THE ROLE OF SOCIAL TIES IN THE PROCESS OF SETTLEMENT OF MIGRANT SURVIVORS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

by

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Abstract

In spite of the growing numbers of civilians who are fleeing their homes for the reasons of political violence, migrant survivors of political violence are significantly overlooked in psychological theory and research. In addition, clinical and social practices and polices involving this population are seldom based on empirical findings. Even though established psychological literature identifies the significant positive role of social factors in coping with stress, trauma, and life transitions, the role of social relationships in the successful settlement of migrant survivors has seldom been explored. Due to a lack of attention to the needs of migrant survivors, and psychology’s narrow research focus on individual “pathology”, little is known about factors, such as social ties, that may contribute to successful settlement outcomes of this population.

This critical ethnographic study explored the diverse experiences and roles of social ties in the process of settlement for 8 migrant survivors of political violence residing in Vancouver and Winnipeg. The research design of this study involved three distinct, yet tightly interwoven, stages: reflexivity, dialogical stage, and system’s analysis, based on information collected in the interviews, participant observation, and conversations with 8 providers of clinical services.

The results of the current study contribute to Counselling Psychology’s theoretical literature on transition and multiculturalism by identifying and describing various types of migrant survivors’ social ties and their diverse roles in the participants’ settlement process. In contrast to linear, universalizing, and apolitical psychological theories of acculturation, these results suggest a conceptualization of settlement as a continuous, dynamic, interactive, and social process rooted in its larger socio-political and economic contexts. In addition to their theoretical value, these results will serve to inform clinical and social practices designed to aid settlement of migrant survivors of political violence.
Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, T. Elez. The research in this dissertation involved human subjects and as such, was reviewed and approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board prior to the start of the research. The number of the original certificate pertaining to the research in this dissertation is: H13-00948.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In spite of their growing numbers in Canada and around the world, civilians who left their homelands after experiencing political violence have been underrepresented in psychological research and theory, and their voices seldom inform clinical practices and social policies designed to aid migrant settlement. While established social support, transition, and trauma research and theories underscore the centrality of social context in coping, psychological literature on the role of social relationships in the process of migrant survivor’s settlement in a new country is scarce. In response, the focus of this study was on the migrant survivors’ experiences of the role of significant relationships in the course of their settlement in Canada. In addition to theoretical contributions, this study offers suggestions for clinical and social practices involving migrant survivors of political violence.

The Changing Context of Political Violence and Exile

According to the United Nations reports (2010, 2011, 2014), the number of people fleeing their homes for reasons of political violence continues to grow. At the end of 2013, 51.2 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced due to conflict and persecution in their homelands. This is the highest number in more than fifteen years. As one of the actively receiving countries, Canada annually resettles 1 out of every 10 refugees resettled globally. In 2013, Canada became a permanent home to 24,049 refugees. In addition, 10,380 people sought refugee asylum in Canada in 2013 (CIC, 2014).

Portraits of psychological trauma associated with political violence can be found in documents dating far back in history. The human condition following exposure to violent events has been described in the works from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Ancient Greece, and in many other historical and modern texts (Birmes, Hatton, Brunet & Schmitt, 2003; Mollica, 2006). However,
the nature of violence has evolved through time, significantly changing who is affected and how. In contrast to violence described in earlier historical periods, mostly involving military soldiers, a massive transformation and global evolution of warfare has been observed in recent decades (Erchenbreich, 1997; Maoz & Gat, 2001), with severe consequences for the civilian population. For example, in World War I, 85% of all victims killed were combatants, while in modern days roughly 90% of all victims of war are civilian women and children (Graves, 2003; Pedersen, 2002). As a result of globalizing trends and modern technological developments, wars are being fought from a distance, and civilians are forced to flee to foreign countries that are often continents away from their homes, frequently leaving their loved ones and communities behind.

In spite of their growing numbers, civilian migrant survivors of political violence are largely overlooked in psychological research and theory. Considering this growth of the migrant survivor population, psychologists, service providers, and governments will likely face an increased demand for services, while having little available information about the needs, concerns, and settlement experiences of this population. By illuminating social relationships and contextual factors that contribute to migrant survivors’ settlement process, this study contributes the field of Counselling Psychology, which has limited knowledge regarding this population. It will also inform clinical and social practices aimed at serving migrant survivors.

Practices of Receiving Migrant Survivors of Political Violence in Canada

In addition to violence faced in the country of origin, migrant survivors of political violence often encounter bureaucratic and other obstacles in their receiving countries, which further affect their settlement efforts. As documented in extant research literature, dominant cultural values and inherent socio-political and economic factors shape social practices and policies concerning migrant survivors of political violence in their host country (Beiser, 1999;
Berman, Giron & Marroquin, 2006; Simich, Hamilton & Baya, 2006; Simich, 2003, 2008). For example, bureaucratic practices determine how a status of “conventional refugee” is assigned, who can and cannot claim this status, and who is allowed to accompany an exiled family member to the new country (Beiser, 1999; Simich, 2003). Bureaucratic definitions of family determine who can migrate, be sponsored, or housed together. As a result, many of the migrants’ significant supports are left behind, close ties are ruptured, and migrant survivors are forced to not only cope without their significant others in the new country, but also fear for their loved ones’ safety and lack of material resources (Berman, Giron & Marroquin, 2006; Simich, Hamilton & Baya, 2006; Simich, 2008).

As described in the literature, the existing Canadian immigration practices and policies affect many aspects of migrant survivors’ lives, restricting their employment, schooling, and housing options, and contributing to further oppression of this population (Beiser, 1999; Simich, 2003). For example, government-sanctioned professional regulatory bodies seldom allow foreign trained professionals to work in their chosen fields, resulting in de-skilling processes and exacerbating experiences of stress and helplessness (Bauder, 2003). However, in spite of their significant influence on the migrant survivors’ settlement process, such policies are seldom informed by research (Simich, 2003). By describing the social needs of migrant survivors and identifying the impact of existing policies on their relationships and settlement process, the current study offers information to service providers and policy makers about how to better serve this population.

Survivors of Political Violence as Described in Psychological Literature

In spite of the growing numbers of people fleeing their homes for reasons of political violence, and regardless of the fact that many survivors of political violence are now living in
neighbourhoods throughout Canada, psychological literature about the experiences, struggles, and success stories of this population is surprisingly scarce. There is an abundance of information regarding the role of social support in coping with life stressors (Cohen, 1992; Cohen & Willis, 1985; Gotlieb, 1983), the consequences of relational and contextual trauma (Charuvastra & Cloitre, 2008; Masten & Narayan, 2012), and the experience of developmental and situational transitions (Bramer, 1991; Falicow, 2003; McGoldrick & Carter, 2003; Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, Waters & Anderson, 1995). However, very little is currently known about the role that social ties and the larger context play in the settlement process of migrant survivors of political violence.

The extant psychological literature is mostly problem-focused, describing trauma, socio-economic difficulties, significant loss of human, social, and material resources, and the challenges of making the transition to the host country (Behnia, 2002; Fazel, Wheeler & Danesh, 2005; Krippner & McIntyre, 2003; Mollica, 2006). Most of the knowledge about migrant survivors of political violence is rooted in the bio-medical model and drawn from quantitative, questionnaire-based, and universalizing research (Pedersen, 2002; Schewitzer et al., 2007; Sideris, 2003). For reasons that will be discussed in chapter two, much of the existing literature explicitly focuses on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in survivors of political violence (Bronstein, Montgomery & Dobrowolski, 2012; Canetti, Galea, Hall, Johnson, Palmieri & Hobfoll, 2010; Kinzie, Boehnlein, Leung, Moore, Riley & Smith, 1990; Kroll, Yusuf & Fujiwara, 2011; Quota, Punawaki & Sarraj, 2003). However, such a focus may serve to over-pathologize this population and portray migrant survivors as lacking hope and necessary coping skills, while offering little information about the transition processes and settlement in the new country (Ryan, Dooley & Benson, 2008).
Contributing to the discipline of psychology’s limited understanding of the experiences and needs of migrant survivors of political violence is that their voices are often missing in psychological theories and research, with very little being known about their first hand experiences (Kayes & Kane, 2004; Lewis, 2010; Summerfield, 1999). Of particular interest to this study was the lack of attention in the literature to the role of social relationships and support networks in facilitating or impeding a migrant’s transition to the host country. Through my personal contacts and work as a therapist with migrant survivors, I have come to appreciate how the quality and availability of migrant survivors’ social networks can play a significant role in their process of settlement – ergo the focus of the current study.

Another reason for the lack of understanding of the settlement experiences of migrant survivors of political violence may be related to the minimal interdisciplinary collaborations and information exchange among mental health practitioners, service providers, and researchers in the field. The challenges and needs of this population have been described and researched independently by researchers from a number of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, economics, and political science. However, psychology has been slow to integrate the insights and findings originating from other disciplines. For example, psychological theory is rarely informed by a large body of ethnographic work in the field of anthropology that has been collected with migrant survivors of political violence (Fassin, Le Marcis & Lehata, 2008; Greenspan & Bolkosky, 2006; Huisman, 2008; Jackson, 2008; Pupavac, 2002; Shuman & Bohmer, 2004). According to Mayer (2009), even though increasing interdisciplinary cooperation would be expected in the area of life course and transition research, in recent years there has been more decline than growth in the integration of this information between and
among disciplines. Through reviewing and integrating research from other disciplines, for the purpose of informing the current study, I attempted to bridge this existing gap.

In comparison to extensive documentation of psychopathology, relatively little is known about factors contributing to resilient outcomes and post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi, 1999) for migrant survivor populations (Betancourt, Salhi, Buka, Leaning, Dunn & Earls, 2012). The limited recent literature on resilience underscores the role of primary relationships, legal recognition, family and friend networks, religious beliefs, social support, and personal qualities in coping with the aftermath of political violence and the transition to a new country (Schweitzer, Greenslade & Kagee, 2007; Schweitzer, Mellville, Steel & Lacherez, 2006; Thomas, Roberts, Luitel, Opadhaya & Tol, 2011). Limited research also indicates that migrant survivors perceive positive changes in self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and philosophy of life, in spite of previous exposure to trauma (Powell, 2003). However, this literature, which will be reviewed in detail in chapter two, is still relatively sparse.

Also limited is the literature on the factors that contribute to successful settlement experiences for the migrant survivors of political violence (Beiser, 1999; Thomas, Roberts, Luitel, Nawaraj & Tol, 2011). The limited available literature suggests that social networks are crucial in the settlement process of migrant survivors (Beiser, 1999; Berman, Giron & Maroquin, 2006; Lewis, 2010; Simich, 2003). As part of transition to life in the new country, migrant survivors transform their families in order to include both kin and non-kin members, and attempt to create a foundation of security across generations (Lewis, 2010). In the literature on successful transition to life in a new country, adaptation and belonging have emerged as two of the most salient themes in the lives of migrant survivors (Kayes & Kane, 2004). This literature offers initial information about the significance of social factors in the successful settlement process.
However, the specific and culturally defined nature and roles of these social factors have not been fully explored in this literature. Further building on these findings, the current study identifies various social relationships and describes their diverse roles in the settlement process.

The Eurocentric White Western approach that has characterized psychological research in North America – an approach dominated by individualist and intra-psychically focused models of settlement which are often devoid of attention to context (Sideris, 2003; Summerfield, 1999, 2002) – may be inadequate to address the transition and settlement issues of individuals from other countries. The harm of political violence perpetuated by other human beings, societies, and cultures, is not individual. Rather, such violence is largely rooted in relationships and contexts and the consequences of such violence may best be understood by attending to this important fact (Charuvastra & Cloitre, 2008). Also, many migrant survivors identify with particular cultures or groups and do not define themselves as isolated psychological beings. Rather, they have more flexible, collective identities (Bhatia & Ram, 2009) and construct their experiences as inter-subjective rather than intra-psychic (Jackson, 2004). Social, political, and economic contexts from which individuals flee and into which they migrate are also highly relevant to their experience of political violence, safety, and exile, and to the shaping of migrant identity and the transition experience (Bhatia & Ram, 2009; Pedersen, 2002). Finally, the meanings people make of their experiences are grounded in their larger contexts, and implications of political violence and exile are often determined by their cultural meaning (Mollica, 2006). Research must attend to the interpersonal context and collective identities of migrant survivors, if we are to better understand their transition experiences and needs during the process of settlement (Ryan, Dooley & Benson, 2008).
Given the limited attention to issues of this growing population and narrowly focused psychological research in which survivors’ voices are seldom included, Counselling Psychology’s understanding of the experiences, transition processes, and needs of migrant survivors of political violence is fairly limited. As such, further research is needed to understand which factors are significant in migrant survivors’ successful settlement transitions, and how these factors contribute to, or impede, their success. As initial evidence suggests that various types of relationships and the larger social and political context may be crucial (Beiser, 1999; Kayes & Kane, 2004; Lewis, 2010; Sideris, 2003; Simich, 2003, 2010), the current study is focused on migrant survivors’ experiences of social ties and the role of their relationships and social networks in the settlement process.

Towards a Non-pathologizing Conceptualization of Migrant Survivors’ Experience

In contrast to the bio-medical model, in the current study, the experiences of migrant survivors of political violence were conceptualized from the perspectives of transition and family life cycle theories (McGoldrick & Carter, 2003; Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, Waters & Anderson, 1995). From these perspectives, the changes related to exposure to violence, migration, and settlement are considered within the context of the life-long development of individuals and the groups within which they are embedded.

According to Schlossberg (1981), a transition occurs when a change in a person’s circumstances results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world, which requires a corresponding change in one’s behaviour and relationships. Schlossberg and colleagues (1997) describe three different types of transitions: 1) Anticipated transitions comprise normative events or major changes in roles that predictably occur during a person’s life cycle, such as marriage, birth of a child, or retirement; 2) Unanticipated transitions are not predictable and have a low
probability of occurrence, usually involving crises or unexpected circumstances that are not a part of life-cycle transitions, such as illnesses, divorce, death of a child and forced migration; and 3) Non-event transitions are events that “an individual had expected, but which did not occur, thereby altering his or her life” (p. 29), such as a childbirth that never took place.

McGoldrick and Carter (2003) offer a relational-contextual framework for conceptualizing life transitions, suggesting that, in addition to consideration of individual changes, a full understanding of transitions requires consideration of family and cultural systems. The authors identify two different types of stressors that individuals and families encounter in their transition process: horizontal stressors and vertical stressors. Horizontal stressors may be developmental, predictable life cycle events, such as births, marriages, or employment, or may be unpredictable, such as accidents, chronic illnesses, or migration. According to McGoldrick and Carter, vertical stressors such as racism, classism, homophobia, and violence, play a significant role in coping with life transitions. The authors suggest that a larger historical context, particularly legacy of trauma, influences how families and individuals move through life and navigate life transitions such as the unanticipated transition of forced migration.

For the purpose of this research, unplanned migration prompted by violence was conceptualized as an unanticipated life transition (McGoldrick & Carter, 2003; Schlossberg et al., 1995). Such transitions require a reorganization of relational systems (McGoldrick & Carter), renegotiation of basic assumptions about self, life, and the world, as well as behavioural changes (Schlossberg, 1981). According to transition theory, while such profound and unanticipated life events can pose risks of psychological deterioration, they also provide an opportunity for growth (Schlossberg). Adaptation to such a life transition is determined by the age and developmental stage of the migrant, the characteristics of the particular situation, and the migrants’ ratio of
resources and deficits at the time of making the transition (Schlossberg). Based on the available literature and my personal experience, a particularly critical resource may be the migrant’s perceived levels of social connectedness during the transition.

Psychological theories of life transition expand the consideration of individual characteristics influencing human transition to include changes in the individual’s larger context, relationships, setting, and community (Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg et al., 1995). In addition, transition theories identify social relationships as a potentially significant factor in coping with life changes (Brammer, 1992), and suggest that historical circumstances, poverty, discrimination, cultures, and classes are crucial determinants in coping with life transitions (McGoldrick & Carter, 2003). Being informed by transition and family life cycle theory, in order to understand the transition needs of migrant survivors of political violence in the current study, I explored their social relationships and paid attention to the role that both anticipated and unanticipated horizontal and vertical, or contextual, stressors played in the settlement process for the participants in this study.

The Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The intent of this research was to address a major gap in the psychological literature by addressing the experiences of social ties in the transition to Canada for migrant survivors of political violence. The purpose of the study was: 1) to document and describe the role and experience of social ties for migrant survivors of political violence who are now living in Canada; 2) to critically examine the larger systems’ dimensions within which the experience of social ties takes place for migrant survivors; and 3) to offer recommendations for clinical and social practices designed to aid migrant survivors’ settlement in the new country.
In an attempt to avoid over-determination and the premature closing down of possibilities, and to allow for discovery of what is not known (Marcus, 1998), the current study’s research question was intentionally flexible, loosely tied to theory, and open ended. The question guiding this qualitative inquiry was: **How do migrant survivors of political violence, now living in Vancouver or Winnipeg, describe their diverse experiences of social ties and their roles in the course of their settlement in Canada?** Using a critical ethnographic method, the current study provided rich descriptions of the complex circumstances surrounding the participants’ experiences of their social ties and their relevance to the settlement process. In addition to participants’ identification and description of various types of relationships and relational dynamics, the diverse roles of these various social ties and networks were also described, offering significant insight into the participants’ settlement processes.

In order to represent the voices of migrant survivors of political violence, minimize the potential of further silencing, and provide a multidimensional picture of their settlement, qualitative research not based on pre-conceived theories and assumptions was used in this study. This methodology extended beyond individually and intra-psychically based notions, allowing for exploration of relational and larger contextual dimensions, and for construction of experience from both an inter-subjective (Jackson, 2004) and intra-psychic perspectives. The current study’s research design was intended to be transparent, attentive to relations of power, democratic (Carspecken, 1996), and open to a variety of cultural perspectives and viewpoints. As a researcher, I attended to my own purposes, agendas, and biographies that coloured my research practices and processes.
Significance of the Study

The current study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. It generates new knowledge that may improve Counselling Psychology’s limited theoretical understanding of the process of settlement for this population and offers suggestions for clinical and social practice. Rooted in critical ethnographic methodology, and supported by strength-based, multicultural, and life transition models of Counselling Psychology, this research challenges individualistic, one-directional, and intra-psychically focused notions of the psychology of immigration (Bhatia & Ram, 2009). Contributing to Counselling Psychology’s theories of transition and multiculturalism, the current study offers a more complex interactive, social, and political framework for conceptualizing the concerns of migrant survivors of political violence making the transition to a new country.

The findings of the current study inform clinical and social practices and services designed to aid the settlement of migrant survivors of political violence. Considering the growing numbers of migrant survivors of political violence settling in Canada, counselling psychologists are likely to be increasingly confronted with this population’s needs for psychological services and social advocacy. Based on the results of the current study, suggestions are made for clinical practice with this population.

The current study identifies and challenges some potentially harmful practices of receiving, perceiving, and responding to migrant survivors of political violence as they attempt to complete the various tasks of settlement in Canada. Based on participants’ stories, this study describes mechanisms through which oppression was perpetuated in their new country, Canada, and offers suggestions for better social practices and polices involving migrant survivors.
The Importance of Language

In naming issues related to violence, language can serve to minimize violence, hide the perpetrators’ responsibilities or the victim's resistance to violence, and blame the victims (Coats & Wade, 2007). Terminology used in research involving people who left their homelands after experiencing political violence and who are in the process of resettling in a new country is inconsistent and, at times, problematic. The most frequently used term, “refugee” (Beiser, 1999; Berman, Giron & Marroquin, 2006; Elliot & Gray, 2001; Keyes & Kane, 2004; Lewis, 2010; Mollica, 2006; Porter & Haslam, 2005; Ryan, Dooley & Benson, 2008; Schweitzer, Greenslade & Kagee, 2007; Sideris, 2003; Simich, Beiser & Mawani, 2003), has complex political connotations, including the fact that an individual is assigned such a term by bureaucracies which have the power to make significant decisions regarding migrant survivors’ lives, families, and futures. In my professional and personal experience, regardless of whether refugee status is claimed by the person or assigned by those in the position of authority, many people labeled “refugee” see the label as an imposed identity associated with stigma, powerlessness, and victimhood. In addition to its negative connotation, the term “refugee” applied to those who resettle in Canada can also be inaccurate, as many “refugees” whose status is determined outside of Canada, become “landed immigrants” upon entry. In addition, this term obscures various legal categories of exiled migrants, such as refugee claimant, illegal refugee, or status refugee. As a consequence, throughout this research I have elected to use the term “migrant” – a term that has been increasingly used in the literature (Ahmed, 1999; Bhatia & Ram, 2011), which emphasizes physical and psychological change in location without the ethical and methodological constraints of legal language involving “refugees” or “landed immigrants.”
Complementing the existing dominance of legal terminology are terms used to describe people exposed to violence, such as “war affected populations” (Ager, 1997), or “survivors” (Summerfield, 1999). Terms such as “victims” or “survivors” may also be inadequate, as living through political violence is about both victimhood and survival, and neither term captures the full complexity of these experiences. The term “victim” can perpetuate stereotypes and connote psychopathology and helplessness, while the term “survivor” carries a potential of dismissal of a person’s pain and struggles (Reynolds, 2010). As political violence is often experienced in countries not officially engaged in armed conflict, the term “war” was not used in the current study. In order to emphasize strengths, resiliency, and post-traumatic growth, the qualities that are often forgotten in research, literature, and public discourses involving this population (Beiser, 1999; Keyes & Kane, 2004; Pedersen, 2002; Powell, 2003; Thomas, Roberts, Luitel, Nawaraj & Tol, 2011), the term “migrant survivors of political violence” was used in this study. This term was meant to be inclusive of people who left their homelands for reasons of political violence and are settling in Canada.

Similar conceptual problems can be found with the notion of “acculturation” (Berry, 1997, 2001) – a term commonly used in psychological research with migrant populations. As conceptualized by Berry, this term implies a universal process of unidirectional change in which a migrant adapts to the conditions in their new culture. Berry’s well established psychological model, that has many strengths, has also been critiqued for its view of “acculturation” as a “series of fixed phases and stages that do not account for the specific culturally distinct and politically entrenched experiences of newer, non-European, transnational immigrants” (Bhatia & Ram, 2009, p. 141). Therefore, in order to capture the active, relational, political, and fluid (Bhatia & Ram) nature of this process, the term “settlement” was used in the current study.
I approached this research with intentional uncertainty regarding definitions and terminology involving the participants’ social relationships (Vered, 2010). Embracing this initial ambiguity, the focus in the current study was on the participant’s definition of the social relationships and networks that they experienced during their transition to Canada. As the notion of relationship can significantly vary between individuals, and between diverse cultural traditions, the terms “social ties”, “social connections”, and “social relationships” were interchangeably used to denote any and all social relationships and networks that were considered significant by the participants in their migration transition. These terms included, but were not limited to, close family relationships, romantic relationships, friendships, neighbours, organizations, and larger cultural and social groups.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

‘Recovery’ is not a discrete process: it happens in people’s lives, rather than in their psychologies. It is practical and unspectacular, and it is grounded in the resumption of the ordinary rhythms of everyday life – the familial, socio-cultural, religious, and economic activities that make the world intelligible. (Summerfield, 2002, p. 1107)

In order to situate the current study in the context of psychological and other literature involving the role of social factors in migrant survivors’ settlement in a new country, an overview of the extant literature is provided. This overview includes: literature on the effects of pre-migration related experiences, especially trauma, as well as a critique of this literature and alternative socio-contextual conceptualization; literature on the stressors inherent in the processes of migration and post-migration; literature on the factors contributing to resilience and successful settlement outcomes of migrant survivors; and literature on the role of social ties in the process of migrant survivors’ (re)building a sense of home as a locus of emotional support, a wellspring of identity, a physical connection to one’s past, and a symbol of continuity (Simich, 2008). It is important to acknowledge that, similar to every other aspect of the current study, this literature review, including the choice of literature, its organization, and critique, is highly subjective and influenced by my various positionalities.

As previously indicated, most literature involving migrant survivors of political violence focuses on the prevalence of PTSD and other psychiatric diagnoses amongst this population (Fazel, Wheeler & Danesh, 2005; Kinzie, et al., 1990; Kroll, Yusuf & Fujiwara, 2011; Mollica, Wyshak & Lavalle, 1987; Quota, Punawaki & Sarraj, 2003). Although not directly addressing the process of migrant survivor’s settlement, this literature is relevant to the current study as it reflects dominant research trends and perceptions regarding migrant survivors of political violence, and illuminates a potentially significant pre-migration component of the migrant survivors’ experience. Pre-migration experiences are relevant for analysis of the migrant
survivors’ settlement in a new country, as they contribute to the range of stressors and resources available in coping with this unanticipated life transition (Schlossberg, 1981). Much of this research has drawn attention to the mental disturbance of migrant survivors rather than focusing on their social identity, successful settlement outcomes, or economic integration (Ryan, Dooley & Benson, 2008). Consequently, it serves to portray migrant survivors as vulnerable and wounded human beings at higher risk for developing a psychiatric disorder (Summerfield, 2002).

Contributing to a complex picture of challenges facing the migrant survivor population is the literature concerned with stressors related to exile and re-settlement, including social and contextual dimensions affecting survivors’ settlement in a new country (Beiser, 1999; Berman, Giron & Marroquin, 2006; Elliot & Gray, 2001; Simich, 2003; Simich, Hamilton & Baya, 2006). This literature describes sources of stress in the host country such as racism (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Elliot & Gray, 2001), underemployment, unemployment, associated lack of recognition of academic credentials (Beiser, 1999; Berman et al., 2006; Elliot and Gray, 2001; Simich et al., 2006), and constraining bureaucratic practices (Berman et al., 2006; Jackson, 2008; Simich, 2003). Research indicates that the most salient stressors affecting survivors’ mental health and successful settlement in a new country involve social dislocation and separation from close family, friends, and community (Beiser, 1999; Elliot & Gray, 2001; Miller, Worthington, Muzurovic, Tipping & Goldman, 2002; Simich, 2008; Simich, Beiser & Mawani, 2003; Simich et al., 2006).

In contrast to the abundance of problem-focused research, a small body of literature emphasizes positive aspects of migrant survivors’ experiences, as well as factors contributing to post-traumatic growth (Powell, 2003), resiliency (Sideris, 2003; Simich et al., 2006; Ryan et al., 2008;), and to successful settlement outcomes (Beiser, 1999; Berman et al., 2006; Lewis, 2010;
Betancourt et al., 2012; Simich, 2008). This literature, predominantly based on qualitative research, provides significant insight into post-migration processes and experiences of migrant survivors. With its emerging focus on factors that contribute to positive settlement outcomes, such literature offers practical suggestions for supporting migrant survivors’ settlement, raises new questions, and illuminates new directions for research.

Literature on social ties, community, and the role of social support in establishing a sense of home in the new country offers another perspective to the complex picture of migrant survivors’ settlement process. This literature specifically indicates that social ties and the larger context have a crucial role in establishing a sense of stability, safety, belonging, sharing, and cultural continuity, which significantly contributes to feeling “at home” in a new country (Lewis, 2010; Simich et al., 2003; Simich et al., 2005). Loss and/or the inaccessibility of social ties and social roles have profound consequences for migrant survivors’ well-being and settlement outcomes (Sideris, 2003). Although it offers significant insights, this body of literature is extremely small and limited to only a few migrant survivor communities and their specific circumstances.

**Pre-migration Experience: The Effects of Political Violence**

Even though the effects of political violence on migrant survivors cannot be simply described as isolated psychological phenomena (Pedersen, 2002; Summerfield, 1999), most of the existing literature focuses on its individualized impact, leading to a psychiatric diagnosis. In contrast to this dominant view is a very limited body of research suggesting that social consequences of political violence have the most profound and devastating effects on the migrant survivors, and that these are not reducible to an individualized psychiatric diagnosis such as PTSD (Sideris, 2003).
Vulnerability, trauma, and mental disorders. Studies regarding the prevalence of PTSD and other mental illnesses amongst migrant survivors of political violence present alarming, and often contradictory statistics (Bronstein, Montgomery & Dobrowolski, 2012; Canetti et al., 2010; Fazel et al., 2005; Kinzie et al., 1990; Kroll et al., 2011; Mollica et al., 1993; Quota et al., 2003). In a review examining the prevalence of mental disorders among 6743 adult migrant survivors resettled in Western countries, Fazel et al. (2005) report that migrant survivors are about 10 times more likely to develop PTSD than the age-matched general population in the country of settlement. According to the findings of this systematic review involving 20 survey-based studies, between 9% and 11% of current and former migrant survivors resettled in Western countries “probably have PTSD” (p. 1309). In addition, 5% of migrant survivors are diagnosed with major depression, 4% with generalized anxiety disorder, and 2% with a psychotic illness (Fazel et al., 2005).

Other frequently cited literature reports alarmingly high numbers of migrant survivors meeting the diagnostic criteria for PTSD, and high prevalence of other mental health problems, such as depression, suicide, and alcohol abuse (Beiser, 1999; Jensen, 1996; Mollica et al, 1993; Kinzie et al., 1990). In the first-ever epidemiological study of a “migrant survivor” population, conducted with 993 adults randomly selected from household rosters, Mollica et al. (1993) found that 65% of their Cambodian sample had clinically diagnosable depression and PTSD. Another study conducted by Kinzie et al. (1990), which involved 322 patients at a psychiatric clinic for Indochinese migrant survivors, identified that an average of 70% of the participants met diagnostic criteria for PTSD. The statistics in this study ranged between 54% and 93%, based on ethnicity and geographic origin (Kinzie et al., 1990). In a cross-sectional study using the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire and involving 123 female Sudanese students, Badri, Crutzen and Van den
Borne (2012) found a strong association between war-related traumatic exposure and symptoms of PTSD. The authors report that 80% of Darfuri students met the DSM IV criteria for PTSD.

Research further indicates that survivors are frequently exposed to a continuum of trauma beginning in the home country and continuing throughout the migration process (Badri et al., 2012; Robertson et al., 2006; Silove, 1994). In a recent study with 458 Somali and Oromo migrant survivor women living in Minneapolis, Robertson and colleagues (2006) investigated self-reported trauma and torture prevalence amongst the participants, and the association of trauma experience with health and social problems. Using data from a cross-sectional population-based survey involving 1134 Somali and Oromo migrant survivors, the authors identified a subsample of 458 women and used measures such as demographics, history of trauma and torture, scales for physical, psychological, and social problems, and the PTSD symptom checklist. The study findings indicated high trauma and torture exposure and associated physical, psychological, and social problems among Somali and Oromo women. Older women, who cared for large families, reported lower levels of education and English fluency, and experienced higher levels of trauma and torture exposure, were more negatively affected on all measures. Pre-migration traumatic events described by the participants included loss of home due to it being taken away by soldiers, being targeted by the government and local militias, life threatening starvation, and having their home searched.

Focus on the psychiatric diagnosis, especially on PTSD as a unifying concept for human response to traumatic events, is understandable in the context of medical studies prominent in the field of migrant survivor research. With its predominantly medical approach, the goal of such research is to identify and define the problem in order to offer appropriate medical treatment. However, the experience of political violence and its aftermath cannot be reduced to a biological,
medical phenomenon (Ager, 1999; Pedersen, 2002; Summerfield, 1999, 2002). While it might be useful to understand the negative impact of exposure to political violence and to articulate vulnerabilities and struggles that survivors may experience, at its best, the literature on violence-related psychopathology only offers a part of the solution. In the next paragraphs, I will further elaborate on some methodological and conceptual problems that could be identified in studies on prevalence, diagnosis, and epidemiology of PTSD and other psychiatric disorders in migrant survivors.

Considering the range of statistics presented in the above-described studies on the prevalence of PTSD and other psychiatric disorders in migrant survivor population, it is difficult to make a clear conclusion about the meaning of such numbers. For example, the frequently cited meta-analysis conducted by Fazel et al. (2005), included studies with various numbers of migrant survivors who settled in various “Western countries,” and whose homelands ranged from Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and China, to Ethiopia, Kosovo, or even unspecified countries. It is interesting that the authors’ selection of studies excluded research solely based on self-report measures and regarded diagnosis assigned externally, most often by a medical professional, as a more reliable indication of a psychiatric disorder. This meta-analysis illustrates several problems inherent in (post)positivist quantitative research which gives little attention to diversity characterizing populations that are being studied. Without a more complex understanding of the specific context from which survivors originated, and the specific context into which they settled, it is difficult to grasp the meaning of such statistics. Each country of origin is characterized by distinct cultural, political, and socio-economic circumstances, and by its locally constructed history of violence, which inevitably contributed to survivors’ experience of trauma and to their coping with its aftermath. Similarly, in addition to participants’ cultural diversity,
“Western countries” are quite diverse and consequently may be very different regarding their politics of multiculturalism, history, legal system, and immigration-related policies. Consequently, statistics such as those cited by Fazel et al. offer little information about the particular experience of the participants and about factors contributing to “psychopathology”. In addition, quantitative research described above does not offer much information about potential differences between groups of participants, based on the type and extent of violent exposure, their social location, and specific circumstances in their country of origin and their country of settlement.

Quantitative, diagnosis-focused studies have also been critiqued for their lack of culturally sensitive diagnostic instruments uniformly applied to numbers of diverse participants, many of whom do not use similar psychiatric language, and do not understand or construct their experiences as PTSD (Ager, 1999; Jackson, 2004; Keyes, 2000; Mollica, 2006; Pedersen, 2002; Ryan et al., 2008; Summerfield, 1999, 2002). According to Summerfield (2002), Western health professionals present misguided, universalized images of the aftermath of political violence – images that are frequently far removed from the actual experience of those living in less Westernized societies. In addition to their lack of validity, such images, which portray “damaged psychologies and moral norms” and “diminished humanity,” are pathologizing and stigmatizing (Summerfield, 2002). Similarly, Ager (1999) argues that a clinical approach, with its focus on the individual experience, inappropriately decontextualizes the impact of political violence, obscuring essential issues such as the social meaning of the experience within a disrupted cultural frame of reference.

Critical social scientists argue for explicit evaluation of how the social, political, and economic sources of inequality and oppression contribute to development of “psychopathology”
and social suffering related to political violence (Ager, 1999; Beiser, 1999; Berman et al., 2006; Clarke, 2010; Pedersen, 2002; Summerfield, 1999). Attention needs to be paid to local patterns of distress, factors that significantly influence the survivors’ experience such as gender, class, religion, ideology, and income, and groups that are underprivileged in dominant research practices. Studies that have PTSD as their only focus and outcome variable say little about the indirect effects of political violence, including disintegration of family and social networks, disruption of the local economies, dislocation of food production systems and exodus of the work force – factors which have significant implications in terms of the settlement of migrant survivors (Pedersen, 2002). Also absent in this literature are the survivors’ own perspectives on their mental health, and their personal perspectives on how they have coped and are coping with the aftermath of political violence (Keyes & Kane, 2004).

Further contributing to the existing lack of clarity in this research literature, is the fact that some of the statistics on prevalence were generated from studies with patients in psychiatric hospitals and medical clinics (Kinzie et al., 1990), where a high prevalence of psychiatric diagnosis and PTSD would be expected. However, in studies with “epidemiologic samples,” the prevalence of PTSD was relatively low in spite of evidence of extensive exposure to trauma of political violence and displacement (Silove, 1999). This would suggest that a focus on PTSD, trauma, and psychiatric diagnosis may apply to only a small percentage of migrant survivors, thereby adding relatively little to our understanding of the successful settlement process and well-being of many survivors of political violence (Ryan et al., 2008).

While acknowledging that migrant survivors may be affected, in profoundly negative ways, by experiences of political violence and by subsequent experiences of exile and migration, my intent in the current study was to maintain a sense of openness, allowing for representation of
diverse worldviews and experiences. Therefore, no universalising goals, typical for post-positivist research, were present in the current study. Rather, my focus in the current study was on particular experiences as described by particular people, which could or could not include PTSD or other related symptomatology. Moving beyond the medicalized notions of psychopathology, the current study’s aim was to describe a larger picture involving not only individuals, but also larger relational, political, and other contexts that these individuals are a part of. In contrast to pathology-focused research, the focus of the current study was on the social ties and process of settlement, which could include both positive and negative outcomes.

**Disrupted connection and loss of social roles as the most salient impacts of political violence.**

To speak of someone as ‘being my life’ or ‘being the world to me’ is to imply that your own destiny is never simply in your own hands; it is determined by your relationships with significant others and by the ways in which they reflect and care for you, even after they have passed away. (Jackson, 2008, p. 70)

Certainly the loss of significant relationships can be a critical factor in shaping migrant survivors’ experiences of making the transition to a new country. In a qualitative study with 30 Mozambican women migrant survivors who were settled in South Africa, Sideris (2003) examined the psychosocial outcomes of war. The author conducted unstructured interviews with women aged 16 to 60 over a two year period, and facilitated group discussions of the findings of a thematic analysis of the data, examining how social context framed psychological responses to violent social conflict. Sideris found features of clinically defined PTSD and locally specific forms of suffering that could not be adequately explained in bio-medical terms. Specifically, the participants described a set of feeling states and personal distress defined in reference to social
relations, severed bonds with living and dead friends and family members, and fractured social connections. The author identified the three most salient effects of war for women: injury to the spirit, loss of social belonging/identity, and somatic complaints. Injury to the spirit was caused by family discord, community fragmentation, murder, death of relatives, moral disorder, severance from the land, and fractured social connections. The loss of social belonging/identity was related to loss of daily practices, kinship arrangements, and social rules and obligations that once gave the participants a sense of purpose and dignity and anchored their sense of identity. Finally, many somatic complaints were described by the women. Even though limited to the study’s specific cultural and geographic contexts, these findings demonstrate that, for migrant survivor women, individual well-being may be defined by having a social place, including social connections, belonging, and identity. In addition, this study suggests that for its participants feeling states take place within and are framed by the social conditions (Sideris, 2003). As this and other extant studies suggest, the disruption of social fabric and loss of related social functions may be one of the most devastating effects of political violence that migrant survivors are left to deal with as they transition to life in a new country (Lim, 2009; Sideris, 2003; Simich et al, 2003; Simich et al., 2006). These findings call for further research regarding how migrant survivors cope with such disruptions and losses, and how they re-build social roles and connections during their process of settlement. The aim of the current study was to further illuminate this potentially most salient pre-migration/migration factor affecting migrant survivors’ settlement process.

Migration Experience: How Safe is “Safe Haven”? 

For by giving up the life to which one was born, one stood to gain, through a kind of rebirth, a greater or more abundant life elsewhere and at some future time, if not for
oneself, then for one’s children… But… rebirth inevitably implies the loss of traditional routines, ties and certainties, and every new departure is accompanied by intermittent nostalgia, regret, guilt for what one has left behind. (Jackson, 2008, pp. 60-61)

In the above quote, Jackson (2008) illustrates the complexities of leaving one’s homeland in search of safety and a better future. In addition to violence experienced in their homelands, migrant survivors of political violence face many challenges inherent in the processes of exile, asylum seeking, migration, and settlement. Contrary to romantic images of a safe haven, the process of finding and building safety in a new country is filled with obstacles and struggles (Miller et al., 2002). In spite of their immense capacity to make the most of environments that offer limited opportunities (Jackson, 2008; Keyes & Kane, 2004), migrant survivors are often unprepared for the bureaucracies of everyday life in Western countries, the impersonality of their cities, or government bureaucracy (Jackson, 2008; Simich, 2003; Simich et al., 2006).

Experiences of settlement are diverse – both positive and negative – but many survivors report feeling homesickness, loneliness, inferiority, psychological numbness, feelings of not belonging, grief, preoccupation with family tensions, and worry for the safety of those who stayed behind (Elliot & Gray, 2001; Jackson, 2008; Kayes & Kane, 2004; Miller et al., 2002).

The disruption of social fabric.

The implications of contemporary wars in the collective health status and well-being of affected populations, at home or in exile, go beyond the loss of life and destruction of physical infrastructure: the devastation of the social and cultural fabric – the people’s history and life trajectories, their identity and value systems (which are in many ways vital for their survival) are under threat to fade away or disappear (Pedersen, 2002, p. 181).
Social dislocation and separation from close family, friends, and community are reported as the most salient and stressful factors affecting not only the process of re-settlement, but also survivors’ health and well-being (Beiser, 1999; Elliot & Gray, 2001; Simich, 2008; Simich et al., 2006). Lack of meaningful supportive relationships has been found to have adverse effects on migrant survivors’ mental health, with reported consequences such as social isolation, stress, and psychological and physical health problems (Simich et al., 2003).

In a narrative study on exile-related stressors described by Bosnian migrant survivors living in Chicago, Miller and colleagues (2002) interviewed 28 adult participants about their life in pre-war Bosnia, the process of exile, and their life in Chicago. Although findings of this qualitative study are limited by its reliance on a sample composed of clients of a medical clinic and by its limited focus on stressors, they offer important insights based on the first-hand experience of survivors themselves. According to this study’s participants, there are several primary sources of exile-related stress. The most significant source of stress for the participants was social isolation, as their family members were resettled around the globe, social networks were ruptured, and close relatives and friends died during the war. The participants also indicated that loss of community and valued social roles, loss of important life projects and meaningful activity, lack of environmental mastery, poverty, and housing related problems were salient sources of distress. Bosnian migrant survivors held on to their memories of pre-war Bosnia, which their current migration experiences were compared against. According to the participants, exile-related stressors were adversely affecting both their process of recovering from war-related experiences of violence and their process of settlement (Miller et al., 2002). As scholars researching migrant survivors’ issues argue, war is a collective experience and its primary effect on victims is through witnessing the destruction of their social world which embodies their
history, identity, and living values and roles (Pedersen, 2002; Summerfield, 1999). According to Miller et al.'s findings, these ruptures of social fabric continued to challenge survivors in their process of re-settlement.

Many survivors resist separation from their homeland and significant relationships by maintaining transnational identities and connections (Simich, 2008), and by sending money overseas in order to help their families and communities (Elliot & Gray, 2001; Jackson, 2008; Simich, 2003; Simich et al., 2003; Simich et al., 2006). Although contributing to their communities and helping relatives and friends left behind may give survivors a sense of meaning (Jackson, 2008), it is also a major source of stress, as survivors often lack material and other resources, are unemployed, underemployed, and owe money to the government (Beiser, 1999; Berman et al., 2006; Elliot & Gray, 2001; Jackson, 2008; Simich et al., 2006).

A multidisciplinary mixed method study conducted in Canada offers significant insight into how maintaining social ties can be constrained by the economic hardships experienced in the country of settlement (Simich et al., 2006). The authors analyzed associations between economic hardship, unmet expectations of life in Canada, and self-reported health and psychological symptoms of distress for 220 Sudanese migrant survivors who settled in Ontario between 2000 and 2003. Major strengths of this study lie in its complex design and in its cultural sensitivity. In addition to a survey conducted with the participants, the researchers facilitated group meetings with members of the Sudanese community, engaged in key informant interviews, and conducted in-depth interviews with 12 participants at the end of the survey to document special cases and explore issues in greater depth. According to Simich and colleagues (2006), Canada is not what Sudanese migrant survivors thought it would be. Large numbers of the participants reported having difficulty finding employment (85%), struggling with a high cost of living (76%), and
experiencing frustration with the fact that “Canadian experience” was required for employment (73%). Even though 77% of Sudanese migrant survivors rated their health as good, very good, or excellent, the majority reported mental distress that was related to work-associated frustration, family separation, and social isolation. Those experiencing economic hardship were 2.6 to 3.9 times more likely to experience symptoms such as loss of sleep, constant strain, being unhappy and depressed, and struggling with bad memories. In-depth interviews revealed that economic hardships profoundly affected survivors though imposing constraints on their transnational family obligations. The Sudanese participants involved in this study maintained strong ties with close relatives and friends left behind and a strong sense of responsibility to their community. For many Sudanese, juggling low-wage jobs, the high cost of living, and sending remittances to Sudan was a constant source of mental anguish that damaged their sense of well-being and impacted their settlement in Canada (Simich et al., 2006). Although findings of this study may be limited to a group that migrated from a specific geographical location and whose concerns may be culturally circumscribed, these findings indicate that settlement-related sources of distress are often complex, and that economic stressors significantly affect migrant survivors’ relationships. Drawing from this literature, the focus of the current study was intentionally wide, allowing for description of factors beyond emotional and social bonds. As illustrated in the above research, individuals and their relationships are embedded in larger socio-economic, political, and other frameworks that shape relational and settlement processes in significant ways. The broad lens of the current study was intended to capture these larger frameworks.

**Socio-economic and political challenges.** Population based research indicates that socio-economic factors affect migrant health more strongly than the health of non-migrants, suggesting that political, social, and economic contexts, replete with inequality and oppression, present
significant challenges in the new country (Dunn & Dyck, 2000). Research conducted in Canada suggests that suicide in the migrant population is linked to the stresses of unemployment, financial problems, housing, and lack of educational recognition, support network, and social integration (Chandrasena, Beddage & Fernando, 1991). In addition to discrimination-based high levels of unemployment and underemployment (Beiser, 1999; Berman et al., 2006; Elliot & Gray, 2001; Simich et al., 2006), migrant survivors experience marginalization and seclusion, patronizing systems of care (Berman et al., 2006), racism (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Elliot & Gray, 2001) and a lack of recognition of academic credentials resulting in processes of de-skilling (Bauder, 2003).

Two qualitative studies, both of which originated in Canada, illustrate a profound influence of socio-political and economic factors on migrant survivors of political violence living in this country. Berman et al. (2006) conducted a narrative study with nine migrant women survivors from various countries exploring themes of violence, changed lives, and new notions of normality. Their participants described a pervasive sense of fear, intensified by Canadian social and political landscapes, and also related to a difficulty in establishing trusting relationships and a profound sense of isolation. Migrant survivor women in this study experienced being “domesticated,” which was in stark contrast to the professional lives lived in their countries of origin. This domesticity, related to the fact that none of the participants were able to practice in Canada due to non-recognition of their academic credentials, deeply affected the women’s lives, leading to experiences of marginalization and seclusion. Having their roles restricted to those of mothers and wives had a discouraging effect, often resulting in a sense of pessimism and depression. In addition, the participants described uncaring systems of care, as they perceived helping professionals in the new country to be patronizing, condescending, and
demeaning. The most difficult aspect of re-settlement for these participants was having no one with whom to talk to about their experiences. Based on this study’s findings, the authors suggest that migrant survivor women need “social spaces and networks that can sustain the element of struggle and a belief in the possibilities for change; they need jobs and people to whom they can talk openly and honestly, without fear of retribution or judgment” (Berman et al., 2006, p. 50).

Findings from another Canadian study also suggest that socio-economic and political factors play a crucial role in migrant survivors’ settlement through affecting their ability to maintain significant connections. In a federally funded study investigating reasons for secondary migration, Simich (2003) interviewed key informants ($n=38$) and migrants survivors ($n=47$) who moved to Ontario from another destination in Canada, and discussed their results with a survivor focus group ($n=22$). Based on her finding that the majority of migrant survivors relocated in order to join family (siblings, cousins) or friends for help, the author concluded that priorities of government bureaucracy and those of survivors were different when it came to place of settlement. For the government employees, filling predetermined refugee targets for various provincial communities took precedence over migrant survivors needs for support. Simich (2003) argues that government officials and survivors have different definitions of family and important social ties and that the Canadian government’s definitions regularly exclude family members and friends, which are considered essential contacts by migrant survivors. By prioritizing pre-determined settlement goals, government bureaucracy privileges political over humanitarian interests and defines the extents of supportive social ties without regard for what is most relevant to survivors. Political interests, such as settling newcomers across Canada, interfere with the migrant survivors’ abilities to re-build the supportive social relationships needed for successful settlement (Simich, 2003).
These qualitative studies are not without limitations, such as small numbers of participants and diversity of the participant sample regarding their pre-migration experiences, length of stay in Canada, language proficiency, gender, and education levels. Interestingly, the study by Simich (2003) critiquing bureaucratic practices was funded by the Canadian government, which likely posed significant limitations on the author’s critique of Canadian bureaucratic practices. This research was significant for the current study as it exemplified processes through which contextual factors affect settlement in the new country for migrant survivors of political violence, especially by limiting their potential for relationship building.

**Positive (Post)migration Outcomes: Community, Resilience, and Successful Settlement**

In contrast to the abundance of problem-focused literature, psychological literature on factors contributing to successful outcomes involving migrant survivors of political violence is surprisingly scarce. However, this extant literature, which will be discussed in detail below, consistently demonstrates that positive settlement outcomes are inextricably connected with social and community relationships. In this section, I will review literature on migrant survivors’ post-traumatic growth, resilience, and successful settlement outcomes.

**Post-traumatic growth.** In recent years, psychological literature has been increasingly focusing on the human capacity to move beyond pre-trauma levels of functioning even after exposure to profound traumatic experiences (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2001; Tedeschi, 1999). In spite of the increasing attention to post-traumatic growth, defined as “positive psychological changes experienced as a result of the struggles with highly challenging life circumstances” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 1), this concept is seldom applied to research with migrant survivors. In a rare study of post-traumatic growth after experiencing the trauma of political violence, Powell (2003) investigated whether posttraumatic growth could be found among
people who had been exposed to particularly severe trauma over a period of several years. Results of this quantitative study involving 150 former migrant survivors in Sarajevo, indicated that the former Bosnian migrant survivors, who had been resettled, reported significant positive changes in their self-perceptions, interpersonal relationships, and philosophy of life. Participants, who varied in age, demonstrated that people could positively adapt to war and migration-related traumatic experiences and were able to grow, personally and interpersonally, in response to these extreme challenges. These findings support a direction for research not often utilized in studies of migrant survivors. Post-traumatic growth theory suggests that social context, personal resources, and ability to utilize personal change processes play a crucial role in an individual’s post-trauma development (Tedeschi, 1999). Therefore, further research with migrant survivor populations may offer significant insights regarding factors that aid their successful functioning and positive growth after experiencing trauma and migration. These findings supported the need to be cognizant of, and alert to, the strengths and resources of participants in the current study.

**Resilience.** There is a similar paucity of published research regarding the concept of resilience for migrant survivors of political violence. Extant studies focusing on resilience of migrant survivors living in a new country describe factors that contribute to resilience such as love, solidarity, and rights (Thomas et al., 2011), significant stable personal relationships (Beiser, 1999; Betancourt et al., 2012; Robertson et al., 2006; Schweitzer et al., 2007; Simich, 2008), stable employment (Beiser, 1999; Berman et al., 2006; Simich et al., 2006), connection to their ethnic community (Beiser, 1999), religion (Thomas et al., 2011; Schweitzer et al., 2007), and personal characteristics such as becoming strong and resolved to fight (Schweitzer et al., 2007). In a qualitative study with 24 migrant survivors resettled in Nepal, Thomas et al. (2011) found that relationships with supportive friends and families were conceptualized by the participants as
a mode of resilience that buffered against vulnerability and reduced their levels of anxiety. Other significant determinants of resilience that emerged in this study were the ability to legally work, the opportunity to realize their skills, legal recognition, and legal rights (Thomas et al, 2011). In addition to describing significant dimensions of resilience in which social relationships play a crucial role, this study also draws attention to socio-political, cultural, and economic contexts and their importance in migrant survivors’ settlement. Lack of economic, social, and legal resources in the country of settlement (a “developing country”), significantly contributed to difficulties in migrant survivors’ settlement process and to their perception of resilience. It follows that more a favourable political, social, and economic climate is likely to strengthen resilience and aid the processes of settlement.

In response to a growing recognition that large numbers of migrant survivors do not experience long-term mental health difficulties in spite of their traumatic exposure, Schweitzer et al., (2007) examined coping and resilience in 13 migrant survivors from the Sudan who settled in Australia. In this qualitative, narrative study, the authors utilized a semi-structured interview protocol, asking their participants about strengths and resources that allowed them to cope. The participants identified several factors contributing to their resilience: family and community support, the role of religion, personal attitudes and beliefs in responding to adverse personal circumstances, and comparison with others who were less fortunate. For the participants in this study, the concept of family was much broader than the one normally adopted in Western European cultures, and included extended family members. The interviewed Sudanese migrant survivors had lost a large extent of their social network upon arrival and turned to their ethnic community for support in the new country. However, findings about the role of ethnic community were mixed. For some participants, their community helped by encouraging
educational and employment-related goals, and by discussing experiences of settlement. However, others reported cutting their ties with the Sudanese community and forming friendships with Australians. The participants reported that, in the new country, remembering those who were less fortunate allowed them to gain perspective and to establish a sense of hope. Becoming strong and resolved to fight, and not giving up, were personal attributes seen as significant dimensions of resilience by these Sudanese migrant survivors. Limitations of this study include a small sample size and its heterogeneity regarding the participants’ time spent in the country of settlement. Perhaps the most significant limitation is a conceptual problem with the authors’ understanding of resilience, as terms such as resilience, coping, and coping strategies seemed to be interchangeably used in this study. With these limitations in mind, these findings help to illuminate the importance of family and community relationships in migrant survivors’ lives in their new country, and serve to demonstrate that the role of ethnic community can be positive or negative, depending on the needs and personal circumstances of each migrant. Based on these findings, it was important in the current study to attend to each participant’s particular story and to maintain a flexible approach to the meaning and significance of ethnic community.

**Successful settlement outcomes.** A small number of studies examined factors contributing to successful settlement outcomes for migrant survivors of political violence living in a new country (Beiser, 1999; Berman et al., 2006; Simich et al., 2006). Defined by the migrant survivors themselves, successful settlement is inseparable from employment, language competence, good general and mental health, the safety and well-being of children, and a harmonious family life (Beiser, 1999; Elliot & Gray, 2001).
In order to document the success and failures of a large group of migrant survivors settling in Canada, to contribute to literature on human resiliency, and to offer policy and practice recommendations, Beiser (1999) conducted a longitudinal study with 1348 “Boat People” (Beiser, 1999, p. xi) admitted to Canada between 1979 and 1981. According to Beiser, “Boat People” is a commonly used expression for sixty thousand people from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia who composed the largest single influx of migrant survivors in Canadian history. In addition to a quantitative survey, this mixed methods study explored intimate perspectives of the lives of 30 people who seemed to do exceptionally well and 30 of those who were not as successful in their settlement efforts in Canada. The author was interested in the social forces and the individual resources that could make the difference between successful and maladaptive settlement outcomes, such as suicide or criminal behaviour (Beiser, 1999). This ambitious study in which participants were followed over a 10-year long period generated many significant findings regarding stressors, protective factors, mental health, and settlement in Canada. The findings indicated that most migrant survivors successfully settled in Canada, but this required time. For example, at the beginning of the study, only 15% of the participants saw themselves as successful, while 10 years later 86% of participants described themselves as employed, competent with the language, and healthy – the indicators of successful settlement as defined by the migrant survivors in this study. Success, or a lack of it, also affected their family life, as migrant survivors who were successful in their settlement reported harmonious family relationships while the participants who described themselves as less successful reported problems with their children. The factors that promoted or impeded their settlement efforts included recognition of academic credentials, language competence, and family, community, and governmental support. According to the findings of this study, the availability of social support
during migrant survivors’ early years in Canada mitigated the effect or occurrence of PTSD, and promoted successful settlement. Friends helped and, at times, made up for their missing family. Connection to their ethnic community also initially had a powerful effect, but this effect seemed to be transient. The author concluded that government policies based on the narrow definition of family, which excluded parents, grandparents, and others and blocked family reunification, were a source of a major stress for the participants (Beiser, 1999).

In summary, extant studies on migrant survivors’ resilience and successful settlement outcomes suggest that social relationships and community support are crucial dimensions contributing to positive settlement experiences in a new country (Beiser, 1999; Simich, 2008). In addition, these studies suggest that socio-political and economic contexts in the country of settlement significantly shape migrant survivors’ settlement process. Therefore, vulnerability, resilience, and successful settlement of migrant survivors seem to be firmly grounded in their larger contexts (Sideris, 2003). Consistent with these findings, Betancourt et al. (2012) suggest a re-conceptualization of resilience, moving from an individual to population-based focus and social ecology that includes families and communities. It follows that in order to better understand the concept of migrant survivors’ resilience, characteristics of social ecology, or the larger environment, that can promote better social and emotional outcomes need to be further examined (Betancourt et al., 2012). Drawing from these findings, in the current study, I adopted a broad focus with an aim to learn more about social and contextual factors contributing to positive settlement experiences of migrant survivors of political violence. Consequently, I approached the individualized psychological settlement related concepts with flexibility, allowing for new conceptualizations based on the participants’ diverse perspectives and consideration of larger contextual influences.
Social Ties, Community Connections, and the Meaning of Home

The gap between memory and place in the very dislocation of migration allows communities to be formed: that gap becomes reworked as a site of bodily transformation, the potential to remake one’s relation to that which appears as unfamiliar, to rehabit spaces and places. This rehabitation of the migrant body is enabled through gestures of friendship with others who are already known as not known (strangers). It is the role of community in the recreation of migrant selves that is so important. The community comes to life through the collective act of remembering in the absence of a common terrain. (Ahmed, 1999, p. 344)

Ahmed’s (1999) description of the process of settlement as a process of creating collective memories in a new terrain is consistent with the literature suggesting that social support and social connections play a significant role in migrant survivors’ efforts to create a sense of home in their new country. Literature on the role of social support and social ties in the process of migrant survivors’ settlement will be reviewed in this section.

The role of social support. Extant literature focusing on the role of social support in migrant survivor’s coping with the processes of pre-migration, migration, and post-migration further supports previously described findings about the significant role of social ties in this population’s settlement efforts. Social support and connectedness with family, peers, and community have been found to be both an important source of protection when available, and a major source of stress when not available (Betancourt et al., 2012; Sideris, 2003; Simich et al., 2003).

In the Canadian study with 47 migrant survivors who settled in Ontario described above, circumstances under which migrant survivors sought support, reasons for choosing certain
sources of support, and for perceiving such supports to be significant were also examined (Simich et al., 2003). According to this study’s findings, intimately related sources of support or “strong ties” were particularly important for emotional or affirmation support, while “weak ties” such as casual acquaintances or community organizations in the larger society provided instrumental resources for long-term integration. The study’s participants strongly indicated that intimate ties were crucial in meeting their emotional needs and their need for empathy, affirmation, and the sharing of experiences with those who had successfully adapted to life in Canada. Dimensions of social support related to affirmation and shared experience were critical in the ability of these migrant survivors to cope with the stresses of migration. These findings indicate a strong need for the migrant survivors to develop or maintain intimate ties with family and friends while settling in their new country, as needs for affirmation and sharing could not be met through government funded agencies or in relationships with acquaintances.

Similarly, in another Canadian study conducted with service providers and policy makers working with migrant survivors, it was reported that social support appeared to significantly reduce migrant survivors’ stress and contribute to their physical and mental health (Simich et al., 2005). Service providers and policy makers observed that social support fostered a sense of empowerment and social integration for migrant survivors through building a sense of community, and through establishing networks in which experiences and problems could be shared. They also observed that lack of social support appeared to lead to increased feelings of loneliness, social isolation, loss of identity, discouragement, and a lack of knowledge about available options. Service providers and policy makers identified three major challenges interfering with their own efforts to provide social support to migrant survivors: 1) limited resources; 2) lack of integration of policies and programs; and 3) narrow mandates. Those
challenges were linked to larger problems of the marginalization of migrants, the political discourses that supported neoliberal policies and funding cuts, and the discrepancy between migrants’ expectations and the reality of life in Canada. Highlighting the perspective of those directly involved in working with migrant survivors, this study illuminates significant socio-political, economic, and other contextual factors that stand in the way of service providers being able to offer the necessary support to this population. The current research was informed by the findings of these studies, which suggest that various social relationships play different roles in supporting or thwarting various aspects of migrant survivor’s settlement, such as emotional well-being, language learning, and employment. Based on these findings, in the current study, I approached consideration of various types of social connections and their roles in the settlement process with flexibility, being open to potentially helpful and/or hindering effect of different relationships.

**Ethnic community and (re)building a sense of home.**

Experiences of ‘home’ are not just centered on a place, but are also about the people who are there, and their relationships to one another. (Simich, 2008, p. 68)

Research and theoretical literature indicates that how well migrant survivors will settle in a new country depends on their capacity to rebuild sociocultural networks and establish a sense of community (Ahmed, 1999; Beiser, 1999; Simich, 2008; Summerfield, 1999). According to Simich (2010), the sense of feeling at home in a new country is related to the proximity of extended family and peer social networks. Transnational ties to their homeland also continue to be important in reality and imagination for many individuals living in diaspora. Literature suggests that strong ethnic community and ethnic associations are important for resettlement, as they are a significant source of support for new arrivals, and can provide better access to health
and social services (Beiser, 1999; Eliot & Gray, 2001; Simich et al., 2006). On the other hand, ethnic community can also be a source of tension and mistrust, and some migrant survivors choose not to associate with those who migrated from the same geographical location (Eliot & Gray, 2001; Schweitzer et al., 2007).

An example of creative strategies which migrant survivors used to compensate for the missing family connections can be found in an ethnographic study with 31 members of Cambodian migrant survivor families conducted by Lewis (2010). The purpose of this study was to explore patterns used by Cambodian migrant survivor families to provide intergenerational exchanges within the context of dissonant cultural ideologies. The author found that, for her participants who are living in the United States, family ties were crucial in successful settlement. In the absence of close family members, Cambodian migrant survivors constructed new “family” by building ties with both kin and non-kin members. This transformation and creation of family in the new country was an important part of Cambodian migrant survivors’ settlement process. The newly constructed family provided a foundation of security, and a place from which culture could be passed on to future generations (Lewis, 2010). This study had multiple implications for the current study. It not only demonstrated that continuation of family connection was needed and, perhaps, necessary in the process of settlement, but it also exemplified a significant role that family may play in providing a sense of security and cultural continuity. Once again, as definitions of family could change during the process of settlement in a new country, it was crucial to maintain openness and flexibility regarding the meaning and type of significant connections, and regarding the language used to describe these connections.
Conclusions: An Initial Glimpse and Some Common Threads

The research reviewed and discussed above illustrates the strengths and value of qualitative research with migrant survivors, in spite of the above discussed limitations. It demonstrates the insights that could only be gained through engaging in in-depth, qualitative investigations of the stories told by the participants themselves, or by those closely involved with them. While resisting efforts to over-generalize, there are several common themes across studies, participants, and ethnic and other groups included in this literature, pointing to intricate connections between individuals, their contexts and the process of settlement. Based on the stories of migrant survivors themselves, this literature offers a poignant insight into details involving the meaning and significance of social ties, the effects of their loss, and initial efforts of restoration. However, as this literature is very scarce, it offers only a glimpse into what might constitute migrant survivors’ social circles and what role(s) social relationships may play in the course of the migrant survivors’ transition and settlement in a new country.

The existing literature on the role of social ties in migrant survivors’ settlement process, suggests that it is necessary to include a complex consideration of broadly defined pre-migration, migration, and post-migration factors in understanding the transition needs and experiences of migrant survivors (Mock, 1998). According to this literature, migrant survivors of political violence are exposed to pre-migration trauma in which the disruption of their social fabric, including loss of relationships, social roles, history, life trajectories, identities, and value systems, is significant in shaping their transition experiences. In the process of migration and settlement, the disruption of social fabric continues, as migrant survivors leave their communities behind and face new challenges in their adopted homelands. Furthermore, social ties appear to be crucial in coping with the adversities of both migrant survivors’ past and present, and may
significantly contribute to their experiences of resilience and successful settlement. Alternately, loss of important relationships and community, and the inability to make up for these losses in their new homelands, negatively affect both migrant survivors’ well-being and their ability to cope with the transition of migration. Depending on personal, cultural, political, and other circumstances, connection with ethnic community can be perceived as helpful or as undesirable, and its relevance can vary at different times in the transition process.

**Directions for Future Research**

The existing disproportion of psychopathology-focused studies, in comparison to the literature describing factors related to successful settlement process, points to a major gap in the literature regarding what contributes to successful outcomes for migrant survivors of political violence. Methodological and conceptual problems characterizing psychopathology-focused research with migrant survivors of political violence have been outlined in this chapter. It is important to acknowledge that having a diagnosable condition can add to the difficulties faced by survivors in their new environment. However, social factors, such as community and social context, may be more salient in the process of their settlement in a new country. In spite the false impression that can be created based on such disproportionate attention to psychopathology, it would appear that most migrant survivors are resilient and not diagnosable with a mental health disorder (Beiser, 1999; Silove, 1999; Simich et al., 2006). It follows that psychopathology-focused literature has little to say about processes of settlement experienced by large numbers of “healthy” migrant survivors and that more research is needed regarding this population’s successful settlement outcomes.

In spite of suggestions in the extant literature that social dislocation and separation from family members are likely the most significant exile-related stressors, relatively little is known
about the nature of these social phenomena and their role in migrant survivors’ settlement. It is not known whether and how migrant survivors re-build social ties, how they re-locate themselves socially, and how they cope with the stresses of separation from their family and community. Some initial data suggest that survivors make up for the missing relationships by changing their definitions of family, re-structuring relationships, or maintaining ties with old communities and homelands (Lewis, 2010; Simich et al., 2006; Simich, 2008). Whether these findings are relevant to other migrant survivors, and how these new families or renewed ties help or hinder the process of settlement remains to be explored in future research.

Although some research points to different, culturally shaped, interpretations and outcomes of traumatic experiences (Argenti & Schramm, 2010; Mollica, 2006), little is known about how various dimensions of diversity shape the process of settlement in a new country. As it has been indicated that poverty, un/underemployment, racially and ethnically based discrimination, and various forms of oppression can be significant sources of stress for migrant survivors living in a new country (Beiser, 1999; Berman et al., 2006; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Elliot & Gray, 2001; Jackson, 2008; Simich et al., 2006), it would be helpful to know how various positionalities and issues of power relate to this populations’ settlement efforts and experiences. For example, research conducted with migrant survivor women suggests that disruption of social networks and loss of social roles have been identified as the most profoundly damaging effects of political violence and subsequent migration/relocation for women (Sideris, 2003). It remains to be determined whether these losses are also experienced as the most significant for male migrant survivors in their transition and settlement in their new homeland.

The extant literature describing the role of social relationships offers promising initial directions. However, this body of literature is extremely small and much more research is needed
to illuminate issues surrounding the role of social ties in migrant survivors’ settlement in their new country. Clearly, more needs to be learned about the transition experiences and needs of migrant survivors’ and the role of social ties in their process of settlement. With a focus on resilience and strengths, the current study included the voices of migrant survivors, approached the experience of social ties in an open and flexible way, allowed for diverse points of view, and took into consideration the migrant survivor’s larger context.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Research as praxis means both personal growth and social commitment. The pursuit of truth in social science cannot be followed without becoming open to wounding, without caring about those who are impoverished and oppressed. It will be painful at times, but it will develop and empower those who follow it with integrity. (Carspecken, 1996, p. 171)

My choice of research methodology was guided by several ethical, methodological, and theoretical concerns related to studying survivors of political violence. The focus of this study was a group of people who have been understudied and underrepresented in dominant psychological theories. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, in the majority of psychopathology-focused quantitative research, migrant survivors are talked about, or described as an object of interest – one that does not talk back. Relying on trauma models of medical sciences and drawing from its own positivist/post-positivist tradition, psychological research conducted with those exposed to political violence often assumes an objectifying stance, utilizing “third person” language (Georgiou & Carspecken, 2002).

Although in light of complex relations of power involved in research processes (Carspecken 1996; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Khalili, 2011) claims about representing voices of minorities can be problematic, it is necessary to find a way to include those voices in psychological theories and practices. As migrant survivors have frequently been silenced by power, employing “dialogues and collaborative efforts” (Khalili, 2011, p. 72) and using a method that would provide opportunities for these potentially marginalized lives “to be brought to the centre” (Morrow, Rakhsha & Castaneda, 2001, p. 583) was crucial in the current study.

In contrast with dominant psychological and medical models that describe migrant survivors’ experiences as an individual phenomenon taken outside of its context(s), the aim of the current study was to consider relational, cultural, and larger systemic factors that affected individual action (Carspecken, 1996). Migrant survivors are not passive recipients of relational
and contextual influences, but have a capacity to affect change in their environment (Carspecken). By definition, migrants move between cultures and between relational, communal, economic, and political contexts, from which their identity is inseparable (Ahmed, 1999). Political violence originates in relations of power inherent in human interaction, society, and culture, and its meaning is always culturally mediated (Mollica, 2006). Armed conflict, exile, displacement, migration, and settlement in the new country are inseparable from politics, economy, history, and society. Settlement is not a unidirectional process but rather involves an on-going interaction between individuals, groups, and their environment (Bhatia & Ram, 2009) – a process that is constantly in flux.

Research is a political endeavour that either challenges or supports the status quo, regardless of whether the researcher’s political agenda is transparently articulated or not (Harding, 1987, 1994). Consequently, “no producers of knowledge are innocent or politically neutral” (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005, p. 218). Therefore, as a researcher, it was my responsibility to engage in on-going reflexivity regarding my own motivation for conducting this study and to continually raise questions about who benefited from this research. Based on the premise of multiple positionality (Fine, 2006; Foley & Valenzuela; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005;), “insider” and “outsider” perspectives cannot be clearly delineated and a researcher cannot neatly fit into one category (Khalili, 2011; Khan, 2005; Mani, 2008; Narayan, 1993). My position as a person immigrating from a war affected country was also shaped by my social status, education, community connections, gender, culture, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, and so on. I was both an insider and an outsider. As a researcher, this posed limits, such as potential for over-assuming, or lack of trust related to differences in power between the participants and myself. However, it also equipped me with flexibility, which decreased social distance between myself
as a researcher and the participants (Mani), and allowed me to examine issues from both emic and etic perspectives (Carspecken, 1996).

Based on these considerations and my beliefs about the nature of knowledge, truth, and ethics rooted in personal experience, I chose critical ethnography as the method best suited to address my research question (Carspecken, 1996; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Georgiou & Carspecken, 2002; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). As previously stated, the research question for this study was: How do migrant survivors of political violence, now living in Vancouver or Winnipeg, describe their diverse experiences of social ties and their roles in the course of their settlement in Canada?

**Critical Qualitative Research**

*To engage in research grounded on an evolving criticality is to take part in a process of critical world-making, guided by the shadowed outline of a dream of a world less conditioned by misery, suffering, and the politics of deceit. It is, in short, a pragmatics of hope in an age of cynical reason.* (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 321)

As principles and perspectives of critical qualitative research informed my values as a researcher and guided the current study, a short outline of these principles and perspectives is provided in the following paragraphs. Critical qualitative research represents a body of diverse research traditions, grounded in a variety of philosophical perspectives (Foley, 2002) that distinctively relies on the premises of critical social theory. Critical social theory is concerned with issues of justice and power and seeks to explain ways in which race, class, gender, economy, ideologies, education, religion, and other social institutions and cultural dynamics comprise a social system (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Critical researchers are concerned with issues of social theory, such as the nature of social structure, power, culture, and human agency (Carspecken, 1996). They believe that “all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted…and…[that] facts can never be isolated from the
domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 304). It is an essential assumption of critical research that certain groups in society are privileged and that subordinates’ acceptance of their social status as natural or inevitable results in reproduction of oppression in its many interconnected forms (e.g., racism and sexism). Critical researchers argue that mainstream research practices generally, although often unintentionally, reproduce systems of class, race, and gender oppression (Kincheloe & McLaren).

One of the crucial features of critical research is its constant evolution and incorporation of new knowledge and theory. Originally based on classical Marxist or neo-Marxist social theory, critical research has greatly expanded its philosophical base to include contributions of race, gender, sexual identity, and postcolonial social movements (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005). Influenced by Standpoint Theory (Harding, 1998) and Theory of Situated Knowledge (Haraway, 1988), critical researchers emphasize the importance of locating research from a historically and culturally situated standpoint. More contemporary perspectives, such as neo-Marxist tradition, including the work of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse, Foucault’s theorizing of power and discourse, Derrida’s poststructuralist deconstruction, and postmodern streams have all influenced critical research to various degrees (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). In summary, contemporary critical research rejects positivism, is concerned with power relations, promotes a more egalitarian society, and aims to produce both theoretical, or universal, and practical, or local, knowledge (Foley & Valenzuela; Kincheloe & McLaren).

Axiology

Values, especially those related to the concept of power, are central to how knowledge is generated and cannot be separated from any kind of human activity. As a researcher, my value
orientation influenced my motivation for conducting this study, as well as my choice of topics, participants, methods, and sites of investigation (Carspecken, 1996). Research is not objective or neutral and claims about objectivity or neutrality have contributed to advancement of the purposes of elite groups, consequently harming research participants (Fine, 2006; Harding, 1994; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). In the current study, I aimed to approximate “objectivity” through being transparent about my own positionality and values, and through gathering evidence from several different vantage points, as outlined in the following paragraphs (Harding).

As a migrant from a war affected country, and as a therapist with years of experience working with clients who faced political violence in their countries of origin, I have both experienced and witnessed unequal power relations and oppression. Migrant survivors and their communities face multiple oppressions that can be traced back to colonial, imperialistic, and neo-liberal (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005) origins of political violence, which are also present in their daily efforts to rebuild lives in the new country. In addition to its theoretical value, the current study draws attention to contextual dynamics of power and oppression calling for a change in conditions that stand in the way of migrant survivors’ creating and experiencing a better life in Canada.

Ontology


The key ontological and epistemological concern of critical research is the relationship between individuals and their contexts, (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005), or the relationship between culture and social structures that significantly affects those participating in the culture (Georgiou & Carspecken, 2002). Social relationships and the process of settlement, which were the focus of the current study, are inseparable from contexts and processes that are culturally and
historically situated. Given that the object of the current study was ontologically complex and impossible to describe as a static entity, as a researcher, I assumed a process-orientation in which no description was fixed or final (Kincheloe & McLaren).

According to Georgiou and Carspecken (2002), to formulate the standards of truth, power relations inherent in the research act need to be taken into account. Therefore, it was crucial for me as a researcher, to attend to and be transparent about the power dynamics inherent in relationships between the study participants, myself, and the larger academic and socio-political contexts surrounding this study.

According to critical researchers, truth cannot be conceived as thought independent of social action. Truth is, rather, a product of active engagement with the world, and needs to be understood through the pragmatics of communication (Carspecken, 1996), and not as a form of objectivity approximated by perceptual processes. The findings of the current study represent interactional and partial “truths” understood by particular people in their particular contexts, and at a particular point in time.

**Epistemology**

As critical research is characterized by many diverse epistemologies (Foley, 2002), it was necessary to situate the current study within a specific epistemological framework. The critical epistemological model that guided this study drew from the philosophical premises of American pragmatism, emphasizing the centrality of values in the production of knowledge and intersubjective, interactional, and symbolic representations of truth (Carspecken, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Consequently, concepts of power and attention to social, historical, political, and economic contexts were crucial in this study’s epistemology. My aim was to
“democratize” the knowledge production through bringing forward perspectives of those who have frequently been silenced in society and in research (Georgiou & Carspecken, 2002).

Critical epistemology rejects positivist ways of knowing, adopting intuitive or subjective knowing (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005) and meaningful action (Carspecken, 1996) as its paradigm. Rooted in the pragmatic theory of meaning as conceived in the works of Pierce, James, and Dewey, this epistemological tradition emphasizes inter-subjective expectations, rather than semantic representations as primary blocks of knowledge construction (Carspecken). Knowledge gained from the current study was constructed through my interaction with the participants, as well as with others engaged in various stages of its process.

Facts cannot speak for themselves and the only path towards knowledge leads through interpretation (Carspecken, 1996). Interpretation in this study was informed by critical hermeneutics, the purpose of which was to develop a cultural critique revealing power dynamics within the participants’ home and host societies and cultures. As insight alone is not sufficient, the current study’s aim was to lead to transformative action (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005), by challenging social policies, and clinical and bureaucratic practices that negatively affect migrant survivors’ settlement process.

Criticalist epistemology adopts multiple approaches, integrating introspection, memory work, and autobiography as important ways of knowing. As knowing is always subjective, extensive critical reflection involving researcher subjectivity and inter-subjective relationships was employed in the current study (Foley, 2002; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005).

Towards a Relational Conceptualization of Psychological Phenomena

…Structures produce lives at the same time as the lives across the social class spectrum produce, reproduce, and contest these same social and economic structures... Critical scholars have a responsibility to connect the dots across these presumed binaries and refuse to reproduce representations of individuals as autonomous, self-contained units
dangling freely and able to pursue their life choices unencumbered by constraint. (Weis & Fine, 2012, pp. 175-176)

As described in the previous paragraphs, ontology and epistemology of critical inquiry challenge the beliefs about truth and knowledge dominant in positivist/post-positivist psychological research. The emphasis in critical research is on inter-subjectivity, relationship, and the larger network of culture and society in which individual psychologies are embedded. Individuals are inseparable from their contexts, and their thoughts and actions are mediated through culture in which power relations play a crucial role. However, I also believe that individuals are not passive or totally governed by their larger context, but are active agents whose behaviours are constrained or enabled by the societal conditions, and who are able to influence, produce, or reproduce these conditions (Carspecken, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Specific to my research, I believed that migrant survivors of political violence were neither helpless victims nor romanticized superheroes, but were people who participated in their environments, who were affected by them, and whose capacity to influence their environments was moderated by the relations of power (Bhatia & Ram, 2009). In contrast to individualized models of dominant psychological and medical research involving survivors of political violence, my aim was to describe human lives embedded in a network of relationships and larger systems.

(Critical) Ethnography

As methodology, ethnography allows the study of complex subjects about which little is known within their cultural and relational contexts, and permits a wide range of methods and interpretive options (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). According to Sluka and Robben (2007), ethnography is based on in-depth study of the culture of a people, group, or community, and is distinctive for its microanalysis and a focus on the particular. Ethnography’s holistic approach
allows for examination of its subject of inquiry from various perspectives, and for exploration of interrelationships between different aspects of life. Ethnographers describe not only local manifestations of culture but also the relation between culture and its wider global context, giving equal emphasis to each participant’s subjective, or “emic” perspective, and the observer’s objective, or “etic” perspective. As an eclectic and inductive method, ethnography does not have a dominant theory, but rather is characterized by diversity of theory. The “product” of ethnography is a very particular documentation, grounded in context, in which the research path is clearly detailed, and the researcher’s own predispositions and positionality are acknowledged. Adopting a humanistic perspective, ethnography aims to reduce suffering and improve the human condition (Sluka & Robben). The subject of critical ethnography is the “lived culture” of participants, including social sites, social processes, and cultural commodities, and the ways in which the social activity of participants constitutes and is constituted by wider social systems (Carspecken, 2001; Georgiou & Carspecken, 2002).

Research Design

_Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites... Multi-sited ethnographies define their objects of study through several different modes or techniques. These techniques might be understood as practices of construction through (preplanned or opportunistic) movement and of tracing within different settings of a complex cultural phenomenon given an initial, baseline conceptual identity that turns out to be contingent and malleable as one traces it._ (Marcus, 1998, p. 90)

The research design of the current study was inspired by Carspecken’s five stage model of critical ethnography (Carspecken, 1996; Georgiou & Carspecken, 2002; Hardcastle, Usher & Holmes, 2006), which was adapted to accommodate the needs of the current study. In the following paragraphs, I will briefly describe the original model designed by Phil Carspecken, followed by a description of the model’s modifications which led to the current study’s design.
**Carspecken’s critical ethnography.** Carspecken’s (1996) model of critical ethnography combines an emic approach to cultural reconstruction with an etic functional systems analysis. The first three stages are intended to capture the cultural conditions of action, while in the final two stages the researcher examines how routine social actions form and reproduce system relations that coordinate activities across different sites. In stage one, a primary record is compiled regarding a particular site through participant observation, note taking, and audio or video recording of the data. In stage two, the researcher conducts initial reconstructive analysis of the primary record, searching for interaction patterns, meanings, power relations, roles, and inter-subjective structures, not articulated by the actors themselves, and often not observable. The third stage consists of dialogical data generation, and is performed through interviewing and/or discussion groups. In stage four, a number of techniques and theoretical models are used to analyze the relationship between the social site of interest and other social sites that are in some way related to it. In stage five, findings of the study are explained by reference to the broad system characteristics using theoretical concepts from critical social theory, and suggestions are offered for how experiences and cultural reconstructions relate to class, race, gender, and societal political structures.

In Carspecken’s (1996) model, the two social theoretical domains, lived culture and social system, are addressed through two distinct methodological orientations – interpretive methodology and functional methodology. Stages one to three focus on cultural reconstruction, as the researcher assumes an insider performative position with the goal of grasping inter-subjective expectations that affect relationships between members of a cultural community (Georgiou & Carspecken, 2002). In the systems analysis involving stages four and five, the researcher assumes an outsider position describing interconnection and consequences of action,
and the distribution of action conditions across sites. Systems analysis is based on the premises of critical theory, according to which the actors are often not aware of how and why certain meaning constituting themes are within their reach (Georgiou & Carspecken).

**Adaptation of Carspecken’s model.** A major value of Carspecken’s (1996) model lies in the author’s emphasis on its flexibility and potential application to a wide range of research contexts (Holmes & Smyth, 2011). The current study adopted the model’s complex approach to the research design aimed at creating a rich description of the participants’ social ties and their settlement process, illuminated from several different perspectives. It also adopted Carpecken’s critical lens, his attention to individual, relational, and systemic levels of analysis, and integration of emic and etic approaches.

However, as encouraged by Carspecken himself (1996), the current study’s design departed from the original model in significant ways. First, in the current study, I abandoned the functionalist analysis, allowing for inductive building of theory based on the diverse perspectives of the research participants (Sluka & Robben, 2007), as opposed to imposition of a pre-determined Western European social theory. The current study’s second significant revision of Carspecken’s model was related to his use of reflexivity as a way to regulate bias. As Holmes and Smyth (2011) argue, this view of reflexivity is contrary to assumptions of critical researchers who consider bias as an inevitable and positive aspect of the research process that informs research in critical ways. Consistent with Holmes and Smyth’s critique, I conceptualized reflexivity as an essential component of the research process (Foley, 2002), closely interwoven with all of its procedures, which fundamentally contributed to the meaning of research findings, interpretation, and representation. Third, with its focus of interest being on migrant survivors, the current study’s design was also influenced by models of ethnography informed by migration and
diaspora studies (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992) that no longer distinguish between the domains of cultural and social. These models of ethnography suggest that the globalizing nature of our modern world requires a multi-sited approach in which boundaries between lived cultures and systems are not always clear (Marcus, 1998). Multi-sited research is commonly used in migration and diaspora studies in which the object of study, the diasporic world, challenges traditional ethnographic notions of site or place (Gupta & Ferguson). According to Marcus:

… in multi-sited ethnography comparison emerges from putting questions to an emergent object of study whose contours, sites, and relationships are not known beforehand, but are themselves a contribution of making an account that has different, complexly connected real-world sites of investigation. The object of study is ultimately mobile and multiply situated… (p. 86).

In the current study, the five stages of Carpecken’s model were transformed into three tightly interwoven stages, each of which will be described accordingly.

**Procedures**

Specific data-collection procedures used in the current study are outlined in the following paragraphs.

**The reflexive stage.**

*Our position as ethnographers is to understand that we bring our belongings into the field with us, not only the many others who constitute our being but how we belong to what we know, how our epistemologies are yet another site of our belonging with and for others.* (Madison, 2012, pp. 9-10)

According to Harding (2004) “strong objectivity” is achieved through the researcher’s intensive work through her own positionality, values, and predispositions, and through collection of thick evidence from many different vantage points. As a researcher, I do not claim to have eliminated my personal, professional, and other biases in order to produce more “objective”
findings. Instead, I was interested in making my presence visible in the final research product to allow for critical evaluation and the multiple creation of meaning.

My interest in carrying out this study originated in my own experience as an immigrant who left the Former Yugoslavia during the 90s civil war, and as a therapist who worked with a large number of survivors of political violence. In the process of migration, I left behind my entire family of origin, a closely-knit network of friends, work and educational circles. Living in a new country I have grieved the loss of these relationships, and struggled to establish new ones. Throughout my many years as a counselling professional working with people who live in exile, I witnessed the pain and courage of numerous clients, many of whom like myself, left behind significant family and community relationships.

In addition to my immigrant identity, I am a middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied woman who is awarded many privileges based on my white, European origin, education, age, and ability to express myself in the dominant culture’s language. Although I see myself as a minority, I also recognize that many privileges are afforded to me through those various locations. My context as a Ph.D. student with years of immersion in psychological theory and counselling practice significantly shaped the process and outcomes of this study.

In respect to the insider-outsider binary (Khalili, 2011; Mani, 2008; Weis & Fine, 2012), I preferred to examine the influence of my subjectivity through multiple positions assumed in relation to participants’ social ties and settlement process, my topic of interest. In a multi-site study, the researcher assumes multiple perspectives, forming relationships with people and sites requiring continuous renegotiation of positions and identities, and contradictory personal commitments impossible to resolve through detached ethnographic observation (Marcus, 1998). My researcher position in this study was complicated by a degree of “insiderness” – my various
identities and histories that were closely intertwined with those of the study participants. These identities and histories not only affected my relationships with the research participants, but also enabled and/or inhibited my insights or lack thereof (Hastrup, 1992; Mani, 2008). My motivation for this study and my research question had not only academic, but also personal interests at their roots (Voloder, 2008).

I conceptualized reflexivity as an integral part of my research process, aimed at positioning myself as a researcher prior to entering the “field.” The goal of this stage was to examine and expose my personal biases, disciplinary and practical training, and other influences stemming from my various roles, and to use my own experience in order to understand others with whom I might share parts of common history (Voloder, 2008). Through reflexivity, I examined how my research work related to my experience, struggles, and hopes tied to human experiences of trauma and political violence, and to my own pain and excitement of relational and settlement-related transformations.

The procedures of reflexivity were conducted through a process of intimate and intense journaling, reminiscing, and reflecting about my personal and professional experiences related to the roles of social ties and the settlement process - the subject of this study. Similarly to Fine (2006), my aim in this process was to examine wisdoms and blinders that I brought into this study, to explore my feelings, responsibilities, privilege, and projections, and to reflect on how not to reproduce dominant ideologies and instead, challenge dominant views and promote counter-hegemonic perspectives.

The product of my reflexive activity is openly subjective. It portrays the researcher, myself, as a living, embodied, vulnerable, ambivalent, and evolving multiple self who speaks in a partial, culturally and historically inflected voice (Foley, 2002). To document my own
experience and positionality, I drew from intuition, introspection, and personal memories, in which I attempted to equally privilege the rational and emotional. Journaling and reflection accompanied every step of my research process. However, I initially engaged in the process of journaling in order to prepare myself for the “field” work. In this respect, I consider reflexivity as having been the first step in my study. A summary of my reflexive account is presented before the current study’s findings.

**Dialogical stage.**

… *It is to emphasize the ways in which storytelling, simply by virtue of its being a shared action of speaking, singing, sitting together, and voicing various viewpoints, makes possible the momentary semblance of a fusion of disparate and often undisclosed private experiences*… (Jackson, 2005, p. 359)

In critical ethnography, dialogical method is used to move beyond the mere description of the “other” to a relational grasp of a “partial presence of a temporal conversation constituted by others’ voices, bodies, histories, and yearnings” (Madison, 2012, p. 11). In the current study, interviews with migrant survivors of political violence are included as an essential source of data. Consistent with Carspecken’s (1996) epistemology, knowledge resulting from the current study was co-created in the interaction with the study participants. The procedures for undertaking this component of the study are detailed in the sections below:

**i. Participants.** Purposeful sampling was used in this study. In-depth unstructured interviews were conducted with 8 adult participants, residing in two major settlement centres in Western Canada, Vancouver and Winnipeg, with 4 participants having been interviewed in each city. The number of participants was intentionally small, as the focus of this study was on collecting in-depth stories, which were accompanied with other sources of data, described in the
following section. The study participants were migrants who experienced political violence in their country of origin, fled their homelands in search for safety, and had resided in Canada between 2 and 8 years at the time of the interviews. The sample was not “representative” in a statistical sense. All participants met the following selection criteria:

- **Adult (aged 18 and over).**
  - Considering the additional ethical implications for younger participants, and research indicating significant differences between children and adult’s experience of social ties (Levitt, Lane & Levitt, 2005), only adult participants were included in this study.
  - All participants were adults. Their age range was 21-44 years of age (Mean: 32.5). Men’s age ranged between 21 and 44 years of age (Mean: 32.5), and the two women were 28 and 37 years old (Mean: 32.5).

- **Experienced political violence in their homeland and left their homeland in search of safety.**
  - This criterion was based on the current study’s concepts and terminology regarding the population of migrant survivors of political violence, as described in the first chapter.
  - All participants self-identified as migrants who experienced political violence in their country of origin and left their country searching for safety.

- **Residing in Vancouver or Winnipeg.**
  - These two major settlement centres in Western Canada represented different contexts in regards to ethnic composition, provincial immigration policies, standard of living, etc.
  - At the time of the interviews, 4 participants (3 men and 1 woman) resided in Vancouver, and 4 participants (3 men and 1 woman) resided in Winnipeg.

- **Comfortable communicating in English.**
  - The participants were able to comfortably communicate their experiences in the interview and to validate the first interview, without help of an interpreter.
  - All participants stated that they were comfortable communicating in English.

- **Have made the transition to Canada in the past 10 years, and have lived in the country for at least two years.**

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1 Other sources of data included materials collected through participant observation at selected sites and conversations with providers and managers of mental health services involved with migrant survivors of political violence.
As research points out, the majority of migrant survivors report acquiring employment, language competence, and health – major indicators of successful settlement - about ten years after migrating (Beiser, 1999). Thus, the tasks of settlement may be mostly completed by the 10-year mark. The two-year criterion was intended to allow enough time for the participants to reflect on their transition experiences.

All participants met this criterion. At the time of the interview, the participants had resided in Canada between 2 and 8 years (Mean: 5 years).

The selection criteria were meant to be fairly inclusive. I attempted to have diverse representation of social locations such as class, age, gender, sexual orientation, and sexual identity, as well as cultures, countries, and ethnicities. However, it is important to acknowledge that my linguistic criteria, the rationale for which is discussed below, already limited the ethnic, class, and age-related diversity of the participants in the current study. In contrast with an ethnicity-specific focus in the majority of studies involving migrant survivors (Graves, 2003; Keel & Drew, 2004; King, King, Foy, Keane, & Fairbank, 1999; Mollica & Lavalle, 1988; Schweitzer, Melville, Steel & Lacherez, 2006), the current study did not privilege cultural or ethnic background over locations of gender, class, race, education, sexual orientation, and age. In contrast to the positivist practice of treating ethnicity, gender, education, and socio-economic status as descriptive demographic categories that are eliminated from further study (Delgado-Romero, Galvan, Maschino, & Rowland, 2005), I adhered to the belief that each social location had the potential to be a significant source of information. Each person in the current study held a unique position based on her/his various social locations, each of which could be a salient constraining or enabling factor, depending on the context (Fine, 2006; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Harding, 1998). Perceptions of social ties and settlement were inseparable from each participant’s multiple positionality.

In order to avoid the complications of conducting interviews with interpreters, only participants who could comfortably communicate in English were interviewed. I believed that
conducting interviews in languages other than the language of the final study product (i.e.,
English), would present challenges not only in interview translation, but also in transcription and
translation of each participant’s language into the final text. Although the inclusion criteria
initially included Serbo-Croatian speakers, who could comfortably converse with me in our
mother tongue, Serbo-Croatian community members did not meet the other selection criteria, as
most of my community arrived in the early 1990s and have resided in Canada for over 20 years.
All of the study participants indicated they were comfortable reading in English, and would be
able to read a summary of the study results sent to them, even though I intentionally removed the
reading requirement from the selection criteria.

ii. Recruitment. Voluntary participants were recruited through agencies in Vancouver
and Winnipeg that served migrant survivors of political violence living in Canada (e.g., Bridge
Clinic, VAST, Cross-Cultural Psychiatry at Vancouver General Hospital, Immigrant Services
Society, Welcome Place, and Therapy Program for Immigrant and Refugee Families). I had a
close connection with some of these agencies in Winnipeg, through previous long-term work and
collaboration. Prior to initiating recruitment, I started a practicum placement at the Bridge Clinic
in Vancouver, which allowed me to learn about services and make connections with agencies
with whom I had no prior relationship, specifically those in the Vancouver area. With permission
and feedback from my contacts at migrant serving agencies regarding how to best recruit
participants, how to post information at accessible places, and how best to distribute materials to
communities they served, recruitment posters (see Appendix A) were placed in visible sites and
distributed to counsellors. As a researcher, I was available via phone, email, or in person, to
answer questions and engage in preliminary conversations with potential participants. Permission
to recruit participants and conduct the study was secured from the agencies involved and from the UBC’s Behavioural Ethics Research Board.

Six Vancouver residents and five Winnipeg residents emailed or called in response to my recruitment notices. Subsequently, an initial in-person or telephone contact was arranged. During the initial conversation, I informed each potential participant about the goals and procedures of the research process, and invited their questions. To assure that the inclusion criteria were met I inquired about the potential participants’ age, reasons for leaving their country of origin, length of time in Canada, and their comfort level with communicating in English. In the preliminary conversations, after assuring that the inclusion criteria were met, I clearly explained participants’ informed consent and that no compensation for research participation would be provided. The participants were provided with a copy of the Consent Form in order to allow enough time for reviewing the document prior to the first interview. I also discussed my own position as a researcher, and shared some information about my own history and my interest in the topic of the study. Two Vancouver residents and one Winnipeg resident did not meet the inclusion criteria, as they had resided in Canada for more than 10 years, or had immigrated to Canada for reasons other than political violence. Eight of the participants who met the inclusion criteria agreed to proceed with a data collection interview following this initial conversation.

iii. Informed consent. In Vancouver, consent forms were provided to the participants in the meeting that preceded the data collection interview, to allow time them to read and process information prior to offering consent (see Appendix B). With the same goal of allowing enough time to review the information, the participants in Winnipeg were emailed a copy of the informed consent after our initial telephone conversation, and prior to the first interview meeting.
Complexities of obtaining informed consent with minority participants have been described in the literature (Mani, 2008; Haene, Grietens & Verschueren, 2010). In obtaining the participants’ informed consent, I had to carefully attend to several factors that potentially problematized the voluntary nature of their consent. According to Haene et al., the validity of autonomous voluntary consent is intensely complicated by current marginalized positions and the history of oppression that survivors of political violence have experienced. Exposure to long-term traumatic distress, disrupted legal protection, and experiences of oppression in the new country can affect the survivors’ sense of individual control and autonomous choice. The researcher’s affiliation with institutions representative of the host society in which migrant survivors of political violence are assigned an inferior social position, can further affect the extent to which consent is voluntary. While taking these factors into serious consideration, it was also important to note that the participants described a desire to contribute to the well-being of others through “teaching” academics, practitioners, and other migrants about their experiences and needs in the settlement process. In addition, the participants offered recommendations about changes in Canadian community that would be helpful in their settlement process. In spite of their prior history of marginalization and silencing, for the current study’s participants, agreement to participate and share their personal stories appeared to represent an act of resisting the history of imposed silence and moving from isolation to community building. Therefore, the consent procedure in the current study involved a fragile balance between autonomy and re-experiencing of powerlessness (Haene et al.). Considering potentially different cultural frameworks, it was also important that the participants fully understood the nature and parameters of the study, my role as a researcher, and the type of engagement that was required
from them (Mani). Therefore, the consent procedure was seen as an on-going process that I closely observed and reflected on in conducting each step of this study.

The participants were asked to share stories about significant relationships, some of which had been lost, grieved, or associated with difficult experiences. The participants narrated about leaving home, and shared memories of violence and other struggles connected to their experiences of exile, migration, and settlement. Although the participants were informed about the possibility of difficult memories emerging from the process prior to agreeing to participate in the interviews, it was difficult to predict how exactly memories of difficult and painful experiences could be brought forward during the interview and what impact these memories could have. I made an on-going effort to be aware of the power imbalance inherent in the course of each interview with this specific population, and approached informed consent as a process that was constantly (re)negotiated. I invited conversations regarding these potential problems and continued to remind the participants that they were free to stop the interview, control the pause button on the audio recorder, or withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice.

Most of the participants in the current study were already connected with a counsellor and I made arrangements with their therapist for follow up care, if needed. For those participants not connected with a counselling agency at the time of the interview, I provided a list of psychosocial and therapeutic supports at the end of the first interview, to accommodate their potential needs, in case a referral was required (see Appendix C). With their permission, a follow-up phone call was conducted with each participant to check for any possible delayed post-interview responses and potential emotional difficulties, and to remind the participants of the potential resources, if necessary. During these follow-up telephone calls, all 8 participants indicated that they were pleased to participate in the interviews and that sharing their stories with
me felt important and meaningful to them. The participants reported no need for further follow-up or support.

To assure confidentiality, the participants’ initials, places, encounters, and identities were changed and safeguarded from other participants, my colleagues, and the general public. Given their small communities in Canada, information about the participants’ countries of origin and the names of their relatives were removed from the interview transcripts in this document.

iv. Data collection interviews. To collect the dialogical data, two interviews were conducted, following the preliminary contact with the participants. My initial intention was to conduct the interviews at the participants’ homes. In the preliminary discussions with the participants, I learned that the participants who lived in Vancouver could not offer a private interview space at their homes. Due to the constraints of their housing situation, the participants shared their homes with others and felt more comfortable conducting the interviews at another private location. Subsequently, 2 participants were interviewed at Bridge Clinic, one participant was interviewed at my private therapy office, and one participant was interviewed at VAST so that he could be in close proximity to his therapist and in the familiar environment of the clinic. In Winnipeg, the participants felt more comfortable with the idea of being interviewed at their homes. Three out of 4 participants agreed to be interviewed in their homes, while one participant, who was also open to being interviewed at his home but had small children around, was interviewed at a private hotel room. Each participant was interviewed alone. Children of one participant who resided in Winnipeg were present in the house at the time of the interview, but they were playing in a different space and could not hear the content of our conversation.

The first interview was an unstructured narrative audio-recorded interview. After the consent forms were reviewed and signed, and the participants were provided with a copy of their
signed consent, the tape recorder was turned on and the interview began. Consistency of the interview was maintained through the use of: 1) an introductory statement, and 2) an opening question – *Can you tell me about your experience of the role of your various relationships during your settlement in Canada?* (see Appendix D).

The purpose of the introductory statement was to introduce to the participants the topic and related key ideas that I was interested in learning about. The interview process was intentionally unstructured to allow the participants to lead me to what they believed was relevant, once they understood what I was hoping to learn from them. I approached this stage with flexibility and tried to adapt each interview to fit the context of the interviewing process and its participants. Consistent with Carspecken’s (1996) model, I saw my role in the interview as that of a facilitator and a listener, who was responsible for creating a safe and supportive climate. In order to provide a safe environment, I approached the interviews from a collaborative perspective and relied on my extensive experience working with migrant survivors, while being aware of my researcher role (vs. my role as a therapist). My skills of active listening, providing verbal and non-verbal prompts, and appropriate self-disclosure, were used during the interactions. I invited the participants to respond in their own language, using metaphors and sharing ideas. However, I was also transparent about my own origins, intentions, and beliefs, and was prepared to share parts of my own story with the participants, while trying to not take away too much space from the participants’ narratives. I informed the participants that I would be including a part of my own migration story in the final document, and that I would be sending this story to them once it was ready. All of the participants expressed interest in receiving and reading my personal narrative. I tried to maintain openness and allow the participants to not only guide me through their story-telling, but to also feel free to stop the dialogue, not answer my
questions if they did not feel comfortable, stop the recording, or ask me to end the interview, if needed or desired. During and immediately after the interviews, I often took notes regarding the non-verbal process. The recorded portion of the first interviews ranged in length between 60 and 90 minutes.

After the first interviews were completed, they were transcribed. As discussed in the preliminary conversations with the participants, each participant’s transcript was emailed to him or her for review at least one week prior to the date of their second interview, to allow space and time for the participants to review, reflect on, and potentially remove or change any parts of the text that they did not feel comfortable including in the subsequent research process. Being a collaborative editorial process, the participants were instructed to review the document, if they felt comfortable doing so, and to feel free to inform me about any content that they wanted to exclude from the document or change in any way, before the document was further analyzed. All 8 participants agreed to receive their emailed transcripts and to review the transcripts before our subsequent meeting. I informed the participants that I would provide them with a paper copy of their transcript in the second interview.

Once the participants had time to read and review their transcripts, a second interview was arranged with each participant. In addition to assuring that information included in the transcripts was acceptable and appropriate from the participants’ point of view, the purpose of the second interview was to follow up on the narratives constructed in the first interview. I informed the participants that my goal was to record any potential afterthoughts, any information that they wanted to share in addition to what was said in the first interview, or anything else that they felt was important to include or add to the first interview transcript. I provided the participants with a printed copy of their first interview transcript and we reviewed the transcripts
together. I invited the participants’ feedback, took notes about changes that they wanted to make, and shared and clarified my understanding of their stories. Most participants indicated that they did not require any changes to their transcripts and that they were comfortable with the information that was included. Three participants made comments about grammatical errors in the text, and we discussed the difference between written and spoken language. I asked the participants how they wanted me to handle the grammar-related concerns, and while some participants asked me to correct their grammar, others wanted their exact words included in the final document. In the final document, I handled this concern following the suggestions of each participant. Consequently, some participants’ transcripts were grammatically edited, while I included unedited direct quotes of other participants. However, no major changes were made in the content of the transcripts, and the participants indicated that they were comfortable with the information that was included. The second interview was not audio-recorded. During and immediately following these interviews, I took extensive notes about the participants’ transcript-related input and our follow-up conversations. My notes regarding the content of the follow-up interviews were attached to the interview transcripts and integrated during the process of analysis. The second interviews were approximately 90 minutes long, including the time required for carefully reviewing, co-editing and discussing the transcripts with each participant.

In the collaborative spirit of this study, and in order to reduce researcher-participant power differentials, as previously agreed with the participants, member checks were conducted upon completion of the data analysis in November of 2014. In addition to including the participants’ voices in the research process, the purpose of member checks was to increase the trustworthiness of my interpretation and the study’s findings, and to assure that the participants were comfortable with how their narratives were represented. After my analysis of the study’s
material was completed, I contacted the participants and sent the final results for them to see and comment on, if they were interested. The participants received a full version of the results chapter, a four-page summary of the study results, and a copy of my own story. I was able to reach seven out of the 8 participants, either through email or through a telephone conversation. The eighth participant had indicated earlier that she would be out of the country at the time my analysis was completed, and could not be reached.

All 7 participants who participated in the member checks, indicated that they were comfortable with my analysis and interpretation, and had no concerns about how they were represented in the study. Several participants commented that they were pleased to participate in the study, that this type of research was important to conduct, and that they were happy to contribute their knowledge and teach others. Except for one participant who suggested that I changed the English version of his name in the document, the participants did not suggest or request any other changes. In conversation with this one participant, we chose a different English name and I removed and replaced the name originally included in the document. He indicated that he was satisfied with the change.

**Systems’ analysis stage.** According to Carspecken (1996), the analysis of systems relations is essential in gaining a full understanding of qualitative research findings. A system’s analysis was employed in order to examine larger, more general, societal factors influencing the participants’ relationships and settlement process, as articulated by the participants and recorded through participant observation and in conversations with key informants. This step paralleled stages four and five in Carspecken’s model. The purpose of this data collection step was to obtain additional information about the social landscape in the participants’ new country, including how they were received, and places, people, and structures that they faced upon arrival.
Data for the systems’ analysis were collected through: 1) participants’ narratives, 2) participant observation conducted at selected sites, and 3) conversations with key informants. As the dialogical data collection step is extensively described in the previous section, the focus in this section is on the data collection methods of participant observation and conversations with key informants.

**Data collected through participant observation.** Participant observation is an ethnographic method in which the researcher immerses herself/himself into the “culture” that is being researched in order to experience and describe the “culture” from the perspective of a person participating in this culture. For the current study, I was interested in learning more about mental health services, policies, and procedures involving migrant survivors of political violence, and consequently, in obtaining information about the larger Canadian context surrounding this population. Therefore, I conducted participant observation through my various engagements in the “field” of mental health services for migrant survivors of political violence in Vancouver and Winnipeg. In Vancouver, participant observation was conducted during my practicum placement at Bridge Clinic, between March and August 2013. Bridge Clinic is a specialized clinic which, at the time my participant observations were conducted, offered medical, social, and trauma treatment services to newly arrived migrant survivors or refugee claimants during their first three years in Canada. During this five-month period, I worked with the trauma counselling team, was introduced to the clinic’s medical staff, learned about the clinic’s various services, and participated in meetings with other counsellors and agencies serving the migrant survivor population in Vancouver. I learned about medical and psychological services offered at the clinic, and procedures, structures, and policies surrounding these services.

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2 Thus, for the purpose of the current study, “culture” equaled mental health services, polices, and procedures, and the larger context surrounding them.
In addition, I learned about other similar types of services that were available to migrant survivors of political violence in the city, and collected information about how these services were organized, funded, and connected with each other. I also met various staff members and interpreters involved with the migrant survivor population, from several different agencies, and learned about concerns and problems that these services and service providers were facing, especially around issues of funding, space, and demand for service.

In addition to working with psychological and medical professionals at Bridge, I was introduced to staff and services at the Immigrant Services Society (ISS) and Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture (VAST). I talked to some of the staff at these agencies, toured their premises, sat in their waiting rooms and community spaces, and I visited these locations on several occasions. Throughout these engagements, I generated field notes with thick descriptions of data. I observed the environment, spaces, locations, people who received services, and people who offered services. I collected information about receiving practices, accessibility, relationships, messages, and the presence and/or absence of systemic support. Data collected through these participant observation processes allowed me to better understand circumstances and concerns surrounding provision of mental health services for the migrant population, and their connection with the larger Canadian socio-economic and political context. These data were integrated during the process of analysis with the data collected through other sources.

A similar procedure was undertaken during my stay in Winnipeg, following completion of the interviews and participant observation process in Vancouver. During the one-month period that followed, I conducted the data collection interviews in Winnipeg and visited Aurora Family Therapy Centre (AFTC), a community counselling agency that provided services to migrant
survivors residing in the city. As 3 out of 4 participants who resided in Winnipeg were comfortable with the interviews being conducted at their homes, I visited the home of each of these three participants on two occasions\textsuperscript{3} to conduct the interviews, and took extensive field notes during and immediately following each visit. In addition to data collected during the interviews, through my observation “in the field,” I learned about the housing situation of these study participants, was able to better understand the participants’ stories in the context of their surroundings, and obtained visual information that complemented their narratives. For example, once I was inside his home, sitting on his couch and listening to the voices of children who were playing outside, I more easily related to P.’s description of his profound loneliness in his little Winnipeg apartment on the 15\textsuperscript{th} floor of a large high-rise.

During my visits at AFTC, I observed the clinic’s spaces, their therapy rooms, waiting rooms, and hallways, and I took notes of materials displayed on their walls. I talked to some of AFTC’s counselling staff, was introduced to their new intake person, and visited my former colleagues and co-workers. I recorded my observations during several visits at the clinic\textsuperscript{4}. As previously indicated, the goal of this data collection method was to augment the information obtained from the participants’ narratives regarding mental health services and larger context circumstances surrounding the participants’ relationships and settlement efforts.

\textit{Conversations with key informants.} In addition to participants’ narratives and participant observation, the systems’ level data were collected through conversations with identified key people in the field of mental health services for migrant survivors of political violence. The

\textsuperscript{3} I returned to each participant’s home for the second, follow-up, interview.

\textsuperscript{4} Through my long prior history with AFTC, as a therapist and as an administrator, I also had significant prior knowledge about conditions at the clinic and was well aware of major services available to migrant survivors in Winnipeg.
purpose of these conversations was to collect further data about how mental health services for this population were organized in each city, what types of services were offered and by whom, and to inquire about potential similarities and differences between the two cities. Through these conversations I inquired about funding sources and structures, operational supports, and challenges related to the provision of mental health services. I asked questions such as: “Where do migrant survivors receive mental health services?”; “What type of services are available and who provides these services?”; “What systemic and financial support do these services receive and from where?”; and “What kind of obstacles are in the way of providing better services to migrant survivors?”

Through my various engagements at Bridge Clinic, and with the wise guidance of my supervisor at the clinic, I was able to identify and approach some key people in the area of mental health services for the migrant survivors of political violence in Vancouver. I met with two migrant service managers in charge of mental health services, and also conducted discussions with three mental health professionals with a long history of engagement with the migrant survivor population in Vancouver.

Through my previous engagement with AFTC in Winnipeg, I already had personal knowledge and well established connections with mental health and settlement service providers in the city. I maintained an on-going contact with the agency director and administrative staff and conducted numerous conversations in the past four years. For the purpose of the current study, I also met, and had conversations with, two front line mental health service providers.

In summary, from these key informants, I learned about frequently used services, practices and policies (e. g., funding problems) affecting migrant survivors, and about how migrant survivors were received and supported in the two Canadian cities (Winnipeg and
Vancouver). A record of informal conversations conducted with the key informants was kept as “data.” These data were integrated with the data collected from other sources in the system’s analysis process.

**Data collection time frame.** Collection of the material for systems’ analysis began in March 2013 and continued until the final manuscript was produced in November 2014. Reflexive material was produced continually starting in January 2013 and ending with writing of the final manuscript. The interviews took place in Vancouver between in June and July 2013, followed by interviews in Winnipeg, conducted in August 2013. Conversations with the key informants took place between March 2013 and November 2014.

**Data Analysis**

Consistent with ethnographic approaches, the first step in data analysis consisted of learning about themes, topics, and interpretations that emerged from the interviews themselves. These topics were used to guide a systemic analysis based on Carspecken’s (1996) model of critical ethnography. While Carspecken’s model differentiates between “reconstructive analysis” and a “system’s analysis,” in the current study these forms of analysis were integrated.

As a recursive procedure, *reconstructive analysis*, or “translating into explicit discourse cultural and subjective factors that are largely tacit in nature” (Carspeck, 1996, p. 93) was applied several times during my process of analysis. According to Carspecken, the hermeneutic process involved in meaning understanding in the process of analysis moves from initial holistic (tacit, intuitive, and undifferentiated) understanding toward more explicit (delineated and differentiated) understanding which, in turn, adjusts the holistic grasp of meaning. The goal of my initial reading of the transcripts of the first interview was to note possible underlying meanings, while maintaining a low level of hermeneutic inference. Through several subsequent
readings, I aimed to identify patterns, unusual events, major themes, and major shifts in the participants’ narratives. In addition to textual meaning, I looked for embodied meaning in behaviour, interaction, and non-verbal expression, as recorded in the interview transcripts and in the notes taken during and immediately after each interview. Additional information collected during the second interview was integrated during the analysis process.

While being aware of the possibility of many different interpretations of the participants’ narratives, I read the materials through the lens of my research question, looking for information about social relationships and the settlement process. Some of the questions guiding my reading and analysis of the research material were: Who was/is in the participants’ social circle? How do the participants describe their major social contacts? How do they describe encounters and experiences with other people in their lives? How do the participants describe the nature and role of their relationships with these social contacts? How are these relationships established, maintained, or interfered with? Who do the participants associate with major shifts experienced during their migration and settlement? What did the participants perceive as being helpful in these relationships and what was harmful and/or unhelpful? How do the participants describe their process of settlement, including obstacles and helpful factors? How do the participants describe various shifts and changes during the settlement process? What/who do the participants attribute these changes to?

A system of coding procedures, including low and high level coding was employed. Low-level coding, which was close to the primary record and involved little abstraction, was used initially. High level coding was employed on selected segments of text, after the low level coding was completed, with the purpose of extrapolation of findings emerging from various
forms of analysis. The final stage of coding, code reorganization, was employed after all data had been analyzed.

In the systems’ analysis, I applied a larger lens examining the context and politics surrounding the participants’ narratives about relationships and settlement process. At this stage, I integrated into the analysis the information obtained through participant observation, my own experience, knowledge of critical social theory (Carspecken, 1996; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Fine, 2006; Harding, 1987, 1994; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005), and information obtained in conversations with the providers and managers of mental health services. The system’s analysis involved specific attention to larger contextual factors including cultural, historical, political, and economic power. Questions guiding this part of my analysis included: What are the social and cultural parameters surrounding the participants’ relational experiences, beliefs, and practices? What are the larger contextual forces that maintain and/or threaten the participants’ relationships? What are the historical circumstances surrounding the participants and their relationships? What are the salient political factors in their country of origin and how do these factors influence the participants’ relationships and their process of settlement? What are the salient political factors in Canada and how do they affect the participant’s relationships and settlement in this country? How do past and current economic circumstances contribute to relational and settlement processes for the participants? As “system relations penetrate all social sites and all group cultures” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 206), employing a larger systemic lens was important in gaining a full understanding of the current study’s findings. The final understanding of the study’s findings involved integration of the various aspects of analysis allowing for consideration of the participants’ narratives, the participant-researcher relationship, and the larger context.
Representation of the Research Findings

*It now seems obvious that academics have to liberate themselves from the pedantic, technical discourse of their disciplines if they hope to write useful stories.* (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005, p. 225)

Madison (2012) suggests that representation of others and their world for “just” purposes requires attending to themes of positionality, dialogue, otherness, and the nexus of theory and method. Each of these themes informed my representation of the findings. In writing this manuscript, I attempted to construct a multivocal, reflexive, and accessibly written account.

Information about the participants is provided through their broader biographical and cultural-historical portraits in the fourth chapter. The presentation of the findings is organized by the main narratives identified, divided into subthemes that emerged from the thematic analysis. I included multiple participants’ narratives and my own personal perspective in the representation. In order to increase the fairness of representation, stay close to the original narratives, and more fully represent the diversity of perspectives, large parts of participants’ stories, as approved by the participants, were directly included in the document. I sought feedback from the participants regarding how their stories were presented and parts of the manuscript were edited based on the participants’ feedback.

System’s level data collected through participants’ narratives, participant observation, and conversations with key informants were integrated in the process of analysis and presented with the participants’ narratives. In order to situate the process of analysis, be transparent, expose my personal, professional, and political biases, and allow for evaluation of the study, I included a summary of my reflexive account prior to presenting the study’s findings, at the end of Chapter 3.
The issue of representation of migrant survivors of political violence raises significant ethical dilemmas, such as potential for exoticization (Khalili, 2011) of this minority group. Careful consideration was required in each step of the study, especially in the final stage of writing. In addition to approaching this issue with reflexivity and attention to power differentials, I sought feedback from multiple sources on my representation of the findings at several points during the research process. I discussed information about my work, experiences, ideas, etc. with my committee members to invite feedback, critique and comparison between various types of research material. The participants were asked to co-edit the transcripts and provide feedback regarding their representation in the manuscript. They were invited to review any part of my document and offer suggestions and edits, if interested.

It was my intention to (re)present the findings of this study in a flexible and accessible style of writing (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005). I was hoping that the participants would be able to read and critique my document. However, I found that accessibility is a relative and not an easily achievable goal in writing an academic document. After finishing the manuscript, I am aware that, although the participants indicated they were able to read and understand English texts, they might not have time or be interested in reading an academic document of this length. Therefore, in addition to the full text of the results chapter, I provided the participants with a short summary of the study’s findings, written in a more accessible language (see Appendix E).

Validity

The following set of guidelines, described by Yardley (2000), was used to assure the validity of this qualitative critical ethnographic study: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, coherence and transparency, and impact and importance.
Sensitivity to context. In conceptualizing, conducting, and writing about this study, I considered several contextual dimensions. As evident in this manuscript, the current study is grounded in the theoretical literature and findings from previous research. As a primary researcher, I aimed to be transparent about the philosophy underlining the methodology employed in the current study. In addition, attention was paid to the broader socio-cultural context of the study and to how dominant ideological, historical, linguistic, and socio-economic influences shaped the beliefs, expectations, objectives, and talk of the research participants, including the researcher. To the best of my knowledge, I attended to and was transparent about ethical issues stemming from the researcher–participant relationship and its power imbalance, making an effort to approximate a fair representation of the participants’ perspectives. My process of attending to contextual dimensions has been explicitly described to allow for independent evaluation from the reader.

Commitment and rigor. Procedures in this study used to assure the rigor of data collection included multiple data sources (interviews, participant observation, and conversations with key informants), triangulation, multiple recording devices (audio-taping and note taking), flexible observation schedule, low-inference vocabulary, member checks, and reflexivity.

Coherence and transparency: To ensure transparency, detailed records of the data, a thick description of methods and analytic procedures, and discussion regarding how researcher subjectivity influenced the production of the findings have been provided.

Impact and importance (utility): The current study contributes to psychological literature on settlement and life transitions through offering a conceptualization of settlement as a continuous, interactive, dynamic, and social process that is shaped by its larger context. In addition, the current study offers practical suggestions for counselling psychologists working
with migrant survivors of political violence and provides recommendations for services and social practices involving this population. The theoretical, clinical, and socio-cultural impact of the current study is detailed in Chapter 5.

**Ethical Considerations**

Primary ethical considerations inherent in this study centered around: 1) engaging in research with populations who have been historically oppressed; 2) risks associated with sharing of potentially difficult memories; and 3) my own positionality as a researcher. In addition to general ethical considerations involving human research participants, as described in Informed Consent section, attention was paid to each of these specific issues.

Complexities surrounding informed consent process with the participants identifying with various minority groups, and especially, involving migrant survivors of political violence, were discussed in more detail in the section on informed consent. Being informed about these complexities, and aware of my responsibility as a researcher, I approached informed consent as a process, monitoring the power imbalance between myself, as a researcher, and the participants, and attempted to be transparent about research related processes, roles, and expectations. On the other hand, I was also aware that engagement with this study was potentially meaningful for the participants who expressed a desire to contribute their knowledge and their experiences. As previously stated, this involved a process of gentle balance between powerlessness and vulnerability, and empowerment and autonomy. I paid on-going attention to and reflected on the consent procedure throughout the entire process of conducting and writing about the study.

Considering that the experience of leaving one’s country under circumstances of political violence had a potential to be linked to significant trauma, the ethical dilemma of potential harm to the participants was taken into serious consideration. Although the purpose of the current
study was not to intentionally bring forth traumatic experiences and related history, the stories about relationships had a potential to be intimately connected with experiences of loss, trauma, and grief. The participants were informed about this possibility in a meaningful way in the consent form, and the possibility of re-traumatization was discussed in preliminary conversations. In order to secure support for the participants in case that a need for such support arouse, arrangements were made for counselling services. The participants, who were not already connected with a counsellor, were given a list with counselling resources and relevant contact information (see Appendix C). As several participants were recruited through counselling agencies, these participants already had a connection with an agency counsellor. With their permission, a post-interview follow-up phone call was made with each participant to check for any late impact of the interview process. This process is explained in more detail in section on Informed Consent.

Another ethical dilemma of this study was related to my positionality as a researcher. As previously discussed in this chapter, I was neither a complete “insider” nor a total “outsider” in regards to the migrant survivor community (Mani, 2008). My personal history, which involved witnessing war in my country, marrying a “refugee”, and years of living in affluent Western society, had an impact on how I conceptualized, conducted, and (re)presented the current study. The lens through which I approached social ties and settlement, the object of the study, as well as the way I interacted with the study’s participants were coloured with my own views, experiences, and memories. My relationships and interactions with the participants were shaped by my multiple positionalities. I was probably more trusted as a person who had a foreign accent and came from a war torn country. I further built this trust by sharing parts of my own personal settlement story with the participants. However, it was likely difficult to trust me (as the
researcher) based on my locations as a therapist, a former manager of the therapy program that some participants attended, and a person with potentially different beliefs and experiences. This is where on-going reflexivity became crucial.

**My Story**

The current study’s findings cannot be separated from my own subjectivity. My own personal history, beliefs, political engagements, personal experiences, knowledge about services, polices, influences of psychological and social theories, and clinical work shaped the study’s findings and conclusions. In order to situate the findings and be transparent about my subjectivity as a researcher, my personal narrative is presented below.

**The war.** At the time I graduated and obtained my first job as a psychologist in a general hospital, my country was engulfed in a civil war. A hotel and an old school building in my town had been transformed into refugee camps filled with mothers, children, and youth who were seeking refuge in our neighbourhoods. The hospital hired young professionals like myself, but the inflation rate was so high that I could only purchase a dozen eggs after receiving my month’s salary. In addition to poverty caused by the war, my country was under economic sanctions – gasoline could not be purchased, and we had to ration electricity, water, and food.

Living in the relative safety of my town, which was geographically removed from the places of armed conflict, I watched from a distance senseless violence and losses experienced on all sides. I watched my male friends and relatives being drafted into military service and sent to the front lines to fight a war that most of our generation had been against. I watched them return traumatized. I listened to their stories about bombs, military surprises, destroyed, ravaged houses, and dead people. I felt deeply shaken and outraged by the stories of humans returning or fleeing from conflict zones, seeking refuge. I struggled to shake off the feelings of being
overwhelmed and helpless in the middle of such immense transformation that my country was going through. I watched people around me transforming as well. Some of them left the country. Some of them became unrecognizable. I could no longer understand their political views, their hatred, their ability and willingness to inflict harm to those who previously lived in the same country, listened to the same music, vacationed at the same places, and went to the same coffee shops. One could not be apolitical in this situation. The conflict, the threat, the poverty, and the economic sanctions – all this intensified our human reaction.

**How it began.** A few years prior, I was visiting a country in Northern Africa with my university friends. After a night of fun, we returned to our hotel room and were faced with war in our country evolving in front of our eyes, on the TV screen. I still have this image in my mind, and it still feels surreal. My country did not engage in wars. We were not supposed to send military tanks into our own streets. We were not supposed to fight against our own people.

Upon our return to our country, we joined massive protests, mostly lead by our fellow university students who strongly believed that the actions of our government were wrong. We went out on the streets with hundreds of thousands of other peaceful protesters, demonstrating against the government and demanding for the senseless politics to stop. With youthful naivety, I believed that we only needed to share our opinion and that the fact that so many people thought differently would be sufficient for the government to listen and make changes. I thought that we had the support of the entire world and that this would be enough to make our government stop their violent and unreasonable acts.

Our peaceful protests were responded to by brutal police force, false representation in the government regulated media, and eventually, military tanks sent out against the students of the country’s largest university. Some of my friends were severely beaten by the police and
hospitalized. A large number of friends left the country. The government sent out police along with tear gas, water cannons, and military tanks. For the first time, and with a great shock, I learned about the power of government-controlled media to suppress and twist the truth, and to silence the voices of those who speak against the dominant political views.

Under circumstances of war, which brought an increased influx of refugees and difficult economic circumstances, resisting feelings of helplessness was not easy. However, even under the most constraining conditions, there are ways to do meaningful things. My connections with friends were quite significant in coping with stresses that all of us were exposed to. We spent a lot of time together, supported and encouraged each other, had fun, talked about our struggles, shared material resources, cried together, and checked up on each other.

**Hi neighbour.** With a small group of friends from my hometown, I joined a psychological organization with a centre in Belgrade, called “Hi Neighbour”. The goal of this organization was to offer psychological support and facilitate social integration of children, youth, and adults residing in newly formed refuge camps in our country. However, in our previous psychological training we had not learned much about war, refugees, and children forced to leave the safety of their homes, their bedrooms, toys, clothes, and the familiar rituals of everyday family life.

Our university training in psychology had not prepared us for working with children who were stripped of their material possessions, who forgot how to play, and who left their fathers and extended families behind and did not know what happened to them. It had not prepared us for seeing mothers who could no longer provide for their children, who no longer had their houses, their jobs, or partners. It had not prepared us for parent child relationships filled with
grief and uncertainty, confined to a small room in a refugee camp, without basic necessities that used to be a normal part of their everyday lives.

During those times, it was difficult to find volunteers willing to engage with the refugee community in my country. Having received the program-related training, even though I did not have much experience, I became a coordinator of the program for two refugee camps in my hometown. With a group of five other professional volunteer women, I started going to refugee camps, meeting people, and conducting regular weekly groups to which everyone in the camp were invited. We met people from all walks of life. We met young children, mothers, and grandmothers. We met youth, who initially tested and questioned us, but eventually joined our groups. We met people who we connected with instantly. We saw people who suspiciously stood in the corner or looked at us through the window of their room, but attendance in our program increased and we continued to establish relationships.

Under economic hardships, inflation, and deprivation caused by war, conditions in the camps were quite poor. In one of the camps, there was no running water and no heat in the communal kitchen. The other camp, which was located in a transformed hotel space, had somewhat better conditions, as families had their own bathrooms and the communal kitchen was better equipped. Food was delivered twice a day and people gathered to receive meals for their families. For most camp residents, finding employment was impossible, as employers were unable to offer salaries, due to inflation.

During this three year long exposure to refugee life, from a perspective of a privileged professional who had her home, family and friends to return to, I learned a lot about people’s resilience, strength, and creative ways of survival. I learned about the significance of people’s material possessions whose meaning is not just material. I learned about the significance of lost
rituals, including everyday rituals of family life, which provided a sense of structure and predictability within which safe family relationships took place. I was amazed by children’s ability to reclaim their creativity, playfulness and laughter even after experiencing such immense loses and profound changes. I was deeply touched by the people’s capacity to transform the difficult circumstances in their lives, build relationships, and be productive. The program Hi Neighbour was eventually funded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which allowed us to purchase colourful art supplies, bring greater quantities of snacks, and introduce new play materials.

**Separation.** My partner left the country two years after the commencement of my hospital job. As a refugee from another part of the country who had refused to carry weapons and engage in the armed conflict, he was no longer welcome or safe in Serbia. Making a decision to separate was difficult, but it seemed like the best option at the time. As a Serbian citizen, I belonged to a different legal category and could not follow my partner, who arrived to Canada as a “stateless” government assisted refugee.

**Immigration.** Having overcome numerous immigration hurdles, I came to Canada as a family class immigrant exactly a year after my husband’s arrival. For an entire year, we focused on the tasks of re-uniting. We longed for each other, struggled to live our lives on two different continents, and reassured each other that we would be together again, somehow.

In the new country, I was excited to be with my partner, but everything else seemed very bleak. Leaving a busy life, which although difficult, used to be filled with meaning and various social engagements, I came to a country where I did not know anyone, was unable to practice in my profession, and was confined to a tiny apartment, hiding from the Winnipeg winter, while my
partner was at work. The only person I knew, my husband, was away twelve hours a day, working a manual job for a minimum wage salary, in order to support both of us.

I remember my first year in Canada as a year of grieving, phoning, writing letters, and being alone. In spite of my education and ability to speak English, my career options were quite limited. The prospect of advancing my education in order to return to my profession seemed daunting at the time, as even though I was proficient in English, I could not compete with other applicants, whose mother tongue was English, on the verbal portion of the GRE test, a requirement for most psychology programs.

**Professional advancement.** I was accepted into a Master’s level program in Marriage and Family Therapy and started my studies a year after arriving to Canada. I have a lot of appreciation for this program in which I felt valued and welcome from the very beginning. After the first year of facing isolation, obstacles, and having let go of my professional and social identities, to be received in such a way almost felt unreal. The program offered a sense of belonging that I had not been able to find elsewhere since coming to Canada.

After several unsuccessful attempts to find a job, I approached the Cross-Cultural Counselling Program at Mount Carmel Clinic, and was given an opportunity to demonstrate my professional competence through providing a workshop for the program’s counselling staff. Following this workshop, I was offered part-time employment as a cross-cultural counsellor, and my journey working with people who arrived from different countries in the world officially began.

For several years, I worked with the Cross-Cultural Counselling program at Mount Carmel Clinic, while finishing my degree and establishing professional recognition as a Marriage and Family Therapist. Through my work at Mount Carmel, and as a practicum student at Aurora
Family Therapy Centre, I became extensively exposed to people living in the margins of the Canadian society. I worked with clients who arrived from various places around the world, at different life stages, with or without education, with or without the language proficiency, and with or without family. While building new friendships with fellow students and immigrant co-workers, and advancing my professional identity, I also became acutely aware of my many privileges.

At my age, it was easy to return to school and obtain Canadian education. I spoke English. I had a husband who wholeheartedly supported my professional development. I had a degree from a relatively recognized European university, which opened some doors for me. I did have my education, professional experience, and correlating skills to demonstrate when I was given the opportunity. I looked the same as the majority of the people in Winnipeg, I was white. Until I started speaking with a foreign accent, I could pass as a member of the dominant culture. I was able-bodied and did not have a mental disability. I was heterosexual. With my increased connections and reputation in the field, my privileges exponentially grew. So did my sense of settlement and belonging. For me, settlement was intricately tied to my professional identity, recognition of my skills, ability to provide financial security for my family in Canada, and ability to build close friendships and establish family and social rituals.

I was offered a position as a therapist at Aurora Family Therapy Centre at the University of Winnipeg when I graduated from the Master’s program in 2001. Five years after our arrival in Canada, my husband and I had steady, professionally recognized, jobs, our first son, and a close group of friends. I found myself feeling like I belonged in Winnipeg. I was at home.

Two years later, I started teaching in the Master of Marriage and Family Therapy Program, and four years after graduation, I became an Approved Clinical Supervisor of the
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. I became increasingly privileged through these roles, but my new roles also provided me with an increased ability to influence the systems that I was a part of. I became able to teach about diversity, and to raise the awareness of students in clinical practice about concerns of minority clients. In my new environment, people were mostly open and supportive of changes and ideas that I presented. The agency and the program were ready to start embracing diversity, and the program slowly changed, supporting and recruiting many more minority students.

**Therapy program for immigrant and refugee families.** With its central location, systemic therapeutic approach, and increased support for diversity related work, AFTC was well suited for working with the growing population of people arriving from various countries and war zones. However, at the time I started working there, such clients were rarely seen at the agency. With a few dedicated Master’s students, and with a strong support of the agency director, I started exploring ways in which we could adapt the therapy service in order to accommodate the needs of the diverse people arriving from other countries. I reached out to my prior migrant connections, to contacts I had met through work at the Mount Carmel Clinic, and to people I had briefly worked with at the International Centre in Winnipeg. Through these contacts, I made a connection with the provincial government and started building relationships with various migrant communities, agencies, organizations, and services.

In discussions with these various old and new contacts, I learned that there was a need for a systemic therapy service in the migrant population, but that our services were inaccessible to many migrants needing therapy for several reasons. Many newly arrived migrants were coming from countries in which therapy, as it was practiced it in Canada and the Western world, was uncommon. On the other hand, these new migrants held different beliefs and engaged in healing
practices that most AFTC’s therapy practitioners were unfamiliar with. Even though our systemic approach could be well suited for working with people who defined their identity more collectively, in our conceptualizations of trauma recovery, we still relied on individualized psychological theory. Even though the minimum fee on AFTC’s sliding scale was $5.00, many new migrants could not afford to pay anything. Also, for many potential clients, the European practice of paying for therapy service, which involved interpersonal relationship, conversation, and listening, seemed strange. In the harsh Winnipeg weather, people could not afford to travel to a therapy session. They had children at home who could not be left alone. They did not speak English. They found the large amount of paperwork required at intake confusing and overwhelming. Some new migrants did not trust many others. Most were unfamiliar with AFTC’s operations and did not even know the agency existed. In addition to potential mental health needs, the newly arrived migrants had other multiple needs which had a high priority, such as needs related to finances, housing, education, employment, child-care, learning the language, or dealing with immigration and the legal system.

In order to offer acceptable, accessible, and meaningful service, all of these factors needed to be taken into account. Adequate service for the new migrant population required much more flexibility and challenged AFTC’s standard ways of therapy practice. It challenged the profession’s ethical guidelines, organizational limitations, and our conceptualization of therapy as a helping relational endeavour. It challenged our financial limitations and our human willingness to engage in other required types of activities. As therapists we faced a challenge to revisit and re-examine our systemic practices and conceptualizations in order to truly think systemically and relationally when offering service to people who perceived themselves as interpersonal, rather than individual beings.
We started with very limited resources and made very significant changes. The fee for service was removed; the paperwork requirement was removed and was, instead, completed in an intake session in collaboration with the client. Specialized intake sessions were offered with a trained intake therapist who helped complete the paperwork, and collaborated with referral sources and other services or people involved with the client. Clients were encouraged to bring to their intake sessions people who they trusted and felt comfortable with; interpreters were trained and used when needed; intake sessions were offered at various locations – clients’ homes, other agencies, schools, or AFTC, based on the clients’ preference. Systems’ sessions involving multiple people and multiple service providers, were held as required. Therapists were responsible to at least learn basic information about geographical and socio-political context that the clients were coming from. Therapy tools were made flexible and therapists also inquired about healing practices that clients were comfortable and familiar with, and incorporated some of these practices when applicable.

The agency’s position as a training center for the Marriage and Family Therapy Program, with a number of students interested in offering the new service, provided the new Therapy Program for Immigrant and Refugee Families with excellent resources for making these types of changes. The new program also provided opportunities to train students, increasing their capacity to work with the migrant population, which they eventually carried to their new places of employment after graduation. However, the growth of the program would not be possible without significant funding and support from Manitoba Labour and Immigration. The government support allowed the agency to become more integrated with other migrant services in the city, which lead to increased numbers of referrals, and, subsequently to growing numbers of clients. Inter-agency collaboration, various partnerships in the city, and active participation in
inter-agency organizations, including political organizations, further increased the program’s visibility and solidified its position within the larger system of migrant focused services. Significance of mental health functioning and importance of mental health services in the process of settlement gained increased recognition among service providers and within the provincial government, which continued to support the program.

**Identity as a psychologist.** Years after arriving in Winnipeg, even though I had gained a professional reputation and established myself in the field of Marriage and Family Therapy, a part of me was still missing. Early in life, I knew I wanted to be a psychologist. I became one and worked in my field for 3 years before arriving to Canada. For many more years, after immigration, I could not call myself a psychologist. I needed to re-claim this part of my identity, but there were too many obstacles. Nine years after graduating with a Master’s degree in Marriage and Family Therapy, feeling well connected and professionally established in my new city, I found the courage to apply to a Ph.D. program in psychology. At this stage, I was able to obtain the GRE test results competitive with the scores of my fellow applicants, the majority of whom spoke English as their mother tongue. Subsequently, I was accepted as a Counselling Psychology student, and my family moved to Vancouver so I could enrol in the Ph.D. training program.

**The current state of mental health services for migrant survivors.** During my Ph.D. training, I completed a specialized practicum as a therapist in the Trauma Program at Bridge Clinic in Vancouver. I had the privilege to meet and learn from leading Vancouver’s migrant service providers, and to work with mentors and colleagues who further taught me about migrant communities in Vancouver as well as the types of therapy work conducted in this city. Through my placement at the Bridge Clinic, I worked with interpreters, met physicians and nurses caring
for the newly arrived migrant survivors, and provided therapy to clients arriving from countries such as Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, Uganda, and Burundi. I also maintained a connection with AFTC in Winnipeg, and offered regular consultations to the Therapy Program for Immigrant and Refugee Families.

In the past two years, immigration funding has been gradually transferred from provincial governments to Canada Immigration and Citizenship, which viewed mental health services as being strictly distinct from and not a part of the settlement sector. As a result, both AFTC and the Trauma Program at Bridge Clinic lost funding for providing mental health services, in spite of the proven need for these services, and in spite of the reported improvement in settlement outcomes related to reduction in clients’ mental health difficulties. The Trauma Program at Bridge Clinic was closed in March 2014. Being a well recognized partner in the migrant serving community in Winnipeg, AFTC continues to provide limited service through support of CIC, with the focus on orientation, information, and community connections, and only a very limited portion of the funding allotted for short term crisis counselling.

Present and future. This dissertation is the final step in completing the requirements of my Ph.D. program. I am hoping that, after completion of this step, many years after my arrival in Canada, I will be able to call myself a psychologist again. However, I am concerned about the current state of mental health services available to migrant survivors of political violence in Canada, as these services have been discontinued due to federal funding decisions. At the moment, no specialized mental health services in Winnipeg and Vancouver receive government support. It is concerning that mental health is not considered a part of the settlement process and that mental health services are being excluded from access to funding and networking resources.
Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, results of the current study are presented. The chapter is organized in three general sections, preceded by a brief description of the participants’ biographical and cultural-historical portraits. The findings section begins with a general introduction of the findings, as conceptualized in conversations with the study participants. This introduction is followed by a thorough description of different types of social ties identified in the interviews, and by descriptions of the various roles that social ties played in the participants’ settlement process. As the current study offered significant insights into the process of settlement itself, findings about the participants’ settlement process are outlined in the final section of this chapter.

Before (re)presenting the participants’ narratives, I would like to acknowledge that some of these narratives have been told several times in several different contexts. The participants narrated about their past experiences of violence in immigration, medical, and settlement context, amongst other contexts, in addition to stories shared with friends and families. The stories likely looked different in each of these contexts, depending on the purpose and economy of story telling, and changed through the process of narration and over time. The research context adds another significant layer to this story-telling. Each specific narrative presented in this chapter is a product of co-creation that took place in the process of interaction between each participant and myself, and is also tied to particular space and time of the interview.

Biographical and Cultural-historical Portraits of the Participants

The study participants were migrants who experienced political violence in their country of origin, fled their homelands in search for safety, and had resided in Canada between 2 and 8 years at the time of the interviews. Six of the participants identified as men and 2 identified as women. One participant identified as gay, while the others identified as heterosexual. The
participants’ countries of origin included Iraq (2 participants), Iran, Somalia, Turkey, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Ethiopia. With the exception of one participant, all other participants sought refuge and resided in other countries for several years prior to being accepted into Canada.

To further contextualize the study’s findings, short biographical and cultural-historical portraits of the participants are provided below. In order to protect the participants’ privacy, information included in these portraits is fairly brief and general. The participant’s original initials were replaced and information about their country of origin was removed.

E. identifies as a 21 year old gay man from Middle East who has been living in Canada for two years. He left his country of origin for multiple reasons including family, political, and gender-related violence. Prior to being accepted into Canada as a refugee, he resided in another country for two years. E. is employed full time and is attending ESL classes full time. He has no family in Canada and is in the process of sponsoring his partner. Two of his immediate family members live in two different countries in Asia and the majority of his family is still in his country of origin. E. regularly sends money to family still residing in his country of origin, as this large part of his immediate family continues to face conditions of poverty and political violence. Due to safety reasons and family concerns, E. was forced to withdraw from high school after finishing grade nine. He is planning to improve his English and, subsequently, advance his education.

G. identifies as a single woman in her late 20s from an Eastern African Country. She and her family left their country of origin which was engulfed in war, while she was a young teenager, and lived in several Middle Eastern countries for a number of years, prior to migrating to Canada. G. and her younger sister arrived in Canada 8 years ago, leaving their large family
behind, in order to obtain education and help their family financially. During her initial years in Canada, her family moved through different countries and faced difficult economic, political, and social conditions. G. and her sister sent money to support the family and helped their large family to join them in Canada five years after their arrival. She is currently self-employed and is planning to advance her education. She completed adult high school and started college education in Canada. G. is an activist, and is highly engaged with various migrant communities.

F. identifies as a 37 year old man from a Middle Eastern country, who has been residing in Canada for six years. He left his country of origin for reasons of political violence and resided in another Middle Eastern country before receiving a conventional refugee status and being accepted into Canada. He has no family in Canada and his immediate family is still in the country of origin, facing threats and oppression. He identifies as a person with a disability based on having received a PTSD diagnosis, and is currently unemployed. F. completed adult high school in Canada and would like to further advance his education. His partner, who he met in Canada, is facing the possibility of deportation.

I. identifies as a married 44 year old man from a Middle Eastern country. He left his country of origin, with his wife and daughter, for the political reasons, and has resided in Canada for seven years. His parents are deceased and some of his family members live in Europe, while most of his extended family is still in his country of origin. I. has no other family in Canada. He and his wife received Master’s level professional training in their country of origin and came to Canada with years of experience working in their field. At the time of the interview, his wife was employed and I. was looking for permanent employment. He is politically active and engaged with his country of origin’s community.
C. identifies as a married 33 year old man from a South Asian country. He left his country at the age of 16, for the reasons of political violence, and lived in two neighbouring countries for a number of years, prior to his arrival in Canada. C. completed grade 7-8 education, and his further schooling was interrupted by political violence. He has been residing in Canada, with his wife and son, for the past six years. C.’s large family of origin lives in different parts of the world, including Asia and Europe, and he sends money to family members facing poor economic conditions in their Asian country of exile. With the exception of his in-laws, he has no immediate family in Canada. C. worked in the construction industry for several years. He recently quit his full time job and started attending ESL classes and working part-time as a pizza delivery driver. C. is planning to complete adult high school and obtain further education that will allow him to work at a hospital.

S. identifies as a 37 year old married woman from the Middle East. She completed university in her country of origin and comes from an affluent family. She and her nuclear family left their country of origin after experiencing political violence. S., her husband and children, landed in Canada as conventional refugees three years ago. Prior to being granted refugee status, they resided in another Middle Eastern country for two years. S. and her husband have three children, and have no other family in Canada. Their “extended” family still resides in their country of origin, facing continuing political violence. S.’s family is on social assistance, and she would like to find employment. Her faith is very important and she observes religious holidays and customs.

L. identifies as a married 37 year old man, from an Eastern African country. He left his country of origin for the reasons of persecution and political violence, and has been residing in Canada for the past six years. L. and his wife resided in several African countries for five years
prior to being sponsored into Canada as conventional refugees. He arrived with a university degree and professional work experience from his country of origin, passed certification exams in Canada, and has been working in his field for three years. Except for their two children, L. and his wife have no other relatives in Canada. His entire family is still in the country of origin facing difficult political and economic conditions. L. regularly sends money for the children in his family. He is an activist, and is politically engaged with his community. Religion, which is very important to him, was the reason for his persecution. L. and his wife are employed full time. He is planning to enrol in a Master’s program.

P. identifies as a 27 year old single man from an Eastern African country. He left his country of origin seven years ago, after experiencing political violence. Prior to being privately sponsored into Canada by a church group, P. lived in another African country for five years, waiting for an interview at the Canadian embassy for three and a half years. P. has been residing in Canada for the past two years. He has a full time and a part time job, and is enrolled in adult high school full time. Even though he completed a year and a half of university in his country of origin, he is required to upgrade his high school education in order to attend university in Canada. He has no family in Canada. Part of his family is still in his country of origin, facing difficult political and economical conditions, and some of his siblings had to leave the country after his departure, moving to a country in Asia. M. feels that he needs two jobs as he is supporting family in both countries. He is planning to attend university and work in social services.

Social Ties and Settlement Process of the Migrant Survivors of Political Violence

In conducting this study, I was interested in the role of social ties in the process of settlement for migrant survivors of political violence who are settling in Canada. In answering
my question about relationships that were important to them, the participants often told stories about their past lives, the violence they had experienced in their countries of origin, and their efforts to resist, or overcome, the impact imposed by this violence. Stories about settlement were inextricable from the stories about past experiences. Stories about social ties were intimately connected with stories about violence. The participants spoke about how violence they had experienced affected their personal functioning, beliefs, and perception of the world. They described the impact of violence on their interactions, social circles, and intimate connections. However, they also highlighted that their close social connections played a pivotal role in their ability to cope with threats and dangers of political violence, helping them resist and alter the effects of experienced violence. Also, the participants described how their social ties contributed, both positively and/or negatively, to their migration and settlement efforts.

For some participants, social circles they were embedded in offered social support, which were beneficial in dealing with challenges posed by violence, or in completing the different tasks of settlement. Others described social circles devoid of social support. However, for the survivors of political violence who shared aspects of their stories with me, the role of social ties was broader and more complex, extending well beyond the notions of social support. The participants described relationships of trust, relationships of encouragement, relationships of hope, relationships that provided practical support, and relationships that offered a sense of belonging. In addition, they described relationships of power, judgment and punishment, relationships of betrayal, relationships of rejection, and exploitive relationships. The participants described relationships that are being missed, grieved, longed for, or fought for. According to the participants, social ties can aid resistance to violence and reduce its impact, hinder progress and recovery, or be protective and harmful at the same time. Significant relationships with family and
close friends left behind not only served as a buffer in stressful situations, but also strongly inspired the participants to overcome the difficulties encountered throughout their migration.

The participants’ stories about their social ties were inseparable from their larger context. Their stories about resilience, adaptation, and settlement successes, always included others, even when those others were not physically or geographically present.

**The relationship circle.** The participants described relationship circles composed of those living in close proximity, those thousands of kilometers away, those who have passed away, those left behind, those who loved them, those who helped, and those who betrayed them, or those who abused and exploited them. Their stories portrayed relationships which have been known throughout lifetimes, relationships organized around certain common goals, or relationships with those whom they briefly encountered, but whom, nevertheless, initiated significant shifts in the participants’ life journeys.

Participants’ depictions of relational circles included complex, tight and sometimes conflicting ties. Their circles included family members, in Canada and all over the world, close friends, and people who they met along their journey. In the circle, there were governments, militaries, terrorists, religious organizations, teachers, sponsors, counsellors, doctors, and the host community. The participants portrayed those who judged, shunned, tortured and inflicted pain, challenging their deepest connection with humanity. They talked about allies in resisting violence and oppression. The participants described contributing to others’ well-being as a powerful factor in their recovery and settlement efforts, allowing them to accomplish what normally seems impossible.

The participants described people in need; the ones who stayed behind and the ones who left. They described people who were inaccessible due to precarious life circumstances, limited
mobility, scarce material and other resources, and rigid immigration laws. The participants depicted a struggle to move forward and still stay connected with the past. They portrayed unresponsiveness of Canadian society to the social needs of its incoming members who arrive tired, traumatized, and haunted by torturous memories. They expressed a strong desire to establish new intimacies and find places of belonging, restricted by the new relational rules of the host society.

**The context of violence and resistance.** The psychological, relational, and physical implications of violence played an important role in the participants’ narratives. Different forms of violence were described, including violence perceived, violence experienced, violence suffered, and violence resisted.

In their narratives, the participants were not simply passive recipients of violence but were also active participants who were fighting against it, looking for solutions, and influencing the situation for themselves and for others. Their settlement successes also represented a way of resisting violence and saying no to oppression. For the participants, migration offered a way of recuperating old resources and mobilizing new ones, a way of maintaining hope and securing a chance for survival and a better future.

**Types of Social Ties and Their Roles in the Settlement Process**

The participants described various types of relationships in their social circles, spanning from intimate ties with family and friends to more distant relationships with individuals, communities, and societies, with these social connections taking place within their larger context. Types of social ties and their role in the settlement process, as described by the participants, are outlined below.
**Family that stayed behind.** Even when not physically present, family was described as a major protective resource for most participants, providing a sense of common purpose and a connection between the past, present, and future. According to the participants, despite residing in geographically different spaces, family members created plans and envisioned their future lives, together or separate.

G. described a strong drive to succeed in the new country inspired by her relationship with her family. She portrayed a difficult introduction to Canada in which she had to instantly find employment in order to return government loans, send money to her large family living in exile, and establish conditions for sponsoring her family to Canada. G. described a hard life during the first few years after arrival, working multiple jobs that she hated, and having no time for rest. However, every time she felt exhausted, she reminded herself of the purpose of her effort.

*G.: We knew it was hard, but we had people behind us…*\(^5\)*I was telling myself, you are doing this for the family, so it was not for me. Being an immigrant was ok because I had family with me.*

G. described moments of loneliness when she was missing her family, but even in these moments, she felt connected with them. As she narrated:

*G.: Our family’s support was always with us. They still helped us feel positive and build up inside...Like you are very strong, built up inside, from your family, that’s the key. And the community, even if you are very far away you have a solid family, solid community background, you miss them, yes, for sure, you have this kind of empty, for the loss that you left behind, but you feel fulfilled inside. You feel you are alone here, but you know*

\(^5\) [...] Denotes parts of speech that have been removed for the sake of clarity
you are not alone. Someone else is in your life. We felt like...we had to learn how to live again as two people, because we, since I became aware of this life, we never, like, I never see only my parents and my siblings as a family, we have never been on ourselves. We had people around us, like, grandma and grandpa, uncle, auntie, I used to tell my mom when I was young, I wish one day we have a life, like only of us, only of us, no one else.

One of the most painful experiences described by the participants is involuntary separation from their family of origin. They described having to flee their homes unprepared, believing that they were leaving temporarily, or being sent away by their families who were trying to protect them from danger. Often, there was no opportunity to say goodbye or to prepare for such long-term absence and geographical separation. Although geographical distance did not necessarily mean a loss of connection, it affected the level of intimacy through participants’ inability to participate in family events and face-to-face interactions, or in their limited ability to share new memories and experiences with each other.

Attempts to keep in contact with the family still in the country of origin were at times conducted under conditions of threat. For some participants, families were left in precarious circumstances; family members were being punished for actions of their departed relatives; they were being monitored by the governments, while their lives, jobs and freedoms were jeopardized. In order to avoid endangering the safety of their loved ones, some participants described rarely calling their families. Other participants described using various strategies to preserve anonymity when their phone calls were under surveillance, such as never using names during their telephone conversations, calling through a friend’s telephone number, or sharing very little information. F. described just calling to hear his mother’s voice. He talked about being
unable to even ask how she was doing, or to share with her his own life in Canada. At times, the emotional response became quite intense, as F. explained:

F.: *It’s just difficult. Because telephone is severely or strongly government controlled.*

*Every single word, and they use these words against my family in [the country of origin]. Like, if you say something, they are gonna be out of job, which is... Or they are gonna [silence] you know, very difficult. They are controlling and controlling over everything... ‘Hey, how are you, how are you doing?’ ‘I’m good, ok, I’m good.’ ‘Ok, bye.’*

*Nothing more, nothing less. Or sometimes, when you get emotional, you are saying, ‘Hey mom, don’t worry’ [silence]. And you know, being parents in this crazy world, it’s very, very difficult, it’s very scary. Very, very scary...And if you grew up a child and save this child in a very horrendous experiences, you’re gonna feel [silence]. The mother and father have more feeling about that child, because they struggled to save the child, and for them it’s very difficult to, you know, to be far distance, and talk to them [silence]. Can’t see them, because we can talk to them, but we really hug and touch, it’s first sense of human being. If a mother cannot touch her children, it is very difficult to say, ‘Hey, I am seeing my children’ and this and that.*

As illustrated, prior history of violence made F.’s separation from his mother even more difficult. F. described exposure to extreme forms of violence since he was two years old. He described a special bond that developed as a result of his parents’ struggle to protect him as a child and endless pain that followed their forced separation. F. talked about feeling his mother’s pain through the telephone wires even though they were unable to exchange real words as this would endanger the safety of F.’s family. He described that due to political circumstances that forced him to leave his country, he may never be able to see his mother again. He is unable to
return and is also unable to sponsor or invite her for a visit. Oppression and systemic obstacles in his country of origin and in Canada impose serious constraints on this significant relationship.

Similarly, P. described that the only way to contact his mother was through a telephone number that belonged to another person, his friend, who still lived in his country. Before she acquired this number, P. did not call as he was afraid of the repercussions. In spite of this distance and forcefully imposed silence, P. described a strong sense of connection, caring, and love for his family.

P.: They are my life...I live for them, that keeps me going. I am so happy to provide for my family...Every time I send money, know they are OK, I did something to make them smile, not worry...that's making me happy. It keeps me going to do those things.

In response to oppression, P. portrayed his family’s efforts to resist harmful political influences by increasing family closeness and cohesion, supporting each other, and sending family members to safety even when this meant separation. At the age of seven, after the passing of his father in his country of origin’s prison and the subsequent imprisonment and disappearance of his brother, P. became the next eldest man in the family, responsible for helping his mother. P. strongly identified with his family and took his family obligation very seriously. However, eventually, P. became the next target of his country’s government, which resulted in him having to leave the country at the age of 21.

P.: I came here alone. When I was in [first country of exile], I was alone too. So, I didn’t plan. When I came off from my country, I just, I don’t wanna...I didn’t plan it, I didn’t think about it, going away, you know. Because I wanted to stay with my family, because after my brother got arrested and my father passed away, I am the next to take responsibility for my family, but my mom, she pushed me, ‘Just go. I don’t want this to be
happening to you, what happened to your brother.’ So I moved out, I was 21. And in two,
three months, just everything has come down and I was waiting to go back. So, I wait a
lot, I wait a lot, I wait a lot and nothing happened, so, time go fast.

In order to cope with violence, threat, and insecurity, P.’s family had to re-organize its
structure and its roles. Younger family members assumed his responsibilities, allowing him to
leave the country and avoid further imprisonment and torture. Eventually, the government came
after his younger siblings as well, forcing them out of the country and leaving only P.’s mother
and his youngest brother, a young child, at home. Through hiding, protecting, and sacrificing for
each other, P.’s family resisted violence and maintained close relationships, strengthening a
sense of responsibility and caring for each other in spite of their geographical distance.

For some participants, sending money to family members still living in the country of
origin was dangerous, forcing them to find creative ways to deliver financial help. For example,
P. described that he deposits funds to a bank in a neighbouring country, which are then
withdrawn and taken to his mother by merchants going in and out of the country. L. narrated
about sending money under a different name, while the government in his country profited from
his efforts to help his loved ones by deducting a portion of the money before it was delivered to
his family.

Some participants have lost close family members since leaving the country. G. described
that her family lost two people prior to joining her in Canada. Although she had been somewhat
prepared for the loss of her grandmother, her father’s death caught her by surprise and she never
had a chance to say goodbye. G. described the loss of her father as her greatest loss.

G.: Took them four years. So they came to join us. [silence] We lost two people, my
grandma and my father, who passed away before coming here [silence] ...So, it’s the
greatest loss...[tears in her eyes][silence]. It was difficult. Sometimes when I look back just being an immigrant is difficult. You gain things and you lose things...I grew up as an immigrant...we moved from place to place and hardly I remember [having a]...stable life, but my mom, she talks about the life they had and what they lost. I can see how it affected them. But, for me, it didn’t bother me [tears]...because I had the family all the time. So that is my greatest loss. That’s the only thing that I lost.

T.: So you didn’t really see your father after you left.

G.: No. I never saw him, him and my grandma...She cried when I was leaving home, and she told me, ‘You are planning to go very far and I don’t think we will meet again’ [crying silently]...When I was preparing, she told me, ‘You’ll be around and you’ll see my grave, but you won’t see me like that’ [silence]. And she cried. That’s why I was almost prepared for not seeing her...And...I dreamt about her but...she was saying, ‘You didn’t invite me for a wedding...It’s your wedding and I am not invited.’ And I said, ‘How come grandma? It’s my wedding, and you don’t know about it, you are not invited? Of course, you are the person who would manage the wedding, except if you are not alive.’...But I said, ‘Things worried me, you were not there at my wedding...I am afraid you will not be there.’...So when my grandma passed away, I already also had this message long time ago, but my father was the biggest surprise that...was unexpected [tears]. That was quite difficult.

G.’s father suddenly passed away a few days before the family’s scheduled departure for Canada. She had promised her father to “never settle down until the family is re-united” and was hoping that their “mission would be completed when mom and dad joined [them].” Her father never had a chance to see what she and her sister had accomplished in their new country.
It is important to note that not all participants described a positive sense of family identity and close, supportive and encouraging relationships. Even though his family’s influence was not perceived as positive, E., nevertheless, described his family’s strong formative influence on him.

E.: *Relationship, it’s everything. If the relationship was good between my mom and dad, I wasn’t run to my family or run to my sister. If the relationship was good between me and my brother, I would be strong like him. If the relationship, wasn’t really deep between me and my sisters, I wouldn’t be feminine, more. If the relationship was really good, I wouldn’t get raped. If the relationship wasn’t good between me and my teacher, I wouldn’t like, do escorting. If the relationship not good between me and my friend, she wasn’t take me to that guy and meet me with him. And the relationship between me and that guy bring me to Canada. The relationship between here and my boss, it’s good, so I am in a good position. The relationship between me and the customers make me special.*

[pause] Yeah, so, *the relationship and communicate between people is very important.*

Dominant societal, cultural, and political views and gender based oppression strongly influenced relationships in E.’s family, within which he experienced violence, judgment, and rejection. The omnipresent gender violence was mirrored in his family’s ignorance of his “feminine” appearance and manners, and in their punishing and shaming reaction to his experience of being raped. Fear of their community’s reaction to E.’s predicament, influenced the family’s decisions to prevent him from receiving timely medical treatment, to withdraw him from school, and to limit his mobility. His relationship with his family significantly changed after this incident, leading to further distancing, fear, and violence. Yet, E. continued to feel a sense of obligation to support his family financially.
Family of origin seemed to take a central role in the participant’s narratives. They described very strong connections with parents, siblings, and extended families, characterized by mutual care, thinking about each other, and/or a strong sense of obligation, extending into adulthood. Their family of origin’s strong influence on the participants was vividly portrayed in their stories. Families were described as a significant source of identity, a place of belonging, and a major source of socialization through which practices, beliefs, and influences of ethnic and religious communities were channelled. Connection with family and family belonging were strongly valued by most participants. The participants described fostering family ties in Canada through means of personal memory and identification, through maintaining contact, and through financial and sponsorship support.

**Romantic partnerships.** Romantic partnerships were described by the participants as a significant source of support, and at times, as the only relationships that could be trusted.

E. was introduced to his boyfriend by his best friend after having worked in the escorting business for two years. He expressed a disbelief that his boyfriend fell in love with him in spite of his previous history.

*E.: I told him I was ok with what’s happening, and he said, ‘I want you to be my boyfriend’. I told him ‘No, I can’t’, and he said, ‘Why?’ And I told him, ‘Because I’m supporting my family and everything. You are not gonna support me and support my family at the same time’. And he said, ‘No, that’s fine. I can support you and support your family. Just stay with me. Don’t do that any more.’ And he told me, ‘Don’t do that any more’. And I stopped, stopped doing that. I lived like a normal life...I lived with him in his house and...it was really nice to stay there. I forgot everything. He talked to me every day. Like, every day, small chat, we go over all my experience and he said, ‘Look,
you are here now. Everything in the past is past. Let’s forget just everything.’ So the relationship start getting stronger and stronger, stronger, and stronger between me and that guy.

As narrated by E., at the time he met his partner, he was experiencing feelings of internalized shame, “disgust”, and self-hate. In this relationship, for the first time in his life, he experienced a sense of acceptance and belonging. He described his partner as someone who was genuinely interested in him and had no intention of any sort of exploitation. E.’s partner encouraged him to stop escorting and start a “normal life”, sharing his finances in order to help E. support his family. He encouraged E. to take English classes and apply for a Canadian visa even though this meant separation. After E. left for Canada, his partner continued to support E.’s family until E. became capable of sending money from Canada. E. described that he and his partner talked on the phone every day and continued to be loyal to each other two years later. E. narrated that separation was really difficult for both of them and that he was trying to help his partner join him in Canada. However, two years later no immigration progress had been made.

F. met his partner, who was from the same country that he originated in, at VAST. He described this relationship as the first trusting connection that he had been able to establish in Canada. At the time of the interview, this first meaningful connection was under threat, as his partner was facing the possibility of deportation due to legal errors made in her refugee claim.

F.: If...they accept your refugee claim, here in Canada, and then they say, ok, your lawyer made a problem, make a mistake, but you were in charge, you have to understand that. And then she said, ‘But I am not a lawyer, you gave me the lawyer’. And they said, ‘No, no, we don’t accept that, you have to go to court. We take everything, we claim to take everything.’...They are trying to take [her refugee status] away. And she was
applying for citizenship...She wrote a letter asking, ok, what’s happened in those six–seven years. And they said, ‘Ok, you have to go to court, because Canada Border Agency...claim you did this, you did that, and they want to take your refugee protection, and if they do so, you have to be out of country. There is no way. So, she went to court and she went for answers. This is a huge risk. I hope that’s not gonna happen, but if it happens, this is the reality. This is the plain law. Law is so abstract and brutal. Sometimes the justice is not fair.

This glimpse of hope, being able to relate to someone after all the struggle that F. described, was in danger. During the interview, I felt as though F. was afraid to talk about this relationship. I almost felt like he was afraid to acknowledge the reality of this relationship, which could soon become severed by a blind bureaucratic procedure.

C. met his wife in 2001, in a country where both of their families had found a refuge. Two years later, she and her family received Canadian visas and left for Canada. She returned in 2005 when they got married. She applied to sponsor C. and he joined her in Canada in 2007. C. described the first four years after his arrival to be very difficult. He found his wife struggling with “depression” and he also started experiencing the same condition, which he clearly linked to traumatic experiences back in his country of origin. Describing his marriage during this initial period post migration, C. portrayed distance and “coldness” in this relationship.

C.: We start living together...and for four years we had a bad situation. We were not, like, wife and husband. We didn’t know but, because she had problems too. And day by day, the same problem, I got the same problem. And now we are out of that difficulties, ok now we can realize it. Life is so nice and beautiful. I can realize that before that, we were very cold...with each other, with the people, and now it’s a lot better. Yeah.
C.’s story illustrated relational intimacy not only affected by past violence, but also constrained by current pressures of economic survival. C. explained that he had no choice but to accept a full time construction job, which left no time or strength for his marriage. He described that his wife was his only social connection in Canada after his arrival. However, they had difficulties connecting and sharing their problems with each other. Each partner suffered alone. According to C., his marriage started to improve after the initial four years. At this time, his wife recovered from depression, completed her education, and secured a meaningful, better paid job. At the same time, he left his construction job, received counselling, and engaged in English classes. At the time of the interview, they enjoyed each other’s company and spent time talking to each other.

S.’s husband became a target of a terrorist group following a violent community division that no longer allowed marriages between the two religious groups that they belonged to. She and her husband had to separate after their son was abducted in response to their defiance to the oppressive new rules. As she indicated, “no words could describe” the angst and pain that she and her husband experienced during that time. However, they continued to fight for their son and for each other, never losing contact, and never giving up on their relationship. S. talked about her husband with utmost respect, love, and caring. She worried about him, his adaptation, and his struggle with trauma and health issues. With tears in her eyes, she described difficulties that he had to endure all by himself, rejected by the community he resided with and taken advantage of by the community he supposedly belonged to. S. saw her family as an anchor, a small circle of people who could be trusted in the new country.

L. met his wife in university. They had a lot in common, sharing Christian beliefs, attending same group meetings, and aspiring to be in the same profession. Talking about his
migration journey, L. described how “she had been alongside [him] for this whole time”. He and his wife fled their country of origin under treacherous circumstances, crossing the border illegally, and risking their lives. Together with two other university friends, they supported each other through a difficult exile in several African countries. L. described his wife as his “best friend”, someone who knew him well, someone who he shared a lot of history with, and someone who supported him. According to L., their caring for each other was instrumental in overcoming the difficulties they faced through the process of migration and settlement. He explained that major current stressors in their marriage were frustrations around his wife’s difficulty obtaining professional recognition and changes resulting from their increased awareness of gender issues.

*L.*: I’ve never cooked anything at home when I was growing up. My sisters and my mom were the ones who were cooking at home. I never washed my clothes. I never cleaned the house. So when we got married, that was my expectation. I work hard to win bread for the family and the mother…[would be] at home and support the kids. She is your friend…That is not working here. It didn’t work in [previous country of exile], it didn’t work here. I knew, I had thought it, but really to live it, is not easy. But now, having the kids, playing with them, helping them change…In my nursing skills, I am ok with taking care of people, so I am ok with taking care of my kids now. That is really getting me there. Most of the time, I take care of the kids. If I am at home, and she has to go.

**Children.** Four of the participants had children. In their narratives, children represented a connection with the future, a sense of hope and a strong incentive to succeed in the new country. The participants described wanting a better future for their children, wanting to protect them from oppression, poverty, threats, and insecurity, and wanting opportunities for their children’s
better education, progress, and success in the new country. However, these future-oriented relationships, filled with dreams and aspirations, were also influenced by previous histories.

I. described that his main reason for leaving his country was his daughter’s future.

I.: She was 15 months old when we came here, and I strongly believe, after current events in [country of origin], that she is going to have a better chance to express herself, to be happy. She is going to have more opportunities, and she is very artistic. She loves to paint, and in [country of origin], actually, if you are a painter, you starve to death, so, it’s not easy... But here, actually... she can do that. She can pursue that career if she wants to... And, the education, became more religious every year. To be honest, actually, I want my daughter to decide what she is going to believe or not believe. I am trying to teach her how to think, not what to think. And, I am just giving her the facts, if she asks me, actually, a science question, or something like that. But, on god, I explained different religions, and belief and disbelief systems. But she is nine, she is not getting everything. Eventually, she is going to develop her mindset, or her opinion, and she is going to decide when she gets older. I believe, trying to train or educate your child on your belief system is not right. I didn’t want that my daughter gets brainwashed by TV, by media, on that subject.

I. expressed a desire to free his daughter from the forces of political and religious oppression that he experienced in his country of origin, giving her a chance to develop her own opinions and build her own beliefs, which resulted in his leaving the country. I. also placed a high value on the education of his child, wanting her to have better opportunities and to be able to choose her educational path, and her future.
C.’s son was born two years after he joined his wife in Canada, during the time when both he and his wife struggled with depression. He described a sense of yearning for the missed time with his son. He wished that he could have this time back, as he felt that he missed “the most beautiful time” of his son’s birth and infancy.

C.: I think that having a kid is very nice and enjoyable, but the time he was baby, small, so that’s the most beautiful time, I couldn’t enjoy that. When I remember that time now, and see some pictures of that time, I say ok, I wish that that time comes again. But not the problem that I had, only the time that...I couldn’t enjoy that time because I wasn’t well.

C. described a chain of experiences in which his history, conditions in Canada after his arrival, and his relationship with his baby were tightly intertwined, highlighting the impact of past exposure to political violence on his new relationships. He mourned the time with his son during which he was unable to engage with, and enjoy his baby. C. invested a tremendous effort in changing his circumstances, reducing the impact of these past experiences, and re-establishing his ability to be there for his son. He described that, at the time of the interview, he was able to enjoy this relationship and was looking forward to being there for his son in the future.

L.’s two children were both born in Canada. As he described, “Whenever I am tired or feel desperate, having my kids around, it helps me to stay positive”. L. explained how spending time with his children contributed to his sense of optimism and well-being. In addition, he described that children provided a channel for establishing social relationships in the new country, as they were “good at getting people together”.

However, L. also described obstacles that his new migrant family with young children faced in Canada, as in the first few years the parents needed to establish themselves, (re)gain professional recognition, and earn money to support the family. Without the support of extended
family in caring for the children, which would have been readily available in their country of origin, his wife had to put her career on hold. A few years later, when she attempted to complete the same registration procedure through which L. secured his nursing registration, she learned that the requirements had changed and that she was unable to register.

Although in his story children represented a major source of hope and joy, L. also described feeling exhausted, as he and his wife did not have any respite. He explained that when his wife returned from maternity leave with their second child and started with her regular daytime job, L. would start working night shifts in order to be available to his children during the day. He described a lack of child-care support and no option of bringing a family member from another country in order to help raise his family.

S.’ migration journey began with the kidnapping of her four-year-old son. Following the kidnapping, she and her husband were forced to separate from each other and let go of all of their physical possessions in exchange for the life of their son. Since the moment their son disappeared, their lives became focused on returning him home alive, and subsequently, on assuring safety, recovery, and a positive future for him. In addition to causing immense suffering, the kidnapping left a mark that followed them on their subsequent journey in search of safety. Following his traumatic exposure, S.’s four-year-old son’s functioning was evaluated to be at the level of a 10-month-old infant.

_S.: I don’t go outside because my son is scared of everything. After [the kidnapping], my son was at the level of 10 months. He drank milk from a bottle, and he [had to] use diapers. Ten months!...And he was four and a half years old, and after two years, [he was] six, and he went to grade two, [and was still in the] same situation. So we went, and I had an interview, I met some counsellor from the ministry of education there in [the_
neighbouring country], and they gave me a permission to sit inside the classroom, because he is in a special state...I don’t want him to be an uneducated person, and this is the only way to be like normal kids. And I went with him and I studied with him, grade one and grade two. In the class I start teaching him, and he is smart, he started learning, but he is still isolated person, scared, don’t like it, don’t want to speak with kids. No speaking at all, just with me, just whisper to each other.

From the moment of being re-united with their son and moving to a neighbouring country, S. and her husband focused on their son’s recovery. They dedicated themselves to securing psychological and medical help for their son, and to making sure he received education, which would create future opportunities for him. S.’s husband accepted difficult jobs in order to pay for treatment. Following the advice of a doctor, S. got pregnant with another child, hoping that this would help her son’s recovery efforts and foster his increased independence. As advised by their son’s therapist, the family applied to immigrate to Canada, a non-Muslim country, in order to remove themselves from the reminders of their faith that were associated with their son’s traumatic history.

Friendships. In the absence of immediate and extended family, the participants described attempts to create other close relationships in order to replace some of the roles originally assigned to family. However, forming these new relationships was reportedly a difficult task, as friendship building in the new country required time and involved social rules that were often different from the ones learned in the country of origin. P. reflected on the difference between countries:

P.: In [Africa], you live like a group, always surrounded by people. You talk with a friend, always people around. Everyone there lived their lives and you were together. In
Canada, you have to **make** friends; people think you are weird, a psycho, if you try talking to them. I don’t have a friend in Winnipeg who is like a brother or a sister.

F. shared his perception that Canadian society was difficult to engage with on a level that went beyond superficial interactions. He portrayed a life infused with intense struggle trying to “live in the community” for the past 6 years.

F.: *And when I came here...I found here very cold, society, very cold, and I couldn’t...Still until now I am struggling to engage in the society, to find myself in the society...and still, I couldn’t understand it, I couldn’t digest it. So the main point is, I couldn’t find myself in the society. For instance, if you say, ‘How many friends did you find?’...No friends. And I’m...a sociable person. And, I am not talking about appointmenty kind of acquaintanceship, I have a lot of ‘Hi! Bye!’ But I think if I don’t have a friend...and I am ill, and I get mentally problematic, this and that, so...I’m not gonna be able to go and ask for help. And if there is no friend, I ended up with more problems. The same thing’s gonna happen for other people too.*

F. described a need to have close, meaningful relationships, which was central to his settlement, as without these relationships, life in the new country lost its purpose. He asked, “If I have no social network, what am I doing here?” With intense emotion, he described how he felt his efforts to adapt to the new society, change his relationship strategies, and create meaningful connections, had been fruitless over the past six years.

L. shared a belief that “wherever you go, you need friends, you need services, that you can rely on”. Similarly to other participants, he described difficulties establishing close relationships in Winnipeg, in spite of his various social engagements and responsibilities. He described that the way of life was different in Canada, as he was very busy in the new country
and significant social components of “networking, the support, counselling and supporting each other” were missing. L. described experiences of betrayal in his home country by his close university friends, which lead to persecution and imprisonment. In his narrative, this past experience strongly affected his level of readiness to open up to new friendships.

L.: I don’t trust people. That one is something I am working on... Cause I’ve seen people who, friends, the ones who know us, are the one who came and are arresting us and putting us in prison. So, my best friend at home is just my wife and my kids... We have friends that come home, but they are still...they are very good friends, that are trusting, but to really share your hurt and what you are going through, it’s very difficult.

L. narrated about historically strong ties with his friends in his country of origin, university colleagues and church companions, the intimacy of which deepened through a shared experience of violence and grew through joint struggle to preserve religious beliefs under precarious circumstances. Under the conditions of threat, small close friendship groups were formed, which became a source of strong identification. In contrast, relationships with other university friends proved to be treacherous. L. and his Christian student group were betrayed by friends and neighbours who reported their secret prayer meetings to the military, leading to confiscation of their Bible, beating, chaining, and imprisonment.

E. described himself as a “friendly” person with strong social skills. Yet, the story about his past was dominated by isolation and loneliness. E. narrated about having one close friend, a trans-woman, who he had met in the escort business. Similarly to stories of some other participants, the intimacy of this friendship grew under treacherous circumstances, in the face of intense fear and threats of violence. E. described several occasions during which he and his friend were almost captured by police. Being captured meant imprisonment, torture, and
potentially, loss of life. He portrayed intimate moments during which these two exchanged open and deep conversations, supported each other, and enjoyed each other’s companionship. E. described this friend as being instrumental to his positive life changes, as she introduced him to his current boyfriend. In spite of his extraordinary ability to converse and meet people, E. described a small social circle in Canada, and a continuing sense of isolation.

The participants also greatly differed in how they chose whom to form friendships with in Canada. C.’s friends were mostly members of his ethnic community who left their country for similar reasons. He continued to have friendships and relationships with the people who he knew back in his country and who have found refuge in various countries around the world, maintaining communication through social media, such as Facebook, email, or Skype. C. narrated about the significance of shared memories and shared histories that one could relate to in conversation with friends. He described being able to search for and connect with his friends as a measure of his own wellness, recovery, and settlement in Canada. As he shared, “It is very important when you call somebody to share your thoughts. But you have to have that ability, to share, talk with those friends.”

Other participants connected with their compatriots around common political goals and struggles. I. described having many friends both in Canada and in his country of origin who he communicated with in person and through social media. Since his immigration, he has been active with his country of origin’s community in diaspora, participating in political organizations and being vocal about wrongdoings of his country of origin’s government. He opposed political oppression through actively expressing his opinions and through forming friendships that defied oppressive political rules in his country of origin. I. described that his best friend in Canada belonged to an ethnic group which was separated from his own ethnic group by centuries long
history of violence. This friendship was characterized by high commitment to “help each other with anything”, and meaningful, trusting conversations about political and personal issues.

In contrast to forming friendships with those who share common ethnic backgrounds or common political goals, some participants described avoiding associations with the members of their ethnic community, which will be discussed in the following section. Other participants, such as G., described a preference for “multicultural” friendships. She narrated that she was quite comfortable with diversity, as through the prolonged migration process prior to arrival in Canada, she had met and shared the lives of people from a variety of backgrounds.

G.: Yeah, that’s why we didn’t feel this kind of, homesick, or lacking of community...No, we didn’t have that, because...we had other immigrants to help us and we started to learn really again and build community with multi-different background. And we didn’t feel bad, we were happy. We had friends from different countries, we worked with different, multi-backgrounds, we were prepared...

She described having an ability to become instantly “integrated”, based on this capacity to relate to people of diverse cultures. Allying with other immigrants was instrumental in G.’s search for information, companionship, and support.

With the exception of two participants, most of the participants described friendships in Canada to be difficult to form and having different qualities from the ones they were used to. They described increased personal distance, difficulty sharing intimate information, and rigid personal boundaries of their Canadian friends. As illustrated in L.’s narrative, some participants described difficulty trusting these new others, based on their prior histories of threat and betrayal.

**Ethnic and/or religious community.** These migrants’ relationships with ethnic and/or religious community were complicated by prior history, socio-political context in the country of
origin, current level of threat and violence, and details involving national, ethnic, and religious identification. Findings about the role of ethnic and/or religious community were mixed, with some participants avoiding connections with their country of origin’s community in Canada and others describing ethnic community as a significant source of support. It is important to note that none of the participants exclusively identified, or associated with, their own ethnic community. In their narratives, ethnic community was rather a part of a larger circle of their new social connections.

**Negative community associations.** F. described a strongly perceived expectation to engage with community from his ethnic group, in spite the fact that he had fled from his country and that, in his experience, associating with the same community could be harmful.

*F.*: *And the role of the community, first, if I flee from a country, and I don’t like to go to different community, I don’t have to. But in this city, the problem is, they say it is multiculturalism society. I didn’t find such a thing. It is diverse cultural society, which is – everybody goes to its own box. Go to your community!...If...they have a problem with their community, they can’t get along with their community, because they think you are crazy, in your community, ‘So we don’t accept you’. That’s the main problem. And therefore, you’re gonna be alone, if you are not in your community...And living side by side doesn’t make sense so that we are living as one society. So therefore, we are diverse cultural society, not multicultural society, in my opinion...And I don’t consider ‘my’, ‘yours’, or ‘others’. There is a community, it is one society, people...At the end, people should live together peacefully as a human being. All together, no matter where they are. But I didn’t find that here, economically, ethnically, and racially. So...I find it here very cold. And...it adds more seasoning to my suffering and problem...I came here to release*
the problem, not to fall to more problem and...struggling. Because, if someone like me
cross a lot of cultures, many thing doesn’t make sense any more.

As illustrated, F. did not perceive Canadian society as “multicultural”, which would
mean mixing and association between cultures. Rather, he saw Canadian society as a “diverse
cultural society” with distinct cultural groups “living side by side” and not interacting with each
other. He described an expectation in the dominant society that everyone arriving from a certain
community would be segregated in their own community “box”. However, in his experience, the
community “box” could be judging, rejecting, and punishing. In a society that operates based on
such expectations, a person who cannot establish relationships with their ethnic community is
destined to be alone.

Other participants described not associating with their ethnic community. Being a sexual
minority in a country with very high levels of gender violence, E. was exponentially more
vulnerable through his identification as a gay person, his “feminine” appearance and, especially,
his escorting business that involved sex with other men. As narrated by E., any one of these
positionalities could lead to physical violence, rape, and murder. In his country, threats came
from family and people on the street, paramilitary groups, and governmental organizations. E.
described an attempt to reach out to his ethnic community in Canada, which lead to further
shaming and rejection.

E.: When I came here...I start looking for friends. I look for friends, I found someone who
is from my culture...Same language, same religion, same everything. Ok? He start
making fun of me because I’m gay. See? It’s a friendship, and I’m not gonna be happy
with this, I just get over it. In Canada, I just came here, I don’t want the same thing
happening, even if I’m here. So, yeah, this is bad, bad friendship...I don’t want it. So I
quit right away. And, everybody...is separate now. Yeah...and actually all my community is the same. They think about gay people, they are bad people, they're not cool, they’re not good. Hurt them, hate them, or whatever. [I] stay away, stay away from them, because they gonna say ‘Oh, you bring the shame for our community!’ Or whatever, and ‘Don’t let that guy come to your house because, he is not a good person.’ That’s why I stay, stay away from those kinds of relationship.

As narrated by E., when introduced to members of his ethnic community in Canada, E. experienced the same response of rejection, judgment, hatred, leading to emotional pain. Even in Canada, he did not belong and could not feel safe with his ethnic community.

S. described that when she and her family arrived in Canada, they were informed about a nearby mosque where people from their country met to socialize and worship. They were excited to meet others who spoke their language. However, soon after their family was placed in a low-income housing complex due to their special circumstances, they started facing jealousy, questions, and judgement from members of their ethnic community.

S.: They took us to the mosque to meet other people and we met other, big community. We meet them in mosque, and we are very happy, we have new family, we have new friends, we have new community, it’s very good. In 20 days, we moved from Welcome Place, we get this [house], also as a special status we had...When we came to this house, it is good, but we are not happy, because we expected better, we expected something like our house, something like that, you know...So our community, they start, ‘Oh, you are lucky...How did you get this one? This is hard to get, [this type of] housing, you know, long waiting. Just 20 days, you are lucky! No, no, maybe you have something... Oh, you know what, maybe you changed your religion from Muslim to Christianity, so for this reason you...’
Because all the community members, they rent here, they applied for the [low income] housing and no one got it until now...Some of them, it started feeling uncomfortable.

S. narrated how, to their surprise, they soon realized that the community divide that had devastated their family and caused them to seek exile, had also moved to Canada.

S.: And then we recognize that there is another group. They are meeting in a different mosque, big mosque...they are [the other religious group]. So, where are we now? We are in Canada. I left my family, my mother, my dad, my brother, my sister. Why we came here? I need to lead normal life, not stupid life! Not like, ‘Those people, don’t talk to them, don’t say hello to them, those people, those not good!’ What’s going on? I told my husband, he is [a religious group]...and I am [another religious group]. I told him, ‘We came here, and you survived, and you had a very bad experience with your community. And me too. So no one of us go with those two kinds of people.’...No one comes to my house, I don’t go to this mosque or this centre, we need to live and grow up my kids in good way. Not like, stupid way...They started to understand that we don’t want to join them, so they start, like, ‘Why you don’t come to mosque? Why you don’t come to center?...Oh, maybe you have friend, Canadian friend’...[silence]...Keep away from me! Because what I survived, no one from them survived. So, they have been here, they have a job, they have better life than what I have, and they look at me...So, I don’t need those people. I live alone, but my head is good, my kids are good...Because of one of them...I suffered, I lost all that I had...And we lived alone, two years, until now, we are alone here.

As described by S., those shocking revelations about continued community divisions were very difficult in the context of their traumatic history. S. described community conflict in
her country of origin coinciding with international military intervention. Prior to these events, the
two religious Muslim communities lived peacefully side-by-side in mixed neighbourhoods. She
and her husband were in a mixed marriage belonging to different religious groups. Her husband,
who suddenly found himself on the enemy side, refused to leave his home and family in spite of
the violent threats. Subsequently, their four-year-old son was abducted from their home by a
terrorist group, which demanded all of their possessions and ordered her husband to leave. Their
four year old was returned in a garbage bag 23 days later. He had been tortured and traumatized,
and became unrecognizable. S. described:

I suffered with my community, with my family. My family suffered with outside area, with
[the terrorist] groups, we were scared of them. And my husband and son suffered with
their community – before, everyone liked him, wanted him, he brought money and gifts.
Now he needed help from them, and no one could help.

Through these traumatic experiences, S. and her family learned that community could not
be trusted, that community divisions were extremely dangerous, and that community was no
longer a place where she and her husband could belong together. Conditions in Canada further
contributed to the community conflict, forcing members of both communities to compete with
each other for limited housing and financial resources.

Coming from a different geographic region, L. described a similar experience of
attempts to approach community in Canada, to eventually be faced with a threatening reality of
sharp community divide, which mirrored the exact circumstances he had fled from. As he
attempted to engage with community, he learned that majority of his ethnic group in Canada had
arrived during a different era, before the current government came into power. L. explained that
many community members who arrived during this period were supporters of the same
government that imprisoned, tortured, and drove him out of the country. Furthermore, he learned that having resided in Canada for years, these people were well established and used their privileged access to power and resources in order to promote this oppressive government.

L.: Those people, they think the government is doing good, but most of us we don’t know. But because they have upper hand here, they know the system, they know the language, they have stayed here, and they know everything, they have the resources even to say to the public here, to government, to the funders, they show them that they are helping the newcomers...And they don’t want us to talk our stories about the difficulties that we faced and what is going on in our country, they don’t want us to talk about it. They just want us to praise the government...and on the top of it to contribute money to the government that we fled from. We seriously complained, even this week they had fundraising...I don’t mind if my name is used, I just decided to speak up. ...I went to the Canadian government and I told the media, and there was a huge story in the media. And there were people who followed me who wanted to speak up and expose what’s going on in [country of origin]. So, there is a huge divide in the community...There is a big community that hates me, there is a big community that likes me, so we are divided. So this stuff also creates its own division.

Some participants described that associations with their ethnic community would jeopardize safety of their families left in the country of origin. In spite of his intense loneliness, P. avoided contact with his country’s community, fearing for the safety of his family. As he had fled the country in order to avoid further imprisonment and his family already suffered the consequences of his decision to leave, P. found his country’s community difficult to trust. He
also described that there were several distinct ethnic and/or religious groups residing in Canada, which had left his country for different reasons.

P.: *There are politics, trust issue. When I am in [first country of exile], I have a lot of friends, and...I [was] sure that they are ok, safe for me to be there with them. But here...I have few [country of origin’s] friends, I don’t go to social...Here also, I am not sure, I am not really sure, I don’t wanna be in danger. I am ok here, but I am worried about my family. You don’t know who is who, so...You don’t know that. Because I, I love my country, I love my people. Just, I don’t feel comfortable...I am ok, nothing is gonna happen to me, I am worried about my family...That’s what I am trying to do now just to hang out with different [ethnic groups].*

The participants described a dominant perception in the Canadian society, especially amongst service providers, that newcomers would and should establish strong connections with other members from their ethnic community living in Canada. Through settlement, health, and social services, they were often matched with interpreters, workers, or counsellors from the same country who spoke the same language. The participants described a widely spread assumption in Canada that people would be much happier if connected to their ethnic communities, attending the community’s centres or places of worship, and shopping at ethnic grocery stores. However, these connections proved to be threatening or re-traumatizing for some.

Through conversations with *key informants and participant observation*, I learned about creative ways in which some of the counselling services dealt with clients’ potential lack of trust in ethnic or country of origin’s community. One of the ways in which Bridge Clinic attempted to solve this problem was through contracting an interpreter who spoke the same language, but originated in a country that was geographically remote from the clients’ country of origin. For
example, an Arabic speaking interpreter from Saudi Arabia accompanied clients from Iraq at their counselling and medical appointments. This type of solution required sensitivity and awareness on the part of mental health service providers built through experience, learning, and exposure to various client related circumstances. However, not all service providers were aware of these potential problems.

**Positive community associations.** Some participants described ethnic and religious communities to be a positive source of identification and support. G. portrayed a process of gradual trust building and engagement with her ethnic community. She and her sister initially built a “multicultural community” through school and work, and could not trust their ethnic community during the first couple of years in Canada. She described her first contact with a woman from her country of origin who eventually “became like a mother” to her and her sister, inviting them to live with her and offering to help them find better jobs. She described not trusting this woman and saying no to her offers. G. narrated how her second contact with a person from her country of origin took place at the end of her second year in Canada.

*G.*: *And he introduced us to his family, his wife and children, and she is a very social person that connect everyone to each other. I always tell her ‘We should crown you as a someone who’s a...you are the social connection’, like, for everyone. She likes to connect women, if there is any special occasion, like weddings, or women giving birth, or, showers...And she is surprised that she doesn’t know there’s some...girls. And then she introduced us to the whole community. That was the connection for us with the community. We...have been here for two years, and people think we came...a few weeks ago. ‘How come you are in the country and we don’t know about you girls?’... And they called us ‘the strange girls.’...Every Friday [we went] to mosque to pray, and we have*
where to go friends...Sometimes if there is a wedding, she’d call us to see the community and explore many families around...And...after we connected with the community, we felt like, we move very fast than some of them we compared. There were people who came before us like, four, seven years and they were still insecure, they are not integrated, they are still looking, don’t know how to look for job and how to find...things that we feel we’ve mastered already [laughing]...

G. described that after this initial introduction and through her various work engagements, she met many “voiceless” people from her community. She described witnessing the struggle of women with families and seeing the plight of immigrant youth in the Canadian justice system, which motivated her to obtain more education and help her community. G. defined her community as “multicultural”, as she identified as a Canadian citizen and had numerous connections with the larger immigrant, language, and religious communities.

Other participants also described positive community associations. For example, most of C.’s friends in Canada were migrants who originated in the same country. He valued the experience of sharing common histories and remembering the same geographies, images, smells and sounds that lead to a sense of understanding and provided a context for his new experiences. As narrated by I., history, political struggle, and correcting injustices in his country of origin were of utmost importance for him. He strongly rejected any religious affiliation. However, his strong connection with ethnic community was enacted through political and social activism.

**Services in Canada.** Following is a vignette from my participant observation notes taken during one of my visits at one of the migrant serving agencies.

*I was invited to meet “community” of migrant survivors, which was gathering at a migrant-serving agency. I arrived early and found a spot on the couch in a small community...*
space. I noticed a rack with free clothes that had been donated, free for the clients to take. Paper plate faces decorated the walls with many different colours. The walls were covered with posters and children’s drawings. There were a few small rooms, some without windows. I noticed stains on the floor and breadcrumbs. The furniture was well used. An old rocking horse was placed in the middle of the room. A big dinner table with chips, jam, cookies, and bread on it was in another corner. A kettle was boiling. A woman was standing by the stove in the small communal kitchen, cooking yellow rice with peas. She introduced herself and offered me some yellow rice. Smell of food was everywhere.

I learned that the agency offered free vegetables on that day. A family of tall people walked in – a woman wearing a long black dress, her gray-haired husband, and two teenagers. The husband approached me and mentioned that he had three children, and that all were teenagers. His wife had a hip surgery and could not have any more children, but he was ok with it, had enough. He smiled. They packed vegetables, mostly greens, into their big bag.

A tall young man with long hair, wearing Western style shorts and sneakers walked in behind a traditionally dressed woman, who apparently was his mother. They filled their bags with food. An African woman, who came soon after, complained about the amount of food taken by that family. “They have no children and took so much food.” Two more families walked in, focused on getting their groceries. A woman started taking out vegetables from a bag that she had just finished filling, saying she did not know what to do with this food, or how to use these vegetables. Another woman was looking for clothes, but could not find any that fit her. Two other women took some clothes.
Twenty minutes later, the place was quiet again. Most people left. The food baskets were empty. The food was still simmering on the stove and there was no more water in the kettle. The agency workers returned to their offices and resumed their daily activities.

This vignette illustrates liveliness, sense of community, and opportunities for sharing and interaction that I observed at some of the agencies. However, through this observation, I also learned about poverty, systemic constraints, unfair competition, and associated feelings of shame that migrant survivors who could not afford to purchase the type food their families needed, experienced in their settlement process.

The participants described using various types of services in Canada. As most participants described engagement with at least some immigrant/refugee services and with mental health services, findings related to these types of services are presented below.

**Settlement services.** Most of the participants described using some of the services offered by immigrant and refugee serving agencies in their cities. These agencies included The Immigrant Services Society, Welcome House, and Mosaic in Vancouver, and Welcome Place, Hospitality House and Multicultural Family Place (LEAP Program) in Winnipeg. The participants described that they were aware that other services existed. However, as L. explained, “It was too much everywhere and once you pass through a lot of hardship you discover, there is another resource that I could have used! ...There is no one to tell you what it’s doing, so you don’t know.”

As described by L., lack of information about other services, the type of support that they offer and how to access them lead to underutilization of some potentially helpful services. Consequently, a general disconnection of services may result in repetitive services or partial services, which some newcomers may not have time or resources for.
For some participants, sponsoring groups and volunteer services connecting newcomers with persons from the receiving country were helpful. C. described that a volunteer family had been engaged with his wife’s family and, currently, with his own family, using the words “Canadian friends”. He described a close relationship with these friends who came to his house, invited his family to dinners, and called to connect and inquire about his family’s needs.

C.: Yes, we have Canadian friends. I can say close friends, like, they come to our house and they invite us to their house...They helped my wife, when my wife arrived here, they...They are very nice people. They always...call and ask...what you guys need, do you have any problems. They give us good advice we need sometimes...

P. was sponsored by the Hospitality House where he resided during his first nine months in Winnipeg. He described how the Hospitality House became a second home for him pointing that living surrounded by others and being cared about, made a significant difference for him during his lonely transition in Canada. P. illustrates the pivotal role of human connection and a place to call home in the initial period after arrival.

P.: This organization, they sponsor families. If you have family here, they sponsor it. But sometimes, they sponsor someone like me, don’t have anybody. When I came here, I stayed with Hospitality House. You stay there until you find a job...I stayed there actually for almost a year or so...I stayed there, they support me by everything. That made it more easy for me to settle down...For example, if I came here just by myself, and I don’t have anybody, I know I’ll get craaazy, I don’t think I could survive the situation here. But there is a lot of things helping, I have received a lot of help. It’s hard, and like I said, even if I am just surrounded by people, I feel ok. If I don’t have that people, I don’t know what I would do in my situation...It’s not money, because they have the house, they buy
us the food and everything, they are different...It’s private, it’s not like the government, but sometimes it is more than the government. It’s just, when we came here, they take us somewhere to go, like a family. I call it, that is my home. My second home...

S.’s story about her family’s experience with a refugee-serving agency was different. In spite of a generally positive experience with the agency, she described being matched with service providers who crossed professional boundaries, violating confidentiality and further exacerbating a general sense of threat that S. and her family had fled from. Through this process, she and her family experienced yet another repetition in the series of betrayals. She expressed feelings of shock finding out that the family’s secret that they had decided to leave behind was spread amongst the members of their ethnic community in Canada. She described being manipulated by a service provider in a way that threatened the very purpose of their migration to Canada, their family unity.

*S.: So, I ask for an interpreter...and [we were assigned]...two of them, one of them a counsellor, the other one like interpreter. So, we were very happy, because this one was a big problem – how will we deal, how will we speak, how...everything?....So we were happy, they took us to get the medical number, and they took us to Superstore, they show us places where we can get our things, they took us to the mosque to meet other people...We went to...a Canadian doctor, a clinic, and we had interpreter, from our community, and the doctor wanted to listen to our story, and my husband speak, and the interpreter interpreted to the doctor, and then we hear our story from all the [our country of origin] community. How do they know? When we came, we said it’s a secret, we put it in the bag, and we closed the zipper, we need to live a better life here, no one knows our [story]. just for my son, for medical things. But we needed to interpret it to the doctor...
S.: So, interpreter! And we get also problem from [an agency], our counsellor there...And he is working at [this agency] as a counsellor and interpreter with [our language] community. And he asked my husband, ‘Come to my office, I am a therapist.’ We must volunteer, we must be as a client for him, my husband and my son. ‘If no, the government will take your son from you.’ My husband, when he heard this word, and I was pregnant with my third baby, and he said... ‘Now I will leave, I am here in Canada, I am far away, I leave everything in [my country]...and here the Canadian government take my son from me? Why?’ He told him, ‘Because you are sick and you need therapy, you have to be with me, I will treat you, and if you are crazy and that doesn’t improve, you are tired, sick, you are not allowed to have your son. You do know the law here in Canada!’

S.’s narrative portrayed a serious breach of trust and intentional or unintentional practice of misinforming the client. Whether this dynamic was a result of a misunderstanding or a deliberate attempt of manipulation, this interaction lead to further isolation and fear for S.’s family.

**Mental health concerns and services.** Several of the participants described using mental health services. Some participants reported that they or their family members used psychiatric help, including medication, while other participants engaged in some form of counselling services, or used both counselling and psychiatric services. Some participants have been officially diagnosed with PTSD, while others described, not formally diagnosed, difficulties that they related to past experiences with violence. The participants in this study exclusively accessed specialized mental health services offered through agencies serving refugee populations. These agencies included VAST and Bridge Clinic in Vancouver, and AFTC in Winnipeg.
Several of the participants described a surprising revelation that once they arrived to Canada, the country where they no longer had to fear for their physical safety, their psychological condition related to previous traumatic experiences persisted or even worsened. The participants described experiencing intrusive and unwanted memories, insomnia, depression, feelings of fatigue, hyper-vigilance, and difficulty and trusting others. They described being afraid of police, Child and Family Services, and other governmental organizations. In the presence of this trauma related condition, the requirements of the participants’ new environment, often related to economic survival, remained the same. F. described his mental health difficulties upon arrival experienced in the context of economic and social pressures in Canada.

F.: So when I came here, wow man, I am here but I have to begin all over again, I have to start from, I have to fight all over again. And I am really, really weak, I don’t have any strength, no strength left over for me. I used...my all effort and energy to flee...Not to come here, to flee, to be able to survive, to be able to go through the whole process of refugee, which is a nonsense to me whatsoever, because, it’s another kind of politics to me. And it is really difficult. It is really, really horrendous experiences...What I’m trying to say is, when I came here I just was like, dead. And then, all over again, struggle. Society struggle, class struggle, it is anywhere. So I thought, I can’t do anything about it, so then I try to move, I try to engage, I try this and that, but still...

According to F., he was diagnosed with PTSD, symptoms of which he had experienced prior to coming to Canada, but had no explanation for them prior to this diagnosis. He described that before receiving the diagnosis of PTSD, he had been harsh towards himself. He believed that he did not invest enough effort and judged himself for his inability to participate in the world more actively and produce the results expected of him in the society. Receiving this diagnosis
provided an explanation, a normalizing way to conceptualize his difficulty, and offered a more compassionate way of looking at himself. However, as he explained, the expectations for adjustment, which included a high level of physical, social, and economic functioning, remained high in the receiving society in spite of his “disability”. After arrival, he continued to experience emotional and physical difficulties associated with previous traumatic exposure, and was, nevertheless, immediately faced with the tasks of survival in the new country, in spite of having no “strength” to deal with these demands.

F.: If I am a survivor of what is called violence... war... or, when I was child, when I was refugee... So, mentally, I get ill, because I can’t digest, as a human being, I can’t digest to cause pain for anyone... Still, I can’t digest that. Because of any reason, I can’t digest it. So if these things happen to me, by any definition, when I came here, I want to take a rest, but here is not for rest. It’s just you have to continue with this aggressive progressive society, to move on. It goes very fast, you can’t sit, you can’t take rest, you have to move, you have to move...

T.: You have to find a job, you have to...

F.: This and that... And I’m really mentally ill. I don’t have capacity for that. Alone.

T.: So, where are those pressures coming from, that you have to keep moving?

F.: Everywhere...

F.’s narrative highlights a need for better understanding of the needs of migrants arriving from the violent contexts. It illustrates lack of support in the receiving society, which further contributes to his difficulties, exacerbating the problems that he is working to overcome.

Similar to F., P. began our interview by sharing about his emotional difficulties and a subsequent journey through which he connected with services at AFTC soon after arrival.
P.: When I moved here, I had a real difficulty to adapt...[I started] living through my past experience and, it all just came back and I was a little bit sad and [I experienced] a lot of emotion. So, I needed someone to talk to me and figure out how I can come out of this situation or just to find a way again to adapt. Because when I was back home, I went through a lot, and then in [first country of exile]...I don’t think about what happened to me in the past, because...I had to survive, I had to think about what is happening tomorrow, so I didn’t have time, or I didn’t have that luxury to think about the past...I was busy surviving. When I came here, the first week, everything was working. Honeymoon time. And then I start thinking, I didn’t have anything to worry about or something, so it hit me, what happened to me. I said to myself, ‘Why have this happened to me?’ or, ‘It shouldn’t happen to me’ or, ‘I didn’t see my family for a long time’. Still, I didn’t see my family for seven years almost now. And, I start this question in my mind, and I need someone to talk to. And, I was in program called LEAP Program, run by Salvation Army...The reason I was in that program, I need someone to talk to, to see, because there was a lot of participants there from different countries, war affected countries. I went there because I need someone to talk to, to belong to, or to see, you know, to tell myself, I am not alone, there are a lot of people just suffering this. So I went there, I started the program, and the supervisor there, she told me about Aurora. I went there one day, I really needed to go there, and started working with Jayne. There were set backs, but there was a lot of progress that she guided me along to find...I have a fear of what’s gonna happen to my family and a lot of [pause] doubt, blaming myself because of this. If I get involved into a situation and I shouldn’t stop it. I know if I didn’t go that far, none of this would have happened, and after I moved from back home, I didn’t know
anything about my family, so I was worried something might happen to them because I left my country. That was just, it would give me hard time.

In addition to difficulties he experienced once he no longer had to worry about the physical necessities of survival, P. described his search for a community of survivors, those who would understand his experience and help him not feel alone. He provided a powerful description of his need to understand his difficulties in a shared context, where he could start building a sense of belonging even though this belonging was based on common experiences of suffering. Through this act of reaching out, he learned about counselling services. P.’s narrative also illustrated how a program designed for employment preparation of migrant survivors could also foster a sense of belonging and social connection, and provide a bridge to other services, such as counselling.

C. narrated that after arrival to Canada, he started suffering with “depression”, which he attributed to violence experienced in his country of origin. Elaborating on his psychological condition, he described a general sense of apathy, being unable, or unmotivated to engage socially, feeling emotionally disconnected, unable to engage in joyful activities, and having difficulty focusing and learning English. He shared an observation that many people from his country experienced similar difficulties once they started settling in a new country where they no longer had to fear for their physical safety.

C.: And the life that we had in [country of origin]. Most people who are my age and they were in [country of origin] when it was, fight, I think they have the same problem when they go to different countries, start living in a peace. They get that, that kind of sickness. My other sister is in Holland...When she arrived in Holland and start living there, she got the same problem. It took like, four years for her. [She struggled with] depression and, same like for me, she didn’t like to do something good and, yeah...And also, when
we arrive to different countries, and, different things happening, like, different culture, different language, and different jobs that...Sometimes you don’t like some jobs that [pause] you have to do it...

In their narratives, the participants clearly related their psychological difficulties, including emotional, cognitive and social problems, to their past traumatic experiences. However, most of them also described that these difficulties became more complicated with the challenges of economic and social survival in the host country. They described pressures and expectations placed upon them immediately after arrival that contributed to their level of stress and, once again, reproduced situations of helplessness and a lack of options. They described having no recovery time, no break or a buffer that would allow for healing, learning about the new culture/society, and learning the language. As described, being alone in the new country, away from family and familiar environments, also contributed to increased psychological difficulties in dealing with the impact of past trauma. Immediately upon arrival, the participants faced a challenging and complex situation, as they, with their histories and life experiences, became immersed in highly demanding environments while being separated from their loved ones, and removed from familiar geographies, and communities.

The participants in this study used psychiatric language of PTSD and depression, prominent in the Western European tradition. These psychiatric concepts seemed to provide a sense of understanding and, perhaps paradoxically, de-pathologizing, as they allowed the participants to see their problems as normal human responses to the abnormal circumstances that they had been exposed to.

The participants spoke very positively about services received from counselling agencies in dealing with trauma-related difficulties. Agencies that the participants attended were
specifically designed to work with the refugee populations and none of the participants reported accessing main-stream counselling services.

C. described that, after four years of being in the country, he attempted to learn English. However, at the time, he struggled with “depression”, experienced difficulties with concentration and memory, and his learning progressed minimally. C. noticed significant improvement in his mood, ability to study, and ability to engage socially, after attending several sessions at AFTC.

C.: *Everything was hard, didn’t like to do anything. Even at school, I couldn’t concentrate...All the time that people were talking to me, I was watching them. Just watching. And I could realize that they were saying something, but...Yeah, the people were thinking that I am ignoring them, because I was watching them like, they were talking, but I didn’t know what they are saying exactly. And finally, my school counsellor, I told them that I had a problem, that when my teacher explaining something, that I cannot get it. So, and they sent me to Aurora Family...I went there, visited Mira for a couple of times, and they were, there I got some positive results for that...Now, when somebody is speaking I can...listen to them and I can understand what they are talking about. And also, I can understand my teacher when explain something. And also, I have patience to do some work at home or listen to my kid. I have patience when he is crying or yelling, but before I had no patience to listen to somebody. I was very upset.*

C. was very precise in describing his problems. He clearly identified the difficulties and the subsequent improvement in various areas of his functioning. He attributed at least a part of his progress to services received at AFTC. However, he also described other changes in his life that coincided with this progress, such as improved economic circumstances for his family, his wife’s recovery, quitting construction job, and ability to start learning English.
Multiple roles of the counselling services. The participants described that specialized counselling agencies they attended were helpful in several different ways. These agencies not only provided trauma focused treatment, but also offered a sense of connection, a relationship with the therapist, and a community of survivors. This multiple role of migrant survivors’ counselling agencies is illustrated in F.’s narrative:

F.: And organization like VAST had helped me a lot, because when I was very ill, still I am ill, but not severely as I was...helped me to reduce, to ease the pain. Other than that, I wasn’t be here. So, it is really difficult and challenging that I deal with. And, I want to say, depend on my experiences, when I’m dealing with mental illness, it’s very difficult, it’s very, very difficult. And sometimes, I can’t do nothing. I can just be, dissolve. Ok, in such instances, it is what it is, I can’t do anything. Anything does not make sense to me. That’s, I am not moving, I am not trying to, you know, get better, this and that, no, no...Sometimes I can do literally nothing. I have to sit down at home, and then, not seeing anyone to ease the pain, to ease the problem...

T.: So, you are saying that VAST helped you with, I think you used the word ‘pain’...

F.: Ease the pain...coming here is like a small community sometimes...In a way that, a lot of people like myself, include myself, coming here with the pain, problem, mental illness and...survivor of torture, survivor of violence, women with, you know, passing a lot of violence and this and that. So, yeah, there are very common ground...The same problem, the same. And sometimes it’s difficult to see the people with the pain, because it’s triggering the trauma, it’s pulling me back to, what is called, a flashback. And some time, it’s good to talk, and to see how other people, they had pain, and helping each other to reduce the suffering. Sometimes it’s very helpful, but sometimes not. That is how,
many, many people, they came from all over the world, they are survivor of any kind of violence, whatever you name it. I can’t name it, but I see a lot of people that are worse than myself. And, sit down, we talk, sometimes we get crazy, just back to trauma, flashbacks and so on.

As described in F.’s story, for the participants, these connections were not always pleasant. In addition to providing a common sense of understanding, they sometimes brought back difficult memories, triggered flashbacks, and lead to re-experiencing past horrors. In spite of these difficulties, F. did not claim that such interactions should be avoided. In his narrative, these connections lead to further consideration of the circumstances, society, and the world in which levels and forms of violence, beyond boundaries of human understanding, were permitted to take place. In F.’s words, such shared experiences of violence and trauma lead to an uncomfortable state of being unable to comprehend, make meaning of, or “digest” memories of people harming each other.

As described, specialized counselling agencies provided an avenue through which participants, symbolically or practically, re-created connections with others who were experiencing similar problems. Also, therapeutic relationship was described as a crucial helpful component. The participants described a complex role of the therapeutic relationship. According to the participants, the relationship partially replaced intimate connections that were missing, as interaction and information shared, at times, resembled conversations that would normally take place within a family unit, or between close friends. P. compared the therapeutic relationship to his relationship with his family, in which a sense of belonging played a significant role.

P.: The services like Aurora. I’d, like to say the people like me came here alone and Aurora kind of service, or someone that can just help [them] get through their problems,
that’s an important thing, it’s the basic thing, it’s basic. To continue that service for newcomers, it’s really needed... That helps a lot. I am sure a lot of people just getting a lot of problems... Therapists can make you find a way to, or to give you suggestions, or give you ideas what to think about things. That’s why I say it’s important to have the therapy, because some people, you don’t have money. Because it’s free. If it’s paid, I don’t think I’d go there, in that program. I don’t think I’d seek that program. But because it’s free, I get a lot of needs met. If we have this program continue, the same program like this program at Aurora, it’s really helpful to... feel like you belong and... to transition from another country here, to feel like you have someone. That’s a big deal. That’s really important.

T.: Would therapy, would what Jayne does be something you would do in... [country of origin]... would you look for that kinda service?

P.: I’d never been in therapy before so I never talked to someone like that. Usually I would talk to family and... Now it’s a family, and that’s ok... Yeah, it’s different, it’s not the same, but you always think about what you get, right? And you take from it, you benefit from it. Sometimes you open up more than you would with your family, you know.

As narrated by P., in the absence of available close relationships, such as those with family and friends, the counselling relationship provided a significant first connection, a context within which a sense of feeling understood and accepted was fostered, and difficult memories were shared. The counselling relationship also provided a context for cultural interchange, a place where social rules were enacted and exchanged, and a place where rules of the new culture and knowledge and wisdom of the old were discussed. However, from the participants’ stories it is also clear that, due to the nature of the therapeutic practice, therapeutic relationships can be
deceiving to a person missing their loved ones and looking for new relationships. They can be misperceived, construed as something they are not, based on the experience of social vulnerability of someone missing their close intimate connections. Described in the next segment is P.’s understanding of the nature of the therapeutic relationship.

P.: At the beginning when I came here, as I said, I had hard time to adapt to things, but when I talked, you know, when I talked with Jayne, that’s now the only thing. I know someone thinking about me and worrying about me so, I have a friend to talk to. Some people, they don’t give it time… but she gave me time to talk to me or something. So I feel like I have someone to talk to...That’s how it’s helpful.

T.: And that contributed to your sense of belonging in some way...

P.: Yeah, in some way. At least, I have someone to achieve whatever, take courses or something. Sometimes, honestly, when I am here [pointing to his apartment], if I close my door, if something happens to me now, the only place that can call me, the work can try to contact me, or a friend from somewhere, but, like I said, if something happened to me, nobody is going to contact me...That...worries me too.

This was a poignant description of how once P. closed his apartment door, he disappeared from other people’s minds, which in his world, was almost equal to non-existence. He described that having a therapist who cared about him and was interested in his life was very important at the stage when other relationships were unavailable or non-existent. He described a comforting sense of knowing that, at least, he still existed for the therapist even when his apartment door was closed and he was alone. This sort of description also pointed to a tremendous responsibility entrusted to the therapist, which extended beyond the walls of the therapy room.
S. described that counselling significantly contributed to trauma recovery for both her son and her husband. She also described her family’s relationship with AFTC as one of the small number of relationships in the new country that could be trusted, as this trust had been gradually built. Even though both her son and her husband continued to experience certain difficulties, S. shared her perception that many symptoms of PTSD had been reduced. S. family’s openness and interest in working with a therapist was an indication of their incredible resilience and desire to improve their lives and free themselves from the influences of violence experienced in the past. They reached out and requested therapy service in spite of their prior experience with psychological treatment, in which their trust was betrayed.

_S_: Until he met one doctor from [country of origin], and he told [the doctor] our story and he said, ‘I am a volunteer to deal with your son and treat him medically, I am a therapist and have office...in [capital of their new country] and I am very happy to help.’ And we are very happy to help my son [emotionally]. Every time we went, he recorded him by video, and we ask him why, and he explained, ‘I will repeat, and I will know where we can point, you know?‘...One day we watch TV, my mom called me and she told me, you know, she told me, ‘Why you did that? ’ I told her, ‘What I did?’ She told me, ‘Why you let your son be on TV, and they, all the people now know his story? Why? You are not good! That’s hurt his feelings, why you did that? That’s not fair!’ I said, ‘Mom, what are you talking about? I don’t understand what you say!’ She said, ‘You allowed for him to be on the TV and the channel, with his doctor and...’ So the doctor make the video, all together, and tell to the channel, [country of origin’s] famous channel. And he is a doctor, he deal with the...posttraumatic stress, and he is very good at this point, and all the people if you want help...
T.: They didn’t ask for your permission, or anything?

S.: No permission. Nothing, nothing. So I go to internet and I google the channel name and doctor name, and the program, and I saw my son like he was... So, he scared all this time. And he collected all this and they show him, they show to the people how bad he was, and then he is totally better... Anyway, we called him, this doctor, my husband very angry and he said, ‘I will call the police, I will complain in the Ministry for doctors or something like that.’ Then he told him, ‘Don’t worry, I will pay you $200.’

In a country without much professional regulation, the helping relationship suddenly became an exploitive relationship in which the “doctor” used client confidential information, without asking for permission, in order to gain further professional benefit. It is easy to take professional relationships for granted in a country like Canada. However, these professional relationships can be complicated by prior histories with similar relationships. S.’s story illustrates the sensitive nature of the therapeutic relationship and the vulnerability with which clients entrust the psychological profession when sharing their life stories, or allowing to be video-recorded.

**Mental health services in Vancouver and Winnipeg.** Through participant observation and conversations with key informants in Vancouver and Winnipeg, I also learned about differences and similarities in organization, structure, and concerns related to provision of mental health services to this population. Differences were related to size, social composition, economic and political circumstances, and to each city’s specific position and relationship with their provincial governments. The cities differed in ethnic composition, community supports, and availability of ethnic group and/or presence of ethnic neighbourhoods. They greatly differed in respect to housing situation and life expenses for the migrant newcomers, affecting their standard of living and ability to access various services. For example, in both cities, similar trauma related
counselling was conducted, with therapeutic relationship and safe trusting environment playing a crucial role in the process of recovery. Competent trauma treatment was offered and interpreters were often used. However, due to systemic constraints, Vancouver clients often attended sessions infrequently, at times only being able to schedule one session every month or every six weeks. In this city, majority of migrant survivor clients lived far away from clinics that were centrally located, and travelling to and from their appointment could take several hours. In addition to time related challenges, travelling also presented financial pressures, as migrant survivors had to use expensive transportation and take time off work to attend sessions. They also had to find child-care for several hours and miss English classes. Consequently, therapy progress was slow, at times, due to low frequency of sessions. On the other hand, physical distance rarely was an issue in Winnipeg, and clients were able to attend their sessions more frequently. However, Winnipeg clients from certain countries of origin did not have a large ethnic community in their proximity. They had no ethnic centres and stores available, and lived in a less diverse environment, frequently facing racial and ethnic prejudice and oppression. Due to expensive housing, migrant survivors living in Vancouver would often look for more affordable housing in remote suburbs, which limited their access to English schools, services, and community resources which were centrally located. This, at times, contributed to migrant survivor clients’ experiences of isolation and loneliness in Canada. In order to solve housing problems, migrant survivors in Vancouver often shared their accommodations, even when they did not feel comfortable with this, or had a difficult time trusting others due to past trauma history. Clients in Winnipeg were more comfortable with their housing situation, although they also had to look for affordable housing, which was often located in areas in the city that did not
feel safe due to high gang activity. Compared to migrant survivors living in Vancouver, they could at least afford to live without roommates.

Mental health services for the migrant survivor population were organized differently in each city. Due to its larger size and larger migrant survivor population, services in Vancouver were offered through several different agencies, which were interconnected and funded through the same source. These services collaborated with each other and held joint monthly meetings in order to coordinate services, discuss their work, and offer support and feedback. In Winnipeg, two agencies providing mental health services to migrant survivor population functioned independently, although efforts were made to exchange information and collaborate on certain projects. The funding structure was also very different in the two cities, with a centralized process in Vancouver and more independent funding structure in Winnipeg. At the time this study was conducted, mental health services were still receiving funding through the settlement sector, but in preparation for transition of funding to CIC, providers in each city were anticipating major changes.

At the time of data collection, mental health services had a place within the settlement sector in both cities, and their significant role within this sector was somewhat recognized. However, in both cities, managers and providers of mental health services for migrant survivors of political violence struggled with the transition to CIC, which was imminent within the following year. In Vancouver, it was anticipated that funding would no longer be received for these services through the settlement sector. In Winnipeg, the future of mental health services looked slightly more positive due to the strong support of Manitoba Labour and Immigration. However, both cities were facing an unknown future regarding continuation of mental health services due to funding issues.
Governments and their institutions. As discussed, most participants included in their narratives extensive descriptions of violence experienced in the country of origin, subsequent migration journeys involving temporary places of residence, and oppression faced along their migration paths. Inherent in these narratives was a described sense of fear and mistrust in relation to governmental structures, institutions, and organizations. Those who had been persecuted, imprisoned, threatened, or tortured by the governments, militias, and police in their countries, described difficulties trusting governmental institutions in Canada. L. shared his observation about the migrant survivors’ community and also reflected about his own experience in regards to legal system, personal rights, and accessing governmental services.

L.: People don’t know their rights when they come. They don’t know even that they can say no. So whenever there is, they say no, they think they will not even get the services here. They think they can do something that they are afraid of. They are afraid from police, it’s very difficult for [country of origin’s] person to go to the police and complain, it’s very difficult. If you see police, that is a different story. The mentality we have about police is arresting, beating up, imprisoning, and sometimes maybe killing you. So you don’t like to go to the police...that’s the mentality. And the relationship with the government, and the trust is, I think it’s being built everywhere...when you go to any kind of community meetings, you repeatedly say these things. It helps you to trust, and it helps others also to build their trust. Not just saying it in orientation, it doesn’t bring people into a trust level of a system, so they can use the services, be it the police, when they are threatened, be it the legal system, and...

I have never gone to, lots of times, even if I am in tension with lots of people and people many times calling me names, I never call the police. Cause it’s difficult, I never
want to go to the court and deal with these kinds of things. Yeah, so I don’t call, maybe I will end up in court, so I don’t do anything about it. If I have anything going on, I just ask if I can resolve it, if not, I don’t wanna complain about anything that I see or what happens to me. That’s my perception.

G. described that people from her ethnic community rarely accessed governmental services. She explained that members of her ethnic community experienced legal difficulties, and at times faced criminal charges based on their lack of understanding of the Canadian law.

G.: And I thought there were a lot of immigrant women, and I see the struggle of women, families, like single moms, some people I worked. So I sat as an interpreter and did different kind of organizations. I worked sometimes with the court system and I see many youth there because some of them they don’t know how they got there...because they don’t know the system, and they don’t know the law, they get in so many troubles. Some of them they are aware, some of them, they don’t understand why they are in prison...So I felt that I had to do some big things for the community, we had to build...because we didn’t have [country of origin] community...

However, even when reaching out in situations of extreme fear, one of the participants did not receive help that she and her family needed. In an attempt to stop the escalating incidents of bullying directed against the entire family and, especially, against their son, S. reached out to police and other authorities for help. In her narrative, however, the help her family needed was never received, as the family could not identify the perpetrators with their last names and their addresses. As she narrated, it was her understanding, from the orientation she attended upon arrival to Canada, that family had certain rights in Canada, including a right to feel safe. She believed that she should call police if she felt threatened. However, police and other authorities
all claimed that the incident was beyond their area of responsibility. In this situation, no organization claimed responsibility for helping S.’s family.

S.: If they can throw the eggs, maybe they can throw the fire, or gas, or something not good for us and all of us die...I’m desperate...So, I have a very big problem. I called the police, also. You know, at night...I said, ‘I need milk, I don’t have milk, I need to go to Superstore to get milk’. When I came back I saw this egg. So they watched me when I left. So I don’t know, if my husband is not here, my car is not here, they will come do something, we don’t know. We are tired people...you know, we came from full of fearness...I don’t know how I can deal with them. I called 911, because we studied at school, they said any fear, anything not normal, just call 911 and they will call you back. And really, we called 911 at 10 o’clock at night. And they called us, ‘What’s happened?’ And I am so scared. I don’t know, I can’t speak with them over the phone. And my husband said, please, I need interpreter to translate, because I am very scared, I have lot of fear, and they bring interpreter over the phone, and he explained the situation from when we came and until now. Like three years, they play with us, or what...And they sent two police for us. They said, ‘Sorry, we can’t help you unless you have the address or the last name for them’. We don’t know that, their address, or their last name, we just know the first name for those guys...

The receiving society. In their description of Canadian community, participants used terms such as “coldness”, “privacy” and “distance”. The participants described being perceived as different in the host culture. They described experiences of being socially removed, difficulties with social engagement with the host community, as well as experiences of discrimination in social, employment, and other contexts.
The participants described being able to engage with the Canadian community only on a superficial level and experiencing a sense of disconnect and isolation. For example, L.’ narration how experiences of difference and difficulty engaging with the host community lead to familiar feelings of isolation for him and his family.

L.: *We live in a neighbourhood that’s totally different. We are trying to get their culture, they have kids, at least, and the kids are good in getting you together, but there is no neighbour that comes into our house. We just say hi and bye from the fence or when they are coming in and out. There are people who kinda make noise on our other side. That kinda scares you, and there you see some suspicious activities going on, and you don’t know if those are things that you can report and if you report, what is to happen to you so…no. Yeah, for sure there is struggle. But I think, because we left the country and we have so many things, we kinda get used to it by being only by yourself and not knowing what your environment is. We are used to it.*

P. shared his observation about private lives that people lived in Canada, which made maintaining a meaningful connection difficult.

P.: *Here, you know, life is just privacy. And then, as much as I am trying to make friends in Canada…it’s people that…surround themselves with themselves, or they don’t have time just to make a friend or something. Living always busy life…I went out to Canada Day celebration, and that day it hit me, because everybody was a couple or with a family around and I was standing by myself. That was the first time I felt alone and I blame myself. That’s because I work two jobs and I didn’t have time to make a friend. Or, I didn’t make a lot of effort to make a friend. I started feeling like, ‘Oh my god, I don’t have anybody’. I used to be surrounded by people and sometimes my phone doesn’t*
[ring]...Yeah, it’s very different. In [first country of exile], you live in group, so you know you just live in a group, you talk with a friend, you always live with people. Here...[You are] in this apartment, by yourself and everything. If you have a friend, you want to leave them alone, you don’t wanna bother. In [first country of exile], if you are living your life, you live somebody’s life because you worry about them, you know what’s gonna happen to them, you know their life and, that’s the kinda person I am...I worry about people, so now I just feel like I don’t have anything, anybody to worry about. Even not have myself. If you don’t have people to worry about or to know what happened to them...it’s very hard. You don’t have time, anybody doesn’t get to know anybody, you don’t get to know each other, because of busy lives, and it’s hard to make, develop that friendship, how we made them in [first country of exile]. Because everybody there they lived their lives and you were together. But here, you have to make a friend. I tried to open myself to make a friend but it is not the same...I made friends here...but still, at the end of the day, you feel alone. You get together, you talk about something, you drink a coffee, and then come home...that’s it. It’s not like before...You don’t bring anything with you, thinking about them, or to think about something.

In P.’s world, friendships extended beyond physical spaces. They existed beyond closed doors. For P., friendships involved knowing about someone’s life and thinking about them even when they were not physically present. However, his experience in Canada was different. Communication stopped, interaction ended, and the person disappeared once they entered a different space or engaged in a different activity. P. blamed himself for his isolation. He believed that being unable to find more time to invest in social efforts was his fault. However, his economic and educational circumstances, feeling like he had no choice but to work two jobs in
order to support himself and his family in other countries, did not allow for much social time. Under these circumstances, he prioritized his family. He chose to work endless hours in order to provide for them. He faced many obstacles in his efforts to build his social circle in the new country: his own circumstances, circumstances surrounding his new environment, economic pressures and work habits of other people, as well as different social rules regarding engagements and relationships. Yet he only blamed himself for his loneliness.

**Larger systemic factors.** The factors described in this section do not form a separate group, but are rather an integral part of the context within which all previously described relationships took place. These factors belong to a context that shaped the participants’ social connections and was being shaped by them. For the purpose of clarity these factors are described separately.

**Education, opportunity, and future.** Although the participants greatly differed in educational experiences in their countries of origin, all of the participants attributed a significant value to education and expressed strong appreciation of educational opportunities, for themselves and for their children, in Canada. G. narrated about a significant value assigned to education by her family. For her and her family, education equalled hope for the future. Under conditions of exile in Africa, educational opportunities were non-existent, which propelled her family to send one of their children abroad in order to gain education and re-establish a sense of hope for the future. Even though she was a daughter, her family entrusted G. with responsibility to gain education.

G.: *Back home, we had the war and we flee for our lives, and we left everything behind, everything that we owned. We just freed our lives and had to start new life from the beginning. And we go to second countries that we had to live our lives, we all survived*
day by day, but time was going by without any education, without any hope for improvement for life, like, financially or educationally. It was most difficult for our parents to see us children growing up without any education or future, hope for future. And my father who hoped for a family member to go outside of that country, that was another hope for the family to survive and improve their lives. And, this was the first choice for the men...I have an older brother, so I am the second...And the brother was, the first choice was for him to go to India to study, to go outside and bring that hope, but he chooses to marry first. So, he fell in love and he said 'I cannot leave my wife behind.' And I felt that...I didn’t want to start life there, I didn’t want to start this life that we are already not satisfied with. We need for immigration...

Some of the participants acquired university degrees, some worked as professionals in their countries, some started university, and for some, educational opportunities were taken away under oppressive regimes, threatening situations, and circumstances of migration. With the exception of one person, the participants experienced difficulties having their prior education recognized in Canada. For some, this process of acquiring recognition or upgrading their education in order to create future educational opportunities was stressful. In spite of having completed first year of university in his country, P. was required to upgrade his high school education in order to be able to apply at a university. He described feelings of confusion and frustration, as he was trying to navigate through educational obstacles and complete adult high school requirements.

P.: What made it difficult for me, when it comes to school...sometimes I really get frustrated because when you start something, they ask you to do one thing, you spend that much time and a lot of effort and when you go to them and bring them this paper, they tell
you you need to add to it. It feels like sometimes they don’t want you to succeed in that. Because they demand a lot, they don’t accept anything you had before, so they don’t just, they don’t recognize what you have so that’s reeeally frustrating, yeah…Even here if they tell you, you do this language course, you should be ok, so you do the language course, ‘Ohhh you have to do this thing!’ Because the policy has changed. When these policies change sometimes, you feel frustrated, you think they don’t want you to graduate, they don’t want you to, there is a lot, just frustrating…But it’s not only those changes. They changed the law for newcomers, they changed that too, so…they don’t want us to graduate. That’s one thing. That I don’t like. They should give more recognition or something. Yeah, you know, encouraging us, you know immigrants are frustrated easily and some people, they say, ‘Oh, forget it’, they try and they give up…It’s soo hard, you can’t do it. The difference is, there is more help, and on this side, they could give more help, or give recognition. Sometimes you can’t learn. They say you can’t go to this course because you don’t have this one. And instead of saying that, go to this course at the same time, take this other course, instead of saying you cannot take this course, stop you from taking the course, why don’t you take both of them…To make it easier for us, it’s really discouraging…

T.: So you are talking about two things. One is, when you come with credentials from another country, they don’t recognize that…and the other is, when you are here and want to take courses…

P.: Every time the system is change. This year for next year, you say, ok, I’m gonna take this, this, this for next year will be ready. So when it comes next year, you know last year was this, and we changed it. Now we have to go back and take another course to...It
is not just me, a lot of people get frustrated. I have a strength and I say ok, I wanna graduate so...

F. also assigned high value to education, which was instrumental in his coping with the difficulties encountered upon arrival to Canada. In an unrecorded portion of the interview, he shared that he attended an adult education program called “Gathering Education Centre”, a part of Vancouver School Board Association. He described that education at this centre helped him to “settle down”, as his teacher and the entire school helped to “ease the pain”. F. shared that he re-experienced traumatic memories and encountered flashbacks during the time he attended his courses. However, the program was paced in a way that fit the needs of each student’s diverse circumstances. He compared education with this program with therapy, as high school provided him with a different perspective, and prompted him to think twice. F. shared that the self-paced course had since been cut due to budgetary constraints and that, in spite of letters of support written by him and other students, the program no longer existed.

As illustrated, the participants equated education with a sense of hope and a way to create future opportunities for themselves and their families. For some, education served as a source of motivation to leave the country, while others expressed hope for education of their children. E. shared that he was hoping to complete adult high school and enrol into a college. At the time of our interview, C. was preparing for an entrance exam in order to enrol into adult high school. F. completed his program and P. was nearing completion. G. completed adult high school and subsequently enrolled into a college. Unfortunately, she had to discontinue her education due to financial constraints, but education continued to be her biggest dream and she was planning to return to school once her financial situation improved.
All but one participant attended English classes designed for newcomer population. The participants reported mixed experiences with these classes, ranging from extremely positive to extremely negative.

**Employment.** Information that majority of the participants secured employment during the first year after arrival in Canada might appear as surprisingly positive. However, most of the participants described difficult employment circumstances and not working the types of jobs that they were hoping for. They described having to work long hours at multiple jobs that involved heavy physical labour and did not allow time for any other activities. They described being exhausted and stressed, being away from home for long hours, and having very little resources left for learning English, furthering their education, or establishing new social relationships.

Five months after arrival in Canada, G. secured employment as a dishwasher. She described this as the job she “hated the most”. G. explained that she did not have a choice but to accept this job, as being on government assistance which paid a bit over $1000 for her and her sister was not sufficient to cover the life expenses in one of the most expensive city in the world. In addition, she had to help her family and pay back immigration loan for her and her sister. Within the first year, she and her sister collected enough funds to pay off their loan to the government, support family back home, and send enough money for their family’s immigration application. She described high levels of stress that she experienced during that time, as she was trying to complete adult high school in addition to working multiple jobs.

*G.: We were working very hard, we were working very, very hard. I remember, I have a sensitive stomach, so much stomach problems, and it was from the stress. And the symptoms, now, when I work with psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors as you, and when they describe the symptoms that they have, I used to…I recognize, but at that time I didn’t know*
that was the symptoms... I had difficulty so much to concentrate, it was bad experience. As much as I tried hard to understand, it was difficult for me to focus sometimes, and I don’t know why sometimes, because I’m so stressed. Now I understand... One day it was difficult for me having a test in adult school, I need to hold on to my schooling, but at the same time, I had to hold on to my job, which becomes very difficult, and the family is waiting for us. I don’t know what to do... I was going to 98B Line bus from Vancouver to the airport, and everyday I would do my homework on the bus. That was my desk for homework, and it wasn’t enough. It wasn’t enough. So I had this, the complaint I was having was like, stomach, all these symptoms, which now I know it’s caused through stress.

C. immigrated to Canada sponsored by his spouse and was not eligible for any financial help. Under the financial pressures of life in Canada, and having to support family left behind, he felt that he had no choice but to immediately start working. As narrated by C., the only employment option available to a person like him, who had lived in exile since his teenage years, without any access to education, and who did not speak English, was construction work. He described how these employment circumstances contributed to his mental health difficulties.

C.: And I didn’t know English very well and I...was new in the city, so right away I started working and I... also come far away from my parents, and had nobody here, like I had my wife and no close friends. So all of that, I am working and, at the same time, far away from my family and from my country, that affect me too. Like, negative effect on me.

P. found employment and moved out on his own nine months after arrival. At the time of the interview, he was working two jobs, full time plus part time, and was enrolled in school. He was planning to engage in school full time in the following month. His situation seemed to had given him a false impression of having chosen this type of life for himself, but as he talked more
about it, it became obvious that he did not have much of a choice. His schedule did not allow much time for social activities, self-care, or even for academic work.

P.: There are a lot of people here too. I just moved here. I didn’t have time, I’ll make time for it. Like I said, that’s my fault. I didn’t put a lot of effort into it. Because I wake up at six o’clock in the morning, I leave my house at seven and come at 11 at night. So I have school, that’s my fault, you know, not making a lot of effort. Other than that, there is a lot of place to hang out. There is a lot of social. There is a lot of places where I can feel I can open myself, just go looking around, find where I belong or what, stuff like that. I didn’t give time to myself...I can work less or, you know the system, you have to work...you have to pay your bills. The life, I know it’s still gonna be the same if I try to make less time to do this stuff. Other than that, you can’t change it, unless you just live with somebody, because you have to pay your bills...I have to work that much because I support my family, support myself. The system is like that...I know it’s gonna be tough but I just can’t manage it myself. [I have] no time to meet friends. I am by myself, you know, just...If I didn’t work, nobody is going to pay my rent...And I don’t have a lot of close friends to borrow money from...I need my security...

T.: And you also go to school. Is that every day?

P.: Yeah. Nights. Last semester, I took two days, only Tuesday and Wednesday but now I am taking Monday to Thursday, four days...and I am working...I have full time work from 8am to 4pm, my full time job. So my classes start at 6pm to 9:30pm, so that’s what I’ll do...am not gonna have time but I just...To study, I am hoping to, after I finish at 9:30, I will have time to go see friends or study, or before class, I finish at four, so I go try to go to gym or...But still it’s gonna be difficult. You have to work hard.
E. started working only three months after his arrival to Canada. He explained that the government assistance was not sufficient to support his needs for survival in Vancouver, repay his government immigration loan, and send money to his family in his country of origin. With pride, he talked about his accomplishments in Canada, being able to learn English, work two jobs, and provide for the financial needs for himself and his family in his country of origin.

*E.: After I came here in three months. I worked, I learned English, I go to school to learn English, and I finished my consultation with the counsellors and everything. I paid my loan, and, I did everything right...I had a lot of time but I paid it all. And, I have my life. I’ve been working for, right now, a year and a half, in my company. I have...a really good position there.*

*T.: What do you do?*

*E.: I work front desk, it’s better than other people. Some people, like, they start with housekeeping...I start from the beginning, from a zero. And...I have extra job, I do promoting for that company, I go outside on weekends three times a month or two times a month. I go outside, and talk to the people, make communication, because I have, because they told me ‘You have very good skills to communicate to people’... If somebody I didn’t know, I say ‘Hey, how is it going?’...I start opening up. And they gave me that extra job, promotion...the same company...I’m student...I have a nice life now and everything is good...and all what I want, I want just my boyfriend, yeah, that’s all.*

Other participants described long working hours in addition to having to respond to family responsibilities, attending to small children, or being engaged with community in various capacities. L. described difficulties finding employment and balancing work with his other duties. He only slept five hours per night for the entire week prior to our interview.
For the participants in the current study, finding employment in Canada was not a problem. However, their work conditions and the types of jobs available posed significant difficulties, requiring them to work long hours and accept jobs that were physically exhausting, that they strongly disliked, and that left very little room for educational advancement. According to the participants, these limited opportunities in the labour market, their credentials not being recognized, and low salaries, resulted in high levels of stress, affecting their physical, social, and psychological well-being.

The participants also described experiences of discrimination in the labour market, in their specific places of employment, or in their efforts to secure employment. This perceived discrimination and injustice is discussed below.

**Experiences of injustice and discrimination.** Arriving from oppressive environments, the participants described that they developed refined tools for detecting injustice and discrimination, and for coping effectively. However, as described in their narratives, discrimination in Canada hindered the participants’ attempts to overcome past trauma, amplified experiences of isolation, and generated feelings of helplessness.

**Employment related discrimination.** I. arrived to Canada with a Master’s level training in Engineering followed by ten years of professional work experience. He described “unseen” discrimination frequently encountered while he was searching for permanent employment.

*I.*: *I told you that I am in between jobs right now, actually, I am looking for a job...I had some experiences, just because I am from, I am from a Muslim country, they have, I don’t know what it’s called, pre-judgement, not even telling me...In some cases I am better than the other candidates, but I am not ever selected for the job. And nobody tells me the reason. And that happens especially among the White Canadians. Yeah, they just assume...*
that I am coming from an extremely religious culture, and I am quite opposite of that. So first of all, I am an atheist, I am a democrat, I am a 100% secular person...I am a hard worker, so I hold the positive traits. But that doesn’t matter, they make their decision...[information about my background] is on my resume...you have to put your education, so they never ask.

T.: Yeah. And your name...
I.: Yeah, actually, just because of that, I actually changed my name...Not officially...I go with name John...I think, it’s so funny...they approach you differently. Can you believe that? Talking to a John is friendlier than talking to a I. Those are the same guys!

T.: So, what’s that like for you? How does that affect you?
I.: First of all, actually, I am still looking for a job...Yes, that’s the reason...

I. described his experience of discrimination in the labour market based on his name, country of origin, and related prejudice. In spite of being the “the opposite” from what was assumed about him, he did not get a chance to demonstrate his skill and explain his beliefs. His narrative depicted ridiculousness of a situation in which he was treated with more respect when using an English name. I.’s use of an English name when approaching his potential employers represented a creative act of resistance to this systemic discrimination in Canadian society. I.’s resilience allowed him to laugh at the absurdity of this situation.

In addition to his own experience with work related oppression, L. described circumstances that prevented other migrants in Canada, who held less power than he did, from requesting help.

L.: So if that’s my perception, when I am reading lots of things about rights and responsibilities and other things that I can do, think about someone who can’t read or
understand English or speak English. So they will never come for service whenever they have violence inside their homes, or whenever they have difficulty with some service providers, whenever they have any abuse happening at workplace, they will not come to you. I know women who tell me that their employer asks them for sex when they go to work. Cleaning jobs, that’s what most of our people does, and the women are asked to exchange, in order to get the work, they are asked to have sex with the employer, but none of the women is ready to go...And I encouraged many of them to go to the police and look for evidence. They don’t, they don’t even want to raise that issue. Yeah, they say, oh, this guy has lots of money, he has a lawyer, I don’t have anything, I am surviving from this cheque, what am I going to do? So I see those kinds of things that happen, but you can’t do anything about it. I don’t know how I can help them. I always direct for them to go at least for the counselling, and look for other jobs, and...So those are some negative relationships, if I could say. And at workplace also, people who want to take advantage of me, being new, and not knowing the system...They see you as vulnerable, and you see them taking advantage of that. And you fear that, not to stand up for your rights. If you stand up, some things can happen. But I don’t want to exaggerate that, I don’t know to what extent it is in the law. I always take it gently, but I can see people doing that. I see doing it to me, but they would never do it to the other person who is a co-worker. So that sometimes kinda ticks me off and kinda hurts me, but, I come back to my senses...Things that I’ve been through, yeah, now it really gives me the positive thinking that helps me to get through it and never even bother.

Talking about other people from his community who did not have his status and education, L. clearly described how much was at stake for the migrants holding multiple minority positions.
Within multiple current constraints combined with past history of violence these people’s resources for addressing extreme cases of exploitation and abuse in Canada are quite limited. F. described an unjust economic environment in Canada that pressured him to compete for employment and other opportunities with those who, unlike him, were not limited by the constraints of trauma related disability.

F.: First, I am a disabled person. It is hugely different between what it means to be a disabled person and then a normal person. So, it’s very difficult sometimes, it is gigantically, ginormously different opportunities. And in this economic growth, which is a global economic growth, everything is dictated by economy. So I have to compete in order to get what I really need...

T.: And you have to compete with people who did not experience the same things.

F.: Yes. If I can’t compete, then I’m out of equation. And many times I feel, I am just like a common denominator in society. That’s a bad feeling...[I am] just a number...I can do the same things that other people do. I am not envying, I can say I am very happy that they can compete and they can grow, I’m happy. But about myself, it is very difficult to sit down and see you are shrinking and can do nothing.

Discrimination in obtaining professional recognition and training. L. described systemic obstacles in the way of claiming his professional credentials in spite of having adequate training and prior work experience. He narrated about confusion, frustration, and difficulty understanding the process of professional registration, as the rules continued to change. It took three years and the completion of a number of additional requirements for him to become a Registered Nurse in Canada. L. narrated how his wife and other colleagues who completed the same training and held
the same credentials were less fortunate, as registration rules had changed and the newly required documents were impossible to obtain from their country of origin.

*L.*: Compared to many friends, they still don’t have it. I was the most lucky. I was able to pass the exams without taking the bridge courses. And...I can only say I was lucky. I was kinda into it, I could do this thing with a good success, so I was happy I was able to work while lots of friends, even my wife, still she couldn’t do her exam...Because she gave birth to two kids, in the middle, and she was pregnant, she couldn’t study, and by the time went, they changed the policies here...they asked us for more papers from our country, which we don’t have any connection. And the government that we fled from, they will not be giving us any papers from our country. We were able to bring our degrees, but also practice and registration and others we couldn’t. We couldn’t get [other documents] because we left the country illegally and we are considered as traitors...So that’s the reason we couldn’t. And we are still...struggling with the registering body that this is not fair...Hopefully it will work with time, but still it’s not easy. It’s not going smoothly for her.

Although the timing of his registration was fortunate, L. shared that he was facing similar difficulties in his application for Master’s level training in Canada, as he was unable to produce required documentation from the university in his country of origin. L.’s narrative illustrates ways in which professional registration bodies and educational systems are blind to the needs and circumstances of people who are exiled from their countries. He and others who suddenly left their country and are unable to access any documentation from that country, are facing perhaps insurmountable obstacles in the way of their professional and educational efforts in Canada.
Discrimination in everyday public situations. Several participants described facing prejudice and discrimination in everyday public situations. S. narrated how she had made a decision to stop wearing a scarf on her head to protect herself from the curious looks and to avoid different treatment. She explained that even when driving inside her vehicle, she could feel people’s judgmental gazes. Without the scarf, her religion did not stand out as much.

S. also described a recent struggle to deal with her son’s experience of being bullied. At the time of the interview, her son had been bullied for three weeks, and the family was still struggling to obtain help, as previously discussed. S. narrated how this new threat put the family on alert and re-kindled memories of past trauma. As illustrated below, S. wondered if her family became a target of bullying because they were newcomers or because they were Muslims.

S.: Yeah, they live there. One of them lives there, and the two they were here, but they moved to another place, over there near the housing. When I drive the car, they don’t go away, they are walking slowly in the middle of the street. And they stare in my face like this. I don’t know why, because we are alone, or we are Muslim here, or we are newcomer here, or what. I wish I understand why. I don’t understand.

L. described experiences of racism, being threatened, and being told that he did not belong in Canada. The impact of these experiences on L. is illustrated below.

L.: Some people make some very negative comments even when you are in the store, or when you are walking or...Yeah, you look different, or...you are like this, and they just disappear. When...tension arises, they remind you that...you are not Canadian, kinda thing...I’ve been told twice like that...They tell you, ‘This is Canada!’ And, they remind you, so yeah...And, maybe, comments about your race in a hidden way. That hits you, that hits hard your morale and your esteem, but I always compare it to what I have been
through where one can really violate... They can pick on you and they can shake you sometimes, but they can’t really take my resilience and my confidence in myself and in what I can achieve.

...I was waiting to park my car, when I was picking up my daughter, and I was waiting and you’ve got to come out and we make line to come into the parking. So I was waiting and it was my turn, I was to enter, and this guy was coming from here...he could see that we are in line, and he kinda run and entered the parking. And I just honked, and he was angry and he was calling me racist names and...he left. I didn’t wanna bother with him, I didn’t wanna go to police or other, I didn’t wanna open anything. I was thinking I am not gonna do anything to you, you can say anything you want and I will just go. Yeah, when I though about it later on, it kinda hit me hard, but I kinda forgot it...Maybe when he is by himself he will think about it if he is a good person, but if he is like that all the time he will get it from somebody else.

In addition to depicting acts of blatant racism in Canada, this story illustrated L.’s resilience built on past experiences with oppression. He described inner resistance, and confidence that this experience with racism would not affect his determination to achieve his goals. He portrayed strength, calmness, and rational decision making in the face of serious threats. L. decided not to approach police or engage in further action. He chose to keep himself safe and move on, leaving this incident behind. L. resisted in his own way, preserving his beliefs, embracing his confidence, and focusing on his future. However, he also described feeling hurt, or being “hit hard”.

Other participants also described experiences with discrimination in their everyday encounters. I. described instances of “unseen” discrimination, based on his foreign English accent, in his everyday life.
I.: The community itself, the public, there is unseen discrimination. When they hear your accent, there are two questions: ‘Where are you from?’ [and] ‘Why did you come here?’...Yes, they always ask that. So, there is another question in the back of their minds, actually, but they cannot phrase it that way, ‘Why did you come here?’ But in a different context, in terms of, ‘Why don’t you go back?’ Or something like that, ‘Why did you decide to come here?’ With this smiley face. Not everybody does that, but there are a lot of people doing that still today.

Similarly, G. described incidences in which negative assumptions were made about her based on her appearance. She described being asked intrusive personal questions with hidden messages about not belonging. G. chose to use these situations as opportunities for educating others. She explained that past exposure to oppressive situations resulted in a stronger self and increased ability to protect herself from the hurtful comments and questions. She assumed an active approach to these situations, seeing them as opportunities to reduce oppression.

G.: We are home with so many different backgrounds, different colours, even if we are discriminated we or another, it doesn’t bother me too much, because I’ve been through foreign countries, we felt discrimination, and it’s given you experience. And people here, I am trying to teach them a lesson. I love that, when people try to discriminate me, and they try to...do things like ‘Do you know the language, English?’ Because they see, they judge your appearance and they put you in a box. And now, it doesn’t bother me, it’s my time to teach them a lesson... ‘Are you an immigrant and how long have you been here?’ Whenever they ask me, I say, ‘Enough to be a citizen. So, what can I do for you? If you need any information about the city or anything.’ Yeah, I love that. Now it’s my time to teach them a lesson. It doesn’t bother me any more...The experience teaches you. If it is
too much. No more. You have to understand people. Really. And in the business I am, I understand people. It teaches you self-development, to know what kind of people you are dealing with, and just, try to treat the way they are and how they see. Yeah, so I have a good way to change them around. As long as I am helpful to people, I am positive, try to be surrounded with healthy environment, when they are some bad experiences, I have a way to turn them myself, to change it.

**Political violence and past experiences with oppression.** Political and other forms of violence, such as gender violence, composed an intricate component of each participant’s narrative. In preparation for answering my question about the role of social relationships in their settlement process, the participants provided a context for their migration, a link between their present and their past, and an unstoppable continuum of life that flew in spite the forceful interruptions of migration. Even though the events portrayed in this section took place in the participants’ past histories, they remained a significant part of their social/relational background that followed them along their paths of migration and settlement. These past histories, represented in the participants’ memories, and in their conceptualizations of their life trajectories, played an important role in understanding their process of settlement and relationship building.

Each of the eight participants presented a story about past violence. The participants came from very different contexts; they experienced political and other difficulties at various life stages and for various periods of time. However, common to their narratives is a description of, often traumatic experiences of violence leading to a decision to leave their countries of origin, which frequently meant separation from closely knit communities and loved ones.

F. described being exposed to political violence since he was two years old.
F.: If I am a kid...I am in a war...I am very vulnerable, I don’t have any choice, and I am just seeing the war, the real war between these countries is happening. And I’m... six-seven [years old]. And these people killing these and these people killing that. [pause] And I’m seeing guns, violence and killing [pause]. Still until now...I observe that, but I can’t digest it...I can’t do anything about it, I can’t understand it, and...I can’t tolerate it. I can’t tolerate it and I can’t love it. War! And people buying guns from different dealerships, from different countries, kill each other for different profit and reasons, and other propaganda from different part of the world, is, you know, adding more oxygen to that, to flame of this war and violence [silence]. So...I am really speechless, I’m confused. I am just an observer, watching. So still until now, this thing is occupying my mind, and I still, I don’t have any answer. I don’t accept it, I don’t respect this memory, therefore, I can’t digest it, it is what it is...[The memories] are there, their pain is there. Sometimes they are catching me, and...I feel I can’t get rid of them though...I try to release them sometime. [pause] They are so painful...it’s so much...It took a lot of time and effort to be able to, right now I am sitting here and talking to you, and not getting anxious or problematic, or flashbacks. I do know later on, I have to deal with some flashbacks. But, believe me, if you saw me five years ago, I was very different than now. Just sitting here and, you know, talking...

C. explained that he was sixteen when his country became tormented by war. He repeatedly stated that his difficulty upon arrival to Canada was strongly connected to his experience with violence in his country of origin. C. and his family continued to face oppression in their first country of exile, where they had no rights for education or employment and faced exploitation both from ordinary people and the government. When they moved to another
country, they had more opportunities and felt accepted by ordinary people, but continued to face oppression and violence in their interactions with corrupted governmental institutions, such as police.

C.: We...experienced a very bad situation, bad life. As you know [country of origin’s] situation, you know we had any kind of problems...economic problems, and life problems, like hiding, you know?[It started] when I was 16. And also, we moved to [a neighbouring country]. We were there for eight years. The people they treated us...not in a good way, you know? They always, when we were...outside, if they knew that he or she is a stranger...And then it was very difficult for us to go out and, shopping or something, because all the people are watching us in a different way.

T.: And they would know you were from a different country?

C.: Yes, because when we were speaking, they could realize, ok he is not [nationality of the new country]. Yeah, that was the bad memory I have from [neighbouring country], from the people. And after that, we came to [country of origin, capital] for two months. So, it was the [new] government...If you would go shopping, everywhere you would see people...hanging...for some reason. So, dying people for some reason... [pause]

And then just after two months we moved to [another neighbouring country]. In [this country]...I start working, the people were ok in [the country], but police is...They just follow you in the corner and they stop you asking for money or for ID. If you had ID and show them, they just keep the ID and then they ask you for ID. And you say, ‘Ok, I gave you the ID’ And they tell you, ‘No, there is no ID. Give me money’...So all this affect us.

L. portrayed a multigenerational history of violence, in which his grandfather, his father, and his generation had lived their entire lives in mandatory military service. He described a long
history of war and centuries of foreign occupation in his country. However, once his country became independent, an oppressive new regime came into power.

L.: But things went from bad to worse. There is no any kind of freedom in our country, there is no freedom of press, there is only one TV, one radio, one newspaper and those are advocating for the government. And the government also controls any kind of gathering. Christian, there were a lot of Christians who were imprisoned by this time. By Christians I mean the Pentecostal Church who were born or passed as Evangelists, and the church leaders have been imprisoned since 2002. And all the private journalists and even 11 ministers who wanted implementation of Constitution. Things went wrong, from bad to worse.

L., narrated how this new government subsequently initiated several wars, which sent the country into further poverty and lead to more violence.

L.: And all the time this war was ignited by our government. And they had a decree that everyone who turns 18, or who completes grade 11, has to go to the military. If you are in school, great, you can come back to the university, if you are not in school, you continue in the military, indefinitely. And people were working for over a decade now, for free, without money...In the military. Just deployed, you work, and you are not going to your family. If you go to your family, then you will be arrested an imprisoned, and can be tortured. That’s one reason that many people get imprisoned and the other reason is, if you are involved with any kind of organization that the government says shouldn’t be there, then you will be arrested and imprisoned.
L. could not escape the military. As he was a nursing student, his first work experience took place in a battlefield, looking after wounded and dying soldiers. He described enormous human suffering and loss of life. He narrated about being haunted by images of dying people.

*L.*: And I was a nurse, from the university we were directly taken to the military arm... To work as a nurse, even though we had no experience, I developed all my experience in the battlefield, helping... We had people with their chopped legs, protruded eyes, we had intestine and head injuries. We had to separate a big truck full of people, you separate the ones who are alive, the ones who are dead, and the ones who are injured. [pause] So you look at them, they have a little bit of injury, but they are just head injured, and you see on this side a bullet entrance and a bulge where it came out. So it was very traumatic, the first few years that I worked in the military. And I worked in different places of the military units and working as a nurse, helping wounded soldiers that have been injured in the war... So from that, I have lots of memories of people screaming and telling me words, and what to say to their families, but even I don’t know who their families are, how could I connect with them... [pause] ...I always remember a guy who was telling me, ‘I am the only one for my mom, the only one for my mom, please help me!’ [pause] And he had abdominal injuries. We didn’t have, we couldn’t do operations there because there was no electricity and definitely, he needed some cleaning and he needed emergency surgery for his abdominal injuries and he died... And this is just one story that I am telling you, but there are lots of them, lots of girls, ladies... There was one girl, chopped her leg and then she was screaming, bleeding, really hard too. We had to stop, we were able to stop the bleeding, but we struggled to at least to make her survive and we were able to take her to the referral hospital. In the referral hospital she died because of
the tetanus. After the injury, she got from the injury...And when the wound kinda settled, in active wound what you treat is injuries, but right after, in the following two weeks, there is a lot of tetanus that’s coming, and many of them, like 80% of the tetanus infection, like young people, people with small wounds in their bodies, they died, died of tetanus... These are a lot of people, these are thousands of people. We can’t, we vaccinated as many as we could, and many lives were saved, but many people also died from it. And whenever they developed a fully blown tetanus infection, the chance is very small to survive. So I have seen these tetanus cases, small wounds and young, young men and women who could survive in their life and make lots of changes in their families and their families hoped for them, they died for no reason.

Following this, L. described his own personal experience of persecution and imprisonment. Immediately after his graduation, L. was arrested, as he participated in a group gathering with other Christian students. He described experiences of physical violence and threat.

L.: I was involved with Evangelical church and I was also a member of University Christian Student Fellowship. One day we were 30 people praying together, we had a bible and prayer time, so they came in the house, probably someone, the neighbour, told them. They stormed the house, they hit everyone in the room with a stick, with a baton, and they told us to lay on the ground, they confiscated the bible and they put us in chains and they took us to the prison. Very filthy prison, they threw us there and, after staying there for two weeks, with serious warning, we were let go...Serious warning...if it happens that you are praying together, is what they said at that time, but later on they escalated to the extent that everyone has to recant his faith to be released. Yeah, first they
started saying you can practice it by your own, but you should not be gathering together.

But that was the first thing and they told us one day, everyone who is holding a bible and walking on the street, can be arrested in [country of origin]. If they don’t know who that person is. In case, if that person is someone that has approval, you can hold, but if that’s not the case, they can stop you and ask you what you believe and they can interrogate you and they can even take you to the prison.

Similarly to L., P. narrated how several generations in his family were affected by political oppression and violence.

P.: After I moved from back home, I didn’t know anything about my family, so I was worried something might happen to them because I left my country. That would give me hard time...My dad passed away in the prison, 10 years ago. So, my brother was before me. I was arrested back home, and with my brother, we don’t know what’s happened to him until now...my older brother. We don’t know, it’s almost one year now since he made contact with my family. And, my mom and my young brother are at home, and there are my two sisters and my younger brother that are in Middle East...Because they run after I left the country...But they are ok. At least knowing that they are ok, you know?...I didn’t apply anywhere as a refugee, I didn’t apply to UN, because I was hoping I would go back home. But I stayed two years, nothing changed, things got worse, and I can’t contact with my family. So I start looking at other things, so I applied to Canadian immigration to get an opportunity...I wasn’t even refugee. You know, when you are not a refugee in a country, you know you are not ready.

S. also described circumstances in her country, wars and community divide which culminated in her son’s kidnapping. Her family resisted threats and her husband refused to leave
home. With intricate detail, she described a horrifying encounter with a terrorist group who abducted and threatened to kill her son, and numerous losses that followed.

*S.*: We live in [religious community] area, because I want to be close to my mom house. My mom...we are [religious group], as I told you. Our neighbour, they know my husband, he is a [different religious group]...so they start to bother us. They start to throw bullets...in my yard...threatened us to go from this area...The neighbour know about us that we come back and it was 2006, the biggest problem at that time, [the conflict between two religious groups escalated]...The worst year until now in [country of origin]...A lot of people died because of that...The neighbour started to bother us, talk with us roughly, and ask my husband, ‘Go...this is not your area! Go to your area!’ He says, ‘No, that’s my house, this is my wife!...After 10 days, I was in my college, just to, I wanted my papers...and my husband in my yard, I had just my son, he was four years and a half. And my husband, he [went] inside, just to...bring the lighter for cigarette and go outside. [pause] He can’t find my son. He looking at my neighbour outside, he called my mom, because she was one street behind us, ‘Is my son with you?’... They said, ‘No’. There is no my son. After two hours, I come...and [my parents] told me, ‘Stay in my house, my son and S., my husband, they are not in your house.’...That’s happened and after three hours, four hours, my husband got the call. They called him, ‘Don’t worry, your son is with us until you go.’ [silence] My son was not completely speaking, ‘Daddy, help me! Come here! Where is mama?’ And he asked them, ‘Who are you?’ They said, ‘We are [terrorist organization], and your son with us and you are a rich person, you are a lawyer, and a businessman...and you have a lot of money, and you are [member of
religious group]. Give us $500,000,000 in two days, or we will send your son in two baggage [pause] separate!’ And hung up the phone.

...Next day, I am unconscious. And I was pregnant, and I lost the baby, because I was...so shocked. [pause] And I lost, who is around me, I don’t know...They gave me morphine or something...to calm down, and I sleep 12 days in the hospital. I don’t know what happened. I just go out from my house to my college and I leave everything. I have dishes, I have laundry in the laundry machine, I have food in the fridge, think I am just going to go and come back. And my husband for that time, he just go out...we never come back to our house, because by the phone, after four hours, they called him and they told him, ‘Give us money’. He said, ‘Please, I have a house!’ And at that time, we are rich people, and a lot of rich persons, but they don’t have cash money to pay. We are out of war, one year, two years around, whatever money you have you finished. And he told them, ‘Please come by, take my house, take my cars, take whatever you want!’ They said ok...My house, it’s a big, big, big, like 800 meters, my house. And, at that time, maybe [worth] $10,000,000.00, for example. And they buy it for $60,000.00. Sixty thousand dollars! They took...it with my furniture, my clothes, my food, with my fridge, with my laundry, with everything.

In contrast to stories of other participants who faced their horrific experiences armed with close family connections and friend support, E. described violence that originated in his family. He described growing up in a physically and emotionally abusive family environment, witnessing his father’s violence towards his mother and siblings. After 20 years of marriage, his mother decided to take the children and leave.
E.: So at that time, I used to live with my family. My dad and my mom, they used to...fight a lot. And my dad, like, fighting talking, and physically hitting, pushing, everything. So he was really bad. It was really really bad. I feel really bad for my mom how she can stand that person for 20 years...20 years of hell...every day. My mom she got really hurt, really hurt by him, physically and emotionally, from inside...I have five sisters, my dad wasn’t...working. He got money all the time from nowhere, he asked us to give him money for cigarettes...You need food, you need cigarettes, you need money to go outside, you need shopping, everything, but you are not doing anything to get it...He didn’t work. I have never seen my dad work before...The money came from my mom. She used to work as a cleaning lady. Because my mom had no education, she cannot even read or, even my language, not English, she never go to school...And my sisters, they both worked in a company for fixing clothing, you know tailor...After a while, everything got worse and worse between my mom and dad and everybody got hurt from him. Everybody except me. He didn’t really hurt me because I was going to school, just a small child, at that time...When I left my dad, I was 12...And, I wasn’t really having something to say or suggest because I was the youngest one. What my mom said, we have to follow. And my mom and my sisters said, ‘We cannot live that way...no more!’

Even though E. came from a country tormented by recent wars, his story differed from the stories of other participants, as he did not directly address the larger context of political violence. Violence in his narrative centered around his experience of being gay.

E.: I start, like, feeling I’m gay. And gay in my country, it’s really dangerous. You got killed if you were gay...by government, by people, by your...family. So, here is the thing.
And it’s really hard to come out about it and it’s really hard if you get caught, from your family or from anybody.

T.: So, did you tell them?

E.: No. They never, they still do not know until now.

E. described knowing that he was gay and being extremely afraid, which led to him distancing from the family and engaging in family conflict. He left the house following a family fight and was raped in a nearby park.

E.: I went outside and I started walking. There was nobody. It was raining a little bit, not too heavily, just a little bit, like a shower and I went to the park and I started walking there. I saw two guys. Just two guys...Nobody [was out], everybody was eating at that time. They waked, and I just keep walking and thinking. I went to, you know, in the park just whistling...And...I kept walking and whistling, thinking. I didn’t know those guys, they followed me. Then, I was just 13 or 14 years old, I can’t remember. Level nine, I was in the school...So I was walking, walking, walking. They followed me, and after five minutes...there were three guys, and I didn’t know that...They found me...these three guys in the park...I looked and there was nobody, nobody here, just me. I am going to the washroom. And I went to the washroom, I wanted to close the door, when someone pushed the door in the washroom. [pause] It was seven o’clock in the evening...at that time. I got raped from three guys, from seven until 10. Three hours, yeah. [pause] The thing is, I started to scream and everything, but nobody heard me because there were no people...At that time, I hated everybody. I hated all the people. Well, what’s happening is, they closed my mouth, so I could not talk. And after 45 minutes, I could not feel anything, so I just passed out, I cannot feel anything. [Tears in his eyes; silence] I woke
up. I got punched in my face, I lost my teeth, one here, and one here I lost both, and...I had so many things around my eyes...bruises, marks around my eyes and everything. And I woke up. You know, the security of the park, there is security for the park, he woke me up in the washroom. My clothes were ripped and the blood. In the washroom. At that time I know what’s happening. He was, like, ‘Hey, are you ok, what’s happening?’ And, like, ‘Shhhh, don’t say anything.’ I just take my pants and I go right away to my house.

**Settlement as a Continuous, Bi-Directional, and Social Process**

In narrating about the role of social ties in their process of settlement, the participants offered significant insight into the settlement process itself. They portrayed the complexity of this process, discussed settlement obstacles in the new country, and highlighted an important role of contribution to others in the process of settlement. The participants also discussed belonging-related needs, and described the meaning of belonging in their old and new contexts.

**Tied together: trauma recovery, social connections, and settlement.** Most participants began their stories by describing circumstances in their countries of origin that often involved violent histories. Their stories about past lives provided a sense of continuity, allowing them to embrace previous identities and make sense of migration and settlement. According to the participants, settlement happened in continuity with their previous lives. The physical reality of migration did not preclude the participants from continuing their relationships or take away the participants’ sense of belonging and identification with their families left behind. They described ways of maintaining or even strengthening close relationships even when their loved ones resided in different geographical spaces. The participants described their settlement process, influenced by their past experiences and close relationships with family members who stayed behind.
According to the participants, one of the problems that exacerbated their mental health difficulties in Canada was absence of close family or friends to share their problems with. They described longing for, worrying about, and missing their loved ones. The participants talked about their desires to see their loved ones again, have in person conversations, and be able to share physical space with each other, although their circumstances do not allow for this type of contact. According to the participants, isolation was a serious obstacle in their process of settlement and trauma recovery, as they were unable to talk about their experiences with others.

C. narrated that not having access to his family was one of the main difficulties he experienced after his arrival to Canada.

*C.: At least they have to make it easier for the people who want to sponsor their close family, like mother, father, sister, brother, because they really want them. For me that is all problem that I had. Because I was [the] only [family member in Canada], and at the same time the other problems comes too. Even if you have a good job here, but still you need your close family, to share your problem or your difficulties with them.*

*T.: And you are saying that's one of the main factors that made you feel depressed...*  

*C.: Yes. That's why. It became difficult for me to stay here without them. Because we are sooo friendly. When I see other people here, or when I start living with my wife family, I realized, ok, the families are so different. We are so friendly.*

However, it is important to note that the participants’ caring and desire to help their loved ones left behind also served as a major source of motivation, resilience, and resistance to the disempowering impact of their past experiences. The participants described how their efforts to help family members who were residing in other countries, and were still facing oppression and threats, served as a strong driving force in their settlement efforts. As G. narrated, she and her
sister had been very efficient in their “integration” efforts based on their strong motivation to help their family.

G.: So when we came here, really, we started our lives as immigrants, but we didn’t have time even to look at us, because we carried a big load behind us and all the family now, they had this kind of hope, since we were in Canada. And the life here, we came full of impatience for education and new life, and not only for us, but for the whole family. So that was a very big pressure, but at the same time it was very present for us to have that thing that pushed us, because, I think it was the main thing that helped me integrate very quick, we integrated very quick.

As illustrated in C.’s narrative, for him, the process of settlement, the process of recovery from the impact of past traumatic experiences, and the process of maintaining old social ties and establishing new ones were intimately interconnected. Moreover, C. described his level of social engagement as a measure of how successful his recovery and settlement efforts had been.

C.: Nowadays yeah, I can feel when I speak with them, I can enjoy, I really like to visit them, but before, it wasn’t like this…Before, I was just like, I was working and, come home, stay at home. Unhappy at workplace, unhappy at home, unhappy, all the time unhappy and…didn’t do anything. So that’s why I didn’t visit my friends and families.

G. felt she was no longer an “immigrant” after she helped her family to join her in Canada, found meaningful employment, started feeling “positive”, and established relationships with various immigrant and host communities. About a year ago, she started feeling that she had completed the stressful process of settlement and that Vancouver was her home.

G.: And now, this [past] year…a new stage for me, that’s the new me. I am not immigrant any more…I am citizen and I don’t want to be called as immigrant now, because…I go
through that immigration process and I’m established now, I am done, I am integrated now here...A year ago I went to Europe to visit my...sister there, and I was one month away, and then I felt, only at the time I was there, I felt Vancouver as a home. First time to feel that you have...a place where I belong, I didn’t felt it before, I didn’t have this idea before that I will settle down and live here. No. I was on my own, and in my mind, I would never ever end my life here, but when I went outside to Europe, I felt home. I started to call...Vancouver as my home...And since I came back, it was February 2012, then I started this business, and then I started to feel ok...I am home now...It’s been only a year and a few months now. After seven years, after six years, going outside. Because I lived these six years here struggling, I didn’t feel this home and...I had a plan to go back...But I feel like, any time you leave a place, you loose your status there. Even in your country. When you go back, you come back, you are not there any more...And I felt it’s better to establish where you are now...Because where I lived, the family, they left it, there is no, for me, home to go back...And I start with this business and everything is positive. When you feel positive inside you flip things around...Now I’m building my home, cause I feel confident, I am not an immigrant any more, because I am in my home now. And I integrated.

Bi-directional influence: contribution, active engagement, and settlement. In the participant stories, the process of settlement was portrayed as a dynamic, interactional, and active process in which the participants were not simply passive recipients of the influences from their new environment. On the contrary, a crucial part of the participants’ settlement process involved active participation and acts of giving, helping, and contributing to well-being of their families and communities. The participants described active engagement with society in order to
eliminate injustices, resist violence, and stop oppressive political practices. They narrated how such acts contributed to their own empowerment and motivation to persevere when under extreme stress.

G. described ways in which helping others and actively resisting injustice provided a sense of meaning, and helped her persist in the face of serious difficulties upon arrival to Canada. After her family joined her in this country, initiating meaningful changes for her ethnic community in Vancouver and enabling access to services for the community members, became her new goals.

T.: And it also sounds like you are changing the discrimination through trying to build those organizations, for example, [country of origin] community, then women’s organization...and helping women...

G.: Yeah, exactly, I still see a lot of need, because I work as an interpreter, because I go everywhere...And I like it because I’m involved with everyone. I go everywhere, I find myself in the healthcare system...in a school...in a legal system, and make me to just explore everywhere and know how life goes and see people, what the needs are, what...they are missing, what they would like to gain, the struggling they have, I can understand. That’s why...I feel...knowing that, we should do something. Just I cannot watch and see people struggling. That’s why I try to bring people who are here and have...education, some of them are teachers, some of them are counsellors, and, we should...connect and we could do this to honour our community. The [people from my country of origin] with children are struggling...Although Bridge Clinic is doing very good, and the government of Canada also, the program they prepare for the family, but they still, if they have a solid community, they might integrate very quick, I
believe...Government cannot do anything, they have all these resources, but the connection is the community that would connect all of them...Like, each country, they have a community and this children and this families receive positive examples. Like us who are working, or us who are being in this stage, and now we are like, we fit this society or are trying to move on with our lives, we’ll be for them the example. And they will try just to follow our path. But we see this community of failed people...They know where the money is, but they are still on the welfare and they cannot do anything. They do not go for college or university level, they are still in ESL for several years. Those are not a good example, and I think that’s what we need for my community...And, yeah, and now I have to learn the way how I can build up...this community, that’s my...next goal.

I. described his various engagements with community organizations and ways in which helping others contributed to his own sense of fulfillment and happiness.

I.: Every Friday for four hours...I volunteer at food and clothing bank, for the last one and a half years. And, to be honest, I didn’t know that there were actually so many people in need in Vancouver. I am doing the coordination of the grocery department, that means helping people...to find what they need...And it makes me feel really nice to be helping people. I like that, I like to be a part of the community....Actually, I picked up that habit of talking to people, starting conversations, it’s socially good for me, actually. I talked with every single one of them, and most of them I enjoy talking. And...some of them, they have health issues...It breaks my heart, but it gives me some happiness to be able to help them, to connect with them. It makes me...more satisfied, more fulfilled...

Now living in Canada, I. organizes with his ethnic community in order to expose oppression and injustices in his country of origin. He described using social media to post
information, express solidarity with the protesters in his country of origin, and mobilize others to stand up against injustices.

I.: They are building a presidential palace in the middle of it, and they cut...ten thousand of trees just for that construction. It’s just a symbol...One thing they did, and there are so many examples, I can give you, on facebook actually, I have about 30 – 40 things about why we are protesting...You understand where I am coming from, how I am feeling right now, actually...First, there were a couple of, maybe, 100 people, maximum. They were camping there, protesting very peacefully. They were living in tents, trying to protect the trees and so on...And two weeks ago, on Friday, the police brutally attacked them with water cannons, tear gas of unimaginable amounts. And...there is a way to use tear gas...there are some pistols to shoot them. You cannot shoot it into the face, you have to keep it in a low angle. You cannot even do that, you can injure people. But I have seen that they are firing them into a person’s face, standing 10 meters away. Directly. And they, actually, they caused people a lot of injuries, people lost their eyesight because of that. I can show you there is so many pictures, there is so many violent [acts]...And they are directly attacking people. And those people, they are peaceful people, they are not actually fighting back. And therefore...the point my country came to is, it cannot be described as democracy any more...If you express your thoughts and opinions, you get arrested, beaten. This is a very good example of that. So, people don’t want that any more. And, I am thinking, if I didn’t decide to come over here, most likely I would be at [the location or the protest] right now...I would be there...protesting against them.

L. described how he decided to “go public” in order to expose the wrongdoings of his country of origin’s government and their supporters in Canada. Through these engagements, he
continued to resist oppression with a renewed sense of power and responsibility. His political activism was not without consequences. L.’s brothers who still resided in his country of origin received threats from the government because of L.’s current involvement. He also expressed a concern about his mother’s safety. L., himself, experienced threats from members of his ethnic community in Winnipeg. In spite of these threats, L. continued to be politically engaged.

In addition to political activism and volunteering with the immigrant community, L. described various formal and informal engagements with marginalized communities, which he viewed as very meaningful.

_L.: I work with the [health agency] which connects me with the main stream Canadians, and African immigrants, and the street involved with people, disadvantaged people who use drugs, street working girls. That’s very different perspective of my life as well, it’s different than my family life...I work with mainstream Canadians and...we deal with reports of infections...And I also work at [an agency] where we give harm reduction supplies to people who use drugs, so that they can stay safe, and we also help them when they decide to get out. I took the motivational interviewing this year, the first level, and it was very helpful, how to motivate people for change. And that brings me also a very big meaning of my life. And it is also in some way connected to what I’ve been...through...I mean, always you don’t get the results to what you aspire maybe...and it takes gentle action to get the change...And the same thing with people who are using, struggling with drugs. There are some people who abruptly change and there are some people with small change...They really do change their life, and if they really don’t want to change, they can stay safe. Helping people wherever they are, would make us a better society in...trying to understand different perspectives.
In spite of the pain and traumatic re-experiencing, which can potentially result from such engagements, F. described his efforts to connect with and help others who are suffering.

_F._: *As soon as I arrived in Canada, in Vancouver, I remember, I helped various people, from different... backgrounds. Even if they were born here, or they don’ born here, I didn’t care really... If they need help, I helped them. Even I had many problems. Still I do that. Still I do this and do that, because as a human being... I really can’t see other people’s pain. Very painful to see some people pain and you can’t do anything about it. That’s more painful. Because, if I can do something, instantly, I have to take an action to make a difference...*

_T._: *So it’s sort of helpful for you too when you do something for them...*

_F._: *Sometimes yes, sometimes no, sometimes it’s adding more flame to my problem. To see, in this beautiful land, in this beautiful city, they have huge problem. Child poverty, homelessness. We are living in one of the most prestigious cities in the world... When you see that, maybe some people say, ‘They want to be.’ You may say that, but susceptibility, when a woman is pregnant, by any reason and any definition, if that woman has stress, a problem, it affects... the baby, and the baby is gonna be susceptible to... more problems...*

In summary, the participants described how small or large, formal or informal, acts of helping family and community and affecting larger political changes in turn contributed to their own meaning making, sense of fulfillment, and settlement.

**Resistance to imposed life changes: Defending beliefs, identities, and relationships.**

In addition to social and political engagement, the participants described how acts of individual and collective defiance to the effects of experienced violence significantly contributed to their
recovery and settlement efforts. Although their narratives depicted pain, trauma, and struggle, the participants also highlighted acts of individual and collective resistance.

Some of the participants believed that migration was a temporary strategic move, which would allow them to wait for the right moment and eventually return. Some of them left for good but maintained strong involvement with family and community left behind. All of the participants remained connected with families who could not join them in Canada. Most of them maintained strong relationships which were a source of emotional support, encouragement, and motivation to keep going. Most of them described a strong sense of responsibility for looking after the loved ones they left behind, providing financial and emotional resources, or securing a better future for them. Several of the participants described worrying about families left behind in treacherous conditions. Some saw themselves as a cause of the family members’ pain and difficult circumstances that followed their departure from the country.

For the participants in this study, the process of settlement was intricately connected to acts of resistance. The participants described resistance to broken relationship ties, resistance to imposed helplessness and numbness, and resistance to losing a sense of home and belonging. They portrayed resistance through successes such as learning the language, finding employment, sending money home, and secretly calling family members in the country still occupied by violent forces. They portrayed resistance through joining together, maintaining a sense of togetherness, and speaking up against injustices. They resisted through individual acts of preserving their values, beliefs and tradition, as well as through helping those who are vulnerable. Through those acts of resistance, the participants maintained and built social connections, preserved individual and collective identities, and continued to heal.
L. described how, through maintaining connections with his family and church, and through preserving his beliefs, he defied threats imposed by his government and survived difficult situations.

*L.*: So you are always under fear; you are under fear that you can sometimes fall into that kind of problem. But in family, that is always a positive thing if you have a chance to meet up with your family...you can revive your personal feeling and your understanding. And everything you aspire for as a human being, you get from family and from church and reading the bible. And I believe in god and by praying to god... god gives you your family, your friends, and your church so that you survive in the middle of those situations... That’s helped me a lot to survive.

G. described her “leadership personality” as one of her strongest qualities. Her initiative and resistance was illustrated on several occasions in her narrative. For example, in her early twenties, she decided to defy family and cultural rules by refusing to marry and start her own family. G. narrated how she refused to live in her previous country of residence, as the conditions in that country were unacceptable. Instead, she decided to move to Canada in order to create a better future for her family.

*G.*: It was the second country we moved to. It was one country, and this was the other country that was the stable life, and we had to start from the beginning. And our lives became like, we all started working and broken lives, and it was like, daily survival and living. We get to cope with that, but future and education, that was missing. I was an immigrant with no hope so there was a plan to go to countries where we would have a better future, and education too... So, at that time, my family, like, they were preparing me to start my own family, but I had this in mind and I didn’t like the way our life was going,
and I thought it’s difficult to, just to resign for the situation and live like that. So...I brought up that idea [with my family]...and they said, ‘As long as that’s what you want and you wish, we are supporting you’. And...for them, I became the hope also, for the family...to go out of that. So, it was a heavy load...carrying that responsibility behind and being that person that everyone is looking for, for that hope.

S.’s narrative also illustrated many instances of resistance to oppressive and life threatening forces. She and her husband defied the demands to move out from their home and separate in spite of the serious threats. S. described risking her life in order to be reunited with her son and her husband, after her son was returned by the kidnappers to his father.

S.: And they give you room, outside, there is a room, or inside the house, just a shelter for him and my son... And my son be good with him, just with him, with him, with him, with him everywhere. He started eating a little bit [but]...he wanted me. So, he still continued suffering...and me too. We have to be together. Like each one take care of each other, you know, we have to be together...So, we make a plan, and I ask ‘Where are you?’ And he says, ‘I am with this family, this is my address... we had a cellphone, but every day we changed the SIM card...because it is...a new web to my country after the war, so it’s bad service. So every two days I buy a new card, he buys new card, and we lost each other...I call his relative, I call my mom, my dad, you know, until I can connect again...I have two cellphones, three cellphones, I would put it with me at night...whichever rings...We move from a big problem to another problem, but at least I feel my son is good with his dad. But...still...as a mom, and he is my son, you know; and first son for me...it’s big, big for me. And then, we make a plan...My neighbour has a taxi and...I took the taxi to [neighbourhood in the country of origin]. And from this area, I took another taxi...and
it’s not safe at all, like no safe at all. But I did that. And even my family, they don’t accept, and they are not happy with me, and they say, ‘You are not good you broke our rules.’ But I said, ‘No more!’ And, my god helped us to be together. When I went to them, and they had a place, and they went to this place and we be together. One night, second night, we got to [a neighbouring country].

Similarly, E. described numerous acts of resistance, in his old country and in Canada. His defiance to rigid cultural and societal gender rules, the punishment for which could be deadly, required enormous amounts of courage in his everyday life. E. described being a target of violence and oppression in pre-teenage and early teenage years, due to his non-conforming appearance and behaviour. However, he also described efforts to resist the impact of this past experience through finishing grade nine, finding a way to support his family financially, running from the police, and leaving the country when he had an opportunity. In Canada, he continued to resist through efforts to establish himself, secure employment, learn the language, and send money to his family. He chose to send financial support to his family in spite of their open rejection, showing that “he is better than them”. As he continued to deal with the painful impact of gender violence, E. described resisting this impact through his efforts to take charge of his future.

E.: And, yeah, I’m trying to control more my emotion, to be not very sensitive like this...not to be affected a lot. Not don’t care, no. If you don’t care, it’s bad. But, to care about your emotion is very important...It’s a long story and it’s very, really painful. As what you said, we go over the details. I told you I have an accident. That accident destroyed my life. Yeah, and the thing is, the family, they didn’t do anything about it, it was really bad. But...

T.: But you are not destroyed...
E.: Yeah. This...is the thing that’s make you stronger. If it doesn’t like, hurt hurt hurt, it’s make you how to be more strong, in the future. Yeah.

**Settlement as a way of creating a sense of belonging.** As previously discussed in this chapter, the participants maintained a strong connection, a sense of belonging and identification with their families and friends who stayed behind. Some participants also maintained strong ties with ethnic and religious communities in the country of origin. However, the participants also described a strong desire to build new intimate connections in Canada, in an effort to re-create types of relationships that they were familiar and comfortable with. Some of the participants explicitly used the term “belonging”, while others did not. Their perceptions of where they were on the continuum of belonging also differed. However, belonging in the new country seemed to be a pervasive theme, relevant for each participant in their different contexts.

P. asserted that he was happy with his settlement progress, as he had become independent, able to support himself and send money to his family, and was moving forward in his efforts to accomplish his educational goals. However, at the time of the interview, he still had not found a sense of belonging in Winnipeg, which he described as being very difficult.

T.: You keep saying that word, belonging, and it seems like it is very important to you.

P.: That’s, it’s very important to me, you know, I was always surrounded with somebody. Some people find people at work, some people find bar thing. I think I have a definition, when some people are doing the bad thing, or join the bad group, like, they are looking to belong so, it was easy for them to find to attract to bad thing. Easy for them to do bad thing...What I mean to say...one person asked me about people coming, the refugee, Somali refugee, they are gangster here. So I noticed that, you know. I told them why those young people, they are looking to belong to something. But it is only gangsters that open
their hands to...accept them. It is easy for them to belong. So that’s why. I want to just find something good, to do good thing to belong...That is easy but I am not that kind of person...Some people they are that way, they always want to go out, either a club or party or something. I don’t wanna be that way. I wanna find normal life, someone that does good things.

T.: So what does ‘belonging’ mean?

P.: For me, belonging means to live...for someone, to worry about someone. Just, thinking about someone and feeling ok, when you work, or when you do something, you think about them. In your mind, you are about, ‘Oh, what happened to them...What happened?’ Knowing they worry about you, so that feels like belonging. To have someone to worry about, and someone to worry about me. Like a family...That’s what I have with my family, but I don’t have family here. I need that here.

Similarly, F. described that after having lived in Vancouver for six years, he still felt isolated, without a social circle to belong to.

T.: So you are the only person from your family who is here.

F.: That’s right. That’s tough. And when you’re here alone, when I’m here alone, there is nothing. Language barrier is one problem. Other problems, you can’t find really people to sit down, to socialize, to talk, you know, to help you. Other than you going to doctor’s appointment and say, ‘What is your problem?’ ‘Oh, my problem is this’, ‘This is the pills, go buy.’ And go to counsellor, ‘Bla bla bla.’ It doesn’t solve my problem.

L. described a very busy life, paid and unpaid engagements with numerous people and communities. However, he explained that his only close relationships in Canada were the ones with his wife and his young children.
L.: What I say is still, I don’t trust people. That one is something I am working on, in whatever I do. Cause I’ve seen people who, friends, the ones who know us, are the one who came and are arresting us and putting us in prison. So, my best friend at home is just my wife and my kids. We have friends that come home, but they are still...They are very good friends, that are trusting, but to really share your hurt and what you are going through, it’s very difficult. Sometimes I try to, I try to use counsellors to help me.

The participants described feelings of being different, not belonging, or not fitting in. They attributed part of these difficulties to different societal rules of engagements. They also described hidden or even blatant societal messages that they were different and that they did not belong in Canada. They described limited access to opportunities in Canada, based on their skin colour, foreign name, foreign accent, language ability, education in another country, or the state of their mental health. They narrated that they were expected to belong to, and interact with, the community from their own country of origin, and that dominant cultural and societal groups in Canada were inaccessible to them. Some participants described an initial general sense of mistrust in people after arriving to Canada, related to their past experiences of betrayal, exploitation, and violence.

Most participants strongly related a need to establish a sense of belonging to experiences of successful settlement in the new country. Also, most participants described difficulties establishing a sense of belonging in Canada. However, one participant shared a positive story of belonging and experience of establishing a sense of home in Canada. As previously illustrated, G. felt that, six years after arrival, she was no longer an “immigrant” and that her settlement process was completed at that point. Her narrative illustrated a gradual progression from G. and her sister’s experience of “two girls alone”, unable to trust others during their first two years in
Canada, to a chain of interconnected multiple relationships with various people and communities. This social progression in her story paralleled her perception of progress made in building a sense of home, and a sense of belonging.

**Collective identification.** The participants described a sudden shift that they experienced as they moved from a communal life, being surrounded by people at all times, to being alone in the new country and colliding with practices of individualism. For some participants, this shift almost felt disorienting, requiring increased effort to adapt to this new reality, and shaking the core of their identity rooted in a collective perspective. However, the participants did not simply adapt or resign to a lone life. They described attempts to maintain this collective sense of self by creating new relationships, nurturing old relationships, and establishing a sense of belonging in Canada.

In narrating about themselves the participants often described a group, usually family, portraying a collective identity, which could not be reduced to their individual selves. All but one participant described a strong identification with their family. This identification persisted even for the participant whose relationship with family was characterized with rejection and ambivalence. According to the participants, in the context a strong collective identity, the new reality of being separated from significant relationships and experiencing difficulties in re-establishing similar connections was profoundly challenging.

There are many examples of collective identification in the participants’ narratives. To my compliments about his ability to find his own way in Winnipeg, L. responded by reminding me that his success did not only belong to him.

*T.: You found your own way...*
L.: And my family as well, my wife was a good support of mine and I always, whenever I am tired or feel desperate, having my kids around, it helps me to stay positive.

Similarly, P. shared about his belief that material possessions were to be shared and enjoyed with others and that without those significant others possessions did not mean much.

P.: That’s one thing I noticed. I didn’t mind it before, because I didn’t think about it, now...I have everything, I have money now, it’s just...You know, sometimes, I take out the money from the bank, I go to hang out with two friends. I have two friends, I call them, let’s hang out they say. They are busy. I say, ‘Money is nothing if you don’t find someone to spend it with.’...I say, you know, now I get money, I have money, but you can’t spend...even there is no place to spend it. Or with someone to share it or to spend it, it is not like back home, not working like that. Yeah, that’s difficult.

The collective perspective held by the participants also offered powerful teachings about how to create a better society. Instead of conceptualizing society members as isolated individuals, the participants offered a collective view that could be beneficial in solving individual problems. The participants not only emphasized a need to work together, but also described a view in which an individual was interconnected with their context. According to this view, a meaningful change for an individual could take place only through addressing the individual’s larger context.

F.: It’s better to invest in wellness, not to invest in illness, solving the illness. So the community is like that...If you are spending a lot of money...just...for the individual...it doesn’t solve the problem. You should spend for the whole community, for the whole society. Therefore any individual in this society becomes less problematic, for the society and for themself. Right? This is what I am seeing...If someone in society, in charge, build
more prison to create more job, it’s not a good way. Because, to me it’s this, you are saying this, ‘We do need more crime, more criminals. We fill our prisons with criminals, we hire the same people from society, different people, put them as a guard to control these people, so we create jobs.’ To me it doesn’t make sense, really. If you really want to solve any problems, you have to, there is no choice, you have to reduce the pain of people, give them a good foundation, a good education to think, to think and pause. Then, they can make better decision, better decision between the variety of choices. And, therefore, you’re shrinking the problem...
Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, findings of the current critical ethnographic study conducted with eight participants residing in Vancouver and Winnipeg are discussed in the context of existing research and theoretical literature on social ties and the settlement of migrant survivors of political violence. In order to contextualize the findings and provide a lens through which these findings should be interpreted, the limitations of the current study are outlined prior to this discussion. Following the discussion of the findings in relation to other literature, theoretical contributions of the study and implications for future research are presented. This chapter concludes with recommendations for counselling practice that emerged from the findings and with a summary of the study’s significance.

Contextual Considerations for Interpreting the Findings

The findings of the current study pertain to the particular positions of eight individuals, living in Vancouver and Winnipeg. They reflect my own interpretation of the unique narratives constructed in conversation with each participant and told in a particular context at a particular point in our lives. As such no claims can or are being made about generalizability. The participants arrived from different countries through various migration trajectories, under different circumstances, at different ages and life stages, and have been residing in Canada between two and eight years. They differ in gender and sexual orientation, in education and employment histories, and in their fluency in speaking English. Although this diversity provided me with a wide scope of information, it also limits the claims of the study.

In order to avoid the relational complexities involving interpretation from other languages, I only included in this study individuals who felt comfortable being interviewed in English. However, excluding from the study those who do not comfortably converse in the
language of the dominant culture can be theoretically, morally, and pragmatically problematic. In making the decision to not include those participants, I may have contributed to further silencing of the people who are already silenced the most in society. This decision also leaves a considerable gap in theory and practice, as the concerns of those who are potentially most vulnerable have yet to be addressed.

The findings of this study are limited to the specific types of exchange fostered and/or silenced at the intersection of my own positionalities with the positionalities of each participant. Considering the participants’ past experiences with threat and violence, I felt deeply privileged by the level of trust demonstrated in the interviews, and with the participants’ courage to share their stories with me. My own position as a migrant who came from a war-affected country implied a degree of “insiderness.” However, my role as a counsellor, a person who is known in the service-provider community in Winnipeg, and my position as a researcher, situated within the Western academy, placed me on a different side of the continuum of power. On the one hand my complex positionality allowed me to have a special access to survivors’ community and likely served to increase feelings of mutuality and trust in the researcher-researched relationships. On the other hand, my many privileges also likely interfered with safety and relationship building (Khan, 2005; Mani, 2008), shaping our interaction and limiting information shared by the participants.

My particular and personal locations based on my education, gender, sexual orientation, class, and race make my own understandings subjective “and forged through interactions within fields of power relations” (Narayan, 1993, p. 679). My thinking as a researcher is influenced by my years of exposure to psychological and other theories, my experience as a therapist and service provider, and my experience as a migrant from the Former Yugoslavia. The
methodological orientation of this study was ideologically and theoretically shaped.
Consequently, no claims can or are being made about researcher neutrality, or the study’s
objectivity. To ensure transparency and provide information about the context shaping my own
understanding, my reflexive account is presented before the study’s findings.

**Types of Social Ties and their Role in the Settlement Process**

The participants in the current study described a number of different types of social
connections that have played a role in their process of settlement. These connections spanned
from deeply intimate relationships with members of their family of origin, romantic partners,
children, and friends, to looser and less frequent connections with services, organizations, and
the larger community. The various social ties described by the participants took place within
larger historical, social, political, and economic contexts, which had to be taken into
consideration in understanding their settlement experiences. As described by the participants,
different types of relationships played different roles in the process of settlement. These findings
are consistent with extant research focusing on the role of social support in the process of
settlement for the migrant survivors’ population (Betancourt et al., 2012; Sideris, 2003; Simich et
al., 2003).

In their study involving the role of social support for 47 Sudanese migrant survivors
living in Ontario, Simich and colleagues (2003) found that both intimately related sources of
support and relationships with casual acquaintances or community organizations provided
significant resources for settlement. The authors found that for their participants, while close
relationships served as a source of emotional or affirmation support, connections with the larger
society provided instrumental resources for their long-term settlement. The findings of the
current study generally support the findings of Simich and colleagues’ research, indicating that
different types of relationships play different roles in the process of settlement (e.g. family, friendships, home and host communities, professional services, and government organizations).

However, the scope of the current study extends beyond the notion of social support, describing broader and more complex roles of the participants’ social ties. For example, the participants depicted relationships of trust, encouragement, and belonging, alongside relationships of judgment, betrayal, and exploitation. Their social ties aided resistance to violence, hindered recovery, or were protective and harmful at the same time. Their close family relationships not only provided social support, but also inspired the participants to persevere in dealing with the difficulties they encountered in their settlement process. Thus, with its wider focus, this study contributes further insight to the literature by describing flexible and variable roles of different types of social ties in the migrant survivors’ settlement process. The current study’s findings about types of social ties and the participants’ descriptions of their various roles are discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

**Family.** The eight participants in the current study described that although geographical distance may have impacted their ability to interact with family left behind, it did not affect their perceived level of closeness, or lessen their efforts to maintain these important connections. Even when not residing in the same country, close relationships with family played a significant role in the participants’ efforts to secure financial stability, learn English, and adapt to the requirements of their new environment. For the participants, close relationships with family significantly influenced their motivation and perseverance to overcome difficulties and to complete the tasks of settlement. They described a strong motivation to succeed in their new country, establish themselves financially and socially, and assist family members left in politically and/or economically precarious circumstances, through offering financial and emotional support, and
securing sponsorship. As a significant source of identification, family also supported their settlement efforts through fostering a responsibility to succeed as a collective. For the participants, the success of one family member was perceived as success for the entire family, the benefits of which were shared among family members who often occupied different geographical locations.

The participants in the current study continued to own a sense of obligation to take care of family members whose economic and other resources were lacking. Consistent with the findings of other studies, carrying such responsibility was an enormous source of stress for the participants, especially in the context of tight economic constraints and discriminatory employment practices (Beiser, 1999; Berman et al., 2006; Elliot & Gray, 2001; Jackson, 2008; Simich et al., 2006). However, the participants also described that their ability to earn an income, send money, and support family members left behind, was a significant source of fulfillment that contributed to their sense of agency, accomplishment, and sense of being settled.

The current study contributes to existing literature by illuminating the very strong, positive role of family responsibility in the settlement process. In addition to emotional and affirmation support described in the literature (Simich et al., 2003), the current study illuminates strong motivational and obligational roles that the family played for the majority of the participants in this study, augmenting their settlement efforts and strengthening their perseverance. It is also important to note that, even for the participant who experienced rejection and shaming by his family, his sense of family obligation continued to provide him with a strong incentive to succeed in his new country.

**Friendships.** According to the participants, long-existing friendships with those who shared similar history, geography, and similar experiences of culture, community, and politics,
served as a significant source of validation and belonging, providing a sense of continuity. Friendships in their new country, which were often difficult to form and less intimate, none-the-less served as an important source of information about the new social rules, job search and credentialing processes, and legal, educational, and health systems in Canada. These findings are congruent with the above-described extant literature on the role of social support, in particular friendships, in helping migrants understand the local norms and negotiate various necessary systems and services (Beiser, 1999; Simich et al., 2003).

**Home and host communities.** The findings of the current study about the role of ethnic community mirror the mixed findings in the literature, as both positive and negative roles of the ethnic community were identified. Consistent with the findings of previous studies (Beiser, 1999; Elliot & Gray, 2001; Simich et al., 2006), some participants described that their ethnic community provided a significant context for information sharing, political engagement, identification, and social support in their new country. However, a number of participants in the current study avoided associations with their ethnic/country of origin community, or reported significant conflict with members of this community. They felt that due to their history of violence and political conflict, such relationships could be threatening, harmful, and dangerous for themselves and, especially, for their family members who still reside in their country of origin. These findings are consistent with results of a narrative study by Schweitzer and colleagues (2007), conducted with 13 Sudanese migrant survivors living in Australia. The authors found that while for some participants ethnic community helped by encouraging educational and employment-related goals, and discussing experiences of adaptation, other participants cut ties with their ethnic community and built relationships with the host community. These findings underscore the complex and sometimes negative role of migrants’ ethnic
communities in the host country, as described in other extant studies (Schweitzer et al., 2006) and have significant implications for settlement and clinical services. Clearly caution should be exercised when matching migrant clients with interpreters and service providers from their country of origin.

The participants described considerable difficulty establishing meaningful relationships with the host Canadian community, leaving them on the margins of the host society and contributing to feelings of isolation. Consistent with other literature (Berman et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2002; Simich et al., 2003), these findings draw attention to profound experiences of loneliness and not belonging, in spite of the participants’ efforts to engage with the host society. However, in conceptualization of this identified loneliness, the existing literature primarily highlights the role of the missing relationships with families and communities that the migrant survivors had to leave behind. To date, the literature provides little insight into how difficulties establishing connections with the host community in the new country, contribute to experiences of isolation for migrant survivors of political violence. The findings of this study indicate a clear need for research on how host communities can better reach out to, and assist, migrants with this important aspect of settlement.

**Services in Canada.** Although most participants had utilized various settlement and mental health services offered in Vancouver and Winnipeg, their stories about the role of these services varied. For some participants, settlement and employment services not only provided useful information, but also served as an important point of human connection at a time when they arrived in Canada and felt confused and lonely. However, other participants described experiencing a breach of trust by an interpreter from their country of origin, misuse of power by service providers, or underutilization of services based on a lack of information about the
available services and supports. Similar findings about negative experiences with services and service providers in Canada were reported in the narrative study by Berman and colleagues (2006), conducted with nine women survivors from various countries who settled in Canada. The participants in Berman and colleagues’ study reported experiencing marginalization, seclusion, and uncaring services. They perceived helping professionals in Canada to be patronizing, condescending and demeaning.

The participants in the current study described multiple roles that migrant service agencies can provide. For some participants, these agencies not only represented places where services were received, but they also had the potential to offer important first human connections in the new country. They represented a place where others who shared similar experiences could be met, thereby helping to facilitate a sense of belonging. These findings are partly in line with the findings of the previously mentioned study by Simich and colleagues (2003) regarding social support for Sudanese migrant survivors in Ontario. In their research, Simich and colleagues found that social support received from agencies and organizations provide instrumental resources for long-term integration. However, the findings of the current study also identify roles of settlement and health services that extend beyond social support, providing insight into a complex interchange that takes place in these relationships – an interchange that can help and/or hinder migrants’ settlement efforts.

It is important to note that most of the participants in this study utilized the mental health services that were available to them, and reported positive experiences and reduction of trauma-related difficulties as an outcome of counselling. This is especially significant considering that for some of the participants counselling was an unusual practice that was uncommon in their country of origin. The extant literature provides little information about the use of counselling
services by migrant survivors. Further research is needed to better understand the meaning and role of counselling services for this population, and the mechanisms through which the reported symptom reduction takes place.

**Governments and governmental organizations.** Considering the participants’ histories of persecution, imprisonment, torture, and threat by their governments, it is not surprising that they reported not trusting, or even fearing, governmental organizations in Canada, such as the police and Child and Family Services. The participants reported not approaching governmental services even when they were under threat and in need of help. One participant who did approach the police and housing services for help in a bullying situation, reported not receiving assistance and continuing to struggle with the threats to her family. There is not much information in the literature about the role of governmental services in assisting the migrant survivors’ population, including the accessibility and responsiveness of such services. The findings of this study suggest that further research is needed regarding the use of these services by the migrant survivors’ population. It is important to better understand what adaptations are required so that these services are better able to accommodate the specific needs and experiences of migrants.

**Larger socio-political and economic context.** Various types of relationships described above are shaped by the larger context of history, society, economy, and politics. Most of the participants in the current study described experiencing extreme violence at some point in their lives, in some cases for prolonged periods of time. Some participants’ family members were still in danger in their country of origin, and others had been forced to flee their home country since their departure. At the time of the data collection interviews, some participants’ family members were still exiled in countries around the world, living in poverty and without rights to work and
education. Apart from PTSD-related research discussed above, there is very little information in the extant psychological literature on the impact of political violence on migrants’ relationships and families. The findings of the current study indicate that the participants responded to such experiences by strengthening their social bonds and heightening their sense of obligation towards those family members who they perceived as being in more vulnerable situations.

Consistent with other literature (Bauder, 2003; Beiser, 1999; Berman et al., 2006; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Dunn & Dyck, 2000; Elliot & Gray, 2001; Simich et al., 2006), since coming to Canada the participants described experiencing injustices, hidden and/or blatant discrimination, and related experiences of stress, pain, or rejection. They described oppression in employment and educational contexts, and/or in their everyday encounters with ordinary people at the store, or even when in traffic. This oppression appeared to be based on the participants’ skin colour, manner of dress, foreign accent, PTSD-related disabilities, foreign name, or foreign work experience and/or academic credentials. Most frequently, multiple forms of oppression were experienced.

In addition to the profound psychological impact previously described in the literature, the findings of the current study further illuminate the participants’ active ways of coping with oppression. In their coping, the participants relied on their resilience, strengthened through past experiences in similar situations, to resist the potentially harmful impact of such experiences. Some participants described calmness in the face of racist comments, and refusal to be deterred from their confidence, goals, and aspirations. Other participants talked about their attempts to educate others as a way of trying to lessen ignorance and oppression. The participants described creative strategies, such as changing their name to secure a chance of being invited to a job interview, changing the way they dress, or confidently claiming their Canadian citizenship and
challenging oppressive practices. These adaptive strategies allowed the participants to continue moving forward in their process of settlement. However, the problem of systemic oppression in Canadian society in employment, education, and in everyday human interaction, posed significant and unnecessary challenges for these people who already were faced with so many other challenges. A context in which a migrant is expected to adapt to such unjust circumstances not only interferes with the process of settlement, but is also harmful to individuals and communities. Therefore, as is evident from these findings, healthy settlement cannot be a unidirectional process in which a migrant is the only party that adapts. Consistent with conclusions in other literature (Beiser, 1999; Berman et al., 2006; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Elliot & Gray, 2001; Simich et al., 2003), these findings suggest that changes need to be made in the receiving society to allow for a healthier transition and to adapt to the needs, skills, and resources that new migrants contribute to Canadian society.

In this section, the current study’s findings about the participants’ social connections, ranging from intimate ties with family and friends to more distant relationships with service providers and larger systems were described. Various roles of these social ties in the participant’s settlement process were discussed in the context of the existing literature. Following is a discussion of the current study’s insights about the process of settlement.

**Settlement as a Continuous, Interactive, and Social Process**

In addition to information about the various important roles of social ties, the findings of the current study offer significant insight into the process of settlement from the diverse perspectives of the eight migrant survivors of political violence who shared their stories with me. In the participants’ narratives, settlement was a continuous process in which past experiences, as well as current individual and collective coping with the impact of those experiences, played a
significant role. In addition to dealing with the impact of often traumatic past experiences, the process of settlement involved managing existing resources and dealing with obstacles and systemic pressures encountered in the new environment. It further involved nurturing their existing close social connections and establishing new relationships, which were essential in building a sense of belonging in their new country. The components of this process are described in greater detail in the sections below.

The continuum: embracing painful history. According to the participants’ narratives, for these individuals, settlement was a continuous process that often began with exposure to violent circumstances, which propelled a decision to leave their country of origin. Even though painful, stories about past traumatic experiences necessarily became a part of their settlement stories, providing a sense of continuity, meaning, and belonging. As the participants moved to Canada, their stories about their past became a way of reclaiming a sense of identity through embracing their histories, and through strengthening connections with other people who shared similar experiences. These findings are consistent with the perspectives of transition and family life cycle theories (McGoldrick & Carter, 2003; Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, Waters & Anderson, 1995), which conceptualize transition, such as settlement, as a process that takes place within the context of the life-long development of individuals and their relational systems. Despite the sudden, unexpected, and profoundly displacing impact of forced migration, the participants in this study preserved a sense of continuity through their connections with their histories, and by maintaining strong ties with people and places with whom they had identified. Similarly to these findings, the extant literature suggests that migrant survivors resist separation from their homeland and significant relationships by maintaining transnational identities and connections (Elliot & Gray, 2001; Jackson, 2008; Simich, 2008; Simich et al., 2003; Simich et
al., 2006). The current study contributes to the extant literature by further illuminating ways in which the participants embraced and narrated their history, in spite the fact that this history was filled with pain and difficulty.

Experiences of political and other forms of violence and persecution were profoundly present in the participants’ stories about their past experiences. This violence may have occurred in the past, or it may have extended to their current lives in Canada, as they learned about the continuing victimization of their family members and communities by oppressive regimes, brutal governments, and terrorist groups in their countries of origin. Whether past or present, the effects of experienced or witnessed violence continued to be a part of the settlement process of these migrants, posing trauma-related challenges and impacting their access to personal and social resources in their new country. Some of the participants reported struggling with trauma issues before arriving in Canada, while others emphasised that their trauma-related past experiences impacted them only after arriving to a country wherein they felt safe. According to the participants, various factors contributed to the worsening of their trauma-related problems after arriving in Canada. For some, being in a safe environment, being alone, and having more time to think about their past, contributed to the intensification of their difficulties. Also, facing the pressures of economic survival in a new environment, which they often experienced as exploitive, blind to the needs of migrant survivors of political violence, and highly competitive, amplified their levels of stress and heightened their distress. This is consistent with other literature that identifies factors such as poverty, un/underemployment, racially and ethnically based discrimination and oppression as significant sources of stress in the new country (Beiser, 1999; Berman et al., 2006; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Elliot & Gray, 2001; Jackson, 2008; Simich et al., 2006).
Psychological impact of pre-migration trauma and the acts of resistance. The findings of this research both align with, and diverge from, the findings reported in previous studies (Fazel, Wheeler & Danesh, 2005; Kinzie, et al., 1990; Kroll, Yusuf & Fujiwara, 2011; Mollica, Wyshak & Lavalle, 1987; Quota, Punawaki & Sarraj, 2003), describing the impact of pre-migration stressors on migrant survivors of political violence. According to the study participants, violence experienced or witnessed pre-migration, continued to have a psychological impact in their everyday lives in Canada, but for most this impact gradually diminished. The participants greatly differed in their reported symptoms and the progress of recovery. Some participants described persistent intrusive memories and flashbacks, incessant thoughts and questions, difficulty experiencing joy in life, concentration and mood problems, social withdrawal, fatigue, somatic difficulties, reduced productivity, and difficulty trusting others. While most of the participants reported gradual reduction of frequency and/or intensity of these problems, some continue to experience flashbacks, unwanted memories, and social difficulties. However, it is important to note that even though they occasionally experienced these problems, the participants described being less impacted by them at the present time. Some of the participants explicitly used psychiatric language to describe their difficulties (e.g., “flashbacks”, or “depression”) and some had been formally diagnosed with PTSD or depression. Some participants reported that receiving the diagnosis of PTSD or depression was a positive experience, as it provided an explanation for their difficulties, and, paradoxically, served to normalize their experience in the context of the abnormal violent circumstances they had experienced in their lives. The participants in this study also described how engaging in counselling, and in some cases in pharmacological treatment, helped them to reduce or eliminate many of the above listed symptoms and problems.
These findings support the research focused on the experiences and PTSD symptoms of migrant survivors (Fazel, Weeler & Danesh, 2005; Kinzie et al., 1990; Kroll, Yusuf & Fujiwara, 2011; Mollica, Wyshak & Lavalle, 1987; Quota, Punawaki & Sarraj, 2003). However, the findings of the current study extend our understanding of the extent to which psychological difficulties may persist or even intensify after relocation, for migrants who have experienced violence in their home countries. The current study further contributes to this research by highlighting the ongoing impact of oppressive socio-economic circumstances on migrants’ experiences of trauma-related problems, while also underscoring the potential effectiveness of counselling services in reducing these difficulties. That said, it remains to be determined what aspects of the counselling process contribute to the reduction of migrants’ PTSD-related symptoms, or how this improvement takes place. More focused research exploring the process of trauma recovery, factors that contribute to recovery, and effective counselling practices with this specific population could provide further insight into these important practical issues.

The current study’s findings illuminate the participants’ suffering with trauma-related difficulties, which occupied such a significant space in their narratives. However, while acknowledging this individual suffering, the current study also supports the critique of individually focused PTSD research pointing to how a sole focus on individual “pathology” may obscure the larger impact of violence and its causes (Ager, 1999; Pedersen, 2002; Summerfield, 2002). In addition, findings of the current study suggest that with a sole focus on the individual’s suffering, scholars and practitioners risk overlooking significant information about the role of social and contextual factors in alleviating or amplifying the impact of such suffering.

It is also important to note that the findings of the current study suggest the participants were not passive recipients of the influence of witnessed or experienced violence. On the
contrary, their narratives portrayed acts of resistance, defiance in the face of oppression, closely holding on to their values and beliefs, strengthening relationship bonds, and actively initiating changes in harmful and unjust circumstances (Carspecken, 1997). According to the participants’ narratives, through such acts of defiance, they resisted the impact of violence and stayed resilient, reducing the damaging impact of traumatic experiences and, subsequently, being able to healing from these experiences. These findings add a significant component to the extant literature on the resilience of migrant survivors of political violence, by highlighting the importance of active resistance in potentially traumatizing situations. Other researchers have identified love, solidarity, and rights (Thomas et al., 2011), as well as community support, religion, personal attitudes and beliefs (Schweitzer et al., 2007) as significant factors contributing to resilience. Based on the findings of the current study, resisting oppression and actively defying the impact of traumatic experiences, also appear to be significant factors that contribute to migrants’ resilience and healing.

**Social impact of pre-migration stress and acts of resistance.** The findings of the current study confirm the claims of other researchers that experiences of disrupted social connection and loss of social roles can be highly distressing for migrants (Ishiyama, 1995; Lim, 2009; Sideris, 2003; Simich et al., 2003; Simich et al, 2006). In addition, the findings highlight the importance of migrants’ acts of defiance in counteracting the harmful social effects of political violence. In their narratives, the participants spoke about how they actively resisted the impact of political violence through: strengthening connections with the loved ones they had left behind; contributing to their families and current communities; their determination to succeed in Canada; political engagement; and the (re)establishment of their social roles. Although disrupted connection and loss of social roles may represent the most salient impact of political violence, as
described in previous studies (Miller et al., 2002; Sideris, 2003), the participants in the current study discussed their efforts to overcome or reduce this impact through active (re)engagement with their social circles. If, as previously argued (Pedersen, 2002; Summerfield, 1999), the primary impact of war for migrants is through witnessing the destruction of their social worlds, including their histories, identities, values and roles, the social worlds of the participants in the current study were not completely destroyed. On the contrary, as a testament to their resilience, the participants’ narratives provided rich descriptions of continuing relationships and strong social and relational roles and responsibilities. That said, it is important to note that the participants in the current study were at an age that allowed for such active resistance and rebuilding of social roles and relationships. It remains to be determined the extent to which active resistance plays a role in the settlement of migrant survivors who are in a different life stage (e.g., children or seniors).

**Settlement as an interactive process.** It is significant to note that the findings of the current study do not support views of settlement as a one-directional, linear, and universal process, as commonly conceptualized in psychological theories of acculturation (Berry, 1997, 2001). Rather, these findings portray settlement for the participants in this study, as an interactive, dynamic, and ongoing endeavour rooted in larger socio-political contexts. As described in their narratives, the participants were not only influenced by the host society in their adaptation to their new environments, but they also actively engaged with their home and host communities, contributed to societal and political changes, and resisted harmful influences of violence. These findings align with Bhatia and Ram’s (2009) model of acculturation, informed by diaspora studies, and lend support to their critique of dominant theories (e.g., Berry, 1997; 2001) that describe acculturation as a series of one-directional steps leading to a final end point.
of adaptation to the host culture. According to Bhatia and Ram, acculturation involves a continuous, never-ending, negotiation between “here and there, between past and present, between homeland and host-land, and between self and others” (pp. 141-142), as the migrant “grapples with his/her place in the larger structures of their history, culture, and politics” (p. 148). Consistent with this theory, the participants in the current study described fluid interaction with the host society, which involved their own active influence and was impacted by their social, historical, and political contexts. The participants’ active influences were enacted through helping their families and communities, and through challenging unjust political practices.

In addition to helping their families, several participants described their active political engagement in exposing oppression in their countries of origin, or opposing discriminative practices in Canada, which in turn, contributed to their own sense of empowerment. Some of the participants engaged in volunteer work, or connected with other migrants in Canada, offering their resources and contributing to the larger community. The participants described this active engagement, or meaningful activity, to be central to their process of settlement. These findings support the extant psychological literature highlighting a pivotal role of contribution to others, and resistance to violence, in working with survivors of violence (Denborough, 2008; Wade, 2007). As research literature is missing on this topic, the current study offers a unique contribution through identifying and describing the participants’ acts of helping and resistance. This active responding, as opposed to passive forms of acculturation described in the psychological literature (Berry, 1997), was critical in the trauma recovery and settlement of the study participants. Clinical implications of these findings are discussed later in this chapter.

Although the existing literature describes difficulties related to migrants’ efforts to help their families by sending money back home (Elliot & Gray, 2001; Jackson, 2008; Simich et al.,
2006), little information is available in the literature on the role that this active contribution may play in the process of settlement. An exception can be found in the work of Jackson (2008). In an essay based on his two year long fieldwork with Sierra Leonean migrants living in London and focusing on the life-world of a young Sierra Leonean man, Jackson argues that contributing to community and helping relatives left behind can provide a significant sense of meaning.

Consistent with Jackson’s claims, helping others, contribution to their host and home communities, and affecting changes in the political arena, were described as key positive factors contributing to the settlement experiences of the participants in the current study. The current study contributes to the existing literature by illuminating this important, and under-examined, aspect of the settlement process. It further contributes to understanding of settlement as a fluid and dynamic, rather than linear process.

**Settlement, belonging, and social processes.** The participants in this study described a strong sense of identification and belonging, that characterized their relationships with family members and friendship groups who still reside in their home country or have settled elsewhere around the globe. Consistent with extant literature (Beiser, 1999; Lewis, 2010), in the absence of close family members and friendship groups in Canada, the participants described attempts to create social circles that would replace some of the functions that those close relationships previously fulfilled in their lives. These findings support the claims in the theoretical and research literature that the quality of migrant survivors’ adaptation in their new country depends on their capacity to rebuild socio-cultural networks and establish satisfying social relationships (Ahmed, 1999; Beiser, 1999; Ishiyama, 1995; Simich, 2008; Summerfield, 1999). Certainly in the current study, the participants described the number and quality of their social connections, as a measure of how settled they feel in Canada.
The participants expressed a strong desire to establish a sense of belonging in Canada, but reported finding it difficult. Multiple challenges to establishing a sense of belonging were identified by the participants. The participants perceived their host society as cold, unwelcoming, and difficult to engage with. They approached relationship building in Canada with a lens coloured by their own past experiences of betrayal and exploitation, which interfered with establishing a sense of safety and trust. The participants also described receiving individual and systemic messages about not belonging, as well as experiencing systemic oppression. Of particular note, the participants talked about how it was expected that they would want to form significant associations and a sense of belonging with community members who also had migrated from their home country. However, for several of the participants who had fled from violence and/or civil conflict in their country of origin, these ethnic or regional communities were considered a source of threat to be avoided. This erroneous assumption, common in Canadian society and amongst service providers, can have serious implications for the migrant survivors, increasing their sense of isolation and risk, and decreasing their sense of safety. As described, matches with interpreters based on such assumptions caused harm for some of the participants, violating their rights for privacy and triggering re-traumatization. Based on these findings, caution has to be exercised in matching migrant survivors with interpreters and counsellors who also arrived from the same country of origin.

The findings also highlight some of the challenges the participants experienced in attempting to establish a sense of belonging in Canada. The participants described both subtle and blatant messages from “White Canadians” inferring that they are different and that they belong elsewhere. Several of the participants described being asked questions about where their real home is, how long they have been in Canada, why they came to Canada, or whether they
spoke English. They described negative assumptions that were made about them, based on their appearance, clothes, skin colour, foreign name, or foreign accent. They also described receiving racist comments and condescending messages implying that “this is Canada” and they do not belong here. In addition to these personal encounters that took place on the street and in stores, the participants also described being the recipients of systemic forms of oppression and systemic messages of not belonging when searching for employment, attempting to upgrade their education, or gain professional recognition of their foreign credentials. These experiences of systemic oppression presented serious obstacles for the participants, further amplifying a significant power imbalance between those who belong versus those who are attempting to settle in Canada. In addition, oppressive practices and policies further deepened the gap between established social structures and the participants who were trying to gain credibility and find their own place within those structures. These findings are consistent with the literature, suggesting that political, social, and economic factors such as inequality, oppression, poverty, un/underemployment, and racially and ethnically based discrimination, present significant challenges for migrants (Beiser, 1999; Berman et al., 2006; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Dunn & Dyck, 2000; Elliot & Gray, 2001; Jackson, 2008; Simich et al., 2006). Certainly for the participants in the current study, systemic oppression and messages about not belonging and/or not being welcome in Canada, negatively impacted their ability to establish a sense of belonging.

With its focus on the missing relationships, previous extant research does not offer much information about how migrant survivors establish new relationships in their host country or about obstacles that stand in the way of building a sense of belonging. The current study further illuminates this important aspect of settlement, highlighting the participants’ desire and attempts to establish new social ties. Although the participants described a strong sense of identification
and belonging with their families, friends and other groups with whom they associated prior to their arrival to Canada, they also described experiencing isolation and loneliness in the host country.

It is important to note that there were significant individual differences in the participants’ experiences of establishing a sense of belonging. Some of the participants described significant difficulties building close social relationships, and experienced a profound sense of isolation in Canada, while maintaining strong ties with family members and the community they left behind. Those participants who perceived themselves as having advanced in their efforts to establish a sense of belonging in Canada, described social attempts and connections with other migrants, increased comfort with diversity, and active engagement in various immigrant organizations.

The participants’ description of their process of identity development was also connected to their belonging-related experiences. In line with literature that suggests the multiple and fluid nature of migrant identity (Ahmed, 1999; Bhatia & Ram, 2009), the participants described a dynamic sense of identity, which varied based on their multiple positionalities, such as gender, occupation, sexual orientation, country of origin, religion, and length of stay in Canada. Consistent with Ahmed’s framework, the participants described the formation of new identities through building relationships and establishing social ties in Canada. They portrayed significant differences in incorporating and embracing their identity as “Canadians,” with a stronger sense of their Canadian identity development being associated with their time in Canada and their immigrant and/or citizenship status. These findings highlight the importance of time and immigration status in establishing a sense of belonging and identity development in the new country.
The findings of the current study support previous extant research indicating that social ties and the larger context have a pivotal role in establishing a sense of stability, safety, belonging, and cultural continuity for migrants, significantly contributing to feeling at home in a new country (Lewis, 2010; Simich et al., 2003; Simich et al., 2005). They further contribute to the literature on social ties and belonging, through illuminating the significant challenges that can be experienced by migrants as they attempt to establish new relationships and build a sense of belonging in a new country.

**Theoretical Contributions of the Current Study**

The findings of the current study inform counselling psychology’s theories of transition and multiculturalism by contributing to our theoretical understanding of the process of settlement for the under-researched group, migrant survivors of political violence. These findings call for a wider systemic and interactional lens in conceptualizing the process of settlement.

The current study contributes to the existing literature on the settlement of migrant survivors of political violence by describing the multifaceted and complex role of social connections in the process of settlement. More specifically, the current study identifies and describes different types of social ties, occupying various geographical and historical locations, spanning from the most intimate relationships to connections with the larger society, and taking place within a larger socio-economic and political context. Even though the findings generally align with literature on the role of social support in the settlement process (Beiser, 1999; Simich, 2003, 2005), they extend our understand beyond traditional, largely unidirectional conceptualizations of social support, in capturing the complexity of the various positive and negative roles that different types of social ties play in the process of settlement.

In line with the findings of other literature, (Beiser, 1999; Berman et al., 2006; Bryant-
Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Elliot & Gray, 2001; Jackson, 2008; Simich et al, 2003, 2006), the current study confirms that experiences of systemic oppression and isolation in the new country are the most salient factors that adversely affect the settlement process. These findings highlight a need for a wider contextual conceptualization of the process of settlement that not only consider individual settlement efforts, but also take into consideration the individual’s social circle, and the impact of wider political circumstances. Supporting Bhatia and Ram’s (2009) critique of acculturation theory, the current study suggests that migrant and host communities and individuals have unequal power and status and that the migrants’ acculturation strategy is very much influenced by their larger political context. To date, prominent psychological theories of acculturation remain silent about the role and importance of power differences in acculturation. The current study suggests that power relations during settlement play a crucial role in the settlement process and that power differences and other political factors must be included in psychological conceptualization of settlement.

Furthermore, in contrast with individualistic, linear, and one-directional conceptualizations of Berry’s (1997, 2001) acculturation theory, these findings point to a relational and interactive understanding of the settlement process. The current study identifies the participants’ active influence that appeared to positively contribute to their settlement. This influence is reflected in: 1) identification with family and the perception of settlement-related success as a collective accomplishment; 2) obligation to help family left behind and increased perseverance in the face of difficulty; 3) contribution to community through political and social engagements; 4) active coping with oppression through resisting the impact of violence – a significant aspect of resilience. For the participants in the current study, active participation, contribution, and resistance to oppression were crucial in the settlement process. Through this
active engagement, the participants not only changed themselves and accomplished many tasks of settlement, but they also changed their environment and contributed to the well being of families, communities, and host and home societies. Therefore, for these participants, settlement was not only a process through which individuals changed in order to adapt to their society. On the contrary, it was a process in which the individual actively contributed to their new and old environments resulting in bi-lateral changes.

In line with Bhatia and Ram’s (2009) claims, findings of the current study suggest that settlement is a continuous, on-going process, that is not frozen in time. In this process, the participants embraced their painful histories, built a sense of continuity, and resisted the harmful social and psychological effects of political violence. These findings are also consistent with life transition and life cycle theories (McGoldrick & Carter, 2003; Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, Waters & Anderson, 1995), in which transitions, such as settlement, are conceptualized within the context of life-long development of individuals and the groups within which they are embedded. Consistent with these theories, the process of settlement required a reorganization of relational systems (McGoldrick & Carter, 2003), renegotiation of basic assumptions about self, life, and the world, as well as behavioural changes (Schlossberg, 1981).

In conclusion, the current study contributes to Counselling Psychology’s theoretical knowledge regarding the process of settlement through: 1) providing information about settlement experiences of migrant survivors of political violence, an under-researched group in the field, and 2) offering a conceptualization of the settlement process as a continual, interactive, social, and political process.

**Implications for Future Research**

Consistent with other literature (Ahmed, 1999; Beiser, 1999; Simich, 2008; Summerfield,
participants in the current study described missing relationships and portrayed a strong need to establish new social ties and build a sense of belonging in Canada. In spite of this strong desire, the participants described that building meaningful connections with the host community was frustrating and difficult. In addition, the participants described difficulty trusting others, related to past experiences of violence, which also interfered with relationship-building. Given the importance of establishing a sense of belonging in the settlement process (Lewis, 2010; Simich et al., 2003; Simich et al., 2005), further exploration of hindering and/or helpful factors that contribute to relationship-building in the new country is needed. Specifically, research about how migrant survivors of political violence are received in the host community, how connections with the host community are built, and what factors hinder and/or foster these connections could provide further insight into this important process. Also, future research could provide more insight into how past relational experiences of betrayal, persecution, torture and exploitation impact relationship-building in a new country for the survivors of political violence, and whether and how this impact could be lessened.

Consistent with extant theoretical and research literature (Carspecken, 1997; Denborough 2008; Simich, 2008; Wade, 2007), the current study identifies active resistance to imposed effects of political violence as a pivotal component of the participants’ settlement and recovery efforts. In their narratives, the participants offered rich descriptions of continuing relationships and strong social and relational roles and responsibilities – a result of their resistance to the disruption of social ties and social roles, intended in acts of political violence. However, the participants in the current study were at an age that allowed for such active resistance and rebuilding of social roles and relationships. The extent to which active resistance plays a role in settlement and recovery efforts of migrant survivors who are in a different life stage (e.g.,
children or seniors) still remains to be determined. Future studies with participants in different life stages could provide significant information regarding the role of active resistance in migrant survivors of different ages.

Practical questions about the utilization, accessibility, and effectiveness of mental health services offered to migrant survivors of political violence also emerged from the current study. The migrant survivors of political violence who participated in the interviews used counselling services and found them effective in reducing the impact of past traumatic experiences. However, the number of participants in this study was small, and the participants were partly recruited through counselling agencies, increasing the likelihood of contact with counselling services. Given these findings and the majority of research literature on this population identifying a higher prevalence of PTSD (Fazel, Wheeler & Danesh, 2005; Kinzie, et al., 1990; Kroll, Yusuf & Fujiwara, 2011; Mollica, Wyshak & Lavalle, 1987; Quota, Punawaki & Sarraj, 2003), further exploration of the role of mental health services is needed. Research could offer important suggestions for clinical practice through identifying factors that contribute to the trauma recovery of migrant survivors, and by describing counselling practices that are effective with this population.

The findings of the current study indicate that, due to past history with violence and the role that government institutions played in it, government-related services, such as police, legal, or child protection services, were underutilized by the participants. Furthermore, the participants report that they and their community members were often afraid and avoided approaching these services. In light of these findings and considering the current lack of literature on this topic, research regarding the utilization and accessibility of government services for the migrant survivors population is needed. This research may provide insight into potential changes that
could be made by the government services in order to accommodate the needs of the migrant survivor population and increase access to, and utilization of, services.

**Implications for Counselling Psychology Practice**

The profession of Counselling Psychology is well recognized for its focus on life long human development, positive emphasis on human growth, and attention to cultural and other contexts in assessment and counselling. With its strength-based approach and values involving collaborative practice and social justice, the lens of Counselling Psychology can offer significant resources aiding clinical conceptualization and work with migrant survivors of political violence.

Given the current study’ findings about the continual nature of the process of settlement, survivors of political violence should be seen as “normal”, successful, and resourceful people who are coping with major, often unpredictable life transition(s) (Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, Waters & Anderson, 1995). Counsellors should be familiar with the contexts surrounding migrant survivor clients, including their history, geography, and current socio-economic and political circumstances. In the conceptualization of clients’ issues, a comprehensive approach is recommended, taking into account factors such as employment, language, education, family, and other relationships, as well as past and current circumstances of oppression (McGoldrick & Carter, 2003; Waldegrave, 2005). Counsellors should be open to learning about the clients’ belief systems and cultural healing practices (Moodley & West, 2005), and to incorporating aspects of these practices into the treatment plan.

In the light of this study’s findings about the interactive nature of the settlement process in which resistance to the impact of violence was crucial, the goal of counselling intervention should not only be focused on helping the client adapt to circumstances in the new country. Furthermore, counselling with survivors of political violence should not be conceptualized only
as “a process of treating effects or impacts” of this violence (Wade, 2007, p. 66). On the contrary, counselling goals should include promoting agency, resistance, and resilience through empowering the client to influence their environment, resist unjust situations, and connect with others in order to ensure more power in this process. The focus of counselling should be placed on “elucidating individual’s physical, emotional, mental and spiritual responses to specific acts of violence” (Wade, 2007, p. 67), and strengthening forms of resistance that lead to the improved well being of individuals and communities.

However, with strong indications from this and other research (Beiser, 1999; Berman et al., 2006; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Elliot & Gray, 2001; Jackson, 2008; Simich et al., 2003, 2006) that oppression has a damaging effect on people’s mental health, responsibility for changing unjust circumstances should not only rest on the client. For counsellors informed by this research, engagement in social action and changing conditions that perpetuate or exacerbate the problems that migrant survivor clients are experiencing, becomes a professional obligation (Waldegrave, 2005). Regardless of whether these harmful conditions are located in Canada, the client’s country of origin, or in the global environment, counsellors have a responsibility to act systemically in order to eliminate the conditions that cause or perpetuate difficulties for many people.

The current study’s findings indicate that even though counselling was helpful in reducing trauma related problems for the participants in this study, without free, specialized counselling services recommended by a trusting source, the participants would have been reluctant to seek counselling. Given these findings, accessibility factors should be seriously considered by the counselling services aiming to offer services to the migrant survivors population. Factors such as free services and easy referral processes through trusted connections,
may be crucial in increasing the utilization of counselling by this population (Elez, 2008). As the findings of this study indicate, the common practices of matching clients with counsellors or interpreters from their country of origin can be harmful and re-traumatizing, so it is recommended that agencies exercise caution when providing or encouraging such matches. In considering the use of interpreters or matching a client with a counsellor from his or her country or origin, it is crucial to be aware that ethnic community can be potentially unsafe, and if possible, to seek consultation from the client.

Findings of the current study suggest that, given that participants faced loneliness and struggled to establish meaningful connections in Canada, some viewed the counselling relationship as a form of close friendship, or an intimate connection similar to a family member. In establishing a counselling relationship, it is important to pay attention to these social vulnerabilities that migrants who are struggling to build a sense of belonging potentially bring to counselling. The therapist needs to be curious about and aware of these potentially unusual roles assigned to her/him in the therapy process. In the context of such potential social vulnerability, there is a possibility of harm resulting from a therapist’s lack of awareness of the client’s unusual expectations and perceptions of personal closeness with the therapist. In working with migrant survivors facing isolation, it is particularly important for the therapist to explore clients’ social needs, expectations, and perceptions of the therapeutic relationship, and to continually explain her/his boundaries and roles, while helping clients establish adequate social ties.

**Implications for Social Policies and Services**

Four significant themes emerged from the findings of the current study pertaining to the participants’ needs and recommendations for social policies and services. These themes include sponsorship related concerns; required support around trauma recovery; employment, education
and credentialing obstacles; and confusion around available services for migrant survivors. Recommendations regarding each of these areas are outlined below.

As discussed, the participants in the current study described intense feelings of distress, longing, and missing their family members, along with the difficulty reuniting with their loved ones, which negatively affected their mental health and settlement efforts. This finding is consistent with the findings of previous studies, which indicate that social dislocation and separation from close family and friends represent the most salient source of stress interfering with migrant survivors’ mental health and settlement (Beiser, 1999; Elliot & Gray, 2001; Miller, Worthington, Muzurovic, Tipping & Goldman, 2002; Simich, 2008; Simich, Beiser & Mawani, 2003; Simich et al., 2006). In spite of their needs to re-unite with families and have at least some family members join them in their new country, the participants describe numerous bureaucratic obstacles to their efforts to help family members relocate to Canada. These obstacles include: 1) Canadian government’s narrow definitions of family, which exclude siblings, grandparents, or other close relatives, and block the participants’ efforts to bring these significant sources of connection and support to Canada, 2) impossible financial or housing requirements for sponsorship, and 3) lengthy sponsorship procedures, which take several years to complete.

Consistent with findings in other literature (Fazel, Wheeler & Danesh, 2005; Kinzie, et al., 1990; Kroll, Yusuf & Fujiwara, 2011; Mollica, Wyshak & Lavalle, 1987; Quota, Punawaki & Sarraj, 2003), some of the current study’s participants arrived in Canada with trauma related
difficulties and, for some participants, these difficulties intensified upon arrival. As previously
discussed, the participants described a dynamic interplay between their trauma related difficulties
and their capacity to perform various tasks of settlement. Therefore, for some participants,
trauma recovery was a significant part of the settlement process. These findings have significant
implications for policies and services aimed at improving settlement conditions of the migrant
survivors. The current policies of CIC, which no longer allow for funding mental health services,
create an artificial division between migrant serving agencies and restrict access to this important
service for the migrant survivors. Given suggestions from other literature (Beiser, 1999; Fazel,
Wheeler & Danesh, 2005; Kinzie, et al., 1990) and the current study’s findings about the
significance of trauma recovery in the participants’ settlement process, it is necessary for
settlement services to accommodate the mental health needs of the migrant survivors. Support to
migrant survivors needs to be offered through: 1) allowing time for recovery upon immigration
and removing expectations about immediate employment and re-paying of government loans; 2)
providing funding for counselling services specifically designed for the migrant survivors’
population; and 3) enabling equal access to employment, education, and other resources, for
people with disabilities related to psychological trauma.

The negative impact of unemployment, underemployment, and non-recognition of
academic credentials on the migrant’s well-being and settlement has been extensively described
in the literature (Bauder, 2003; Beiser, 1999; Berman et al., 2006; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo,
2005; Elez, 2014; Elliot & Gray, 2001; Jackson, 2008; Simich et al., 2006). In line with this
literature, the current study’s participants describe experiences of discrimination in employment
and educational contexts and insurmountable obstacles in obtaining professional recognition, in
spite of their extensive educational and work histories. They describe limited access to
employment, restricted to entry level minimally paid work, and rigid educational constraints requiring them to begin education at a level significantly below their previous educational achievements (e.g., having to complete high school even though they attended university in their country of origin). In addition, the participants describe difficulties obtaining professional registration and being asked to produce documents from the country of origin that they were unable to obtain as they had escaped from persecution by their country’s government. Given these findings, changes need to be made in the way that foreign academic credentials and work experience are being evaluated in Canada. Educational institutions and registering bodies need to approach migrant survivors, who fled their countries of origin and have no access to documentation, with more flexibility, allowing for different ways of demonstrating professional credibility and expertise. Programs need to be created that will allow easier access to desirable employment and professional recognition of migrant survivors of political violence who are trying to establish themselves in their new country, occupationally and professionally.

Findings of the current study indicate that the participants underutilized services designed to aid migrant survivors’ settlement, as they described confusion regarding types, availability and roles of various services, repetitive services, and lack of information about services available. These findings suggest that increased collaboration, sharing of information, and streamlining of various services is needed, in order to increase utilization and usefulness of these services.

**Significance of the Study**

By representing the stories of migrant survivors of political violence who participated in this research, this study extends our limited current knowledge about how 8 migrant survivors engaged in the process of making the transition to Canada. The findings contribute to extant psychological literature through: 1) identifying and describing various types of social
connections that migrant survivors engage in during their process of settlement; 2) analysis and description of the diverse roles that various social connections play in the settlement process; and 3) systemic conceptualization of the process of settlement as a continuous, interactive, and social process in which larger socio-economic and political context is crucial. Through these contributions, the current study further informs Counselling Psychology’s theories of transition and multiculturalism.

The current study significantly contributes to counselling practice through offering a systemic and political approach to counselling based on the values of Counselling Psychology. These suggestions include: 1) assuming a normalizing stance and conceptualization of settlement as an unanticipated life transition; 2) examining the impact of the larger socio-political context; 3) identifying and supporting acts of resistance to violence; and 4) political action aimed at reducing/eliminating oppression. In addition, the current study offers practical suggestions regarding the importance of accessible counselling, interpreter use, and ethical practice in establishing a therapeutic relationship with clients who may approach counselling from a position of social vulnerability. The current study identifies harmful or unhelpful practices in receiving and responding to migrant survivors of political violence as they attempt to settle in Canada, and offers suggestions for changing certain social practices and policies.

**Personal Impact**

I feel deeply privileged to have been allowed into such a significant and intimate part of the participants’ worlds. As I listened to their stories during our several encounters, I experienced complex connections with the participants that not only involved my researcher self, but also brought forth my emotional, personal, and human selves. The participants’ stories were not easy to share. They were not easy to listen to. During the interviews I witnessed tears, and I cried. We
laughed together, were outraged by the cruelty and senselessness of violence, and we sat in silence. I felt I connected with the participants in our common struggle with oppression and in our shared determination to eliminate violence and injustice. Most of all, I experienced a sense of mutual understanding, as we created a common context for this story-telling. Participants’ stories about early settlement experiences, their profound loneliness, and missing family and friends resonated for me. I felt connected to their experiences of discrimination and rejection in Canada. I felt pain and numbness as I listened about violence, injustices, and threats that they had experienced. I was speechless in the face of described atrocities.

However, I was also aware of my many privileges that separated me from experiences described by the participants. At the end of the interview, I was able to go back to my husband, children, and many friends. I drove home in my own vehicle, went to my own house, and continued to work on my dissertation. My family is in a different country, but they are safe and have food on the table. I do not feel judged or rejected based on my skin colour, sexual orientation, or my manner of dressing. Reconciling these tensions between being a part of the migrant community and belonging to many privileged groups in the Canadian society was not easy. Owning responsibility for the privileges that I was entitled to, based on my various social locations, was a painful task that I continued to remind myself of. Connections with the participants, based on my personal experience, identification, and history, allowed me to learn more about the lives and struggles of the participants. My position as a researcher created a distance and allowed me to hear the participants’ narratives from a more removed, “objective” place. However, this division was never clearly articulated and was never static.

I was moved by the participants’ stories about resistance, by their wisdom, and by their collective strategies for dealing with many life problems. I was touched by each person’s
longing, loneliness, and perseverance. I celebrated their successes. I was reminded of the immense resilience and strength of us as human beings. In a new way, through these encounters, I became intensely aware of the power and importance of social connection.
References


The psychological impact of war trauma on civilians: An international perspective.


Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS AND LIFE IN CANADA

- ARE YOU AN ADULT WHO LEFT THEIR HOMELAND FOR REASONS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE?
- HAVE YOU BEEN LIVING IN CANADA BETWEEN 2 AND 10 YEARS?
- ARE YOU COMFORTABLE COMMUNICATING IN ENGLISH OR IN SERBO-CROATIAN?
- ARE YOU INTERESTED IN SPEAKING WITH A UBC RESEARCHER ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE?

A research study is being conducted by Tanya Elez, a doctoral student at UBC, to explore the role of important relationships in the lives of people who left their homeland for reasons of political violence. The study is being supervised by Professor Judith Daniluk, Ph.D., Counselling Psychology Program.

Participation in this study will involve:

- A total of approximately 3 - 4 hours consisting of one confidential audiotaped interview, lasting 1 – 2 hours, and a follow-up interview, lasting up to 2 hours

- Sharing your story about life in Canada and about people that are important to you

For more information about this study, please contact:

Tanya Elez
Telephone: XXX XXX XXX
Email: X@gmail.com
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY IN ADAPTING TO LIFE IN CANADA FOR MIGRANT SURVIVORS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Principal Investigator: Dr. Judith Daniluk, Professor (Supervisor)
Department of Counselling Psychology
University of British Columbia
XXX XXX XXX; X@ubc.ca

Co-Investigator: Tatjana Elez, PhD Student
Department of Counselling Psychology
University of British Columbia
XXX XXX XXX; X@gmail.com

Introduction:
The purpose of this study is to learn more about the role that social relationships play in adaptation to life in Canada. Knowledge collected through this research may help mental health professionals and members of the community to better support people who migrate to a new country.

Procedures:
You will be asked to participate in one audio-recorded interview which will be approximately 1 ½ to 2 hours long. For this interview, I would like to visit you at your home, or meet at another private location that you are comfortable with. You will be asked to discuss important relationships in your life and your experience adapting to life in Canada. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions during the interview, you may say so and we will move on to the next question. Once the interview content is transcribed, I will ask to meet with you to go over the notes and make sure that I understood your story correctly, and to note any other information that you may want to add.

Results:
The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books.

Confidentiality:
The information collected from this research will be kept private. Any information about you will have a number on it instead of your name. Only Dr. Daniluk and I will know what your number is and that information will be kept in a locked cabinet. The audio-recordings will also
be kept in a locked filing cabinet and you will not be identified by name on the tape. The tapes will be transcribed and destroyed five years after the project is finished and the copy of this consent form will be kept separately from the data.

**Potential Risks and Benefits:**
You will be asked questions which might raise difficult memories and remind you of things you have not talked about for a long time. You can stop the conversation at any point and do not have to provide any reasons if you choose not to answer any questions or talk about anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.

There will be no compensation provided for participating in the study. However, you may find you gain some personal insights by speaking about your transition experience with the researcher. It may also be helpful to you to know that through your participation in this study, other migrants who have experienced political violence in their homeland may be better supported in adapting to their new country.

**Contact for Information About the Study:**
If you have any questions or would like further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr. Judith Daniluk at the Department of Counselling Psychology at (XXX) XXX-XXX.

**Contact for Concerns About the Rights of Research Subjects:**
If you have any concerns about your rights as a research subject and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

**Consent:**
You have read the above information, and have had an opportunity to ask questions.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

*Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in this study, and acknowledge receipt of a copy of this form.*

____________________________________  _________________________
Signature of Participant  Date

____________________________________
Printed Name of the Participant signing above
Appendix C: List of Counselling Agencies

LIST OF COUNSELLING SERVICES
(To be offered to the participants should a need for such services arise during or after the interviews)

Counselling Services in Winnipeg:

*Therapy Program for Immigrant and Refugee Families at Aurora Family Therapy Centre*

University of Winnipeg
515 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg R3B 2E9
TEL: XXX-XXXX

Counselling Services in Vancouver:

*Trauma Program at Bridge Community Clinic*

2450 Ontario Street
Vancouver, BC, V5T 4T7

*Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture (VAST)*

2618 East Hastings Street, Vancouver, BC V5K 1Z6
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX
Toll-Free: X-XXX-XXX-XXXX
Email: XXXX@XXXX.ca
Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Introductory Statement

Thank you for agreeing to discuss this important topic with me. The purpose of this study is to describe the role of community in adaptation to life in Canada, especially for the people who left their homelands for reasons of political violence. “Community” is a word that I use to represent various people and relationships that you may consider important. Those people may include family members, friends, neighbours, ethnic or religious groups, community agencies, government representatives, or anyone else who you might have a connection with. If you have a different word you would like us to use instead of “community”, I would be happy to use your words.

We know that people who move to this country generally do well, but we know little about what helps or blocks their efforts to adapt to life in a new country. I am specifically interested in learning about your experience of “community” and also about how this experience has affected your process of settlement in Canada. For some people, “community” provides a sense of belonging or support, some people start feeling at home only after having established community connections, some maintain strong ties with community in their homeland, while others find it important to build relationships with those living in the new country. People’s experiences and needs are different, and I am interested in learning from your own story about what is important to you. If you would like to share some photographs of people who you are significantly connected with, or objects that may remind you of those connections, you might find that this makes your story even more meaningful. It is my hope that by sharing stories such as yours we will make connections with others who are adapting to life in Canada, and teach professionals who are trying to support migrants in their settlement process. I will not be asking
too many questions, but will mostly listen to what you feel comfortable sharing. This is your story, and I will follow your lead.

**Opening Question**

*Can you tell me about your experience of the role of your various relationships during your settlement in Canada?*
Appendix E: Abbreviated Version of the Study’s Findings

Social Ties and Settlement Process of the Migrant Survivors of Political Violence

In conducting this study, I was interested in the role of social ties in the process of settlement for the migrant survivors of political violence who are settling in Canada. In answering my question about relationships that were important to them, the participants often told stories about their past lives, the violence they had experienced in their countries of origin, and their efforts to resist, or overcome, the impact imposed by this violence. Stories about settlement were inextricable from the stories about past experiences. Stories about social ties were closely connected with stories about violence. The participants spoke about how violence they experienced affected their personal functioning, beliefs, and perception of the world. They described the impact of violence on their interactions, social circles, and intimate connections. However, they also described how their close social connections played an important role in their coping with dangers, helping them resist and alter the effects of experienced violence. Also, the participants described that their social ties contributed, both positively and/or negatively, to their settlement efforts.

Different types of social connections were described by the participants. These types of connections played various roles in the participants’ settlement process. In general, close social relationships had a stronger influence on recovery from the impact of past traumatic experiences and on settlement efforts in Canada. These various types of relationships are described below.

Family was described as a significant source of identification, support, and motivation to not give up in the new country. The participants described a strong motivation to succeed in Canada, establish themselves financially and socially, and assist families left behind, through offering financial and emotional support, or securing sponsorship. Family also supported
settlement efforts through fostering a responsibility to succeed as a collective. For the participants, success of one family member was perceived as success for the entire family, even when the rest of the family lived in other countries.

Long-existing friendships with those who shared similar history, geography, and similar experiences, served as a significant source of validation and belonging, providing a sense of continuity. Friendships in the new country were often difficult to form and less intimate. They were perceived by participants as an important source of information about job search and credentialing processes, and legal, educational, and health systems in Canada.

In regards to ethnic community in Canada, both positive and negative roles of the ethnic community were identified. Some participants described that their ethnic community has been a source of information, identification, and social support in Canada. However, a number of participants avoided associations with their ethnic/country of origin community. They described that due to their history of political conflict, such relationships would be harmful and dangerous for them, and especially, for their family members who still live in their countries of origin.

Establishing meaningful relationships with the host Canadian community was difficult for several reasons. The participants described profound experiences of loneliness and not belonging in spite of their efforts to engage with the host society.

Although most participants had used various settlement and mental health services, their stories about the role of these services varied. For some, settlement and employment services provided useful information and also served as an important point of human connection at a time when they arrived to Canada and felt confused and lonely. Other participants described breach of trust by an interpreter from the same country, misuse of power by service providers, or lack of information about the existence and type of support offered. The participants had used therapy
services, reporting positive experiences and improvement in trauma related problems. This is especially significant considering that for some of the participants therapy was a strange practice, uncommon in their cultures and countries of origin.

Considering the participants’ prior experience with violence and threat by their governments, it is not surprising that they reported not trusting, or even being afraid of governmental organizations in Canada, such as police and Child and Family Services. A participant who did approach police and housing services asking for help, reported not receiving help and continuing to struggle with threats to her family.

The participants described injustices, discrimination in Canada, and related experiences of stress. They described oppression in employment and education, or in everyday encounters with ordinary people at the store, or in traffic. This oppression was sometimes based on the participants’ skin colour, the way they dressed, their foreign accent, PTSD related disability, having a foreign name, or having foreign work experience and/or academic credentials. The participants coped with these situations by relying on their resilience developed through past experiences, and they actively resisted the harmful impact of these experiences. Some participants described calmness in the face of racist comments and refused to be deterred from their confidence, goals, and aspirations. Other participants attempted to educate others, lessening the impact of oppression. Creative strategies, such as changing their name to secure a chance of being invited to a job interview, or changing the way they dress, were strategies they used. These strategies allowed the participants to continue making settlement progress.

In the participants’ narratives, it became apparent that settlement is an on-going process in which their past experiences and coping with the impact of such experiences, played a significant role. The process of settlement for these participants involved managing existing
resources and dealing with obstacles and new pressures encountered in Canada. It involved nurturing the existing close social connections and establishing new relationships, essential in building a sense of belonging in Canada.

In addition to adapting to their new environment, the participants described their own active participation and influence through helping families and communities, and through challenging unjust political practices. Several participants described exposing oppression in their countries of origin, or opposing discriminative practices in Canada. Some of the participants engaged in volunteer work, or connected with other migrants in Canada, offering their resources and contributing to the larger community. The participants described this active engagement, or meaningful activity, to be central to their process of settlement.

The participants express a strong desire to establish a sense of belonging in Canada. However, establishing close social ties in Canada has been difficult. Several obstacles to their efforts to belong in Canada were identified: 1) the host society is perceived as cold and difficult to engage with; 2) their own past experiences of betrayal and violence make building trusting relationships difficult; 3) messages from Canadians about not belonging, and oppression experienced in Canada; 4) being expected to relate with community members who arrived from the same country, which can be a problem for those who fled from violence in their country of origin and do not wish to associate with their community.