

**HANGING ON THE EDGE OF THE HOUSE:
AFRICAN REFUGEES, HOUSING, AND IDENTITY
IN METRO VANCOUVER**

by

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ABSTRACT

For African refugees arriving in Metro Vancouver, housing is a crucial component of settlement and integration. Given Metro Vancouver's expensive housing market, high levels of homelessness, and consistently low vacancy rate, how are they coping in Vancouver's housing market? What barriers do they face and what are some possible solutions? By providing an overview of the housing challenges African refugees face and identifying gaps in available services, this study expands the knowledge base upon which improved settlement policy and service provision may be built. The results show that, due to a complex combination of factors, including lack of affordable housing, discrimination, low incomes, and long application processing times, African refugees are facing a housing availability and affordability crisis in Metro Vancouver that forces them to accept substandard housing which is unsuitable, inadequate, and unaffordable. These unstable conditions are both symptomatic and generative of other problems, including poverty, debt, hunger, and a high risk of homelessness. Importantly, the study also reveals how these material conditions, which are the effect of policies grounded in theoretical perspectives around multiculturalism and notions of Canadian identity, are reflective of those underlying ideological frameworks. The author also argues that an enhanced understanding of the historical roots of current discriminatory practices is required in order to effect positive social change for the future.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AMSSA	Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of British Columbia
BC	British Columbia
BCID	BC Identification (government issued photo ID card)
BCSAP	British Columbia Settlement Assistance Program
CCR	Canadian Council for Refugees
CHRA	Canadian Housing and Renewal Association
CIAI	Centre of Integration for African Immigrants
CIC	Citizenship and Immigration Canada
CMA	Census Metropolitan Area
CMHC	Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
COA	Canadian Orientation Abroad
EAL	English as an Additional Language (formerly ESL)
EI	Employment Insurance
GAR	Government Assisted Refugee
ISA	Immigrant Serving Agency
ISS	Immigrant Services Society (operates Welcome House)
LICO	Low Income Cut-Off (the “poverty line”)
LSIC	Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada
MBM	Market Basket Measure
MEIA	Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance (“welfare”)
MSP	Medical Services Plan of British Columbia
NOS	National Occupancy Standards
OLA	Official Languages Act
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PR	Permanent Resident
PSR	Privately Sponsored Refugee
RAP	Resettlement Assistance Program
RC	Refugee Claimant
SIN	Social Insurance Number
SPARC	Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia
SRO	Single Room Occupancy
TR	Temporary Resident
TRAC	Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre
TWF	Total Welfare Income
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees

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This thesis is dedicated to refugees everywhere
in hope of a better future.

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

“If you look at the paper we are Canadian, but psychologically we don’t believe we have a voice, and if we don’t have a voice we can’t contribute, because you cannot contribute to a country when you feel like you are on the edge. You have to be inside the house, be part of the place. We are here, but we are really just hanging on the edge of the house.” –Pierre

Despite their increasing numbers there is little research looking at African immigrants or refugees in the Canadian context. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that their experiences are usually subsumed under categories such as “visible minority” or “black,” which both show the continuing salience of race in Canadian identity constructions, and also conceal the range of experiences within black communities. Through my own work with different African¹ communities in Metro Vancouver, I have come to recognize that although there is a wealth of “anecdotal” evidence and experiential knowledge concerning the immense and sometimes overwhelming challenges African refugees in particular face, unless their perspectives are made the focus of formal inquiry, prospects for change at the policy level will remain remote. Thus in undertaking this research I sought to link the issues affecting people I care about with mainstream policy concerns to highlight how African refugees’ unique experiences fit into larger settlement patterns, and offer recommendations for positive social change.

¹ A note on generalisability and use of the term “African:” although people of African origin in Vancouver represent a range of ethnic and racial backgrounds, legal statuses, ages, religions, educational attainments, etc, there are also important commonalities. Black or “sub-Saharan” Africans in particular tend to see themselves as having important aspects of culture in common, in addition to shared experiences of colonisation, immigration and marginalization within Canadian society on the basis of their skin colour and African origin. The fact that there is virtual unanimity on the need for an African community center (which would also be inherently multicultural) reflects this sense of collective identity. At the same time, in Metro Vancouver at least, people of North African descent who identify as “Arab” tend to take part in community activities organised along linguistic (i.e. Arabic) or religious (i.e. Muslim) lines, rather than as “Africans.” This is also the case for people from East Africa whose families migrated there from South Asia. However, identity is never fixed or stable, and there are occasions when people come together in solidarity or to celebrate their African heritage, however that is defined. Like “indigenous,” the term “African” is problematic because it appears to collectivize many distinct populations whose experiences under imperialism have been vastly different, but it is also an umbrella enabling people and communities to come together to learn, share, plan, organise, and struggle collectively for self determination on local and global stages (see Tettey 2001 for an extended discussion of the problematic equation of African with blackness and vice versa; and Razack 1998 on “strategic essentialism.”).

For African refugees settling in Metro Vancouver, housing is a crucial aspect of settlement and integration that both affects and is affected by all other aspects. Therefore their housing conditions cannot be studied in isolation from factors such as their family composition, immigration status, employment situation, and widespread discrimination in the housing and labour markets. The issue of shelter and access to appropriate housing has also arisen in the context of recent immigration to Canada generally and there is evidence of links between immigration and homelessness (Fiedler, Schuurmann and Hyndman 2006; Mattu 2002). According to Canada Mortgage and Housing Census data, 36% of recent immigrants in 2001 were in core housing need, and 50% of immigrant renters spent at least half their income on accommodation. Given Vancouver's expensive housing market, low vacancy rate and rapid rent increase since 2001, immigrants are likely to face increasing difficulties (Hiebert et al 2006). However, although stakeholders agree on the need for further research looking at the housing experiences of continental Africans, existing studies tend to focus on blackness (Myles and Hou 2004; Murdie 1994), other areas of Canada (Danso and Grant 2000; Tiexera 2006), or other settlement issues (Adjibolosoo and Mensah 1998).

Consequently, this study begins to fill that gap by exploring and analysing African refugees' experiences of housing and homelessness in Metro Vancouver in order to gain an understanding of the factors that influence their access to suitable and affordable accommodation. One key question I sought to answer is whether current settlement policies are meeting the needs and concerns of African refugees. More specific research questions centered around the adequacy, suitability, and affordability of refugees' current housing; the processes through which they found accommodation and the challenges they faced; the nature and extent of assistance they received; and suggestions for policy makers and service providers to improve the housing situations of African refugees. At the same time, I also sought to shed light on how theoretical discourses around "diversity" and "multiculturalism" intersect with concepts such as "social exclusion" and "interlocking

systems of domination” in people’s lived experiences, and to investigate what these processes reveal about Canadian society and the construction of national identity. Using the empirical findings as a foundation, the theoretical analysis revolves around notions of diversity contained within Canadian multicultural policy and the implications of persistent white supremacist national imaginaries for refugees of African origin. In other words, I examine what African refugees’ experiences disclose about Canadian national identities, values, and priorities. I believe this approach is critical to disrupting the kinds of analyses that simply study immigrants and their problems without looking at the wider context, in part because it offers a historically grounded basis from which we may move forward without reproducing current inequalities.

Throughout my investigation I have been guided by Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999) caution that, although the pursuit of knowledge is often assumed to inevitably benefit humankind, research occurs within a set of socio-political conditions that have not always considered the “objects” of research to have a voice or contribute to research, while in some cases years of research have failed to improve the conditions of the people being studied. Accepting the notion that privileging the voices of subaltern groups has the potential to affect power relations (Said 1994), I view my project as being fundamentally about the right to speak and be heard accurately. Thus, my challenge was not only to address questions African immigrants want to know, but also to produce practical beneficial outcomes.

The following thesis is presented in six sections. Chapter two lays out my conceptual framework, looking at how theoretical perspectives grounded in particular notions of “diversity” and identity formation relate to experiences of social exclusion and interlocking systems of domination, as well as the role that public policy influenced by those perspectives plays in creating conditions of marginalisation. Following a historical overview of racism in Canada I summarise some of the ways in which these ideas are manifested through multiple forms of discrimination, especially those based on race, socio-economic class and immigration status in

the Canadian housing market. The second part of this chapter offers an overview of African immigration to the region, a brief contextual synopsis of the housing market in Metro Vancouver, and an outline of local settlement service agencies.

Chapter three describes my methods and underlying methodology, drawing extensively on Smith's (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies* for both direction and an assessment of my own work. Through a consideration of Smith's ideas in the context of the conceptual framework laid out in the previous chapter I show how I have attempted to use research methodology to interrupt some of the problematic notions of identity that sustain particular forms of domination, in part by undermining the subject/object dichotomy of traditional research. The second part of this chapter describes the study sample in terms of recruitment, participant demographics, and basic housing conditions.

Chapters four to six presents my main findings and analyses using the metaphor of the layers of an onion to demonstrate the overlapping and intersecting ways African refugees are variously positioned in the housing market. In the context of the well documented challenges that are known to exist for visible minorities and refugees generally, the findings underline the immense barriers to accessing suitable, affordable and adequate housing that African refugees in particular face, and point to the need for more meaningful connections between refugee settlement and housing policy. I also suggest important theoretical connections between underlying ideas of what constitutes Canadianness, the development and implementation of public policy frameworks grounded in particular perspectives, and the socioeconomic and psychological consequences for African refugees.

The concluding chapter reviews the work and examines its contribution to academic discussions and policy debates around immigration and housing. Holding firmly to the belief that research can be a catalyst for positive social change, I hope that in some small way this project has

contributed to the struggle for the decolonization of both our minds and the material world, and ultimately to the promotion of greater social justice.

CHAPTER II CONCEPTS AND CONTEXTS

“They call us ‘visible minority,’ but I would say ‘invisible minority.’” –César

2.1 Diversity and domination

2.1.1 Troubling multiculturalism

Although it has become commonplace to talk about the “diversity” of Canada and other western societies that has resulted from recent patterns of international migration, several authors have also drawn attention to the notion that observing only ethnicity or country of origin offers a limited and ultimately misleading approach to understanding contemporary diversity. For example, writing from the UK, Vertovec (2006) calls for a diversification of our understanding of diversity that takes into account a range of other variables that affect where and how people live. He proposes the concept of “super-diversity” to refer to the interplay of mutually constitutive variables including immigration status and concomitant entitlements and restrictions, labour market participation, age, gender, the local service provision environment, race, sexuality, etc. Obviously, as he points out, diversity along these lines is nothing new; nevertheless he argues that there have been significant recent changes, especially the diversification of immigrants’ countries of origin and the proliferation of migration channels and legal statuses. Key to the concept of super-diversity is the fact that, within any population from a particular country, in addition to differences of ethnicity, religion, language, religion, and age, there are also important variations in legal statuses, each of which comes with specific and enforceable conditions, entitlements and limitations that cut across cultural and socio-economic dimensions. Moreover, all of these factors intersect with gender, and also influence employment outcomes, resulting in turn, in new patterns of inequality, prejudice, and segregation.

Vertovec also points to some of the implications super-diversity has for settlement service delivery. For example, most local authorities have become used to dealing with a small

number of large and well organised associations, but now there are large numbers of smaller and less organised groups, which raises the question of how local and regional authorities should deal with those groups' internal diversity. As he argues, it takes organisations years to get to the point where they can effectively influence policy decisions, so new immigrant populations are often excluded, sometimes leading to resentment and frustration as existing agencies fail to respond to their needs (2006; 25). He further shows that in Britain, multiculturalism policy tends to be delivered in terms of African, Caribbean and South Asian communities who are ethnically defined as "not British," while new, small, less organised, legally differentiated groups have hardly gained a place on the public agenda; yet he argues that it is these sorts of groups that have radically transformed the social landscape (3).

Canadian theorist Bannerji (2000) also addresses these themes in *The Dark Side of the Nation*, with a critical look at multiculturalism and diversity in the Canadian context. Like Vertovec, she writes against a limited vision that takes culture/ethnicity as the only focus of enquiry; however, taking these arguments a step further, Bannerji also examines what the notion of diversity does politically, arguing that it is a descriptive term that signals heterogeneity without power relations by abstracting difference from history and social relations. The term has a neutral appearance that is attractive for practices of power as the raced, classed and gendered social relations of power that create the differences drop out of sight, thereby enabling the blaming of people for their own disadvantage.

More specifically, Bannerji (2000) demonstrates some of the ways in which the elimination of power relations in the construction of multicultural communities from above is particularly felicitous for the ruling classes and the states which express their ideological and socio-economic interests. Similarly, Warburton (2007) argues that multiculturalism's silence on class protects the powerful by assuming that class differences are normal, natural, and necessary

elements in our social structure. Consequently, lower class minorities, such as black people in many urban centres, have not benefitted from multicultural policies supposed to ensure an inclusive society based on equality and the ability of all members to reach their full potential. Srivastava (2007) argues that multiculturalism is based in a liberal pluralism that is concerned primarily with improving equal access to jobs, services and benefits. However, this understanding assumes that there is a level playing field in which people are free to exercise their individual rights and express their cultural heritage; thus, the liberal approach glosses over historical and systemic relations of racism that make this playing field less than level. Later I will demonstrate the relevance of these ideas for African refugees struggling to overcome structural disadvantages in the housing and labour markets.

Bannerji identifies the “paradox of diversity” as being that the concept simultaneously allows for an emptying out of actual social relations while also suggesting a concreteness of cultural description; through this process understandings of differences as constructions of power are obscured within the Canadian state as well as in the multicultural ethnic communities who come from equally sexist and classist societies (2000; 35). She demonstrates how official multiculturalism in Canada represents the polity in cultural terms, separating immigrants of colour from First Nations and francophones, thereby juxtaposing “Canadian culture” against “multicultures.” As a result she concludes that “the language of diversity is a coping mechanism for dealing with an actually conflicting heterogeneity, seeking to incorporate it into an ideological binary predicated upon the existence of a homogenous national, that is, a Canadian cultural self with its multiple and different others” (37).

Developing her argument further, Bannerji (2000) shows how the constructed relations between a Canadian national self and its Other, between homogeneity and heterogeneity, or sameness and diversity, rely on the underlying notion of an essentialised version of a colonial

European turned into a Canadian who is the subject and agent of Canadian nationalism, and who has the right to decide on the degree to which multicultural others should be tolerated or accommodated. She explains that extending this idea to the scale of the community provides the context for the notion of diversity. The Canadian “we” does not reside in language, religion or other aspect of culture, but rather in the colour of one’s skin, since the “two founding nations” theory of Anglophones and francophones does not include non-white people of the same language groups. Dua agrees that the legacies of colonialism and nationalism continue to shape processes of inclusion and exclusion; in the context of nation and culture, skin colour is reinscribed not as a marker of innate biological difference, but rather of who is seen as a “real Canadian,” constructing those who appear white (whatever their country of birth) as native, while racially oppressed people appear as perennial outsiders (2007; 177). Thus whiteness comes to signify non-diversity. Moreover, due to its selective modes of ethnicisation, Bannerji believes that multiculturalism also functions as a vehicle for racialisation by establishing Anglo-Canadian culture as the ethnic core culture, “tolerating” and hierarchically arranging others around it as “multi-culture” or “diversity.” As long as multiculturalism only skims the surface of society, expressing itself in food, clothes, song, and dance (thus facilitating tourism), it is tolerated by the state and by “Canadians” as non-threatening. But if the demands go deeper than that, such as teaching “other” religions or languages, they produce a violent reaction, as do calls for affirmative action (Bannerji 2000; 79).

In this context, Galabuzi argues that the process of minority formation is central to the Canadian political economic order. In Canada, racialised peoples are referred to as “visible minorities,” suggesting that race is the most important distinguishing feature in their experiences and fixing their identity for all time as the “other” in Canadian society. Moreover, the term implies that some people are more visible than others and that there must be something peculiar

about them that draws the attention, separating them from those who are normal. Their interests will always be “special interests,” allowing the majority to feel justified in carrying out acts of oppression, discrimination and aggression in defense of the interests of the majority, an ideological position that is reinforced by the media and educational institutions that maintain “invalidating myths” about minority groups (2006; 31). Bannerji also underlines how the term visible minority constructs a category of people who are both not white and politically minor players; being designated a minority signals tutelage. It is in this light that she argues one need only look at economic outcomes, home ownership, the racialisation of poverty and crime, accusations of “welfare fraud,” etc, to imagine that non-white immigrants are not the primary beneficiaries of the discourse of diversity (2000; 47).

When considered together, the complex effect of these overlapping discourses is the creation of what Razack and others have called “interlocking systems of domination.” In this conception, social, economic, and political systems of oppression rely on each other in mutually constitutive and historically specific ways, resulting in positions that exist symbiotically but hierarchically. With these ideas in mind, and in order to better understand the challenges African newcomers face, this study also employs the concept of “social exclusion,” which Galabuzi (2006) defines as the inability of certain groups or individuals to participate fully in Canadian life due to inequalities in access to resources arising out of intersecting disadvantages based in race, class, gender, disability, and immigrant status. The framework of social exclusion is important because it puts the burden of addressing marginalisation on the society and not on the individuals who are its victims. Similar to the idea of interlocking systems of domination, the characteristics of social exclusion occur in multiple dimensions simultaneously and are also mutually reinforcing. Thus, for example, people living in low income areas are also likely to experience substandard housing, inequalities in access to employment and education, social

service deficits, disconnection from civil society, increased health risks, stigmatization, and isolation.

It is not possible within the limits of this thesis to examine each aspect or location of the interconnectedness of systems of oppression as they pertain to African refugees, so I have elected to focus primarily on the intersections of immigration status, socio-economic class, and racialisation as they are operative among African refugees in the Metro Vancouver housing market. First I offer a general historical analysis of anti-black racism in Canada. This is followed by some empirical evidence of how race, class and refugee status combine in specific ways to affect people's housing trajectories based on a number of studies undertaken by Canadian scholars from across the country.

2.1.2 Anti-black racism in the Canadian context

As we will see below, there is extensive evidence to suggest that racism in the housing market is a major barrier preventing some members of visible minority groups from obtaining adequate and affordable housing in Canada. However, discrimination in the housing market represents only one aspect of broader systemic racism in Canada (Dion 2001; Fong and Gulia 1999). Although in this chapter I focus on those studies that describe the experiences of African/black people, it should be kept in mind that there is also a significant body of literature on the challenges faced by members of other visible minority groups. A key difference, however, between Africans and others is that Africans are the only group that was brought to Canada as enslaved labour; although many Africans also entered as free women and men, slavery persisted for over two hundred years (Mensah 2002). It may seem out of place to include a discussion of a topic that most Canadians consider ancient history in a study of contemporary housing concerns among a group of recently arrived refugees. However, as William Faulkner once famously said,

“The past is never dead. It is not even past.”² This is no less true for those who made up the slave-owning classes than for those who were enslaved; widely and long held ideas about subordinate groups in society do not die out in a couple of generations simply because particular practices have for the most part disappeared. For many African-Canadian authors the historical existence of slavery in Canada is a defining feature of Africans’ existence here today because the ideas about black people that developed during slavery persist in policy, education, the criminal justice system, and popular culture. In this context, Dei cautions that “when it comes to speaking about racism we cannot step outside of our histories. There are those who would want to amputate history from the discussion of Canadian society, in part, because this history is of a troubling past. We must resist this call to amputate the past...and see how the past continues to shape and influence the present” (2005; 97).

Relatedly, Hier (2007) argues that the lack of care often granted to epistemology – the presuppositions and foundations for how we know what we know – limits the extent to which research is able to document and explain the complexities of race and racism. As a result, it may restrict the effectiveness of policy development and contribute to the polarization of research findings. He divides empirical literature on racialisation into two analytical categories: social critique and social comment. He defines social critique as an intellectual orientation seeking cultural, historical and physical explanations for why the social world is configured and stratified in certain inequitable ways. This method does not explain reality only on the basis of individual subjective accounts or patterns of group social incorporation, but pursues wider and more complicated explanations. In contrast, social comment is the collection and dissemination of information about how people experience, interpret and live in the world. According to Hier, many quantitative researchers use the latter method to attempt to document, primarily using

² *Requiem for a Nun* (1951).

statistics, the degree to which groups of people with certain shared characteristics (e.g. skin colour) are able to access valued resources. Thus he argues that there is a dilemma in the exercise of conducting social research on race and racism: do we develop explanations for why discourses of race and patterns of racism persist, or do we document and observe how people experience racial identities and patterns of racist exclusion? He concludes that we require explanations for *both* why racism persists *and* how or in what ways it manifests at particular historical moments (2007; 22-24). I have attempted to incorporate these dual concerns into the analysis that follows by revealing some of the complex ways in which the empirical and material effects of contemporary public policy frameworks are embedded within particular socio-historical ideological constructions.

Scholars of race relations in Canada inevitably trace the roots of current racialised practices to colonialism, the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples, and slavery. Europeans during the colonial era developed a complex hierarchy of races and cultures that placed white skin and European culture at the top. Examining the Canadian spatial and legal practices required to create and maintain a white settler society that continues to be structured by a racial hierarchy, Razack finds that the dominant mythology asserts that white people principally developed the land and are most entitled to the fruits of citizenship; an essential feature of this mythology is the disavowal of conquest, genocide, slavery, and the exploitation of the labour of peoples of colour (1998; 2). As Mensah (2002; 43) points out:

...a student of Canadian history can go right through our school system, university courses, and even graduate school without ever being exposed to the history of blacks in Canada. Right from early elementary school, Canadian students are taught histories that dwell on an endless glorification of whites, with few parenthetical references to blacks and other visible minorities, [thereby] overstating certain contributions while making others invisible... [however,] the exploitation of black labour through slavery was such an essential element in the foundation of Canada that the neglect of black history can hardly be accidental.

A related consequence is the development of few positive role models for young people, who are already routinely subjected to racist images and stereotypes through visual media, music, stories, etc. At the same time, the absence of teachers of colour, combined with educators' attitudes and low expectations, also negatively influence many racialised students, who drop out rather than participate in an alienating experience (Galabuzi 2006; 48). Thus the cycle of marginalisation continues.

Furthermore, according to Razack the erasure of Africans' contribution to nation building in Canada allows them to be scripted as late arrivals who came after most of the development had occurred; their enslavement is handily forgotten while the "crowds" of refugees at the border are perceived as threatening the calm ordered spaces of the "original" inhabitants (1998; 4-6). Similarly, McKittrick believes that the continual institutional and social denial of historical black existences makes possible the vision of Canada as white (2006; 96), while black Canada is rendered "simultaneously invisible and visibly non-Canadian" (99). Moreover, because early black communities are erasable, Canada may be positioned as a safe haven for fugitive slaves from the US and a land of opportunity for contemporary Caribbean and African migrants (97). Consequently, McKittrick argues that contesting white people's primary claim to the land involves undermining the idea of white settler innocence by uncovering the ideologies and practices of domination. In this context, Mensah (2002; 39) believes it is pertinent to note that:

the straitened circumstances of blacks in contemporary Canada are not fortuitous; they correspond to the colonial ideologies of the past. Any contemporary study of the black situation in Canada that ignores this... 'acquires the oversimplified character of a fable.' Without a doubt, it is because of the legacy of slavery that blacks are frequently treated with utter condescension and discriminated against in nearly all spheres of Canadian life. We cannot reasonably expect a group to endure centuries of racial prejudice, concocted negative mythology, slavery, and other forms of dehumanization without facing long-term stigmatization afterwards. In a nutshell, the racism faced by blacks today is an extension of the racism of the colonial era.

Abdi (2005) agrees that black people in Canada, as in the US, have been the continuous victims

of a devastating system of oppression, not only via the economic and social legacy of slavery, but also through its ideological heritage, institutional racism. Thus, he posits that the historical experiences of black Canadians provide a fundamental backdrop for understanding the situation of Africans who have come to Canada since the latter part of the 1960s.

However, Mensah contends that Canadians have a tendency to not only ignore our racist past, but also to dismiss any contemporary racial incidence as an aberration in an essentially peaceful, tolerant, charitable and egalitarian nation superior to countries such as the US, even though non-whites are commonly harassed and subjected to discriminatory practices in nearly all aspects of Canadian life (2002; 3). Moreover, commenting on the dearth of research looking at the experiences of black Canadians, he claims: “considering that any analysis of blacks inevitably invokes the racist character of Canadian society, something many scholars are uncomfortable with, one can reasonably assert that the omission is strategic” (12). Wondering why Canadian school teachers ask her whether they should teach about slavery, Brown concludes that “to acknowledge the past would necessarily be to acknowledge the present, and the ‘developed’ world is largely incapable of that” (2008; 10). Arguing that we need a historical awareness of our present circumstances, she challenges the amnesia that allows white subjects to be produced as innocent, entitled, rational and legitimate. For these reasons, McKittrick argues that anti-racist approaches to black Canada must “work through these discourses of hyper-visibility and lost histories, offering a critique of the ways in which geopolitical patterns push blackness out of the nation...disclosing how Canadian racism shapes black lives” (2006; 102).³

³ It is important to note that while an analysis of slavery in Canadian history is crucial for understanding the situation of Africans in Canada today, this argument does not imply that all members of African communities are necessarily worse off than all others in any given situation. For example, the situation of some Vietnamese or Iraqi communities in Canada may be comparable to those of some African communities, but other explanations need to be found to account for their marginalisation. The aim of this chapter is not to compare Africans with others to determine whose suffering is of the highest magnitude, but to investigate the origins of African marginalisation by identifying continuities and ruptures with the past, so that a point of departure for positive future change may also be

Thobani (2007) insists that control over representation of the nation's past is as critical to maintaining legitimacy and moral authority as is control over its present; moreover, the past, as a direct link to the present, has the power to hold nationals together in a shared collective cause and community. For example, the explicitly racist imaginaries of the past can be projected onto a nationalist minority within the white population who are cast as incorrigibly racist and also made responsible for the sins of the past. Nationals who embrace multiculturalism can detach themselves from their blatant racism while continuing to benefit from the effects of past racist policies. The displacement of racism to the past or onto a present minority enables contemporary nationals (still coded as white) to be constructed as tolerant, generous, and respectful of diversity.

However, racial and ethnic minorities can provoke the majority beyond tolerance with their incessant demands for "special rights" while, according to Thobani, appeals to tolerance enable a national amnesia regarding inconvenient histories (2007; 90-92). These ideas underpin Henry et al's (1995) concept of "democratic racism" which they define as an ideology that permits and sustains Canadians' ability to maintain two apparently conflicting sets of values. One consists of a commitment to a liberal, democratic society motivated by the egalitarian values of fairness, justice, and equality. Conflicting with these values are negative behaviours and attitudes concerning people of colour that result in differential treatment or discrimination. These values are grounded in a historical tradition based on hierarchies of power that have consistently worked to exclude racialised groups or to accept them on conditional and delimited terms.

Law and the legal system are key means by which racial hierarchies are maintained. Over

constructed. However, it may be the case that shifts in the ideological frameworks underlying the treatment of Africans in Canada will also improve conditions for other groups as well.

the past forty years, Canadian ideologies and public policies have shifted from explicit racism to an ostensibly non-racist position and, clearly, there have been positive changes. Nevertheless, significant numbers of people continue to claim that they experience racist discrimination and, while most Canadians deny harbouring racist sentiments, they express social distance from visible minorities (Mensah 2002; 5). In addition, many authors have noted that visible minorities and poor people encounter discrimination in their contact with the criminal justice system (e.g. Razack 1998; Bannerji 2000; Manzo and Bailey 2005; Galabuzi 2006). Significantly, ideologies of colour blindness create the appearance of equality and fairness while hiding practices of discrimination, leading to very different understandings and experiences among whites and non whites regarding racism. Patel (2007) argues that, given Canada's history of overt and covert racism, it is not surprising that many policy makers reflect attitudes that are explicitly non racist but whose underlying frames of reference are racist, and that these attitudes translate into general public policy structures. As a consequence, the racial hierarchy of desirability that makes up the Canadian mosaic has not disappeared. Moreover, he points out that policy makers are usually members of the majority (white) population and generally share many of the dominant perceptions and attitudes; they may be unaware of the historical roots of racism, including the existence of slavery in Canada or the historically unequal treatment of non whites. Such ignorance helps sustain the myth of equality, resulting in a troubling denial of contemporary racism by policy makers (2007; 263). For example, a recent UN Mission to Canada found that policy makers were reluctant to admit the reality of racial discrimination, that the judicial system fails to protect victims of racism, and that the insufficiency of resources allocated to anti-racist strategies is a major limitation of existing attempts to address the situation (Diène 2004). Patel concludes that given the generally low levels of understanding among policy makers of the basic historical roots of modern racism in Canada, serious educational efforts need to be undertaken

because, “until the truth of the present and the past is told, little real progress will be possible” (2007; 267).

Immigration policy in particular has always provided an important mechanism by which the Canadian state creates and sustains racial hierarchies. Richmond (2001) argues that the use of deterrents by the Canadian government to prevent refugees from entering Canada constitutes institutional racism, given the fact that most refugees today are of non-European origin. More specifically, Danso and Grant (2000) believe that Canadian immigration policy discourages the settlement of African refugees; their disproportionately low numbers appear to bear these claims out. This was certainly the perception among the people interviewed for this project, as well as the conclusion reached in the Canadian Council for Refugee’s (2000) report on systemic racism in Canada’s immigration policies. Following Bashi, who states that “a transnationalisation of anti-black sentiment in immigration law and policy in the Anglophone west began during the trade in enslaved Africans and continues today” (2004; 601), I am convinced that the notions about black people which underlie the reluctance to welcome them here in large numbers dates back to colonialism and slavery. Bashi concludes that although explicitly racial categories have been removed, Canadian policy makers’ anti-black sentiments have continued, enabling them to claim to have transcended racism while retaining racial hierarchies. Taking the point one step further, she asserts that there are two intersecting and mutually interdependent hierarchical systems: a racial system and a hierarchy of nations or world system. In this context she criticizes some scholars for seeing the trees (the constructions of racialised categories in local settings) but not the forest (how those processes are an integral part of and reinforce transnational racialised and world systemic hierarchies) (600).

There is no magic line dividing the “past” from the “present” or “here” from “there;” rather there is an ongoing intersectionality of time and space, within which ideas that condition

the construction of social space are passed on and adapted to new circumstances. Slavery is no longer legally practiced in Canada and explicitly racist legal frameworks have been eliminated. Yet, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. Identities continue to be constructed in alterity (Bhabha 1994); how Canadian citizens perceive themselves and the manner in which they view African refugees are inherently linked. Accordingly, in order to claim rights for ourselves that we deny to others we need to understand “them” as somehow less deserving, and ourselves as somehow superior. Thus, “we” built Canada, and Africans did not; we are innocent and peaceful, they are violent and disorderly; we are the original settlers, they are lucky we let them in; we are generous and law abiding, they are criminals, etc. Pupilampu and Tettey (2005) describe this process as one of “differential citizenship” whereby people of African origin in Canada are seen as eternal immigrants and outsiders. These constructions can only be upheld by suppressing the historical and contemporary relations between groups of people; in this way the denial of Africans’ past contributions to Canada also enable their marginalisation in contemporary times.

As far as I am concerned, these ideas are fundamental; until the dominant Canadian majority collectively recognizes and acknowledges where they have come from and how the historical legacies of past practices and older beliefs continue to influence the development of Canadian society today, anti-black racism will continue to flourish and meaningful, substantial positive social change for contemporary African refugees will remain a distant dream. Moreover, since the denial of humanity to non western peoples was a central aspect of colonisation, the struggle to assert a common humanity is a key part of anti-colonial discourse. Finally, making these connections holds relevance for both practical and scholarly considerations; as McKittrick explains, “Black discourses and sites of contestation, conflict and displacement advance a different sense of place...exposed are surprising black geographies...and new analytical sites of social difference and social justice” (2006; 106).

2.1.3 Racism and the socio-economics of refugees' housing in Canada

This section describes some of the material repercussions of the ideas outlined above for African refugees in the housing market. Because few studies focus specifically on the settlement experiences of continental Africans in Canada, their stories must be teased out from more general studies of persons identifying as black and visible minorities. In both the labour and housing markets, members of these groups experience well-documented challenges related to low incomes and discrimination based on skin colour, source of income, family size, and immigration status. Every study that looks at the connections between discrimination and housing concludes that racism and other forms of discrimination have negative repercussions in terms of access to appropriate accommodation. What is more, discrimination tends to lead to the same negative consequences whether it occurs in Calgary, Montreal, Toronto, Regina or Vancouver; these include overcrowding, unsafe neighbourhoods, substandard accommodation, higher rents, longer housing searches, increased stress, less successful integration overall, more frequent moves, housing segregation, social exclusion, absolute and hidden homelessness, and self-exclusion (Galster 1992; Teixeira 2006, 2008; Danso and Grant 2000; Owusu 1998; Skaburskis 1996; Galabuzi 2006; Fong and Gulia 1999; Myles and Hou 2004; Mensah 2002; Murdie 2003a, 2005; Novac 1996; Miraftab 2000; Mattu 2002; Danso 2001; Wasik 2006; Novac et al 2004; Dion, 2001; Qadeer 2004; Mattu 2002; Preston and Murnaghan 2005; Darden 2004; Hiebert and Mendez 2008; Hulchanski and Shapcott 2004; Hiebert, Mendez and Wyly 2008).

Investigating the ideological underpinnings of these empirical findings, Myles and Hou (2004) contend that one of the legacies of conquest and subjugation in Canada is an enduring racial hierarchy, or “vertical mosaic” based on skin colour. Thus, for example, Teixeira (2008) found that in the Toronto housing market, the darker one’s skin, the greater the barriers presented by landlords. Consequently, people identifying as black typically live in neighbourhoods with

the highest density, lowest average educational attainment, and the highest percentage of low-income families and unemployment (Fong and Gulia 1999; Myles and Hou 2004). In this sense, it is worrying that audits, academic research, and anecdotal evidence all suggest that black immigrants experience more intense discrimination in the Canadian housing market than members of most other visible minority groups. Indeed, several studies have identified racism on the part of landlords and housing providers to be among the most formidable barriers to accessing affordable and appropriate housing facing black Africans (eg. Miraftab 2000; Danso 2001; Teixeira 2006, 2008; Dion 2001).

For example, in Toronto, Murdie and Teixeira (2000) found black people of African and Caribbean origin to be among those with the most problematic housing conditions, with persistent racial discrimination seemingly the major barrier preventing more successful integration. Additionally, Murdie (2003a) found that Somali and Jamaican immigrants in Toronto faced greater affordability challenges than Polish newcomers, with over 70% paying more than 30% of their income on rent, and 50% paying more than half their income. As we will see below, these statistics are reflective of larger trends in African-Canadian household incomes. Hiebert et al. (2006) also found that black people face the greatest financial difficulties of any group in the Toronto housing market. Similarly, Danso and Grant (2000) demonstrate that the majority of black Africans in Calgary are living in core housing need, compelled by low incomes and discrimination in the private rental market to accept housing that is overcrowded, unsuitable and inadequate. Likewise, in Montreal, Rose, Germain and Ferreira (2006) show that despite lower rents, higher vacancy rates, and relatively large black and African populations (25% and 12% respectively), African refugees still face greater housing challenges than almost any other group.

These racialised processes are also distinctly gendered. African women, especially single

women with children, are particularly disadvantaged in Canadian society as they earn less than their male counterparts (Statistics Canada 2001); suffer the most intense discrimination based on skin colour and source of income (Dion 2001; Diène 2004; Novac et al 2004); and are more likely to be taken advantage of by landlords (Mattu 2002; Novac et al 2004). Further contributing to the complexity, single parent families make up a disproportionate number of black households (Hiebert and Mendez 2008); this adds another dimension to the process of social exclusion because without affordable daycare, single parents are forced onto social assistance, which in turn provides yet another basis for discrimination. Thus, Novac et al. (2004) found that families were often refused accommodation, especially if they were headed by a single parent, with women of colour facing the greatest discrimination. It is worrying in this context to note that families constitute the fastest growing group of homeless people in Canada (Hulchanski 2004b). At the same time, young black men are often assumed to be connected with criminality, drug use, and violence, and so also face tremendous obstacles in the housing market (Hiebert, D'Addario and Sherrell 2005; Danso 2001). The contrast between African and Caribbean communities' strong and deep rooted feelings of discrimination on the one hand, and the lack of political will by federal and provincial authorities on the other, indicates a lack of understanding and sympathy among policy makers operating under the influence of dominant ideological frameworks that actually function to sustain inequalities.

Racialisation is intricately and intimately tied to both socioeconomic class and immigration status. For example, Peter Li (1998) argues that there is a social hierarchy of races in Canada manifested in Canadians' views of which groups are socially desirable or undesirable according to racial origin that results in a race based disparity in earnings in the Canadian job market whereby those of European origin have higher earnings than non whites. Moreover, racialised immigrants are incorporated into the labour market in ways that reproduce racial

inequality, and what emerges is a labour market based not only on class but which is also racially stratified. Galabuzi (2006) locates the late twentieth century intensification of racial segregation in the Canadian labour market within the context of the neoliberal restructuring of the global economy. He argues that the normalisation of non-standard forms of work is central to understanding the present day racialisation of class formation, or the “racialisation of poverty,” which occurs because the labour of racialised group members is devalued in ways that reproduce pre-existing racially discriminatory structures in the labour market; thus a market value is attached to racial origin.

An important factor relating to these processes is “skill discounting,” which refers to the devaluation of foreign credentials that are deemed sufficient in the country of origin and elsewhere, apart from Canada. Skill discounting particularly affects visible minority immigrants for whom the “foreignness” of their qualifications or their “heavy” accents, can be used as a justification for failing to take in to account the full value of their qualifications (Galabuzi 2006; 133). This occurs even when applicants have obtained their qualifications in Canada, leading some researchers to ask: “What Colour is Your English?” (Creese and Kambere 2002). Galabuzi (2006) believes that the fact that immigrants’ educational advantage often has no significant impact on income suggests that it is racial discrimination in the labour market that is responsible for the inability to translate human capital into wages and occupational status. Indeed, for professionals, African certifications seem to be on the bottom rungs of the accreditation hierarchy; this can be attributed in large measure to the low intellectual capabilities accorded Africans as a result of persistent stereotypes. For example, an article about a Nobel Prize winning DNA geneticist who claimed that Africans had been scientifically proven to be less intelligent than people of European descent made front page news in 2007 (Milmo 2007). Accordingly, a study from Calgary argues that Africans’ high unemployment rate stems from

their qualifications not being accepted because they are from Africa (Danso and Grant 2000).⁴ Generally speaking, recent immigrants, most of whom are members of racialised minorities, occupy jobs in the lower echelons of the labour market for longer periods of time than previous immigrant groups (Wayland 2007; Hiebert, D'Addario and Sherrell 2005), which partly explains why, although the total immigrant population's average income in 2000 was \$24,000, it was only \$18,000 for racialised workers. In the same time period, the average income for the Canadian born was \$26,000 (Galabuzi 2006; 10).

More specifically, according to Statistics Canada (2007d) the incomes of members of the African population in Canada are below those of the rest of the population by an average of \$6,000 per year. In 2001, 40% had incomes below the poverty line, compared to 16% for the rest of the population, while 47% of African-Canadian children were living in poverty, compared to 19% for the general population. However, according to Galabuzi (2006), it is insufficient to explain earnings differentials between immigrants and the Canadian born by saying that Canadians worked full time and immigrants worked part time without also taking into account the barriers to finding full time work; the higher levels of part time, contractual, casual, and precarious work that racialised group members experience are not natural phenomena. Racial segmentation in the labour market in turn leads to such social outcomes as differential access to housing, contact with the criminal justice system, access to social services, health risks, and political participation. Given the above statistics, it is not surprising that across Canada, black people are also among the groups with the lowest home ownership rates (Hiebert, Mendez and Wyly 2008). Moreover, bearing in mind Patel's (2007) arguments regarding the identity of policy makers and their relationship to ideologies that perpetuate racial inequalities, Galabuzi's

⁴ Clearly, what is needed in these contexts is a much more open, fair and accessible testing system that ensures qualifications are relevant, with training provided for those who need it.

(2006) related claim that the importance of these discriminatory patterns goes beyond income to the limited part of racialised groups in the administration of the Canadian state is worth noting.

Although all black Africans are forced to contend with the racism that pervades Canadian society, those who come as economic immigrants have advantages over refugees. Immigrants come to Canada by choice and generally arrive with financial resources, education, urban experience, pre-existing social networks, and other resources that enable them to integrate successfully into Canadian society. In contrast, due to their low incomes and lack of social networks or assets, on top of the trauma and family separation resulting from forced migration, refugees are disproportionately disadvantaged in the housing market. Furthermore, refugee women are more likely to live in poverty than men due to multiple forms of discrimination that put them at the bottom of the economic ladder (Wasik 2006; Yesufu 2005; Komeza 2007; Hiebert, D'Addario and Sherrell 2005). Comparing the general housing situation of immigrants and refugees, Hiebert and Mendez (2008) found that although overall averages for immigrants indicate progressive housing trajectories, this is not the case for the vast majority of refugees. Even four years after arrival, less than 20% had achieved home ownership (the authors regard this figure as astonishingly high, given the challenges refugees face), compared to 60% for family class migrants and nearly 75% for economic migrants. Since immigrants are able to draw on other resources, they are generally able to find, and even purchase, adequate housing, while refugees struggle to access appropriate rental housing.

At the intersection of race, class and immigration status, case studies from across Canada demonstrate that the disadvantages African and other refugee groups face in the housing market constitute a national trend. Yu, Ouellet and Warmington (2007) found that low incomes and high rents constitute a major barrier for refugees in finding stable housing. Specifically, for Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) low Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) rates mean

that over 50% of refugees in British Columbia (BC) spend more than 50% of their income on rent. Despite spending such a high proportion of their income on accommodation, Mattu (2002) found in Vancouver that refugees suffer from overcrowded, poorly maintained, and unaffordable housing for which they are forced to pay higher than normal deposits, while complaints to landlords are ignored and deposits are not returned. Similarly, examining the experiences of Somali and Kurdish refugees in Vancouver, Miraftab (2000) found that due to language difficulties, racism, low incomes, lack of references, and administrative barriers to accessing subsidised housing, overcrowding is common, with 63% of those interviewed living in illegal basement suites which are also substandard. Moreover, some refugees experience the painful necessity of being forced to lie about the number of children they have in order to convince a landlord to take them (see also Murdie 2003a).

In another study, Hiebert, D'Addario and Sherrell (2005) found high levels of hidden homelessness among refugees in Vancouver, as well as overcrowding, substandard accommodation, and discrimination based on skin colour, family size, ethnicity, gender, source of income, and immigration class. They also found that refugees lack information about public housing, which in any case is extremely rare in Vancouver, and that low incomes present almost insurmountable barriers. *All* of the Refugee Claimants (RCs) they spoke to spent more than 50% of their income on housing in the first six months after arrival. Although that figure was reduced later for some people, it is clear that all the refugees in that study began their lives in Canada in poverty, with potentially long lasting effects. The fact that there are immigrant households that have been in Canada for more than ten years and still face acute affordability issues demonstrates that some are locked into these vulnerable situations for long periods of time (Hiebert, Mendez and Wyly 2008).

In other parts of Canada, Teixeira's (2006) study of Mozambicans and Angolans in

Toronto shows that those who came as refugees face the greatest housing challenges, including overcrowding, frequent moves, and unaffordable and substandard housing. Murdie (2005) also demonstrates that in Toronto both RCs and Government Assisted Refugees face immense affordability challenges that force them to “trade off” between shelter, food, clothing and other essentials. Similarly in Montreal, Rose and Ray (2001) found that refugee claimants pay inordinately high portions of their income on rent, and that even though rents in Montreal are considerably lower than in Toronto or Vancouver, refugees are among the most precarious social groups, with 61% spending over 50% of their income on rent.

The preceding sections have described some of the complexly interrelated and highly problematic frameworks within which African refugees’ experiences are situated. In section 2.2, I contextualize their experiences more closely with a look at African settlement and the housing market in Vancouver.

2.2 Arrival and survival in Vancouver

2.2.1 African settlement in British Columbia

According to the 2006 Census, there are 34,575 people of African origin living in BC, out of a total African-Canadian population of just over 300,000 (Statistics Canada 2007b).

Importantly, the number of immigrants from Africa entering BC is growing steadily: the five year period from 1996 to 2000 saw the arrival of 5,270 immigrants from Africa (of which 4,135 settled in Metro Vancouver), while 6,080 came between 2001 and 2006 (of which 4,800 settled in Metro Vancouver). Although African immigrants and refugees made their way to BC from every country in Africa, the majority originated in East Africa (Masinda and Ngene-Kambere 2008; 29-30). In 2006, the total number of people claiming African origin in Metro Vancouver was 27,260 (Statistics Canada 2007a), while 20,670 identified as black (Statistics Canada

2007c).

Most people of African origin settling in BC arrive through economic or family sponsorship schemes, or transfer from another province in Canada. However, a significant number also come as refugees, especially Government Assisted Refugee (GARs). GARs are UNHCR Refugees selected abroad by the Canadian government. They have often lived some or all of their lives in refugee camps and tend to have the lowest educational attainments among immigrant groups, as well as the lowest capacity in either official language. Overall, this is a high needs population that requires comprehensive orientation to live independently in a large western urban environment. A shift in Canadian resettlement policy from selecting those deemed most likely to establish themselves independently in Canada, to those with the most pressing needs, occurred in 2002. However, few changes were made to how refugees are supported in their integration process, despite the fact that social programs geared to the mainstream do not adequately address refugee needs, particularly those of single parent families coming from protracted refugee situations (Pressé and Thomson 2007). I examine the effects of these policies in more detail in chapters six to eight. From 2003-2006, 1,065 GARs arrived from Africa out of a provincial total of 3,219; in other words 33% of GARs arriving in BC during that period came from Africa. Given that over half the world's displaced people are in Africa, this figure is disproportionately low. Table 1 shows the countries of origin for GARs coming from Africa. As can be seen from Table 2, the vast majority settled in Burnaby or Surrey. These figures are reflective of broader settlement patterns of African immigrants and refugees in Metro Vancouver (Masinda and Ngene-Kambere 2008; 31-32).

Table 1. Source countries for GARs from Africa: 2003-2006

SOURCE COUNTRIES	NUMBER	% (of total GARs)
Southern Africa (Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe)	6	0.02%
East Africa (Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia)	752	23.36%
West Africa (Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Togo, Liberia)	176	5.47%
Great Lakes Region (Congo, Burundi, Uganda, Rwanda)	130	4.04%
North Africa (Morocco)	1	0.03%
TOTAL	1065	33%

Immigrant Services Society, 2007

Table 2. African GARs' initial settlement locations

AREA	NUMBER	% (of African GARs)
Vancouver	76	7%
Burnaby	409	38%
New Westminster	93	9%
Surrey	287	27%
Other areas	200	19%
TOTAL	1065	100%

Immigrant Services Society, 2007

While some who flee persecution seek protection in a UNHCR refugee camp, Refugee Claimants (RCs) make their own way to the Canadian border. However, the number of RCs arriving from Africa is relatively small given restrictive visa criteria, the geographical distances involved, and the fact that there are only four Canadian visa offices on the entire African continent (compared to ten in Europe (CCR 2000)). In 2008, the total number of refugee claims filed by people from Africa in Canada was 1,747 (Rehaag 2009), out of 36,851 total entries across the country (CIC 2008b). Out of that national figure 2,147 made claims in BC, and at the end of 2008 there was a total (including arrivals from previous years) of 4,672 claimants living in BC, with 2,245 of those residing in Metro Vancouver (CIC 2008a). Specific statistics are difficult to come by, but clearly only a small portion of those would have come from Africa.

I speculate that the low numbers of people coming from Africa are a reflection of the institutional racism manifested in immigration policy which is grounded in particular notions of who “belongs” in the Canadian nation. Moreover, I am convinced that these conditions function

as part of a larger process whereby racist legal structures prevent African immigrants and refugees from reaching Canadian shores; their low numbers subsequently serve as a justification for failing to provide adequate and culturally relevant services. This results in a cycle of marginalisation in the housing and labour markets, and in social and political life, that ultimately benefits the interests of the majority population as well as those of capital. These conceptual arguments are further developed later in the paper. In the following section I summarise the existing research focusing on African settlement in Metro Vancouver.

2.2.2 Living in Vancouver

Unfortunately, there are almost no published studies on the settlement experiences of African immigrants and refugees in Metro Vancouver, with much of the available literature focusing on the settlement and integration challenges faced by African women, refugees, youth or families. In the discussion which follows, the concerns authors have identified are divided into economic difficulties, discrimination, and family life; a discussion of social service providers and community organisations may be found in the final section. Most, if not all, of the issues raised are reflected in the findings of the current study, discussed in detail in chapters six to eight.

It is important to bear in mind the extreme variation within and among African communities in terms of ethnicity, nationality, religion, language, age, gender, sexuality, and legal status. Nevertheless, despite these differences, finding full time employment with an income adequate to meet their needs was identified as a key challenge that affects nearly all African immigrants in Metro Vancouver (Masinda and Ngene-Kambere 2008; Wasik 2006; Adjibolosoo and Mensah 1998; Magassa 2005). One result of these difficulties is that many people, especially single parents and refugees, are forced to work at several jobs to make ends meet (Ochieng 2006; Komezha 2007). Authors identified a number of reasons for these challenges, including non-recognition of credentials; demands for Canadian experience; low

levels of spoken and written English; lack of qualifications and limited access to further training; insufficient orientation to Canadian systems; lack of affordable daycare; and discrimination based on skin colour, accent, and country of origin (Masinda and Ngene-Kambere 2008; Adjibolosoo and Mensah 1998; Creese and Kambere 2002; Komeza 2007; Wasik 2006; Magassa 2005). For example, African women GARs, several of whom were single parents, told Wasik (2006) that they found themselves poorly qualified for work here and largely unemployable, especially without fluent English skills; an astonishing 75% had worked as cleaners. Further, Adjibolosoo and Mensah (1998) documented a lack of information, skills or finances among African immigrants and refugees which would enable them to set up their own business or take part in politics; failure to qualify for business loans; and inability to decode systems (education, financial, political, social) as additional barriers to achieving economic stability.

Related to low incomes, several studies also point to inadequate housing, inability to afford transportation, and food insecurity as major concerns for African families in Metro Vancouver, especially for refugee families struggling to pay back their transportation loan to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) (Masinda and Ngene-Kambere 2008; Komeza 2007; Wasik 2006). Magassa (2005) also found that for Sudanese GARs, the difficult transition from the Resettlement Assistance Program to welfare after one year was a significant source of frustration. Finally, as is the case for immigrants from many other parts of the world, Africans also feel a deep sense of obligation to send remittances to family members back home, despite their own low incomes. In the current study, Marie, who lives with her seven children in a three bedroom house, asked, “How can I sit down to eat dinner when I know that the ten orphans left behind by my brother in Congo have nothing to eat? So, even if I can only send ten dollars, I must send it.”

In addition to financial concerns, discrimination including racism was identified in every

study as yet another challenge exacerbating those noted above (Adjibolosoo and Mensah 1998; Masinda and Ngene-Kambere 2008; Komeza 2007; Wasik 2006; Ochieng 2006). For example, Creese and Kambere (2002) show how accent, race, gender, and immigration status as bases of marginalisation weave seamlessly together so that the women they spoke to (most of whom had graduate degrees from English institutions) believe that their accents in the context of their skin colour and African origin result in them being marked as permanent outsiders in ways that people with Scottish or Irish accents are not. Similarly, Jacquet et al (2008) found that young French speaking African immigrants feel disconnected from the wider society in BC because they seem to belong to neither the francophone community (due to their skin colour and non-European cultural background, and the lack of commitment among white francophones to embrace these differences), nor the Anglophone community (primarily due to language), and are therefore doubly marginalised. Relatedly, Adjibolosoo and Mensah (1998) note the prevalence of racism in Metro Vancouver classrooms, finding that the perpetrators tend to go unpunished while African students are blamed for being over sensitive or lacking credibility. Their research also underscores the problem of racial profiling by police and the association of blacks with crime, which they blame on stereotypical media images of Africa that conjure up pictures of chaos, starvation, killings, and tribal warfare in the minds of Canadians.

Low incomes and discrimination, combined with the fact of being separated from everything that is familiar, result in social exclusion, isolation and a general sense of feeling unwelcome in Canadian society. In this context, some African families also describe difficulties getting to know Canadians and a lack of time to socialize generally (Magassa 2005; Komeza 2007; Wasik 2006). According to Magassa (2005) the consequence is profound psychological stress and lasting damage to some African newcomers' perception of self-worth. In order to make sense of their experiences, Magassa documents five stages of adjustment that African

refugees often experience as they adapt to life in Canada: *first*, the “honeymoon stage” of optimism and excitement; *second*, the “culture shock stage” where they feel overwhelmed and like they do not belong; *third*, the “initial adaptation or superficial adjustment stage” where they have begun to grasp some of the realities of dealing with new language, forms of work, and society, but are reluctant to let go of their culture from back home; *fourth*, a “stage of mental isolation, depression and frustration,” usually related to feelings of low self-worth and a perception of being “stuck” in their efforts to reach social and economic goals; and *fifth*, “cultural integration or acceptance,” in which immigrants and refugees find that their values and lifestyle have adjusted to fit comfortably into mainstream Canadian culture. He found that all of the participants in his study were still operating within one of the first four stages, despite having spent several years in Canada (2005; 76).

In light of all these difficulties, it is perhaps unsurprising that family conflict is also identified as a further issue that needs to be addressed both within ethnic communities as well as through larger policy frameworks (Magassa 2005; Ochieng 2006). Concerns include spousal and child abuse; difficulties adapting to new parenting styles, different forms of domestic task sharing and discipline and unfamiliar ways of showing respect in a more individualistic culture; gender power shifts from a male dominated society and household to a situation where women sometimes earn more money than their husbands; and pressures related to a couple’s relationship and parenting issues in the context of poverty (Adjibolosoo and Mensah 1998; Masinda and Ngene-Kambere 2008; Ochieng 2006; Kgomo 1996; Magassa 2005). However, at the same time, Ochieng (2006) and Kgomo (1996) also demonstrate a few of the ways in which some parents successfully incorporate both Canadian and African parenting styles in their negotiation of new gendered roles in Canada, as well as how African women create new extended families and social groupings that provide support and validation of their shifting identities as they

confront structural oppressions.

In the face of the many challenges African immigrants and refugees face in Metro Vancouver, several authors also drew attention to the assets they bring from their home countries, underlining their tremendous resilience in the face of gender, race, age, and other forms of discrimination. In general, researchers found that members of African communities draw strength from having family members and friends around them, spirituality or religion, a deep determination to “make it,” community associations, pride in their home culture and language, and the maintenance of close relations with family back home (Masinda and Ngenekambere 2008; Ochieng 2006; Kgomo 1996; Magassa 2005; Komeza 2007). Sustaining a sense of optimism is also crucial; as Kwame noted in the current study, “If you look at life straight and you don’t take your eye off the ball or your dreams and goals, hopefully one day you will find it—because it’s here, and that’s all we pray for.”

2.2.3 The Vancouver housing market

In addition to the integration and settlement concerns described above, housing is one of the first and most immediate needs for newcomers, and where one settles has long-term implications; housing is not only a basic need but also impacts social relations. At the same time, immigration is responsible for nearly all the population growth in Metro Vancouver, and since it intersects with every aspect of the housing sector, immigration also has a significant impact on the housing market. However, the housing choices of immigrants and refugees are constrained by affordability, which is exacerbated by the declining availability of non-market housing as well as various forms of income assistance in the context of neoliberal economic policies that promote social polarization and increase poverty (Stapleton 2004; Hulchanski 2004b). In general there has been a significant erosion of housing rights over the past twenty years and, while the steady increase in housing prices and lack of affordability particularly impacts the

poor, it is progressively affecting other sectors of the population as well. For example, Hulchanski (2004a) shows how the wealth and income gap between renters and owners is increasing across Canada. Hiebert, Mendez and Wyly (2008) also identify increasing polarization in the Vancouver housing market, where the vacancy rate has not risen above 2% in the last ten years, and even dipped below 1% in 2008 (Hiebert, Mendez and Wyly 2008; CMHC 2008). One consequence of these conditions is an intensification of poverty for Vancouver's poorest citizens, and a concomitant increase in homelessness.

As lack of availability drives prices up, one alternative is subsidised housing. However, with over 14,400 people on BC Housing waitlists as of 2007 (SPARC 2007) and an estimated 15,000 homeless people in BC (Chudnovsky 2008; Patterson, et al 2008), there is simply not enough subsidised housing to meet current needs. At the same time, although rental demand is increasing, rental supply is shrinking, especially at the lower-rent end. A recent study found that 561 housing units for low-income singles were lost between 2003 and 2007; by 2010 at least 1,600 will have been lost. The same research also revealed that approximately two hundred people are turned away each night by shelter staff in Vancouver alone. Yet in 2006 there were seven million dollars in cuts in federal spending on affordable housing (Carnegie 2007). Despite these concerns, a 2008 CMHC housing starts report notes that in 2008 over 98% of construction was of units for sale rather than for rent. This comes on top of a decade of similar trends, and no new co-ops have been built in the last five years (Table 3). Due to increasing problems of housing affordability and availability, and homelessness, no Metro Vancouver municipality received either an A or a B grade in the *Municipal Report Card on Housing and Homelessness* issued by the Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre (TRAC 2007).

Table 3. Housing starts by intended market - Vancouver CMA, 1996-2004

Year	Number (#)				Percent (%)			
	Rental	Owned*	Condo	Co-op	Rental	Owned*	Condo	Co-op
1996	715	5,149	9,505	83	4.6	33.3	61.5	0.5
1997	1,248	4,937	9,694	71	7.8	31.0	60.8	0.4
1998	499	3,710	7,669	0	4.2	31.2	64.6	0
1999	988	3,912	3,762	0	11.4	45.1	43.4	0
2000	1,145	3,602	3,421	29	14.0	43.9	41.7	0.4
2001	2,721	4,054	3,960	124	25.1	37.3	36.5	1.1
2002	1,302	5,569	6,275	51	9.9	42.2	47.5	0.4
2002	944	5,759	8,923	0	6.0	36.9	57.1	0
2004	746	6,037	12,647	0	3.8	31.1	65.1	0

* Excludes condos

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 2005

The Minimum Housing Wage measures the level of hourly wages that a household must earn to afford an average-rent unit without paying more than 30% of their before-tax income on housing. In Vancouver a single parent must find a job paying almost three times the minimum wage to cover the rent for the average 2-bedroom apartment (Table 4). However, according to a recent CHRA (2007) report, the minimum housing wage is increasingly moving out of reach for low-wage workers. To illustrate, compared to 2006, the 2008 minimum wage in BC remained at eight dollars per hour, but the average monthly rents in Metro Vancouver had increased to \$736 for a bachelor; \$857 for a 1-bedroom; \$1,071 for a 2-bedroom; and \$1,223 for a 3-bedroom (CMHC 2008). As Ahmed pointed out in the current study, “You cannot say that people will continue to work for eight dollars per hour, but raise the price of food, bus passes, and rent. Even if you are not an economist you can see that it is impossible if your expenses are greater than your income.”

Table 4. Minimum Housing Wage: October 2006

Vancouver average monthly rent				Required minimum wage (\$/hr)				Real min. wage
Bachelor	1-bdrm	2-bdrm	3-bdrm	Bachelor	1-bdrm	2-bdrm	3-bdrm	\$/hour
\$701	\$816	\$1045	\$1220	13.48	15.69	20.10	23.46	8.00

Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, 2007

The Market Basket Measure (MBM) estimates the cost of a specific basket of goods and services including food, clothing, shelter, etc. For a family with two parents and two children in

2002, the MBM in the Vancouver CMA was \$29,000 (HRSDC 2008). Yet in BC a single parent with one child on income assistance receives gets 61% of the market basket, and a single “employable” only 41% (NCW 2006). According to the National Council of Welfare, a single parent was better off in 1997, when assistance covered 70% of families’ basic needs. The current shelter allowance is still well under what most people have to pay for rent. For example, a single person receives just \$375 every month for shelter, but a recent study found over one thousand Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units in the Downtown Eastside with rents over \$425 (Carnegie 2007). Moreover, poverty cannot be defined simply in terms of absolute minimum levels of material well being; it is also necessary to look at an individual’s or group’s position relative to others in the same society

For the lowest income households, cuts in social spending have led to chronic poverty as they are forced to spend most of their revenue on accommodation, with little or none left over for other needs such as food, medicine or clothing (Hiebert, D’Addario and Sherrell 2005; Mattu 2002; Murdie 2003b). For households at risk (paying at least 30% of their income on rent), their average 2001 income of \$19,300 was not much more than their average housing expenses of \$18,700. According to CMHC’s report on the housing needs of recent immigrants to major Canadian cities, households at risk pay more for rent than the average of all tenants, whether immigrant or Canadian born (Hiebert et al 2006). To illustrate how these conditions intersect with processes of racialisation, Hiebert, Mendez and Wyly’s (2008) research shows that the average total household income for black tenants at risk in Metro Vancouver was \$16,345. For black tenants paying at least 50% of their income on rent, their average total household income was only \$9,033. The authors speculate that this figure may indicate the existence of undeclared income or high debt burdens.

Although by almost all accounts, visible minorities do worse than whites, in Vancouver a

careful distinction needs to be made between people who immigrate as economic migrants and those with refugee status. This is important because immigration category and housing outcome are closely linked. Vancouver receives the smallest ratio of refugees and has the most expensive housing market in Canada; in this context the lack of adequate and secure housing disproportionately affects refugees and as a result, they face the most difficult challenges (Wayland 2007; Hiebert and Mendez 2008). Measuring housing stress based on LSIC data, 96% of refugees in Vancouver experience extreme, high or moderate housing stress in their first six months (Hiebert, Mendez and Wyly 2006). According to data from the current study, African refugees tend to be among the “hidden homeless” (e.g. sofa surfing) rather than on the streets; these findings are supported by the identification of concentrations of potential hidden homelessness around Edmonds and in Surrey, in areas where large numbers of African refugees live (Fiedler, Schuurmann and Hyndman 2006). In contrast, people from Asia tend to come as either business or family class migrants and, as a result, these groups are often able to own homes inhabited by extended families (Hiebert, Mendez and Wyly 2008).

2.2.4 Immigrant serving agencies in Vancouver

The final section in this chapter examines the institutional landscape that meets African refugees when they arrive. A more specific description of African refugees’ interactions with these organisations is provided in chapter five. Immigrant serving agencies (ISAs) in Metro Vancouver vary in size from small national or regional groups with a handful of members, to Immigrant Services Society (ISS), which runs Welcome House (a twelve-apartment reception centre for GARs arriving to BC), and other large multi-million dollar operations. The institutional landscape has changed rapidly over the past decade, with half of the organisations whose representatives took part in this research only coming into existence during that period.

Agencies offering BC Settlement and Assistance Program (BCSAP) services assist

clients by completing forms, providing referrals, and helping them get on waiting lists, but BCSAP has no specific mandate to address housing related needs. Moreover, because housing searches and meeting landlords takes so much time, workers are not generally permitted to leave their offices to visit or find housing for clients. Thus, although housing is viewed by many experts as a reliable predictor of integration (e.g. Danso and Grant 2001; Rose and Ray 2001; Hiebert, D'Addario and Sherrell 2005), there appears to be a disconnect between housing and settlement policy. Furthermore, ISAs in BC are only funded to provide services to newcomers for their first three years. However, the fact that nearly half of those in the current study have been here longer suggests that settlement concerns extend over a longer period of time. Other studies have also identified a gap between the amount of time refugees in particular require services and the length of time services are provided, in addition to a need for better follow up and monitoring, and enhanced coordination among service providers, to ensure that needs are met (Pressé and Thomson 2007; Mattu 2002; Miraftab 2000; Hiebert, Mendez and Wyly 2005; Hiebert, D'Addario and Sherrell 2005; Komezza 2007). In this study Michel told me, "You meet those people who have been here for five years or more and they are crying. They are still not settled, and our fear is that could happen to us."

African refugees who speak French are in a special position due to the status of French as an official language. Unfortunately, the Official Languages Act (OLA) discriminates against non-European French speakers due to the choice of "mother tongue" as the criterion for belonging to a language group outside Quebec. This definition is of particular concern in questions of funding for community organisations. Because the mother tongue of members of African communities is a local language, they are not included in Statistics Canada censuses or entitled to the same services and benefits as people from Quebec living in English speaking provinces, who are considered to be genuine French speakers. Effectively, this means that race

and ethnic origin are indirectly used to determine who is considered French-speaking; persons of ethnic groups such as Wolof, Lingala, Ewe, or Kirundi are not recognized as francophones, even though French is their official language in accordance with the OLA (Diène 2004). Given this situation, it is perhaps not surprising that francophone participants in the current study were unanimous in their frustration with the lack of services available in French and lack of supports for francophone Africans, especially refugees.

In addition to “mainstream” organisations that provide settlement services funded under BCSAP or OLA initiatives, dozens of African community groups and service organisations of varying sizes also provide a wide range of services including advocacy, employment assistance and training, translation and interpretation, family support, and event organising. Sometimes these groups are referred to “ethno-cultural” organisations and, because terminology is directly linked to funding entitlements, there is a lively debate among people who work in ISAs about whether particular organisations are “cultural groups” or “service providers,” as well as what constitutes “settlement” versus “community development.”

Most African organisations are volunteer run and have a mandate to uphold and preserve their culture, as well as to help immigrants adapt and integrate into Canadian society; some serve all Africans while others serve only their national or religious group. All have a desire to help, but organizational capacity is usually low due to a number of factors including: lack of information and resources; unfamiliarity with funding systems; lack of executive accountability; constituencies that are widely dispersed around Metro Vancouver; and ethnic, legal, linguistic or religious divisions that inhibit cohesion and development of trust among and within organisations (Masinda and Ngene-Kambere 2008; Adjbolosoo and Mensah 1998). In this context, Vertovec’s (2006) point regarding the challenges for local and national authorities and funding bodies in determining the extent of support they should extend to small groups whose

organizational capacity and structure are not in line with mainstream standards is highly relevant. The recent growth in the number of community based organisations reflects the movement among African immigrants who believe that their communities are best able to define and serve their own needs; frustration and resentment that their needs are not met by existing service providers; and public policy that promotes competition among groups for representation and funding (Masinda and Ngene-Kambere 2008; Adjbolosoo and Mensah 1998; Komeza 2007).

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

3.1 Research and power / Research as power

“We just hope that our voices may reach a higher point so that they can hear what we are crying for.” –Paul

I owe many of the ideas in the following discussion to Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s brilliant and influential book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, which she opens by explaining that “from the vantage point of the colonised...the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism” (1999; 1). Accordingly, she argues that any discussion of research methodology and indigenous⁵ peoples together must be incomplete if it lacks an analysis of imperialism or a demonstrated understanding of the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practice. Perhaps most centrally, she reminds us that research is not an innocent or disinterested exercise, but a practice with something at stake that occurs in a particular social and political environment. An additional concern is the conception among indigenous peoples that research inevitably implies the ongoing construction of indigenous communities as a “problem” (Smith 1999; 1). I have attempted to partially address this latter concern by placing the focus of my inquiry on Canadian society and policy through the concept of social exclusion. As an indigenous (Maori) researcher herself, Smith sees research as a “site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the west and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other” (2). Feminism also contains a commitment to rethinking the purposes of knowledge creation to re-working the research process itself as mechanisms to explore and unsettle oppressive power relations (Maguire 2006; Collins 1990). With these ideas in mind, my methodology sought to explore the challenge of how to privilege the creation

⁵ Although Africans are not indigenous in Canada, I believe that their experiences as colonised peoples, and as the objects of research on “indigenous peoples” within Africa (just an airplane ride away) are directly analogous.

of responsible knowledge so that those who have been the victims of past exploitation become the recipients and beneficiaries of research.

According to Smith, imperialism may be partly defined as involving at least one of the following: economic expansion, subjugation of ‘others,’ an idea or spirit, or a discursive field of knowledge. She shows how historically, imperialism provided the means through which notions of what counts as human could be systematically applied as forms of classification, such as through typologies of societies and hierarchies of race. Legislation based on the principle of “humanity” was frequently used to regulate the categories to which people belonged, as well as the relations among people of different categories (1999; 25-7). However, although Smith uses the expression “ways of knowing,” it is perhaps more accurate to speak of “ways of *not* knowing” to refer to the learned ignorance that is created and sustained in various ways and interpreted euphemistically within the context of Canadian national identity as “innocence.” Similarly to what I proposed in chapter two regarding the ongoing implications of historical slavery for contemporary processes of racialisation and identity formation in Canada, Smith insists that the legacy of these ideas remains with us today. As she argues, “imperialism still hurts, destroys and is reforming itself constantly,” and therefore needs to be engaged at multiple levels (19). In this context, she considers it crucial for researchers to have a critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values informing their research practice (20). When viewed in the context of the whole system, including scientific rules and practices, legal frameworks, notions of subjectivity and objectivity, the privileging of written texts and particular authors, etc., these ideas determine the wider rules of practice, which ensure that western interests remain dominant (47). Thus Smith insists the notion that research necessarily serves humankind is a reflection of ideology, yet one that has become quite taken for granted, with the result that many researchers assume they naturally embody that ideal when they

work with other communities (5).

My own research is situated within this problematic framework. Fortunately, Smith offers some guidelines for researchers wishing to engage in “decolonizing methodologies” and the promotion of social justice. As a possible starting point, she summarizes several major research issues in the following questions:

Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated? These questions are part of a larger framework of criteria for judging a researcher: Is their spirit clear? Do they have a good heart? What other baggage are they carrying? Are they useful to us? Can they fix our generator? Can they actually do anything? (1999; 10)

Finally, Smith reminds us that who will listen is at least as important as who is speaking, and that there are diverse ways of disseminating knowledge and ensuring that the research produced reaches the people who helped make it. Importantly, reporting back and sharing knowledge both assume a principle of reciprocity and feedback (71). Being able to address these multiple concerns with integrity has been my aim throughout this project.

3.1.1 Self-assessment: A decolonizing methodology?

In order to assess the extent to which my efforts to apply Smith’s framework have been successful, I begin by answering the list of questions posed above. This is neither a simple nor a straightforward task; as Smith points out, what may appear to be the “right” or most desirable answer could still be deemed incorrect (1999; 10). What follows is my attempt at a self evaluation based on my own ideas considered together with feedback I have received from the people who took part in the research, as well as friends, acquaintances, and colleagues.

Smith’s framework requires that researchers reflect on who owns the research and whose interests it serves. In my case, there can be little doubt that the research is both owned by me and also serves my interests, in that I have obtained a valuable university degree and the research has

been published and copyrighted under my name. Additionally, I carried out the research and wrote it up myself. Since there was no funding available to train and pay other researchers, nor enough time to do so, given the temporal limitations of the project, there was no other practical option. In that sense, this was not a “community” research project. Given those limitations I believe that busy people with already overwhelming family and employment responsibilities would have expected me to carry out the research rather than asking others to “do the work for me” without compensation. However, I am aware that greater “insider” involvement could have altered the execution and findings of the research, perhaps resulting in a more effective presentation than what I have produced.

While there are clear educational and future career benefits accruing to me through this project, I am also hopeful that the research has benefited and served the interests of the people who helped make it (i.e. the participants and the communities they are part of). For example, although it is difficult to trace the exact origins of particular policy shifts or variations in the service provision environment, it is possible that some positive policy change has occurred or will take place as a result of my research, although such changes are likely to affect people arriving after the research was carried out rather than the people who actually took part. Many interviewees understood and expressed precisely this wish, explaining that they were sharing their experiences with me so that their children and the people arriving after them would not have to go through what they did. For others, simply having somebody who appeared to be in a position of relative power listen to their problems was significant. Clearly I do not want to overstate this, but for some people having a Canadian take note of their challenges was important and possibly cathartic, especially if they felt that they had not met with many sympathetic (white) Canadians previously. Although I had initially feared that my right as an “outsider” to ask questions and write about African refugees’ experiences would be questioned, I was

surprised and relieved to discover that participants were unanimously pleased that I was focusing on the experiences of Africans since, as they are painfully aware, very few authors do.

Because I carried out and wrote up the research myself, I do not consider this project to fall under the rubric of “participatory action research.”⁶ However, interview questions and the research design were produced with significant and substantive input from African friends and acquaintances, as well as advice from my academic supervisor. Moreover, from the beginning of the project, I have drawn on the insights and suggestions from an informal advisory committee comprised of people who have immigrated from Africa. Interviewees often expressed the view that I asked relevant and practical questions that effectively got at the heart of their experiences. Participants also confirmed that, since the interviews were quite lengthy, they had a chance to say everything they wished. Further, because I have maintained contact with most of the participants since the interviews took place, there have been ongoing opportunities to add to their initial discussion.

Apart from “getting their stories out there,” was I useful? To answer this question, I turn in part to my continuing relations with participants. Although I have lost touch with a few, I am in varying degrees of contact with many others through ongoing phone calls and visits, while a few have become friends. Further, several have taken part in various capacities in other “community projects” that I am involved in. During the course of our relationship, I also have assisted a number of people with a range of housing related issues, including undertaking housing searches, making and attending viewing appointments, assisting with the interpretation of contracts, dealing with conflicts with landlords, communicating with collection agencies and utility companies, and advocacy. Also, because I have a relatively large network, I was able to

⁶ There is some debate over what precisely constitutes Participatory Action Research (PAR) but a minimum requirement appears to be that community based co-researchers together with a facilitator (the traditional researcher) engage in an inter-subjective group process of investigation, interpretation, and analysis. See for example, Wadsworth and others in the 2006 edited collection, *Handbook of Action Research*.

connect several people with others who could assist them in some way or who were in a similar situation. On the other hand, obviously not everything I do is correct or helpful, and it may be that some of those with whom I am no longer in contact were offended by something I said or did. Despite this concern, I hope I am justified in understanding the fact that I am still in more or less regular contact with almost all of the people I interviewed, and that many extend their active support and encouragement for activities I am involved in outside the academic environment, as acknowledgements that my efforts are worthwhile.

I have also put a lot of consideration into the processes of reporting back and disseminating information. Briefly, I published the research on which this thesis is based in an HRSDC report⁷ and as a Metropolis BC Working Paper; took part in several radio interviews along with various participants (CKNW, CBC Overseas, and La Palabre); have been invited to take part in interviews for other research projects; and the research appeared in several newspaper articles and notices (*The Afronews*, *The Georgia Straight*, *The Patriotic Vanguard*, and *The Afri-Can*). In addition, I made presentations and/or organised workshops at UBC; at a Metropolis Symposium in Vancouver; at the National Metropolis conference in Calgary; at the Centre of Integration for African Immigrants; at the BC Provincial Budget Hearings; and at a roundtable discussion with the UN's Independent Expert on Minorities Issues. I also sent out several drafts of the published articles and reports through various local and international listserves, to government and non-governmental organizations, and to participants. In this way, I sought and responded to suggestions and criticisms as completely and honestly as I could. I was amazed and touched by the positive response and interest the research generated among a wide

⁷ It is important to note that this research was partially funded by an HRSDC grant awarded through Metropolis BC. Without that funding I would not have been able to offer honoraria to participants or publish the findings as an HRSDC report, two elements of the project which were key to its success. I am grateful to my supervisor Dan Hiebert for making this opportunity available and for encouraging me to take it up despite my initial misguided reluctance to do so.

range of people on several continents, many of whom thanked me for opening their eyes to the housing conditions of African refugees in Metro Vancouver. Nevertheless, I am aware that there may be people who do not believe I have gone far enough in ensuring that the research reaches those with the authority to effect significant change. My response to that critique is twofold: first, an admission that I could indeed have made a greater effort to publicise my findings, and second, that I have not finished yet!

3.2 The study sample

3.2.1 Recruitment

The pathways along which research participants are recruited affects who is represented in the study. A study of this size cannot be fully representative of the entire African population in Metro Vancouver; rather, within the context of immense spatial and temporal heterogeneity, the aim was to reveal patterns and identify particular groups whose needs are not being adequately met under the current system, and to offer an analysis of how the present situation arose. Interviewees were located through networks I have developed over several years of community involvement, which include connections to local ISAs and African community groups. Participants were also found through other interviewees, who tended to suggest people they knew in similar circumstances.⁸ The use of this snowball sampling technique implies some limitations as these networks excluded homeless shelters and other sites of extreme marginalisation, although flyers were posted in those locations. There were many stories circulating about people at the very bottom of the social ladder, but they were ultimately excluded from the study because without a permanent address or phone, the lives of traumatised

⁸ This partly explains the exclusion of people from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, which was not deliberate, but which had the effect of focusing the study on people from “sub-Saharan” Africa (see also note 1, page 1).

homeless refugees who may not speak English are so unstable that setting up an interview with an unknown university researcher presented insurmountable difficulties.

It is also possible that there are African refugees in Metro Vancouver who have become wealthy, and it may be a limitation of the study that none are included in the sample, for the reason that none were found during the recruitment process. Also, unlike the plentiful anecdotes concerning those at the lowest end of the socio-economic spectrum, no stories were related to me of African refugees who had attained a place at the top of the social ladder. Only one refugee in the current study has a mortgage for an apartment (see section 6.6). This finding is supported by data demonstrating disproportionately low rates of home ownership among both refugees and those who identify as black (Hiebert, Mendez and Wyly 2008); presumably those who fall into both categories are doubly marginalized in the housing market. However, this is not meant to imply that people from Africa who came to Canada under other immigration categories have not become economically successful.

3.2.2 Interviews

“By the rules of the system I am tied already...Honestly, we want to talk about the system and make it good - that’s why I’m talking to you like this.” –Youssouf

*“I suggest you take five hours so I can tell you the suffering we are going through...”
–Kupakwashi*

Interviews lasted from one to four hours (for interview schedules, see Appendices D, E and F), and were semi-structured, with questions grouped into themes around past and present housing conditions, barriers to adequate housing, formal and informal assistance received, and recommendations to improve the housing conditions of African refugees. The interview schedule was not followed precisely, but rather used as a guide so that throughout the course of the conversation, answers to all of the questions were obtained. Each participant interviewed as a refugee received a thirty-dollar honorarium. I also brought a package of food (some combination

of bread, cheese, fruit or nuts) to all of the interviews, and this appeared to be gratefully appreciated. Although most interviews were conducted in English, in a few cases a family member who was also being interviewed assisted as an interpreter, while the two focus groups were conducted in Arabic through an interpreter. Interviews primarily took place in participants' homes; however, five were held in cafés and two in my apartment. The group interviews took place at an ISA that participants regularly attend and where they felt comfortable, while the interviews with settlement workers occurred at their places of work. All the interviews except two were audio recorded. Following the interviews, I personally transcribed the recordings then coded the data manually using simple coding techniques and numerical counting to draw out quantitative and qualitative data for analysis and interpretation. My objective was to situate the empirical data concerning people's housing conditions within a conceptual framework that could shed light on how the current situation arose and also indicate potential ramifications for decision making that could help overcome inequalities in the future.

Given the racialised class and legal status power differentials that clearly exist between me and those interviewed, the issue of "trust" is a crucial one. In this regard, having a personal introduction to the people I interviewed, either from an organisation, friend, or other participant was extremely helpful. Also, as a result of volunteer work I have carried out since arriving in Vancouver in 2001, I am quite well known among many African communities, so in some cases, potential participants had an opportunity to ask others about me beforehand. Further, during the interview I made my political views known by expressing awareness of my privilege as a white, university educated, citizen, settler, etc, and by acknowledging my complicity in the perpetuation of exploitative neo-colonial North-South relations, including in the production of refugees. Also, I spoke honestly and sincerely. However, I do not wish to overemphasize a claim to having successfully fostered trusting relationships with every individual I spoke to. Since the interviews

took place, many people have opened up far more than they did during the research itself, suggesting that they did not feel complete confidence in me during the interview, and this is hardly surprising.

In general, I found that people who had been interviewed for previous research projects tended to be more wary than others since from their perspectives no tangible results had come of the past interviews, and all claimed that they did not hear from the researcher again once the research had been completed. One pointed out that “research with no follow up is just a nuisance.” A few people mentioned being afraid that their words would “come back to haunt them” if criticisms reached the government, and one person did not allow me to record the interview. In another case, one participant called a friend to take part but the friend refused, explaining that they feared they would “read everything on Google.” On the other hand, a few people insisted that they had “a lot to tell the government” and had merely been waiting for an opportunity to do so! The most difficult interview was with a gentleman who exhibited open hostility at the beginning of our meeting, demanding to know what good could I possibly do as a student, and asking hard questions such as ‘why does racism exist?’ However, by the end of the interview, I believe we parted on friendly terms and we have since worked together on a variety of different events and committees.

In sum, I found the interviews to be enjoyable, enlightening, inspiring, and also sometimes depressing. For both interviewer and interviewee they elicited a complex mix of emotional reactions including pleasure, surprise, laughter, love, pain, bitterness, disappointment and sadness. At the same time, and despite the seriousness of the subject matter, many of the participants drew on a sharp, witty, and often quite cynical sense of humour that enabled them to joke about the challenges they faced, provoking the laughter that frequently punctuates the interview recordings.

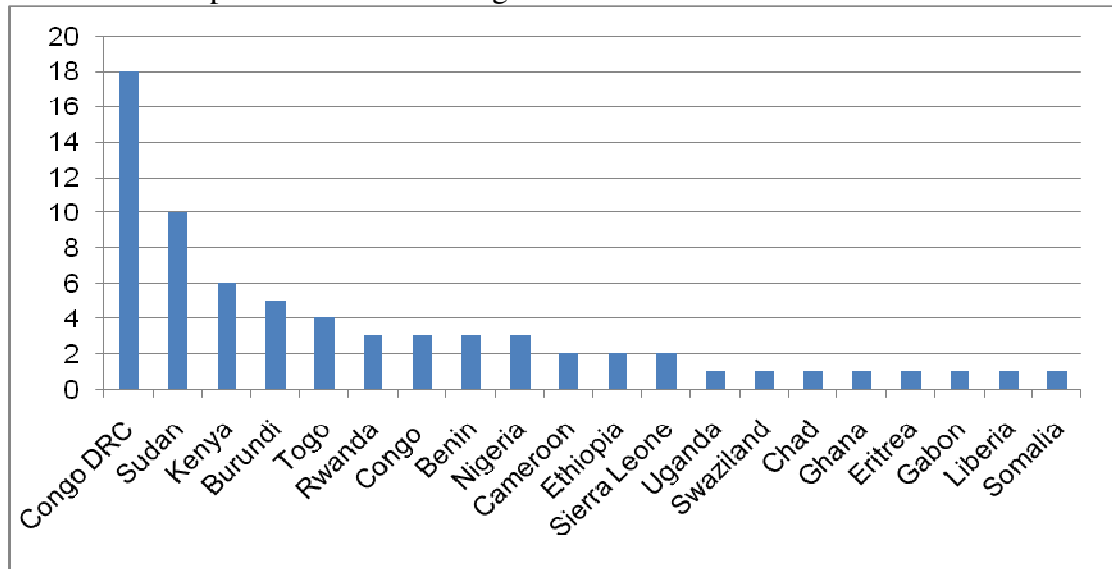
3.2.3 Participant demographics

In addition to sixty-one people interviewed as refugees (thirty women; thirty-one men), the study sample also includes interviews with ten settlement workers who are employed at nine ISAs located in Vancouver, New Westminister and Surrey, including three large multi-service providers designed to assist all newcomers (Table 5). The annual budgets of the three smallest organisations are under \$300,000 while those of the three largest are over \$5 million. Eight of the ten settlement workers interviewed had immigrated from Africa. Altogether, participants came from a total of twenty countries in East, West, South and Central Africa (Table 6). All of the names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

Table 5. ISA Representatives (settlement workers) and populations they assist

All newcomers	Primarily RCs	Primarily GARs	Africans/francophones
Mansa	Simon	Garang	Kagiso
Betty	Robert	Tunde	Thomas
Anita			Annie

Table 6. Participants' countries of origin



In terms of status at the time of entry, fifteen of those interviewed as refugees came as Refugee Claimants, forty-two as Government Assisted Refugees, and four as Privately

Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) (Table 7).

Table 7. Status on entry

GAR	42	69%
PSR	4	6%
RC	15	25%
TOTAL	61	100%

Of the forty-six sponsored refugees (GARs and PSRs), 80% had been in Canada three years or less (Table 8) and 89% were Permanent Residents (PR) (Table 9). One quarter had only primary school education or less (Table 10), and two thirds could not speak English (Table 11). Had the interviews been conducted at the time of arrival, even fewer would have spoken English. In general, RCs tend to have higher official language abilities and education than GARs. Over half of the RCs in the current study had some post-secondary education (Table 10), and all spoke English, while nearly 50% spoke both English and French (Table 11). This is possibly because two thirds had been in Canada for at least three years (Table 8). However, despite this, 40% were still Temporary Residents (TR) (Table 9), in one case for eight years. Please note that in all tables, totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Table 8. Length of time in Canada

	All		GARs and PSRs		RCs	
Less than 1 year	15	25%	14	30%	1	7%
1 – 3 years	27	44%	23	50%	4	27%
3 – 5 years	10	16%	5	11%	5	33%
5 – 10 years	9	15%	4	9%	5	33%
TOTAL	61	100%	46	100%	15	100%

Table 9. Status at time of interview

	All		GARs and PSRs		RCs	
Permanent Resident	47	77%	41	89%	6	40%
Temporary Resident	7	11%	1	2%	6	40%
Canadian citizen	7	11%	4	9%	3	20%
TOTAL	61	100%	46	100%	15	100%

Table 10. Educational attainment

	All		GARs and PSRs		RCs	
Post-secondary*	16	26%	8	17%	8	53%
Secondary school*	33	54%	27	59%	6	40%
Primary school*	12	19%	11	24%	1	7%
TOTAL	61	100%	46	100%	15	100%

* Indicates attendance rather than completion

Table 11. Official language ability at time of interview

	All		GARs and PSRs		RCs	
English only	13	20%	5	11%	8	53%
French only	18	30%	18	39%	0	0%
Neither English nor French	12	19%	12	26%	0	0%
Both English and French	18	30%	11	24%	7	47%
TOTAL	61	100%	46	100%	15	100%

3.2.4 Participants' basic housing conditions

“If people have a good place to live it makes all the difference to their stability and ability to start a life...A whole series of things have to be working in tandem, but without good housing the rest become more tangled and messy: you’re moving, missing mail, and the stress...” –Simon

“Housing is a story and a half.” –Daniel

For both GARs and RCs, legal status is a key determinant of their housing trajectories.

Discourses that celebrate Canada as a humanitarian nation and a haven for African refugees ultimately function to conceal the reality of life for people once they reach Canada. Related notions of Canadians as generous and compassionate are underpinned by a limited conception of what constitutes having “saved” African refugees, the implication being that the mere act of allowing refugees entry into Canada is sufficient on its own. Yet, as the statistics below demonstrate, when refugees arrive they discover that they are unable to afford adequate shelter, an outcome that also has repercussions in terms of health, education, employment and general well being. However, rather than submitting to blame-the-victim discourses grounded in racist and classist stereotypes, I propose that by attempting to understand these processes from the

perspective of those disadvantaged under the current system, we can discover what African refugees' experiences disclose about Canadian national identities, values and priorities. In this way the functional consequences for Canadian society of incorporating a limited number of African refugees who are subsequently maintained under conditions of vulnerability and marginalisation, will also be revealed.

At the time of the interviews participants lived in Vancouver, Surrey, Burnaby or New Westminister (Table 12). The overwhelming majority (89%) were in market housing, primarily basement suites or 3-storey apartment blocks (Table 13). Most of the latter were located in large complexes, and were in obvious need of improved maintenance and repairs both inside and outside. This is reflective of Hiebert and Mendez's (2008) finding that low-rise apartment complexes make up a disproportionate percentage of buildings in need of minor and major repairs in Metro Vancouver.

Table 12. Place of residence at time of interview

	All		GARs and PSRs		RCs	
Vancouver	13	21%	7	15%	6	40%
Burnaby	31	51%	25	55%	6	40%
Surrey	15	25%	12	26%	3	20%
New Westminister	2	3%	2	4%	0	0%
TOTAL	61	100%	46	100%	15	100%

Table 13. Type of residence at time of interview

	All		GARs and PSRs		RCs	
Basement	13	21%	7	15%	6	40%
Apartment (3 storey)	34	56%	32	70%	2	13%
Co-op	4	6%	0	0%	4	27%
BC Housing	3	5%	3	6%	0	0%
Other	7	11%	4	9%	3	20%
TOTAL	61	100%	46	100%	15	100%

Sponsored refugees

“...surviving by the grace of God.” –Michel

According to the findings of this study, African GARs tend to arrive from protracted refugee situations in large families with up to ten children, often headed by a single parent. Such families encounter tremendous challenges finding adequate housing. In contrast, PSRs' immediate housing needs are lower than GARs' due to the terms of the sponsorship agreement. However, they often struggle with finding affordable housing in the long term, especially if the agreement breaks down, as it did for Sarah, whose abusive husband drove her and their four children out of the house. At the time of the interview, Sarah was living in a refugee shelter and the children were in temporary foster homes. Moreover, when the family arrives the cost of providing for several dependents can severely strain sponsors' resources, yet because of the terms of the sponsorship agreement, sponsored relatives are not eligible for government support. This is true even if they are senior citizens like John and Charity, whose relatives are struggling to care for them with minimum wage jobs.

Despite their greater support needs, GARs and PSRs in this study overwhelmingly live in overpriced market housing in run down complexes (Table 14). Overcrowding is practically universal; some examples are shown in Table 15. Of the twenty-six GARs interviewed who had three or more children, only one had more than three bedrooms. Based on qualitative interview data on the affordability, suitability and adequacy of participants' accommodation, over 90% experienced moderate, high or extreme housing stress (Table 16).

Table 14. GARs' and PSRs' real estate market participation

	GARs and PSRs		All	
Own	0	0%	1	2%
Rent (market)	43	93%	53	87%
Co-op	0	0%	4	6%
BC Housing	3	7%	3	5%
TOTAL	46	100%	61	100%

Table 15. GARs and overcrowding

# family members	6	8	3	6	8	8	6	8	8	7	8	6	5
# bedrooms	3	3	1	3	5	3	3	3	3	2	4	3	2

Table 16. GARs’ and PSRs’ housing stress

	GARs and PSRs		All	
Low or none	4	9%	10	16%
Moderate	7	15%	9	15%
High	8	17%	10	16%
Extreme	27	59%	32	52%
TOTAL	46	100%	61	100%

Refugee claimants

“Housing is soooo difficult, you look at it like a nightmare.” –Daniel

Unlike GARs, RCs from Africa tend to arrive as either singles or couples with one or two children. They usually have no idea where to stay and often find themselves homeless within the first week, as whatever money they came with runs out. At that point they may stay at a shelter downtown or sleep outside until they connect with somebody. The African RCs in this study invariably began by looking for another black person, in hope that they would understand their situation and offer assistance. Iman explained: “It’s a long story, oh my God! I was eight months pregnant, I was very, very hungry! I was seeing people eat and just salivating with hunger! The first black person I saw I said, ‘I’m so hungry, can you give me something to eat?’ He gave me twenty dollars—it was like he gave me twenty million [dollars].” Ultimately RCs’ housing trajectories depend on what kind of social network they get connected into. A lucky few find a place in a transition house, but the rest are left to fend for themselves and many end up in extremely precarious situations. In general, RCs’ housing is characterised by instability and poverty, which is related to long processing times that prevent them from settling down, with the result that they “bounce around” from place to place; some examples of this may be seen in Table 17. RCs in the current study experienced lower levels of housing stress than GARs (Table

18), in part because one third were in subsidised housing (Table 19). However, nearly three quarters had been homeless at least once since coming to Metro Vancouver (Table 19).

Table 17. RCs' frequency of moving

Years here	2	5	3	5	4	4	6	6	7	2	8	2	2
# moves	3	3	4	5	5	5	5	4	8	4	4	5	8

Table 18. RCs' housing stress

	RCs		All	
Low or none	6	40%	10	16%
Moderate	2	13%	9	15%
High	2	13%	10	16%
Extreme	5	33%	32	52%
TOTAL	15	100%	61	100%

Table 19. RCs' real estate market participation

	RCs		All	
Own	1	7%	1	2%
Rent (market)	10	66%	53	87%
Co-op	4	27%	4	6%
BC Housing	0	0%	3	5%
TOTAL	15	100%	61	100%

CHAPTER IV MAJOR STRUCTURAL FORCES: THE OUTER LAYERS

4.1 Introduction

In chapter two, I described how theoretical discourses around diversity, multiculturalism, and minority formation produce a particular vision of the ideal Canadian subject, naturalized as white and imagined as egalitarian, tolerant, and legitimate, while simultaneously masking ongoing inequalities based on race, class and legal status. I also suggested some of the ways in which policy is implicated in the creation of marginalisation and how these processes are further concealed through the practice of democratic racism. Policy makers are influenced by notions of the Canadian national self, which arise out of liberal ideological frameworks and, although the intent of the policies they produce might be non racist, a failure to take into consideration existing inequalities can have negative repercussions for racialised and economic minorities. When viewed together, the combined effect of policies around housing, refugee settlement, law enforcement, immigration, multiculturalism, income assistance, education, and ISA funding is to create a tight bundle of overlapping conditions that affect African refugees in particular ways.

With these ideas in mind, the central empirical finding of this study is that African refugees are facing an availability and affordability crisis in Metro Vancouver that forces them to accept substandard housing which is neither suitable, adequate nor affordable,⁹ and that these unstable conditions are both symptomatic and generative of other problems. Drawing on the related concepts of social exclusion and interlocking systems of domination, a useful metaphor for understanding these processes is that of an onion. The outer layers represent larger structural challenges faced by many Canadians and newcomers generally: low incomes, lack of affordable

⁹ “Adequate” dwellings are those reported by their residents as not requiring any major repairs; “suitable” dwellings are those that have enough bedrooms for the size and make up of the resident households according to the National Occupancy Standards (NOS); and “affordable” applies to accommodation that costs less than 30% of the resident’s gross income. For renters, shelter costs include rental payments and utilities such as oil, gas, electricity, water, heat, municipal services, etc. (CMHC 2004)

housing, and lack of information. Peeling away the outer layers, coming as a refugee of any class implies further disadvantages, and these are exacerbated as a result of persistent stereotypes when one is African/black. Institutional barriers comprise the middle layers of the onion, and include discrimination in the private rental market, as well as obstacles presented by public institutions, such as the CIC travel loan for GARs, long processing times for Refugee Claimants, and barriers to accessing subsidised housing. Continuing to peel away the layers, problems are compounded further if one is a woman, a single parent, cannot speak or write English, spent several years in a refugee camp, or has only primary school education. The combination of these factors means that in terms of vulnerability to homelessness, African refugees are at high risk indeed. At the heart of the onion is a homeless African woman refugee from a protracted refugee situation, who is also a single mother with limited English and literacy skills.

Throughout this and the chapters that follow, I will be peeling back the onion's overlapping layers to reveal how the effects of policies in the lives of black African refugees reflect the problematic notions of Canadian identity that underpin liberal conceptions of multiculturalism and diversity as they are currently implemented. I will also show how particular constructions key to minority formation simultaneously serve to disguise these effects, arguing that unless the underlying relationships are recognized and acknowledged they will be extremely difficult or impossible to change. The process of decolonization includes an ongoing struggle to overcome ideological alienation and fragmentation, while also actively working towards social justice. Therefore, rather than entrenching divisions between "us" and "them," we need to recognize and acknowledge the hierarchical and interdependent relations among groups of people who inhabit "overlapping territories and intertwined histories" (Said 1994), and who furthermore share a common humanity and therefore have a claim to equal rights and justice, in order to avoid reproducing colonial relations and inequalities.

4.2 Lack of money

4.2.1 Low incomes for racialised newcomers and refugees

“You can’t get any good job as a refugee - for \$1500 a month? No way.” –Focus Group

“It’s hard for Africans to get a job because they are black.” –Thomas

“If you do manage to find a job it will never be full time, it will never be permanent, it will be low paid, and you find yourself in the ocean drowning.” –Bernadette

The liberal approach that sustains multicultural policy is concerned with enhancing equality of opportunity in terms of employment, education and other social goods. However this approach glosses over historical and systemic relations of racism that result in differential access to opportunities, and also ignores the ways in which legal status influences access to labour market benefits. Africans, as members of a minority group, find that their labour is devalued based on their racial and geographical origin through the continual reinforcement of enduring mythologies that code Africans as inferior, lazy, unintelligent, etc. At the same time, refugee status confers further disadvantage that also limits the way people who come as GARs or RCs interact with labour market structures. Such relations are concealed by the silence of multicultural discourse on class relations, alongside the related assumptions that economic inequality is natural and necessary, and that individuals are responsible for their own welfare. These intersecting ideologies enable people in the wider society to blame African refugees for their own marginalisation because the relationship between privilege and oppression encapsulated in the term visible minority remains hidden. Thus without an explicit anti-racist component aimed at Canadians, liberal multicultural policy also serves as a cover for continued racist practices that have significant economic outcomes.

Participants in this study were shocked at the reception they received in the Canadian labour market. In order to get a foothold they are often forced to volunteer or start at the bottom,

so much of their time is spent catching up regardless of their skills or qualifications. Ahmed, who has been in Canada for eight years, expressed his frustration:

I've been working in many different dirty jobs – factory, tree planting, security, warehouse, logging...I hold a Business Management Diploma, a Private Investigations Diploma, I'm a graphic artist and a journalist...but nobody trusts me! They still see me as an immigrant with an accent, even though my diplomas are all from Canada and I got over 90% in all of them!

Correspondingly, Jane asked, “Don't the Scottish have accents? Everybody has an accent. It's just another way of being racist because it only applies if you're African.” Jane's comments draw attention to the ways in which Canadian understandings of who is legitimately considered a French or English speaker excludes non white people of those language groups. Thus, immigrants who appear white are more quickly assimilated into the Canadian national body while racialised people are configured as incomprehensible outsiders. Importantly, it is through the contraposition of identities conceived of as mutually exclusive that populations may be defined against each other so that black Africans cannot be understood as “Canadian,” regardless of what language they speak or the length of their residency. Thus, undermining white people's primary claims to valued national resources and identities requires unsettling the notion of innocence that stems from the denial of black historical experiences in Canada upon which the two founding nations theory rests.

Within these racialised contexts, refugees face particular challenges. In addition to overall lower educational attainments for GARs, papers may be lost in flight or during a protracted stay in a camp, or cannot be obtained from war zones. Consequently, GARs with formal qualifications often give up ever having them recognized (see also Yu, Ouellet and Warmington 2007). For RCs on the other hand, Dada believes “that 9 [at the beginning of a SIN indicating temporary status] contributes a lot because when [employers] see 9 they know that you are temporary, and that you don't have experience...so it's difficult to get a job with that

9...and if you get one you won't get full payment like somebody that has PR." Due to this confluence of intersecting vulnerabilities, the African refugees in this study are concentrated in precarious employment (ie. security, cleaning, warehouse, factory, etc) characterised by low pay, no job security, poor and often unsafe working conditions, excessive hours, and no benefits. Moreover, several people who work in the service industry and light manufacturing are on contracts from employment agencies that pay them a fraction of what they earn and appear to be holding those contracts even though employers require the workers permanently.

While the men interviewed tended to work in security or warehouses, for African refugee women, especially those who do not speak fluent English or who have little formal education, cleaning is practically the only employment option; 50% had worked, or were working as cleaners. At eight dollars per hour, the pay is well below what could be considered a living wage. Moreover, most of the work takes place at night, so the women may not return home until 4am. After catching a few hours of sleep, they have to be up to get their older children to school and look after the younger ones, then perhaps try to concentrate through an English class. For single mothers, such a routine quickly becomes exhausting and can lead to the well-evidenced cycle of poverty associated with low wage labour. In addition, several of the women I spoke to suffered from chronic illnesses from cleaning jobs that required heavy lifting or exposure to dangerous chemicals without adequate protection. Illnesses often go untreated because they get lost in the daily struggle to survive, yet ultimately income is negatively affected.

These women's stories underscore Razack's (1998) arguments concerning racialised gender hierarchies that interact symbiotically at multiple scales. Razack's framework helps us comprehend how domestic workers and professional women are produced so that neither exists without the other. As she explains, "first world policies of colonialism and neocolonialism that precipitated the debt crisis and continuing impoverishment of the third world, and enabled the

pursuit of middle class respectability in the first world, were implemented in highly gendered ways” (1998; 100). As a result, western middle-class women benefit from those economic and political processes that produce immigrant and refugee women from the Global South, with the status of one depending on the subordinate status of the other in complex ways. In order to address these concerns, she argues that researchers and authors need to move beyond essences, including those constructed in terms of culture/ethnicity; rather, we have to work around how subjectivity is constituted and how systems of domination are reproduced. For example, liberal assumptions that racism and sexism are no longer relevant considerations ignore the requirements of capital for a massive low wage labour force whose disadvantage must be justified somehow. These relations are concealed by notions of fairness and equality, yet they are central to the functioning of the Canadian economy.

In the current study, 80% of GARs and PSRs were under- or unemployed or earned \$10/hr or less. Only 33% of RCs and 17% of GARs were working full-time, while 40% of RCs and 76% of GARs were looking for work at the time of interview. Fifty percent of GARs had never worked, even though only 21% were on RAP (Table 20). Only three participants earned more than fifteen dollars per hour. Kupakwashi argues: “around 85% of francophone African refugees’ income goes to housing...if you get the minimum wage of eight dollars per hour and you work forty hours, how much do you get? Then you rent three bedrooms for \$1000 so the bills and the rent together are actually more than your income, and you also have children...this problem has never got any particular attention and yet it is the one that gets all our income.” In the context of these difficulties, some understood the problems they face in the housing market as being due to affordability rather than availability; as Obiajulu said, “There are lots of houses, but since I cannot find a good job I cannot afford them.” The fact that only three out of the sixty-

one refugees in the current study earn enough to afford an average 2-bedroom apartment shows that it is not sufficient to “just get a job” to address the problem of housing affordability.

Table 20. Sources of income

	All		GARs and PSRs		RCs	
Working full-time	12	20%	7	17%	5	33%
Working part-time	12	20%	9	20%	3	20%
Never worked	22	36%	21	46%	1	7%
Looking for work	38	62%	32	70%	6	40%
RAP (GARs only)	9	15%	9	21%	0	0%

*Column totals may not add to 100% because more than one answer is possible.

Poverty affects the whole family and can trigger a complex cycle of marginalisation. One settlement worker said that “Most [GARs] work two jobs each – that helps, but another challenge is that poverty is a factor in kids dropping out of school...they see that their parents cannot do it on their own, so they contribute either by dropping out of school and working or by moving out of the house so there are fewer people to feed, then they find their own roommates...There are a number of boys who do that, and they also work for minimum wage.” Patrice painted a grim picture: “With this colour, whatever we do we cannot succeed, especially in this situation we are living in - but how to get out, how? Never, I will stay like this forever, even my kids, oh my goodness.”

Indeed as Patrice indicates, breaking out of these cycles is extremely difficult – how does one cease to be a visible minority? Is it even possible to imagine a Canada in which the term has no meaning? Dismantling the definition of Otherness that remains essential to the construction of Canadian identity requires an understanding of where the process comes from. However, this history and its enduring significance are suppressed by liberal discourses that attempt to erase race and construct a myth of equality, even while old ideas implying that people with black skin are external to the nation and consequently less entitled to citizenship rights, remain powerful. For example, Ahmed was forced to leave his job when a co-worker “refused to use a computer

touched by a nigger,” and his employer found it simpler to get rid of Ahmed than confront racist attitudes among his staff. Elaborating further, David explained that “people do everything to tell you that you are not from this country: they say, ‘Yes, you can live here but we don’t like you.’...When you really want to settle down they always remind you that you are not in your place...that you are a foreigner.”

4.2.2 Low rates of government assistance

Low RAP rates for GARs

“I can say honestly we have to thank the federal government, but the budget is not enough. There will always be somebody who says it is not enough, but please let it be a little bit realistic... Although we have to say thank you, we still have to look at what needs to be improved.” –Yousouf

“We have a food bank here at the church; without that you cannot survive.” –Justice

Particular legal categories carry specific entitlements and limitations that intersect in complex ways with racialised minority status and African identity. When they arrive in Canada GARs receive one year of government assistance known as RAP. However, given the level of RAP payments (and the obligation to repay the CIC travel loan, discussed below), even where a large enough place for families can be found, GARs cannot afford it. Because of low RAP rates (Table 21) GARs are forced to convince a landlord to allow extra people, resulting in families of five to eleven sharing 2 or 3-bedroom apartments, while single parents with 1-3 children live in bachelor suites or share a 2-bedroom apartment with another newcomer. One family of eight living in three bedrooms had the parents in one, four girls in another, and two boys in the third. Even though they live in small apartments, African refugee families pay high rents because landlords inevitably charge extra for additional occupants. Low RAP rates also mean that GARs have to spend money intended for food on rent and utilities. As one settlement worker pointed out, “There are the homeless and the foodless. The homeless are visible because they are on the

street; the foodless are ‘invisible’ African refugees who go to bed hungry.” African refugees are “invisible” not only because they are not on the streets, but also because the conditions of their marginalisation are masked by ideologies that posit Canada as a generous refugee-receiving nation. It is by peeling away these concealing ideologies that the actual effects of policies are revealed.

Table 21. RAP rates in 2007

	SHELTER	FOOD	TOTAL	ANNUAL
Individual	\$400	\$235	\$ 635	\$7,620
Family of 2	\$620	\$307	\$ 927	\$11,124
Family of 3	\$655	\$508	\$1,163	\$13,956
Family of 4	\$690	\$615	\$1,305	\$15,660
Family of 5	\$725	\$722	\$1,447	\$17,364
Family of 6	\$760	\$829	\$1,589	\$19,068
Family of 7	\$795	\$936	\$1,731	\$20,772

Immigrant Services Society, June 2007

In addition to concerns about the inadequacy of RAP rates and their failure to take into account factors such as family size or discrimination in the housing market, another issue that arose in many interviews concerns the difficulties that arise in the second year of residency in Canada. Felix explained, “when the year [of RAP] expires is when most people get the really big problems because they don’t get [enough settlement] assistance during that year, so when it’s over you still don’t know what to do.” Betty also pointed out that when GARs finish their year of RAP most have to move; they can no longer afford where they are staying because welfare rates are even lower than those provided under RAP, yet moving is costly and undermines stability. RAP rates are so low (they have not been raised in a decade) that it is difficult not to see the program as a deliberate strategy to maintain refugees in poverty and vulnerability, with advantageous results for the functioning of capital through the creation of a disposable population readily exploitable by employers. According to the *Immigration Act*, immigration is a labour market strategy; it is in this context that I understand the insistence on the part of nearly

everyone I spoke to that the Canadian refugee regime is akin to a modern day slave trade.

Low welfare rates

“...It’s not my fault, I wasn’t lazy in Africa!” –Justice

For those forced to rely on government income assistance, life is very hard indeed. In BC, a single parent with one child receives just 54% of the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO), and a single “employable” only 31% (Table 22). One discouraged settlement worker describes how she feels:

helpless and hopeless about housing...the city is becoming more and more expensive and people still need places to stay...and the money they give on income assistance – if they give \$375 and they know there is nowhere in Vancouver that they can get housing then there has to be some way to bridge the gap. After all some people are going to be on income assistance not because they don’t want to work, but because their circumstances don’t allow them to.

In the current study, approximately one third of all refugees interviewed were on income assistance at the time of interview, while 43% of GARs and 100% of RCs had relied upon it at some time (Table 23). Thus, at least as important as raising welfare rates is the need to address the ways in which African refugees are forced onto government assistance.

Table 22. BC welfare rates

	Total Welfare Income (TWF)	Low Income Cut-Off (LICO)	TWF as % of LICO
Single “employable”	\$6,456	\$20,778	31%
Person with a disability	\$10,656	\$20,778	51%
Lone parent, one child	\$13,948	\$25,867	54%
Couple, two children	\$18,466	\$38,610	48%

National Council of Welfare 2006

Table 23. Refugees’ use of welfare

	All		GARs and PSRs		RCs	
Currently on welfare	19	31%	15	33%	4	27%
Ever used welfare	35	57%	20	43%	15	100%

One major barrier for RCs is the amount of time needed to obtain a work permit. RCs in the current study waited between six months and one year. This is a time of enforced welfare yet Mamoud insisted, “We want to work! But we need the papers to come on time! That would make a real difference!” One alternative is to work under the table, which two participants

admitted doing. Daniel worked for ten dollars per hour (but did not get paid for all hours), and Fatuma worked for eight dollars per hour (after working one month she was accused of stealing and fired without pay). In these cases, coping strategies actually served to increase vulnerability. At the same time, enforced inactivity can also affect mental health. For example Iman said, “It took one year for my work permit and Mamoud around eight months...all the time I had a headache, I had no hope, no money, nothing! Me and Mamoud were fighting like cats and dogs...I was depressed about everything.”

While RCs are forced onto welfare by long processing times, GARs often move from RAP to welfare because they receive so little settlement support in their first year, and also because issues around language and trauma cannot always be resolved in a year. Kasinda, a single mother of seven with limited English and only a few years of formal education, is perpetually looking for work. She said, “I’m so tired. Every month they ask, ‘Do you have a job?’ ‘No...’ ‘Okay next month you won’t get any money.’ I go there and cry, ‘Please give me a job! If you have a cleaning job, give it to me, I can work, just give me a job!’” Similarly, Marie insisted, “I don’t want to stay home! I’m still young - just thirty-five, even if I have seven kids I’m still a young strong mother...I must work very hard to find money to take care of myself and my kids, that’s all I want, but now I don’t have a job and I don’t know how to write English...I just don’t know what to do.”

Finally, a related issue arises for refugees who are disabled. Afua, Bernadette, Afifa, and Ahmed were tortured before coming to Canada, yet they are expected by some welfare workers to take jobs as cleaners or in warehouses where the work requires heavy lifting or standing for long hours. This lack of understanding is disturbing for people who argue that they were sponsored in part because they were tortured. Cecile, John, and Joseph also have permanent disabilities that make it nearly impossible to find work in Canada. Given the degree to which

disabled people experience discrimination, it is important to understand the intersections of disability with race, class, gender and immigration status. While there is little data available in Canada, evidence from the US suggests that racially oppressed disabled people, especially women, experience both underutilization of services and lower rates of employment compared to other disabled people (Dua 2007; 186-7). To illustrate how racism and ableism can combine to push people out of the national imaginary, Cecile related to me the words that were shouted at her when she failed to understand a passer by on the street: “What! You’re black, you’re [handicapped] and you don’t speak English? What are you doing here!?”

Clearly immigration status and welfare use are closely related. However, when refugees receive income assistance, they may be construed as “taking advantage of” or “over-burdening” the system. What is hidden by such constructions is the manner by which refugees end up on welfare in the first place. For example, racist structures in the labour market are concealed by liberal multiculturalism’s assumption of a level playing field and also by its focus on culture, which may also serve to stigmatize African families via the stereotype of the “welfare queen” or “overly fecund” African woman. In contrast good (white) middle class Canadian citizens may be situated as hardworking, self-controlled, and honest. The interdependent relations between notions of Canadian identity and Africanness in turn influence policy makers considering the amount welfare recipients should be entitled to. Since in this case the recipients are black refugees who are supposed to be productive rather than reproductive (despite the concern that the Canadian population “needs” to grow), there is no justification for raising the rates, especially in a neoliberal environment in which individual responsibility for welfare is considered paramount. However, the effect of policies that leave people little choice but to rely on government assistance is to continue the marginalisation of Africans in the Canadian nation. There could be increased settlement supports, affordable daycare, effective anti-racist workplace strategies, and

affirmative action policies implemented to address these issues. Instead, African refugees are maintained in perpetual poverty as a highly exploitable intergenerational reserve army of labour.

As we will see below, a range of other intersecting factors, including lack of information and the shortage of affordable housing, function together with low incomes to ensure African refugees' ongoing minority status. If this were an original development, we might focus solely on the explanatory capacity of contemporary processes for enlightenment, but obvious continuities with the past mean we may need to dig deeper to accurately understand what is occurring and why. However, since Canadian society is deemed to be fair, generous and democratic, and there appears to be little appetite for the disruption of these perceptions, such investigations rarely take place.

4.3 Lack of information

4.3.1 Inadequate orientation and follow up: GARs

“Because we’re not citizens yet, we need to be shown how to do things first...I’m not just waiting for people to do everything for me, but just show me how and then I can do it myself.” –Adele

Although it seems almost unimaginable, for the GARs in this study, the pressure to find a place to live started the day after they arrived at Welcome House. Some people receive more help than others: those with any English at all are given a newspaper containing classified ads for rental accommodation; others are sent off with their deposit and a map. However, since most African refugees cannot read maps, getting around is a difficult experience even if somebody has already found the apartment and made the arrangements. Much is taken for granted; some refugees from rural areas have never read a newspaper before, much less attempted to interpret a classified ad for a rental apartment in an unfamiliar urban setting (see also Wayland 2007). As a result, there is a tremendous lack of information about how to find a place to live, and these difficulties are exacerbated for those who cannot use a computer, or who cannot speak or read

English. In her study of African refugee women in Vancouver, Wasik (2006) also found that housing searches were conducted by refugees on their own without the help of a settlement counselor, and that the failure of the government to assist GARs with housing was a turning point in the women's lives where they experienced a sense of abandonment and desperation.

In general, the process of gathering information about housing can be quite random.

According to Youssouf,

The answer to the question, if anybody at ISS helps you to find a house, honestly, no. They just give us the newspapers and then you check yourself... But even the system of calling in Canada is very different; we are always losing our money with continuously putting coins. They just disappear and the phone at Welcome House is so busy... Then we don't know the city—even if you give me the map I don't know how to arrive there, or how to buy a ticket... I got lost looking for my first place and when I arrived there it was nighttime and the owner had already left, and I didn't have a phone to call him, it was a horrible thing! It's a serious problem to find a house.

Echoing Youssouf's point, Erasto explained,

They leave you alone from the first day you arrive, the next day they just give you a map and say, 'go this way,' but for most people from Africa it's difficult to use a map, so it's very hard. The other day I helped a single mom who I met at Welcome House when I was there to see somebody. I knew the place [where she was going] so I took her... She came one day and the following day she just had the map - you see how people are challenged!

Although individual needs vary, anyone who has visited a foreign country will likely understand why accompaniment for at least a few weeks is crucial, and may be necessary for longer for people who do not speak English or who need extra help dealing with landlords. Within the first few days GARs are given a brief orientation and receive a large folder of papers containing information in English about available settlement services, but this takes place immediately after arrival when they are still exhausted and overwhelmed. When asked if they had received an orientation at Welcome House, almost all of the GARs in the current study insisted that they had not. One focus group participant responding through an interpreter said, "No...if you are new in Canada you don't understand; maybe they gave it to me but I don't

understand English.”

Whether or not their recollections are accurate, they do indicate that whatever orientation they received was insufficient for their needs. Dominique elaborated on this point: “We really need some orientation because when we came here we found that Canadian culture is totally different from ours – people get lost; they can’t integrate because they don’t know how...they lose their origins, and they are nowhere, stuck in the middle.” Similarly, a focus group participant explained,

A serious problem that all newcomers from Africa face is a lack of information about how to integrate into Canadian life. We expected to have that orientation when we arrived...but all they ever gave us was a map, but that is a problem for illiterate people who don’t read maps, and I don’t speak English... there are many difficulties but there is nobody to direct us.¹⁰

Lack of accompaniment services also pose a barrier to accessing other assistance and information. A woman in a focus group said,

I have many papers of programs but I don’t understand the place. If somebody could just show me once, the next day I could go by myself, but I have no help so I just come here and go to my son’s school. In my country I went everywhere, but here it’s very difficult ...If you are a single mother you have nobody to help you.

Finally, Pierre discussed how lack of information at the start can affect housing stability in the long term: “By making mistakes you end up moving seven times, and once you analyse it you realize it’s because you don’t know the system, but on top of that you have to pay BC Hydro \$40 each time...You miss things but it’s all because you are trying to adjust.”

¹⁰ Some GARs go through a Canadian Orientation Abroad (COA). COAs are aimed at orienting future newcomers to life in Canada before their arrival. However, of the forty-one GARs in this study, only two couples claimed to have gone through the orientation. However, Michel suggested that because they were so superficial and so many other things were going on at the same time, many GARs may not be aware that they have in fact received an orientation. Garang added that “[GARs] think the first thing they’ll do is buy a car so you want to tell them the truth: that it will be really hard to find a job, what a food bank is, this is how much you will earn and how much food costs: let them see the reality...But it doesn’t happen that way: the orientation just brushes over the geography of Canada: these are the biggest cities, it’s the second biggest country in the world...it all looks so neat and clean because they never show any homeless guys sitting on the street, but people have to know the reality—that homelessness exists, that Canada might be a great country but there’s a lot of poverty—so they won’t be shocked when they arrive.” Anita agreed that “the government should do more to inform GARs about what is awaiting them here in Canada - not what may come after ten years - but what is really here, because when they arrive they are always saying, ‘Nobody told us, nobody told us.’”

The foregoing discussion raises the question of how one can integrate successfully into a new society without access to adequate information. The lack of orientation and accompaniment services impedes settlement and leads to conflicts with landlords and others in society for which African refugees are typically blamed, often in ways that rely on invalidating myths and negative stereotypes about African culture or blackness. At the same time lack of information leaves African refugees feeling isolated and alienated: they have left African ways of doing things behind but do not know how to fit in here. Then, because they remain unfamiliar with Canadian culture they are viewed as alien by members of the wider society who may also perceive them as ignorant, backwards or unable/unwilling to adapt. The nexus between power and knowledge in these contexts is complex; within the articulation of race, class and legal status the denial of information to those who need it in turn deepens the power differentials between Canadian citizens and African refugees and thus adds another layer to the onion. The function of these combined processes is to prevent Africans from integrating into the Canadian nation as legitimate Canadian subjects. However, instead of being understood as constructions of power, differences tend to be interpreted within the framework of multiculturalism as stemming solely from culture. I believe this offers an example of how policy can serve to reproduce idealized constructions of national identity as, by denying African refugees access to information that would help them to assume Canadian identity, and simultaneously concealing the power relations that create difference, they are kept on the outside of the nation.

4.3.2 Inadequate assistance for RCs

*“When I came it was like I’m on a different planet...I couldn’t do it all on my own.”
–Billalou*

In terms of access to information, RCs face particular challenges because, unlike GARs who go directly to a reception center (e.g. Welcome House), most RCs who have just arrived

have no place to go. Simon described what he called a “classic story:”

A fellow was released from a detention center in Maple Ridge at 11pm on a Friday. He somehow gets out to the main road and catches whatever bus is going by...He tells the driver, ‘I’m new and I don’t know where I am and I need help, so if you know any Ethiopian restaurants just take me there.’ But the guy doesn’t know any Ethiopian restaurants, so the bus comes all the way downtown...and the driver says, ‘It’s actually 1am, and I have to shut the bus down—why don’t you come home with me?’ So they agree that the guy will sleep in his car for the weekend and then on Monday they’ll find an Ethiopian restaurant...So that’s how it worked out. Then I started getting these calls from various people: there’s someone looking for housing. We had a space so he ended up here... But just the vulnerability of people! Absolutely no sense of where they are in the world.

Esther’s description of her panic on being evicted after being wrongfully accused of theft emphasizes Simon’s point: “They said, ‘We want you to go,’ ‘To go, go where?’ They said, ‘Just look for a house.’ But how do I look for a house? How do people look for houses? Where do I go from here? I cried for two days and asked God what was happening.” Esther also emphasized the need for orientation to Canadian life to help RCs avoid costly mistakes and overcome fears: “Let them arrange a place where you can stay at least for one month where they can teach you: if you need this, do that...You see, because we just learn the hardest way... Nobody tells you anything so you learn by yourself by doing the wrong thing...you are afraid – you don’t know, so it’s difficult.” She continued, “It would be good if there were some kind of housing not only for refugees, but for people who were once refugees and now have status, so that we can move from this stage to another...because we are beginners and beginners need extra support.” Isaac stressed the randomness of information gathering: “Everything was just word of mouth: ‘Go to this place and you’ll get a voucher,’ so I went; ‘Go there to get a bus ticket,’ then I went.” He also pointed out the financial cost of lack of information. For example, he explained that many RCs are unaware that they can apply for a BC Identification card (BCID), but without it they cannot open a bank account, forcing them to cash their welfare cheque at Money Mart and pay a commission.

Meanwhile, Robert commented on some of the particular challenges for refugee women:

We've found that the women struggle more at the beginning: the guys could get out and swing a hammer, do security guard—they didn't care if they were out all night on a cold street running security patrol. But the women, with language, vulnerability, personal security and trauma issues, it's harder for them; they seem to have to have a stronger personal network to make it. Even housing is a little tougher because the other foundational issues didn't fall into place as quickly.

Simon further illustrated the need for greater assistance: “If language and resources—networks—are an issue, then [without] a stable address the correspondence with lawyers doesn't happen, and work permits, the whole transition piece gets shut down.”

Because of the many disadvantages they face, the provision of adequate orientation services should be seen as part of Canada's humanitarian obligation in the settlement of refugees, whether they come as sponsored refugees or claimants. Not only would orientation and accompaniment services assist RCs in their integration, but they would also likely reduce their dependence on social income assistance later on. Instead, however, RCs tend to be demonised in the media and public discourse as “queue jumpers” and “bogus refugees” coming to take advantage of Canada's “generous” asylum system. The combined effect of lack of services on the one hand, and discursive vilification on the other, is the creation and maintenance of poverty and stigmatization. Thus lack of information and orientation signify the generation of another onion layer.

4.3.3 Weak social support networks

“If you are Chinese or Indian there is a large community to help you, but for Africans that's not the case - you have to do it yourself.” –Isaac

Further compounding the difficulties stemming from lack of information is the fact that relatively small numbers and the legacy of past discrimination means that African refugees coming to Metro Vancouver do not enter a well developed social network of landowners, managers, civil servants, politicians or professionals. This adds an additional layer to the onion

and contributes to social exclusion because as a result, the networks African refugees rely upon tend to be marginalized and mis- or uninformed. Thus, as has been argued in other contexts, although newcomers receive help through social networks, those offering assistance are often in precarious situations themselves, with little difference between themselves and those they are assisting (Simich et al 2004; Hiebert, D'Addario and Sherrell 2005). For example, Kagiso mentioned that moving house can be especially difficult for poor single women with children because neither they nor anybody else they know owns a car.

Yet community networks are crucial nonetheless. Musoke, who came to BC from Quebec with his wife and young son and initially stayed in a shelter said: “Any African will always meet with other Africans; as soon as you meet one they will say, ‘Hey, we have other Africans here,’ and they will show you the address, invite you to come tomorrow—they will even come to pick you up...Then about the house, they will start looking for a place for you.” Paul’s comment is telling: “Canadian people are rushing: time is money! No one can say, ‘Let me take you to this place.’ But an African person who has no job, they can show you, that’s our way...But not white people – they are always busy! That’s the way we find things.”

Although participants found that community networks provided essential supports, at the same time many contrasted the experiences of Africans with those of people coming from Asia. In particular, they argued that unlike other groups, Africans have to learn English before they can find work or move ahead. For example, Kwame pointed out that “...the car dealer is Chinese, the bank manager is Chinese, the construction foreman is Chinese...[Chinese immigrants] can find [their] network, and before you know it everything is okay...And me, I haven’t even crossed the first obstacle yet: upgrade! Science grade 10, English 12....” Similarly, Adele told me,

Africans have different problems than other immigrants. For example, in my class when the teacher asks people from Pakistan or Yugoslavia about themselves they say, ‘My name is --- and I’m working in this place.’ But I can’t understand how can they already

be working—they don't speak English any better than me and we're all refugees in that class.

These arguments are not intended to dismiss the challenges faced by other groups, yet the fact is that lacking effective support networks and without orientation to Canadian life, African refugees are left to fend for themselves and many simply fall through the cracks.

Importantly, the marginalisation of African communities is not only a function of relatively small numbers, an argument that in any case begs the question of why the numbers are so low, but of a deep seated racism. Writing about the destruction of Africville in Nova Scotia during the late 1960s, Nelson posits that “the notion of an enduring and united black community which exists on its own terms and is subject to the same rights and freedoms as the greater white community was, and remains, inconceivable to a racist society” (2000; 164). In the same way, the historical centre of African settlement in Vancouver, Hogan's Alley, was destroyed in 1970.¹¹ As Nelson argues, “the burial of past injustices requires diligent maintenance” (163) because the erasure of black communities and simultaneous denial of racism on the part of Canadians enables the dual construction of Canada as white and Canadians as innocent. Also, because the historical and geographical contributions of Africans are suppressed, Africans remain an Other in Canadian society. Hence the “twisted eyebrow” Yesufu describes whenever an immigrant from Africa claims to be Canadian (2005; 144). These perceptions will not change as long as multiculturalism's focus on culture persists because not only are African cultures seen as primitive, inferior and backwards, but that focus also conceals the conjuncture of racism and classism with other overlapping systems of domination that functions to make Africans' lives more difficult than other people's.

The effects are not only felt by individuals but, as Nelson indicates, African communities also remain under-resourced and marginalised. The policies that create these conditions serve as

¹¹ Hogan's Alley Memorial Project <<http://www.hogansalleyproject.blogspot.com>>

a bridge between the theoretical or ideological frameworks that oppose blackness and Canadian identity, and people's experiences inside the onion. Peeling away the layers reveals the connections between policies grounded in particular perspectives and the effects for black African refugees and their communities. Effective intervention and de-mythologisation only becomes possible once these connections are made visible, and our complicity in oppression acknowledged.

4.4 Shortage of affordable housing

“Most of the people I deal with struggle with affordable housing.” –Garang

The complex dilemmas presented by low incomes and lack of information are intensified by the shortage of affordable housing, with resource shortfalls that affect the general population exacerbated for refugees on fixed incomes, especially those headed by single parents. Tunde explained, “there are difficulties in trying to locate a decent place for single moms...the apartments need to be situated close to malls, bus stop and school, this reduces her stress...but the price of those apartments is more than single mothers can afford.” Larger families face particular challenges because there are few places to accommodate them, while those large enough are extremely expensive. Sarcastically expressing his bitterness at a welfare worker telling him and his wife to stop having children, Patrice said: “We were surprised: my God, this is another kind of life! So what are we supposed to do, do we have to kill the kids in order to get a house?!” Patrice's situation provides an example of how minority demands for “special rights” (i.e. affordable apartments to suit larger than average family sizes) can provoke members of the majority beyond tolerance. That Patrice and his family were selected by the Canadian government for resettlement, or that they were not intending to come to Canada when they had their children, becomes irrelevant. In Canada, the stereotype of African women who “have

babies as if they think they are going to the bathroom”¹² is foregrounded and African families are deemed responsible for the lack of affordable suitable housing that greets them when they arrive.

However, the problems for African refugees seeking adequate housing are not limited to families. Simon described the plight of single people: “Economically you just can’t find a place that’s affordable on your own, it’s chronic, so you end up going into some sort of bunking-in scenario.” This was the case for several participants including Denise and her daughter, who share a two-bedroom apartment with Laurent. Most single people pay between \$375 and \$500 for a room in a substandard basement suite shared with several other strangers paying the same rate. Sometimes the bedrooms do not even have locks on them, which raises concerns about privacy and personal safety. Onani said, “When I came here I wanted to live properly. I also wanted to live alone, but the problem is that I don’t have money, so you have to share.... But even when you find somebody to share with, the places you can find are not good...so I have to accept this place.” Single people are also particularly vulnerable to exploitation. For example, Esther was invited to live in a particular house; when she awoke the first morning, she realized it was actually a respite house for sex workers who she was expected to look after; from her perspective, “...because of the house problem I’m forced to look after the people that I would not really have said, ‘yes, come and live with me.’”

Clearly the lack of affordable housing affects everybody in BC. However the concept of interlocking systems of domination shows how the further one is located inside the onion, the harsher the compounded effects. Poverty, lack of information and lack of affordable housing affect many people; when one also has to deal with racism and the trauma and cultural dislocation that accompanies refugee status, the challenges increase exponentially. In my experience however, based on personal interactions and what I have read in the media and

¹² Actual quote from a conversation I had with a (white) Canadian.

scholarly work, many Canadians appear to be convinced that their government provides refugees with more than sufficient income to afford suitable housing, if not actually the housing itself. Many Canadians also tend to view themselves and their nation as “always already” compassionate, charitable, and humanitarian, so the issue of refugees rarely makes it to the table in discussions of housing and homelessness. African refugees’ experiences are further masked by the fact that they are primarily found among the “hidden homeless,” resulting in the problem being rendered “invisible” to most Canadians in both discourse and practice. These conditions are the effects of a combination of interconnected policies that define processes of inclusion and exclusion based on values grounded in a historical tradition that relies on hierarchies of racialised and legalized power. The material and ideological function of these policies is to ensure the minority status of an Other against which “Canadian” may be defined.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the metaphor of an onion to illustrate the concept of interlocking systems of domination, and begun the process of peeling away the layers starting with low incomes, lack of information, and the shortage of affordable housing. The effect of the policies that create those outer layers is that African refugees are assimilated into the lowest socio-economic category as visible minorities and non citizens, yet these structural disadvantages and the mechanisms through which they are connected to representations of Canadian national identity are obscured within the dominant liberal framework. In this conception, refugees are accepted into Canada and provided with the same opportunities to succeed as others in the society; if they fail to do so then the implication is that it must be due to an inadequacy on their part, stemming either from a personal failing or from some perceived group characteristic. The sublimation of the reality of past and present injustices in the dominant mythology is thereby

also productive of a national imaginary in which whites are envisioned as innocent, legitimate, entitled subjects committed to a liberal democratic society; at the same time, the mythical construction of Canada as white also stems in part from the disavowal of black history, including the denial of slavery from which many negative ideas about black people arose.

I suggest it is the resulting construction of Africans as eternal outsiders that fundamentally underlies the functional failure of current policy to respond to African refugees' concerns. Razack argues that when we examine shifting hierarchical relations in specific sites we can recognize how we are implicated in the subordination and marginalisation of others, enabling us to identify when we are dominant and when we are subordinate. Understanding our own complicity in the construction of meaning around terms such as diversity and multiculturalism may also point us towards the practice of a "politics of accountability" (1998; 159). Thus, although Africans have been subjugated in Canada for centuries, identifying the ways in which long-term patterns influence contemporary forms of oppression and disenfranchisement may enable us to construct a way out of the cycle.

CHAPTER V INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS: INSIDE THE ONION

“Sometimes I say to people that the racism is institutional because there are so many laws that people don’t know about that limit things for immigrants. But they doubt you, they just say, ‘Oh if you’re an immigrant you can have all things just like a Canadian.’ It’s not true.” –Cecile

“I tell people we came to Canada but even if you get citizenship you are not Canadian.” –Patrice

5.1 Private sector barriers

5.1.1 Discrimination and exploitation in the private rental market

“When you approach the landlord you want to be as humble as you can! ‘Where I came from in Africa I never even killed a fly. Please give me a chance, I’m not what you think I am!’ -like that.” –Kwame

“Always you have issues with housing – always! Housing is stress!” –Abdelaziz

According to the ideological conceptions of liberal multiculturalism, race has been effectively buried. Unfortunately, it has been buried alive and continues to haunt post-slavery Canada. Thus discrimination based on accent, skin colour and country of origin, in addition to family size and immigration status, is a common theme running throughout the interviews. Every single participant mentioned at least one incident of what they explicitly considered racist behavior. What was troubling was the self-deprecating and hesitant manner exhibited by many when they broached the subject, as if they were expecting to be met with disagreement. For example, Mamoud suggested, “Maybe you have to have my colour to understand what I’m saying, but it’s a fact.” However, it appeared that the longer participants had been in Canada, the more confidently and openly they spoke about racist discrimination they had experienced or witnessed. Thus Pierre, who had been in Canada for nine years, explained, “Those racist comments, I just take them like they are normal now.” Some authors have suggested that reluctance to name racism could stem from a lack of awareness among recently arrived immigrants of the workings of systemic or institutional racism in Canada (e.g. Simich et al.

2004). Alternatively, new arrivals might be less willing to criticize a society that has offered them refuge out of fear, gratitude or some other reason. Ahmed also shed some light on this phenomenon when he explained that after having lived in Canada for eight years, he has seen how “it is almost like talking about racism itself is the crime; you are the racist because you raised the issue.”

As Ahmed’s point illustrates, attempts to discuss racism are discouraged, yet it is difficult to challenge what cannot be named. Moreover, because racism is seen as an aberration, Canadians can espouse egalitarian values while actually sustaining and continuing to benefit from racist structures that serve to exclude racialised groups from the rights of citizenship. These oppressive systems are extensions of the colonial era’s racist constructs. A key means by which continuities are manifested is through the covert and overt anti-black racism exhibited by landlords.

Participants repeated the same stories over and over: “They hear my accent on the phone, ‘Where are you from?’ Africa. ‘Oh...’” and, “You know the place is for rent because you just talked to them by phone...but when you get there *they take one look at you*, ‘Oh sorry, the place was just rented.’” Some participants watched landlords replace the “for rent” sign after they left. Several asked a white friend to visit on their behalf, and they inevitably found that the suite was available, even when the African applicant had been told it was taken (see also Teixeira 2006; Miraftab 2000; Dion 2001). As Billalou suggested, “Race can be a really important factor. You might not want to say it out loud, but it’s there.”

Participants also argued that media reporting is an important means by which negative notions of Africans are perpetuated and that these ideas impact their treatment in the housing market because when landlords associate black people with crime, disease, or backwardness they are reluctant to rent to them. Thomas insisted,

what the media says affects housing because if they say Vancouver is the ‘capital of bank robbery,’ and they show a black man, then who will rent a house to a black man? Or if they say Africa is full of AIDS, or Africans don’t integrate—then who wants to rent them a house? ...The media needs to balance better, not only show the negative.

Billalou related how a woman in her car at a stoplight became visibly terrified when she caught sight of him on the street outside and hurriedly locked her door. “Imagine,” he said, “if she were a landlord and saw a black person coming to rent her place—she would just lock the door.” Kwame explained that “there are houses in Africa, people have cars, but here they don’t know that; the pictures are just of war, famine...so when you say, ‘I’m from Africa,’ the first thing that comes to their head is, ‘oh Africa is bad,’ and some people even think that Africans are living in trees or whatever! I don’t know how to explain it, but it has an effect!”¹³ Ahmed pointed out that it is not always easy for others to see how discrimination works: “When the landlord says ‘no’ because you are black, but then a white person gets the house, [the white person does not] see the blacks who were turned away—only the black people see.”

Landlords are also reluctant to rent to people who are on income assistance, whose Social Insurance Number (SIN) begins with a 9, families, and to Refugee Claimants. For example, Simon described what one RC went through: “We’d written letters of support...we went with them to places, we also had letters from others who guaranteed that the landlord will be paid, but as soon as they saw they were refugees suddenly there were fifteen other applications, or ‘somebody just came,’ and conveniently they never get the place.” Billalou agreed, “It wasn’t easy.... There were places we went but they wouldn’t take us: ‘You guys are new, you don’t have references...’ It was very hard.” Fatuma links race, class and immigration status to illustrate the impossibility of finding decent housing for low income African refugees: “A good place when you are a newcomer you cannot find it. First of all they will ask you for a reference, and

¹³ Most of the people I spoke to informed me that either they or their children have been asked whether Africans live in trees, engage in sexual intercourse with monkeys, have tails, or other such questions since arriving in Canada.

then they will ask where you work. If they hear you are on welfare, you will never get the house, and if you are African you also can't get it - that's something too different for them." Onani summed up the challenges for those able to navigate information systems: "The problem isn't lack of information; I can find something in the newspaper or on the internet, but I cannot get it - that is the problem."

Negative notions of Africa reflect the ongoing relevance of colonial stereotypes rooted in binary categories such as primitive/modern, black/white, rational/irrational, etc., which continue to play a fundamental role in contemporary determinations regarding who is entitled to material rights including housing. Thus, racism on the part of private landlords goes far beyond individual expression; it is systemic and socio-historical. For Africans, overcoming these structures may be especially difficult. As Afifa argues,

Black people have the worst problems because all races hate blacks: Arabs, Chinese, Indians, Latin Americans - none of them like blacks. Even if those groups also have trouble with Caucasians, blacks are hated by every race. In my mother tongue we say 'the big fish eats the little fish and the small fish eats sand,' so we are like the sand at the bottom with those fish eating us - they could be white, Chinese, Arab, whatever, they all feel that black people are dirty, uncivilized persons.

Many participants also explained that when they do manage to find a place, it is common for the landlord to take advantage of them by charging extra for utilities; imposing strict rules about noise; complaining about the hand-washing of clothes; raising the rent; harassing single women, especially those who do not speak English; refusing to do repairs; telling refugees they are not allowed to move out; or alternatively holding the constant threat of eviction over them. Obiajulu explained,

They might give it to you but they put the price very high and lay down all sorts of rules, so you can't have freedom... We like to have three people visiting just to sit and talk, but other people see that and think they must be selling drugs. When other people meet together it's okay, but if you see five black people coming it's a problem... Or they say, 'don't make noise,' but how come you on top can make noise and we have to be silent? And with kids it's a lot of problems...

Keisha complained,

We never even had hot water...I had to boil water for my kids to have a bath [but the landlord] just said, 'My daughter likes to stay in the bath for hours.'...I had to turn on the oven to keep warm, [and] we would always wake up in the middle of the night from the cold because he turned off the heat."

Esther's complaint was also typical: "You ask him to please fix this broken thing, 'Okay I'll come,' but he never comes, it's like a song...but when it's time for him to come for money he's always here." Onani said "The water was running down the walls every day and night, so I called him to fix that but we had to wait six months. He always said he didn't have time, or that he would send someone, but as soon as he had the rent he forgot about it again." Kasinda's family actually lived in a condemned building for a month before inspectors insisted they leave. Many participants also complained that their accommodation is infested with mice, cockroaches or bedbugs. A focus group participant explained,

I'm cooking and there are cockroaches, in the bed, in my clothes, everywhere...I have lots of time to clean because I only study English a few hours a week, but all these cockroaches come from outside...if you have children it is bad because as soon as you put food on the table it's covered with cockroaches. Everybody has these troubles.

Finally, one settlement worker related the following terrible story:

I had a woman last year who had been in a shelter for almost a year—different shelters—with four children. She ended up having problems with the Child and Family Development Branch and in the end she was told she is incapable of looking after her children and they were taken away. The landlord had given her a place where the toilet was broken, everything was falling down! They were literally [going to the bathroom] in the forest every day for months; she had no electricity for months—BC Hydro came and disconnected it so she was looking for firewood and lighting a fire and cooking with firewood as if she was back in Africa...you won't believe it, such a sad story! So she left those children at home to go to work, and that's when they got taken away.

Additional problems arise when refugees want to move out, especially around the non-return of deposits, which was virtually universal. For example, Dada and his wife were given a long list of tasks to complete in order to have their deposit returned to them:

In our efforts to get that \$400 back, we dry-cleaned the curtains, hired somebody to clean the carpets, we cleaned the walls, and on the day we were supposed to go we

called the lady to come and check and she said there was a stain on the wall from a picture, so we couldn't have our deposit, but there was nothing there! We were desperate for that money, but she told us we had to go to court to get it. But I was new and my wife was quite new so we didn't know the process, we didn't have any idea what to do...we had already lost our deposit on the last place, and we had to pay the deposit for the new place...Some people love immigrants, but many don't love them at all, but they don't say it with their mouth, they just show it by taking advantage of people.

Although it could be argued that landlords exploit poor tenants generally in these ways, African refugees are particularly vulnerable because of their skin colour, immigration status and lack of information about their rights. Overall, the more vulnerable a person is, the more easily exploitable they are. Dada's comments illustrate how these factors intersect with gender:

I know women are well respected here, but when they see you are an African woman they don't care because they know that you don't know the law, so they can molest you; when you are a white woman they cannot talk to you like that, but they molest African women, they can even molest your wife.

Conflicts with landlords are also linked to inadequate orientations. Thomas insisted that "it's not always the landlords who are at fault; the people who come also have to know how to look after their housing...Newcomers need some training because we don't have these kinds of houses in refugee camps, sometimes there are no stoves [or] electricity...so those things have to be looked at from the time they land or the problems will only get worse."¹⁴ Dada agreed that

Agencies need to provide orientation workshops to tell African people how to live in a [Canadian] house. That is very important because where we come from, vacuuming for example, is very different. Also, over there kids can always take chalk and write on the wall, but here if you do that it will cause problems for you: you will have to repaint...We also don't know how to pay bills, but they have to tell people that the more you use the more you pay, because when we come we just cook, open the window, turn on the heat, use water, and don't realize that these things are consuming energy and at the end you are going to pay for it. Many people have run into problems because we don't know.

¹⁴ It is worthwhile noting that African refugees' lack of information about how to care for a Canadian style house does not stem from some immutable aspect of "African culture," but rather from poverty in their home country and in refugee camps, in conjunction with inadequate orientations when they arrive in Canada. In other words, unfamiliarity with electrical items such as fridges and stoves needs to be understood as a consequence of poverty and a function of power, not a cultural practice.

In addition to providing better orientations, many participants also suggested that governments and ISAs should work to sensitise housing providers to newcomers. For example, landlords need to know that refugees may be sensitive to certain situations because of their experiences. Abdelaziz said, “The family upstairs bought a new video game, a war game which they played very loud at night. I asked them, ‘Please, not so loud,’ [shooting noise] agghhh... Sometimes I woke up like crazy - what is that?! [shooting noise].” Many participants stressed the importance of a personal relationship, which was usually lacking. Ada related that “some landlords no longer want you to be there, maybe they have their reasons but they don’t tell you, so you always feel like maybe this time they will tell us to move; because we don’t talk, we don’t know what they are thinking.” Like many African newcomers, she and her family live in constant fear of eviction. In contrast, Dada and his wife are the only participants living in a building owned by another African, and they believe it is advantageous. Dada explained, “We understand each other. The amount is less than before, and we didn’t pay a deposit. He said, ‘Do you have money?’ ‘No, we don’t...’ ‘Okay, forget about it.’” Although some participants mentioned landlords who eventually warmed up to their African tenants, relations could be improved from the start if housing providers were more engaged with refugee issues, especially around poverty and discrimination.

5.1.2 Utility companies and billing agencies

“...condemned in debt.” –Michel

As if discrimination and exploitation by landlords were not enough, many participants also experienced problems with utility companies and other billing agencies. It is common to be asked for deposits of hundreds of dollars. For example, Marie, a single mother of seven, was asked for a \$700 deposit from Terasen Gas and a \$300 deposit from BC Hydro. Another family of eight had their electricity cut off when they did not pay bills they had not received, even

though they are still receiving RAP and speak limited English. In addition, twelve participants mentioned problems with MSP (BC Medical Services Plan), especially receiving huge bills out of the blue (the two largest were \$800 and \$1000), being charged for periods they were not eligible for, or being referred to collection agencies. For example, Denise was taken by ambulance from Welcome House while a resident there, and only received the bill a year later when she was no longer on RAP. Despite appealing to ISS, MSP and CIC, Denise finally had to pay to end the daily harassment from collection agencies. Meanwhile Lily is being charged for three months that she was not even eligible for MSP. While these might seem like small matters, sorting them out takes refugees' time, energy and money and significantly contributes to stress.

For example, Justice related the following:

I cannot work because there is no daycare, so my husband went for security, but as soon as he starts working, MSP sends us a bill for \$1000! We pay \$1050 for rent, and we have to pay that bill for coming here and after that, interest...if we had money these debts would not be a problem, but when someone only earns ten dollars per hour and you have to pay those debts and take care of the children it's quite complicated...it's actually not possible, that's why we are complaining.

Moreover, due to lack of familiarity with the system and an unwillingness to "cause trouble," several refugees in this study ended up paying previous tenants' bills, or being overcharged by dishonest landlords. Michel connected these issues with the need for better orientation and follow up:

The Hydro bill of the last person who was here came to us and we had to pay it. We didn't consume that energy but we were told to pay! We went there, tried to talk to them, we telephoned, they wanted confirmation from the manager, they confirmed it, but they were still telling us to pay. We didn't have money to pay, but when you are a new person in a foreign land you don't want any trouble; they can even bring a bill to you, you say let me pay it to avoid problems. When you don't see where your rights are, you just pay it—you don't want problems with the police or with people...If there was an orientation they could tell us about all that! It's the problem of no follow up. At least they have to tell you what could happen, how to live in an apartment, pay bills, or whatever.

In the case of utility companies and billing agencies it seems clear that the intent is not to

persecute African refugees in particular. However, it is interesting to note that, as with the RCs who cash their cheques at Money Mart, private corporations are profiting from refugees' marginalisation and lack of information. In the context of other forms of discrimination, the effect is to add another layer to the onion and intensify social exclusion. If I receive an outrageous bill from a utility company, I simply pick up the phone and use my fluent English and sense of white middle class entitlement to insist that the bill be corrected. For African refugees who lack that feeling of legitimate authority because they are made to feel they do not belong here, and who also may not speak fluent English, the task becomes that much more difficult.

5.2 Public barriers

5.2.1 CIC debt for GARs

“What that debt means is that those people will stay in poverty for the rest of their lives.” –Mansa

“It’s just a kind of slavery that’s changed its form.” –Paul

Further exacerbating the economic marginalization of African refugees, a major financial burden for GARs is the repayment of their transportation loan to CIC, which compromises already low RAP payments. These loans are usually \$1,500-\$2,000 per person; consequently, a single mother of five from a protracted refugee situation starts her life in Canada with a debt of approximately \$11,000, which she must pay off within three years or accumulate interest. In fact interest accumulates with each missed monthly payment, or is garnished from Child Tax Benefit cheques. GARs are literally going hungry because of the CIC debt. Those in this study often spend their entire RAP or welfare amount on rent, use their Child Tax Benefit for the payment to CIC, and then have to seek food that is often expired or otherwise unhealthy from foodbanks. Ninety percent of GARs in the current study were eating from foodbanks or had in the past. Patrice explained: “If you don’t pay it they add more...we feel hunger but we are good with the

government. We are paying that money back, but it's not a good life." The short amortization period and high monthly payments for families living well below the poverty line are a major financial and psychological burden, while harassing letters and phone calls cause extreme stress that undermines integration (see Appendix B). One distressed settlement worker said, "I can't imagine how a government caring for humanitarian ideals could do this to people: force them into debt that they will never come out of...and even when they explain to me on the phone, I just think if they had any idea what poverty really is they would never do this to people."

The requirement for GARs to pay back their transportation loan is a clear illustration of how policy directly impacts marginalisation. Other refugees also have to pay back the loan so the policy has a neutral appearance, but Africans tend to come from larger than average families, therefore their debt is higher. At the same time, living costs are also increased, yet RAP payments per person decrease with each additional family member.¹⁵ However, my purpose is not to compare African refugees to others to determine who suffers the most, but to investigate the causes of African refugees' marginalisation.

It is well known among people who work with refugees that the debt prevents people from moving ahead, yet policy makers resist the calls to waive repayment. Is this because, as the settlement worker above suggested, they do not understand what poverty is? Is it because they do not care or are racist? Possibly they believe that Canada's humanitarian commitment has been fulfilled in the act of making the loan available to an undesirable population that no other country wants, and in that way we have sufficiently expressed our generosity. As Patel (2007) reminds us, policy makers may not be deliberately or individually racist, yet because they are frequently unaware of how systemic historical relations of exploitation and inequality have brought us to

¹⁵ Although it is counter-intuitive, it appears that the poorer refugees are, the higher their costs. For example, Australians can call home very cheaply, but African refugees must pay much higher rates; the less renters earn, the more (both absolutely and proportionately) they pay for rent; those who cannot pay the CIC loan have interest added on top; in each case, the poorest pay the most.

the current juncture, in which Africans are already disadvantaged in Canadian social, political and economic life, their policies may have racist effects by perpetuating the marginalisation of Africans vis à vis not only the white Canadian majority but even in relation to other refugees. The requirement to pay back the transport loan is yet another means by which Africans are anchored firmly to the bottom of intersecting world systemic and locally racialised hierarchies as they move from poverty, to poverty and debt bondage. Yet in my experience white Canadians are for the most part not only unaware that refugees have to pay their own transportation costs, but they also tend to believe that refugees receive thousands of dollars per month, free housing and other benefits.¹⁶ Thus the charade continues.

5.2.2 Long processing times for RCs

“I’m surprised that even though education is the key, I had to wait so long to get a study permit, more than six months just to get into school...If [only] there was a package or guide to help people get into education, something to make people feel like they are people.” –Joseph

While GARs are handicapped by the CIC travel loan, RCs are particularly affected by long processing times, which also often entail negative consequences for housing. We have already seen how the long wait for a work permit forces RCs onto welfare even when they want to work. Also, as Joseph’s quote above indicates, the extended wait for a study permit holds people back as well. On the other hand, the hearing date for refugee determination takes place so long after arrival that many RCs are already working by the time it arrives. As a result, Legal Aid does not cover legal costs, even though RCs with temporary status rarely earn enough to pay a lawyer and so end up thousands of dollars in debt. At the same time, lack of access to information and orientation services leave RCs extremely vulnerable to exploitation by

¹⁶ Based on countless conversations with different people. Also, see CIC’s website for information about a recent email which I also received, proposing that Canadian seniors should apply for refugee status since refugees receive thousands of dollars per month whereas seniors’ pensions are set at just over one thousand dollars per month <<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/facts/aid.asp>>.

unscrupulous lawyers, employment agencies, and immigration consultants. Simon argued that for RCs “it’s about finding that balance, so one policy would be to speed up certain parts of the process, giving due process where it needs to be. RCs arriving now take up to two months to get into the system and that’s before they get on welfare, so how are they going to survive? They have to work underground to make ends meet.”

Although according to CIC the claim process takes 18-24 months, several of the claimants in this study have waited even longer. Fatuma and Afua have been waiting over three years for PR status, while Isaac has been waiting four years, Gabriel eight, and Dada six. In addition to preventing RCs from improving their economic situation, delays have potential long term repercussions for housing because, according to one settlement worker, “those in limbo waiting for their PR to come through—it’s just chronic bouncing around...When everything is temporary and up in the air, they don’t know where home is, then they get into housing situations that aren’t stable and it feeds on itself somehow....” Mamoud also explained that “it would be good to get not only the work papers, but all the papers. The more time is consumed, the more risk there is to fall into the street and to fall into bad things.” The illusion of a generous asylum system conceals the reality of how the regime actually functions to channel refugees into the ranks of the working poor, onto welfare rolls, and into the underground economy.

One worker contrasted earlier migrants with contemporary RCs: “They came with nothing and they worked hard, but these people are also working hard or they can’t because they don’t have a work permit, so they get into these sub-streams of under the table stuff and all the exploitation that’s under there and it’s hard to move away from that: you get kind of trapped.” White Canadians whose families immigrated to Canada from Europe prior to the twentieth century often ask me, “My family came with nothing but they worked hard and eventually made it, so what’s wrong with these Africans—don’t they want to work?” The implications of this

specious analogy are that Euro-Canadian families are hard working, determined and intelligent, while in contrast Africans are assumed to be lazy and lacking in ambition. This construction ignores how racism and the slave trade not only kept Africans in a subordinate position but also enabled white families to prosper by providing the low cost labour that subsidised the development of Canada. What is more, the system in place at the time privileged migrants of European origin, who also likely did not have to wait for work permits, permanent status, etc.

However, Mensah points out that when slavery is mentioned in the Canadian context, common responses typically include “but there were only a few” and “but it wasn’t like in the US” (2002; 77). Not only does it need to be emphasized that numbers do not determine historical significance, but the notion that slavery in Canada was somehow kinder and gentler than in the US is offensive. Like the inappropriate comparison above, this analogy ignores the fundamental denial of freedom and human rights that stem from the ownership of one human being by another, and overlooks the long-term social and economic consequences of such a system. For example, white families were able to purchase land, pursue education, own businesses, and access other valuable resources because people of African origin were prevented from doing so, and these unequal conditions sowed the seeds for the growth of contemporary racialised power relations present in Canadian society.

5.2.3 Barriers to accessing subsidised housing

“Barriers to settlement in general? The biggest is affordability and availability of housing: there’s just hardly anything out there.” –Simon

With all the challenges they face, if there is a group of people who need and deserve subsidised housing, it is refugees. However, there are both formal and informal barriers to accessing subsidised housing that affect refugees. To begin with, GARs are not eligible for BC Housing for their first year (while they are on RAP), and RCs do not qualify until they have PR,

which can take up to two years or longer. Other examples of formal exclusion criteria include debt and a history of eviction, while informal barriers include application forms in English, opaque adjudication procedures, and discrimination. Relatedly, Billalou's explanation of why he has not applied for coop housing demonstrates that self-exclusion may also be a factor: "I just haven't found the courage to do it because of the experiences I've had—you know, the way I was treated when I was looking for a place to stay." Another barrier is the requirement to have worked in order to qualify for the Rental Assistance Program since RCs cannot work for up to one year while waiting for a work permit, and GARs often cannot work because they are on RAP, cannot speak English, suffer from trauma, or are single parents.

In addition, National Occupancy Standards (NOS) meant to protect people are actually barriers in some cases as the strict application of NOS by co-ops and BC Housing mean that African refugees end up living in smaller apartments for which they also pay more. For example, a family of seven in a 2-bedroom market apartment was told by BC Housing that they could not have a 4-bedroom apartment in a subsidised complex even though one was available, because it would contravene NOS (see Appendix C). Two settlement workers related similar stories of two African clients, one a single mother with ten children who also lives with her elderly mother, the other a single mother of four living with her parents, in both cases living in 2-bedroom apartments. Both families were informed by BC Housing that in order to qualify for subsidised units they have to separate into at least two households, which for these African families is not an option. This is yet another example of the inability of multicultural policy to move beyond superficial expressions of difference, such as those around conceptions of what constitutes a "family," while current implementation actually serves to exacerbate inequalities.

Due to these difficulties, only two GAR families in this study were in subsidised housing: Afifa and Ahmed have a 3-bedroom unit for their family of six, and Kasinda shares a 5-bedroom

apartment with her seven children; when she was still with her husband, nine people lived in a three bedroom apartment. According to settlement workers, there are individual cases where particular criteria have been waived, but this only occurs when workers with the right connections are willing and able to devote the time and energy needed to overcome institutional barriers. The struggle can last for months and requires a significant commitment from the worker because it takes time and resources away from other issues.

However, the point is not that there should be different rules for African refugees versus other people, but that all families should have access to adequate and suitable housing, whatever their family size and composition. If the standard occupancy rate of one person per room is considered reasonable and necessary for Canadian born families then those from Africa should also have access to conditions that meet those standards. Currently, the effect of placing vulnerable low income families from refugee camps in Africa into one of the most expensive housing markets in the world with no orientation to Canadian life is that they are forced to accept substandard housing, along with all the other disadvantages this entails. It would be a simple matter to construct 5-bedroom units to accommodate resettled refugees, yet this has not occurred. If this argument is politically difficult to make, then we have to ask why, given the obvious consequences of not having suitable housing. Canadian children are required by law to have their own bedrooms, yet for some reason it is deemed acceptable for Africans to live crowded five people to a room. In this way, policies construct categories of deserving and undeserving populations based on race and legal status. The effects of policies are made visible by peeling away layers on the onion to reveal how interlocking systems of domination operative in the housing market function to embed African refugees at the bottom of Canadian social and economic hierarchies.

5.3 Interactions with immigrant serving agencies

5.3.1 View from the outside

“We need help, because otherwise we cannot live like Canadians.” –Justice

“There is a gap between the people out here and the people in the offices because they don’t really understand each other.” –Kupakwashi

Although a large number of different agencies seek to address the concerns described above by offering settlement assistance to immigrants and refugees in Metro Vancouver, most of the people interviewed were either unaware of existing services or unsatisfied with the services they received. One common critique was that mainstream offices and staff are unwelcoming or intimidating for African refugees, especially women, francophones, and children. Hiebert, D’Addario, and Sherrell (2005) also found evidence of discriminatory attitudes among service providers, including those who believe that “services should be for ‘Canadians,’” insist on clients taking an English name that is “easier” to pronounce, or are unsympathetic towards particular cultural or religious practices. This type of treatment offers a further example of multicultural policies that barely skim the surface of difference, drawing attention to the circumscribed range of qualities that will be accommodated by members of the wider society. Although as one participant insisted, “there can be no diversity without identity,” African identities are often either dismissed or rejected. Iman explained,

You just have to leave it and say, ‘God wanted it to happen.’ That’s what people say, because if you go somewhere and you are black, they don’t like you. Like if you and me went somewhere and you told them your problem and I told them my problem, they will take your problem seriously but not mine - that’s the worst thing.

I suggest that if white people’s problems are perceived as more valid than those faced by people of African origin then it is at least partly due to an underlying notion of, on the one hand whites as “real Canadians” with legitimate human concerns and rights and, on the other, people of the multicultures whose concerns may be judged to be trivial or intolerable by Canadians who

maintain power over the process of definition,. This situation has both material and psychological repercussions for African refugees who experience a sense of alienation, abandonment and otherness exacerbated by the entrenchment of difference between their lives and the middle class Canadian standards they aspire to, which results from their limited access to needed services,.

Another issue mentioned by almost every participant is that while agencies advertise a variety of services, when refugees arrive it sometimes seems that the organisation is only interested in their name and SIN. Several speculated that this was so that they could show funders how many clients they had “served.” Some participants were quite cynical about what ISAs are able to do; one said, “They can’t really help you to get a job, or a place to live, or to sponsor your family anyway.” In a sense he is correct; for example, one settlement worker said,

We always ask [clients] what they need, and what haven’t we done...and most of the things are out of our control. Things to do with housing are out of our control—like if the landlord says he won’t take them because it’s over his quota you can’t force him. Things to do with jobs are out of our control: we can help with the resume or how to attend an interview, but out there we can’t control anything...but people have different expectations.

Further, although BCSAP has recently been extended to include RCs, Esther’s description of visiting social service agencies is worrying:

When I came I was looking for such things that help you find a job or whatever, so you go to those organisations: ‘Do you have a SIN? What is it? No, no, no, we don’t help 920. Come back when you are landed.’ Disappointment! One week I walked from one organisation to another and I ended up with ‘we only help the landed.’ You see, they look at you when you say you are a claimant like you are from another planet, nobody pays you any attention, nobody! They just listen to your problem and then say, ‘You are still a claimant and we can only help you when you are permanent,’ but it takes up to two years to become permanent, and it is when you first arrive that you most need help.

In terms of housing, service workers could offer greater assistance if they were provided with adequate human resources and funding. For example, in 2005 ISS created the position of Housing Assistant to assist newcomers in their housing search and ensure they are supplied with

basic household items.¹⁷ However, possibly in part because the position pays only \$13.50 per hour, ISS has recently hired the sixth Housing Assistant since the position was created. The person who held the position previously was hired after having been in Canada for only two weeks and held the position for just nine months. However, success will depend on developing relationships with landlords and housing providers, which are hindered by high turnover, and there are limitations on what one person can do.

Despite these concerns, many African refugees also received extremely useful settlement assistance from local agencies, and spoke very highly of particular workers. Billalou said,

Thank God those offices that help newcomers were able to guide me, to send me to welfare to get some money so that I could live, and they recommended [other organisations]...Everywhere you go you get some advice on some particular thing, so luckily I was able to find my way around, but it was very, very hard...

Many African refugees also received limited forms of assistance from church groups (especially food, second hand items, etc.), and to a lesser extent from mosques. Additionally, the Host Program is a volunteer-based program whereby newcomers are matched with Canadian volunteers who help them learn about available services in their community. However, hosts vary widely in their abilities and time commitments, and are also not available to everyone. Interviewees who had a host generally said they benefitted from the program but also insisted that it needs to be expanded. Overall, the most useful services offered by ISAs, even where they exist only in very limited form, include: accompaniment, pick up and drop off, advocacy, housing search, assistance communicating with landlords, translation and interpretation, transitional housing, cultural orientation, resume writing, job search and interview skills, counseling, food bank, information and assistance to access further education, bus tickets,

¹⁷ There were many complaints about the household items GARs were given: they don't know what the objects are, and items are often broken or missing parts. Michel said, "They just come here, throw it down and say, 'We were told to come here and bring you this.'" In addition, Denise received rusted pots that could not be used, while Adele said the broken things she received were "an insult."

English as an Additional Language (EAL), youth services, and daycare. Although this is an impressive list of services, they are unevenly available, and there are just not enough of them.

The issue of ISA funding is inherently a question of policy. Evidence that ISAs are not funded sufficiently to serve the needs of their clients reveals the negative effects of such policies in terms of immigrants' and refugees' social and economic well being. In other words, liberal policy frameworks serve to sustain a system in which the lack of effective services contributes to social exclusion and the process of minority formation by failing to address the conditions that force some refugees into poverty.

5.3.2 View from the inside

“If we keep doing things the way we are, I mean I’ve had families with me for over five years and nothing changes for them. I can tell you where they’re going: nowhere, in fact it just gets worse...” –Mansa

Settlement workers in the current study are as frustrated as their clients. In Betty’s words,

One of the biggest problems is that there are too few providers and too many people. We are not able to help as we would like - the practicalities of it just don’t allow us to do that and it’s difficult. There are times when you have so many files...then because of the funding things are changing every year or whenever the funding is coming up... Moreover, clients tend to wait until they have fourteen things on their list, but you have to pick two or three of the main ones to deal with, and then they leave wondering about the others. They think maybe you don’t want to help, or that they’re not important—they are! It’s just that with thirty clients each with fourteen things you have to choose the main ones.

Annie also explained that,

in looking for housing, it depends on how much the workers are willing to help the person because a housing search is a tedious thing...you need to talk to the landlord, they have to see you and see if you can communicate, if you are clean or whatever, ask you questions, you have to drive around...it’s just a pain. This is hard because most clients need more support, but most workers are overwhelmed with what they already have to do, or they are not allowed to leave their office.

For example, Garang expressed the following regret: “My work schedule doesn’t allow me to visit families so I really don’t know what kind of condition they are living in.”

However, although there are only a handful of spaces available, Robert explained that transition houses provide essential services for RCs:

We provide the transition services [RCs] need from the time they get here to the time they can get on their feet financially enough to move out and find their own place...it takes six to nine months to get their work permit, then they have to get their SIN, then BCID, and once they get their work permit there is also a window of time before they actually get a job...Once they've been working two months and can say they have a job, then they can move on. We work with apartments or landlords or other agencies to help them find housing...we might give them some numbers, or do an internet search together, or show them the sites where they can do it...we take them as far as they need, and then let them do what they can...but basically when people move out of here we set up an apartment for them.

The house also provides references because “the landlord looks at that, if you’ve been three weeks here, a month there, then you can’t sign a lease for a year. They are looking for stability so if you can say, ‘I was with [name of house] for six to eight months,’ then that’s a good reference. And one of us will also show up to vouch for you.” Robert also mentioned how helpful it is for newcomers to have the backing of an organisation, explaining that “there is a real hesitancy in the Vancouver area to rent to new immigrants, refugees especially, and especially if they are on government assistance of any kind, so if you can say, ‘Here’s my proof that I can pay my rent and be in a good place for a long time, and here’s the backing of an organisation,’ that seems to be okay.”

In general, ISA representatives acknowledge that both agencies and individual settlement workers are overloaded, so that people are often passed along from agency to agency, leading to frustration and disconnections in service provision (see also Mattu 2002). One described a common scenario:

A person can go to an office and they’ll be told to go point B, that takes two weeks; at point B they do one thing then they say, ‘Go to point C,’ so they book another appointment: one or two weeks. Then they’re told to go to another point: another three weeks because they have a backlog. Then at point D they say, ‘We can do this but those people at C should have done all those other things, why did they send you here? You need to back to where you started.’ Two months later they’ve got nowhere so they go

back to A and the person says, 'What is wrong with you, I told you to go to this place, didn't you go there?'

Part of the problem is the intense competition among agencies and community groups for funding, which is exacerbated by funders' focus on numbers rather than needs, and also by funders' practice of changing granting criteria every year so that even small organizations have to constantly reapply. Reflecting the ideology of the current neoliberal climate obsessed with a narrowly defined notion of "accountability," one settlement worker explained, "They want an organisation that is legitimate, but they also just want numbers: everything has to be reshaped and reformatted so that it's just plug in numbers." At the same time, successful programs are cancelled even when they are still fulfilling a popular need.

Clients are aware of these issues. César said, "I heard the government is cutting support to those organisations and that's a big problem because some really have the heart, but if there's no money available they can't offer adequate services." Similarly, Iman wished, "If only the government could help those organisations...if you go there they just say, 'Sorry the government cut everything,' so they can't help you. Sometimes you have nothing in the fridge and you just go to sleep like that." Reapplication and the requirement for extensive reporting also mean that too much staff time is spent on administration, while without continuing core funding there is no job security. This increases turnover and interrupts continuity of services for vulnerable clients who already struggle to develop trusting relationships. In this context, Kagiso cynically wondered whether ISAs are supposed to serve their clients or their funders.

Another challenge faced by BC ISAs stems from provincial policy that pushes all settlement services through a competitive open-tender contracting process and, settlement workers argue, accepting the lowest bid means offering the least services. According to the director of the Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA), open tendering resulted in many offices closing, some services for marginalized groups like single

mothers and RCs were canceled, several staff positions were lost, there was a loss of trust and connection with immigrant communities, and a drastic reduction in sector wide collaboration (Welsh 2006).

The reduction in services for vulnerable women has had devastating effects. A frustrated settlement worker told the following story:

I've sat with one woman and her baby who were moving from shelter to shelter, a very terrible situation! We started phoning at 11am and I was on the phone until 3pm and guess what, I called here and there and here and there, and at 3pm that person told me to call the place where I started! I was so mad—the whole day on the phone, and I speak perfect English and understand the system...by the time I found her a shelter it was 7:15pm and they wouldn't give me the address; they told me she had to go to a Value Village and call from somewhere on the street! She was exhausted, I needed to drive her somewhere and go home myself; I wasn't going to leave her on the street somewhere when I have been speaking on her behalf all day...I just said, 'Stop this nonsense. You will be in the paper tomorrow if you don't tell me where you are!' So they did, but she had to leave the next day.

Mansa elaborated on the dilemma: "I feel torn and guilty when women are being abused at home: should I tell them to leave? Then where should they go? And what if they have children? So should I advise them to remain at home and possibly be killed?" Perhaps the president of Sarah's national organisation felt similarly conflicted when he advised her to return to her abusive husband when she sought his help after becoming homeless due to the breakdown of the family sponsorship agreement under which she came to Canada. Canadian women in abusive relationships face similar problems, but are not simultaneously navigating a new country, language, and way of life.

Although there have been moves to increase the amount of BCSAP funding available, the challenges for small ISAs and community organisations have remained or even intensified as large organisations continue to grow at a more rapid pace and reporting requirements increase. There also appears to be a lack of recognition among funders of what small organisations can do, such as provide more culturally appropriate services for vulnerable groups. This is important

because, as Robert pointed out, “When there are services that are for everybody, the most marginalized always have extra barriers to accessing them.” The lack of adequate support services plays a key role in the process of minority formation and the creation and perpetuation of social exclusion. African refugees arrive without resources then find that they are prevented by a range of structural forces from accumulating assets once they are in Canada. The material effects of ideologies that undergird the refusal to fund sufficient and appropriate services for African refugees may be perceived in the ways they struggle disproportionately to access housing, employment, and needed services. I propose that contesting the denial of services to those who need them requires uncovering the persistent ideologies and practices of domination that perpetuate unequal social and economic relations, in order to provide a starting point from which to make positive change.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined some public and private sector institutional barriers to housing for African refugees in Metro Vancouver. It may be tempting to focus solely on the present manifestations of racial prejudice to understand how processes of inclusion and exclusion function to produce conditions of differential citizenship, but it is also necessary to inquire where these ideas come from and who benefits. Vulnerability is a product of marginalisation; marginalisation in turn is the result of policies around housing, settlement, and social service provision that enfold African refugees in layers of overlapping disadvantage. The policies are grounded in particular ideologies such as multiculturalism and minority formation, which are themselves based on notions of what constitutes legitimate Canadian subjects. These systemic relations of inequality are veiled by the denial of past injustices that simultaneously enable the idealized construction of Canadians as generous, tolerant, law abiding and legitimate. Africans in

contrast, are seen as outsiders, visible minorities, criminals, and inherently un-Canadian. The manifestation of these ideological constructions in material inequalities, such as the denial of access to adequate housing, underlies precisely why many Africans also feel that they will never be Canadian.

The point is not that people deliberately set up a racist environment, but that those in a position to make profound changes do not appear to be in any rush to change the status quo. Decisions about how government money is allocated are made by human beings who are products of their society and culture. When multinational corporations receive subsidies while CIC staffing budgets are cut, we need to understand why this is happening and the effects on different groups of people. For African refugees, the result is that they are held in poverty, debt, and uncertainty, which leaves them vulnerable to exploitation; in contrast employers and landowners benefit because they can hire for less and rent for more. Lawyers and immigration consultants are also ensured of a steady income. Thus, African refugees' minority status is ensured while notions of equality and fairness hide practices of discrimination. Moreover, these policies are racist in effect because most refugees are people of colour. Hence current immigrant integration and settlement policy also contributes to social exclusion and the racialisation of poverty. The following chapter demonstrates further the complex ways that systems of oppression rely on each other by examining some of the connections among housing, health, education, justice, family separation, psychological well being, and homelessness.

CHAPTER VI LAYERS UPON LAYERS: HOUSING AND...

“With housing everything is interconnected...If somebody comes in with no language and no education and trauma, especially if it’s severe trauma, their chances of improving their housing with current supports are next to none. You will have the unique people who go out and do all these thousands of jobs and have the 13-year old taking care of the siblings every day and night – then they can change their housing situation, although other factors may appear: with the parents away the children could get into trouble...so it’s all interdependent. It’s hard to put housing on its own, because all those other things affect housing and housing affects all the other things. It’s one of the biggest factors psychologically and in terms of safety...Also if you live in a better place your children go to a better school...you have access to way more and it influences your life.” –Betty

“When we are talking about housing we are talking about everything.” –Esther

6.1 Health

“Sometimes we only eat lunch; there is no way to have breakfast or supper.” –Chika

Housing and health are closely linked (Bryant 2004; Hwang 2004). As well, Cooper (2004) found that poor housing has negative consequences for children in terms of safety, physical health, education, and overall development and wellbeing. In the current study, Anita connected the rising cost of housing with nutrition: “The raise in rent is often reasonable, \$25-30 more, but if that money used to buy milk or juice for the child and now it goes to rent, that strains [a mother’s] resources, and if she’s on welfare that raise can make a big difference.” Marie explained: “Money, that’s my big problem...if I have money I won’t have to miss school every Friday to go to the food bank...the doctor said to me, ‘These children want meat, they need eggs’...but how?” Finally, Betty related this story:

I remember once a nurse from the health unit had a family there and she told me to show them what they are supposed to be eating, and they laughed: ‘Give children milk how many times a day? They’re like, ‘A whole glass of milk?!’ To them that was luxury. And how are you going to buy fruit when you don’t even have enough food, when you’re planning every single meal down to each pay cheque or Child Tax Benefit or whatever? This causes them so much stress...as if they don’t have enough to worry about.

The links between housing and mental and physical health can be complex. César

speculated that when people “are under stress to find housing they lose opportunities to get counseling and other help they need, because they don’t have basic shelter.” The following anecdote from Iman makes a similar point: “My nurse came to visit me and I was complaining that the house was too expensive and I don’t have money...and she said, ‘What do you expect, you came from Africa so be grateful!’ ...I never accepted her in my house again.”

When people are in poor health or suffer from malnourishment, other aspects of their lives such as working, studying, looking for work, or caring for a family, also become more difficult. These conditions are created by government policies whose ultimate consequences are to force people into poverty. Yet, at the same time, the relationship between policies guided by particular ideologies and African refugees’ living conditions are concealed by liberal discourses around equality of opportunity and individual responsibility that shield unequal raced, classed, gendered, and legalized relations of power. The effects of the policies in terms of health are uncovered as another onion layer is removed, allowing us to perceive the creation of an extremely vulnerable population that remains exploitable because they cannot get up from the bottom.

6.2 Interaction with the criminal justice system

“You black people always steal!” –Store Manager to Afifa

The refugees in this study were unanimous in their agreement that black people are criminalized in Canada, and several detailed negative and intimidating experiences with the police. For example, Simon described what happened to Mazin, a single man living in a shared basement suite:

[He] came to [us] because his roommate had pulled a gun on him, so we called the police...They came and it was the most confusing situation I’ve ever been in: the police take him outside and it’s about eleven at night and they’re shouting, ‘You tell us the truth about what happened! Stop lying to us that this guy pulled a gun on you!’

You're a Refugee Claimant, we know that, we could take away your documents and have you removed from the country immediately!' This kind of thing going on at top volume at night, what do the neighbours think? Talk about total intimidation. Finally they came inside and I said, 'Do you know anything about this roommate?' 'Oh yeah, he's got a police record, he's got gun charges from the past...' And here's this other fellow who's had a gun pulled on him and then he's getting shouted at—it disturbed me really badly.

Simon also related another experience:

...a case of profiling that happened around five years ago. There was a kidnapping by a black person, and this refugee claimant who lived in the neighbourhood was thrown into prison just because he was black...that's all part of being part of a small community that is so visibly identifiable...You have police surrounding the house and he had his whole traumatic background, so he runs and they assume he's guilty...It took this guy a really long time to undo all the shit he got into as a result of all that. He was in detention for a long time and he was so confused, he didn't even know what was happening. It took him years to get PR and he was on the street a lot, just moving around after that.

Afifa and Ahmed moved to BC from Quebec when Ahmed's persecutors from Central Africa arrived in Canada. Ahmed informed CIC before they arrived that the people coming were the same ones who had caused him to become a refugee: "They just said I have the right to live anywhere in Canada. I said, 'How can I move?' but they said they can't help me with that, so we used the next Child Tax Benefit cheque to escape to Vancouver." Unfortunately Ahmed was followed to Vancouver and his pursuers had him arrested. Ahmed was acquitted in court and released. He said, "I won so I have no record, but what about all those jobs I had applied for, all those people who saw me arrested and being on probation (he could only move along a short distance from his home in one direction), and what about the trauma I went through?" Afifa was also arrested in Vancouver, accused of stealing the jacket she was wearing in a local second hand store. Upon receiving a call that his wife had been arrested for shoplifting, Ahmed rushed to the store to find Afifa lying on the ground wearing only a tiny top, her hijab in disarray. Later, after showing a photo of Afifa in the jacket several months earlier, and two court cases, they got the jacket back and accepted several thousand dollars in compensation.

Although in each case the person in question was acquitted, these and similar incidents

are upsetting, time consuming and can also affect relations with neighbours and local businesses. Simon pointed out that “those things can really set people back... You start living in fear and that makes you more vulnerable to exploitation because you don’t dare draw attention to yourself, you’re just trying to live below everybody’s radar. It’s that web of factors, and how if you don’t have a good place you’re just constantly moving and it affects everything.”

As Brown (2008) argues, black lives are seldom considered precious or innocent. The racist stigmatization of blacks as criminals is part of a constructed negative mythology that also provides the foundation for further discrimination in housing, employment, etc., thereby exacerbating social exclusion. At the same time Africans as violent criminals are discursively separated from peaceful law abiding Canadians through the perpetuation of an us/them binary construction that has material effects, ideologies of colour blindness and equality conceal discriminatory practices. Until the historical connections are made between the negative associations of blackness with criminality and violence that developed during slavery and colonialism on the one hand (Mensah 2002), and contemporary racialised relations on the other, addressing inequalities based in racial prejudice will be difficult. If we do not know where we are or how we got here, then moving forward without reproducing colonialist inequalities becomes a nearly impossible task.

6.3 Lack of educational opportunities

“Go to Canada: go to the factory.” –Patrice

Many participants stressed that lack of educational opportunities and the pressure to accept precarious employment were major obstacles to successful integration and obtaining reasonable wages, with obvious implications for housing affordability. Billalou offered the following perceptive analysis:

I went through grade 11, then I was so busy with work so I quit. It was too much for me because I worked eight hours then went to school for four hours. If I work less then I can't afford to live, and if I go to welfare then I can't study, so it was just there in between that housing should have kicked in and helped so that I could work slightly less and afford to study full time...I could be educated now if there was affordable housing, but I didn't have it so I had to leave school.

Parents who came here seeking a better life for their families are also frustrated: Patrice explained,

I have a responsibility for this big family so I cannot live without working ...When I reached here I looked to see what kind of job I can do [and] I saw that I have to go to school...So you have that plan and you go [to MEIA] and they just tell people they don't have to go to school! Just: 'Are you looking for a job?' ...There are a lot of jobs I can do, and they can pay me eight dollars per hour but how am I going to support this family? ...But I have an idea: let me go back to school, because after finishing my school I can get a good job which can pay me fifteen or twenty dollars per hour, then I can support this family. But they say you have to go to work; you just come here and go to the worst job, you see?

Similarly, Abdelaziz believes MEIA workers forced him to quit studying:

I went to grade 11 English, and I was trying to finish grade 12 to get a very good, or at least a reasonable job...At that time I lived on welfare because I wasn't working, but they pushed me from studying. I said, 'Please let me finish, I'm going very well, and I have only one course to complete,' but they said, 'No, you have to leave and we are going to send you to job training—what do you like, computer? Security?' At that time really I was in need of money because I also had to pay rent and my ticket to immigration, so I just said 'Okay which one is the fastest?' ...They said security and sent me to some program for two months, and after that they sent me to [an employment agency] to find a job in security as fast as possible...finally I got a job. It is eight bucks an hour, so...

Conversely, people also stop attending classes if their housing situation becomes too unstable. Thus a cycle can start where unstable housing prevents newcomers from progressing in English, which in turn inhibits them from finding work, and therefore affects the standard of accommodation they can afford. Further, for people who have never attended school, the formal environment of the classroom can be so intimidating that they simply stop attending. These issues underline the argument made by many GARs in this study that one year of government assistance is not enough for everybody; some people require extra supports in order to be brought to the level of others.

Many Canadians also struggle to continue their education, but their situations are different for important reasons. They are generally on the outer onion layers. Refugees have been denied the protection of the country they were born in, along with the educational opportunities that citizenship normally implies. African refugees come in at the bottom; then a range of interlocking mechanisms function to ensure that they remain there. A key aspect of the creation and perpetuation of minority status is the lack of educational opportunities that stem from poverty and lack of information. Without education many African refugees are effectively destined to a life of low wage and low status labour, and precarious employment. This means they have no opportunity to build assets that could be used to purchase a home or subsidise their children's education. Parents who are struggling with literacy themselves are also unable to assist their children with their homework, and so the cycle of ongoing marginalisation persists. Ideologies that posit a level playing field and equal opportunity conceal these relations, while the danger is that the negative historical association of blackness with poverty and low intellectual capacity becomes further entrenched in the public consciousness.

6.4 Family separation

"You cannot settle like this!" –David

One of the most pressing concerns for refugees who have found protection in Canada is for their family left overseas. Fatuma's husband was killed, their house burned down, and she was imprisoned. Luckily she made it to Canada, but had to leave her four children behind. Reuniting with her kids is all Fatuma can think about, yet due to its focus on economic concerns, immigration policy seems to assume that people function in isolation from their families. In fact however, the longer the separation, the slower the integration of the refugee into Canadian society, with significant implications for housing and wellbeing. For example, many are so

preoccupied that they cannot advance professionally, exacerbating affordability problems (Dench 2006). Moreover, parents separated from children often suffer from depression. Fatuma said, “People will listen but they don’t like problems all the time, so when I think about my kids I just have to take it by myself. I sit here and listen to my music and cry...I say, ‘I wish I was there with my mum,’ or I cook, or I go outside, you know.... It’s really hard.” Also, during the long uncertain period when they do not know when their children may arrive, people do not know from one month to the next how many bedrooms they will need, leading to instability. One worker described it like this:

They’re in this in-between space, knowing that their family is coming but not knowing when, but needing to find housing. So it’s always temporary and that seriously affects the capacity to be stable in housing...One woman got into a co-op, then sponsored her family, and anticipating their arrival she moved out. She’s now in a market situation, but it’s already been months that they are arriving ‘tomorrow,’ so that really affects where people live and how they are housed...Now she’s ready to look in the paper every month for a 3-bedroom apartment that will accommodate the family on her salary...it’s really complicated!

Family separation not only prevents families from integrating and building assets together; it is also costly. For example, because sponsors are separated from their legal dependents, they must maintain two households (here and overseas), possibly for several years. Phone cards constitute another cost. In addition, Africans are disproportionately asked to provide DNA samples to prove family relationships, which are time consuming and expensive.¹⁸ Meanwhile, security clearances and medical checks expire and have to be repeated, causing further cost and delays. Finally, processing times for family sponsorship vary significantly by region, with Africa by far the slowest (CCR 2004).

In my opinion, it is not an accident that processing in Accra, where Billalou’s case has been held up for seven years, and Nairobi takes forever. Rather, it is a political decision as to

¹⁸ In 2004 for example, a parent and three children in the Democratic Republic of Congo paid \$1,225; a parent with five children paid \$1,800; and the group rate for eight children was \$1,945 (CCR 2004).

how many people are staffed in the Kenya or New York office, and I believe this determination is motivated by anti-black sentiment and a concomitant desire to limit the number of Africans in Canada. Immigration is the primary source of population growth in Canada, so immigration policy is key in determining the demographic makeup of the country for the future. The fact that disproportionately few Africans enter, and that this is part of a long term pattern, underlines the ways in which immigration policy (which comes from somewhere) acts to perpetuate the un-Canadianness of blackness. Communities may have the right to decide who they admit, but the question of who reserves the right to define “the community” and make decisions regarding entry is crucial while, as we have seen, old coherencies were actually created by smothering diversity.

Table 24. Family separation for RCs

Separated from:	How long:	Reunited?
wife and children	3 years	YES
wife and children	7 years	NO
husband and children	1 years	NO
children	3 years	NO
wife and children	4 years	NO
children	3 years	NO
children	6 years	NO

Among the RCs interviewed, only Joseph has managed to bring his family (Table 24). Unfortunately, the marriage did not survive the three year separation. Meanwhile David expressed his frustration: “How can you live with your wife away and you can’t see her for years? ...Are you supposed to end that relationship and start another one? You don’t know where it is going to end and your life keeps going like this, it never settles!” Difficulties persist even after family members arrive, since people who have waited for years in precarious situations are likely to have greater needs when they finally arrive in Canada. For example, children who have missed several years of schooling will need increased support when they enter the Canadian education system, while families who have been living in dangerous and unhealthy conditions with limited access to health care are likely to need more from the health care system than if they

had been brought out of such situations sooner. If they do not receive this assistance then their chances of stepping out of poverty will be severely reduced.

Canadian parents would be outraged at the prospect of being separated from their children for years, so why is it deemed acceptable for people who have been accepted as refugees? This is especially puzzling since family reunification is often presented as a value that supposedly underpins immigration policy. As one participant told me bitterly: “Canada looks good on paper;” however, behind the words on the paper lies a much darker truth.

6.5 Psychological well being

“We are good people... We have lots to contribute and we want to contribute, but we don't have that opportunity so the government has to give us a chance.” –Bernadette

“That is what is missing here: a chance.” –Kwame

Many of the people in this study found that coming to Canada entailed a loss of control, social connection, and social status. Also, with no affordable daycare it is, in the words of one settlement worker, “automatic welfare” for single mothers. Then, with too much time to think, bad memories come flooding back. Patrice explained that African refugees:

passed through a very hard situation: you see people killed next to you and by the grace of God you passed that place, but your mind is still thinking about what happened, and your family is still there, or perhaps they were killed, so you are not stable... They should take care of those people when they come here, give them an affordable house... so that [person] can feel I am at home, I am safe... You know they say ‘feeling at home in a new country takes time’? In these conditions we are living in, it takes a lot longer, even our kids will feel the same.

Although RCs do not usually come with the same high immediate expectations as GARs, according to those in this study, expectations are crushed over time as, on top of the traumas of persecution and the challenges of adapting to a new country, living conditions fail to improve and family separations drag on. César reminded me that “refugees are people who come to Canada with hope about a new life, and they want to work and succeed, but when they meet

these problems in the beginning they get discouraged and their expectations fade.”

As a result of their traumatic experiences, many African refugees are afraid to “complain” because they literally do not know what might result - possibly denial of sponsorship or even deportation. In one case, Betty expressed alarm that refugees in a housing complex where many African GARs live “are afraid of moving out because they said that when they were put there they were told, ‘You have to stay here six months and you are not allowed to move.’ Then I tell them, ‘It’s okay you can move,’ but...they are told by the management, ‘No, you have another six months.’ ... And coming from a camp they say, ‘we don’t want a bad record.’”

Mansa explained why refugees in particular need advocates:

Many are not highly educated; the war has thrown them out on the streets then they end up here...So the nature in which [an immigrant] finds a house is very different from how a refugee finds a house...Because refugees can’t advocate for themselves, I find they have a lot of problems with housing. Landlords take advantage of them, they give them a house that’s falling apart, appliances that don’t work...Refugees don’t know how to inspect a house, or they are so desperate they just say it’s okay. Or by the time they realize the toilet or washing machine doesn’t work, the landlord says it’s them who broke it, then they lose their deposit and these things were not functioning in the first place...So, many people by the time they rent a house have been thrown out of three places and lost their deposit on all of them...

Another concern for many African refugees is that they live in unsafe neighbourhoods; fears revolve around drug use, gangs, sexual harassment and racist abuse. Dada described the situation thus: “There are a lot of bad things happening there - people smoke and do drugs and do all sorts of things, there was even a rape, and when people come new from Africa they mingle with these things and it’s not good; it’s a bad influence for people who are so vulnerable.” To add insult to injury, Betty said, “some landlords say, ‘Didn’t you come from a refugee camp? Shouldn’t it have been worse than this? I don’t understand why you are complaining.’ ...A lot of the housing conditions are really terrible, but people are afraid to cause trouble.”

Lack of familiarity with Canadian culture and weak support systems also combine with sensitivity to discrimination to prevent people from living normal lives. For example, Simon

said:

What I've heard from African Claimants is that they feel like they stick out because of the colour of their skin; it's not Toronto or Montreal where there are large populations of African Canadians, so there's a huge lack of security. There was one gentleman who I thought was the epitome of integration, but one day I was walking down Commercial Drive [a well-known multicultural area] with him...and I asked, 'Have you ever been in this store?' And he said, 'No, I don't go into any of these stores.' I said, 'Why not? Just go in and explore,' but he said, 'I'm afraid I'll do something that will draw attention to myself or that I won't know what I'm doing.' And that was shocking to me that he would feel that way - such a high level of discomfort with how things work and what are the systems...I had perceived this guy as really having integrated incredibly well, and yet.

6.6 The power of personality

In a departure from the previous sections in this chapter, the following section shows how some of the study participants were able to draw on particular resources to improve their housing situation, and relates these resources to legal status. In general, African RCs are better off than GARs in terms of personal resources because, as Mansa explained:

To be a Refugee Claimant is such a rigorous process that at the very least you have some education, and have worked in some kind of city setting...[RCs] come in at the bottom, but they know good opportunities when they see them. They have some barriers, but they also usually have basic English...When you are coming as a GAR you don't have the language, you don't know about buses, or carpet, or keys—why are people always carrying keys? Everything is new for them...

As Isaac perceptively explained:

This is clear: you cannot get to Canada easily, there's no way to get a visa, just look where the borders are and how they are...to be a refugee claimant in Canada you have to have some resources - social skills, money or connections...so basically all the claimants had a way to get here and that makes them more independent, they know about the risks they are taking and they are ready to face that risk, so mentally they are already trained...but for the sponsored ones it's just a new world, and they have high expectations...I have to say that those are the real refugees; it's a joke to think that you only have to give them support for one year and you'll be helping them—no, these are really persons who went through hell...if you look at their statistics you will never find ten people like me.

In this study, male RCs appear to have an advantage, especially if they came alone.

Another crucial factor was access to subsidised housing and other supports. For example, Isaac was fortunate to find a place at a refugee transition house and get connected into networks immediately. His university degree and the fact that he immediately began volunteering in several places eventually helped him find a well-paid job. Similarly, Gabriel also came alone and stayed for several months at a refugee transition house, then for six years paid \$300/month to live in a church while working three jobs at a time. He now owns his own business and has a mortgage for an apartment. Joseph also came alone and was lucky to get into a subsidised co-op. Because of his disability, he was accompanied everywhere when he first arrived. Moreover, he is quick to find out about his rights and not afraid to advocate for them. Like many of the RCs in this study Isaac, Gabriel, and Joseph have outgoing personalities and express optimistic outlooks. The following remarks from Billalou and Fatuma are also typical: “I’ve never been a shy person, or too proud to ask, or too afraid to speak; I couldn’t say a word but I would still try, and I found helpful people” and, “I meet friends wherever I go.” Betty elaborated on the importance of personality:

There is a lot to be done when it comes to housing...people [do not] have enough information...The really proactive people who knock down doors and say, ‘What can I do? What can I find out?’ They are amazing...But if you are not that way, which most people don’t tend to be after all their experiences and trauma, then you really miss out on information, and depending on somebody’s experiences in the refugee camps, not trusting people might be a huge barrier too.

6.7 Homelessness

“Without you having a place to put your head you are nothing, nothing. So everything must start from housing.” –Esther

Faced with all the difficulties this paper has documented, yet hoping for something better, or perhaps forced out of their current housing by conditions beyond their control, some African refugees simply find it impossible to settle down (see Appendix A). A total of thirteen had come

to BC from another province. At the time of interview, 73% of RCs and 26% of GARs had moved at least once per year since arriving to Metro Vancouver. Altogether, at least 36% changed their place of residence at least once in the six month period following the interview, including at least six who left BC. The following comments by Ahmed also draw attention to the frequency with which many African refugees move: “Look at those people who are moving around from place to place, city to city, and province to province—no Canadians are doing that, it just makes you poor! One lady asked me, ‘How do you immigrants move all the time? It’s so expensive!’ I told her, ‘Don’t think it’s our choice - we are compelled to do that.’”

In terms of vulnerability to homelessness, the risk for African refugees is also extremely high, although levels and characteristics vary for GARs and RCs. While RCs tend to bounce from one unstable housing situation to another, many GARs do not attempt to move even when they are housed in very poor accommodation due to the difficulties families face to find housing. Moreover, GAR families have no opportunity to build assets because finding employment is difficult without affordable daycare, while learning a language takes years, especially if one is also struggling with literacy. As a result, GARs are extremely vulnerable to homelessness because any unexpected cost or change in financial or residential arrangements can tip them into crisis. Potential shocks include eviction, rise in rent, redevelopment, illness, fire, condemnation of building, conflict with neighbours or landlord, accident, etc. While a Canadian family might recover from those shocks without slipping into homelessness, for African GARs unfamiliarity with the system, lack of family and other supports, restrictions on the availability of subsidised housing, as well as a low vacancy rate and large family size, mean that once they become homeless it is difficult to get back into housing. For example, a single parent family of eight recently remained homeless for two months following a fire, and a family of seven driven from their home after a violent attack by neighbours was homeless for over seven months before

finally moving into BC Housing (personal communications). Garang argued that

if the government doesn't help young people who are coming to improve their lives then there will be a lot of social problems in the near future, there will be a lot of homeless African people...It's pretty small now, but as people age then age becomes a factor; some really old people are doing security but the day will come when they can no longer work and they'll have to move out, then where will they go—to the street. If nobody looks at the situation and takes action, it will be much more costly containing a huge social problem than preventing it now.

Garang proposes that homeless African people could pose a potential cost to Canadian governments; however this suggestion is based on the assumption that steps would be taken to house the people in question and therefore glosses over the possible “benefits” homeless Africans could represent in a neoliberal economy that thrives on ultra-exploitable and vulnerable labour. Unfortunately, black marginalisation is highly functional in terms of Canadian national economic development. Moreover, when homeless people who are also members of visible minority groups are held responsible for their condition, then their homelessness actually serves to bolster the notion of white middle class Canadians as rational, hard working and law abiding.

6.8 Conclusion

The foregoing sections illustrate African refugees' awareness that they are not considered legitimate residents of Canada. Although egalitarian ideologies conceal discriminatory practices and beliefs, the consequences of discrimination are all too visible to those who suffer from them. This partly explains the different perceptions of racism among Africans compared to members of the dominant population. Unwrapping the layers from the onion reveals the effects of policies that may be non racist in appearance, but which have racist outcomes. For African refugees, these include the creation of a marginalized community whose members are often unable to advocate for themselves due to issues of unresolved trauma, poor health, and ongoing stress. A related result is that Africans are continually associated with poverty, criminality, and poor

educational performance, and they remain invisible in the civil service, law enforcement, the judiciary, and administrative decision making posts.

However, instead of looking at what African experiences disclose about Canadian culture the tendency is to blame “these people.” I argue that this tendency may be traceable to negative socio-historical constructions of Africans and it is highly functional to permit the entry of a very few people from Africa under conditions of extreme vulnerability as a low wage labour force and a “constituent outside” for Canadian identity constructions. Thus the limits placed on the number of Africans who can enter are both a cause and effect of the notion that blackness is un-Canadian. Such policies also prevent the development of a critical mass of citizens who could establish community structures able to effectively demand social and economic rights that go beyond cultural celebration. Canadian constructions of how black people are and have been treated in Canada are often based on spurious comparisons of patterns of urban violence and residential segregation with the US, which are interpreted as showing that Canadian society is more tolerant. However, Mensah asks,

Can't one attribute the 'absence' of major racial disruptions in Canada to factors other than our presumed tolerance? The fact is, the 'absence' of major racial distortions could be because ethnoracial minorities (e.g. Blacks) are not politically well-organised; because minorities are afraid of the possible repercussions, in terms of public backlash, media lashing, and police brutality; because minorities have been oppressed to the extent that they cannot bear the financial burden of organising a major resistance; or, worse still, because they are too oppressed to even fathom the thought of resisting (2002; 2).

Although many Canadians are reluctant to admit that racial oppression and inferiorization persist in this country, the fact remains that due to their high visibility and the legacy of slavery, black people in particular are stigmatized and discriminated against in a fashion that drastically undermines their social, political, and economic status in Canada.

CHAPTER VII CONCLUSION

“Africans face specific challenges because our people really come with nothing, zero ...To advance becomes a big issue: how do you get higher in the social ladder? How do you build something with nothing? ...I don’t know where the trend is going to end, people just get stuck.” –Garang

“Refugees and refugee claimants are survivors and have an immense capacity to contribute and settle in if we can just let them.” –Simon

7.1 Summary

When African refugees arrive in Canada, they are grateful for the opportunities they have been given and they appreciate the peace and safety of Canadian neighbourhoods. However, while physical safety is critical to wellbeing, it is not fulfilling on its own. People also need to live in comfortable accommodation, contribute to their communities as productive citizens, enjoy good emotional and physical health, support and be supported by their family, and put their traumatic pasts behind them. Despite their desire to integrate fully into their communities and build successful lives in their new home, African refugees do not feel welcome in Canada. Participants used strong words like “beggars,” “dogs,” and “slaves” to describe the depth of the alienation they felt.

I have illustrated some of the material effects of the alienation experienced by African refugees through the example of housing using the metaphor of an onion, in which each layer represents another aspect of social, economic, or political disadvantage. These include: low incomes; lack of information and marginalised social network; lack of affordable housing; racism and discrimination based on socio-economic class, gender, and immigration status; the requirement to repay the travel loan to CIC; and long processing times for RCs. Together, these conditions force African refugee families to accept substandard, overcrowded, unaffordable, inadequate, unsafe, and unsuitable housing, and ultimately contribute to a high risk of

homelessness. However, since where people live also affects their access to education, health care and employment, and impacts their social and emotional wellbeing, the consequences extend well beyond the question of shelter. At the same time, because the layers signify the effects of public policy frameworks, understanding how they intersect in the lives of African refugees also reveals the values and priorities of Canadian society that lie behind the policies. Accordingly, the results of this study also suggest some of the ways in which current policies ultimately function to perpetuate the racialised, legal, and class divisions that are central aspects of Canada's colonial legacy. Importantly, absence of motive is not adequate defense for differential outcomes; as the Supreme Court of Canada stated, "It is impact, not motive or intent, that is the proper test of unequal treatment" (Diène 2004).

Drawing on the work of Canadian anti-racist and anti-colonial scholars, I have argued that liberal multiculturalism discourse abstracts difference from history and power relations and obscures the ways in which classed, raced, and legalised relations of power continue to operate to the disadvantage of particular groups of people. Through the concealment of these relations, in conjunction with the assumption that there is a core Canadian national culture that exists in opposition to those represented by the notion of diversity, multicultural policy also promotes the formation of minority status. This occurs via the concept of visible minority, which constructs a category of people who are both non white and also marginalised in social, economic and political life. These processes are buttressed by the practice of democratic racism, key features of which include a reluctance to admit that contemporary racist practices— as legacies of colonialism, slavery and nationalism—are integral aspects of Canadian society (Henry et al 1995). In addition, democratic racism also involves the rejection of slavery as relevant to the development of Canadian racial hierarchies, and therefore also contributes to the related suppression of the past contribution of black people to the Canadian nation. Finally, I have

proposed that ideologies developed in the past continue to influence policy makers, most of whom belong to the majority white population, even though explicitly racist expression has been removed from immigration and other policies. Thus, ideologies of colour blindness create an illusion of fairness and equality, while the denial of racism enables the construction of Canadians as charitable, tolerant, and generous, even as African communities' experiences demonstrate ongoing discrimination.

The historical experiences of Africans in Canada are fundamental to the treatment contemporary African refugees receive today because ideas that developed during that era remain powerful. These constructions also have material consequences that affect present power relations between Africans and Canadians because Canadians continue to benefit from racist practices even as they deny being racist themselves. Kwame explained,

You see the argument is like, 'that's not me: I didn't own a slave, that was in the past.' ...People just say, 'My grandparents did whatever they did, they left me a chunk of money and I like it—even if it came from the blood of Africans, I don't care, I don't want to know that...I didn't do anything and it's not my fault I was born into this.'

However, the possibility that we are not responsible for creating the current situation does not mean that we have no obligation to change it. Moreover, newly arrived refugees can hardly be expected to tackle discrimination in their first few months in Canada. Abdelaziz pointed out that "even when you have problems you don't have time to complain or think about things or fight for your rights; all you do is work like a dog and pay money, and you don't have time to think if the government is bad or what." Rather, it is the responsibility of those with social, political and economic power to push for greater social justice and equality. As a useful starting point, Canadians need to wean ourselves of poisonous national imaginaries by admitting the reality of past and present discrimination so that we may move into the future without reproducing current inequalities.

7.2 Policy implications

Based on the empirical findings from this study, several policy recommendations may be made. The proposed changes require additional funding, but will save money in the long run and also contribute to a more welcoming and just society. As Tunde insisted, “I know we have a system we should follow, but sometimes we have to be human.” Starting from the outer layers of the onion, RAP rates must be raised to reflect the reality of living costs in major Canadian cities and steps should be taken to address the ways in which refugees are forced onto income assistance. There also needs to be intensive orientations made available to refugees on arrival, including accompaniment. Perhaps most obviously, the availability of affordable rental housing must be increased to meet the demand. Governments should also consider providing transitional housing where refugees can live for up to five years with extra supports. In addition, the federal government should waive the repayment of CIC transport loans for GARs and speed up processing times for RCs. Finally, the mandate and funding of ISAs needs to be increased to enable them to effectively assist incoming refugees with housing searches, deal with landlords, etc. If these changes are implemented, it is certain that there will be major improvements in both the short and long term settlement outcomes for all refugees coming to Canada. As Drummond, Burleton, and Manning argue, “the public policy case for addressing the problem of affordable housing could not be more transparent” (2004; 15).

In addition to housing policy, there also need to be more fundamental societal changes to address systemic racism and other forms of discrimination. Legislation such as the *Employment Equity Act*, or the National Action Plan Against Racism are steps in the right direction. However, as Mensah points out, Canadian public service departments are among the worst violators of employment equity policy (2002; 251). In addition, these strategies do not include changes to school curricula that are currently designed to deny young people access to information about

power relations (Apple 2004), yet clearly these need to be radically altered. Centuries of racism and other forms of discrimination will not be overcome in a day, but the fact is that those in power could do more.

7.3 Further research

Given the scale of this study, many questions have been left unanswered. Further research into the experiences of members of African communities in Canada disaggregated by ethnicity, national origin, immigration status, religion, language, sexual orientation, age, gender, etc., is needed to better understand the range of experiences. In addition, it would be instructive to explore the pathways through which refugees become homeless in absolute terms (i.e. on the street). Future research could also examine the convergences and divergences of experiences among people who identify as black in terms of identity formation, community relations, and experiences of social inequality. In general, because Africans have been marginalized in practically every facet of Canadian life from the academy to the economy, from the housing market to political life, for over four hundred years, there is much potential research to be done. However, the goal of such study, in addition to filling gaps in current research, should be to empower and improve the condition of those disadvantaged under the current system.

7.4 Conclusion

Despite the extensive critiques I have leveled against multiculturalism as an ideological framework, it still may be worth keeping, if it can be adjusted to incorporate an explicit and historically informed anti-racist component directed at the Canadian majority. Obviously, a major hurdle in these efforts is presented by the current hegemony of liberal ideology. Nevertheless, by looking at policies and their effects from the perspectives of those discursively constructed as being outside the nation (or inside the onion), and revealing how underlying

notions of white supremacy continue to sustain the Canadian national imaginary—in other words, by offering a critique of what *is*—I hope that I have also pointed to an alternative: the more just Canada that *could be*.

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APPENDIX A CASE STUDY: DANIEL (RC)

If they are among the vast majority of RCs who do not stay at one of the refugee houses, RCs may find themselves in a cycle of unstable accommodation that is difficult to break out of. Daniel arrived at the airport late at night with thirty dollars in his pocket, took a taxi downtown, found the Salvation Army and stayed there for one night. Following that he stayed at UBC to attend a conference, then went to stay with a couple from his country. While he was with that couple, he started an application through a church to immigrate as a clergy. When the couple moved, Daniel went to stay in an unfinished church-house basement “like a rat.” When that became untenable, he stayed in the pastor’s van for two weeks. Then the pastor sent him to live with a friend who lived with five large dogs who slept in one of the apartment’s two bedrooms. Daniel slept with the dogs. He then met a man who offered to let him stay with him on his sofa, but this man’s habit of bringing different women home every night made Daniel’s life on the sofa a misery. Then a man he met on the street asked him if he would like to work as Tenant Support Worker in youth homes, which he accepted. In the meantime, while waiting for documents to be sent from Africa, and having gained more confidence in the refugee application and determination process, Daniel decided to apply for refugee status. However, when a fight broke out one night at the youth home and Daniel called the police, he found himself arrested for overstaying his visa even though his papers were in order. Released from prison the next day, Daniel is now living with Esther. Although neither feels comfortable living with a stranger of the opposite sex, and the house is in need of repairs, they feel they have no other choice.

Daniel is not a free man in other ways as well. Originally upon his release from prison he had to report to CIC twice a week, that was eventually changed to every second week, and it is now every month. Daniel works for the same employer who first hired him under the table, but still only receives ten dollars per hour. What is worse is that he does not get paid for all the hours

he works. Although Daniel is clearly being exploited, a debt of gratitude and the uncertainty of where to go next with his “9,” which Dada referred to as “a cancer,” keep Daniel under his employer’s thumb. Daniel said his friends ask “‘why are you letting this man exploit you?’ But they don’t know how much I’m struggling both ways, to get a job and to get a house.” Daniel also owes thousands of dollars in legal fees to his lawyer, and is currently awaiting word on his application to be a Protected Person. Meanwhile, the house he shares is located on a lot slated for redevelopment, and Esther is also a claimant expecting her children to come “any day.”

APPENDIX B CASE STUDY: BERNADETTE (GAR)

Bernadette is a single mother of six who came to Canada nearly five years ago. She speaks some French and some English, and has worked as a cleaner and at a plethora of other low wage jobs, but suffers from ill health (partly the result of having been tortured) and receives a Disability Pension, although she is also trying to find work. Bernadette's original debt to CIC was \$13,000 but she still owes more than \$3000, despite having made payments for over four years. As a result of her experiences Bernadette is exhausted and depressed. Her family has moved nine times and they just keep getting moved on: the rent goes up, neighbours complain, the landlord's relative is coming, or the site is sold for redevelopment. One recurring issue is that Bernadette does not receive her damage deposit back from landlords and, because she has borrowed these sums from MEIA, she now owes for all the deposits that were not returned. At one place she cleaned the filthy house for three days, then the landlord decided to raise the rent and give it to somebody else. Not only did Bernadette lose her deposit yet again, but the landlord threatened to call the police to force her to leave. Betty confirmed that this is a common occurrence:

I've seen so many cases myself! Someone goes to rent a place and it's totally run down and so dirty, old appliances piled all over ...[landlords] entice people saying, 'Oh I'll clean everything, just pay the deposit first,' so they pay the deposit, they clean everything, perhaps even paint the place, and after that the landlord says, 'Oh sorry, I've found someone else' ...or they come up with an excuse: 'you didn't tell me you had two children...'

Bills and deposits demanded by utilities companies are yet another source of financial and psychological stress. At one apartment complex Bernadette related that "when the bills came for Hydro and gas, the woman never brought the original bill, she always made her own and added some more money to it." At another location she received a bill from Terasen Gas for \$1,300 (including a \$625 deposit) and another from BC Hydro for \$700 (including a \$250

deposit). These deposits were also borrowed from the social assistance bureaucracy. Despite these problems, Bernadette says CIC doesn't care: "They call me all the time, 'Madam you have not paid.' I say, 'I don't have money now.' 'How do you live, do you eat?' 'Yes.' 'Then you have to pay.'"

At the time of interview Bernadette was paying rent of \$1,900, but desperately looking for another place. Disturbingly, the landlord had sent unknown men to stay in one of the bedrooms to help pay the rent without her consent. She complained, "Welfare people think I simply like to stay in expensive places but the truth is that I get refused everywhere else, it is only because nobody else will take me." One month a frustrated worker cut her monthly amount down to just \$350 to "punish" her for taking what the worker saw as too expensive an apartment. Bernadette explains:

The money I get is \$1,500 a month but I pay rent of \$1,900, and I have to pay the transport loan, phone, it's not possible...I tried to work at nine dollars per hour, ten dollars per hour, but I find myself exhausted all the time. I have a medical prescription that isn't covered, and my young son is also on prescription medicine which I have to pay for if I work for nine dollars per hour, and also daycare for my son; I find myself desperate...I don't have a place to stay, the landlords keep creating new rules and throwing me out all the time—if the landlord reads in the newspaper that somebody is renting a 3-bedroom for more than I am paying they raise the rent, and if you can't pay you have to move out.

As if all of that were not enough, there was a three month period where due to an administrative error Canada Revenue Agency thought Bernadette had died, and for that time she did receive any Child Tax Benefits. Finally, when everything was sorted out and she was sent a cheque for the missed months (approximately \$2000) MEIA told her she had to refund them one month's cheque. Thus, five years after being invited to Canada as a sponsored refugee, a single mother of six with limited English owes the provincial government around \$2,500 and the federal government approximately \$3,000.

APPENDIX C CASE STUDY: PATRICE AND EVELINE (GARS)

After fleeing a war and spending several years in a refugee camp, Patrice and Eveline came to Vancouver in 2005 with their three children and Patrice's twelve year old sister. They share a small 2-bedroom apartment in a run down market housing complex for which they pay \$850/month, in addition to making payments to CIC for the \$7,500 they still owe on their transport loan. Patrice was a teacher in Congo, but after their year of RAP finished he worked part time in security for eight dollars per hour. However, at the time of the interview he was studying EAL during the day while Eveline studies EAL at night (both through MEIA). Eveline was pregnant when they arrived and became ill during the pregnancy, in part due to overcrowding in the apartment, as well as to a mold allergy and repeated spraying of pesticides, despite their appeals to management. When doctors realized the conditions the family was living in six signed a letter to BC Housing saying the family needed alternative housing. Two settlement workers also wrote appeals on their behalf. Patrice and Eveline had applied to BC Housing as soon as they arrived, but despite repeated visits and the several letters written by others about their situation, they were unable to access subsidised housing.

Meanwhile they were receiving no money at all for Patrice's sister, so they appealed to welfare, who told them they needed a letter from the parents saying that Patrice could receive the money on their behalf. When he explained that their parents were deceased, he was asked for a letter from CIC proving that she was here with Patrice, but when he finally got the letter and showed it to them MEIA said they still could not give her anything because she was too young! Next they appealed to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, who told them that she should eat at a soup kitchen. Quite reasonably shocked at the thought of sending a twelve year old girl from Congo to eat alone at a soup kitchen, they again appealed to welfare, who finally agreed to record her as Patrice's daughter and they now receive \$35 per month for her upkeep.

After the baby was born Eveline's ill health continued, and the baby was also ill. According to their doctors the room the baby slept in was too hot, but the parents said they already kept the windows open all the time, and that the problem was too many people in a tiny room. While dealing with all of these issues, the building manager served them an eviction notice based on the illegality of having seven people in two bedrooms (although they are far from the only family in that situation in that complex). Following the manager's instructions, they took the notice to BC Housing, hoping to be able to move into subsidised accommodation since they had nowhere else to go and did not speak English or have any idea about how to look for another apartment. However, at BC Housing they were told to go to TRAC to take the manager to court. They explained that her reasoning was just, but in the end they had no choice but to go to TRAC, who also did not understand what the manager should be accused of. However, the notice was canceled.

Following the cancelation of the notice, the manager informed Patrice and Eveline about the agreement between BC Housing, who own the complex, and the management company, whereby nobody is ever evicted (at least for overcrowding). This partly explains why GARs are directed from Welcome House to this complex despite the fact that the largest apartment has only three bedrooms. Patrice and Eveline however, did not let the matter rest, but appealed to their MLA, who wrote to the Minister of Housing about their situation. The reply expressed sympathy, but concluded that all they could do was wait for BC Housing. Finally, after nearly three years and a protracted struggle fought on their behalf by several devoted settlement workers, Patrice and Eveline were allowed to move into a 4-bedroom subsidised unit (personal communication).

APPENDIX D INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: AFRICAN REFUGEES

1. Before we begin, do you have any questions about me or about the research?
2. Where do you come from? How long have you been in Vancouver? Are you a sponsored refugee (GAR or PSR), or refugee claimant?
3. Describe your employment situation.
4. Could you describe where you are living now – is it adequate for your needs, why or why not? How do you deal with these challenges? If currently homeless: could you describe your living conditions and how long you have been homeless? What do you do to address these challenges? Could you give some examples?
5. If in rental accommodation: how would you describe your relationship with your landlord (eg. good, okay, difficult, etc)? Could you give some examples?
6. What are the greatest challenges you have faced finding appropriate and affordable accommodation in Vancouver? Do Africans face any special challenges that perhaps other immigrants don't? Could you give some examples?
7. How have you addressed those challenges? Could you give some examples?
8. What kinds of assistance have you received in finding accommodation? Have you got help from friends/family, agencies, church groups or other institutions? Could you give some examples? What did you find most/least helpful? Have you had any difficulties interacting with or accessing services such as ISS, La Boussole, MOSAIC, etc? Is it clear how these services function?
9. What gaps do you see in the provision of shelter assistance to newcomers? How could institutions change to better assist newcomers in finding suitable affordable accommodation? What suggestions would you give to the organizations you already know to improve the services to you and your family?

10. What changes in government policy would you recommend to help other newcomers in similar positions?
11. Do you feel you have enough information about how to find housing in Vancouver, including how the social housing system works, and the legal rights of tenants? If so, how did you acquire that information? If not, what would be the best way for that type of information to be provided? Could you give any examples?
12. How would you like to see this research used? For example, government report, media, funding proposals, etc?
13. Is there something you'd like to talk about that I haven't asked you?

APPENDIX E INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: SETTLEMENT WORKERS

1. Before we begin do you have any questions about me or about the research?
2. Which organisation do you work for? What is your position at.... and how long have you worked here? How does this organization work within the larger context of service-providers?
3. What services do you typically offer to newcomers, especially refugees? How do newcomers get to know about your services?
4. What other services are available to assist newcomers find accommodation in Vancouver? Does your organization provide services for African refugees? Do you work with these? In what capacity? Are you aware of any organisations that serve Africans specifically?
5. What is the demographic profile of the African immigrants/refugees you have assisted?
6. What socio-economic resources do you find African refugees have when they come here and what resources do they lack?
7. What are the most significant barriers to accessing adequate housing experienced by the African immigrants/refugees you have assisted? Are there specific challenges for people coming from African countries? How do you help African immigrants/refugees address the challenges you have identified? How do these needs change over time? Can you speak to the issue of housing needs for refugee women in particular?
8. For those who are homeless or in housing stress, how do they cope, and what assistance do you offer? What other assistance is available? How do newcomers learn about these services? Does the refugee community use these services? How do you know?
9. Describe any gaps in service provision that you have identified through your work. Could you speak about some of the barriers preventing access to services?
10. How do you assess whether your programs are effective? Do you know if they are well-

received in the immigrant/refugee community?

11. How could your organisation improve its provision of settlement services to African refugees in MetroVancouver?
12. What policy changes from governments would you recommend to improve the housing situation of African refugees?
13. Do you have any future projects or programs you would like me to know about?
14. How would you like to see this research used?
15. Is there something you'd like to talk about that I haven't asked you?

APPENDIX F FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Before we begin do you have any questions about me or about the research?
2. Could you tell us about yourself – Where are you from? How long have you lived in Metro Vancouver? Did you come as a sponsored refugee (GAR or PSR), or Refugee Claimant?
3. What is your current housing situation? Could you give some examples of the main challenges you have faced in accessing suitable, affordable and adequate housing in Metro Vancouver, and how you have addressed those challenges?
4. What kinds of assistance have you received in finding accommodation (friends/family, agencies, church groups, ISAs, other)? Could you give some examples? What did you find most/least helpful? Have you had any difficulties interacting with or accessing services?
5. What suggestions would you give to the organizations you already know to improve the services to you and your family? What changes in government policy would you recommend to help other newcomers in similar positions? How would you like to see this research used?
6. Is there something you'd like to talk about that you haven't mentioned?

APPENDIX G ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE



The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road,
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - FULL BOARD

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Daniel J. Hiebert	INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT: UBC/Arts/Geography	UBC BREB NUMBER: H07-02850
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:		
Institution	Site	
UBC	Vancouver (excludes UBC Hospital)	
Other locations where the research will be conducted: part 1) interviews will be conducted at locations convenient for the subjects - at their place of work or service, at their homes or in community centers, or at settlement service offices Part 2) same as part 1).		
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Priya Kissoon ; Jenny Francis		
SPONSORING AGENCIES: Human Resources and Social Development Canada		
PROJECT TITLE: Housing and Homelessness Among Selected Newcomer Groups to BC part 1) African Immigrants/Refugees' Experiences of Housing and Homelessness in Greater Vancouver part 2) Housing Survival and Risk of Homelessness amongst Migrants Without Status in Toronto and Vancouver.		
REB MEETING DATE: January 24, 2008	CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: January 24, 2009	
DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:		DATE APPROVED: February 15, 2008
Document Name	Version	Date
Protocol:		
part 2 research summary non-status migrants and homelessness	N/A	November 25, 2006
part 1 research summary African immigrants and refugees	N/A	November 25, 2007
Consent Forms:		
part 1 consent African migrants	N/A	January 31, 2008
part 2 non-status migrant consent form	2	January 30, 2008
part 2 key informant consent form	2	January 30, 2008
part 1 consent form settlement workers	N/A	January 31, 2008
Advertisements:		
part 2 non-status migrant flyer for participation	N/A	November 25, 2007
part 1 advertisement to recruit participants (migrants)	N/A	January 31, 2008
Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:		
part 2 non-status migrant interview schedule	N/A	November 25, 2007
part 2 key informant interview schedule	N/A	November 25, 2005
part 1 interview questions migrants and settlement workers	N/A	January 31, 2008
Letter of Initial Contact:		
part 2 key informant introductory letter	N/A	November 25, 2006
part 1 introductory letter for migrants	N/A	January 31, 2008
part 1 introductory letter settlement workers	N/A	January 31, 2008
part 2 non-status migrant introductory letter	N/A	November 25, 2007
Other Documents:		
part 1 interpreter confidentiality assurance form	N/A	January 31, 2008
The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.		
Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following: Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair Dr. Ken Craig, Chair Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair Dr. Daniel Salhani, Associate Chair Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair		