get the story, the researcher must conduct himself or herself in a way conducive
> to fostering disclosure from the narrator. This may require the researcher to reveal
> something about himself or herself. Information-sharing and finding a common

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connection enables the narrators to realize that researchers, too, have experiences that they can relate to." (Stuhlmiller, 2001, p. 67)

While my religious affiliation may have potentially hurt the trust I was building with the participant, an evasive answer would have been, in my estimation, much more detrimental. It would have been selfish and exploitative to expect a participant to open up to me about experiences that were private and emotional, without a willingness to reveal information about myself in return. I felt that if I expected my participants to share with me their truths, then I owed them some of my own, too.

Other aspects of my identity emerged as important to my role. My gender (woman) and sexuality (heterosexual) were identified as one possible barrier to recruitment. I had begun with the intention of recruiting heterosexual couples, so that I could explore the gendered perspectives of a man and a woman who underwent similar migration events. The first four participants and a few 'expressions of interest' that came were all women. Several were single and thus did not have a male partner that I could interview. Those that did have a male partner, when asked whether their partners would be interested in being interviewed, consistently responded with, 'He is too busy.' These were women who were enthusiastic about the project and generous with their time and stories, despite being very busy themselves. Indeed, I found myself often thinking that these women sounded busier than their husbands!

I asked one of my key contacts, a middle-aged man, why he thought I might be struggling to recruit men. I explained to him that only women had expressed interest thus far, and those who had male partners seemed reluctant for their partners to participate. His

response was to laugh, and to explain that if a woman enjoys talking to me, she may not want her husband to enjoy talking to me, too. In an instant, the significance of my social identity as a young, heterosexual woman hit me. 'But- but I'm married!' I sputtered. He shook his head, telling me that the apprehension will be there anyway, especially if a couple's relationship has been shaken by the experience of migration. Eventually, I was able to recruit five men to participate in the interviews, but I remained unable to recruit couples.

As I initially expected, self-identifying as a first generation immigrant, as someone with a cultural background that is different from what many of the participants perceived as 'white, Newfoundlander, Canadian,' greatly helped in building rapport with participants. Most participants were careful not to assume that they and I shared a perfect understanding simply because we had both migrated to Canada. Still, there was often an appeal to the similarities in our experiences. Consider the following excerpt from one interview with a participant from a South American country of origin:

> "And I guess one thing about immigrants – they're their own individuals. There's no such thing as a universal experience, you know? There might be a universal experience when it comes to (people from country of origin) coming over here and when it comes to people from Egypt perhaps coming over here. They might have similar experience, but you cannot generalize that to other countries or other people that come from other countries."

While the participant asserts that there is no generalizable 'migrant' experience, he draws in a thread of my identity (Egyptian background) as a way of appealing to our shared

migrant past. This illustrates that he saw my immigrant background as a resource he could use to help me understand his perspective.

Being a racialized person allowed me to empathize strongly with some participants' experiences of racial microaggression (see Chapter 3). For example, one black woman described feeling objectified, especially regarding her hair. When she wore a wig, someone once pulled it off 'out of curiousity,' and when she wore her hair naturally curly, people frequently touched it without her permission. I shared with her my story of a situation in which someone touched my hair, which is also curly, without my permission. This is an excerpt from my field notes on that portion of our interview:

> "I referred to a story about people touching my hair without permission when she talked about people touching her and her daughters' hair. She nodded understandingly as I told my story, and I felt like it made her feel that I *have* understood the experiences she described - more than the average graduate student."

However, the similarities between participants' and my own experiences acted as a double-edged sword: on one hand, my memories and experiences allowed me to understand certain situations and reactions that the participants described. On the other hand, some participants' narratives triggered some of my own painful memories and emotions. It is important to acknowledge this, because my emotional reactions to the research undoubtedly had an influence on my analysis and interpretation of the data. Gilbert writes:

"If the qualitative researcher is to be the research instrument, then he or she must be fully aware of the nature of that instrument. What is at issue, then, is the impact of immersion in an emotionally charged environment, and the elicitation of painful, and inspirational stories, and the telling of these stories." (Gilbert, 2001, p. 11)

Because I felt obligated to share bits of my life with participants in order to make the interviews feel more conversational and less one-sided, and because I wanted to maximize the common ground between me and the participants, I felt a lot of pressure to 'own up' to roots and origins that are not strong aspects of my current identity. I found myself saying again and again that I was born in Egypt, my parents were Egyptian, that I had grown up with Egyptian cultural expectations. This is all true, but these are parts of me that have been buried for a long time beneath other aspects more relevant to my current identity. Offering these parts of my self to participants in an effort to be open and to find common ground meant that my sense of identity was ruffled. The result can be seen in a humorous incident that I describe in my field notes:

"An incident happened to me today that highlights one of my own insecurities. When I went to the mosque to put up my recruitment posters, a man walked in. After the initial greetings, he asked, 'Where are you from?' I stared at him as I tried to figure out what the question really meant. In the milliseconds while I tried to figure out how to answer, I had flashbacks to past instances when I have been asked this question, especially by other immigrants. It usually means, *I notice you look like me; you are also 'different,' so I gather you are not from here. Why do you look 'different'?* So I answered 'My family lives in Edmonton but I was born in Egypt. I'm not sure if either of those answered your question.' I laughed uncertainly. He quickly

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said, 'No, no, I meant why are you putting up these posters? I want to know who you

are because people usually need permission to post on this board.' Once I realized

what he was *really* asking, I felt embarrassed…Later, when I told Chris [white, non-

immigrant] what happened, he said, 'That's funny. I would have understood the

question in relation to what I was doing then, and would have explained that I'm

from MUN.' I laughed and replied, 'Damn this immigrant insecurity! Always feeling

like I have to explain my presence here!'"

Undoubtedly, this ruffling of the layers of my identity by the question 'Where are

you from?' made me attend carefully to the occasions when participants talked about it in

the interviews. Some participants also spoke about feeling like their presence here was

being questioned every time they were asked, 'You're not from here, are you?' even when

the question seemed to be asked with innocent curiousity. My heightened attention to

these experiences, because of my own, contributed to my analysis of this question in

Chapter 2.

The impact of my emotional involvement in the research on the research itself is

most clear to me in the case of microaggression (Chapter 3). One participant's interview

proved to be particularly difficult for me to transcribe. I could not listen to the audio

recording and transcribe it for more than 45 minutes at a time. To avoid providing

information that could identify the participant, let it suffice to say that her narrative of

prolonged racial persecution in St. John's resonated deeply with my own wariness of racial

profiling. Her narrative carried the potent helplessness that results from days and years of

feeling that one is completely and thoroughly persecuted for no good reason, and with no

genuine way of escaping the persecution. As a Muslim woman who wore the headscarf for

many years, with brothers who are dark-skinned and have beards, I have known that same helplessness when faced with discrimination. As such, transcribing and analysing that participant's interview proved to be one of the most difficult parts of the research process. It also had an indisputable impact on my analysis of the rest of the interviews; I became hyper-aware of every mention of persecution, small or large, subtle or overt. I was aware of my own hyper-awareness, and made an effort to attend to the particular kind of oppression that my participants spoke of, not the kind of oppression I have experienced in my past. I discovered that the concept of microaggression fit the participants' experiences and their explanations of those experiences, and that formed the basis for Chapter 3.

Research Objectives

In the context of NL's poor retention of immigrants and refugees who initially land in the province, the focus of this study was on the experiences of former refugees who have decided to remain in St. John's and make it their home. The primary research question guiding the study was: what factors influence the sense of wellbeing of refugees who are resettled in St. John's? The secondary research questions were: in the absence of significant ethnic diversity, what other factors exist that promote former refugees' sense of wellbeing in St. John's? In particular, if there are few members of one's ethnic, religious, or linguistic community, does this lead to tight-knit communities that may be a source of social support? Does it encourage support seeking from members outside one's cultural or linguistic group? What social, personal, and institutional supports are important for former refugees who have chosen to remain in St. John's and make it their home?

Socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, and education, moderate the interaction between stressors and factors that support refugees' wellbeing during resettlement (Beiser, 2009). Gender, in particular, plays a significant role in the type of pre- and post-migration stressors encountered by refugees, as well as the protective factors available to them during resettlement. In this section, I will outline how the objectives of the study changed from those at the onset of the research, as a result of challenges encountered during fieldwork. The documentation of the research process is an important way of establishing rigour and accountability in qualitative research. Ethnographic studies, in particular, place value on discussions of how the aims of the research change as a result of new information encountered by the researcher while working in the field (Flick, 2004).

The study began with the objective of identifying the factors that influence refugees' sense of wellbeing during resettlement in St. John's, and comparing these factors between men and women. I was interested in resettlement as a gendered experience. Research conducted elsewhere with resettled refugee has found that men and women face different challenges during resettlement due to different gender norms and expectations (Baird & Boyle, 2012; Berman, Giron, & Marroquin, 2006; MacDonnell, Dastjerdi, Bokore, & Khanlou, 2012). Because of my salutogenic orientation, I approached this study with the intention of focusing on the factors that help men and women cope with the challenges of resettlement.

The study was thus designed to examine the role of gender as part of the broad question: 'What factors influence (positively or negatively) refugees' sense of wellbeing when they are resettled in a small urban centre such as St. John's?' A portion of the interview guide focused specifically on gender. I asked participants questions like: 'Do you think men and women who come as refugees to St. John's have different experiences?'; 'Do

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you think your experience here would have been any different if you had been a [member of the opposite gender]?'; and 'Do you think refugees who come here as mothers have different experiences than those who come here as fathers?' Most participants were taken aback by these questions; it appeared that they had never thought of their experiences as gendered experiences. Some insisted that gender does not determine one's experiences, but that individual personality does; they pointed to the heterogeneity of experiences within the categories of 'men' and 'women.' Still others replied that gender *does* make a difference, but their responses spoke more to the dimensions of oppression and privilege that intersect with gender (see Chapter 3) than to what I wished to know: whether men and women accessed different resources and coping strategies to attain a sense of wellbeing during resettlement.

A second element of the study design had been intended to highlight gender differences, and that was the intended recruitment of heterosexual couples. However, this recruitment strategy failed and the participants were unrelated. It became difficult to draw any conclusions about gendered access to resources in St. John's. Rather, I saw many similarities between men and women's narratives of coping and the strategies they used to attain a sense of wellbeing. The lack of a clear pattern of gendered challenges and coping may have also resulted from the diversity of the sample, since there was great variation in the participants' countries of origin, displacement history, age, cultural background, and religion. Other studies that have demonstrated gender differences in refugees' resettlement experiences typically controlled for these factors.

Since my primary concern was to examine the experience of resettlement in a small urban centre, in this *particular* small urban centre with its unique culture and history, I

turned my attention away from the focus on gender differences and focused on the themes

that emerged from the data. I found strong currents running through the interviews and in

my observations that pointed to the influence of other factors on refugees' experiences in

St. John's. In Chapters 2 and 3, I illustrate these currents as they address the primary

research question guiding this study: What factors influence the sense of wellbeing of

refugees who are resettled in St. John's?

Co-authorship Statement

In the following two manuscripts, Rowan El-Bialy is listed as first author and Dr. Shree Mulay is listed as second author. The following is a breakdown of each author's contributions:

Two sides of the same coin: Factors that support and challenge the wellbeing of refugees resettled in a small urban centre.

R. El-Bialy: 70% - conceived, designed, coordinated and conducted the study; collected and analyzed data; theoretically framed the argument; drafted and revised the manuscript.

S. Mulay: 30% - contributed to the design of the study; supervised data collection and analysis; contributed to the framing of the argument; revised the manuscript.

Microaggression, everyday resistance, and the mental wellbeing of refugees resettled in a small urban centre.

R. El-Bialy: 80% - conceived, designed, coordinated and conducted the study; collected and analyzed data; theoretically framed the argument; drafted and revised the manuscript.

S. Mulay: 20% - contributed to the design of the study; supervised data collection and analysis; revised the manuscript.

CHAPTER 2

Two sides of the same coin: Factors that support and challenge the wellbeing of refugees resettled in a small urban centre.

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Abstract

For refugees who undergo permanent resettlement, characteristics of the resettlement context influence their ability to heal from pre-migration persecution and achieve a sense of wellbeing. Using an ethnographic design, this study examines the impact of place-related social determinants of health on the mental wellbeing of refugees resettled in a small urban centre. The paper reports on the results of in-depth interviews that were conducted with ten refugee-background individuals in St. John's, Canada. We found that challenges and coping resources both emerged from the same aspects of the city, including its built environment, natural environment, history, and low ethnic diversity. Future research on refugees' wellbeing should attend to how aspects of the resettlement context give rise not only to challenges, but also to supports and resources.

Keywords: refugee, resettlement, wellbeing, support, environment, diversity

Introduction

Canada offers permanent resettlement to refugees who have fled their home countries due to a fear of persecution based on their membership in a social group (UNHCR, 2010). Although permanent resettlement allows refugees to establish a new life in a safer place, they must still cope with the effects of pre-migration trauma as well as post-migration challenges (Carswell, Blackburn, & Barker, 2011). Place-related social determinants of health have been shown to have a strong impact on the mental and emotional wellbeing of refugees who are resettled in high-income countries (Beiser 2009; Beiser et al. 2011; Lamba & Krahn 2003; Simich, Roche & Ayton 2012). Most studies on the wellbeing of resettled refugees are conducted in large metropolitan areas (Hansson, Tuck, Lurie, & McKenzie, 2012). Using data from an ethnographic study conducted in the small city of St. John's, the current paper examines the impact of settling in a small urban centre on refugees' sense of wellbeing. We demonstrate that challenges and supports for resettled refugees' sense of wellbeing can be traced to the same environmental, social, and historical characteristics of the context.

Background

Refugees' experiences of adversity do not stop after resettlement; moving to a different country brings a new set of losses and difficulties including language barriers, poverty, and the loss of social networks (Pumariega, Rothe, & Pumariega, 2005; Tilbury & Rapley, 2004). The process of resettling in an unfamiliar place, compounded by the material and emotional losses of displacement, can have a negative impact on refugees' sense of wellbeing. Wellbeing can be understood as a subjective feeling of contentment

including 'life satisfaction, affect (happiness), and coping abilities, considered in a social, political, and psychological context' (Whittaker, Hardy, Lewis, & Buchan, 2005).

Despite the challenges that refugees face before and after resettlement, most refugees in Canada are mentally and emotionally healthy (Beiser, 2009; Lamba & Krahn, 2003; Simich, Roche, & Ayton, 2012). Traditionally, resettled refugees have been constructed in research as vulnerable to mental illness due to pre-migration suffering or trauma (di Tomasso, 2010). This view has been critiqued for disregarding the lived experiences of the majority of resettled refugees who do not develop mental illness (Beiser, 2009; Gozdziak, 2004; di Tomasso, 2010). Importantly, the traditional emphasis on pre-migration trauma undermines the influence of post-migration experiences and the resettlement context on refugees' sense of wellbeing (Beiser, 2009; Ryan, Dooley, & Benson, 2008; Schweitzer, Brough, Vromans, & Asic-Kobe, 2011). Refugees' sense of wellbeing after migration depends on personal resources such as language fluency, as well as on social resources such as the availability of social capital and accessible services (Beiser, 2009).

There is a significant gap in the literature regarding the experiences of refugees who are resettled in small urban centres. Most research in Canada examining refugee resettlement is conducted in the three large cities of Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal (Hansson, Tuck, Lurie, Mckenzie, 2012); these cities receive the greatest numbers of immigrants and refugees (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). Moreover, they have sizeable cultural and linguistic communities, multiple settlement services, and high ethnic diversity (Statistics Canada, 2013). Ethnic and linguistic diversity in the resettlement context can help refugees build social networks and access services (Stafford, Newbold, &

Ross, 2011). Drawing on an ethnographic study of refugees' experiences in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), we examine how characteristics of a small urban centre influence resettled refugees' sense of wellbeing.

The Ethnographic Context

St. John's is the capital city of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), the most eastern province of Canada. Lying on the eastern tip of the island of Newfoundland, the city of St. John's has a population of just over 200,000 people (Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, 2014). Forty percent of the population of the province resides in St. John's, and the remaining portion of the population is scattered across small towns and rural areas (Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, 2014). Rocky cliffs jutting out into the sea and high hills characterize the provincial landscape. The foggy climate and coastal landscape are at once beautiful and formidable. Residents of the province have traditionally lived off of the land and sea, but in 1992 the cod fishery was closed to commercial harvesters. This cod moratorium had a devastating impact on the province's economy, resulting in a loss of 35,000 jobs (Mather, 2013). In the years since, NL has seen an extensive out-migration of labourers who travel to other parts of Canada in search for employment (Nolan, 2007). Despite a recent increase in offshore oil jobs, there continues to be a net outmigration of labourers from NL to other provinces (Provincial Population Growth Strategy, 2014).

Most current residents of Newfoundland claim primarily Irish and English ancestry, and there is a large population of Aboriginal peoples especially in Labrador. Seven per cent

of NL's population identifies as Aboriginal, including First Nations, Metis, Inuit, and those with multiple Aboriginal identities (Statistics Canada, 2013).

There is limited ethnic and linguistic diversity in St. John's compared to other Canadian cities; only 1% of St. John's residents identified as visible minorities in the 2011 Census (Statistics Canada, 2014) and only 1.5% speak a language other than English or French[1] at home (Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, n.d.). In the past, the governors of the island had tried to maintain ethnic homogeneity (Bassler, 1987). Over the last decade, however, the provincial government has stressed the need to attract and retain more migrants as a strategy to counter the rapidly aging and declining population (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2005; 2007; 2014). This suggestion has been met with some hostility. For instance, the journalist Stephen Nolan (2007, p. 142) argues that by promoting immigration as a population growth strategy, the provincial government is neglecting 'the population's desperate need for their own people to stay and contribute to the province.' This resonates with what Baker and Bittner (2013) term the 'zero-sum game' attitude towards immigration in Atlantic Canada, based on the assumption that benefits to immigrants result in a loss for local residents.

NL receives a very small number of refugees compared to other provinces. In fact, the number of government-assisted refugees (GARs) is so small that Citizenship and Immigration Canada reports the number for NL and Prince Edward Island together: only 153 in 2012 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). Twenty-four asylum-seekers came to the island in 2012, and that is the highest number in nine years (Citizenship and

[1] Both English and French are official languages in Canada.

Immigration Canada, 2012). St. John's is the main destination for refugees who are resettled in NL, primarily because it is the location of the only federally-funded refugee settlement agency in the province.

Immigrants and refugees who initially come to the province often move to other provinces where they may have family or friends, there are more employment opportunities, and there is greater ethnic diversity (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2005; 2007; c.f. Sarma-Debnath & Kutty, 2006). A recent report found that NL has the lowest immigrant retention rate in Canada (Okonny-Myers, 2010). Another study on the experiences of school-aged refugees in St. John's found that they faced significant racism and discrimination in the school environment (Baker, 2013). Despite these reports, there has been very little research conducted on the experiences of refugees who resettled in NL and decided to remain in the province. It is not clear why some resettled refugees decide to stay in the province, and how the challenges and support they find in St. John's affect their sense of wellbeing. St. John's offers a unique context to study the influence of place-related social determinants of health on resettled refugees' sense of wellbeing, because it differs from other resettlement contexts that are commonly studied. The results presented below demonstrate the impact of environmental, social, and economic characteristics of the resettlement context on refugees' sense of wellbeing in a small urban centre.

Methods

Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in St. John's between September 2013 and July 2014. The first author conducted field observation and in-depth interviews. This paper

is based on the results of the interviews, which commenced after receiving the approval of the NL Health Research Ethics Board in December 2013. Five women and five men participated in the interviews. Inclusion criteria were that participants had arrived in St. John's as Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) or asylum-seekers, had lived in the city for three years or longer, and were able to converse comfortably in English. Participants were originally from countries in Europe, Latin America, and Africa. Given the small number of refugees who remain in Newfoundland, the participants' specific countries of origin will not be identified in this paper to protect their anonymity. To the same end, the names of all participants used in this paper are pseudonyms. Participants were between the ages of 20 and 55, and had lived in St. John's between 4 and 20 years. Three recruitment strategies were initially employed: advertisements posted in ethnic food stores, community service organizations, and religious spaces; the help of key contacts or 'gatekeepers'; and snowball sampling. The advertisements did not yield any expressions of interest, and the snowball sampling yielded only two expressions of interest that did not result in actual participation. All ten interviewees were recruited by key contacts who were religious leaders, community service providers, and health service providers. The key contacts were asked to approach individuals whom they knew had come to St. John's as refugees or asylum-seekers, and to provide them with information pamphlets about the study. These potential participants could then contact the first author directly or request that the key contact introduce them to her.

The first author had an initial meeting with participants to introduce the study and obtain consent. During this initial meeting, the interviewer situated herself, relative to the study, as an immigrant to Canada and a recent newcomer to St. John's. Seventeen

interviews were conducted with the ten participants, lasting between 1 and 2.5 hours. Whenever, possible, we conducted two interviews with the same participant in order to encourage the development of a sense of familiarity and trust with the interviewer. This also allowed us to include a form of member-checking by offering participants at the beginning of the second interview a summary of the key points discussed in the first. This gave them the opportunity to correct or comment on the interviewer's understanding and interpretation. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Ethnographic content analysis was used, as outlined by Murchison (2010). The first stage of analysis began while data collection was ongoing, and it involved open coding and the identification of key symbols in participants' narratives. A combination of coding strategies was used: broad and general comparisons were made between participants' narratives to explore the macro-level heterogeneity in refugees' and asylum-seekers' resettlement experiences as well as to identify organizing themes (Murchison, 2010). At the same time, illustrative stories were identified and compared with each other to explore the relationships between actors, places, and events (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001).

Results

Built Environment

The participants in this study all originally came from large cities with populations greater than that of St. John's. As such, the small population of St. John's and the urban geography of the city gave some participants what we term 'urban shock.' Like culture shock, this experience led some participants to feel initial distress and doubts that they could feel like they belong in the city:

"When we first came to Toronto, it was definitely, 'Wow!' you know, this is the

reality. This is amazing. This is even better than what we expected. And then after,

you know, Toronto wasn't the final stop, and when we came close to the island, from

the airplane you can see. My little (sibling) started crying, like 'What is this? There's

nobody living here, this is so-!' So we were like, you know, we weren't disappointed,

we were just - we didn't know what to expect. So somebody waited for us at the

airport, and they drove us to the (temporary housing). So we thought, like for us

that was completely isolated, but we were like, 'Oh my God, this is okay, because it's

close to the airport, so this must be a completely rural area of the city.' Actually I

work by there now and every time I pass I always remember. If only I knew that this

was one of the *main streets* in St. John's, you know, but I thought it was just a rural

area, right?" (Jasmina)

The urban design of the city was identified as a factor that exacerbated the sense of

isolation for newly-settled refugees. Adnan talked at length about the difficulty his family

experienced travelling across the city to access basic services. Poor snow removal, lack of

safe pedestrian spaces, and an inadequate public transportation system all contribute to

the isolation he describes:

"There's an assumption in the city that everybody either has access to a car, or is

very close to the services they need to avail of. And it's a pretty bad urban planning

kind of an assumption, because when you come here as a newcomer, and you're not

of a very high income bracket, you are pretty vulnerable to the routes that public

transit can take, and those routes can be pretty lengthy, can be far from the places

where you need to go. And so you spend half of your day trying to get from point A

to point B. In our case the grocery store was far from where we lived, so we had to walk for about 20 minutes to the grocery store in sometimes the coldest of times in winter, through uncleared sidewalks, and in the middle of the road with plastic bags in our hands, and walk back. And it was a big challenge actually, because I guess it impacts in some ways how comfortable you feel in the area, just being able to access some of these services."

Although the layout and size of the city poses such barriers to newly settled refugees' sense of wellbeing, some participants felt that the small size of the city was conducive to fostering a sense of familiarity. Participants perceived that it would be more difficult to grow familiar with people and spaces in a larger city:

"There was some point in time that we were also thinking about moving, but my parents still like it here. They like that it's safe, they like that you still see people, people still say 'hi' to you on the streets and stuff like that…When you go to school, if you see always kind of the same people, you get more comfortable, you get more used to it than if you, for example, go to a big city and then you see one person, you know, one year and then maybe next year you're going to see them again, right?" (Jasmina)

One of the common reasons for remaining in St. John's mentioned by participants is the belief that it is a safe place to live compared to larger cities. For example, one black participant spoke at length about feeling excluded in St. John's. Despite this, she believes that living in a smaller city is safer than a larger one, where she might be the target of more direct racial hostility:

"Here, though you feel like you are not integrated, like you are not accepted among them, but you have peace, because nobody bothers you. The crime rate is low, and nobody come to break in your house, or because you are colored people to harm you. But in - if it were in other environment that (short laugh) they don't like the colored people at all, how are you going to survive? So it would be worse, I think."

(Beatrice)

Natural Environment

Newfoundland has a cool, windy climate. The mean January temperature is -7 degrees Celsius and the mean July temperature is 15 degrees Celsius (Hiller, 2014). It is typically overcast and rainy year-round. Regardless of their country of origin, participants described the Newfoundland climate as oppressive. Ernesto spoke about his first job in St. John's, which involved outside labour. He explained that he was physically unprepared to deal with the cold, because he could not afford to buy winter clothes:

"I was there and I was ill-dressed for the weather. This was in November and that was one of the coldest winters ever. That was a really hard winter. So - well we didn't have – I mean, this (points to dress shirt) is pretty much what I wore. I had a suit that I brought. Very expensive Italian suit, nice expensive suit that was useless here. Right? This [points to sole of shoe] came out, because these shoes were meant to wear in a nice place that came with heat and you know, and keep the shape– they were good expensive shoes. But they were not to be worn with salt and stuff and that, so they came apart and I could put my hand in [mimics inserting fingers

between sole and upper of shoe]. And that's how we were walking on the snow and all that stuff, you know."

Participants explained that the lack of sunlight exacerbated their distress and homesickness after resettlement. Camilo explained that walking his children to school in the winter caused him and his children a great deal of distress:

CAMILO: That was the first impression that shocked me was the snow, and the temperature would be low, my kids they were crying, my younger ones were crying most of the time. We had to walk from (neighbourhood) to the school because the government don't provide transportation for the kids. Very, very cold, it took us 15-20 minutes in the cold, walking and we never, never in our lives walk. Never had to do that kind of thing. So my daughter was crying - whenever we went to school in the wind, very strong, she ask me, 'Daddy, why don't we go back to (country of origin)?

R.E.: How did you feel then?

CAMILO: I felt so bad, yeah. Sometimes I felt very down, you know? That, my God, this is not right. This is totally wrong. But I was thinking, if I go back to (country of origin) then they're going to be killed. So I couldn't- I really wished I could go back to (country of origin) at that point when I was here at the beginning, because I felt for my kids it was *too hard* for them to bear the cold.

Even after living in St. John's for many years, participants still felt that the climate continued to pose a challenge:

"And you know, and the weather that happened, the weather here was really a big challenge, and the lack of sunlight is still a challenge. And I think it will always be - to me anyway. I mean, I am here and this is what my life is all day (gestures around to window-less room), pretty much, so…" (Ernesto)

Conversely, several participants described the natural environment of NL as offering a healing landscape. The majority of the province is undeveloped wilderness, with places for hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, and berry picking. Several participants felt that the landscape of NL facilitates emotional healing and a sense of wellbeing, and that the accessibility of nature was a strong reason to stay in the province. For example, Doris felt that the hills and coastline of St. John's reminded her of her country of origin:

"We stayed and we like it and - to me it reminded me more of where I came from, it's all hills and valleys and it's very peaceful. Yes, it depends on what you're looking for. Yes, and I was looking for that peace and calm, so we stayed."

Engaging with nature is one of the strategies participants used to manage feelings of distress or homesickness. For example, this was Irina's advice for newly settled refugees:

"Especially if you are homesick or depressed, go to the ocean, waves are helping you, look like they giving you advice. Calming your nerves. Fishing – fishing is good when depressed. Or picking blueberries in the season."

History, Culture, and Othering

A recurrent theme in the interviews was the difficulty of entering established social groups in St. John's. The theme of feeling excluded emerged when participants spoke of their experiences in different contexts, from schools and businesses to neighbourhoods and

religious communities. Interestingly, participants simultaneously attributed their experiences of exclusion to the history and culture of Newfoundland and used these explanations as a way to cope. For instance, Jonathan drew on the colonial history of NL to explain the exclusory culture that newcomers face in St. John's:

> "Establishing partnerships here, for example, is really hard. Because you have to essentially show them that you are looking out for them. But they won't accept it, right? They won't trust you, right? Especially if you're foreign, because there's a history. Well you know, Newfoundland over the last five centuries has been a place where a colonial influence tries to make money out of it, somebody sells it to someone - another place. Like, there's an entrenched idea that Canada's always trying to screw over Newfoundland, or England's always trying to screw over Newfoundland- *someone's* always trying to screw over Newfoundland. And in a sense, they're right. Because Newfoundland was put together and run by merchants, and they were always trying to maximize profit, and the living conditions here were not never something that was valued. The people who settled here didn't have the choices."

All participants or their family members had experienced Othering behaviour, 'which serves to mark and name those thought to be different from oneself' (Weis, 1995). The intent behind Othering behaviour was often ambiguous, but included comments or questions that highlighted a person's differences. Several participants attributed Othering questions to curiousity about outsiders resulting from the homogeneity and historical isolation of Newfoundlanders. In the following quote, Jasmina demonstrates a sympathetic attitude to people who highlight a newcomer's difference:

"Again, it depends, you can find people like that [who intend to hurt you], but I think in general they don't mean to hurt anybody, I think it's just that they are curious. They are surprised, you know - of course, just going back to your own self, if you see somebody in your community like back home, we also don't have a lot of people who are not white or who are not- and then if somebody comes, you're going to be asking, you know what I mean? So it's normal for people to be curious, as long as they're not judgmental."

One of the most common Othering experiences that participants encountered is constantly being asked, 'Where are you from?' or 'You're not from here, are you?' Although some, like Jasmina, attributed these questions to curiousity and were not offended by them, others felt that these questions reminded them that they don't belong in St. John's. A concern with who is an outsider and who is an insider is deeply rooted in Newfoundland culture (Devine, 2005), and this is apparent in everyday interactions in which people attempt to locate one another in the social categories of hometowns and families. As such, 'Where are you from?' is a question often asked when people first meet. For those who routinely face more hurtful forms of discrimination, this question appears to challenge the legitimacy of their presence in Canada in general, and in St. John's in particular. Refugees, who have been disconnected from their country of origin and who were persecuted based on their ancestry, ethnicity, or beliefs, may feel particularly targeted by this question.

Several participants described a moment of revelation, sometimes after many years of living in St. John's, when they realized that Newfoundlanders use Othering discourses with each other, as well:

"I found that all the guys that were from away were experiencing the same isolation that I was feeling. Even though they were living here with family or acquaintances. You know, they felt left out and discriminated against. And I was really, really, really surprised to find out, like 'But you're from Cornerbrook[2]!' - 'Same thing if I were from China or India, you know!' or 'Townies and baymen[3], we don't get along together.' That kind of thing. I was like, 'What?!' Yep. Okay, now I know that I'm not the only one swimming in strange waters (chuckles). I don't feel alone, you know? Being the weird guy? No." (Michael)

Social Support

It was very clear from the interviews that the support of others was critical for refugees' ability to cope with the challenges of resettlement. Participants described the overwhelming loneliness and social isolation that some face when they come to St. John's. One contributor to this was linguistic isolation, since eight of the ten participants did not speak English upon their arrival. Participants identified social and linguistic isolation as barriers to overcoming the difficulties and loss experienced prior to their migration. Beatrice stressed that a resilient attitude alone is not enough – it is only empowering when one can share this attitude with others who provide encouragement:

"You make up your mind that you can. You have to work hard to survive all those things and to make it, and that gives you courage. But when you are with other

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[2] A city in Newfoundland.
[3] 'Baymen' is a term used to refer to people from villages and outport communities. Townies and baymen are terms indicating the perceived divide between those living in urban and rural communities.

people, you share your testimony, you share your experiences. You share. It is a kind of encouragement, uplifting for you."

While most Canadian provinces have multiple federally-funded agencies that support immigrants and refugees, there is only one such agency in NL. This limited offering of settlement services is presumably due to the fact that very few immigrants and refugees come to NL and stay in the province. Some participants found that the limited settlement services in St. John's exacerbated their sense of social isolation after their arrival. Jasmina noted that settlement workers offered her family assistance during the first month after their arrival, and but that support stopped abruptly:

> "I remember when we moved to a different house, like nobody ever came. Again, you know, you don't have to help me, but maybe just to ask, 'How are you?' Nobody came to see if you like the house, I felt like they just had to get their job done. And they did it very well, you know, don't get me wrong, very well at the beginning, but afterwards, you're like…and it was okay because my family in general we are very - because we went through so much in our life, we were independent. Like we really work hard for it. But definitely somebody who maybe went through a lot - you know? Maybe somebody who can't do stuff on their own, you know, it would be harder for them for sure."

Similarly, Jonathan's academic experience was impacted by the fact that there were limited English as a Second Language (ESL) services in the school he attended. During his first year after arrival, as a student in junior high school, he recalls having only one or two

ESL classes each month, leading to feelings of confusion and disorientation. This was a major source of stress for him that adversely affected his wellbeing:

> "What ended up happening was that I became completely disengaged with school, and for a while I suffered from chronic heartburn. So that meant I ended up skipping a lot of classes. That was actually one of the biggest threats throughout my education here. I missed a lot of class."

Living in a place with low ethnic diversity means that many newly settled refugees do not have the informal social support of others who share their cultural or linguistic background. Some participants felt that some kinds of practical advice and emotional support can only be provided by people who share a similar background. Alternatively, other participants benefited from the support of local residents who did not necessarily share their background. Several participants had been 'partnered' with a local family that acted as their social hosts during their resettlement. Those who had been part of such a partnership identified their hosts as playing a key role in helping them become connected to the city:

> "These people were very friendly, supportive, all the time. 'What do you need, what do you want? Do you need clothes, do you need this? You need a ride home, you…?' [They] visit your house in Christmas time, when sometimes you feel alone, they were there for you. Taking you to different places…that was very nice." (Camilo)

Because most refugees who are resettled in St. John's move to other Canadian cities within the first two years, those who participated in the interviews represented an exception. We asked them why they did not leave the city. One explanation was that the

poor economic situation in Newfoundland made newly arrived refugees and local residents relate better to each other. Adnan emphasized that this was reason enough for his family to stay here, despite acknowledging that moving to a different city would have brought them into contact with more people from their country of origin and more employment opportunities:

> "A lot of it was the way in which we had been received here, and a lot of it was- when we first moved here, Newfoundland and Labrador wasn't prospering. In fact, it was still lagging behind most of the provinces in Canada, and we were a have-not province and going through many economic problems. And I think in retrospect there was something that we didn't realize at the time, but over time we noticed we shared something in common with Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, which was that people didn't have much but they wanted to share what they had with you. And that generosity of spirit really made a difference for our family, because we lost materially everything we had. We lost our belongings, everything that our family had worked for. And so we had come to realize that what really matters is this kindness and generosity and - how would you say it, just - spirit that people have that really matters in life. And to see people here who were in many ways going through their own financial, economic difficulties, but who were willing to extend their hand to help you, I think made us think and realize that these were good people that we were surrounded by, and more than anything we wanted to be surrounded by good people."

Genuine social connections helped newly-settled refugees grow attached to the city, despite the stress of physical isolation and the difference in climate and culture:

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"I guess those are the little things that begin to connect you to a place, it's that- a sense of the way that people feel, the way they celebrate things, the way they live their lives. But not the superficial pieces that you only see as a stranger, but the inner parts of people's homes and lives, and stories about their families, and it's that connection I think that makes you ultimately realize that you're no different than anybody else, and those differences that you saw when you came here initially like the climate, like the streets, like distances in the way urban planning is done, and the little social norms – those are just, I guess minor points and insignificant pieces as compared to the human connections that you make and notice that there are many things that bring you together." (Adnan)

Some participants felt that there are benefits to living in a place with low ethnic diversity, where newcomers are not likely to socialize exclusively with others from their country of origin. This was seen to be beneficial in two ways: first, it allowed new arrivals to form connections with people from different cultures. Irina felt that her and her children's close connections to people from different backgrounds contributed to her sense of wellbeing:

"I am so happy that I've met good people, that's one reason I stay connected with them, like sisters and family, like brothers and sisters from different cultures. I am very grateful to live here, my kids feel more comfortable here. They have lots of friends, sisters, cousins from other cultures."

Second, some suggested that being separated from one's cultural group allowed introspection and evaluation of the losses and conflicts that had occurred in the country of

origin. For Adnan, the sparse number of others from his country of origin gave him the space to reflect and make meaning of the conflict he fled, far from the influence of dominant discourses in his cultural group:

> "When you're a bit farther removed from the cultural community that you come from, you get the chance to look at the big picture and see how issues are conflated or exaggerated, and understand what the essence of the problems or even the solutions is. [...] Living in Newfoundland and Labrador, away from most cultural communities that you belong to, gives you a chance to understand those communities better and gives you a chance to analyse your own cultural baggage."

Discussion

This study contributes to the existing literature demonstrating the influence of place-related determinants of health on resettled refugees' mental and emotional wellbeing (Beiser, 2009). In particular, the study addresses a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of refugees who are resettled in small urban centres (Hansson, Tuck, Lurie, & McKenzie, 2012). It is worth noting that some participants differed in their views of certain aspects of the city (e.g., low ethnic diversity, size of the city), which were seen as challenges by some but were considered unimportant or even positive by others. This points to the diversity of views and experiences amongst refugees, and highlights the lack of a singular 'refugee' or 'resettlement' experience. Despite the diversity of the participants' backgrounds and their views, shared themes emerged in the interviews. These shared themes indicate the impact of place and its related determinants of health on refugees' sense of wellbeing during resettlement.

A notable finding of this study is that the factors that hinder refugees' sense of wellbeing in St. John's and those that promote coping and healing were often the same. Low ethnic diversity, the natural environment, and the culture of NL were all factors that contributed to participants' distress and sense of isolation. Yet, these were also factors that promoted healing and coping in different ways. The participants' ability to draw on characteristics of the context to cope and to heal, even when those same characteristics contributed to their sense of isolation and exclusion, demonstrates refugees' capacity for creative and resourceful resilience. These results also point to the complex relationship between place and wellbeing, indicating that aspects of a place can be simultaneously hostile and supportive. It appears that for the participants in this study, who belong to the small percentage of refugees who decide to stay in St. John's, the supportive aspects of the place were meaningful enough to mediate the impact of its hostilities (Edge, Newbold, & McKeary, 2014).

Studies of refugee resettlement in other cities identify similar challenges to those in St. John's, including the differences in culture (Carswell, Blackburn, & Barker, 2011), climate (Ahmad, et al., 2004), and lack of mobility in the city (Wood, McGrath, & Young, 2012). These challenges contributed to participants' sense of social and physical isolation and negatively impacted their sense of wellbeing during resettlement.

While it may be easier to obtain social support in places with high ethnic and cultural diversity (Stafford, Newbold, & Ross, 2011), our study demonstrates that it is also possible to find meaningful social support in a place with low ethnic diversity. Most participants did not feel that they belonged to a broader ethnic or cultural community, due to the small number of people from any one cultural or linguistic group in the city.

Regardless, they had established social connections with local residents and other 'Newfoundlanders by choice' (Greenwood, Pike, & Kearley, 2011). In all cases, relationships with people who were more knowledgeable about the social and physical dimensions of the city, including its services, culture, activities, and natural spaces, were critical to newly settled refugees' sense of wellbeing. Interestingly, the financial struggles faced by local residents made their support all the more meaningful to at least two participants in the study. Although it might appear counterintuitive that a poor economy should contribute to resettled refugees' sense of belonging, other studies indicate that societies with lower levels of income inequality have greater social cohesion (Dayton-Johnson, 2001).

Unexpectedly, the results indicate that low ethnic diversity may have positive implications for some resettled refugees' sense of wellbeing. The absence of an established community of people from their country of origin or from their cultural background allowed some participants to undergo a private process of healing far from mainstream cultural narratives of their persecution. This raises important questions about assumptions of cultural communities as sources of support for newcomers. It is clear that for some individuals, communal support can be the most important component for their wellbeing during resettlement (Lamba & Krahn, 2003; Simich, Beiser, & Mawani, 2003). However, there is also mounting evidence suggesting that communities can be a source of pressure during resettlement (Baird & Boyle, 2012; Sohtorik & McWilliams, 2011). This points to the necessity of offering newly settled refugees various opportunities to build social networks with people who do not share a similar background as well as people who do.

The culture and history of St. John's had both a positive and negative impact on the mental wellbeing of refugees in St. John's. A culture of mistrusting outsiders made

participants feel excluded, and some drew on Newfoundland's colonial history to explain

and cope with this exclusion. Additionally, recognizing the preoccupation with in-group/

out-group membership in Newfoundland culture (Devine, 2005) helped some participants

cope with Othering behaviours when they realized that residents of the island are

subjected to them, too.

This duality can be also seen in how participants described the effects of the built

environment and urban design of St. John's. The design of the city exacerbated participants'

sense of social and physical isolation due to urban sprawl, limited public transportation,

the expense of owning a car, and inadequate snow removal that makes walking impractical.

Additionally, for participants who lived in large cities before migrating to Canada, the small

size and slow pace of life in St. John's led them to experience 'urban shock.' Conversely,

some participants came to see living in a small city as be supportive of their wellbeing; they

perceived a small city like St. John's to be safer and more conducive to a sense of comfort

and 'familiarity' than a large city.

Similarly, while the climate caused participants significant distress, the natural

environment of NL also provided opportunities to cope with sadness and homesickness.

The natural environment of the island provides a therapeutic landscape (Rose, 2012) that

assists in healing the emotional wounds of pre-migration loss and trauma. Participants

identified the ocean, hills, and the island's natural flora and fauna as powerful sources of

emotional healing. Outdoor activities that allow direct engagement with these elements of

nature were identified as ways to cope with distress, homesickness, and depression. These

findings are aligned with research demonstrating that living close to natural spaces (Maas,

Verheij, Groenewegen, De Vries, & Spreeuwenberg, 2006) and to the sea (White, Alcock,

Wheeler, & Depledge, 2013) is related to higher perceptions of health and wellness.

The significance of this result to refugee studies lies in the fact that the therapeutic

landscape was an important reason for some refugees to stay in St. John's, despite the lack

of economic opportunities and diversity compared to other cities. Most research on

refugees' wellbeing during resettlement focuses on determinants such as social support

and employment. It is uncommon for studies of refugee resettlement to consider the

natural environment as a determinant of mental health and wellbeing. In light of these

results, however, we suggest that the natural environment (or the lack thereof) be

incorporated as a determinant of wellbeing in future studies of refugee resettlement.

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CHAPTER 3

Microaggression, everyday resistance, and the mental wellbeing of refugees resettled in a small urban centre.

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Abstract

There is a wealth of research conducted on the resettlement experiences of refugees in large Canadian cities, but the experiences of those resettled in small urban centres have been largely unexamined. Drawing on an ethnographic study of the mental wellbeing of refugees resettled in the small Canadian city of St. John's, this paper documents participants' experiences of discrimination and microaggression. We argue that participants use acts of everyday resistance to construct a sense of self, and that this helps them cope with microaggression and achieve a sense of wellbeing. This study contributes to the literature that de-emphasizes the 'vulnerability' narrative of refugee mental health, by demonstrating the role of agency in resettled refugees' experiences of mental wellbeing.

Introduction

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recognizes refugees

as those who have fled their countries of origin due to the threat of persecution based on

their religion, ethnicity, or membership in a social minority group (UNHCR, 2010). Of the

world's 10.5 million refugees and displaced people, only 1% have their applications

submitted for permanent resettlement in a third country (UNHCR 2014). Canada is one of

the 22 countries that regularly admit refugees for permanent resettlement (UNHCR 2013),

although the numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers admitted to Canada have declined

significantly over the past decade (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). There is a

wealth of research conducted on the resettlement experiences of refugees in large

Canadian cities, but the experiences of those resettled in small urban centres have been

largely unexamined. This paper draws upon an ethnographic study of the mental wellbeing

of refugees who were resettled in the small Canadian city of St. John's. The paper

documents the participants' experiences of discrimination and microaggression and the

acts of everyday resistance that enable them to construct a sense of self that validates their

presence in St. John's.

St. John's is the capital city of Canada's eastern-most province, Newfoundland and

Labrador (NL). It is a small urban centre with a population of just over 200,000 people

(Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, 2014). While most residents of the

province claim English and Irish ancestry, 7% of the population identifies as Aboriginal,

including First Nations, Metis, Inuit, and those with multiple Aboriginal identities (Statistics

Canada, 2013). The province has relatively low ethnic diversity: only 1.36% of the

province's population identified as visible minorities in the 2011 census, compared to the national average of 19.07% (Statistics Canada, 2013).

Whereas asylum-seekers are those who land in Canada and claim refugee status, government-assisted refugees (GARs) are those who have refugee status prior to their arrival in Canada, and who are assisted by the federal government. Asylum-seekers may land in any province upon their arrival, but the Canadian government assigns GARs to a particular province for resettlement. Compared to other provinces, NL receives a very small number of GARs, only about 100, each year (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). Moreover, a report published in 2010 found that NL had the lowest immigrant retention rate amongst all Canadian provinces (Okonny-Myers, 2010). Most refugees who are assigned by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) to be resettled in NL eventually move to other provinces, where there may be more employment options, greater ethnic diversity, and more services operating within a multicultural framework (c.f. Sarma-Debnath & Kutty 2006). Because the province has an aging population and a shrinking labour force, the provincial government of NL (2007; 2005) has stressed the need to attract and retain more newcomers in the province. Part of NL's population growth strategy involves promoting diversity and multiculturalism (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2014). This study will shed light on the experiences of refugees in St. John's, and how some have achieved a sense of belonging and wellbeing in the city.

Research shows that the mental health of refugees is not only affected by the suffering they experience before and while fleeing persecution, but also by the experiences they encounter during resettlement (Schweitzer, Brough, Vromans, & Asic-Kobe, 2011; Beiser M. , 2009). Resettled refugees experience barriers to their wellbeing, including

culture shock, loss of social supports, poverty, and discrimination (Pumariega, Rothe, &

Pumariega, 2005; Tilbury & Rapley, 2004). Nevertheless, research demonstrates that most

resettled refugees attain a sense of wellbeing and do not become casualties of mental

illness (Beiser, 2009). Because of the violence and persecution many refugees experience,

they have been portrayed in academic and clinical realms as highly vulnerable to mental

illness, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder (c.f. di Tomasso 2010; Simich, Roche &

Ayton 2012). Most studies conducted on refugees' mental health have adopted medical or

stress models (Ryan, Dooley, & Benson, 2008). These approaches have been criticized for

removing human suffering from its social, political, and historical contexts, and

constructing the individual refugee's mind as pathological, thus absolving external socio-

political causes of their influence (Gozdziak, 2004; Summerfield, 2004; Tilbury & Rapley,

2004; Wellman, 2000). Moreover, this emphasis on the vulnerability of refugees neglects

the narratives of survivorship and resilience that are also part of refugees' experiences

(Polzer, 2008; Simich, Roche, & Ayton, Defining resiliency, constructing equity, 2012). The

narrative of vulnerability is applied to refugees even after resettlement, presumably due to

the pre-migration violence and persecution they experience (Schweitzer, Brough, Vromans,

& Asic-Kobe, 2011). This narrative is problematic not only because it undermines the

resilience and successes of resettled refugees (Polzer, 2008), but also because it has been

implicated in government policies that limit benefits to refugees and asylum-seekers in

Canada (Olsen, El-Bialy, Mckelvie, Rauman, & Brunger, 2014).

There are current theoretical frameworks that avoid the 'vulnerability' narrative,

and instead address resettled refugees' mental wellbeing from a holistic perspective (e.g.,

Beiser 2009; Kuyini 2014; Ryan et al. 2008). These frameworks focus on social and

economic resources as mediating factors for mental wellbeing. While these approaches are useful for understanding the role of social determinants on resettled refugees' mental health, they do not address the individual narratives of coping and meaning making that emerged in our study. To this end, we draw on the psychological framework of microaggression developed by Derald Sue and colleagues (Sue, et al., 2007; Sue, Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender, and sexual orientation., 2010) and the sociological concept of 'everyday resistance' (Scott, 2008; Sivaramakrishnan, 2005). By combining these two theoretical approaches, we acknowledge the adversity that refugees experience during resettlement while highlighting the ways they deviate from the 'vulnerability' narrative. We argue that participants use acts of everyday resistance to construct a sense of self that helps them cope with microaggression and assert their right to belong in the city.

It is important to note that being a 'refugee' is not a permanent, static element of a person's identity, but rather it is a transitory category constructed by national and international laws. Any person can become a refugee, and many of those who become refugees cease to be so, especially if they are repatriated to their country of origin or permanently resettled in another country. The term 'uprooting' is often used to describe the experience of becoming a refugee (Lacroix, 2004). The term is used to illustrate the totality of displacement and loss that refugees experience; it conjures up the image of a plant suspended, its roots dangling, ungrounded.

In this paper, we use the metaphor of 'uprooting' in our analysis of the experiences of refugees who are resettled in St. John's. In our expansion of the metaphor, resettled refugees attempt to 'set down roots' in the resettlement context, and are met with negative

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experiences, such as microaggression, that 're-uproot' them by challenging their right to be where they are. We show how refugees use acts of everyday resistance to 'set down roots' by asserting their role and contributions in the resettlement context. To visualize this metaphor, we commissioned two illustrations: *Uprooting* (Appendix C) and *Setting Down Roots* (Appendix D).

Methods

The results in this paper emerged in an ethnographic study exploring resettled refugees' sense of wellbeing in the city of St. John's, the capital of the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). Field observation was conducted between September 2013 and July 2014, and in-depth interviews commenced in December 2013 after obtaining the approval of the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Research Ethics Board. The first author conducted both the field observation and in-depth interviews. Field observation took place in spaces and events in which refugees and other migrants participated[4]. This included two multicultural religious congregations, a multicultural community organization, the province's refugee settlement agency, and events focusing on diversity. Field observation aided in contextualizing and analysing the narratives obtained in the in-depth interviews, which have provided the quotations presented in this paper.

Inclusion criteria for the in-depth interviews were that participants had arrived to St. John's as government-assisted refugees or asylum-seekers three or more years prior to their participation, had remained in St. John's for that duration of time, and were able to

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[4] During field observations, members of different migrant categories (e.g., economic immigrant, family immigrant, Government-Assisted Refugee, asylum-seeker) were identified as such only if they voluntarily offered this information.

converse in English. Five women and five men participated in one or two in-depth

interviews lasting 1-2.5 hours, for a total of 17 interviews. The participants came from

countries of origin in Europe, Latin America, and Africa. The participants' ages ranged

between 20 and 55 years old, and they had lived in St. John's between 4 and 20 years. All

names of participants used in this paper are pseudonyms.

Before beginning the interviews, the first author had an initial meeting with each

participant to introduce the study, obtain consent, and locate herself relative to the

research. The interviewer identified herself to participants as an Egyptian-born first-

generation immigrant to Canada. All ten individuals who participated in the in-depth

interviews were recruited using the help of key contacts or gatekeepers. All interviews

were audio-recorded and transcribed. The interview transcripts and field notes were

analysed using the iterative process of ethnographic content analysis (Murchison, 2010).

Field notes from field observation were used to aid in the analysis of the in-depth

interviews. The quotes presented in this paper are all from the in-depth interviews.

Microaggression

Participants in our study identified several factors as barriers to their mental

wellbeing, among which discrimination emerged as a primary barrier. The participants'

stories of discrimination were frequently coupled with narratives of coping and resistance.

In our analysis of participants' experiences of discrimination, we draw upon the theory of

microaggression proposed by Sue, Capodilupo, and colleagues (2007), who define

microaggression as:

"[T]he brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group." (p. 273)

Microaggression is characterized by subtle, covert acts that may appear harmless, but that accumulate to have negative impacts on the target's mental wellbeing (Sue, Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender, and sexual orientation., 2010). The framework of microaggression was particularly useful for characterizing the experiences of participants in this study because they rarely faced overt discrimination. Instead, they regularly faced what Sue et al. (2007) term *microinsults*: small verbal and nonverbal acts that appeared to be done with no intention to hurt, but that clearly conveyed negative assumptions about the target based on their appearance, accent, or race.

Sue and colleagues (2007) outline three manifestations of microaggression: verbal, nonverbal, and environmental. Regarding the latter manifestation, we wish to clarify that in this theoretical framework, the term *environmental* is used to refer to any contextual cues, whether in the social environment, the built environment, laws and policies, or public discourse, that communicate hostility towards a particular group.

Microaggression takes one of three forms: microinsult, microassault, or microinvalidation (Sue, Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender, and sexual orientation., 2010). In this section, we present some examples from participants' experiences in our study to illustrate the three forms of microaggression and their manifestations. Regardless of the form or manifestation of the microaggression

experienced by our participants, all carry the underlying message that the target does not belong in Canada. As such, microaggression serves to 're-uproot' refugees during resettlement.

Microinsults

Verbal microinsults were the most common form of microaggression that participants in our study experienced. Microinsults are defined as:

> "Interpersonal or environmental communications that convey stereotypes, rudeness, and insensitivity and that demean a person's racial, gender, or sexual orientation, heritage, or identity. Microinsults represent subtle snubs, frequently outside the conscious awareness of the offender, but they convey an oftentimes hidden insulting message." (Sue, 2010, pp. 31)

Consider the following example of a verbal microinsult. In this example, Camilo, a former refugee from a Latin American country, tells of the negative stereotypes he encounters about his country of origin. These stereotypes are revealed to him through questions that appear to be posed out of curiousity, without an explicit intention to offend:

> "People think that we live in in the jungle. And we have probably more technology than here! (chuckle) So they really are wrong. They don't know about (country of origin). But I found that people really think that we live in the jungle, so people come here and people say, 'Oh they don't have even bathrooms probably, they don't even go to the toilets.' There's one case where someone said, 'Do you have telephone there? Like phone?' I said, 'What do you mean?' They said, 'Cellphones and things.' [I

said] 'Yeah, we have cellphones, better than you have here.' He said, 'Oh.' I said,

'Listen, we have more technology than you here.'"

Microassault

Unlike microinsults, which may be done unconsciously by the offender, miroassaults are purposefully done to insult or demean someone. Microassault is more likely to be recognized as 'old-fashioned' racism, sexism, heterosexism, or xenophobia, compared to microinsults or microinvalidations (Sue, 2010). Consider the following verbal microassault that Deborah experienced:

"I've had a (client) telling me he'll kick me and send me through the window and I'll fly back to Africa. Yes, and (the manager) went in and spoke to him and told him, 'You don't talk to the staff like that.'"

Microinvalidation

Microinvalidations are defined as: 'Communications or environmental cues that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of certain groups, such as people of colour, women, and LGBTs' (Sue, 2010, pp. 37).

The following is an example of nonverbal microinvalidation. Grace has endured daily racial harassment in her workplace for more than a year. In this quote, she describes reporting the harassment to her supervisor:

"I always tell my supervisor, 'That is bullying. I thought that bullying is going on in the high school or the English school, but I'm surprised that even in the working place. It can't be done.' I ask my supervisor 'Why?' He says, 'I don't know why.' But

what is the measure that is taken to protect other workers? There is no measure. There is nothing. You see? Nothing."

The lack of consequences for co-workers who perpetrate harassment constitutes a nonverbal microinvalidation of Grace's experience of racial discrimination. Sue (2010) argues that microinvalidation may be the most damaging form of microaggression because it denies the lived reality of marginalized people, and instead imposes upon them the version of reality endorsed by the oppressors. In this case, Grace's supervisor invalidates her experience as the target of racial microaggression and imposes his view that the situation is not problematic.

Everyday Resistance

While the theory of microaggression fits the subtle forms of discrimination that participants in this study experienced, it left some questions unanswered: what are the strategies participants use to acknowledge, resist, and subvert the power of microaggression? How do acts of resistance and subversion affect participants' sense of mental wellbeing?

The concept of 'everyday resistance' was originally theorized by Gramsci (1971) and further developed by J. C. Scott (2008). Everyday resistance 'refers to the small, seemingly trivial daily acts through which subordinate individuals or groups undermine – rather than overthrow – oppressive relations of power' (Groves & Chang, 1999, p. 235). Studies of how marginalized people live with oppression have been traditionally relegated to the fields of sociology and anthropology (Groves & Chang, 1999). Research on the psychological experience and impact of everyday resistance is limited (c.f. Wade, 1997).

We argue that strategies of everyday resistance allow resettled refugees to make meaning of microaggression, to cope, and to construct an empowered sense of self and belonging in the resettlement context. Everyday resistance allows resettled refugees to construct a self in opposition to the assumptions communicated by the offender through microaggression. In this section, we outline the themes of everyday resistance used by participants and demonstrate how they acknowledge, resist, and subvert the oppressive power of microaggression.

Rejecting Victimhood

Some participants refused to accept the role of the victim when they experienced microaggression. One way they did this was by parodying the assumptions hidden behind the microaggression, thus making them explicit. For example, consider Carlos's response to the following microinsult:

> CARLOS: We had a job one day that involved presenting, and there was this British guy in our group, and there was this Cornerbrook[5] guy that presented his first part, and people were making fun of his accent and stuff. And then the British guy came in and he was talking about (unclear) and they were making fun of his accent. And he finishes his part of the presentation saying, 'And now you're going to have Carlos from (country of origin), *that's* when you're going to have fun.'

> R.E.: What was that like for you? Did it bother you?

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[5] Cornerbrook is a city in Newfoundland and Labrador.

CARLOS: No, first it was more of a 'Yeah, yeah, we're having fun. We're not making

fun *of* you, we're all having fun, okay?' The guys with me were not feeling upset

about that, you know? They set the tone, so it was for me to keep going. So I started

the presentation in (mother tongue). Just to mess with them, right? And I kept going

for 2-3 slides, you know, blah blah blah.

Carlos's colleague's microinsult consisted of introducing Carlos as a foreigner, as someone whose accent will be even thicker and presumably 'funnier' than a British or Cornerbrook accent. Rather than accept the role of the offended victim, Carlos resists the attempt to subordinate him by performing a parody of his colleague's hidden message: he speaks in a language that no one can understand. Through this act of resistance, he refuses to comply with his colleague's and the audience's expectations that he will speak broken English that they can laugh at. Moreover, it leaves his colleagues and the audience confused for several minutes, placing them in the position of trying to make sense of a foreign language, a position he finds himself in each day. Not only does Carlos reject victimhood by refusing to allow them to laugh at him, but he also subverts the power of the microinsult by putting himself in a position to laugh at them.

In some instances, as in the following example, rejecting victimhood took the form of refusing to respond in the way the offender assumes one will respond. Consider the following excerpt from Grace's narrative of discrimination and harassment in her workplace. In this example, she is describing her sources of support during that stressful time:

"So it was first of all God, the word of God, and also my courage, myself, and my supervisor. Yeah, my supervisor told me, he said that he knows them [offenders] very well, that they are doing what they are doing with purpose. They are doing that to make me upset. But when I overlook them, I ignore them, they will stop. But when I'm mad, I'm upset, they will be powerful. So do the opposite, don't be annoyed, don't be upset, overlook them, whatever they do, whatever they talk to you, overlook them and they will stop. But they will stop for a while, and in a little time they go back to it (chuckles)."

Grace acknowledges the oppressive power of her co-workers' harassment and resists it by refusing to react emotionally in the way they expect. Her supervisor advises her to refrain from reacting to their harassment by becoming upset or angry. Her supervisor is, in fact, committing an act of *microinvalidation* by denying Grace the right to be upset over the racism and harassment she experiences. He does not reprimand the offending co-workers. Instead, he constructs the situation so that the power to stop the harassment lies with Grace – if only she could manage to ignore them and not become upset.

Although her manager invalidates her experience and does not reprimand the offenders, Grace lists him as one of her sources of support, after God and her own courage. At other points during the interview, she describes him as someone who was on her side, who empowered her by encouraging her to 'ignore' the constant harassment she faced. How is it that she could see her manager as a source of support, when he was taking no action to stop the attacks and was, in fact, putting the responsibility on her?

Grace perceived her manager to be on her side because he constructed her as an agent in the situation. She says that 'when I'm mad, I'm upset, they will be powerful' to explain that her emotions are her connection to the power of the offenders and their microassaults. It is empowering to construct herself as capable of restraining the offenders' oppressive power by defying their expectations and not becoming upset. In this way, she subverts the offenders' power by imagining a way to eliminate their ability to control her. This construction of the self as an agent is a clear rejection of victimhood; victims are oppressed, but the self as an agent *acts* to resist and subvert the oppression. Because Grace's manager's response to the workplace harassment was to construct her as an agent in the situation of oppression, she felt empowered by him and counted him among her supporters.

In an essay on trauma, Rebecca Lester (2010) writes that in mainstream psychotherapy, a great emphasis is placed on not blaming the victim of an adverse or traumatic experience. However, she finds that:

> "[Clients] often strain against the notion that they were powerless and at the utter mercy of someone or something outside of themselves...Survivors must accept that they were powerless so that we can then empower them through their recovery. This reclaiming of agency (which we had to persuade them they had lost) is thought to bring about healing." (p. 756)

Lester's observation clarifies Grace's seemingly counterintuitive reason for feeling empowered by her manager. Grace's manager suggested that the power to stop workplace harassment lies in her own hands, and she took this as an empowering belief in her own

agency rather than as an act of microinvalidation or victim-blaming. Although Grace admits

at the end of the quote that ignoring the offenders is not an effective long-term solution, she

used it as one strategy of resistance during her time in that job. By rejecting the role of the

victim who is the passive object of oppression, Grace was able to construct herself as an

agent in an oppressive workplace environment, and this helped her cope. Eventually, she

quit the job when she found that no measure of resistance put a stop to the

microaggression.

Not a Burden

In her analysis of Canadian media and government discourses on immigration,

Kinga Pozniak (2009) identifies what she calls the 'good/bad immigrant ethic.' A 'bad

immigrant' is one who does not learn English quickly and supposedly abuses the welfare

system. Closely connected to the 'bad immigrant' ethic is the discourse of refugees as 'costs'

or 'burdens' to the Canadian health and social system (Pozniak, 2009; Olsen, El-Bialy,

Mckelvie, Rauman, & Brunger, 2014). Sophia described the moment she learned of the

discourse of refugees as burdens:

> SOPHIA: He (friend) said, '(Another friend) was so surprised, actually he told me
>
> some really nice stuff about you.' I was like, 'What?' He was like, 'You know, you're
>
> so different than the other refugees that he's met.' And I was like, 'Why? What do
>
> you mean?' and he was like, 'Because you actually want to *be* somebody, you want to
>
> do something, you want to make a change, and you're good in school. A lot of the
>
> refugees that he has met, and you know he's travelled to a lot of places, they're
>
> really lazy, they don't want to do much. They don't even want to go to school, they

just want an easy life or whatever. They just expect everything from the government, and they're really kind of rude and loud and stuff.' I was like, 'Really? Oh my God.' So I guess that's the idea they have, like refugees are mostly like gypsies, right? Like they don't belong anywhere, they're just going to make a mess in the country, right?

R.E.: What did you say to him?

SOPHIA: I was shocked. I didn't *know* that people think this, you know? Why - why would you do that to yourself? When you came from a, you know, that kind of background, you come here and you still want to continue — like, we came here to do something good to your life. I mean if you still live like back home, then you might as well just move back home and continue living in misery. If you're here, do something good.'

Although Sophia's friend's comment superficially comes across as a compliment ('You're not like other refugees'), it is in fact an act of microaggression, a microinsult, because it reveals negative assumptions about refugees as lazy and burdensome. The comment puts Sophia in a defensive position in which she actively distances herself from 'other refugees' who supposedly fulfil the stereotypes.

Sophia does not acknowledge her friends' stereotypes of refugees as discriminatory. In fact, she does not even consider that the stereotypes may be unjustified; rather, she holds them at arm's length, focusing instead on expressing her disapproval and asserting that she is different. In her study with Colombian refugees in Toronto, Pozniak (2009) found that some participants used a similar resistance strategy, whereby they

distinguished between themselves and 'other' refugees who were presumed to fulfil negative stereotypes. Sophia's act of resistance enabled her to construct and assert a sense of self as motivated and hardworking, in contrast to the stereotypes espoused by her friends. However, this form of resistance perpetuates the narrative of the 'burdensome refugee,' as it does not directly address the prejudicial nature of the narrative, but rather places it on the shoulders of 'other' refugees.

One participant, Deborah, is often subjected to microinsults in the form of questions like 'Did you come here for the jobs?' Such microinsults carry the underlying assumption that foreigners come to take employment opportunities away from locals, an assumption that is widespread across the Atlantic Canadian provinces (Baker & Bittner, 2013). This suggestion is complicated in the case of refugees by the discourse of the 'bogus refugee,' which maintains that some people who come to Canada as refugees or asylum-seekers are only coming to usurp the economy, health system, or social assistance system. Deborah resists the discourse of refugees as 'burdens' on Canada's economy by rejecting the label 'refugee' altogether. Consider the following excerpt:

> DEBORAH: I don't consider myself a refugee. I was a refugee in another country, before I was resettled here by the Canadian government. Which made me a landed immigrant. So I don't accept that term, as being labelled a refugee. You have people that come in as refugees and it takes them about ten years to be a landed immigrant, you know? They have to get lawyers involved to prove that they cannot go back to their country and then this constant fear of being sent back. But it's not the case for me, because I didn't come here as a refugee, I came here as a landed immigrant, which most people don't understand the difference. That's why they tend to label

you as a refugee, so you just let it be known to them that you are not a refugee. You

are not *seeking refuge*.

R.E.: You were assisted and brought by the government?

DEBORAH: Yes, yes. And before you came they told you they were assisting you in

the form of a *loan*, because you have to pay back the cost of your airfare, the cost of

your medical bills, the cost of the first apartment they rented for you with a

telephone instalment. You sign all of that before you even come to Canada.

R.E.: What about any sort of financial support? Do you have to pay that back?

DEBORAH: No, no. You don't, you don't. When we came here, you see it's – it's

immigration that actually looked after us, if you're a landed immigrant, it's the Immigration

that looks after you. You get your cheque from Immigration for a year, they look after you

for a year. And after a year, if you cannot look after yourself, then you'll have to go on the

social services or assistance. But luckily, Immigration looked after us for six months, then I

was able to gain employment.'

Landed immigrant status, or permanent resident status, is given to all government-

assisted and privately sponsored refugees who enter Canada. By distinguishing between

her status as a landed immigrant and the precarious status of asylum-seekers, Deborah

evokes the difference between being desired and being undesired, being rooted and being

un-rooted. She differentiates between herself and asylum-seekers by emphasizing that her

existence in Canada is desired and supported by the government. She aligns herself with

the term 'immigrant' rather than 'refugee,' choosing to use the term 'landed immigrant'

rather than 'permanent resident' to describe her initial status, although both terms are

interchangeable (Government of Canada, 2014). Similarly, she emphasizes that 'it's the Immigration that looks after you,' referring to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), the federal body that regulates the entry of both immigrants and refugees into the country. By simply calling it 'Immigration,' she creates the impression that CIC deals exclusively with immigrants. In reality, CIC governs policies and services for economic immigrants, temporary foreign workers, government-assisted and privately sponsored refugees, as well as asylum-seekers (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012).

Fundamentally, Deborah is not so much rejecting her legal status upon entering the country as she is rejecting the narrative of the 'refugee.' She resists the narrative of a burdensome, undesired person who relies on government assistance. She stresses that she is not in debt to the government, having paid off her resettlement loans, and that she gained employment even before the one-year resettlement support period ended. Like Sophia, she does not acknowledge the oppressive nature of the discourse. Instead, she resists it by distancing herself from it.

In contrast, Samir does acknowledge the oppression of this discourse and resists it by challenging its validity:

> "We determine people's lives in many ways by the discourse we use to refer to them and their situations, forgetting that even if they are in a very vulnerable situation right now, like being on income support temporarily, it doesn't mean that they're going to be in that situation for a long time. In fact, any refugees who come on income support are in that situation of desperation, not because they're choosing to receive the least amount of income that they could, particularly knowing that

they're in a place where they have opportunities. If they don't avail of those

employment opportunities, it's because something's getting in the way, and not

because they choose not to."

Samir believes that one way to counter such microinsults is to educate offenders

about the difference between refugees and other categories of migrants in Canada. At

another point, he argues that:

"Refugees are much more likely to feel Canadian and they are much more likely to

make contributions to this country that are more robust and more meaningful than

so many other people who come here for less altruistic reasons, or for less

humanitarian reasons."

Although his strategy can succeed in dispelling the assumptions behind the

discourse of refugees as burdensome, it is based on a construction of refugees in opposition

to 'other people' who come to Canada for 'less altruistic reasons.' This act of resistance

relies on displacing the 'bad immigrant' narrative on other categories of migrants, such as

economic immigrants or temporary foreign workers, who are portrayed as being invested

in their individual prosperity rather than that of the country. Unlike Samir, who resists the

discourse of refugees as burdensome by challenging its validity, Deborah and Sophia resist

this discourse by distancing themselves from it and attributing it to 'other' refugees. And

although Samir argues that refugees in fact contribute meaningfully to Canada, he also

bases his resistance of the 'burdensome refugee' discourse on a construction of 'other'

migrants who are not invested in contributing to the country.

Ignorance and Education

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Several participants drew on a perception of Newfoundland as geographically and culturally isolated to explain that the microaggression they face is the result of 'ignorance.' For much of the island's history, residents have fought to protect their culture and lifestyle from the exploitation of outsiders (Nolan, 2007). This culture of self-preservation has been tinged by negative stereotypes of Newfoundlanders:

> "[W]hat began to emerge to replace the traditional culture of Newfoundland [to outsiders] was 'Newfieland' peopled by 'Newfies' – a place out of step with time, inhabited by the numskull figure of the 'Newfie' joke, too stupid to realize his own ineptitude and alien status vis-à-vis mainstream North American society, but eternally happy, embarrassingly hospitable, and full of fun, deferential to his betters (read any non-Newfoundlander), but fiercely proud of his homeland and his way of life." (Byrne, 1997, p. 238)

This narrative of Newfoundlanders as out of touch from the rest of the world encourages participants' use of 'ignorance' as an explanation and resistance strategy for microaggression. Consider the following excerpt from an interview with Deborah, a black woman:

> DEBORAH: It's how you deal with it. It's how you deal with it. Some people would come up to you and say, 'Is this how you do things where you came from?' in a degrading tone and you ask, 'What do you mean? In what way?' You know, it's how you respond and how you deal with what people say to you. Yes, because it's ignorance for some people. Some of them have never left their city, so they have no inkling about how other people live. Yeah, so it's all about how they perceive you to

be, you know. You're dark, you're from Africa, you're poor. Yes, yeah. 'Did you come here for the money?' Some of them don't even know the Canadian government brings in immigrants from Africa. They don't know. So I put it down to ignorance, and the way they think. It's how *you* deal with it. That is what is important.

R.E.: What is the best way to deal with it? From your experience.

DEBORAH: You just answer in a simple, honest way, you know? And try to give them a little bit of education about where you came from: you don't live on trees, you don't eat with the monkeys, and - but you see when you look at the advertisements for these aid agencies that want money from first world countries, they show people in shanties, they show children with runny nose, sores, flies! Some of them, that's the image they have of you, and I think they do it to get more money from the people. And some people they meet you and the first thing they say to you is, 'Oh! I have a foster son or a foster daughter in Kenya' and I say, 'Okay, that's nice. Nice for you to sponsor somebody. I'm sponsoring a child, too.' Yes, oh yeah. (chuckles)'

In this excerpt, Deborah mentions four experiences of microaggression:

1. The question 'Is this how you do things where you came from?' asked in a degrading tone (verbal microassault - assumption: foreigners are incompetent and inferior).

2. The question 'Did you come here for the money?' (verbal microinsult - assumption: refugees/ immigrants/ outsiders are greedy).

3. Someone telling her, unsolicited, that they sponsor an African child (verbal microinsult - assumption: she is African and will be appreciative of this person's charity).

4. Advertisements for humanitarian aid agencies that portray African children as poor and desperate (environmental/ contextual microinsult - assumption: African people are exclusively poor and desperate).

All four experiences of microaggression deliver to Deborah the same message: you are different from 'us' who belong here, you do not belong here, you belong somewhere else. For a refugee who is trying to set down roots and is working towards a new conception of 'home' and 'belonging,' these experiences effectively re-uproot her. They are reminders, from different sources and in different forms, that she is not rooted to the place of resettlement.

In response to the first three experiences of microaggression, Deborah emphasizes that the offenders are ignorant. She explains that some Newfoundlanders have never left their home cities and thus are unaware of how others live differently. She explains that they draw on the only exposure to African people they have, in the form of disempowering humanitarian aid commercials. Constructing the offenders as ignorant is a powerful act of resistance, because it belittles the offenders, portraying them as naïve and discrediting the perception of reality on which their assumptions are based. Sue (2004; 2010) explains that the insidious power of microaggression comes from the dominant group's ability to define reality by promoting their own, and undermining the realities of marginalized groups. By

dismissing the offenders as ignorant, however, Deborah subverts the power dynamic by undermining the offender's perception of reality.

Similarly, consider Sophia's answer to the question, 'Do you feel like you belong to a community here?' Sophia is a young woman from a European country of origin who identifies as an 'invisible minority.' Throughout the interview, she insists that she has not faced discrimination or prejudice, and that she feels like she fits in St. John's.

> SOPHIA: Yeah, I never felt different than anybody else, or you know - maybe even I felt like I was interesting to other people. They would always ask - like the other day, a lady from work asked, 'How did you come to be white?' and I said, 'What do you mean?' and she said, 'You're not from here. How did you come to be white?' (laughs) You know those are the kind of innocent comments, you know, like it's nothing…nothing big, you know. For me that's cute. You know what I mean?
>
> R.E.: So what did you think of that?
>
> SOPHIA: I was like, 'Oh my God.' I just thought, right away: this lady doesn't know much about the world, you know, she probably thinks that only *here* people are white.

There is a paradox in Sophia's sense of belonging: on one hand, she states that she does not feel different from others, yet on the other hand, she acknowledges that other people see her as 'interesting' or exotic. She feels that she is met with curiousity rather than animosity, and thus accepts the role of the 'interesting foreigner' as a way to belong in St. John's. As such, she does not see the woman's comment on her race as offensive. She tells the anecdote as an example of being 'interesting' (i.e., the object of curiousity) to others.

When the interviewer probes her thoughts on the event, she reveals that she was initially shocked. However, this shock does not turn into offense or anger because Sophia constructs the woman as someone who is unaware of the world outside her immediate surroundings. Thus, Sophia resists the potentially negative impact of this microaggression on her mental wellbeing by discrediting the offender. Like Deborah, she subverts the oppressive power of microaggression by positioning herself as knowledgeable and the offender as ignorant.

When the target of microaggression constructs herself or himself as more knowledgeable than the offender, it creates a role for the target to fill: the role of the educator. Describing the offender as 'ignorant' results in an empowering construction of the self as an agent of positive change in the resettlement context. In the first example, Deborah answers that the best way to deal with microaggression borne out of ignorance is to give the offenders 'a little bit of education.' The type of information she gives as an example, 'you don't live on trees, you don't eat with the monkeys,' appears slightly ridiculous, suggesting that only someone who is completely naïve about the world would need to be informed that people do not live on trees in Africa. Similarly, Sophia constructs the offender as a naïve person, capable of being so ignorant of the outside world so as to think that only people in Canada are white. After the offender is thus placed in this position of inferior knowledge, the person who was the target of microaggression then gains the position of the educator. This is not only empowering, but it also justifies the presence of the refugee in St. John's. In this construction, a resettled refugee does not remain in St. John's only because he or she has lost their home and is now seeking another. Instead, the resettled refugee remains in St. John's as a contributing member of the community, an

agent of positive change who actively promotes diversity and inclusion. Hence, resisting

microaggression using the 'perpetrator as ignorant' explanation allowed participants to

construct an empowered sense of self that mediated the negative impact of

microaggression on their mental wellbeing and asserted their sense of belonging in St.

John's. In the metaphor of the uprooted plant, this can be seen as finding an alternative way

of setting down roots despite forces that can re-uproot.

Transience of vulnerability

Media and public discourses that portray refugees as vulnerable were considered by

some participants to be oppressive, a form of environmental microaggression. One

participant in particular, Samir, was vocal in his resistance of the discourse of refugees as

vulnerable:

> "I think the way that journalists who illustrate the stories of refugees do ultimately
>
> lead to that picture of vulnerability because they're supposed to evoke some sort of
>
> empathy in the [audience], by telling about the difficult journey someone has gone
>
> through. And not being able to control for what comes in the end, which is this
>
> person has succeeded despite all those challenges. They're not able to make the
>
> listeners aware of the fact that this story ends on a positive, rather than having the
>
> [audience] focus on particular aspects: 'Oh, they lost everything, and therefore
>
> they're not able to have anything ever again.'"

Samir argues that the discourse of refugees as vulnerable is oppressive because it

does not acknowledge the transient nature of vulnerability. Media coverage of refugee

issues tends to oscillate between the xenophobic 'refugees as burdens' discourse and the

supposedly kinder 'refugees as vulnerable' discourse (Olsen, El-Bialy, Mckelvie, Rauman, & Brunger, 2014). Service providers and researchers commonly use the discourse of 'refugees as vulnerable' as well. This discourse is disempowering, particularly when the vulnerability is considered to be an inherent quality of the refugee that results from their displacement, loss, and exposure to traumatic events. In the following quote, Samir subverts this idea of refugees as inherently vulnerable by arguing that if refugees are vulnerable in Canada, it is because the context is strange and they are not prepared for it, not because of an inherent vulnerability:

> "There are advantages that immigrants have in the sense of being prepared for the move, mentally and financially, because they make these decisions consciously to go to another place. Refugees don't always choose that, and so it can be a big shock when they are in the place where they have come. But I haven't seen refugees not recover from that experience initially, in fact I think they're some of the most versatile and flexible people that you can get to know, because they are in the most unfamiliar surroundings they could be in, and yet they're able to adjust, adapt, integrate, and move on, build a family, build a home, and build a future for other people, and make a difference in the process as well."

Samir's argument that vulnerability depends on the context (the degree to which it is strange or familiar) and the time (refugees stop being vulnerable over time, as they become more familiar with the context) resists the media message that trauma renders refugees vulnerable forever. Rather, he argues that refugees are strong and resilient people who overcome the challenges riddling their resettlement context.

The concept of the transience of vulnerability parallels the idea that oppression and privilege are also transient and dependent on place and time (Hulko, 2009), an idea that emerged from the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Participants recognized that they experienced microaggression based on different aspects of their identity depending on the place and time. For example, Heidi explained that being a woman was a source of privilege during her initial years in Canada. Consider the following excerpt of our conversation:

R.E.: Do you think if you were a man, would your experience have been any different?

HEIDI: Oh yeah, I think it would have been very different.

R.E.: In what ways?

HEIDI: I think that Canada has a genuine support for females, young females, you know? There are programs - you're seen as a more vulnerable person, and that makes people support you better. When you are a guy, you could be suffering, too, could have been facing a million problems, but he's just a man (chuckles). And men, they got to be tough and you know. I think it would have been very, very different. But that's just my case. I'm talking just by my husband. I find for me it was easier to get sympathy than it is for him. But I would just get sympathy immediately, because you know, I look vulnerable, I'm skinny, I don't know. But he's a big guy, also suffering a lot, but not being considered vulnerable. For me, I find it was easier. It has a lot to do with our personalities. We were more shy, still very scared and insecure about everything. But nobody would perceive him like that, just because he

is a big guy and his voice is like this (mimics deep voice). So I – in many times I was

treated better just because I look like this. It's convenient sometimes to be a woman,

it's convenient sometimes to be part of a minority – in Canada, at least.

Heidi states that it was easier for her, as a woman, to be perceived as vulnerable and

thus to receive support when she asked for it after her arrival. Her husband, on the other

hand, found himself at the intersection of multiple dimensions of oppression: hegemonic

masculinity, the discourse of the 'bogus refugee', and the feminization of refugees.

According to hegemonic masculinity, the powerful mainstream notions of 'true'

masculinity, strength or toughness are associated with masculinity and weakness or

vulnerability associated with femininity. Because Heidi's husband appeared masculine,

with a large body and a deep voice, he was perceived as requiring no assistance or support.

She, on the other hand, received compassion and support easily.

As asylum-seekers, Heidi and her husband were also subjected to the discourse of

the 'bogus refugee,' which dictates that asylum-seekers who do not fulfil the stereotypes of

'true' refugees – helpless, lacking in agency, vulnerable – are considered with suspicion

(Olsen, El-Bialy, Mckelvie, Rauman, & Brunger, 2014). The discourse of 'true' and 'bogus'

refugees is gendered by the feminization of refugees through images and narratives used

by media, humanitarian organizations, and international institutions that portray refugees

worldwide as 'women-and-children,' the most vulnerable of the vulnerable (Johnson, 2011;

Hyndman & Giles, 2011). The feminization of refugees involves the construction of 'true'

refugees as feminine, vulnerable, and in need of rescuing (Johnson, 2011; Hyndman & Giles,

2011). Those who do not fit this construction, by expressing agency or by virtue of being

male, may not be seen as vulnerable or in need of support as much as those who do. Indeed, Heidi's application for asylum was processed and granted quicker than her husband.

Heidi recognizes the context-dependent nature of oppression and privilege in the final sentence of the quote. She acknowledges that being a 'minority,' a member of a group that is typically oppressed, may actually be a source of privilege in Canada. Of course, simply being a woman or a visible minority is not itself a source of privilege in Canada, as evidenced by the discrimination faced by visible minority women across the country (Berdahl & Moore, 2006). For Heidi, however, her identity as a woman privileged her because it intersected with other dimensions of power: the feminization of refugees and the discourse of the 'bogus' refugee. For her husband, his masculinity – a source of privilege in other contexts – resulted in his oppression because it intersected with those same dimensions of power.

Setting Down Roots

Newfoundland and Labrador has the lowest retention rate of immigrants and refugees among all Canadian provinces (Okonny-Myers, 2010). Most immigrants and refugees who come to the province eventually move to other provinces where there are more job opportunities, a wider variety of community services, and greater diversity and multiculturalism (Sarma-Debnath & Kutty, 2006). The participants in this study constitute members of the small minority of refugees and asylum-seekers who arrive in St. John's and choose to stay. Several participants expressed the sentiment that feeling at home is an active process for refugees who are resettled in St. John's. Part of this is refusing to see oneself as the victim of microaggression, and to assert one's right to remain and set down

roots in the resettlement context. Consider Marco's experience with members of his wife's community, which lies outside of St. John's:

> MARCO: I have had issues that people don't accept me in certain social groups and they basically closed the doors to me and it was hard to break into the group, but had I thought that that was discrimination first, I would have lost the opportunity to be part of the group, which I am now.
>
> R.E.: Are you saying that if you had thought that it was discrimination at first, you wouldn't have tried again? And you wouldn't have succeeded?
>
> MARCO: Maybe I would have become bitter about it and said, 'Well I'm walking out of here.' But to me, I went to this community and it was a lot of antagonism. There was a lot of antagonism there, small place and stuff like that. But I said, 'Well I am here and I will stick around, so I don't really care what you feel about that.' So there was a lot of people that were a little bit pushing me away, but I'm convinced that it had nothing to do with discrimination, it had to do with the fact that you go to a small community, the people are not used to change. They see someone new coming in, I don't think it matters where you come from. That's how I took it. And I don't think it lasts very long, either, because pretty soon they got the point that I was going to stick around. And guess what? Now all these people who were a bit antagonistic towards me being there, now these are the people that want me to come back there and do stuff and go out to these things and all that.

Participants felt they had to work to make the city feel like home. Part of this attitude is making a deliberate choice to remain in the city, rather than to move away. Some

participants argued that being content and satisfied does not depend on the place you live in, and so it is futile to move to a different place in pursuit of satisfaction. An attitude of 'you have to make the best of what you have' prompted this view. Consider the following:

ALEXANDER: [Other refugees from country of origin] all moved away. They all ended up moving away to find better opportunities.

R.E.: Do you know if they found better opportunities?

ALEXANDER: I don't know. When they did that, then I kind of like, scratched them off in my mind, because I wasn't interested in them. I felt that they gave up on the place. This is me being very judgmental of them: I felt that they were going to be just as dissatisfied there as they were going to be dissatisfied here, so I've always assumed that no matter what the circumstances are, you have to make the best you can.

In the face of microaggressive incidents suggesting that a person or group is not welcome in a place, remaining in that place may be the ultimate form of resistance. Alexander, Marco, and others expressed a determination to make St. John's their home, despite the challenges they encountered that may have contributed to other refugees' decision to leave Newfoundland and Labrador. The act of setting down roots in the resettlement context is seen to be an act of willpower and effortful labour. Deborah described this view with fervour:

"You have a big responsibility on how to adjust to the culture you're coming to meet. Because you are coming into their own culture. You have to make adjustments. You don't just expect for them to make adjustments for you. No, some people have never

dealt with people coming from other cultures. So it's your responsibility on how you respond and how you behave, and how you grasp all of this. It's your responsibility."

Discussion

Microaggression, in its various forms and manifestations, figured prominently in participants' narratives of their sense of mental wellbeing in St. John's. Microaggression was identified as a factor that had the potential to negatively impact participants' sense of wellbeing during resettlement. It also made participants feel that they did not genuinely belong in Canada. Participants' narratives of microaggression were interwoven with narratives of resistance, demonstrating a tension between experiences that re-uproot and the desire to set down roots in the resettlement context.

Refugees' experiences of microaggression during resettlement are not limited to St. John's. For instance, in an Australian study of Sudanese refugees' resettlement experiences, participants described facing subtle forms of microaggression, particularly the question 'where are you from?' that participants in our study also faced (Hatoss, 2012). However, the historical, cultural, and economic context of St. John's lends a unique angle to the participants' experiences of microaggression and resistance. In particular, some participants drew on stereotypes of Newfoundland culture to explain microinsults as a result of cultural isolation and 'ignorance.' The participants' construction of the self as agent of change and as educator allows them to create a sense of belonging in their resettlement context, leading to a sense of wellbeing.

The attribution of microaggression to the offenders' 'ignorance' is very similar to the reaction that Sue (2010) terms 'rescuing the offender.' Sue describes this reaction as

characterized by compassion for the offender or excusing their actions, and indicates that 'explaining this reaction appears complex. Most of our work generally reveals people of colour to become incensed and/ or very bothered by microaggressions.' (p. 76)

The case may be, in fact, that even when the target of microaggression appears to 'rescue the offender,' the target *is* bothered by the microaggression and is responding with an act of resistance. In this paper, we have argued that suggesting that the offender 'doesn't know any better' may be a way of subverting the offender's oppressive power and constructing them as inferior, rather than a way of excusing and accepting their behaviour. Attributing microaggression to the offender's ignorance allowed participants in our study to construct an empowered sense of self as educated, as an educator, and as an agent of positive change in their resettlement context.

Some participants in this study resisted the discourse of 'refugees as burdens' by distancing themselves from the label 'refugee.' Other studies of migration and identity have found that immigrants and refugees in other places use similar strategies of resisting negative dominant discourses by rejecting the labels of 'immigrant' or 'refugee' and the connotations of difference inherent in them (Kumsa, 2006; Rochira, 2014; Killian & Johnson, 2006). The rejection of the 'refugee' label may explain why we had difficulty in recruiting participants for this study using advertisement posters. The posters read 'Did you come to St. John's as a protected person, a refugee, or under sponsorship?' Because we chose to interview people who had lived in St. John's for at least 3 years, it was unlikely that anyone who had lived in the city for that amount of time would have continued to identify themselves as one of those three categories. Considering that the participants in the study did not identify themselves as 'refugees' at the time of data collection, it is no surprise that

no one willingly responded to the advertisement posters. As such, the failure of our advertisements suggests a quiet form of everyday resistance: those refugee-background individuals who saw our posters resisted labelling themselves as refugees and chose not to respond to the advertisements.

The acts of everyday resistance employed by participants in this study ranged from behavioural to psychological strategies of resisting and subverting the oppressive power of microaggression. These acts of resistance contributed to participants' sense of mental wellbeing in several ways. First, it allowed them to construct a sense of self that was superior to that portrayed by the negative discourses underlying microaggression. It allowed them to resist the image imposed upon them by the oppressor, and in some cases it allowed for the subversion of power. Second, the mere act of resisting or subverting oppression allows the oppressed to become an active agent rather than a passive victim. Third, when the self is constructed as superior than the offender's assumptions, or superior than the offender himself, the newly recovered sense of agency leads to a construction of the self as an educator or an agent of positive change. This is perhaps the most critical outcome of refugees' everyday resistance in our study, because it forms the foundation for the assertion of a sense of belonging in the resettlement context. According to this construction, the refugee is *needed* to bring diversity to St. John's. According to NL's provincial government, increasing diversity and multiculturalism is necessary for the city's economic and social prosperity (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2005; 2007; 2014). As such, participants are able to conceive of their place in St. John's as agents of positive change and growth. In conclusion, microaggression may negatively impact resettled refugees' sense of wellbeing by repeatedly 're-uprooting' them as their right to be

in the resettlement context is questioned. In response, acts of everyday resistance contribute to resettled refugees' sense of wellbeing by allowing them to set down roots, on their own terms, in the resettlement context.

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CONCLUSION

The low retention rate of immigrants and refugees who initially come to Newfoundland and Labrador prompted the initiation of this ethnographic study. After asking, 'Why do most refugees who come here leave?,' my next questions were, 'Why do some stay? What are their stories?' The latter questions were the impetus for the study and remained throughout the data collection and analysis stages. Chapter 2 of this thesis uses the social determinants of health approach to illustrate how certain aspects of the resettlement context can give rise to both challenges and supports. That chapter highlights the importance of environmental as well as social characteristics of the resettlement context on refugees' sense of wellbeing. Chapter 3 examines former refugees' narratives of wellbeing in St. John's using the psychological framework of microaggression and the sociological concept of everyday resistance. In that chapter, I argue that everyday resistance allows refugees who stay in St. John's to set down roots, despite facing acts of microaggression that can re-uproot them.

As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, the study began with a strong focus on gender as a determinant of refugees' wellbeing during resettlement. Prior research demonstrates that gender roles impact a person's resettlement experience in several ways, including: one's expectations for oneself and for others; access to services; ability to form a social network; and family dynamics. As such, I approached the questions underlying this study ('Why do some refugees who come to St. John's stay? What are their stories of wellbeing?') with a strong focus on gender. I expected that whatever answers I found to these questions would have clear gender implications.

Familiar as I was with Kimberle Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), which stipulates that a person experiences intersecting dimensions of oppression and privilege based on his or her intersecting identities, I was aware that gender is only one facet of anyone's social identity. Nevertheless, it took me a long time to accept what participants told me again and again: there were dimensions of identity that they perceived to influence their resettlement in St. John's more strongly than gender. These dimensions of identity were, in no particular order: 'foreignness,' age, education, race, and faith. The one aspect of identity that participants correlated with their resettlement experiences, directly and indirectly, was 'foreignness.' Some recognized the influence of gender on their resettlement experiences, but most dismissed my questions on the topic. It became important for me to relinquish my expectations regarding the role of gender in resettlement. Instead, I began to investigate how and why participants felt that 'foreignness' was the one dimension of their identity that most impacted their resettlement experiences in St. John's.

Investigating the thread of 'foreignness' running through participants' narratives of wellbeing, distress, and coping led to the analyses presented in Chapters 2 and 3. I still recognized that gender is a dimension of a refugee's social identity, even if it is not the dimension that the person perceives as having the most impact on their experiences. As such, I analysed the data again while attending to themes that may be in some way connected to the concept of gender. A paper based on this analysis is planned for future publication, but will not be included in this thesis.

The flexibility to shift predictions and expectations to meet emergent ideas in the data is a hallmark of ethnographic research (Hammersly & Atkinson, 2007). In the case of

this study, the results regarding the importance of the built and natural environments (Chapter 2) and former refugees' resistance of microaggression (Chapter 3) were unexpected. The unexpectedness of these results is a testament to the value of such context-focused, small-scale research, as the policy and service recommendations emerging from this study could not have been extracted from research conducted elsewhere.

The study's limitations arise from the fact that it focuses on the experiences of a unique group of individuals who differ from the majority of refugees and asylum-seekers who are resettled in St. John's, by virtue of their choice to remain in the city. The specificity of the study population and the uniqueness of the resettlement context mean that the narratives reported in this research are not uniformly generalizable to the experiences of refugees resettled in other Canadian cities. While elements of the experiences reported by participants in this study are not unique to their situation (e.g., the negative impact of microinsults on mental wellbeing; the importance of social support; the impact of the natural environment and a healing landscape on wellbeing), other aspects of resettling in a small urban centre cannot be generalized to the experiences of refugees resettling in larger or more diverse cities.

Future research should investigate the nuances of tensions between insiders and outsiders in NL, especially in the currently changing economic landscape of the province. The province's economy is changing due to the discovery of off-shore oil. Oil companies hire individuals from other parts of Canada and the world to fill managerial positions and professional roles, leading to increasing tensions between local Newfoundlanders and 'outsiders' who work in these high-paying positions. Moreover, off-shore oil jobs have somewhat curbed the outmigration of Newfoundlanders to other provinces in search for

work. This changing economic landscape is an opportunity for future research that can explore how the discourse of locals/outsiders shifts as part of these changing economic and migration patterns.

Policy and Service Implications

One of the main resettlement challenges that participants described was social isolation (Chapter 2). This was due in part to the fact that most refugees and asylum-seekers are not able to communicate in English upon their arrival in St. John's. Although the English school provided a venue to meet other newcomers who speak the same language, most people outside the language school (e.g., neighbours, grocery store employees, bus drivers, etc.) speak only English. Social support is critical during resettlement, and the limited opportunities for building a social network is likely one of the reasons that most refugees and immigrants who come to NL choose to leave the province. Simich, Beiser, and Mawani (2003) conducted a study with refugees who underwent this so-called *secondary migration,* meaning that they moved away from the Canadian city to which they were originally sent for resettlement. Simich and colleagues found that the social support of friends and family was, in many cases, one of the primary reasons for this secondary migration. They note that although visa officers ask refugees if they have friends and family in Canada, in order to place them in the same city, sometimes the need to fill provincial refugee quotas takes precedence. This study also found that having the social support of friends and family was important for several reasons. First, friends, family, and others from a similar linguistic or cultural background can be informal sources of information and assistance, and are often more accessible than formal avenues. Second, connecting with others who have had shared experiences was found to be a source of emotional and

material support for refugees. Therefore refugees undergo secondary migration to connect with friends and family, and to obtain the support and affirmation of others who have shared experiences with them.

A few participants had the experience of being 'paired' with a local family soon after their arrival, and they spoke at length about the benefits of such a partnership. First, the local family provided practical information and assistance for the refugee family's particular needs. For example, if the newcomer family had a child who required a tutor, the local family could help by showing them how to find one. Second, the local family acted as a gateway to establishing social connections and joining activities. For instance, the local family could invite the refugee family to its barbecues or parties, where they can meet other people and expand their social network. Third, participants indicated the importance of having someone who 'checks in' to make sure that the newcomer is doing well. Participants who were not partnered with a local family said they felt that no one cared about them once the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP)[6] ended. During the RAP program, resettlement workers frequently checked in with them, but after it ended they became busy with other newcomers. Newfoundland's federally funded settlement agency, the Association for New Canadians (ANC), indicates that the Resettlement Assistance Program is offered to newly arrived refugees during their first 4-6 weeks (Association for New Canadians, 2010). Over the past two years, the settlement agency has been struggling with staff shortages due to budget cuts (Personal communication, June 16, 2014).

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[6] The RAP program is offered during the first five weeks after arrival.

In the 1990s, the ANC arranged partnerships between newcomer families and local families. It is not clear why these partnerships ceased. Participants who had benefited from this program all indicated that the local families they were partnered with were strong sources of social, emotional, and practical support. Thus, the first service recommendation I make is that these partnerships be reinstated. A newly arrived refugee or asylum-seeker would benefit greatly from being paired with a local family that is familiar with the city and its services, and that can help them feel included and welcomed.

The ANC and the Refugee and Immigrant Advisory Council (RIAC) both offer an 'English conversation partner' program, but the aims of this program are quite different from the partnerships recommended here. Whereas the role of the 'English conversation partner' does not officially extend beyond helping a newcomer practice English, the family partnerships recommended here would encompass a larger scope of assistance. The local family would be expected to call or visit the newly-arrived refugee or asylum-seeker and to help them discover the services offered in the city that they need, of which they may not be aware. In the past, local families have entered such partnerships voluntarily, and it is my recommendation that these partnerships be voluntary again when they are reinstated. As such, this program will not cost the organizers much beyond the salaries of those arranging the partnerships, although it is recognized that such salaries may be outside the capacity of available resources. Moreover, the support of the volunteering local families can help fill the gaps left by resettlement workers who are overtaxed and whose number has declined with recent federal cuts to resettlement programs. This program can be promoted in St. John's through a public campaign that draws on Newfoundlanders' national narrative as a hospitable and generous people (Burke, 2008).

The second service recommendation arising from this study is for an increase in services that operate within a multicultural framework. It may be argued that the scarcity of services offered within a multicultural framework in St. John's may be attributed to the relatively low degree of multiculturalism in the province, meaning that there is not enough demand for such services. Others have suggested, however, that the paucity of multicultural services in St. John's may be one of the reasons that most immigrants and refugees who come to NL eventually move to other provinces (Sarma-Debnath & Kutty, 2006). Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 2, even refugees who decide to remain in St. John's struggle with the limited and over-taxed resettlement services available. As such, I recommend that the provincial government encourage existing community organizations to expand their services in a culturally- and linguistically-inclusive manner.

Moreover, I recommend that the provincial government request additional federal funding to increase the number of agencies providing resettlement assistance in the province. While the small number of GARs and asylum-seekers arriving in the province annually may be used to justify limited funding for resettlement assistance, the argument has been made in the other direction. For example, Jose Riviera, the director of the Refugee and Immigrant Advisory Council, has made a public appeal to asylum-seekers to *not* come to St. John's, due to the lack of services available to provide them with proper assistance (CBC News, 2014). As such, one way to attract and retain more refugees, asylum-seekers, and immigrants would be by ensuring that there are sufficient and varied services that provide settlement assistance and social services in St. John's.

Finally, I recommend that the provincial government sponsor dialogues between members of the public on the topics of social exclusion and beliefs about insiders and

outsiders. The results discussed in Chapter 3 illustrate that the microaggressions participants experienced often revealed a tendency to exclude and 'other' people from outside of Newfoundland. Chapter 2 mentions that even Newfoundlanders often experience the same feelings of exclusion and inferiority if they were from 'around the bay' or from an area of the city that is stereotyped. Although participants in this study found ways to feel like they belong in St. John's, a larger dialogue about inclusion in St. John's remains necessary. Acts of everyday resistance may be an effective individual coping strategy that contributes to former refugees sense of wellbeing, but it is not a tool for systemic change. Systemic changes will come about through public dialogue and acknowledgement of the insider/ outsider tensions in Newfoundland culture.

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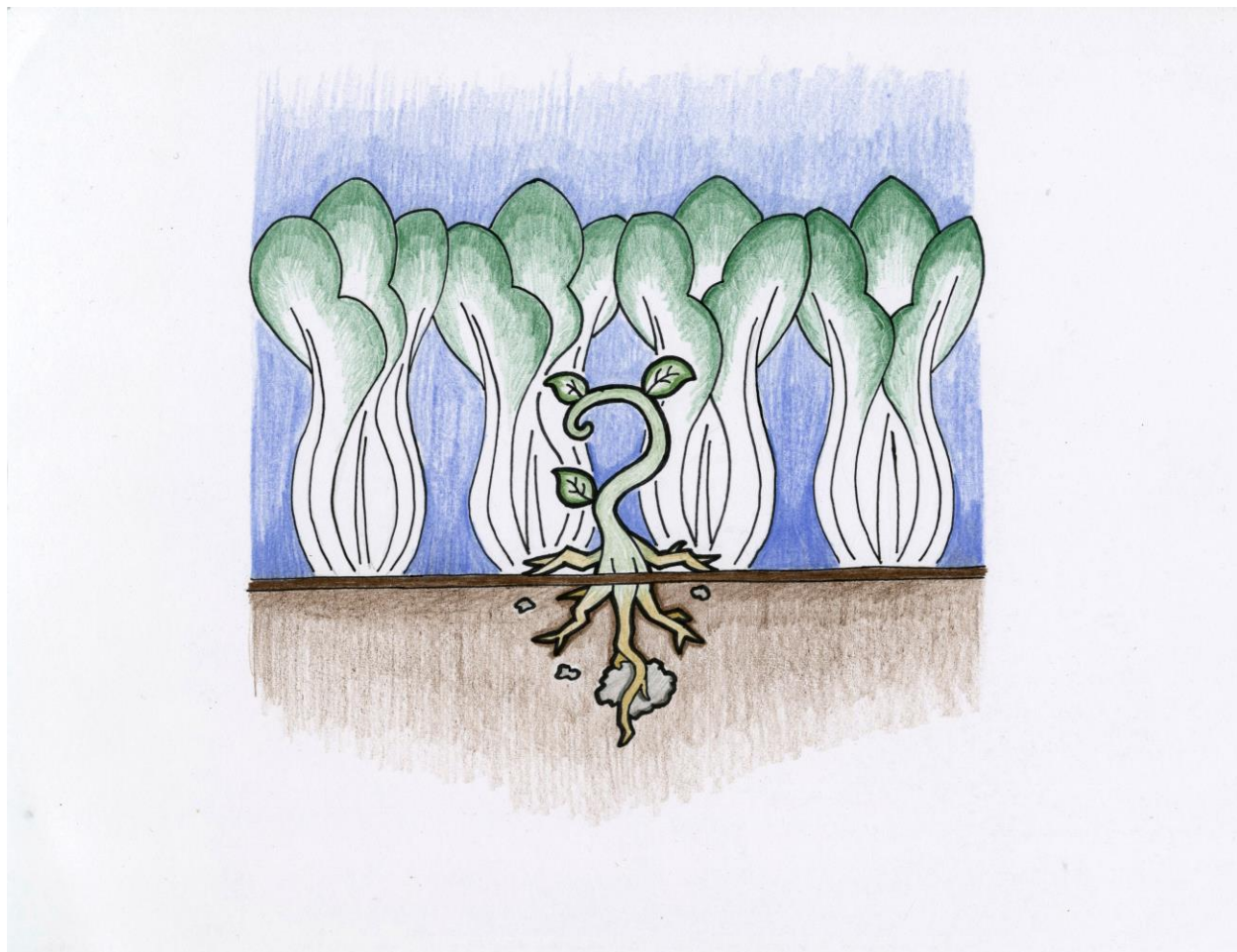
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Uprooting (2014)
Conceived and commissioned by Rowan El-Bialy. Drawn by Jamie Chang.

Setting Down Roots (2014)
Conceived and commissioned by Rowan El-Bialy. Drawn by Jamie Chang.