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Crossing Thresholds: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Examination of the Experiences of Refugee Women from the Former Yugoslavia

by

Margaretha M. Wilcke

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ABSTRACT

Women form the majority of refugees worldwide and play a pivotal role in maintaining family unity. Despite this fact, few studies focus on the specific experiences of refugee women and on their strengths and needs. Refugees from the former Yugoslavia have recently settled in Canada as a result of the Yugoslav civil war. This hermeneutic phenomenological study provides an in-depth account of the experiences of a group of Yugoslav refugee women in a western Canadian city. It explores their lives before the outbreak of war, during the war and as refugees, as well as their experiences since coming to Canada. Their accounts offer insights into their experiences, their struggles and accomplishments, as well as insights into Canadian society. The study concludes with a discussion of the implications for social work education and practice.
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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the memory of my father,

D. C. Marais van der Merwe,

who encouraged me to dare,

and to the women who participated in this project.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the lived experience of refugee women from the former Yugoslavia who have settled in a western Canadian city. The 1991-1995 civil war in the former Yugoslavia resulted in the displacement of large sections of the population and many escaped the fighting by seeking asylum in other countries, including Canada. It is estimated that there are between five- to six-thousand refugees from the former Yugoslavia in the city studied (Statistics Canada, 1998).

Refugees are forced to leave their homeland due to traumatic conditions (Kunz, 1981) and in the process of building new lives in the country of settlement, it is often the women who provide the strength that keeps the family together (Birman & Trickett 2001; Williams, 1990). Refugee women fill a multiplicity of roles, embedded in a web of family, social and cultural relations which existed in the country of origin and continue to exists, in a transformed way, in the new country. Despite their pivotal role and the fact that women form the majority of refugees worldwide (Levine, 2001; Martin, 1995), their strengths and needs have been largely ignored (Camus-Jacques, 1989; Harrell-Bond, 1986; Kreitzer, 1998).

Women from the former Yugoslavia are a recent group of refugees to come to Canada and in this study I have sought to expand our knowledge of this population by exploring their experiences. What is like to be a woman in this situation? What transformations does she go through? What does she keep of the old ways, what does she
discard, how does she decide? What are the challenges, the sorrows, the triumphs she faces? What outer and inner resources does she draw on for strength? How does she make sense of her experience? In this study, I attempt to shed light on these questions.

**Outline of the Study**

Chapter One provides an overview of the study as a whole and discusses its purpose and significance. In order to situate the study within a political context, this chapter also provides a brief description of the events leading up to the Yugoslav conflict, as well as an overview of current Canadian refugee policy.

Chapter Two provides a review of the relevant literature concerning the refugee experience. Theoretical models of the refugee journey and conceptualizations of the acculturation process are discussed, including the push-pull model of refugee flight; psychological, learning theory, acculturative stress and U-curve models of adaptation; and strategies of acculturation. This is followed by a review of the empirical literature relating to the experiences of immigrants and refugees and factors identified as influencing settlement, including pre-migration experiences, personal characteristics, socio-economic status, community of ethnicity, and nature of the host society.

Chapter Three describes the methodology of the study. The chapter includes a discussion of how the topic was selected and the personal issues that contributed to the selection. The philosophical assumptions underlying the research approach, hermeneutic phenomenology, are discussed, as well as the steps that were undertaken during the research. The chapter also includes a brief description of each of the participants.
Chapter Four describes the encounter with the topic and coalesces the findings around major themes of life in the former Yugoslavia: life before the war; the coming of war; life during the war; life as refugees in their own country; and the decision to leave.

Chapter Five continues the encounter with the topic and discusses aspects of refugee life in Canada: the journey to Canada; making a life in Canada; and issues of identity and resilience.

Chapter Six revisits the topic and discusses the overarching metaphor of crossing thresholds, a metaphor that enhances the understanding of the topic.

Chapter Seven reviews the effectiveness of hermeneutic phenomenology as a research method and the implications of the study’s findings for social work education and practice. The study concludes with suggestions for further research.

Significance of the Study

The 20th Century saw the mass displacement of populations on an unprecedented scale, many of them fleeing war or persecution. The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as a person who has left his or her country of origin due to a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion” (Marsella, Bornemann, Ekblad, & Orley, 1994, p. 3). It is estimated that there are over 23 million refugees worldwide, the majority of whom are women and children (Van Wormer, 1997). Despite their number, and the fact that refugee women have specific experiences and needs, their voices have too often been ignored.
The Canadian Immigration Act of 1978 recognized refugees as a distinct class, eligible for admission to the country (Young, 1991). Between 1980 and 1990, refugees comprised 18% of the immigrant population in Canada (Logan, 1989) and during the 1990's there was a 25% increase in the number of refugees admitted (IRB, 1994). Refugees therefore form a significant part of the Canadian population.

Social workers in their role as providers of services frequently encounter immigrants and refugees in their work. Despite the growing number of research studies which focus on this population, there are still few studies that focus on the specific experiences of women refugees. In this study, an in-depth account is offered of the experiences of ten refugee women from the former Yugoslavia, and their lives before the outbreak of war, during the war and as refugees are examined, as well as their experiences since coming to Canada. Their accounts offer insights into their experiences, as well as insights into Canadian society. It is hoped that this study will deepen social workers' knowledge of the experiences of this group of refugee women from the former Yugoslavia, as well as encourage social workers to reflect on their own culture and the assumptions that underlie it. This deepening of understanding should contribute to social workers examining others' and their own experiences with greater insight, as well as contributing to their skills as multicultural workers.

**The Yugoslav Conflict**

This section gives a brief synopsis of the history of the Balkans, the creation of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia; the breakup of the Federation and the events leading to the outbreak of the 1991-1995 civil war.
History of the Balkans

The peoples of the former Yugoslavia are descended from Asian peoples who migrated into Europe following the break up of the Roman Empire in the sixth century (Bennett, 1995/1998). Croats settled mainly in the west and came under the influence of Rome and the Roman Catholic church, while Serbs settled in the east, coming under the influence of Byzantium and Orthodox Christianity (Bennett). During the 15th century, the Balkans came under the domination of the Ottoman Turks and, although the Ottoman state exercised religious tolerance, many Christians converted to Islam (Sudetic, 1998/1999). In the 17th century, the Hapsburg Empire conquered northern areas of the Balkans (Bennett, 1995/1998).

The Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia

In 1918, after the end of World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman and Hapsburg Empires, the first Yugoslavia, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, was created under the Serbian king, Peter I. The name was changed to Yugoslavia in 1929. The kingdom was destroyed when German-led forces invaded during World War II, and the ruling king, Peter II, set up a government in exile in London (Encarta, 2001).

Germany gave large areas of land to neighboring Axis countries and set up puppet states in Croatia, which incorporated all of Bosnia, and in Serbia (Sudetic, 1998/1999). In the newly created Fascist Independent State of Croatia, the Croatian Fascists, the Ustasas, perpetrated atrocities and massacred tens of thousands of Serbs and other minorities (Out There News, 1998). Two groups, the Yugoslav Communists and the Monarchists, fought against the Germans until the end of the Second World War. The Monarchists, also
known as “Cetniks,” in their fight against the Fascists, in turn perpetrated massacres against Croats and Muslims (Bennett, 1995/1998). The Communist Partisans, composed mainly of Serbian peasants under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito, were supported by the Allied forces and emerged as the liberators of Yugoslavia from occupying forces (Bennett, 1995/1998; Sudetic, 19981999).

The Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia, a communist state under the dictatorship of Tito, was created in 1946 and consisted of Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Tito emphasized the unity of the differing regions under the new Yugoslav identity, and the atrocities committed by various groups during the war were officially ignored (Out there News, 1998). Tito died in 1980 and a deepening economic crisis gave rise to an increase in nationalism as new leaders vied for power.

**Breakup of the Federation and Outbreak of War**

Various leaders in the republics of the Federation, notably Franjo Tudjman in Croatia and Slobodan Milosovic in Serbia, sought to exert domination over the other republics. Milosovic, who became president of Serbia in 1989, developed a vision of a “Greater Serbia”, which included Serbia, large areas of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Vojvodina, Kososvo, and Macedonia. Elections in the various republics led to the breakup of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in 1990 and, in 1991, Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence. The Yugoslav People’s Army, under the control of Belgrade, invaded Slovenia, and although hostilities lasted only two weeks, this event marked the beginning of the civil war (Bennett, 1995/1998).
That same year, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia also declared their independence. In a secret meeting, Franjo Tudman of Croatia and Slobodan Milosovic of Serbia decided to carve up Bosnia-Herzegovina between their two countries (Bennett, 1995/1998; Glenny, 1992/1993/1994). The subsequent escalation of the civil war was characterized by atrocities and brutal policies of ethnic cleansing aimed at innocent civilians (Pajuc, 1998; Sudetic, 1998/1999).

In 1995, the Dayton Peace Agreement, brokered by the United States, signaled an end to hostilities in Bosnia Herzegovina (Office of the Spokesman, 1995), but Serbia retains a large area of Bosnia’s territory and NATO forces are still deployed in Bosnia to enforce the peace (Sudetic, 1998).

**Canadian Refugee Policy**

Canada is a signatory to the both 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, which define what a refugee is and set out states’ obligations (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2001). A refugee is defined as a person who has left his or her country of origin due to a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion” (Marsella et al., 1994, p. 3). The 1967 Protocol expanded the definition to include the principle of “nonrefoulment” (nonreturn) to country of origin due to fear of persecution (Marsella, et al., p. 3). People who meet the Convention definition of refugees therefore have a right to stay in a country where they seek refuge and resettlement. Canada also instituted the Women at Risk program in 1992, designed to help women who feared gender-related persecution (IRB, 1994).
The Canadian government selects a number of refugees each year for resettlement (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2001). Before being resettled, refugees are interviewed and their applications processed overseas by Canadian visa officers. From 1992 to 1995, as a result of the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, Citizenship and Immigration Canada created a special program for refugees from the former Yugoslavia. The number of qualifying points was reduced from 90 to 60 and the time to process applications was accelerated, sometimes taking only four months (Petrovic, 1998). As a result of these provisions, the number of refugees and immigrants from the former Yugoslavia who entered Canada each year increased significantly from 88,815 in 1991 to 121,975 by 1996 (Statistics Canada 1998).
CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Current estimates are that over one fifth of the annual influx of newcomers to Canada consists of refugees (Jabukowski, 1997). Refugees face daunting tasks. They are forced to flee their country of origin due to unrest and fears of violence, often leaving loved ones behind, and are then faced with the need to build a new life for themselves in surroundings in which culture, language, customs, geography and opportunities may be very different from those in their country of origin. The process of adapting to a new society takes place over a period of time and involves challenges on both a group and an individual level. This chapter will examine the theoretical and empirical literature relating to the experiences of refugees and immigrants and of the factors identified as influencing successful settlement.

A review of the literature was conducted by searching for articles listed in electronic databases: Social Work Abstracts Plus, PsycINFO, Sociological Abstracts; Medline and CARL UnCover (now Ingenta). In addition, references in identified articles were reviewed. To avoid publishing bias (Light & Pillemer, 1984), unpublished dissertations and conference papers were also examined. Search terms included: immigrant, refugee, acculturation, adaptation, migration, settlement, ethnic community, social support and host society. Only articles relating to immigrant and refugee experiences were selected. In discussing pre-migration experiences, studies conducted in
other countries were included, but literature relevant to settlement issues was limited to articles referring to immigrant experiences in North America.

Interest in the experiences of immigrants and refugees did not receive much attention in North America until the 1970's, when a large influx of Southeast Asian refugees stimulated interest in this population. Theoretical models were developed to account for the nature of refugee movements and for the process of acculturation. In the following section, terms used throughout the chapter are defined. Sections discussing the major theoretical models of refugee migration and theoretical conceptualizations of the acculturation process follow this. Finally, theories regarding the acculturative strategies employed by newcomers in the process of settlement are discussed.

**Definitions of Terms**

**Immigrant:** an individual who has been granted landed immigrant status and is a legal resident.

**Refugee:** an individual who has fled his/her country due to the fear of violence and has been granted asylum (Zolberg, Surhke & Aguyao, 1986). Once settled, refugees and immigrants face the same issues of adaptation, although refugees carry the added burden of involuntary migration and possible trauma as the result of their experiences during flight and transit.

**Newcomers:** an inclusive term referring to both immigrants and refugees.

**Culture:** “the customs, habits, skills, technology, arts, values, ideology, science, and religious and political behavior of a group of people in a specific time period” (Baker,
Culture has both an individual and a societal sense (D’Andrade, 1990) and unconsciously influences our perceptions of the world and our actions (Adler, 1975).

**Acculturation:** a “complex pattern of continuity and change” (Berry, 1997, p. 7) that results from contact between two independent cultural systems and is assumed to involve some change in both systems.

**Adaptation:** the final outcome of the process of acculturation, involving psychological, sociocultural and economic factors (Berry, 1997).

**Theoretical Conceptualizations of the Acculturation Process**

Moving from one culture to another involves an uprooting from what is familiar to surroundings which may be different in terms of language, dress, customs, values, foods, geography and climate, and in the process of acculturation and adaptation changes can occur in the psychology of the individual and in the culture of a group. Herberg (1993), using a Jungian model of the mythological hero’s journey, conceptualizes the process of change as reflecting a death-rebirth experience. The initial separation and change are viewed as causing such upheaval that they correspond to the death experience. This is followed by a period of readjustment that results in rebirth in which a new ethnocultural identity emerges, incorporating aspects of the culture of origin as well as reflecting the new circumstances under which individuals are living. Even if one does not subscribe to the death/rebirth framework, it is undeniable that settling in a new country involves elements of loss, adjustment and change that need to be resolved over time.

Various theoretical models have been proposed to account for the process of acculturation and adaptation: the “push-pull model: psychopathological perspectives,
including a “culture shock” model; learning theory models; and an “acculturative stress” framework. These theoretical approaches are discussed below, followed by an examination of the U-curve hypothesis to which several of the models subscribe. Finally, theories regarding the acculturative strategies employed by newcomers in the process of settlement will be discussed.

**Push-Pull Model**

Refugees are a distinct class of immigrants, since they have not freely chosen to leave their homes, but have been forced to move due to life-threatening circumstances. Kunz (1973) developed a kinetic model to account for the movement of refugees. Refugees are subject to “push” factors, such as armed conflict or persecution, factors which pressure them to flee. At the same time, they are also subject to “pull” factors, factors such as lenient immigration policies and economic opportunities, which facilitate settlement in a host country. Kunz further postulates that home-, displacement- and host-country factors, as well as individual refugee attitudes, will affect settlement (Kunz, 1981).

**Psychopathological Perspective**

The psychopathological perspective assumes that the process of migration can result in serious psychological problems, particularly among refugees who have undergone traumatic experiences. Refugees have been diagnosed with depression, anxiety, somatization disorder and post-traumatic stress (Abe, Zane & Chung, 1994; Berry, 1997; Blair, 2001; Freire, 1995; Hauff & Vaglum, 1994; Mollica, et al., 1992; Van der Kolk, 1994; Weine, Becker, McGlashan, Laub, Lazrove, Vojvoda & Hyman, 1995;
Westermeyer, 1986). These disorders are at times considered chronic (Kinzie, 1988).

Whether or not a Western psychiatric model is appropriate for diagnosing and treating survivors of war and political repression is a matter for debate (Summerfield, 1999). However, irrespective of one’s approach, it is undeniable that some migratory experiences result in extreme distress for some individuals.

**Culture shock model.** The culture shock models conceptualized by Oberg (1960) and Adler (1975) were some of the first to examine the process of acculturation. These models propose that individuals experience an initial psychological crisis that results in a period of regression to a lower level of functioning. This period is usually followed by a resolution of the conflict and successful adaptation to the new environment. If the resolution is unsuccessful, then the individual is viewed as at risk of developing a serious psychological disorder.

The culture shock models appear strongly influenced by psychoanalytic theory and have been criticized for implying that the process of adaptation involves some form of pathology (Berry, 1997), rather than a normal process of adjustment to change. They do, however, serve to highlight that some individuals find the transition difficult.

**Learning Theory Models**

Learning Theory models do not distinguish between cross-cultural adaptation and other experiences of adjustment to new or changed life circumstances, such as marriage, birth of a child, or death of a relative (Anderson, 1994). The models propose that adjustment involves recognizing an obstacle or new situation and trying out varied responses until a solution is achieved. The process of cultural adaptation is assumed to be
one involving personal change through the acquisition of new skills and behaviors (Barer-Stein, 1988). While acquiring new skills and behaviors can be important components of adaptation, these models appear simplistic in that they locate the area for change solely within the individual, and ignore environmental factors such as pre-migration trauma and current socioeconomic obstacles.

**Acculturative Stress Framework**

Berry (1997) conceives the process of acculturation as one in which most people experience only a moderate level of difficulty and draw on a variety of strategies to help them through the process. The strategies and elements involved are conceptualized in an Acculturative Stress framework, which serves as a guide to the complexity of the process (Berry, p. 15). The framework includes cultural or situational variables, such as society of origin, level of group acculturation, and characteristics of the society of settlement. Individual variables include demographic, motivational, cultural and personality variables, and environmental variables in the society of settlement (for example, length of time in the country, social support, etc.). These structural variables interact, on both a group and individual level, with the coping strategies that are employed. Berry is careful to stress that his model provides a framework indicating areas that need to be evaluated when working with newcomers, and that differing elements will take on significance depending on the situation and the individuals involved.

Berry’s conceptualization appears the most comprehensive of the models reviewed, and is compatible with social work’s person-in-environment and ecological frameworks. It takes into account individual, cultural and environmental factors, as well
as providing a non-pathologizing framework with which to approach the process of adaptation. In addition, in a comprehensive study of the needs of immigrants and refugees conducted by the Canadian Task Force (1988), variables identified as impacting the process of adaptation included pre-migration experiences, personal characteristics, current socioeconomic status, community of ethnicity, and the nature of the host society. These variables accord with Berry’s framework.

**U-Curve Hypothesis**

Various researchers have identified a performance curve that occurs over time during the process of adaptation, which has been conceptualized as the U-Curve Hypothesis (Adler, 1975; Beiser, 1991; Herberg, 1993; Lin, Masuda & Tazuma, 1982; Oberg, 1960; Tyhurst, 1982). The performance curve involves an initial “honeymoon” phase or period of overcompensation, followed by a period of undercompensation, and a final state of resolution. The exact factors involved are not clear, although the initial honeymoon or euphoric phase has been attributed to either a process of denial (Lin, Masuda & Tazuma, 1982), or a “social displacement syndrome” (Tyhurst, 1982, p. 106), in which psychological arrival occurs up to six months after physical arrival. It could, however, also be attributed to a reaction of excitement at finding oneself in new surroundings, and feelings of pleasure or accomplishment at having realized a dream of forging a new life, which may then become deflated as the realities of adjusting to potentially difficult surroundings accumulate.

The first twenty-four months after arrival have been identified as the most difficult time for most immigrants (Beiser, 1991; Ritsner & Ponizovsky, 1999; Williams
and Westermeyer, 1986) as it is during this period that immigrants have to work through issues of grief over what they have lost, which may result in feelings of sadness, anger and depression (Lin, Masuda & Tazuma, 1982; Quick, 1997), as well as the task of rebuilding their lives in the new surroundings (Stein, 1981). After the fourth or fifth year, immigrants tend to have reached a certain level of stability in terms of psycho-social adaptation and will either be experiencing feelings of success or resignation, depending on their achievements; and after ten years, it does not appear that any significant changes in adaptation occur (Stein, 1981; Williams & Westermeyer, 1986).

The U-Curve time frame has been identified by the majority of the studies cited above (except Ritzner & Ponizovsky, 1999) as involving an initial honeymoon phase which lasts up to six months; a time of struggle lasting about two years; and a time of resolution that occurs around the fourth or fifth year after arrival; and after the tenth year stabilization is complete. (Herberg (1993) conceives the performance curve somewhat differently, identifying four stages: (a) a preparatory stage, involving pre-arrival and initial settlement; (b) a period of over-compensation lasting up to the fourth year of settlement; (c) a period of under-compensation lasting up to the fifth or sixth years; and (d) a final stage of normalization which takes place in the seventh year.

One should keep in mind that these are schemas only, and that not all individuals will follow these timetables exactly, some taking longer to settle and others making the transition with ease.
Acculturation Strategies

With regards to cultural involvement, two major challenges facing newcomers have been identified: (a) cultural maintenance: deciding what to preserve of the original culture; and (b) contact and participation: how much to become involved in the new culture (Berry, 1997; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Berry identified four strategies that immigrants can explore and adopt, and other authors have used his categories (see for example Hannigan, 1990; Rumbaut, 1991; Ward & Kennedy, 1993) or proposed their own variations (Bourhis, Moise, Perrauld & Senecal, 1997; Kim & Hurh, 1993). The four categories that Berry identified are: (a) assimilation: replacing one’s own culture with the culture of the host society; (b) separation: maintaining one’s own culture while avoiding interaction with the host culture; when the separation is imposed then segregation occurs; (c) integration: maintaining one’s own cultural identity and at the same time becoming “an integral part of the larger societal framework” (Berry, 1997, p. 29); and (d) marginalization: being out of cultural and psychological contact with both one’s own culture and that of the larger society. Bourhis, et al. (1997) conceptualize the fourth strategy as one of anomie or individualism. Anomie is similar to marginalization in that it implies alienation, whereas individualism involves a separation from both one’s own and the host culture, seeing others as individuals and following one’s own inclinations. The authors assume that during the course of adaptation, immigrants may experiment with different strategies, although the implication is that they will adopt a preferred one. Kim & Hurh (1993), however, emphasize that the categories are not mutually exclusive and that individuals may develop a hybrid lifestyle, blending ethnic
and host-country influences. In addition, individuals may choose to adopt different strategies in different situations, not subscribing to any particular one.

The categories discussed above refer to strategies adopted by newcomers, but it is important to place them in the social context in which they occur, as this will influence which strategy will be adopted under which circumstances. Initially, it was thought that newcomers to the United States, with its “melting pot” approach, would opt for assimilation (Williams & Westermeyer, 1986); whereas newcomers to Canada, with its multicultural approach, would be more likely to opt for integration (Berry, 1997). However, the size of the community of ethnicity is an important element, as well as the manner in which the surrounding culture may change in response to the presence of newcomers. The definition of acculturation implies that both the new culture and the host culture will change, although theorists differ as to the amount and nature of the change. Sayegh & Lasry (1993), for example, assume that both cultures will experience an equal amount of change, while Berry (1997) argues that the non-dominant, less powerful group tends to change more than the dominant group.

**Interactive Acculturation Model.** Bourhis et al. (1997) developed an Interactive Acculturative Model to examine the interactive nature of the relationship between newcomers and the host culture. The model assumes that the attitudes of the host culture towards newcomers will influence the acculturation strategies newcomers adopt. Research conducted by Montreuil & Bourhis (2001) confirm the model’s hypothesis.
Overall, the literature reviewed does not adequately address the complexity of the relationship between newcomers and host culture and the impact they have on each other. Additional research needs to be conducted in this area.

This section has first examined conceptualizations of the acculturation process, including the psychopathological, learning, stress, and U-curve models; and second, discussed theories on cultural involvement. The following section will review the empirical literature on the variables that have been identified as influencing immigrant adaptation and acculturation.

**Factors Influencing Adaptation and Acculturation**

Variables identified as affecting the process of adaptation and acculturation include pre-migration experiences, personal characteristics, current socioeconomic status, community of ethnicity, and the nature of the host society. Studies concerning each of these factors will be examined below.

**Pre-Migration Experiences**

The World Health Organization has defined health as not merely the absence of disease, but a state involving physical, mental and social well-being (Brody, 1994). Pre-migration experiences of trauma, multiple losses and unresolved grief can all impact on an individual’s health and ability to function effectively.

**Pre-migration trauma.** Theories of migration assume that the greater the duress under which individuals exit their country of origin, the greater their distress in the country of settlement (Foster, 2001; Kunz, 1973; Schmitz, 2001; Rumbaut, 1991; Williams & Berry, 1991). Studies have documented the types of pre-migration
experiences that refugees can be subject to: suffering political repression (Nguyn, 1987); witnessing or been subjected to violent and traumatic events, including witnessing the death of loved ones and being separated from family members (Agger, 1994; Beiser, 1991; Herbst, 1992; Palinkas, 1995); and spending time in refugee camps (Bernier, 1992; Chan & Loveridge, 1987; Chung & Kagawa-Singer, 1993; Drachman & Halberstadt, 1992). Feelings of survival guilt and grief have been identified (Drachman & Habelstadt, 1992; Quick, 1996), which can be aggravated if the media contains news of continued conflict (Lipson, 1993).

Much of the literature assumes that refugees who have been forced to flee their countries are at special risk of experiencing physical and mental health problems as a result of the violence, loss and deprivation they have endured. While not wishing to minimize the real trauma that many suffer, not enough attention is given in the literature to those refugees who overcome these obstacles and lead healthy, productive lives.

**Loss and grief.** Although immigrants do not experience the same traumatic events prior to departure as do refugees, they all face similar issues of loss: of their country of origin, of family members left behind, and of socioeconomic status (Brody, 1994; Westermeyer, Vang & Neider, 1983a). Several studies identified the loss of family members and the subsequent grief as more crucial variables in healthy functioning than pre-migration trauma (Aroian, 1990; Drachman & Halberstandt, 1992; Nicholson & Walters, 1997; Nguyen, 1987; Westermeyer, Vang & Neider, 1983a). Family reunification therefore appears to be of prime importance to the well-being of newcomers. Another factor that appears to facilitate the process of acculturation was being able to
return to the country of origin for a visit, as this seems to alleviate feelings of cultural loss and dislocation (Aroian, 1990; Drachman & Halberstadt, 1992; Herberg, 1993). Since return visits are not possible for all newcomers, it would be interesting to research what other mechanisms can facilitate overcoming the sense of loss and dislocation.

**Personal Characteristics**

Personal characteristics which have been found to influence the process of acculturation include age, education, language ability, attitudes and expectations, current employment status, and gender.

**Age.** The research reviewed indicates that age is an important variable, with adolescents and the elderly being identified as experiencing the most difficulty in acculturation (Adler, 1975; Canadian Task Force, 1988; Chan & Lam, 1983; Choldin, 1973; Chung & Kagawa-Singer, 1993; Comley, 1998; Lin, Masuda & Tazuma, 1982; Oberg, 1960; Rumbaut, 1991; Tran, 1994; Tyhurst, 1982; Westermeyer, Vang & Neider, 1983b). Young children appear to adapt easily, but can be adversely affected by negative family attitudes and adaptation problems (Short & Johnston, 1997).

**Level of education.** Researchers disagree on the impact of an individual’s level of education. Neuwirth (1991) and Nguyen (1987) identified higher levels of education as facilitating adaptation, but conversely, higher levels of education were found to result in lower self-esteem and to impede adaptation (Indra, 1990; Rumbaut, 1991). This can be attributed to a discrepancy between level of education and employment opportunities, resulting in unfulfilled ambitions for those with more education (Indra, 1990; Neuwirth, 1991; Rumbaut, 1991; Zhou, 2000).
**Language ability.** The ability to communicate in the language of the host country has been identified as one of the most important variables that facilitate the process of adaptation (Beiser, 1991; Canadian Task Force, 1988; Fox, Cowell, & Montgomery, 1994; George & Tsang, 2000; Hannigan, 1990; Oberg, 1960; Westermeyer, Vang & Neider, 1983b).

**Individual attitudes and expectations.** Personal attributes identified as helping in the acculturation process include extroversion, flexibility, high self-esteem and optimism (Hannigan, 1990; Major, Richards & Cooper, 1998). Individual expectations also can contribute to levels of satisfaction, with those who expected to struggle and work hard reporting more satisfaction than those who did not anticipate difficulties (Nguyen & Henkin, 1982; Westermeyer, Van & Neider, 1983b).

**Employment.** Empirical studies on employment indicate mixed results. Low income and unemployment were found to result in increased distress, while being employed increased satisfaction levels (Choldin, 1973; Phan, 1994; Tran, 1994; Tress, 1998) and decreased levels of depression and anxiety (Bernier, 1992; Chung & Kagawa-Singer, 1993). In contrast, Westermeyer, Vang & Neider (1983b), administered two culturally tested self-rating scales to 90 Hmong refugees and found an increase in depression, obsessive-compulsive and anxiety disorders among 49 employed people compared to the 41 unemployed people in their sample. They attribute these findings to a loss in vocational and socio-economic status, but do not explain why the unemployed sample should suffer less distress. Other studies have also identified loss of
socioeconomic status as contributing to emotional distress (Aroian, 1990; Drachman & Halberstandt, 1992; Nguyen, 1987).

**Gender.** Gender has been identified as an important variable in the immigration process (Arcia, Skinner, Bailey & Correa, 2001; Freire, 1995), with women being at social and economic disadvantage but often exhibiting greater strength and resiliency. Women can suffer from gender discrimination during the various phases of the immigration process. They may be excluded from the family decision-making process, including the decision to emigrate (Camus-Jacques, 1989). The structure of the refugee application process is such that 80% of asylum applications are by men, thus perpetuating the dependency of women “legally, economically and psychologically” (Lee, 1989, p. 53). On arrival, women tend to have fewer marketable skills and lower education levels than men (Camus-Jacques, 1989), thus marginalizing them into part-time or piece-meal jobs (Lee, 1989). Many settlement services such as language and skills’ training are reserved for “heads of household,” usually identified as men, so that, as dependents, many women are forced to pay for their own skills-training programs (Ng, 1994), and the programs tend to be male-focused and do not take into account female heads of household (Camus-Jacques, 1989).

Immigrant women can suffer from isolation if they have lost their traditional support systems, or if they are limited in their ability to participate in the new society due to confinement as a result of traditional gender roles, and lack of language ability (Camus-Jacques, 1989; Lee, 1989). Immigrant women continue to play a pivotal role in the family (Lee, 1989) often caring for both children and the elderly (Friedman, 1992), as
well as helping the family to adapt successfully (Martin, 1995). Those who work outside
the home may experience greater role pressures than men as they try to balance work
responsibilities with traditional roles of wife and mother (Cagan & Julia, 1998; Camus-
interviews, observations and questionnaires with a non-clinical sample of 141
Vietnamese refugees, 32 percent of whom were women. Phase One was conducted soon
after arrival, and Phase Two one year later. Women who were single heads of household
and those of reproductive age were found to be most at risk of exhibiting physical and
mental health problems. The authors attribute this to the multiple responsibilities facing
women with young children.

During flight, refugee women are vulnerable to persecution and violence,
including rape, (Agger, 1994; Herbst, 1992; Martin, 1995; Moussa, 1992; Quick, 1996;
Williams, 1990), and both immigrant and refugee women are also vulnerable to domestic
violence (Mahmud, 1996). The increase in domestic violence after settlement has been
attributed to the loss of traditional support structures, the stresses caused by gender role
reversals as women find employment outside the home (Foster, 2001; Pettys & Balgopal,
1998), and by men’s frustrations at their own status change both within and outside the
home (Nguyen, 1987). Domestic violence can become a means for men to reestablish
control and gain power (Friedman, 1992).

The acculturation process can challenge traditional gender roles, as well as the
individual’s sense of identity. Immigrant men often experience greater difficulty than
women in resolving role and identity conflicts (Eastmond, 1993; Tang & Dion, 1999), as
they may feel greater pressure to succeed in their employment roles. Indra (1990), in a study of immigrants in the Lethbridge community, found that women expressed higher levels of self-esteem than men, and Bylund (1982) reports that women expressed greater satisfaction in their contacts with family and friends than men, although Choi (1997) found no gender differences in the buffering effects of social support. Freire (1995) speculates that women’s pivotal role in the family may provide them with a continuity of meaningful tasks which help buffer the stress of acculturation. Buijs (1993), however, comments that worldwide, women suffer from lower self-esteem than men due to their subordinate roles.

This section has discussed the empirical literature concerning personal characteristics that impact the process of acculturation. Although the literature discusses the difficulties that immigrants face, there is a dearth of studies of women and men who have benefited from the experience of immigration.

**Effects of Acculturation on the Family**

This section will examine the effects of acculturation on immigrant and refugee families.

**Pre-migration.** During pre-migration experiences, the refugee family unit may disintegrate, with loss of both adults and children though separation or death (Williams, 1990), which poses tasks on the remaining family members after settlement. As previously mentioned, family reunification and resolving issues of grief are important components of the settlement process. Children, who have been catapulted into an adult world of violence and upheaval and have spent time in refugee camps, have to adjust to a
more normal life (Williams, 1990). Mothers who have lost children may form an overly intense bond with the remaining children (Bylund, 1982), which can make the children’s task of adjusting to a new culture more difficult. Lang (1995), in his work with survivors of the Nazi Holocaust, found evidence in his clinical work that trauma can be transmitted over the generations, a finding supported by Levine (2001). But in a study conducted with a non-clinical sample of Holocaust survivors, compared with a control group who had not experienced the Holocaust, Rose & Graske (1987) found no evidence of transgenerational trauma. The findings, therefore, are inconclusive and further research is needed.

Although immigrant families do not carry the same legacy of trauma as refugee families, they may have lost the support of their extended family, and all newcomers are faced with acculturation stresses which can impact on the culture and the development processes of the family (Chambon, 1989).

**Role conflicts.** Family problems tend to increase during the second year of settlement (Stein, 1981), once the initial tasks of acculturation have been completed. Gender conflicts may arise as a result of changes in roles and status. Children’s roles within the family may also change. Children tend to learn new languages and adapt more quickly than adults, and adult family members may make use of the children’s superior language ability to translate for them (Bylund, 1982). Children’s roles within the family may thus change as they gain more power (Chan, 1987).

Parents may be faced with a variety of parenting dilemmas as a result of conflicts between their own cultural values and beliefs and those of the host society (Foster, 2001; Nann, 1982). Traditional discipline and child rearing techniques may not be acceptable in
the new society, and families have to learn to adapt to a new education system that may be perceived as lax and intrusive (Nann, 1982).

Issues of respect versus assertiveness can cause conflict. In more traditional cultures, respect for elders, heads of household and for parents is the norm, whereas North American culture tends to value autonomy and assertiveness. Elderly grandparents, who traditionally earned respect as wise elders and expected to live with their families, may find themselves isolated and marginalized (Herberg, 1993).

**Multigenerational conflicts.** Multigenerational conflicts and communication problems can arise, with adolescents being particularly vulnerable to developing problems (Laffrey, Meleis, Lipson, Solomon & Omidian, 1989; Nann, 1982; Pettys & Balgopal, 1998). Immigrant youth are faced not only with the traditional developmental tasks of adolescence (Erikson, 1959), but also with the additional task of reconciling their culture of origin with the new culture, and constructing a bicultural identity (Pettys & Balgopal, 1998). Visible minority youth also may have to contend with the effects of prejudice and racism which can be present among their peers (Fox, Cowell & Montgomery, 1994). Despite these pressures, many immigrants have been able to maintain healthy and cohesive families and to overcome the difficulties of raising adolescents (Criddle, 1992; Pettys & Balgopal, 1998).

This section has reviewed the literature on factors that may impact on immigrant families as they face the task of acculturation. The following section will examine the role of social support and of the ethnic community in facilitating the settlement of newcomers.
**Social Support and the Ethnic Community**

A variety of studies have examined the role of ethnic communities in helping individuals and families in the process of adaptation. (Bedard, Gertz & Kostelac, 1998; Beiser, 1991; Brody, 1994; Canadian Task Force, 1988; Choi, 1997; Choi & Wodarski, 1996; Fuchs, 1991; Herberg, 1993; Kim, 1999; Nann & To, 1982; Nguyen & Organista, 1997; Nicholson & Kay, 1999; Padilla, 1997). The most important function that an ethnic community seems to provide is protection against the larger society by creating a sense of belonging and by acting as a support system, which can mitigate the effects of acculturative stress. Cultural continuity and the maintaining of customs and traditions can be a source of support and comfort for individuals and families as they learn to adapt to a new environment. Other functions of the ethnic community include helping to sustain a sense of attachment to the country of origin through formal institutions for education, religious practice, and artistic and cultural activities; empowering the community vis-à-vis the greater society through social, political and economic interest groups; and creating specialized services for newcomers which provide resources and information. The size of the community and its social cohesiveness has been identified as an important factor in whether or not the community has an effective impact (Canadian Task Force, 1988).

This section has examined the role that the ethnic community can play in providing support for immigrants. The following section will examine the effects of the host society on the successful adaptation of newcomers.
Effects of the Host Society on Adaptation

Although the impact of the host society, from national policy to neighborhood attitudes, on the process of immigrant adaptation is recognized to be an important factor, reviews of the literature note little research on the topic (Canadian Task Force, 1988; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Bourhis et al. (1997) characterize the relationship between newcomers and host as taking three possible forms: consensual, problematic and conflictual. Horenczyk (1997) reminds us that the society to which immigrants adapt is not monolithic and that host attitudes may be inconsistent and contradictory, with differences between theory and practice.

In recognition of the growing diversity of its population, Canada instituted the Multiculturalism Act in 1988, whose aim is to preserve the language and culture of various groups, reduce discrimination and promote culturally-sensitive policies and procedures (Leman, 1995). Despite a stated policy of acceptance, immigrants in Canada face numerous barriers to successful economic and social integration. Although immigrants may be accepted on the basis of their expertise, they frequently have difficulty having their skills, education and work experience recognized (Neuwirth, 1991). Immigrants frequently find themselves marginalized into menial and temporary jobs, with resulting downward mobility (Aroian, 1990; Chan & Lam, 1983; Drachman & Halberstad, 1992; Herbst, 1992; Lin, Masuda & Tazuma, 1982; Westermeyer, Vang & Neider, 1983a). Neuwirth (1987) in a survey of 656 Southeast-Asian refugees in Ontario, found that only 7% of the sample had found white-collar jobs, irrespective of level of education or qualifications, the majority being clustered in low-paying, menial
occupations, with one-third of these receiving less than the minimum wage. Although language ability has been identified as a crucial variable in successful adaptation, language training programs have been criticized for being inadequate (Aroian, 1990; Chung & Kagawa-Singer, 1993; Neuwirth, 1991) and settlement programs for not recognizing the length of time needed to make a successful transition (Nann, 1982).

Another factor found to impede adaptation is the racial prejudice which is present among some Canadians (Fox, Cowell & Montgomery, 1994; Matas & Simon, 1989), with studies identifying visible minorities as being subject to discrimination in terms of housing and employment (Herberg, 1993; Neuwirth, 1991). The experience of being different, of not belonging and being unwanted is painful and can lead to an increase in stress levels (Beiser, 1991) and a withdrawal from mainstream society (Birman & Trickett, 2001).

**Concluding Thoughts**

The literature review was initially conducted prior to interviewing the participants and then was revisited before the completion of the study in order to incorporate new research. Research on immigrants and refugees received little attention from the discipline of social work until the middle of the past decade. Since then, a variety of studies have been reported in social work journals, reflecting social work’s commitment to diversity and multicultural issues.

As a result of conducting this literature review, I concur with those authors who have criticized the literature on immigrants and refugees for being problem-focused (Aroian, 1990; Muecke, 1992; Nguyen, 1987; Weine & Vojvoda, 1997). Future research
should focus on resiliency and creative ways in which newcomers have overcome obstacles to adaptation. Other areas for research include examining strategies for overcoming loss and cultural dislocation if unable to return home; the differing experiences of men and women in the process of immigration; the effect of immigration on women’s self-esteem; the impact of the host society on immigrants; and strategies employed by the host society to adapt to demographic change as a result of immigration. Since research on cross-generational transmission of trauma was inconclusive, further research also needs to be conducted on this topic.
CHAPTER THREE

Approaching the Topic

Introduction

Empirical studies on refugee populations have been criticized for focusing on pathology, for regarding refugees as surplus people (Muecke, 1992), and for ignoring refugee women and their strengths (Camus-Jacques, 1989). The aim of this study is to explore what it means to be a woman refugee through seeking to understand the experiences of a specific group of refugee women, that is, women who came to Canada as a result of the war in the former Yugoslavia. Through the process of shedding light on an aspect of human experience and by “encouraging reflection on what is learned” (Bergum, 1997, p. iii), this study seeks to help us become more understanding and effective helpers, and thus contribute to our mission as social workers. Camus-Jacques (1989) notes that encouraging refugee women to speak their experiences “helps to give a human content to cold reports, it helps to restore the dignity of human beings too easily classified as powerless victims” (p. 155). Experiences encompass both outer events as well as inner events, such as thoughts and feelings, and in order to discover these experiences it is necessary to talk to women and explore what they have to say.

Since little research has been done on the experiences of women who are refugees, I did not want to approach the exploration with pre-planned questions regarding what I thought would be relevant or important. Therefore this study is not based on testable hypotheses, nor does it seek to impose categories or develop theoretical constructs based on the data collected. Rather, I wanted to approach the research as a
voyage of discovery, where together the women and I would enter into a conversation and seek to uncover the meaning of the experience, in order to reach a deep, clear and respectful understanding of what it means to be a woman who is a refugee.

In doing research, the question determines the type of approach used (Creswell, 1998). The research question informing this study is: “what is the meaning of the experience of being a woman refugee from the former Yugoslavia?” The question focuses on experiences and their meaning, and demands an approach that is exploratory and interpretive. Qualitative research is concerned with “attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2), and hermeneutic phenomenology, a qualitative research approach, is concerned specifically with lived experience and the meanings imbedded in it, and is therefore the approach chosen.

**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is usually used to explore problems about which little is known (Morse & Field, 1996), and researchers seek to understand the complex world of lived experience by studying things in their natural settings, and by attempting to make sense of, or interpret the phenomena from the point of view of the people involved and the meanings they bring to the phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Jansen & Davis, 1998; Schwandt, 1994). Qualitative research is multimethod in focus (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and encompasses a variety of practices, each approach having a different emphasis. However, all approaches share a common orientation which includes: a natural setting; the researcher as sensitive and empathic instrument; a flexible design responsive to
emergent issues; inductive analysis; a holistic perspective sensitive to context; a focus on meaning; and expressive and descriptive use of language (Creswell, 1998; Denzin, 1994; Neuman, 1997; Patton, 1990; Schwandt, 1994). In seeking to understand the phenomenon of being a woman refugee and to interpret the meaning of the experience, one qualitative research approach, hermeneutic phenomenology, offers the most appropriate approach.

**Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

**Historical Background**

**Phenomenology.** The term phenomenology derives from the Greek *phainomenon*, whose root words are *phainein*: appear; and *logia*: science or study; therefore the study of appearances (Hoad, 1986/1996). Developed as a philosophy by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), phenomenology is a “reasoned inquiry into the world of appearances, that is, anything of which one is conscious” (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 3). To study the experience of phenomena as they appear in consciousness and in so doing apprehend their authentic reality, phenomenologists turn their attention to the life-world of the individual, the world of lived experience, that is, of human experience in its immediacy as it appears in consciousness (Munhall, 1994), without taking into account causes or origins (Merleau-Ponty, 1996). To facilitate the apprehension of the core structure of an experience, i.e. experience free of extraneous details, the researcher engages in the process of phenomenological reduction, in which all beliefs, assumptions and pre-conceived notions regarding the phenomena to be studied are identified, made explicit, and then set aside or “bracketed” (Beck, 1994). The researcher takes nothing for
granted, is aware of preconceptions and sets them aside, and is able to adopt an attitude of "wonder" in the face of the world" (Fink, quoted by Merleau-Ponty, 1996, p. xiii).

Phenomenologists use subjects' descriptions of the experience as raw data. The data are reflected upon in order to discover the nature of the phenomena, intuit their essence or underlying structure, and describe them (Parse, Coyne & Smith, 1985; Spiegelberg, 1982).

**Heidegger's influence.** Heidegger (1889-1976), Hussrl's student, introduced hermeneutics into the study of phenomena, since he believed that pure description was limited in its ability to reveal meaning (Osborne, 1994). The word "hermeneutics" has its origins in the Greek *hermeneuein*: to interpret (Hoad, 1986/1996), and derives from the Greek god Hermes, the messenger of the gods, who made the unknowable knowable through the invention of language and writing (Thompson, 1990). Originally, the term "hermeneutics" referred to the study and interpretation of biblical texts, but as a result of the contributions of various philosophers, including Heidegger and Gadamer (b. 1900), the term is now defined as "the theory and practice of interpretation and understanding (Verstehen) in different kinds of human contexts" (Odman, 1988, p. 63; italics in the original).

Phenomenology focuses on knowledge of the world, the intuiting of essences and description of phenomena. Heidegger rejected the notion of the dichotomy of subject and object implicit in Hussrl's philosophy, where the researcher as subject clears her mind of preconceptions in order to study the objects of consciousness. He also rejected the notion of essences, and the emphasis on knowing. He argued that we live our life by
experiencing it, not by knowing it (Thompson, 1990), since “being discloses itself in lived experience” (Palmer, 1969), and that rather than coalescing into essences, human existence is each one’s own, although one can still give a diagnosis of human existence in general (Spiegelberg, 1982). Heidegger (1962) conceived of existence, that is Dasein or being-in-the-world, as taking place in a world that is already given and which we take for granted. Many of the elements that shape our being-in-the-world are hidden and require interpretation for existence to be understood; therefore Heidegger’s concern was to uncover these hidden phenomena of our lives as well as their meanings (Spiegelberg, 1982). Rather than the phenomenal reduction and “bracketing,” Heidegger emphasized the importance of our preconceptions. He posited that we experience and understand the world by means of projection, for “whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a pre-suppositionless apprehending of something presented us” (p. 191). Our interpretation consist of structures of pre-understanding, that is, a “framework of already interpreted relations” (Odman, 1988, p. 66), which anticipates the future and encompasses the person’s past and current situation. Understanding and experience are thus inextricably linked.

Hermeneutic phenomenology therefore differs from descriptive phenomenology in significant ways. Descriptive phenomenology emphasizes knowledge of the world and examines experience with the goal of revealing consciousness. In order to intuit the essence of phenomena, the researcher makes assumptions explicit and then brackets them, so as to study the phenomena objectively. Findings are offered through explicit
Rather than bracketing our assumptions, Heidegger maintains that our preconceptions are an integral part of understanding. Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to go beyond description in order to discover meanings that are not immediately apparent (Merleau-Ponty, 1996). Hermeneutic phenomenology therefore appropriates elements of descriptive phenomenology, modifies them and incorporates them with the hermeneutic process of understanding.

**Gadamer and the Metaphors of Understanding**

Building on the work of Husserl and Heidegger, as well as other phenomenologists, Gadamer (1997) stressed the importance of language in shaping both our experience and our understanding, and wrote extensively on the process of understanding. He discusses the hermeneutic experience of understanding as being characterized by three metaphors: the hermeneutic circle, the fusion of horizons, and the act of dialogue (Thompson, 1990).

**The hermeneutic circle.** The hermeneutic circle of understanding refers to a circular movement, an ever expanding circle of understanding and interpretation (Gadamer, 1997). We approach a topic with some pre-conceptions, or projection, and this projection is then examined and revised in the face of what “the things themselves” reveal to us (p. 267), and we return to a further exploration in the light of this new understanding. In addition, the topic is understood by viewing “the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole” (p. 291). This dynamic movement of understanding from projection to topic to new projection, and from whole to part to whole, constitutes the hermeneutic circle of understanding and interpretation.
The fusion of horizons. The "fusion of horizons," refers to another facet of the process of understanding (Gadamer, 1997). Every person’s horizon consists of “a range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point” (p.302), and can be understood to refer to our frame of reference, based on our experiences and current situation, with which we orient ourselves in the world. The limits of anyone’s particular horizon are not fixed but expand as our range of vision expands, as we deepen our understanding. The term “fusion of horizons” refers to the encounter between the researcher and the topic of inquiry, in which two standpoints come together, and “we genuinely let the standpoint of another speak to us, and in such a way that we are willing to be influenced by the perspective of another” (Thompson, 1990, p. 246).

The act of dialogue. Gadamer (1997) further proposes that the fusion of horizons occurs through the act of dialogue, in which we engage in a genuine conversation based on the Socratic-Platonic art of dialectic, “i.e. the art of questioning and of seeking truth” (p. 367). The questioner maintains a stance of openness to the topic, and seeks to formulate questions in such a way that the topic is “broken open” and something is allowed to emerge, that is “the truth that the topic reveals” (p. 363). The aim is not to understand individual people, but to understand that about which they speak.

The goal of hermeneutic phenomenology, is to “reveal a totality of meaning in all its relations” (Gadamer, 1997, p. 471) through a process of interpretation which involves making manifest that which is hidden by going “beyond what is directly given” (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 712), reading between the lines (Odman, 1988) and paying
attention to what has been omitted, to the silences and the assumptions, to that which has been so taken for granted that it has not been questioned. Hermeneutic phenomenology thus seeks a deeper understanding of human experience by rediscovering it and opening it up (Bergum 1997).

Orienting to the Phenomena

The first step in hermeneutic phenomenological research is to orient oneself to the phenomena (Van Manen, 1990/1994), which includes exploring the historical and cultural horizons of both the participants and the researcher in order to make these explicit.

Participants' Cultural and Historical Horizons

Since we are all shaped by our history and our culture, the first step in the research process was to gain a deeper understanding of the culture and history of the former Yugoslavia. This included reading historical, political and biographical accounts (Bennett, 1995/98; Boyce, 1997; Drakulic, 1993; Drakulic 1996/1999; Glenny, 1992/1994; Judah, 1997; Kumar, 1997; Lalic, 1981; Selimovic. 1983; Simic, 1992; Sudetic, 1998/1999; Ugresic, 1995), viewing films (Granada Television, 1993) and collecting anecdotes on refugees from the former Yugoslavia. In this way, I attempted to formulate some understanding of the historical and cultural factors that had shaped participants lives.

The Horizon of My Understanding

Hermeneutic phenomenology asserts that all research is value-laden, since researchers bring their biases, prejudices and assumptions to the research, and these color the findings (Heineman, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Taylor, 1987). Gadamer (1997)
refers to the elements of prejudice and fore-meanings as the means by which we orient ourselves to a topic and states: “The important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings” (p. 269). Critical self-reflection and an honest statement of research orientation thus form part of the research approach so that the manner in which theories and assumptions color the findings can be examined.

When I try to analyze my personal orientation and what brought me to this topic in this way, what influences my stance, certain personal experiences and interests come to the forefront.

**Something in the garden is rotten.** I lived in South Africa during the 1960’s, a period of strong political repression. One Sunday, my family was gathered for afternoon tea in the garden under the shade of a tree. I recall sipping tea and reading in the newspaper that another African prisoner had “slipped on a bar of soap in the shower and died”, meaning he had been tortured to death. I felt a sense of horror in knowing that beneath a peaceful exterior, daily atrocities were being committed, and by my own people.

**A traitor to one’s race.** I came home from school one day to find my mother distraught, because my brother’s teacher had said that Afrikaners who married English people were traitors to their race. Since my father was an Afrikaner and my mother an English woman, what did that say about them, and about my brother and myself?

**Putting on my American skin.** Having decided to leave South Africa, I gained entry to the United States. I am white, speak English and was unprepared for culture
shock, which was great, since American ways of acting and communicating were very different from what I had known. Each day, before I went out, I would consciously prepare myself to meet the world, a process I thought of as “putting on my American skin,” which I would then take off when I got home. One day I realized the skin was sticking to me, that, unwittingly and irrevocably, I was being changed.

Sojourners. I come from generations of adventurers who fanned out from England and Europe and traveled the globe. I have lived in nine countries on three continents, and have always been interest in different peoples, and different cultures. But voluntary travel, even voluntary exile, is very different from the forced displacement that refugees undergo.

“Where one cries, ‘Mother, I am lost’, ” (Zulu sentence-word meaning “far away.” Buber, 1970, p. 69). On a cold, gray day in New England, I saw a Southeast Asian women crouched on a hill under a windy sky, her long skirt wrapped around her legs. She was foreign, out of place in a small town, recalling a bird blown off course by a terrible storm. A multiplicity of themes coalesced around that image: the tragedy of refugee’s disrupted lives and their need to create new lives in alien surroundings, the loneliness they face, the need to come to terms with past trauma, lost hopes, shattered dreams, as well as the need for strength, resilience and the courage to take up new opportunities.

The Tragedy of Yugoslavia

As the civil war erupted in the former Yugoslavia, the news media reported on the brutality and destructiveness of the conflict. Other countries were impotent or, rather,
lacked the desire to intervene in any meaningful way. I wondered about the women whose lives were being disrupted by the war, and what it was like for those who managed to leave and resettle elsewhere. What did they have to tell us, what did their lives illuminate about an extreme facet of human experience?

As I learnt more about the situation that developed as a result of the war in Yugoslavia, I drew on my own experiences, mentioned above, as a means of understanding the experiences of Yugoslav women. As I learnt of the brutality and discrimination between national groups in Yugoslavia, I saw parallels with my own experience of having to face the brutality of which people of my own nationality were capable, as well as discrimination as the result of a mixed marriage. Although my experiences do not compare to those of people who have been subjected to the horrors of war, they did give me a means with which to begin to orient myself to the topic. My experience adjusting to a new country gave me some understanding of the process of cultural adjustment, and my international background stimulated an interest in international politics and an appreciation for different cultures. These interests were further developed in my years as a clinical social worker, where I had the opportunity to work with refugees. As a woman, I am interested in the experiences of other women, and when war erupted in the former Yugoslavia, I wanted to know more about the women who were experiencing war and dislocation. I am also white and middle-class, so that my class, gender and life experiences all inform the exploration of the topic in ways which may be more apparent to the reader than to myself.
Research Design

Selection of Participants

Research participants consisted of ten women refugees from the former Yugoslavia. Two women that I met with were not included in the study as they had come to Canada as immigrants rather than as refugees, implying a measure of choice not felt by participants who came as refugees. Participants were contacted through both formal and informal channels, that is, agencies and individuals. Each woman I met with was asked if she knew of anyone who would be willing to participate in the research study, and several participants identified other possible respondents. Selection criteria stipulated that respondents had to be female, 18 years of age or older, had been residents of the former Yugoslavia, and had relocated to a western Canadian city as a direct result of the 1991-1995 civil war. Since the first six months in a new country are the period of greatest upheaval (Williams & Westermeyer, 1986), only women who had been in the city for longer than six months were selected.

Only women who have a sufficient command of English to express themselves articulately were interviewed as no interpreter was used. The process of the inquiry involves entering into a dialogue with each respondent and to be as attentive as possible to her experience. The use of an interpreter would impede the I-Thou (Buber, 1970) quality of the dialogue, since the conversation would have to take place through a third party. The information obtained through a translator is second hand, filtered through their interpretation, and may not accurately reflect the interviewee’s experience, since the
interpreter may "want to be helpful by summarizing and explaining responses" (Patton, 1990, p. 338).

**Informed Consent**

Respondents were initially contacted over the phone, and a brief explanation of the research was given. Once a respondent had agreed to participate, a time and place for the interview, convenient to her, was arranged. Eight of the women preferred to be interviewed in their homes; one woman was interviewed at her place of work and one woman in my office at the university.

At the beginning of each meeting, I explained the nature of the study in greater detail, discussed issues of confidentiality, freedom to terminate and informed consent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Munhall, 1994) and offered to answer any questions participants might have. Participants were given a form outlining the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed and steps the researcher would take to assure the confidentiality of the data obtained (Moussa, 1992; Tutty, Rothery & Grinnell, 1996), (see Appendix A). A consent form was given to each respondent for her to sign (see Appendix B), and each respondent filled out a demographic information form (Appendix C). At the end of each interview I took time to debrief with each respondent, and followed up with a thank-you letter.

**The Interview Process**

Individual interviews were conducted with each respondent and lasted from one-and-a-half to three hours, depending on the amount of information the interviewee wished to share. Ten interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher. During the
transcription process, each tape was listened to three times, since the women’s accents and grammatical errors made the tapes initially difficult to follow, and a transcript was typed up with gaps left where words or statements were unclear. A second and third round of transcription allowed me to fill in the gaps, and I found that at the second or third listening, statements that had seemed indistinct became clear once heard within the larger context. A second interview was conducted with each participant either face-to-face or over the telephone to clarify any unclear statements and to make sure I had understood their meaning correctly. This second set of interviews was taped if conducted in person, or written up immediately following the telephone conversation, and then transcribed in the same manner as the first tapes.

**The Interview Question**

The research process involved engaging the women in conversation about their experiences. The question guiding this research is “what is the experience of a woman refugee from the former Yugoslavia?” Questions that could help to elicit information included: What was life like for you before the war? What were your experiences during the war? How did you come to Canada? What is life like for you now? What helped you survive the experience? How has the experience changed you? The questions were guideposts only, and questions changed depending on the information that emerged out of the conversation. As I moved from one interview to another, questions were added based on previous conversations: their experience of the Canadian health care system during childbirth; the effect of immigration on family life; homesickness; and sources of inner
strength. During the second interviews questions were more specifically about statements respondents had made whose meaning was not clear.

**The Cycle of Interpretation**

Initially, the researcher transcribed the tapes of the conversations and then transcriptions were checked and rechecked against the tapes, in order to make sure that the transcripts accurately recorded the conversation. Through the process of transcribing the tapes of the conversations, the experiences described were transposed to written text. The transcripts were then examined and divided into statements, a process that Creswell (1998) calls "horizontalization" (p. 55). These statements were then organized into clusters of meaning, or essential themes using a cut-and-paste method, and then the researcher, through a process of writing and rewriting, reflected on these themes to interpret what it is that they rendered meaningful (Van Manen, 1990/1994), since the text is viewed not "as an expression of life but with respect to what it says" (Gadamer, 1997, p. 392). Close attention was paid to statements that rang true, that were haunting, or that showed the phenomena in a new way. After the second round of conversations was completed, the feedback received was incorporated into a second cycle of interpretation in which themes were explored and refined, and illustrated with examples from participants' conversations. Interpretation involved writing, reflecting and rewriting, looking at individual themes, exploring their connection to the whole, then returning to examine the themes again. Once the material had been shaped into a coherent whole, a final cycle of interpretation was undertaken in order to uncover hidden meaning and to allow a metaphoric interpretation of the subject to emerge, since "metaphor teases the
mind into thinking something new by virtue of seeing a resemblance previously unnoticed and unthought” (Klemm, 1983, p. 96).

**Establishing Trustworthiness**

In a phenomenological hermeneutic inquiry, interpretations emerge as a result of dialogue between the researcher and the text. Subsequent readers will then engage in their own interpretive dialogue with the written text produced by the initial researcher. In this sense, the inquiry is an open-ended process in which no final truth is assumed, since there is no “single, accurate privileged perspective” (Thompson, 1990, p. 257). It is possible, however, to take steps to ensure that the collection of data and the phases of interpretation are rendered transparent and open to scrutiny and, therefore, can satisfy the criteria of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). “The qualitative researcher has an obligation to be methodical in reporting sufficient details of data collection and the processes of analysis to permit others to judge the quality of the resulting product” (Patton, 1990, p. 462).

This inquiry made use of several procedures as a means of maintaining trustworthiness. An audit trail was established (Creswell, 1998) in which interview tapes, transcriptions, and documented stages in the interpretive cycle were preserved and kept in a locked cabinet, available for scrutiny. After the data were collected and transcribed, I checked with respondents to ensure that the facts as reported were correct. A reflexive journal has also been preserved. The reflexive journal is a means of documenting and noting how the researcher’s personal reactions, thought and beliefs change as a result of the process of exploring the topic (Thompson, 1990). New learning, whether personal,
theoretical, methodological or observational was documented; meetings with contacts and reactions to interviews were noted, as well as any additional topics that emerged out of the conversations. In addition, the text, in which the data are presented in an interpretive whole, includes "thick description" (Creswell, 1998) in the form of direct quotes from the respondents, and I have tried to make the process of my interpretive dialogue with the text clear to the reader.

**Ethical Considerations**

Since this study asked people to talk about their personal experiences in depth, there was a risk that painful thoughts or feelings could emerge (Patton, 1990). One woman agreed to be interviewed and then canceled ten minutes before the interview, saying she did not feel ready to talk. We agreed that she would contact me if and when she felt ready, and I did not hear from her again. Before beginning a conversation, I made sure that each woman was clear that she could terminate the interview at any time. I have extensive experience as a social worker working clinically with issues of trauma, and had the skills necessary to respond appropriately should any of the respondents become distraught, while remaining mindful that my role was that of researcher, not therapist. At the end of each meeting, I took time to review our conversation and to debrief. In addition, a list of counselors experienced in working with the population from the former Yugoslavia was made available to each respondent.

Feminist researchers have debated the ethics of investigating groups to which one does not belong (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996; Reinharz, 1992), and ask how one can assume to speak for a group whose culture and language are different to one's own.
Although I am aware of these debates, I made a decision to pursue this inquiry based on the belief that any study that seeks to promote empathy and understanding between people is worthwhile. Although I am an “outsider” and do not have intimate knowledge of the group I was seeking to know, I was encouraged by a colleague from the former Yugoslavia to pursue this research, since she considered that my ignorance might be helpful in that I would not make assumptions on issues that an insider might accept and take for granted.

**Limitations of the Study**

This inquiry is limited to the experiences of a small sample of women from one national group, now living in a western Canadian city. Participants were selected using a snowball sampling method, and only women of Serbian and Croatian origin agreed to be interviewed. Four Muslim women were contacted but declined to participate, thus no women of Muslim descent were included. Since only women who spoke English were interviewed, the study does not include the experiences of refugee and immigrant women who are isolated from the larger society by their lack of language skills. All the women interviewed lived with at least one family member, and were aged between 30 and 45. Experiences of immigrant or refugee women who live alone, or are elderly are not included in this study. The purpose of this inquiry was to deepen our understanding of a facet of human experience, and did not aim to generate theory or to provide findings that could be generalized to a larger population.
Description of the Participants

Ten women from the former Yugoslavia are included in this study. All of the women, except one, wanted their actual names to be used, although each was offered the opportunity to use a pseudonym. Due to ethical considerations governing doctoral dissertations, I have not included their names in the study and have referred to them as either participants or respondents.

The participants ranged in age from 30 to 45 years. To give readers an idea of the background of the participants, I am including a brief description of each one. The following descriptions follow a random order.

First Participant

Married, no children. Originally from southern Croatia, she moved to Sarajevo as a student and has an advanced degree. She is Croatian and her husband is half-Serb, half-Muslim. She lived in Sarajevo for three months under siege, then escaped to Croatia. The couple have lived in Canada for four-and-a-half years, she is employed in a social service agency; and her husband is employed in a professional capacity.

Second Participant

Married, two teenage children. Born and raised in Sarajevo, has a professional degree, is from a Jewish background and her husband is half-Serb, half-Slovenian. She escaped from Sarajevo with her children after one month of war, and went to Belgrade. The family has lived in Canada for six years, she is employed in a social service agency and her husband is employed in a professional capacity.
Third Participant

Married, two pre-school children: one born in Croatia, the other born in Canada. Participant has a professional degree. She is half-Croat, half-Serb, and her husband is Serb. She and her husband lived in Sarajevo for two-and-half years under siege and have lived in Canada for three-and-a-half years. She is currently a homemaker and her husband is employed in a professional capacity.

Fourth Participant

Widowed, has a high school education, has two teenage children. Her heritage is half-Croat, half-Serb, and husband was Serb. She lived in Croatia and worked in a factory. When war broke out, she went to Serbia as a refugee and her husband was mobilized. After ten months, the couple returned home and her husband was killed. The family has lived in Canada for two years. She is currently studying English.

Fifth Participant

Has a professional degree. Was born and raised in Bosnia. She is half-Croat, half-Serb, and is married to a Serb. Before the outbreak of war, the couple moved to Serbia in search of work. They applied to Canada three times before being accepted as refugees. They have three young children, one born in Serbia, and two born in Canada. She works part-time in a social service agency and her husband is employed in a professional capacity. The family has lived in Canada for four-and-a-half years.

Sixth Participant

Has a professional degree, is married with two pre-school children. Her heritage is half-Croat, half-Serb and her husband is Serb. She was raised in a seaside town in
Croatia, and she moved to Belgrade with her parents eight months before the outbreak of war. The participant and her husband have lived in Canada for six years; she stays home to care for her children and has a part-time job; her husband works in a professional capacity.

**Seventh Participant**

Married with two children: one primary-school and one pre-school age.

Participant was born and raised in Bosnia-Herzegovina and is of Serbian heritage. She left her hometown 43 days before the war started and lived with her husband and child for four years as a refugee in Belgrade. The family has lived in Canada for two years. Her husband is employed in a professional capacity, and she is at home caring for her youngest child.

**Eighth Participant**

Has a university degree, is married and has a pre-school aged child. Respondent is from Sarajevo and escaped to Belgrade eight days after the war started. Both she and her husband are Serbian. The couple met and married in Belgrade and lived as refugees for two years. After trying to settle in Europe, the couple moved to Canada where they have been for four years. She works part-time in a retail store and takes care of their child. During our last conversation, the respondent informed me that her husband had taken a position in the northern part of the province and that she would soon be joining him.

**Ninth Participant**

Married, one pre-school child. Born and raised in a town near Sarajevo; has mixed heritage: half-Serb half-Croat. When war broke out, she was studying in Sarajevo, and
she went home to live with her family. She lived for eight months under siege in her hometown before moving to Belgrade to complete her studies. Her fiancee decided to come to Canada and she joined him here and couple married. Her husband has a professional degree and is currently employed, but not in his field. She is at home with their child. The family has lived in Canada for four years.

**Tenth Participant**

Married, with two pre-school aged children. Her home is in a town north of Sarajevo. She was studying at a university in Serbia when the war broke out and her parents encouraged her to stay there. One year after the outbreak of war, her parents came to visit her and were unable to return home and so lost everything. After graduating, participant moved to Belgrade with her husband, but deteriorating economic and social conditions made them decided to come to Canada. They have lived in Canada for just over one year. She is studying English and caring for her children. Her husband is employed in a professional capacity.

**Organization of the Text**

As I moved between the description of participants' experiences and my own reactions and interpretations of these experiences, the information seemed to fall naturally into a linear progression, mirroring the journey participants had experienced. Chapter Four: Encounter With the Topic, Part I, concerns experiences in the former Yugoslavia before, during and after the war, under the following headings: Yugoslavia Before the War: Living a Beautiful Life; Fault Lines in the Fabric of Yugoslav Society; Eruption; Social Disintegration; Resistance; Refugee Life; and Emigration. Chapter Five:
Encounter With the Topic, Part II, reflects participants’ experiences in Canada, under the following headings: Journey to the End of the World; A New Life in Canada; Family Relationships; Canadian Society; The Meaning of Exile; You Can’t Go Home Again; Caught Between Two Worlds; and Resilience. Chapter Six is titled Crossing Thresholds and revisits the topic in light of this metaphor.

In describing the topic and my encounter with it, I have combined my thoughts and the descriptions given by participants into a narrative that attempts to reflect their inner and outer journey as it occurred through time. My thoughts are written in normal script and participants’ actual words are written in italics to distinguish between them, yet at the same time to combine them into a seamless whole. I have attempted to render the immediacy of the experience as I encountered it during our conversations and in subsequent reflection, and for this reason have reported conversations verbatim, without correcting the grammar. Three dots indicate words that have been omitted in order to improve the clarity of the sentence. Some paragraphs contain quotations from different participants that reinforce the sense of multiple views of the same experience. In this case, each quotation is on a separate line.
CHAPTER FOUR

Encounter with the Topic: Part I

Yugoslavia Disintegrates

After all the interviews had been transcribed, I read and re-read the transcriptions, seeking to identify patterns and clusters of themes that would help organize the topic into a coherent whole. One description evoked a strong reaction from me and persisted in troubling me as I sought to understand its import. A young woman recounted leaving her home in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina because all the roads to the town were closed except one and she was worried that her family might be without electricity or without milk, so she decided to spend a few days with her mother-in-law. She stepped out of her house carrying her infant son, a bag of diapers, and an umbrella because it was a rainy day, expecting to return in a few days. She never saw her home again.

What is it about this image of a young mother setting out innocently, carrying her baby, and an umbrella for protection, that is so haunting? “Interpretative inquiry ... begins by being ‘struck’ by something...and goes on to explore what understanding this instance makes possible” (Jardine, 1998, p. 40-41). What struck me was her innocence, her vulnerability, her complete lack of preparation or awareness of impending conflict, as well as the poignant inadequacy of an umbrella to protect her against the approaching storm of war. Around this figure coalesce various experiences: the unanticipated and incomprehensible event of war disrupting the fabric of life; the loss of home; the need to protect and provide for one’s children; and the loss of innocence that is about to occur as
she steps out, naive, trusting and vulnerable. All participants shared these experiences in one form or another.

**Yugoslavia Before the War: Living a Beautiful Life**

The outbreak of war disrupted lives by shattering the stable, predictable quality of everyday life. To reach an understanding of what had been lost, what had been broken, I asked participants to describe their lives before the war.

**Family Ties**

As recounted by the women in this study, daily life in Yugoslavia took place in an emotionally rich and secure atmosphere provided by family, relatives, friends, neighbors and community: *people didn’t have problems because you have your parents, you have your sister, you have your relatives, you have friends, you have a whole bunch of people to help you, to talk with you, to go over, much easier.*

Participants all maintained close ties to their parents, even after marriage, frequently sharing accommodation or living in apartments connected to their parents’ homes, and parents continued to provide financial support: *people have big, big support of your parent; parents take care of children, help their children in lots of ways, until they have 40, 50 years.* If living separately, close contact continued: *after we married and live with our family, we are still close with our parents; we have to speak to our parents, maybe everyday, every second day, and every weekend we have to go their house.* Rather than an onerous duty, contact with parents provided a sense of safety and security: *I was so glad to be with them and feel like a young girl; everybody feels like that with their parents.*
Although day-care was available, most participants’ parents, if they were retired, looked after the grandchildren, because after we married we have children, and they become baby-sitters. One participant questioned the fairness of this arrangement, but concluded that despite her reservations, her parents enjoyed the experience and eagerly anticipated that role: they live their life for that time, to have grandchildren and take care of them. Participants felt safe leaving their children with known, familiar people while at work: I could have job and don’t think that my children not in good hands, because a person that I can believe most is my mamma or my husband’s mamma.

Although parents played an important part in participants’ lives, the extended family was also important, including grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins: because we have cousins, we call them sisters and brothers, we are very close with them and their family.

**Friends and Neighbours**

Friends and neighbours were an integral part of life, with frequent daily contact. People lived a settled life and everybody in an apartment building got to know each other: a lot of people...they have apartment, live there a long, long years...so you know always who is your neighbour; even in Belgrade, I know everybody in my parents’ building. Neighbours became friends, sometimes taking the place of family: neighbours are more important than relatives...because we can help each other, even in the middle of the night. Neighbourhoods provided a network of familiar people, and socialising with others formed an important part of daily life:
Just all the time somebody at my home for coffee, or my mother goes for coffee, and even when she goes to market... she can find a couple friends, and somebody invite you, and afternoon after lunch... we went to the park and sitting and talking until its dark.

There were some drawbacks to such close contact with neighbours: *people want to look in your home, in your business; I really don't like when everybody gossip and want to know about what you got, what you haven't got, where you've been and things like that,* but for most participants, the positive aspects seem to have outweighed the negative ones.

One of the results of such close knit communities was that neighbourhoods were safe places for children, who could play outside even at a young age: *when he was baby, he was three years old, he played outside by himself; children were outside, maybe 30 or 50 kids were outside, in front of building.* The streets and parks were filled with adults and children, and neighbours kept an informal eye on each other's children: *a lot of people are outside, stay on bench, and look at their children, and they will take care of yours, only watch, nothing special.* Children could play outside safely all day, as well as visit their neighbours: *my street have many children and everyday, everyday they go in my house and they ask me some questions... they like it; every child in the neighbourhood they like me.*

Familiarity with the surrounding community also made it easier to parent older children, to keep track of their activities and to protect them from harm:

*When your kids go out you knew where they are, you know the people, like*
you know the parents of their friends, you know everything. If she tells me:

“I am going to this cafeteria,” back home, and I would know immediately:

“Oh, I know that place is not good for her. Not good for anyone to go there.”

**Life Under Communism**

Life under communism wasn't paradise, but basically 80% people were living good. Participants felt that life in a communist society had many advantages, especially in terms of equality and fairness: there was some good things about that ideas: everybody equal, everybody same, everything for everybody, everybody have enough, they were good ideas. The result of the system was the creation of a large middle class, with few very poor and few very rich people: there were not so many rich people, but middle it was very big: maybe just a few persons here (gestures up) and a few persons here (gestures down) but middle was very big.

All participants agreed that life was good: we live a nice life; everybody live nicely, very good standard; it was a good life. Holidays in the mountains, European travel and summer vacations at the coast were the norm for many: everybody had cottage, we all went skiing on Austria, every summer to Adriatic Coast, travel around Europe everywhere. That lifestyle has remained the standard to emulate: like I want for my children now a life: everything I remember from my childhood, everything, lots of toys, with a lot of travelling, lots of movies, holidays, nice station, family, everything nice. Even the less affluent reported that they lived well: not a great life, but a good life. And there were no homeless people.
Another result of the equal distribution of resources appeared to be the low level of crime and other social problems:

*Of course we had social problems too, but not that much, not that much abuse, especially child abuse, not that much criminal, and not that much drug abuse, prostitution; we just didn't have that much economical differences between rich people and poor people.*

As a result, streets were safe and *you can go everywhere and during all night.*

**Education**

Although most participants described grandparents as caring for their young grandchildren, the country had a well-organised day-care system for pre-schoolers, with tight security, *nobody could enter inside...just children and parents and people who are working there.* Facilities were clean, well-furnished and had a variety of educational emphases: *we have day-care for music, for art, and day-care for foreign languages.*

The educational system was free and of a high standard, and was a combination of eastern and western approaches: eastern in that *they memorised a lot of things,* and western in its emphasis on *freedom and creativity.* All participants started learning a foreign language in elementary school and continued with this language throughout high school. Languages mentioned included English, French, German, and Russian. All students studied a broad range of subjects: in primary school, 12 subjects were offered; in secondary school, 15 subjects were offered including ancient Greek and Latin, French and Italian literature and various science subjects.
European Lifestyle

Yugoslav lifestyle was compared to a European lifestyle: *we live a European life, not Yugoslav life; it's more similar German and Yugoslavian and Italian than American.* Cities were planned so that apartments, businesses, stores, restaurants, cafes, and theatres were all in the same area so *that everything is here around you and you have facilities at every street at every time.* Cafes were the preferred place to meet friends and the streets of the cities teemed with life:

*It was full of life, so many people on streets, so many people selling books, selling music, so many people singing and dancing; every couple of meters there is something happen, guy with a puppet, or somebody playing; its so nice.*

But it is not only during the day that the streets were busy; the cities don’t seem to shut down:

*In Belgrade you have everything what you want, in the city, everything; and night life, oh my God, really, the best in Yugoslavia...everything, some special restaurants, some bar...people like drink, people like eat, people like dance... and everything is open to next morning...and everybody out...a lot of people, doesn't matter what years you are.*

Nationality and Religion

In the former Republic of Yugoslavia, religion and nationality were combined: Croatians were predominantly Roman Catholic, Serbians were Russian Orthodox, and many residents of Bosnia were Muslim. However, *there were so many mixed marriages*
that nationality was not really important. Of the women in this study, three were Serb, one was Croat, and one was Jewish; the other five were of mixed parentage: half-Serb half Croat. Two of the participants’ husbands were also of mixed parentage: the Croatian was married to a man who was half Muslim, half Serb, and the Jewish participant’s husband was half Serb, half Slovene. Relatives, too, were of mixed parentage:

*My family have mixed marriages;*

*In my family, in my very close family, we have different religions and live in same apartment;*

*One cousin ... his mother is Serbian, but father is Muslim;*

*We have family relatives like Croat, and we are mixed.*

Two respondents defined themselves in terms of nationality or religion. Both came from mixed parentage, and one said: *I am not Serb ... but I feel like Serb.* Another said: *my nationality is Orthodox religion.* The other respondents, however, defined themselves as Yugoslav:

*I always thought of myself as Yugoslav;*

*I wasn’t Croatian, I wasn’t Serbian, I was Yugoslavian;*

*I didn’t belong to any religion or nationality when I lived there, because I was Yugoslav.*

Society as experienced by the majority of the participants was characterised by tolerance, acceptance and equality:

*Serbian people were minority in B____, and all my neighbours were*
Muslim and Croatian, and I never thought about them in that way: just people; and in my family, never, we never talk about religion...they accept us, they know what I am; In our town, 30% Muslim people, 30% of Serbs, and 30% of Croats; and everything worked nice, everybody ...people from three of us had same things, or didn’t have job, or had job.

Friendships crossed national or religious boundaries:

We didn’t talk at that time who are Croatian, who are Serbian, or Muslim or whatever; We didn’t care, we had so many friends; even today, different religions, we live together; And I always had friends, many friends from all nationalities and my only, you know, I only look at whether this man... is good or not, it doesn’t matter to me whatever.

When I described the former Yugoslavia as a multicultural society, one of the participants corrected me:

Not multiculture: multiethnic; culture was the same. And it’s really hard to tell who is who ...its not written on your forehead what you are...we had differences, Croatians, Serbs, Muslims, but believe me, we are all the same, absolutely the same; its just religion that is different, and little bit of accent and some other things related to climate conditions, or something like that,
or maybe food or something like that, but we have all the same mentality.

Religion did not appear to play an important role in society, because it was a communist society that did not encourage religious practice: *it wasn't forbidden as some people think, but ...it wasn't so good to talk about that.* In the 1950’s and 1960’s, under communist rule, churchgoers were discriminated against, for example forbidden to be teachers. But in the 1970’s, as Yugoslavia moved to a more socialist type of government, religious observance became more accepted, depending on which region you lived in: Croatia and Slovenia being more liberal, Serbia more hard-line, and Bosnia somewhere in between. One respondent described sometimes attending church with her mother, and another said that frequent churchgoing was a practice of the very old, and she attended only one or twice a year for big festivals like Easter or a special saint’s day.

**Being Rooted**

Most of the participants (eight out of ten) never considered living anywhere else: *we make a good life, enjoy, never thinking that maybe one day we move from Bosnia; I never thought of going from my home city.* Life seemed stable and predictable:

*I actually saw my future pretty clearly; we didn’t live like saving money...we thought everything is fine, everything is going to be like that, we’re going to get married, and my dad and mom move to this house, then they have apartment for us and then the grandkids...you know, just normal life.*

Identity was strongly correlated to a sense of place: *we belong to the country, and to the town, and that was all we needed.* Even after the war it was difficult to uproot oneself.
The Jewish participant explained that members of the Jewish community didn’t want to leave, not even to go to Israel, because *our promised land was in Yugoslavia.*

Women spoke with affection of the country, the landscape, the cities and their lives:

> *At that time it was a wonderful country;*

> *We lived near Adriatic Sea and everything was shiny, warm and style of life;*

> *Novi Sad is beautiful city; it is a beautiful city on the river, with wide streets, with friendly people;*

> *It is such a beautiful country; the sea it’s Mediterranean, so it’s warm, beautiful coasts, islands, everything; even Italian, they were always jealous because it’s there across the sea, but it’s nicer.*

A sense of belonging, identity, home, family, beauty, friendliness, a *shiny, warm* light bathes the Yugoslavia that has been lost. When speaking of their homeland, participants referred to it as *the former Yugoslavia,* a Yugoslavia that no longer exists, and in seeking to define the land and life that shaped them, participant’s view seemed influenced by nostalgia, from Greek: *nostos:* return home, and *algos:* pain (Hoad, 1986/1996). Refugees are forcibly uprooted from the land, the people and the culture in which their lives were embedded. The former Yugoslavia no longer exists and the country is no longer safe. The past becomes a safe haven to which they cannot return and which, in memory, offers both comfort and longing as they struggle with loss and dislocation. The warmth of life in the former Yugoslavia contrasts with the coldness of life as a refugee: in the former Yugoslavia there was warmth, sun, family; in exile there is coldness, strangeness and loneliness.
Fault Lines in the Fabric of Yugoslav Society

How did things go so wrong? The picture that emerged from our conversations on the Republic of Yugoslavia was of a beautiful country, where everyone had enough to live comfortably, if not in luxury, where there were few extremes of riches or poverty, where everyone had access to strong educational and welfare systems, where different ethnic and religious groups lived in harmony, where the extended family maintained strong ties, and where there was a vibrant, European style, social life. How could it descend into the brutal civil war that became marked by atrocities and the systematic extermination or forced relocation of communities of people under the policy of “ethnic cleansing?”

Economic and Political Changes

Under Tito, Yugoslavia had changed from a rural country to one that was increasingly urban, industrial, cosmopolitan and ethnically mixed, with the main division being between urban and rural communities (Bennet, 1995/1998). One participant explained that after Tito’s death in 1980, things slowly began to change, first economically, then politically, with each nation in the federation wanting independence to form its own country. She stated that in order to mask the economic problems, nationalism was promoted:

To camouflage selfish interest for one or certain amount of people who want to have power and money and political position, and that’s it basically, I think, they just divide; and the people who started this they are president, premier, they have power in all countries.
Deteriorating economic conditions gave rise to unemployment: *many people in my country, even before the war, they finished university and couldn’t find job*. One participant left Sarajevo after graduation and moved north to her home town, because *if we live in Sarajevo, I didn’t have much opportunity to work, because it was time before the war, there was less and less job*. Another participant applied for a job in Austria, and one couple first moved from Bosnia to Serbia in search of employment, and then tried to emigrate to Canada because of the deteriorating economic and political climate:

*We were against Slobodan Milosovic and we were against his party since 1988, so many years, but he is strong, but all people suffer. We wanted to go to Canada before when this war 1991 started, because we saw injustice: only normal people who wanted to work, they couldn’t survive; only people who trade who are not honest, which was lawless, and you don’t mind breaking the law, you can make money.*

Commenting on the custom of married children still living with their parents, one attributed it partly to the high cost of living: *it’s too expensive to buy; dream about buy house, pay apartment and good salary; too hard.*

**Prejudice**

Most participants had difficulty explaining how, given their experience of the harmonious co-existence of various ethnic groups, their society disintegrated into warring nationalist groups. One participant did comment that prejudice was present in the society: *many, many years before war started, my parents and my husband’s parents notice that we are all Serbs and we couldn’t be same like Muslim in Bosnia; they had*
priority always. Some of the upsurge of ethnic separatism was attributed to the difference between rural and urban dwellers. Rural dwellers, people in small villages, especially in the border areas between Bosnia and Serbia, or Croatia and Serbia, were considered to give greater importance to issues of nationality and religion and they didn't mix as much. The older generation, the grandparent's generation, did not mix as much either, and there are some fresh wounds from the war, the Second World War, because there were so many atrocities in that war, and from the rural parts I think hatred was still there. Another factor identified was that people tended to be very expressive and had difficulty controlling their emotions, especially if they were less educated. Historical resentments were another contributing factor: because we have that heritage of blood, our land is so full of blood from so many wars; and if you wake up those memories, if there is no forgiveness, then war becomes possible.

Participants therefore attributed the conflict to a volatile, mainly uneducated rural population, some of whom carried old sentiments and prejudices, and to living in deteriorating economic conditions with self-serving leaders who fueled nationalist ideologies to further their own ends. None of the participants wanted or supported the war, nor did their spouses, and trying to explain the causes of the conflict was difficult and painful, because we are the ones who started killing. Explanations given for the conflict were given in hindsight. What was clear was that most participants did not see that war was coming and were taken by surprise.
Rumblings: The Approach of War

Amongst all the participants, only one, a student in Sarajevo at that time, anticipated the onset of war:

*I remember last year to university, I was not so serious as a student as I was before because I would say: “Oh, war will happen, I will go out now, I don’t want to study.” It’s like I had some bad feeling.*

Another commented that looking back, she remembers a friend of hers leaving to join her husband in Italy earlier than planned, citing the deteriorating political situation. And she said: *I was wondering, what situation? Like I had no idea. So some people did know, but not my close friends or relatives, or anything.* For the majority, the thought of war, civil war between people who had lived harmoniously and peacefully together for over 40 years was unimaginable: *nobody could believe that it would be war; in Bosnia there were so many mixed marriages.*

By definition the term society, from the Latin: *socialis* - allied, companionable, sociable (Hoad, 1986/1996), implies a cohesive group of people with a shared understanding of the norms and values that govern interaction with various institutions and formal and informal networks (Graham, Delaney & Swift, 2000; Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2001). Actions between people are coordinated and based on trust and reciprocity (Putnam, 1993). A stable society allows us to believe in a world which is predictable, comprehensible and over which we have some control (Zulueta, 1993), where human interactions proceed along agreed-upon lines and fate is assumed to be benevolent. As social beings, we need to believe in a social order, for the ordering of our
lives depends on it. Civil war attacks the very foundations upon which a society is based: society’s cohesion is disrupted, as is civil life. The term civil comes from the Latin: *civis* - citizen, a person with rights in a society; it is also the root word of the words *civility*: politeness; *civilised*: cultured, refined; *civilisation*: a developed state as opposed to a savage state (Hoad, 1986/1996). The term war is from the Old High German: *werra*: confusion, discord, strife. War brings conflict; it also represents a return to a primitive, savage state. In the face of savagery, civil life, in all its above-mentioned permutations, disintegrates. It is difficult and painful to admit that the stability of society is based on a fragile and easily disrupted foundation. War challenges the beliefs on which our lives are based. The sense of disbelief, of the inconceivability of war between people who lived together, was echoed again and again:

- *I couldn’t believe that war would come;*
- *It was unbelievable;*
- *Nobody could believe that it would be war;*
- *Nobody thought that something like that would happen, because we were in 21st century and it was crazy idea;*
- *We didn’t believe in war, we didn’t believe it would happen: who will make aggression and who will fight and on which side we have to run? And from whom? It was very confused for me.*

Even when fighting started, initially in Slovenia, it was far away and people still felt secure. They did not anticipate that it would spread or that they would be affected:
In Yugoslavia, war started, it was a crazy situation because war started in one province like maybe here in BC; war there and live here careless because we thought it happened there and we don’t have to be worried about that.

The expectation was that rational civilised behaviour would prevail: and then suddenly war started in Croatia, in Slovenia. I couldn’t believe that it will expand; I thought it will be just short period; the people are smart, they will try to stop.

Participants who lived in Bosnia were certain that they would not be affected, that ethnic conflict could not erupt there because:

I spent all my life there and with people, people who are different religions;
that war was between different religions and I had friends, cousins, who are from different religions and still we were together in moment when war started and I couldn’t imagine that something like this could happen.

One mother, who had lived through the Second World War, warned her daughter: now is time to move, it will be worse in Bosnia than in Croatia, believe me. She replied: Oh, come on, in Bosnia we live together, it doesn’t matter nationality, or religion; it cannot be possible; Sarajevo will be O. K.

Participants seem to have been torn between the knowledge that war could erupt and the desire to deny the possibility of such an event.

Eruption

Bringing It Home

As the fighting came closer, people moved to be with their loved ones. One participant left Sarajevo three days before fighting broke out there to join her family in
their hometown north of the city, preferring to be with my family if anything bad should happen. Another’s fiancée drove 300 kilometres north to fetch her back to the perceived safety of Sarajevo after war broke out in northern Bosnia, because he was certain, absolutely sure, that nothing could happen in Sarajevo.

In the days preceding the outbreak of fighting in Sarajevo, tensions became visible in the streets: people were nervous, they were running; there were political demonstrations, and food and other merchandise disappeared from the stores, mostly during the night. It was a frightening and confusing time: something was happening, but we didn’t know what.

When the fighting started, it was experienced as sudden and unexpected: suddenly (snaps fingers) it was in our city; it was shock. Nobody went to work, people in apartment buildings spent time together for comfort, and residents ventured out for only a few hours every day: but everything was empty, we didn’t have anything to buy. Nobody had expected their city to be affected: it was really hard, especially I think because it was really big shock for all of us; we didn’t expect things to go like that. People hoped that rational, civilised behaviour would prevail and that the conflict would be short-lived: suddenly it was in our city; it was shock; and I said, “Oh my God, it cannot be more than one month; some stupid people want to do this and it will be short and then finished.”

Full understanding of the situation came in different ways. For some, it was a gradual realisation that they were in the midst of war, for others, it was a telling moment that brought the reality to awareness. One participant described hearing shots, shells falling and bombs exploding, but still not fully grasping what was going on. It was only
when she and her husband saw a shop being looted in the middle of the day, while policemen stood idly and watched, that she realised the seriousness of the situation: *in this moment, we like were woken up: there is no rule, there is no government, there are no sure...like civil laws.* They had become helpless bystanders: *and this man asked us, “What are you doing here, what are you watching here?” And we said, “Nothing,” and we went home.* Their silent retreat speaks of shock, horror, helplessness and a refusal to participate in destruction.

The disruption of the normal routines of peacetime gave daily life an unreal quality: *like I'm on different planet, I have never seen this planet like this.* Even after several months of war, feelings of dissociation persisted: *you still don't believe that it is happening, you think that it is happening on TV or that you are just watching something; for a long, long time I didn't feel is real.* A waking nightmare.

The situation was not only an unexpected and frightening shock, however; it also held a certain excitement. War viewed as exciting and romantic is war not experienced, but war as an idea, a story gleaned from history books and from stories told by older relatives, an abstraction, a play from which one can enter and exist at will. One participant was frank about her initial reaction to the outbreak of war: *it is not good to say, but I was even glad to experience war during my life; I am 33 years old, and I am telling myself, “This you can enjoy.”* The Yugoslav educational system promoted the idea of war as heroic, and the role of Tito's Partisans during and after World War II was celebrated in lessons and in films. She remembered her grandmother narrating her experiences of the Second World War: *she was telling too many stories about it and I*
was just imagining her in those situations... and for a moment I envy her: why we didn’t have that opportunity to be heroes in same way? The first few days of war evoked romantic memories and a feeling of excitement. Army planes flying overhead stimulated a rush of extra energy, and not thinking about what will happen after; just like beginning of some kind of film and you are actor for two or three days and it will be nothing. But the fighting did not stop after three days. It continued and residents gradually became aware that indeed they were in the midst of war and that they were not ready for what was happening to them:

To have seven days and it was enough for me; but it did not stop after seven days, it was more and more and it was enough for me. You read before that, through books you know, so many war stories, you imagine everything; but when it happen to you, you are not ready, still not ready. First day was exciting, excitement is gone, then you don’t know what to do, how to do.

The Rift

Cities were besieged, from siege, Latin sedere, to be seated: “encirclement and blockade of a town or fortress by an army determined to capture it; a prolonged period, as of illness or distress” (Davies, 1969/1976). Residents under siege were forced to sit and wait, trapped in their apartments or in underground shelters during bombardments, going outdoors for limited periods; and enduring a prolonged period of distress. Under these conditions, neighbours banded together for comfort:
In that time we still lived together in same building, you know. Just organise and pretty much we were together all the time because nobody worked and just go outside for during the day for a couple of hours; but everything was empty, we didn’t have anything to buy. It was really hard, especially I think because it was really big shock for all of us, we didn’t expect things to go like that.

As the war intensified, town and cities were not just encircled, creating a division between those inside and those outside, they were also divided internally:

In Sarajevo, it happened that Sarajevo was divided into Serbian and Moslem part;

In Mostar, which is south of Sarajevo, it is big town destroyed because the town was separate in two part, Moslem and Croat.

Freedom of movement between the separate parts of the cities was restricted and residents found themselves trapped:

We realised that Sarajevo was closed, we cannot leave;

You cannot cross anywhere, you have to show your documents and you weren’t allowed to leave town.

As a result, some families were separated. For example, parents who worked in the Muslim section but whose family lived in the Serbian side were unable to go home to be with their children, or people were separated from their elderly parents, sometimes for the duration of the war: up to five years.
Forced Mobilisation

Participants’ husbands were subject to forced mobilisation. One family moved to Serbia from Croatia at the beginning of the war and the husband was mobilised into the Yugoslav Republican Army. Another participant’s husband walked out of his home in the Serbian part of town, leaving everything behind, and crossed the river to shelter with his in-laws in the Moslem part of town; he had refused to join the army and was afraid of being killed in retaliation if he stayed. A Serb husband spent seven months in hiding in the Moslem section of Sarajevo, afraid of being forced into the army. Another husband, also a Serb in the Muslim part of town, was protected by a Croatian friend with connections to the government in that section, and given the post of security guard in a museum. This was lucky, lucky, lucky, as other conscripted men had been ordered to kill people who shared their religion so as to make a crime against his family or friends.

Women were also pressed into military service if they were over 18 and didn’t have small children. Two participants narrowly avoided being forced to join the army, one because she was able to prove that she had been born in a different region, another by getting a special dispensation.

Shortages

In a besieged city such as Sarajevo, survival came down to the essentials: food, water, heat, shelter and money to pay for them.

Money. German Marks became the chosen currency, and those fortunate enough to have money were able to purchase necessities on the black market:
before war started, people notice something is going wrong, you cannot get money you have in bank and my husband said, “You know, what we are saving now, lets keep it at home in old way, and my mother-in-law said, “Maybe its right thing to do it, O. K.” Thank God that we did...my family, my husband and mother-in-law, they survive because of money.

Food. Some families had food stores in reserve, which helped them survive:

My mother-in-law, she was young during the Second World War and she said, “I still remember not having salt, bread; doesn't matter meat or whatever, but these essentials like oil, sugar, it is good to always have little bit in reserve.”

Country towns or villages in the war zone fared better, since they had access to fresh produce: we were lucky, it was summer so many people had gardens and stuff like that.

Those in the cities were not so fortunate and had to buy what they could on the black market, or wait for food packages from aid organisations or from family members outside the war zone. Food on the black market was plentiful, but exorbitantly priced: on black market you can buy oil for 80 Deutsch Marks for one liter; one Kg sugar costed 60 German Marks, about 50 dollars; one Kg of garlic, 100 German Marks.

Families tried to send food packages, but often these did not arrive:

I try to send some parcels with food, you know, to mother-in-law and husband; seven or eight I send and they receive only two; because you know in that way they go through many checkpoints and everybody pay.
Food aid sent by international donors also did not reach the people who needed it, partly because *government sold it and used the money to buy weapons*, so that much of it ended up on the black market. When food aid did reach people, the rations were pitiful:

*Glass like this of oil for whole month, and just a little flour like this,*

*and maybe beans like this, and this for whole month. No sugar; sugar every third month, just a little...you couldn’t live for three days.*

Hunger was a constant presence.

**Water.** People trapped in small towns or villages again fared better than those trapped in cities when it came to having access to fuel and water: *we were lucky because our town was small, so some people had still farms for water, my neighbours actually,* *and we have pretty clean river: I cook there and wash stuff; it was crazy, like hundred years ago.*

In cities such as Sarajevo, where the supply was cut off, water had to be collected in containers: *my husband and I went every day to bring 120 litres of water;* this was used for cooking, washing and sanitation. Due to the lack of water, *there was spread a lot of diseases.* Collecting water was perilous since it could entail a journey of several kilometres, and there was always the danger of sniper fire. A participant described having to cross a bridge and *everyday people were killed on this bridge but it was only way to get water.* On occasions there was blood on the bridge, *blood, big, big blood like oil, and very thick, I had never seen blood in so much.* Under conditions of war, horror becomes a facet of daily life, so she jumped over it and continued on her way.
Heat and Light. The electricity supply was cut off, so that residents had to manage without heat or light:

For me it was more terrible because after 8 o’clock, they have some kind of...I don’t know how you call it...but we couldn’t go out; and I didn’t have light to read or do anything after it get dark, and I was getting crazy.

In Sarajevo, residents scavenged for wood to heat their homes and to cook with, although little wood remained since Muslim soldiers, they cut almost all trees in the town; it wasn’t allowed to us to cut anything and sometime my husband and I went to pick up branches which remained. Winter was the worst time:

We didn’t have heating, it was very cold winter, minus 10, we didn’t have windows because glass were destroyed because bombs; it was very cold inside...I had to wear my husband’s ski coat and five or six pairs of sock and tights and three, four, five sweaters, and I look like this (gestures wide with arms); and without heating, it was terrible, terrible, terrible; sometimes I cried because it was so cold during the night.

Social Disintegration

When a society is engulfed by war, the old order is disrupted, and new rules are created which serve the ends of those waging the war and their minions. The welfare of ordinary citizens becomes unimportant.
Stupid Starts to Talk

Under conditions of war, when civil rule breaks down, criminals take the opportunity to gain positions of power. The rules of an orderly society are replaced by the rules of lawless and violent people:

*My mother remind me when Ivo Andrich, he got Nobel Prize for literature, and he said once, “The war, every war, is the time when stupid starts to talk and smart stop to talk, and criminals become rich,” and it was absolutely true.*

In Sarajevo, one man, who had spent half his life in jail for rape and murder, became one of the major people in the army; and usually in prison are criminals, but now criminals were out and having guns and uniforms, and normal people were inside. Civil law did not exist in besieged cities and *it was living without rule, without law, without government; everybody could kill somebody on the street and don’t say why and without consequences.* People were murdered because of their religious affiliation; elderly people were murdered for their apartments; people were murdered for their valuables, such as money or furniture. Residents therefore not only faced the dangers of shelling and snipers, but also the danger of violence by criminals taking advantage of the situation.

Speaking out, speaking one’s thoughts, was dangerous under these conditions: *it was the most terrible time because you mustn’t show anyone what you are thinking, because people were killed for only one word.* So if you were accosted and insulted because of religion or nationality, you had to stand and listen without reacting: *not say anything; keep quiet, just look, but you have to stay and listen first.* People were guilty for
who they were rather than for what they did. In some cases, Muslim extremists killed people who were Christians, and when other Muslims protested, they were threatened with death if they weren't silent.

Not only were people vulnerable to unpredictable violence, they were also witnesses to atrocities and helpless to intervene. One participant described spending three days listening to the sounds of women being raped in the nearby prison: *and I felt terrible, no shells was so scary like that; its terrible, I was just sitting, I couldn’t do anything, I cannot call anybody; if I go there they will do the same to me.* She felt helpless for them and for herself. And this memory has remained with her years after the event: *sometimes I remember just this sound, this screaming.*

**The Bombs**

In cities under siege, people lived under daily shelling and the explosion of bombs. The bombing was *really scary, because the sound is so loud, you know.* One bomb exploded in a bread queue and *we just saw some people on open trucks, like pickup trucks, without legs and with blood and without arms and without head...people who were around picked up bodies and parts of bodies and brought to hospital.*

Not only shops and public places, but apartment buildings too were targeted for shelling: *our building was shot four times with shells, big shells and it was on fire; it was very dangerous.* Sometimes the bombing was caused not by the enemy, but by the factions themselves for propaganda purposes. In the Muslim part of Sarajevo, a Muslim faction staged some of the bombings and blamed the Serbs. If foreign officials were
planning to visit, people were warned to be quiet, be at home, because something will happen, as a bomb attack was being planned to sway international public opinion.

**Fear**

Being caught on the street during a shelling attack was dangerous and frightening, since buildings were locked and there was no place hide. Bomb shelters did exist, but they were terrifying places in themselves: some people were shaking, some people were crying, yelling, some people were in the floor; it was terrible fear, frightening. For those further from the conflict, fear was still part of daily life, because there was always the apprehension that the conflict would come nearer. The unpredictability of life under conditions of war was hard psychologically, because you never know what will happen. Under the strain of living under these conditions, some people became mentally ill: hospitals were full of people with mental illness, people who had been healthy before the outbreak of war.

**Injustice**

Not one participant supported the war, and there was a sense of injustice at being caught up in events beyond their control:

*Because it was terrible experience; I wasn’t guilty for it, I didn’t start this war, I didn’t wish this war, I didn’t want to stay there. “Why I’m there?” I ask myself, “Why somebody kick me?” What did I do in my life that I deserve something like this?*
**Hopelessness**

The disruption of the fabric of society by war and the accompanying destruction of all the familiar signposts and routines of a stable life lead to questioning the very essence of existence. Under siege, there was a sense of desolation and of great existential loneliness:

*In the war I was alone with me and nothing was around, and I said there is nobody who can help; I am by myself, alone in whole cosmos. And I felt such loneliness because there was nobody who can help me; hopeless, absolutely hopeless.*

**Resistance**

How does one maintain the will to continue and a sense of personal integrity under such conditions? Participants identified various strategies they employed to help them survive including: cultivating attitudes of calmness, defiance, fatalism and hope; finding distractions; ignoring risks; using humour; having a sense of special destiny; and facing reality.

**Remaining Calm**

In the face of danger, one forced oneself to remain calm: *sometimes they started bombing and you cannot run, absolutely; if you run, never mind; if you stay, never mind; its the same.*

**Distracting Oneself**

Distracting oneself was also helpful:
I feel better when I read book. If shells, if it is bombing, I read my book and keep my mind busy...I try not to cry, trying to read books, because we didn’t know what to do with all this time, just sit in prison and read books. Its good and useful, and keep your mind fresh.

**Ignoring Risks**

One couple forced themselves to go out for a walk everyday regardless of the danger: we decided to go out everyday, never mind bombs, shells falling down or not, we have to have fresh air.

**Humour**

A sense of humour helped to counteract the grimness of the situation: you need to find something funny in this situation, you know, it was so crazy actually. A participant described how a few days after May 2nd bombing of Sarajevo her mother-in-law said:

“If you can find something green (she mean some vegetables from outside) it will be nice,” and I said: “I will try.” And I came back after two hours, telling her: “I saw only green colour lighter, that was only green thing in the market.”

**Defiance**

Acts of defiance took different forms. One participant refused to let the drabness of the situation make her assume a drab appearance:

I got new skirt and new jacket, it was different colours, and new shoes I had.

And it was after the 2nd of May, after the huge bombing. I was dressed up
in all that, with makeup; its 10 o'clock in the morning and my mother-in-law
said, "Sweetheart, where are you going?" I said, "To stand in line for
bread." She was laughing: "Oh, that's good, that's really good."

Another used a sense of inner freedom and a feeling of anger as tools of defiance:

and I was angry, because they can keep me physically; but they cannot keep my mind,
they cannot keep my spirit; it cannot be destroyed. I have freedom inside; it's mine.

**Hope and Determination**

The hope of escape and the determination to survive also helped those trapped by
the siege. The determination to survive was experienced as the strength of will over fate: I
think I am the type of person that if I am telling myself; "... you will survive," nothing can
stop me. Determination also resulted in persistent efforts to obtain exit documents and a
refusal to give up: when others were given permission while a participant’s request was
repeatedly denied due to her nationality: I didn't give up. Her persistence paid off, and
after two-and-a-half years, she received her exit papers.

**Fatalism**

Residents of Sarajevo developed a certain fatalism in the face of death. Every
time people went outside, they faced possible targeting by snipers who were shooting all
the time...and you never know what will be; you hear "Phew' just behind you. After
awhile people became immune to the threat of danger: after some time you don't care
about that; if its my destiny, maybe I will die. They became fatalistic about falling bombs:
sometimes they started bombing and you cannot run, absolutely; if you run, never mind;
if you stay, never mind; its the same. So they walked.
A Special Destiny

Fatalism was accompanied by a sense of special destiny, of protection by the forces of fate. A participant described two incidents in which she and her husband had escapes from death, which she attributed to a sense of premonition. One time they were going to buy bread, but she kept finding pretexts to stay in the apartment because I felt like I had to stay there, I don't know. She began polishing her shoes, and her husband commented: “You are crazy; in the middle of the war you are brushing your shoes?” Just then a bomb exploded, killing people in the bakery where they would have been. Another time, she and her husband were going to their usual market but changed their minds suddenly and headed for another one. Five minutes later, their usual market was bombed and several hundred people died. She commented: several things like this happened to us; it looks very unusual; is happening, I don’t know how I can say.

A sense of special fate helped people survive the years of siege. One participant’s husband survived almost two years of siege in Sarajevo and never doubted that he would survive. A few days before his departure, he went to buy milk and saw a crowd gathered around a man killed by a sniper. A bystander commented: “Poor guy, he had paper in his pocket...he got permissions to go out.” The terrible irony of a man being killed just as he was about to reach freedom pierced her husband’s sense of invulnerability: for the first time he was afraid something would happen and maybe he won’t survive.
Cultivating Awareness

The sense of a benign fate protecting individual destinies was not necessarily accompanied by a refusal to face the real brutality of the surrounding environment. A participant described forcing herself to acknowledge and be aware of events around her:

*I try to have experience of the war, I try to be aware of everything, even if it is rude: I try to see with open eyes, just see and accept again. When you go out and you see killers and you see death and you see everything what is happening, you say: “That is reality.”*

She had a carefully thought-out reason for her determination to face events without flinching:

*You have to do, because if you don’t look, you don’t know what is truth, what is not, and you are starting to make in your head preconceptions what is, what could be, what couldn’t be, what will be, what not, and it’s not good. If you lose your mind, if you lose your conscious, you are dead inside.*

Escape

To escape, to get out of the war zone, was almost everyone’s desire, although the decision could be heart wrenching: *my parents didn’t want to go from T____, from war, because of dog; he was nine or ten years old, and they couldn’t escape with dog; and that is why on the end they gave him to one Muslim family.* Given the opportunity to escape, a choice had to be made between remaining with a loved one, or fleeing to safety: *I wanted to go, but at the same time I also say: “It’s not fair, I would like to be with this man;” it was fight inside of me: I wanted to stay, I wanted to go.*
Escape stories were told calmly, with feelings of fear downplayed. Some left early in the conflict: *we took the last bus, the last one, after that they stop.* One escape was organised by a Jewish relief organisation one month after the siege of Sarajevo started. The escape by cargo plane was a relief, but brought with it other fears:

*For me, it was really kind of bad, bad memory, because we were many of us, I don’t know how many we were packed in that plane, and all of us sitting on the floor and there was not enough space, so some other’s knee or elbow would poke you; it was really crowded, very crowded.*

*And all the time I had this silly thought like of Jews being transported to the concentration camps during ... Second World War, because it looked like that. And I remember I thought, “Well, now they will ask our gold teeth or whatever.”*

Because of her Croatian nationality, one participant was able to get permission to leave the city and obtained a ride with an acquaintance who was travelling to Croatia. At the border, the guard turned her back, explaining:

*“You know, tonight a decision-agreement between Bosnian and Croatian Republics was signed that women are also soldiers and you have obligation to be soldier. You have to be member of Bosnian army, because you are also a Bosnian citizen.”*

Her first reaction was shock and horror: *and I was shocked, again; what did I do in this life that I deserve something like this?* Fortunately, the driver had connections with the military authorities in a nearby town who gave her permission to cross over into Croatia.
Another participant escaped in a group with others who had permission to leave:

*I escaped under airport, was one secret tunnel and it was water and a lot of water with ground; it was very dirty, and very low and narrow, about one kilometre long; and it was ... one very dangerous territory between three sides, Serbian, Croatian, Muslim, and everybody shoot everybody, because every side thinks it is other side. And we were running because it was fog, very early in the morning, fog was so quickly going up...and we were running, and running, running about two kilometres and there was one very big mountain, across mountain; I was going with my foot and hands, climbing, and through one forest and there was bus on the top of mountain. And this bus brought us to Croatia.*

Escape did not come cheaply however: *we had to pay a lot of money; I cannot count how much because on everything you pay.* Certain people accepted bribes to arrange escapes, but they could not all be trusted, *because it happened that they take money and kill.* One man was able to escape by bribing a United Nations employee with U. S. $1,000 to provide him with false identification papers. I expressed shock that a U.N. employee would be abusing his position, but the couple was grateful he had helped, and as for the money: *its not too much to pay for a human life.*

**Home is Another Country**

When the young mother stepped outside clutching her baby and her umbrella, she fully expected to return home within a few days. But fighting broke out in her
hometown, and suddenly she found herself a refugee: *it happened just in two hours*. The life she had known was gone:

*It happened big changes ... maybe with people who don’t have experience like mine, very difficult to imagine how bad situation can be and how big difference from previous and new life was. It happened just in two hours.*

*I remember that day; it was very terrible day for me.*

**A Person Without a Home**

People under siege face the constant possibility of death, and their life involves privations, fear, and suffering. The world has been turned upside down: *stupid starts to talk and smart stop to talk, and criminals become rich*, and home has become a dangerous place. One looks with clear and wondering eyes at a world gone mad: *I forced myself to look.*

Being a refugee involves a different type of dislocation. One moves from home, which has become dangerous, to a new and safer place where life continues at its normal pace. Here the refugee is the homeless one, the outsider looking in:

Interviewer: *And what did you do everyday?*

Participant: *Nothing. We were sitting and waiting for our husbands to get out from Sarajevo and looking into... like windows, you know, envying people that they have their home while we lost everything.*

For some, their homes and possessions were gone forever:

*I brought only two suitcases and like my clothes; I didn’t want to bring any like fancy clothes because they are going to be ruined. So you know, I*
ended up with this purpose wardrobe, and very little memorabilia, or anything like that, pictures.

Participants expressed anguish over their parents’ loss of home as well:

*My parents left Sarajevo too... but we left everything there: an apartment, a house, furniture, everything. I felt sorry for them; and they still have a hard time, you know.*

*In 1992, my parents went to Serbia ... to visit us and never came back to B____. I was really sorry for my parents, you know, because they are not young, they are not enough time to build something other, more, and that for me very, very hard.*

**Seeking Refuge**

Bosnians who identified themselves as Serbs didn’t feel at home in Serbia, where they had sought refuge: *it was not our country... when I came there it was not my home there.* Refugees who went to stay with family members found that their relatives were not particularly welcoming:

*You know, when you are a refugee, no one is really to happy to see you; I mean, they are happy to see us for a week or two, but that’s enough, more than enough, and you become a burden.*

This was hard to endure, particularly because of the vulnerable state refugees are in. Relatives seemed unable to give that *special treatment which you need in that time,* because *it was really hard for us emotionally.* The close families ties which had
characterised pre-war society and been taken for granted became strained under the stress of special circumstances.

Society was not welcoming to Refugees either. The special aid they received was resented because we were getting some help from U. N. and stuff like that in food and ...they didn’t feel its right; some people live much worse than we did. They were scapegoated and blamed for the deteriorating economic situation in Serbia:

*People who were born there, they couldn’t understand us, and maybe at the time they thought...that their poverty, all changes in that part of the country came from people...from refugees...they blamed the refugees for the hard time.*

**Finding Shelter**

Refugees struggled to meet their basic needs. Finding a place to live in Serbia was difficult since accommodation was scarce and expensive, due to the influx of refugees from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The increased demand forced up the price of rents at the same time that wages decreased due to inflation. One participant’s father was wealthy and able to support her, but others lived with their parents in cramped spaces: *there was no...chance for us to have our apartment, to live by ourselves; we could live with ...my parents in one small apartment.* Others were forced to find accommodation where they could, and *moved a lot of times...for me it was very, very bad time because I had to pay rent for something ugly, for old, lot of...moisture*
Finding Employment

Employment was hard to obtain since at that time you couldn't find job, or if you could, it wasn't enough for just living, since salaries did not keep up with the cost of living: in 1993, our salaries were four Deutsch Mark, four dollars per month, and we had to pay 100 dollars apartment rent. The local currency was unstable and prices were liable to change during the day, during the night.

Those who did have jobs put up with difficult conditions:

My husband...worked one company...and it was hard, from six in the morning to six afternoon, everyday, and every Saturday, and for four years had only 15 days’ holiday; ...that was strange time, you know: if you have a job, go do that job, because tomorrow you don't know what happen.

Others worked several jobs at the same time: my husband work at the university and he have to do something else to make more money, so he sold things on the black market and from that job he made some money, but not enough...and he found third job.

Women had an equally difficult time finding work: it was so hard, I try find from the job before in factory, but they don't listen, they don't want. Salaries were low, maybe ten Deutsch Marks a month, and there was no job stability: we lost our jobs.

Discrimination

Not only did society resent refugees, some people actively discriminated against them because of their national origins or affiliations. One participant was forced to leave her home region after a change in government: I can't stay in my home country...I must leave because Croatian government come. She also lost her job:
I have work like city hall, I have work and I can't work because they said,
"Your husband was in the army, you can't work here any more," and in
1996 I stay without job...and I didn't have any money."

Another participant returned to her parents' home in Croatia where she had grown up and found a job in a daycare, but after three days she was told: "person with that family name cannot work," since her married name was Serbian. She was shocked and outraged, but it was even worse for her father because it was attack on his family, on his name; my family was for ages, for generations in that area, long time ago; he was shocked, surprised. He still has not recovered from the slight since even today...he doesn't like to talk about it.

Rise of Lawlessness

Criminals profited from the situation since there will always be people who profit from war, and they were able to make money, while ordinary people struggled to survive: normal people who wanted to work, they couldn't survive; only people who trade...who are not honest, which was lawless, and you don't mind breaking the law, you can make money. Refugees felt exploited and taken advantage of because for some people it was very important to make money, doesn't matter from whom, doesn't matter for anything.

Receiving Aid

Refugees survived with the help of their families:

My brother and my parents helped me very much, and my mother-in-law, all family helped me;
Our families send us every month packages, even with kiwi for my son, and bananas; my husband has aunt... she had very big field so they send us food, or pigs they send us twice... so everybody helps.

Aid organisations also helped with food and accommodation: its war organisation, I think it's Canadian, have one place bank, took me food, can, oil, sugar.

**Psychological Effects**

People were unprepared for the hardships they had to endure as refugees:

*I think it was bad time for us because we were spoiled children before war, we lived a nice life... everything nice and because of that we couldn't imagine life like we had after can exist... and terrible, terrible this life.*

Living under difficult and unstable conditions could be humiliating: *it was so shame for us to be two engineers and we couldn't live,* and despair could lead to severe depression: *I remember sometimes when life was very, very terrible... in that situation some people... could commit suicide or something.*

**Survival Strategies**

Despite these difficulties, participants proved resourceful in finding ways of surviving. One family lived *for four or five months without a steady supply of electricity* and the mother hooked up a car battery so that her children could watch television

**Generating income.** Participants were willing to try anything in order to generate income and to be useful and productive. One participant knitted and crocheted items to sell to support herself and her children. Then *when school started... and we have high school, I have typing machine... and I type for students.* Another helped start a school for
refugee children in Croatia and is proud that at the end of the war the school was accepted into the Croatian educational system. Keeping busy was experienced as productive as well as personally helpful.

**Fighting back.** Fighting back against discrimination was another strategy that increased a sense of mastery. After being dismissed from her job for having a Serb surname in a Croatian city, one participant and her father contacted Helsinki Watch, a human rights organisation, which took up the case. After about six months, she was reinstated in her job: *I was happy when I received this letter that I have my job and I sent letter: Thank you, but..."* Having been vindicated, she preferred to work in a refugee camp helping other women.

**Separation From Family**

Being separated from family members was painful, since participants worried about their family's well being, at the same time as feeling guilty and relieved that they themselves were safe.

**Fear for loved ones.** Having themselves escaped, refugees worried about the safety of family members still trapped in the war zone:

*I know that everyday it's so dangerous, he needs to go home...it's two or three kilometers, its not far...shooting all the time...and you never know what will be; It was hard to be a student, because we had to think about our parents over there, and we never know what would happen.*

Relatives were willed to survive: *I say: “Come on, he won't be unfair and die during*
the war, he can’t doing to me; he wouldn’t dare something happen.” Some did loose family members as a result of the war: my brother-in-law’s son was killed...he was 13; my other good friend she lost her leg...and some other people killed.

Even family members in Belgrade were not always free from the demands of the war:

There was some pressure on men at that time in Belgrade...they tried to make those men from Bosnia in Belgrade to go back to fight, and he didn’t want to go; and it was pressure all the time he could be catched and ...against his will, so he personally couldn’t go out much.

Living in a peace zone was not necessarily a guarantee of safety: one participant’s husband returned from the front, having lost an eye and a leg; they moved back to their hometown, which had been bombed, and survived as best they could. One day, after 1992, he can walk you know, he can everything and he walking in...we have ground, you know, like garden, he walking and step on a bomb, and was killed. Faced with such horror, no interpretation is possible; before the awful - silence.

**Communication.** Regular means of communication with areas under siege broke down and people couldn’t hear, and send letter or anything; radio communication was the only means to hear that family members are good and they are alive. Radio communication felt unsafe since it could easily be intercepted and so people sent wild coded messages because we were afraid that they would listen to the messages, and one recipient confided later that he had no idea what I was trying to tell him.
Messages could be unreliable. One participant received a message that her husband had been wounded, but thanks God it was mixed message, it was for somebody else; because after two days I receive new information telling, “Sorry, we made mistake, this was for other family”. An acquaintance of hers received official information that her husband was killed in the south part of Bosnia, and then after ten days he came to visit her.

**Reunion.** Reunion with loved ones could be bittersweet, even traumatic:

*I remember lady who received official information that her husband was killed in the south part of Bosnia, and then after ten days he came to visit her. And she was surprised, “How can you come, because you are dead?” You know, she try to convince him that he is dead. She went through the first phase of her grieving and now she finally was accepting, finally absorbing that he is dead, now he is here. She told me; “I was grieving for him and now he is here. Its not fair.”*

Even anticipated reunions could provoke a mixture of happiness and anxiety:

*I was surprised, I was happy...I don’t have even words in my first language...to explain how I was feeling; and somewhere here behind I was asking myself how will he look, because we had never been separated for 17 months, it’s a long time, and how will it be; but at the same time I knew we will just get on with our life.*

Becoming intimate after such a long separation was not easy, but tenderness returned after the initial strangeness:
We just continued to talk, same as we left we saw each other...I was surprised, as a woman I think you can understand, we were speaking all aspects of our life, and I say (to myself), “How it will be now after 17 months to be intimate, to make love again?”...and then it just suddenly came and then...

The Eternal Refugee

Becoming a refugee is an individual experience, and yet it has a timeless quality, a sense that what is experienced individually forms part of an eternal pattern in which others have shared:

All the time I had this silly thought like of Jews being transported to the concentration camps during...Second World War, because it looked like that, and I remember I thought: “Well, now they will ask our gold teeth or whatever.”

Before one’s life is disrupted by war, no one imagines that they will find themselves in such a predicament. Refugees are viewed as foreigners, from the Latin foris: outside (Hoad,1986/1996), outsiders from an unimaginable place who have nothing to do with ordinary, settled life: I couldn’t imagine what it is, what kind of situation, who they are, why they came...and I couldn’t imagine that it can...happen in our society. Not only are they foreign, they evoke a certain distaste because they looked liked...dirty gypsy, because of situation, because of everything that happened to them. But then shock after shock, surprise after surprise, people lost their homes as stable, civil society disintegrated
and people were forced to flee, and as a result a lot of people in Yugoslavia looked the same and was like this: like dirty gypsies.

Literature also provides images that echo individual experience. A participant recounted how she had read Doctor Zhivago (Pasternak, 1958) as a young girl and had enjoyed the love story. As a refugee, she reread the book:

*And for me that book was very different, like new book: I didn't see love story like that...I saw only bad things: they were without food, without wood to burn to make fire, to make heat inside, or without water, or dirty...I recognise myself in the other story.*

The refugee experience transcends time and space, and she also found similarities with her own experience in a novel by Pearl Buck about the Chinese Revolution *maybe fifty years ago, everything same: people, refugee, made money on the same way like we did; but it was in China and 50 years ago, and our story happened in Yugoslavia a few years ago.* The way that people made money in China 50 years ago and recently in the former Yugoslavia was by selling goods on the black market, *and same things made most money: tobacco was very popular, selling tobacco or cigarettes was made most money than anything else.* As she read the account of Chinese refugees selling tobacco on the streets she *stopped and counted how many years before in China and what happened there and what happened here, and people found same way to survive and make money, in different cultures, completely.*
Emigration

Deciding to Leave

Unlike North American society, which tends to be one of high mobility and transience, society in the former Yugoslavia was less mobile. People were rooted within their extended families, within their cities and towns and within their regions, which is where they expected to live out their lives. They would not have left their home towns if their lives hadn’t been disrupted by war: *I never go from my home city...because I always imagined I would live there...I never thought of going, especially this far.* The decision to leave was a painful and difficult one:

*Because for us it is difficult to think about leaving that place because we have family, we have family right now there, our parents and brother, sister, everybody and it is very difficult to go... and from that place Canada looked more far than Yugoslavia from here.*

Most participants felt that either they had no choice but to leave or that the choice was forced on them. One participant felt pressured to leave the former Yugoslavia by the organization that had evacuated her family from Sarajevo and was supporting her as a refugee in Serbia: *they didn’t want to waste money...so they began pressuring us to leave, and nobody wanted to leave.* Another, a Bosnian refugee of Serbian nationality in Serbia, felt like a stranger in a foreign country because: *it was not our country, Serbia is now to live like Canada; when I came there it was not my home there, so we...it is better to come on another place.*
Refugees who had lost everything struggled to find work and a place to live: because we are refugees, we don’t have anywhere anything; you know, we left everything and we were living without place to go. Some tried to make a life for themselves in other European countries close to home, but with little success. One couple, after living in Turkey for a year, tried to settle in Slovenia where they had relatives, but they were unable to get long-term work permits, only permits for one month at a time. Another couple lived in Greece for a while but again were not able to get permanent work permits, and returned to Belgrade where they struggled to subsist: in Belgrade there was a big economic crisis and hard to survive.

Others also cited economic reasons for they decision to leave, because life was very hard: you can’t leave, you can’t pay apartment, you can’t buy food and they realized that economically and in every way we couldn’t stay in that place. Work was scarce and poorly paid, and since the cost of living was so high, salaries were not enough to live on: we had to rent apartment and it was so expensive, more than our salaries.

For some the catalyst that prompted the decision to leave was loosing a job. For others, the realization that conditions weren’t improving came gradually: after four and half years we lost any hopes, I can say like this, and we decided to come here. One participant said that she eventually realized that we don’t have, didn’t have so much of choice, at least not if she and her husband wanted to make a good life for themselves and their children. When discussing their options with her husband she said: My husband told me: “O. K., we can go, then if you are not satisfied we can come back to these conditions any time.”
Concern for the future of their children was an important factor for many of the participants in their decision to emigrate: *biggest, first reason was for my children*. Not only were the countries of the former Yugoslavia in an economic crisis, there was also political and social instability: *you are not safe, especially if you have children, because you don’t know what happens after ten years.*

**The Pull of Canada**

This section was originally titled “Choosing Canada”, but how much choice does a person have whose home has been lost and whose society is wracked by war. Kunz (1973) speaks of the “push-pull” form of the migrants experience. What factors pulled participants towards Canada as opposed to elsewhere?

**Youthful dreams.** For some, the opportunity to come to Canada fulfilled a youthful dream: *Canada is our, mine and my husband’s, dream from youth*. A childhood friend had emigrated to Canada 30 years ago and we always wrote letters to each other and she was my guest a few times to Yugoslavia, so I knew everything about her life. During the Olympic Games in Sarajevo in 1984, presentations, brochures, and promotional materials were available about Canada and we wanted to go, even like tourists to come here to see. She and her husband were unable to come as immigrants because they didn’t have money to come like independent immigrants. Coming to Canada was only dream...but when refugees started to come here, we wanted to apply. Twice they were refused, and in desperation they wrote letters to the Canadian embassy and ask them to send us north, north of Canada, anywhere, just not stay in Yugoslavia. The frozen north was preferable to their current situation. Two years after their initial application, her
brother was granted refugee status in Canada and she wrote a letter and tried again after he got his visa, to be together with him and then, when they checked his papers, then they give to us.

**Immigration policies.** For others, the choice was pragmatic, a result of Canada’s immigration policies: we didn’t choose Canada, Canada choose us. Canada provided a legitimate, legal way for refugees to enter the country and that is main reason why we came here. Western European countries had restrictive refugee policies, they didn’t want to give us any status there...almost impossible to go there, unless you want to smuggle. Those able to obtain refugee status in Western Europe were only offered temporary asylum: temporary, everything was temporary. Many refugees from former Yugoslavia found asylum in Germany but now they had to leave, because Germans are sending them back. In contrast, Canada offered permanent settlement: Canada was the only one where your status was that after three years you can get citizenship.

**Opportunities.** One couple had applied to New Zealand before they learned they could apply to Canada as Convention refugees;

we put on paper plus and minus what we know about both countries. Canada is bigger, and economic level even higher than New Zealand; it has special connection with other world; we are going to city we know about...from Olympic Game; and we also have that secure feeling, of security. If you don’t find job in one month, you still have Canadian government support; you know you won’t be hungry.
Government programs. Canadian government programs for refugees were perceived as generous and offered a measure of security during the initial settling-in period:

*Canada gave us just really good opportunity, you know, to apply as refugees to come here...they paid the bank for transportation and the government paid here for housing, basic needs, and this is something really good for that time, for that first year, because I didn’t know English well.*

Other choices were based on less information. One participant decided against going to Australia because *it is so warm...I can’t take.* All she knew of Canada was that *Canada never have war, you know, and I just hear it is easier for job.* Peace and opportunity, both rare occurrences in war-torn Yugoslavia, were the pull factors. Others were equally uninformed:

*I expect that Canadian people live under the land because it is too cold you know;*

*I thought about Canada like a big forest.*

Help and Hindrance

For some, friends and family members encouraged or helped the application process. A friend informed one participant of the opportunities offered by Canada and *he explain everything* about how to apply. Another’s brother guided her through the whole application process: *he give me paper for government, Canadian Consul, and he help me sign.*
If family members were remaining behind, however, they tended to discourage participants from leaving. The winter before one participant came, a particularly cold one in Canada, her mother would watch the news and call her: *come, come see, look at the snow, look how is cold; stay here.* Her sister tried to discourage her even as they said goodbye at the airport by insisting that life elsewhere would not be any different: *you stay here, because everything will be the same, you will stay home with your children like here; stay here, better than there, here you have us, there you don’t have anybody.* Others were the objects of envy: *you are so lucky you are going to Canada; you have forestry and you have so luck you are going to Canada.* Envy was experienced as an added stress, an expectation that they needed to be successful because of the good fortune that they were given.
Travel to an unknown destination as a tourist can be exciting: there is the exhilaration of adventure and of new experiences, yet underneath remains the knowledge of stability, of familiarity, of home. The journey is an interlude, a brief respite from our normal routines, so the foreign, the different, can be tasted, savoured without any of our beliefs, habits or lifestyles being affected. The experience remains superficial since our way of life is not challenged. For refugees arriving and settling into a new country, the experience is different. Part of the fabric of their lives has been ripped apart and surviving at home is no longer feasible. The task facing immigrants is to create a new life for themselves in a foreign society, which involves learning the language, customs and habits of the new society, acquiring the necessary job skills and integrating into the workforce, developing a social network and finding ways to continue family life. To undertake this journey requires both courage and desperation. Participants had given up hope of being able to survive in the former Yugoslavia: economically and in every way we couldn’t stay in that place, and had to find the courage to leap into the unknown, travelling to the end of the world to start a new life.

Expectations

Two of the respondents had some knowledge of Canada, one because of her life-long interest in Canada and contact with Canadians; another because she was well-briefed
by a consular official and this help me a lot being realistic in expectations. For others is
was a journey into the unknown, since knowledge of Canada was sketchy:

I didn't know nothing;

I expect that Canadian people live under the land because it is too cold;

I though about Canada like a big forest.

Arrival

Refugees who arrived at night, in winter, had their worst fears confirmed: it was
24 below, it was December 17th, and I thought it was like the end of the world, while
those who arrived in summer were unprepared for the warm weather: and first we landed
to Toronto and I was surprised because it was a very warm day, everybody wore short
sleeves and we have very warm jackets because we had imagination that here is just ice
and snow.

Fear. Initial arrival was characterised by fear. Refugees were briefed about their
journey before departure and were met when they arrived and taken to a reception house.
However, when one mother, her husband and young baby arrived at midnight carrying
plastic bags with signs that everybody can recognise us and help us...nobody waited for
us, nobody recognised us. The experiences of that night remain indelibly marked in her
memory. When I interviewed her, she had been in the country four years, but she spoke
of this night as if it has just happened: that night was very special for me, and I
remember always, and colours I think I saw, and everything. While her husband walked
up and down with the plastic bag identifying them as newcomers, she stayed with her
child, and stopped a man in uniform: my English was very poor and I told him: “I am
immigrant and nobody is waiting for us and what can I do now?” When her husband eventually found an immigration officer, she felt huge relief: that moment I know it is good place...everything is going to be OK. The journey to the settlement house revived her fears. The taxi driver was black:

And this is very important for me because I don’t have experience with a lot of different colours. I met some black people, some Arabic people because they came to Yugoslavia and they studied there...but maybe I watched a lot of movies and a lot of gangs and everything bad that happened in America and I was OK, I wasn’t scared in that moment, but when we came to reception house it was night; no people. And maybe one man who was Filipino, something like that, a new face for me, second new face, and he was a manager there and he found room for us in the basement, which is terrible for me...because I really didn’t have experience with basement, and one with small windows...I remember he asked do we like for child in the other room. “No, no way!” Because we had only two beds in that bedroom, I decided to share bed with my child. And in the morning, everything was different, because we went to dining room and we met some people from Yugoslavia. But that night was very special for me, and I remember always, and colours I think that I saw, and everything...

Desolation. Arrival could also signal desolation. One participant, who arrived on the east coast, didn’t unpack her bags for ten day because I felt better when my clothes in my bag; like it promises to me to go very soon. The structure of Canadian cities contributed to the sense of strangeness: there is downtown, people are during the day, but
dead in night, nobody is there; and there are big zones, sleeping zones where people just live and sleep, just sleep, nothing, because they work in the other part. This makes the suburbs a lonely, frightening place: I was walking about two hours outside and I didn't see anybody. I said, “Where is everybody? There are no people. I like to see Canadians, where are you?"

**Starting with Nothing**

Most of the participants had lost everything and arrived in Canada with little money or possessions: *we came with one suitcase, each suitcase new...my husband and me, we didn't have anything, we start from zero here.* Therefore, immigrant aid programs were essential in helping newcomers survive: *by the time we came here, all money I had was gone, and it was good we have some help, we couldn't live without that.*

**A Place to Live**

In addition to financial assistance, immigrant organisations helped newcomers to find a place to live: *immigration office help us with apartment,* or settlement house staff located apartments: *I have one counsellor and he found this apartment.* Private organisations that offered sponsorship also provided assistance and *found an apartment...it was furnished, volunteers furnished the apartment...it was really nice.* Other newcomers stayed with relatives until they found their own place to live: *my husband has his two cousins here, they came before us, and that first ten days we with them in their apartment and after that we found apartment.*

**Frequent moves.** Life as a refugee is characterised by homelessness and frequent moves, and settling in a new country does not always mean finding a stable home. The
rental market can cause instability: *we were moving very often, changing place: it happened they change rent or in previous apartment they make decision to sell apartment and we had to leave.* Having to move frequently caused emotional distress: *we really moved a lot since we escape from Sarajevo, and seven times I changed, yes, I change seven apartments you know: I'm just tired, I just want to be in one place for awhile.* The desire for stability, for permanence was very strong: *I want to stay in one place all my life: never happen, I know, because I want that so much...one place, to be one place for all my life.* Yet, despite the longing, there was still humour to be found in the situation: *every year we changed or city or apartment, every year; and one year country...next year planet!*

**Creating a home.** After many moves and losses to finally...*find something that is ours was deeply satisfying and exciting: it was like first time making your home.* For one couple, moving into their own apartment had great significance since they had lived with her parents after marriage:

*We were so happy because it was first time that we were alone together by ourselves; we didn't have furniture at the time...and I wrote letter that we didn't have anything but we was so happy, happier than ever before... because we had our lives.*

Arrival, settling into one’s own apartment, could also signify a deep and satisfying return to normality and the comforting routines of daily life after months of disruption. Small routines anchor our lives, giving them predictable shape and pattern as well as the comfort of familiarity, elements that are lost in the chaos of refugee life. One participant
described her first morning in her new home: *after so much time, for the first time I prepared breakfast for my family...it was good.*

**A New Life in Canada**

How quickly newcomers began to create a new life for themselves in Canadian society depended on past experiences, temperament and language ability.

**Climate**

Canada’s harsh winters made adjusting to a new life more difficult for those who were unused to cold weather. One participant said: *I like climate...because it is similar like in my born city,* but another participant told me: *the first winter when we came here was terrible.* She described walking to school with her son who started to cry: *and I remember I feel very bad when I saw him with white moustache frozen around his mouth; it was very strange for me and I feel very sad because of that.*

**Time to Recuperate**

Refugees who spoke English did not feel as pressured as those who did not speak the language, and were able to take some time for themselves to rest and heal from their experiences. One husband told his wife: *I did a great job in Europe, I was working 12-14 hours during the day...and I need six months’ holiday.* For several months he didn’t work: *he enjoy, he go bicycling, the two of us go driving; it was summer, July, August, September, nice, and them maybe it was October and he said: ‘I have to do something, start to work again, enough is enough.’*

Another participant also took several months before becoming involved in finding work as she didn’t need language classes. She was worried about family members still
trapped by the war and for six months she stayed at home: *I really didn’t do anything...children went to school and I was kind of, you know, watching TV ...I can’t say I was bored, I think that I needed that time for myself.*

**Language**

Everyone I interviewed spoke at least one language other than their own: English, French, German or Russian. But not everyone spoke English, some just “*hi*” and “*bye.*” “Every conversation presupposes a common language” (Gadamer, 1997, p. 378) and an unfamiliar tongue is a river of sound without meaning which cuts us off from others and prevents us from communicating and making our thoughts and desires known, except on a superficial level. Not speaking the language isolates the individual, preventing her from participating in society since “speech is the most intimately linked with communal existence” (Merleau-Ponty, 1996, p. 160). The result is a sense of anxious isolation:

> *It was most difficult for me because I didn’t know language; I felt so kept in myself, so nervous, because I said: ‘People are kind and...maybe some people would like to talk with me, but I’m not able to do it’...sometimes I meet someone somewhere, and in this moment I cannot speak.*

Not knowing the language was also disorienting and made everyday tasks impossible: *I don’t know English, I don’t know how go in bank, or go in another place.*

**A sense of urgency.** Newcomers who did not speak English felt a sense of urgency to take action, make plans, learn the language and begin to gain a sense of mastery. They took stock of their situation and made plans:
We are short in food, again; we are short in clothing, again; we are still having second hand furniture and what to do? What I need to learn?

First of all, what we know to do is attending school, because I was attending school all my life, probably this is what I can tolerate. What I need to learn?

First of all is English language, because we don't speak this language and I started to learn.

**Learning English.** Government financial support for refugees provided the needed security so that newcomers could concentrate on learning the language: *it was good we had some help, we couldn't live without that, and it was easier for us just concentrate on learning English*. Participants worked hard to learn the language:

*I speak little, I speak nothing...I just listen, listen, listen, and school help me;*

*Oh, I study it so hard; I went to ...college because government paid for me, and I paid for myself to .....school; in the morning, I had English at ...college, in the afternoon and evenings in ...school. I also take some courses at ...college. I study, study, study hard.*

Language training programs follow a progressive sequence and some newcomers found the pace too slow: *you have to go step by step, when you finish this program you start another...but I didn't have time, I was not patient enough to spend two years learning English, I just wanted to work.*

Participating in the workforce was a good way to improve language skills:
I find job in daycare with my not good enough English, but it is the best way to learn English is to speak with other people; doesn't matter if you make mistakes and it is important that they understand you. And I improve my English in that way.

**Finding Employment**

All participants, except one, had professional degrees in engineering, architecture, teaching, psychology or forestry and most had some work experience before coming to Canada. Some participants had hoped to find jobs related to their training and were finding it difficult: *we were much more optimistic when we come to Canada, but here we find its hard to find job for us.* Others had come ready to do whatever was needed in order to survive: *we prepared ourself to come here and do all jobs you can do, clean something, broom something, wash bathrooms or something like this.* Employment represented independence from government subsidies: *I never live like this, you know, receiving money, not doing anything: I am going to work, it doesn't matter what.* First jobs were often menial or unskilled work:  

*I got job in daycare, just to get some experience Canadian;*  
*I work for two or three months as a just cleaning person.*

Despite their menial status, first jobs could be a source of pride:  

*I was actually surprised how I enjoy the job. I never worked as a waitress (before) but it was nice: I met people, I practice my English, I met different gamblers, all of them are gamblers, but it doesn't matter; we talk about everything, my tips was good and I feel you know worthwhile. It doesn't*
matter what kind of job, I really enjoyed.

The difficulty of finding employment in one’s field could be an impetus to action. One participant’s search for work was fuelled by anger: *and I met some people who told me that no way I could find anything here, except for cleaning or that kind of job...that made me angry.* She persevered until she found work that satisfied and interested her. Another participant went back to college to improve her credentials:

*I study and study and study again, all the time when I have time, and I went college and I was the only immigrant there... in the whole class, that was hard you know but I am honour student I finish with honours, yes, yes, and I really study hard; at that time I was pregnant. Can you imagine, you know, only immigrant, with stomach. ...and I study and write and write and because my English is not good enough...but I did, I finished.*

Several participants volunteered at immigrant organisations, which led to offers of employment. At the time of the interviews, of those employed, none were working at their original professions, *this is not my real occupation*, although they expressed satisfaction with the work they were doing: *I feel good working here, really.*

**Husband’s Employment**

Seven of the participants had small children and were either employed part time, or stayed *home with the children.* Their husbands’ employment was therefore crucial for the support of the family:

*Right now he is unemployed, because it is job, seasonal job, but he gets recalled in spring...so we feel pretty secure;*
He is working in his profession...it was very important for us that one
of us is working.

Some men found work comparatively easily:

After a few months, they need someone as a contract specialist in the
department for few weeks, and then my husband went, it was a few months,
and then he came back, then month after he receive new phone call...telling:
‘We would like to have you in permanent position, senior contract specialist;’
my husband accept, he really enjoy.

Determination paid off:

He is very persistent and he was everyday on market trying to find
companies, and to meet people and finally after six months he found a job
...his boss told him that he got the job just because of his persistence

Those with technical expertise fared better than those with other types of qualifications.

One participant’s husband, who was a trained veterinarian in Yugoslavia...had to start all
over again. He initially worked at Burger King, then as a veterinary assistant: he was
working really hard, sometimes six days, on weekend, and sometimes if there is
emergency, he had to stay late. Underemployment took its toll on both partners: I was
really upset because he worked hard and no money...and he was unhappy because he
didn’t have any kind of satisfaction: no money, no position, nothing. This participant and
her family ended up having to relocate, since it is hard to find job here in C____ and he
was offered a good position elsewhere.
Family Relationships

All the participants, except for one who was widowed, were married and had emigrated with their partners; and all participants, except for one couple, had children living with them. I was curious how the refugees’ experiences had affected their marital and family relationships.

Marital Bond

The refugee experience placed stresses on marriage: we had some hard times and some good times. Often, the marital bond was strengthened by the experience of exile, especially since couples spent more time together than they would have in the former Yugoslavia: marriage here is better, because we spend a lot of time together. The lack of extended family meant couples had to rely on each other more which was seen as both negative and positive. One participant noted: we are more connected to each other, me and my husband, because we are alone here without relatives to help, grandparents. Another participant spoke about the stresses of having an exclusive relationship with only one person:

Because according to all this situation I have through and everything, I know, and the different way of life and the isolation and homesickness, and sometimes really sad, you know, and he’s only person I have here and my baby- because she is too small you know, I couldn’t talk with her, and that mean that my husband is the only one that is really close to me in the way, and you can fight, and you laugh him, and you can go through all these emotions only with him and its not easy always, that sort of relation...but you know, in every marriage you can have ups
and downs. I don't think that we are unusual situation, but emotionally I can find difficulties sometime, or because of this all stress and all kind of life. In my country it is different, because you have friends and you can go outside and spend...or you can go and talk with your sister and say: “Oh, I’m so mad at him and blah, blah, blah” and you feel better. But here, you know, the people are different...I find that situation particularly difficult, because I don’t have anybody here very close to me except him. And that’s the way emotions go. And the same with him...if he is upset and worried, thinking...we communicate, he talks with me and I talk with him; that’s it, you know, we only have each other here. But this is not healthy all the time to be with one person.

The struggle for survival could be a source of stress: if you don’t think about how you will buy food and stuff like that, it's much easier; if you have to think about that, it's much harder, even on marriages. In their first jobs, men often worked long and erratic hours, and this placed a strain on marriages:

*It's hard for some people because specially men work long hours and even in the afternoon, and its harder because we don’t see each other as much...it was easier in my country; maybe one day when we find normal jobs, we work from 8-5, it will be easier, because we will know; but like right now, sometimes its pretty crazy because my husband sometimes works three days from morning to 12 o'clock at night, because he worked two job; many people work two jobs...and people don’t see each other.*
Gender Roles

Although in the former Yugoslavia women had careers, and most of the women interviewed had university degrees, gender roles tended to be traditional, with the husband working and the wife being responsible for the children: *he's responsible to find job, to have money, to buy this, to buy that, to fulfill all obligations, to take care about his parents, and so many things; and I'm at home, and I'm more committed to that inner life.* Working mothers had an easier time of it in the former Yugoslavia since they had more social support in their roles as wives, mothers and workers: *a lot of women has big career, some of my friends...and they can work, and they have support of their husband and family, you know, they will take care of the children and she will go to work.* Despite this support however, gender roles were not equal: *even if woman works, she was expected to do more work; there are some exception, but usually...especially with the diapers and stuff. But I think younger generation is changing, here and there.*

In Canada, by necessity, men were more involved in childcare, but they were also freer to participate in parenting tasks: *my husband takes care of him as much as me; that's another good thing here, because in my country man wouldn't change diapers and stuff like that, because other people say something.*

In comparing Yugoslav and Canadian marriages, Canadian men were considered to be more emotionally available:

*When I see Canadian, I feel they are much closer...I think maybe their relationships are different, maybe they are...I see them more romantic and stuff like this, although I don't know...but some friends of mine they are married...not*
my personal, but friends of friend...are married to Canadian men, and they say they are caring, and they always buy them flowers and stuff like that...

Canadian women were perceived as having more freedom of choice in whether or not to remain in a marriage. First of all, Canadian women had greater financial independence:

*I think that it is different, really different than there; women can live here alone with her children. In my country, its impossible because you don’t have money, you can’t...here you can. If you have good salary, you live with your children alone and I think that the government give some money extra for that woman and they have support of society. That’s big difference.*

Another difference was the lack of social stigma about divorce in Canada as compared to the former Yugoslavia:

*In my country...that woman is, not black woman, but forget for her, it’s too ugly...divorce is not usual in my country. A lot of woman stay with their husband and I know they live really...they have really bad relationships, but they stay together, maybe because of children; but it is worse for children to stay together and living there looking at how parents argue or something, you know, than divorce or separate. That’s the biggest difference, because women have support of society here.*

**Gender differences.** Women were viewed as being stronger and adapting to their new circumstances more easily than men: *I found that women are more capable in adjusting to new situations than men, like here, like at the workplace, or anywhere.* Men
were considered to be more preoccupied with status and success, as well as more prone to frustration and violence:

*The women are stronger than man; if man don't accomplish, you know, goals and materialistic in any ways, he is not satisfied, that is a big problem in the family, its not in my case because my husband is not violent with the kids, but some men actually...*

Even if violence was not present in the family, men’s difficulties in adapting could place a strain on the marriage:

*It has put stress...ja...you can’t avoid it, because you don’t need that additional kind of stress, and you know he...in some movies, he is the one who is supposed to...but you end up being like strong for all of them.*

**Caring for Children**

In the former Yugoslavia, caring for children was primarily a woman’s responsibility, but it was also a communal endeavour involving grandparents and other members of the extended family, as well as neighbours:

*After we married we have children and they (grandparents) become baby-sitters; a lot of people are outside, stay on bench and look at their children, and they will take care of yours, only watch, nothing special.*

Raising children in Canada without a supportive network created added stress on families:
Here it is little difficult for us because...and will be difficult in future...because we don't have any cousins, we don't have our parents; in Yugoslavia, we had parents, they...this time they could be retired and take care of our children and we could have more freedom.

Mothers were reluctant to leave their children with baby-sitters in order to go out: here it is very hard to go outside with a friend, you have to find a baby-sitter, but I don't like to leave her until 11 p.m. or midnight. Lack of support also restricted family size: one young mother with two children said that her husband would like another child, but that she would not consider having a third: I'm alone with children, I can't, really can't; maybe if my mother here, my parents, then maybe...

Fathers' role. In the former Yugoslavia, gender roles followed a traditional patterns and men were not involved in the care of young children: in my country man wouldn't change diapers and stuff like that because other people say something, although the perception was that younger generation is changing, here and there.

Immigrant fathers did seem more willing to help their wives with childcare:

My husband is very good with the baby, from the first day. And my father was so surprised when he saw tape and him changing diapers; he couldn't believe his eye. Because my father wouldn't even hold us because his work is pretty...hand work, how you say, and his hands are hard, and he was always afraid that he could harm baby, I think he didn't hold us for first year But he was very pleased to see that he (her husband) was helping, because here I don't have
help from anybody; he was my only help. My husband takes care of him as much as me.

**Daycare.** Participants compared Canadian daycare services unfavourably with those in the former Yugoslavia. Yugoslav daycare had high standards: *inside is everything for children and nobody can enter with shoes, it must be clean, and children are not sleeping on the floor and everyday on different...sponge...you get to sleep in a bed...the same one.*

Canadian daycare services are also considered too expensive:

*I am unhappy here in Canada because of daycares are too expensive, and I have to weigh: will I work or not. When I started work, part-time job, I had to pay. Now I am paying three kids daycare...almost all my salary I give to them...*

Canadian working hours were considered to be too long and detrimental to family life: *you work until six, for me its too long leave children without parents, its too long, I can’t do it; I will try find job only part-time at first.* Others tried leaving their children in daycare but gave up when their children became sick: *she is two years, and actually when I started to work, I gave her to daycare, but she start to be sick all the time and I just give up, I didn’t want to do that.* Despite these criticisms, sending children to daycare for a limited time was seen as a positive experience for them: *they enjoy...they have a lot of friends there from our country.*

**Staying home.** Participants with young children chose to stay home with them: *most of the time now I am at home with the baby.* When children reached school-going
age, mothers worked part-time in order to be home when their children came back from school. 

> very nice job time, hours from nine to two, so I have time...prepare everything and pick up son from his school bus, so I have time.

The notion of leaving a baby in daycare for long periods of time was abhorrent, although the necessity for some people was acknowledged:

> I used to work in daycare here, and I didn’t like that too much; they leave them, they probably have to, you know, because nobody wants to just give up a baby, they just left babies, three months old babies, I think its cruel...its not good.

**Isolation.** Any young mother who stays home with her children tends to be isolated, since mainstream society values and encourages work outside the home and, as participants noted, the suburbs are *sleeping zones*. Immigrant mothers are doubly isolated: they are home alone with their children; at the same time they are not interacting with mainstream society which makes it harder for them to learn the language: *I stayed home with children...I didn’t have opportunity to learn language*. It also makes it more difficult for them to go out into society and meet new people: *maybe because of my three kids, it is very hard to meet people*. Mothers who lived in apartment buildings were able to create a network with other immigrant residents: *no, I don’t feel isolated...because a lot women here have small children, they don’t work, we go out together, outside, or museum, or home; we have good organisation*. But immigrant mothers who moved to the suburbs were cut off from friends and from the larger society, which they had not yet had an opportunity to explore:
The most hard thing for me about that is I feel isolated, especially here when we bought house here. When we live in apartment...so many people from Yugoslavia live in my neighbourhood, and many people were in downtown...and of course we were mostly related...we had friends from Yugoslavia, people from Yugoslavia; and when we came here everybody is so far, and some many people have jobs anyway, they are not at home and it is not the main thing in life to have friends over for a cup of coffee...but the phone is the only source of communication for me...and that's mostly the thing that bothers me here, because in Yugoslavia I could go out, I had a job, I had friends, I had people around me. It was always something. And here I am all alone...I am not alone, I have two kids, thanks God, but I need to talk to somebody that is older than four years of age.

**Outdoor play.** Canadian society was not seen as child-friendly, and children's freedom to play outside and to explore their world was therefore severely limited:

I'm sorry for my kids, because they can play on the balcony, but out there is nothing. In Belgrade, they can go out alone...they can go out alone with their friends...its not dangerous; here you can't, you can't...especially because a lot of people are outside, stay on bench, and look a their children, and they will take care of yours, only watch, nothing special, and you can watch them from windows, if they're outside you can check. But here, no.
Others agreed:

_In Belgrade, for example, my daughter all the time she was outside, play with other kids in the park, because you could find a lot of kids in the parks; but even here it is nice time, you go to the park, there is nobody there._

Participants expressed sadness and fear at the restrictions on children:

_We were like kids like that, my husband and me... we go outside playing with other kids, and it was so healthy, and now I am so scared...we heard a lot of stories of missing kids, so it is so scary._

**Child rearing.** One of the most difficult tasks faced by immigrant parents is what to teach their children. How does one balance the norms and traditions of the old culture with the requirements of the new culture in which the children are now living? What does one keep, what does one discard, and how does one choose? These are all complex and difficult decisions:

_It is very confusing, we talk about that all of my friends. When I deliver babies here, I compare everything with my first pregnancy and delivery in Yugoslavia and here, and there are bad and good things; and after that for raising, what I heard from pediatrician here and there, everything is different: for example, I breast feed babies and they told me here, no water, only breastfeeding; in Yugoslavia, you can give water._

Mothers talked together, gave each other ideas and advice, and also attended workshops: _I went to many workshops about this topic...and I read a lot._ Participants all stressed the importance of teaching children their native language so that they could communicate
with family members: *we decided to learn our language to our children, to speak at home only our language; so our language we will keep because of grandparents, family.* In addition, maintaining strong ties with family and friends was important: *every year we will go to our country.*

**Canadian Society**

What did participants think of life in Canada? I was interested to know what had struck them, what they saw as the strengths and the flaws of Canadian society. As newcomers, they brought a fresh perspective and could teach Canadians about themselves. At the same time that I was trying to understand and interpret participants experiences, I was also curious to learn how they experienced and interpreted us, since a genuine conversation involves an effort to "transpose oneself into the other person in order to understand his (sic) point of view" (Gadamer, 1997, p. 376).

**A Stable Society**

One of Canada’s perceived strengths is that it is a peaceful and orderly society that provides a haven for those seeking refuge from civil war:

*Canada never have war;*  

*We pretty much like life here, especially there is some order, some peace and we feel pretty secure.*

Civil society is well organised: *this government is strong, they have a lot of rules; if you have any problems you know where to go, so its organised and it is really what I like; in that way you have some sort of security.*
Canadian Citizenship

In contrast to European countries that only offer temporary asylum, Canada offers refugees the opportunity to become citizens: *Canada was the only one where your status was that after three years you can get citizenship.* In addition, government programs provide financial support until newcomers learn English and find work:

*It was good we had some help, we couldn't live without that, and it was easier for us just concentrate on learning English;*

*If you don't find job in one month, you still have Canadian government support; you know you won't be hungry.*

It was not only living in Canada that provided a sense of safety and security; travelling abroad with Canadian citizenship also provided protection from prejudice or identification with one or other nationalist or ethnic group: *we have Canadian citizenship, we are so proud, nobody can touch you, you know, nothing bad will happen.*

Multiculturalism

As white women, none of the participants were visible minorities, so that colour prejudice in Canada did not affect them. But in their own country they had been subjected to prejudice and discrimination as a result of ethnic origins. Canada’s multicultural society was viewed with relief and appreciation: *that's why I like Canada...there are so many immigrants from all over the world;* and the policy of diversity enabled newcomers to feel accepted: *we don't feel like immigrants here...from the beginning we feel that we are like everybody else.*
**Style of Life**

Inevitably, participants compared the difference in lifestyles between the former Yugoslavia and Canada: *if you want to compare everyday life, its so different, everything is different.* The lifestyle in the former Yugoslavia was seen as following a European model, whereas Canada followed a North American model:

*I think all American life is different, never mind it is Canada, or United States...but it is different from Europe; and when I came here I started to divide life: American life and European life, not Yugoslav life, European life.*

European life is seen as more sophisticated: *people in Europe have more sense of, for example, interior design, fashion, thinking, of life, behaving.* Some participants disagreed; they minimised cultural differences and thought that socioeconomic status was more important:

*I think people are the same anywhere, just it depend on past, if you are poor, you are same there and here and if you are rich, you are same here and there, or if you are more educated or less educated...it depend how much money you have or how old you are or how educated you are, and I think difference between people, not between countries.*

**City Structure**

The structure of the western city where the participants lived was viewed as not conducive to a rich and varied city life:
There is downtown, people are during the day but dead in the night, nobody is there, and there are big zones, sleeping zones, where people just live and sleep, just sleep, nothing else, because they work in the other part.

The effect is to create a sense isolation: my husband said, “What did you see?” and I said “I saw houses but no people”...I felt very lonely. Cities in the former Yugoslavia followed a different planning model: we have different conception because we try that everything is everywhere, to have our house here, but theatre there, and cafe over there, and everything is around. The result was a sense of vibrant urban life:

I didn’t feel lonely, because if you don’t know people very much but they are around you;

It was full of life, so many people on streets, so many people selling books, selling music, so many people singing and dancing; every couple of meters there is something happen, guy with a puppet, or somebody playing; its so nice.

Work Life: Everything is Purpose

Opportunity. Canada provided greater opportunity for material comfort than did the former Yugoslavia: here its better in material things, we can work, especially if you work hard, you can have good life. Financial stability gave a sense of security and freedom after the experiences of loss and deprivation: I like it here, I feel free...because I can buy everything that we need...that means free for me now.

For some, finding work in their chosen field proved difficult, and the promise and expectations they had had of Canada had not yet been fulfilled: actually we were much more optimistic when we come to Canada, but here we find out its hard to find job for us.
Upgrading skills or getting credential equivalencies could require taking additional courses: *it is so confusing with these courses and stuff like that.* Other, however, perceived more opportunities in their new surroundings:

*I like here because there is lot of opportunity to have a job; if you want to work you can work and you can make money. If you want to work twelve hours you can find two jobs and you can work if you want really the money. You have opportunities even if you don’t have education, if you want to work you can work...you can share apartment with a friend, you can get a job in retail, you can get job in 7-11.*

**Work hours.** Working in Canada entailed *hard work, long hours,* and the work environment was more pressured:

*In my country...when you come to work, they usually start at seven... you can get coffee, you talk to people next to you, and its different, its more relaxed. You’re working...but its more relaxed, you don’t feel pressure. Here, I don’t know, they’re watching you, you got to work, you got to work,...you can’t socialize at work...you just have to have certain attitude here to work, you didn’t come here to have a good time, you came here to work,...everything is purpose, purpose.*

The *hard work, long hours* is one explanation as to why the city has so little vibrant street life: *when you come home at six and you have your dinner, you don’t think about going outside; its really hard, you have to prepare and everything, wake up tomorrow morning and go to work.* In the former Yugoslavia, work hours were more conducive to family
life: working hour is seven-to-three, and after you have time to rest, to be with your kids...to watch them, to play with them, to help them do homework and things like that. Canadian society is perceived as being overly concerned with work at the expense of everything else: \textit{this shift, eight-to-five, or nine-to-six, my God, all day you work; basically your work has you.}

\textbf{Inequality}

Participants expressed shock at the \textit{gap between rich and poor, the rich and 90\% other people}. The fact that quality health care and education were reserved for the wealthy led to feelings of anger: \textit{I became mad when see it seems just reserved for small elite which can pay}. Social conditions in Canada compared unfavorably with those in the former Yugoslavia:

\textit{Here money is so important...you cannot fix your teeth, have surgery, you cannot heal yourself, you can die on the street because you cannot pay rent, you live on the street, you cannot eat; in Yugoslavia it wasn't like that.}

The existence of homeless people was difficult to comprehend, especially given the availability of jobs: \textit{people from Europe, especially from Yugoslavia...they can't understand why here there are so many homeless people and so many alcoholic people.}

The existence of homeless people evoked fear of sharing a similar fate: \textit{when I see them I have panic; it also evoked a sense of outrage: I think its shame for society...because society allow}. In this instance, Canadian society contrasted unfavorably with society in the former Yugoslavia:
We were just simple people, and you know nobody was homeless...there was always possibility to find something or to have something that is home, and food, but there were not so rich people, but middle it was very big...

Inequities in the Canadian job market and the low wages paid to service workers were compared unfavorably with other countries:

If you don't have at least a decent job, you work more and have less time for your family, that's the bad thing; its big difference between here and lets say Germany, where people work just simple. I work for two or three months as just a cleaning person and it was minimum wage, $5 an hour, and it was pretty hard job, that's the only thing I don't like here, because the harder the job gets, the lower the pay.

Those trapped in low-level jobs tend to be immigrants and the nature of the work limits their opportunities:

When I see people who work for ten years...and young people who could go and find school...its sad to see people work like that...of course its immigrant, but they start work that job, they never learn English

These inequalities in Canadian society led to a reassessment of life in the former Yugoslavia and a comparison of capitalist and communist societies:

I didn't belong to Communistic Party, I was against most of it...because I didn't find this system is good, but I found, when I came here, I found that a lot of things were good there, not in the system, in the way we were living:
Health Care

Recalling my own experience of childbirth in a foreign country, I was curious about the participants’ experience of childbirth in the Canadian health care system. Six of the participants had had children since arriving in Canada. On the whole, their experiences were positive, especially since the health care system in the former Yugoslavia had broken down and medical supplies had to be bought on the black market:

*I'm talking this time, the present, not before, before it was different; but now they don’t have enough supplies you have to buy that. If you have somebody who know, then it is easier, you can get, but if you don’t have anybody, they just leave you; oh, they don’t leave you to die, but, you know...*

The Yugoslav system was also seen as not sensitive to patients’ needs: *in hospital they are soldiers, they treat you like soldiers, not like people: you must do this, you mustn’t do that, you must obey and just be quiet.*

Hospital care in Canada was considered to be of a high quality: *with everything... it’s excellent, I was very happy there. Follow-up care was appreciated: we were very, really very happy with everything, especially because nurse came to see us two, three times and they were really helping, helping because I had problems with breastfeeding and they really helped.*

A big difference between childbirth in the former Yugoslavia and in Canada was the presence of fathers at the birth:
My husband was with me, which was very strange for people from our country;

One thing that is excellent is that my husband was with me during labor,

and it was beautiful, excellent.

One participant, however, had a very different experience. She had a high risk pregnancy and found the care she received in Canada inadequate and negligent:

I don’t know is it because I am immigrant ...here I said that I deliver like in Middle Ages...they just sat and watched me and I did everything myself and my husband helped me...thank God that I didn’t have any complications, but I could. They didn’t help anything, they didn’t want to, they didn’t have time, forgot to give me anesthesia, so without epidural or anesthesia, I did it like in the field, by myself.

She was also dissatisfied with follow-up care, because her child was born with a rare skin disease and she was unable to find specialists who would discuss his case with her. She had to educate herself: I...read books and thought Internet, I wrote to doctors in the United States to see what’s that (his condition); it is very, very rare and I don’t know where to go with him here in Canada.

Education

One participant voiced strong opinions about the Canadian educational system, comparing it unfavorably with that from the former Yugoslavia: (Canadian) schools, I found they are very weak, because we have very strong school and I was very satisfied with school system in Yugoslavia, so I asked other participants with children what they thought of the Canadian educational system. Participants agreed that the Yugoslav
system was more rigorous, covered a broader range of subjects and students were more advanced:

A lot of children came like big children here and continue school and usually jump one level, two levels, and because they learned how to learn and they learned a lot of a fact...I wish that this system of school is here.

The Canadian system is seen as favoring the rich: people who are rich, they have opportunity to give a good school and a good education to their children, but the public school, no. Higher education in Canada was seen as narrowly focused: here people are more practical: you need this, you learn only this; but there they had broader education.

At the same time, Canadian university students were seen as under more pressure:

When I look at the students at the university here...I feel really sorry for them because we had such a great time back home when we were students...we didn’t have so much tests and exams and we had major exams in June; so till June it was up to you, you spend your time, days, in the cafeteria discussion deep issues, and we had a great time, but here they are so busy, they don’t have time to do and to enjoy actually.

The difference in the educational systems caused some parents a great deal of anguish: I am really concerned, sometime I cannot sleep; I cannot sleep because it was very important, in Yugoslavia we have bigger standard than here. Others were more pragmatic: schools are different, but now I think that everything depends on school and teacher...so I don’t miss my Yugoslav school because we will not go there to live; we are here.
Meeting Canadians

What happens when two cultures meet, when people from different cultures try to cross divisions and forge alliances?

Ignorance and condescension. Canadians are frequently ignorant about other cultures and condescending in their assumptions: the only thing that are hurt me, that all people, all Canadians, think that we came from the tree, that we, Yugoslav, Serbs, we didn’t know anything; we really live very nice. But immigrants from the former Yugoslavia could be equally condescending about Canada: a lot of people from my country are so arrogant, when they see all of this. This attitude among immigrants could be attributed to the shock of dislocation and difficulty in adapting to a new environment:

A lot of Yugoslav people didn’t want to come here; when they come here they watch only the bad things, “Ah, it is not good, in Yugoslavia it is better, it is not good,” and they are not happy here and it is not good for their lives.

They talk, “We will return to Yugoslavia and never return” and they will not like to settle here.

The participants I interviewed, although they had concerns about specific aspects of Canadian life such as the low educational standard, appeared to have come to terms with the direction their lives had taken and were determined to have a positive attitude and make the best of their circumstances: some people when they come here they just complain of all things, but I don’t think there is that much difference, I think every country has good and bad things. They expressed satisfaction with their life in Canada:
comparing with Yugoslavia and Europe, I would rather be here than there;

I'm happy because I am here, really

**Socializing with Canadians.** Canadians were experienced as friendly and accepting of immigrants:

*The first impression was, and I still think today that the best about this city, are people: helpful, very helpful; I didn't have any, any bad experience as an immigrant. Because so many people ask me, from former Yugoslavia, and from other countries, Spanish speaking, they ask me, “What was your experience as immigrant, did you...feel anything different, did something happen that you didn’t like, didn’t feel good?” and I said, “No, never, never I feel,” even my broken English, whatever...I didn’t have anybody, honestly. Although friendliness and politeness were viewed as pleasant, positive traits, one respondent described how she gradually realized that they embodied a superficial style of relating:

*I found here, people are very kind and polite (in Yugoslavia you won’t find it) in bank, or post office...first I took it personally, because I thought this person is kind to me maybe because she or he likes me. But it’s not about it, I finally realized. It was professional smile, was in office or street or somewhere, in store, its not connected with me: “Hi there, how are you today...never mind”. In Yugoslavia you don’t find that, the sales person, she will tell to you, “Yes, what do you want?” It’s very cold.*
There was a real desire to make friends with Canadians, but immigrants found this difficult. Coming to a new country in adult life, immigrants don’t share past experiences and ties that develop between people over time: *it is really hard, you know, you need time to know somebody, you know, to become your friend.* In addition, differences in lifestyle and patterns of socializing made developing new friendships more difficult than expected. Canadian styles of socializing are more formal than those in the former Yugoslavia: *here it is inappropriate and absolutely unpolite to buzz somebody at the door and say: “Oh, here I am, do you want to have coffee with me?”* 

No, you have to make appointment for that.

Canadian society is seen as dominated by work, with people’s jobs being the central organizing principle of their lives: *your work has you.* The long hours Canadians spend at work interferes with their ability to lead full and spontaneous social lives. Their main focus, apart from work, is the immediate family: *they work long hours, people don’t have time for each other, they only have time to be with their kid and family.* This makes Canadians *more kind of isolated in a way,* and contrasted unfavorably with the larger social networks participants were used to: *for us it was different, the whole family and friends and neighbors.*

Contact with Canadians friends is not a spontaneous, spur of the moment occurrence, but something that requires planning: *you have to make appointment to see your friends, you know, to go to dinner together, because you have to make appointment for this week for another, or three weeks in advance, and that I really don’t like.*
In addition to being busy, Canadians, despite their superficial friendliness, are difficult to form friendships with:

*Hard it is to make friendship with Canadians, because we are not same mentality; I really try, I wanted to make friends with young people, talk to each other, go to picnics, and still for four years we don't have anybody, so I'm disappointed with this.*

The difference in mentality was described as a type of reserve: *I think that Canadians are very closed*, as well as a difference in the level of intimacy that people are willing to share:

*When we meet people from Yugoslavia, after very short period of time we are friends...we know so many...one about another, about our lives, about our thinking, my feelings, so many things...and with Canadians we can't do that immediately, like talk, because its that language barrier, and maybe fear that some would not understand something. I think that people here don't go so deep so in short period of time, then they are protected and they can choose, when years go by, who are the right person for right feelings...in one way its good, but in other way you have to wait so long.*

Communication styles were also different. Participants described themselves as *more like south type of people, passionate*, which led to difficulties in communicating with Canadians:
Here like at the workplace, or anywhere, people from my country are always complaining that you always have to put this mask of whatever, you always have to control your emotions, to be very careful what to say, how to behave. The positive aspect of Canadian reserve was that it provided a sense of privacy and freedom. Whereas in the former Yugoslavia people pay attention to other people too much, in Canada, people don’t look in your home, in your business, they have privacy and they respect your privacy and I like that.

Struggling to define the difference between the Canadian and Yugoslav attitude to socializing, one participant commented that Canadians work and go dining outside and come home, sleep and then another day; weekend they go outside to the country...its their way of life, you know. Canadians seem more purpose driven, more goal oriented, even in their leisure pursuits: there is no relaxing, no killing time; you don’t have time to kill time.

A few respondents had made Canadian friends: I have some friends that are Canadian and they are good friends, but most participants socialized mostly with other immigrants from the former Yugoslavia. Having Yugoslav friends was comforting: I feel much better when I have somebody from my country, especially when we don’t have family here...we feel less homesick. Immigrants provided a system of mutual help and support: There were four families from my country...Croats, Muslims, everywhere, everybody, not Serbs, but we were so happy, especially when I delivered...its
was so hard for me to be alone...I had to stay at home all day ...I didn't have
car, my husband had car, and I didn't have license...so I had a lot of friends
in my old building, they bought me something in Safeway, something what I
needs, especially when kids were sick, so I had very good friends, but only
from my county.

All the respondents had established friendships with members of the Yugoslav
community, so I wondered about the significance of having Canadian friends, since it
was a theme that reoccurred: I think its best for me to have some Canadian friends...and
sometimes friends from our country. Friends from the former Yugoslavia made up for
the loss of home, they provided a link to what was familiar, a sense of a shared culture
and language, as well as a support system, but having Canadian friends implied an
acceptance and an involvement in the new society, not as members of an expatriate
community, but as integrated members of Canadian society. So lack of friendship with
Canadians contributed to a sense of still being on the margins of mainstream society: so I
have very good friends, but only from my country, not Canadians...I'm so unhappy
because of that.

The Meaning of Exile

Refugees are exiles, condemned to wander from their homes. The term exile has a
variety of connotations: forced removal from one’s home, absence, banishment,
punishment, homelessness (Davies, 1969/1976), all words denoting an inflicted
uprooting, separation, pain, suffering, dislocation, journeying. An exile is one who is
condemned to wander from her home. And what is meant by the word “home?” Home,
from the Old English *ham*: a collection of dwellings (Davies) is first of all a physical space, the building in which one lives; it is also a larger space, the environment where one is born and lives with one’s family within a surrounding community. In addition, it is an emotional space, a space of ease, comfort and familiarity to which we are attached. Home is the vital center of our lives, just as the heart is a vital center of our living body, the innermost core of our being. We talk about the “heart of the matter,” we say “the thrust went home” (Pollard & Liebeck, 1979/1994), both phrases referring to a central core of truth, of being. Heart and home sustain our being. We all grow and leave our past behind us, but for exiles the past is in truth another country.

Given my own experience of exile, I was curious how participants came to terms with feelings of homesickness. I found that no matter how successful the transition or how satisfied participants were with their new lives in Canada, they continued to struggle with the realities of exile, with the fact that they had had to leave their homeland and their families behind: it takes time, it really takes to ...get over all these things, and I don’t know, I just accept that this is a phase, a normal phase.

**The Pain of Separation**

Separation from loved ones was hard to bear, especially in the initial stages after arrival: I really had a hard time when I came from Yugoslavia, all month I was sick, I was depressed, I missed my parents so much, I phoned every three days. For some, the pain of separation was alleviated by satisfaction with their new lives: I enjoy it here, I feel good, I’m happy; and by frequents phone contact with family members: if I am really sad, I just phone and speak with my sister, that helps too. For some though,
nothing, not even the passage of time, seemed to help to ease the pain of exile: *I don’t know how long we will be homesick: we are older and older and still homesick.*

Families with young children missed the support that extended family provided: *I would leave L. with my parents home, and I would go out; I would put him asleep and then I would run out, I would go to downtown.* They also expressed sorrow that their children were growing up without their grandparents: *I just get sad that my baby is not spending time with their grandparents.* The lack of an extended family in Canada influenced participants’ choices about whether or not to have more children. One participant with two children didn’t want more children as there was no extended family to help her: *my husband wants more children...but alone, I’m alone with children; I can’t, I really can’t; maybe if my mother here, my parents, then maybe.* Another participant was considering having another child: *we don’t have family here; if we have family, with other children, maybe I would think (of not having more children) but here he would be by himself, so that’s the first thing that comes to mind.*

**Guilt**

Separation from family members placed added responsibility on those left behind, which resulted in guilt at one’s own good fortune at having escaped to make a new life. One participant mentioned that her younger brother had taken on the responsibility of caring for their aging parents, as well as for his in-laws: *I feel a little bit guilty, because my brother is there and he is person who take care of those old people. He told me: “I belong here...I have to take*
care of them...” It’s hard for me to hear that a person, 32 years, is thinking in that way.

A Different Way of Life

Participants missed the vibrancy and intimacy of life in the former Yugoslavia, the ease of communication between people with a shared history and heritage, as well as the emphasis on interpersonal relationships and friendships:

its kind of a complete different way of life, living, here,...in the beginning

I missed my friends very much, like all of us, neighbors, friends...there you can go to have a coffee with your good friend, just to sit, you know, at cafeteria, whatever, restaurant, and I miss that, I miss the phone calls from my friends...I miss that kind of sharing.

Over time, some participants adjusted to the Canadian lifestyle, although this was not necessarily seen as a completely positive change: but later on, when you get a job and everything, then you get into this routine, then you don’t have time for anything...that’s another bad thing. For others, the pain of separation never went away, no matter how satisfied they were with their lives in Canada:

I would rather be here than there, you know, but this other connections that I have with my old country and my family there, my parents there...it is just a heartache that I have inside me, but it is there.
The Face of Homesickness

Adjusting to new surroundings was difficult: *when I came here I had like so many up and downs, and missing everything*. The quality that defined home could be elusive:

*Its hard, because I miss a lot of things...oh, nothing what you can take, but I miss some special feelings, I lost them here...its hard to live in your country, but you like, you want to stay and on the other hand you know you have to go.*

**The smell of home.** Nostalgia seemed to be evoked most strongly by physical sensations. Several participants mentioned the scents associated with home: *that mix of feeling inside me when I open my window and smell my country*. A smell could be evoked unexpectedly: *all of a sudden I could smell the sea*, and smells were associated with a variety of places and objects: *there are different smells, you know, smell of my mother's apartment, or even the hallway when you enter the apartment building, there was this characteristic smell...the smell of my books, old, or even just coffee spots*. For those who lived near the sea, nostalgia manifested as a longing for the seaside: *the thing I miss the most its actually the sea, Adriatic Sea; oh, I would give anything just to go there for one day to lie on a beach*. One participant described deliberately trying to recapture that elusive scent that signified home to her:

*After some time, I miss, I saw it is different, smell is different. And maybe, you know, it was homesickness, the face of homesickness. Downtown, in downtown...is a memorial park and building feel like my elementary school, very similar to my elementary school, and I found myself few times standing on those*
stairs and trying to feel the same smell, you know, to make it like home. I try to
convince myself standing on those steps...I try to explain to myself: “Why you
need that smell, when you open the window you can feel the fresh air from
mountains”, but it is higher, its something different, its not seaside.

Sometimes these memories could be shared with children: my daughter...
sometimes she says: “Oh, Mom, it smells the same...” but other times children could not
understand their parents longing: once we were talking about sea...and I told her... “But
its salty,” and she said “Yuck;” she prefer swimming pool.

**Other senses.** It was not only scent that triggered nostalgia. Other physical
sensations, not necessarily pleasant, were also associated with memories of home:

*So nice, you know, to use the bus, public transportation here, its enough
space, you can always sit, even in rush hour; but at home, in rush hour,
you stay in middle, and I said one day to my girlfriend: “I feel someone to
breathe in my ear.” And she told me, “You are crazy, you are pervert!”*

*Some things maybe even not nice...*

When I interviewed participants in their homes, they always served coffee and
some delicacy from their country: *this is from my home country*. Food, too, evokes strong
memories of home.

**Dreams.** Longing for home could also manifest in dreams:

*It was very hard for me in the beginning with my home town and
everything...I used to dream about the streets; I didn’t dream like about*
my apartment, I dreamed about Sarajevo and the streets...I missed it so much in the beginning.

Dreams were not always about immediate home and family. One participant described dreaming about her grandparents’ home where she used to go as a child. The journey was difficult: *journey was so hard, I didn’t like*, but now that she was living in Canada, she found herself dreaming about that time: *I don’t know why, I dream only about that city*. Trying to explain why she should be dreaming about a place that she had no conscious memory of liking, she concluded that it was surfacing in her dreams because: *I was really free there, really really free.*

As time passed, feelings of homesickness receded: *I missed it so much in the beginning, but now, I guess you...somehow maybe you lock it in, so just gone.*

**Lost Treasures**

Home is also characterized by the possessions we accumulate which link us to our ancestors and to other family members, as well as to significant episodes in our lives, and which are irreplaceable. Some participants were lucky and did not lose their treasured possessions: *I didn’t loose, because all the time someone, mother-in-law, was there to protect*. Others, however, were not so fortunate

*I still miss...especially now when I am going through my albums, I always remember the other pictures that I had, or I travelled a lot and I had small souvenirs, some things I bought, or I played hand ball and I travelled a lot with my club, and I met a lot of people from other places, and I trade with them...and I don’t have anything from the period...I lost everything from socks*
to couch to house, and I wait to have house, couch and everything again, but
some small things I will never have again.

Treasured possessions that had been lost were remembered vividly:

I had so many books...like from since I was a child and that was kind of the
gift I like the most, not chocolate, candies, but books; I had many books and
my husband as well. And I think I miss those really; I can still see shelf of
books and recognize each of them

Photographs

Canadian’s ignorance about life in the former Yugoslavia was painful:

The only thing that are hurt me that all people, all Canadians, think that we
came from the tree, that we, Yugoslavs, Serbs, we didn’t know anything, that
we really live very nice. I can show you our pictures, you have time...

I did have time, and we looked at a series of albums with photos from life in the former
Yugoslavia: houses, landscapes and important events shared with family and friends. It
was a significant and intimate moment, as the participant shared, and I gained, a visual
impression of the events and landscapes of her life. Another participant showed me a
postcard of her hometown, a series of photos of town landmarks: the river, some
impressive buildings, a scenic vista. The last picture in the series was of a pile of rubble,
all that remained of once beautiful buildings destroyed in the war. The effect was
shocking: there was no room for a conventional response, “How pretty!” “What a nice
town.” I couldn’t fathom who had created this card. Was it a cry of outrage: see what war
has done to our city? Or was it a perverse tourist attraction: come and see the spoils of
war? It was heartbreaking to see this card and realize that this represented her hometown and what had become of it.

**Future Cast**

Personal experiences of loneliness and homesickness were alleviated by an orientation towards the future, an emphasis on the next generation and on sacrifices made willingly for one’s children: *I think that Balkans, its not a place to raise your kids, there is no future for them; so maybe that had something to do with it, me trying, you know, to accept this society and this country.*

**Reordering Priorities**

The experiences of loss and exile forced participants to confront their assumptions and attachments. When I asked them how they felt their experiences had changed them, the most important change was that they had re-examined their priorities.

**Material possessions.** Participants found that they could survive without possessions they had once thought indispensable to their lives:

*I thought I would never, and I think this is perhaps something for me in my life, that I could never get apart from them, you know, but I did and I survived, so you can actually live without; probably your life is not the same quality or whatever, but you survive.*

Losing possessions changed participants attitude to material possessions: *maybe because we lost everything and this material factor is not that strong like maybe for other people here,* and quality of life was viewed as more important than accumulating possessions: *you have a choice...if you want to keep your job and make career or if you want to spend*
more time with your child. Compared to loss of life, loss of possessions was not of prime importance: some people lost their lives, that you can’t really get back; and possessing material objects does not compare to possessing life: we started to think that everything what is material is not important, just life, only life, this is the most important what we have.

Setting priorities. Not only did participant’s attitudes to material possessions change, the priorities they set for themselves were altered:

I think I don’t think about stupid things, you know, I am just focused more on my life, on my baby, on my work, on my life, and that’s it; I don’t have actually time to be depressed, or you now, to dream about things, what to do with this, what to do with that, I really don’t have time. Really, I cut certain...activities I had in my country, you know.

You Can’t Go Home Again

Despite their strong feelings of homesickness, participants did not want to return to live in the former Yugoslavia: I’m sure to visit, but to live I’m sure not, and they expressed ambivalence about visiting, some being eager to visit regularly, others not sure if they would ever go back.

Home Was Another Country

One reason for not going home was that home as participants knew it no longer existed. The home they knew was the country that had existed before the war, before the country had been torn apart by bitter ethnic divisions and fighting: we are children from
the other, previous country. The polarization of ethnic groups as result of the war was a barrier to returning:

When I think of Sarajevo now and going back, its completely different, its kind of probably a reaction to things that happened in other republics, you know, this escalation of religion; of course, you know, they started in Serbia, and then in Croatia, and of course now they are building mosques everywhere...its kind of response to other, you could have expected. So, I don't think that that would be a place for me because I wouldn't like to live anywhere over there, just where you have to belong to some group.

Home has also changed in that it had become dangerous, no longer the peaceful, safe society of the past where women had been able to move around freely: you can go everywhere and during all night. The new country was dangerous and controlled by criminals:

Belgrade is big, big city, really big...its two or three million people and now its too big, and dirty and dangerous, and on the other hand it is beautiful. You have everything what you want in that city, everything; what you can’t find in Europe, Germany or other country, you can find in Belgrade; and beautiful, really beautiful, but dangerous...because there a lot of bad people live now there, because they can’t find job in Belgrade, in war, criminal, a lot of criminal. On playground zone for kids, they shot each other, and it is too dangerous, really, because there is underground Mafia and they shot each
other on the street. Belgrade is really now dangerous...before the war, that was really nice city.

For those who had experienced tragedy and discrimination during the war, these wounds had killed any feeling for their former home: now I don't have feeling for place, my home; just for family because they still live in Croatia. There was also a sense of anger and bitterness at how the country had destroyed itself and its future:

They just can't change, its in their blood, so I can't see any future over there because they have this primitive...instinct; its not something that you should tell about your country but I think its true. And I think that whatever they say now, or they blame States, they blame America, west, for everything that happened and that's not true. Maybe they help of course, they always do but...we started killing each other first; actually not started killing each other,
but voting for nationalists and parties...and so that's why I really don't have a good feeling.

Some were fearful of facing the new reality because of the disappointment they might experience. Longing and nostalgia for home had been dealt with: you lock it in, so just gone, and there was fear that return would reawaken these memories and also accentuate the sense of loss:

But I'm not sure if I would like to go or not, many people say its like different, its completely different than it used to be: there are no more friends and there are new people over there, you don't know anyone, so maybe that would be a
disappointment for me, maybe it's better to keep it memory, because everyone I knew left, so there wouldn't be anyone to see.

Others, however, were intrigued by the changes and wanted to go and see for themselves:

I didn't live there in war, I left before anything happen there, and after me happened lot, and a lot of people told me, my parents told me, I saw a lot of pictures about everything, but I have to say I can't have feeling, real feeling about that...I want to see, to go there...I'm sure if I go to my native town, and walk along one street, everything will...all my feelings, all my imagination will be different, I'm sure, but how different I don't know; I have to go there to see it.

Losing Home

Some participants and their families had lost houses and land during the war, and this loss was felt keenly: because we had...house and a lot of land in that city and village, but now we don't have anything there: everything is lost, lost. The injustices of war and the knowledge that neighbors had benefited from participants' losses made it difficult to forgive and forget the past:

I can't say that it (a feeling of sadness) is far away from me, because I still miss things there. I miss my family, I worry about them and things that happened there make me a little angry now. I had my life, like here, ja, things that were good for me, had friends and company, normal life. But when things happened there, there were people who steal, there were people
who kill... they were people from our place... people who live in same
town...and because of that I was afraid and I had to leave and left everything.
And still now there are people, I haven't met them but I know their names, I
know their occupations, everything about them, they live in my parent
apartment...they just took it and they use all stuff that my parent worked very
hard to make it...because of that I can't forget that place...and we have big
piece of land there...my father got it from his father, my grandfather got
it...two centuries (in the family) and some people took it and they used to live
there and they stole it, and its very difficult to forget...I used to live there, I
was born there, I grew up there, and I wish to go there to see everything, how
its looks now and meet people who are there; not to fight with them, but just
to see them.

But returning to see people who had expropriated property or to recontact old
acquaintances would require great dignity and courage:

And there are some of my friends, they are still there...I had their phone
numbers and their address and a few times I wanted to write them or phone,
but our lives last eight years were very, very different...I like to meet them,
but it is stupid to take paper and write two sentences...I can't explain...I like
to meet them to talk them, to see them...when you meet somebody in that
moment, sometimes you don't need a lot of words like write...sometimes you
can feel something from their eyes, from people, from gesture, something like
this. I have friends, she was old friend, there, and I know her long time before things happen. But she stayed there and this situation improve her, you know. she was on the other side that got from this situation, and I am from the other side that lost everything, and because of that it is a little difficult to write. Maybe for people who loose...I want to be proud you know...somebody came and pushed me out from my home, from everything that I had, I don't like to go there and say, "Oh, I am sad, you did bad thing to me buh, buh, buh." I want to be proud and never say that I had bad times, you know. Because of that, I don't like to write before I meet.

**Economic Insecurity**

Participants recognized that economic conditions in the former Yugoslavia were poor and that it would be difficult to return to settle and make a living:

*We see that people back in Yugoslavia, even those people who work their job, they cannot live as good as we live here on simple jobs...very expensive... wages are pretty low, and we feel much more secure here. I don't know if I could live through all that tough country.*

**A Bleak Future**

Participants agreed that life in the former Yugoslavia did not offer a stable or prosperous future for their children:

*And its a beautiful country, I love my country, of course, and people, and life there is beautiful, but it is hard; you are not safe, especially if you have children, because you don't know what happen after ten years.*
Parents also feared that the ethnic hatreds that had erupted into civil war could resurface and affect their children:

*I saw that those things happened one time; I always think, if it happened once...I don't feel secure, because especially when you have a baby right now, child, if I think that he could go through that...I never will go there because for that.*

Even if participants did long to return, they were determined to remain in Canada for the sake of their children: *for me its a little hard* (adjusting to life in Canada) *but I look everything for them; they don't like see me sad, crying, they like me smiling... everything for them.*

**Maintaining Contact**

Although participants did not want to return to live, many planned to make regular visits to see family: *every year we will go to our country.* Participants felt that it was important for children to be taken back to the former Yugoslavia to see family members and to experience life there so as to stay in touch with extended family, as well as their heritage:

*And that was one of the reason why I went home and spent three months there instead of stay here and work...because I wanted, you know, for her to be with my patents to enjoy, and I took her to the Adriatic coast, and she swam in the sea, and she is talking about that all the time.*
Home Is No Longer Home

One of the definitions of home is “the place where one resides” (Davies, 1980). Refugees no longer live at home; they have been forced to live in another country, yet their emotional ties remain to the place where they used to live. But while they have been creating new lives for themselves, those left behind have been living their own lives. Lives that used to be synchronized are so no longer and returning home can be an unsettling experience.

Initially, returning home brings with it a mix of excitement: you feel the butterfly in your stomach; trepidation: feeling a little bit afraid to go back to Sarajevo; and elation: I was so happy, you know, going back because of family. One participant described trying to cram everything into a short visit:

Whole day I was outside talking, walking to my university, to see old place where I go to school and during the night I was reading newspaper...here I didn’t even bother to open paper, but back there I tried to see all gossip world, political world, entertainment worlds.

This intensity gave her visit a sense of unreality: three weeks was like a dream; a blur of people, events, sights and sounds.

Participants found that, as a result of the war, home had changed and was no longer the familiar placed it used to be:

When we used to go to Sarajevo we had nice parks, if you are going to hotel for walk you see at least eight, ten people that you know to say, “Hullo,
how are you, what are you doing, are you going for coffee?" or whatever;
but now it is hard to see somebody that you know from before: the population
changed.

As travelers returning from a journey to a strange land, participants wanted to tell
their families and friends of their experiences, only to find that families had routines that
they didn’t want disrupted. One elderly relative remarked: you came last evening and I
was talking too much, I didn’t see my last show of the ...soap opera...and now I don’t
know what is happening. Travelers wanted to share their adventures, to be in the middle
of attention...because we came from Canada, but found that relatives were more
interested in their own lives:

They ask you something, even the closest is your blood, they ask you something
about ...Canada, you will talk about it and then you find something related or
very similar to their situation, and they will continue about their life, telling
their story.

Emigration involves a physical separation, but it also creates a psychological
distance that may be less apparent to refugees until they return home. There is a desire to
recapture the old sensations of home, of belonging, but the result can be a sense of
incompleteness: I try to capture everything, to make full picture, but I still don’t have
feeling that I am full, that I am whole person here. In terms of lives embedded in their
surroundings, refugees no longer belong, since they are not living here any more, they are
living a different life. For those satisfied with their lives in Canada, returning home as a
visitor can be a happy experience, a chance to be with friends and relatives and to have
children spend time with grandparents, but for those more ambivalent about Canada, the experience is one of being caught between two places, neither of which is really home: *I don’t feel I belong...I consider that I am depressed because of that, but that’s the fact.*

**Caught Between Two Worlds**

Participants were caught between two worlds: a past one that had irrevocably changed and to which their ties of belonging had weakened, and a new one to which they did not have ties of heritage or tradition. I was curious: given these realities, how did they define themselves and how did they feel they had changed?

**Ethnic Heritage**

Many of the participants came from mixed ethnic backgrounds, mostly half Serb-half Croat, and two of the participants were in mixed marriages: a Croatian married to a man half Muslim-Half Serb, and a Jewish woman married to man half Serb-half Slovene. In addition, many participants had relatives who were of mixed heritage:

*My family have many mixed marriages;*

*In my very close family, we have different religions.*

**Ethnic Identity**

The importance of ethnic identity varied among participants. Some participants identified closely with their ethnic heritage: *I am very proud to say that I am Serbian and Yugoslav;* or with the religious affiliation that ethnicity implied: *I am Orthodox religion.* Others, however, although recognizing their roots, did not consider these to be the defining measure of their identity: *I’m Serb, this is my nationality, but I’m not, you know “The Serb;” my feelings are different, I don’t need to express them in these ways.*
Tolerance

Most of the participants did not consider allegiance to one or other ethnic group as of primary importance: *for me, it doesn't matter is Muslim or Croatian or Serbian*. Both in the former Yugoslavia and now in Canada, participants expressed a willingness to socialize with people from the different groups. One participant, a Serbian, described her wedding in the former Yugoslavia, where the best man and the bridesmaids were *all nationalities...Muslims, Croats, so we are all mixed*. Once in Canada, refugees from the former Yugoslavia banded together to help and support each other:

*There were four families from my country...Croats, Muslims...not Serbs, but we were so happy, especially when I delivered...it was so hard for me to be alone...I had to stay at home all day...I didn't have car, my husband had car, and I didn't have license...so I had a lot of friends in my old building they bought me something in Safeway, something what I needs, especially when kids were sick, so I had very good friends, but only from my country.*

Participants also expressed tolerance of other members from other ethnic groups:

*we have the majority of friends are Serbian people but we have others, Muslim, Croatian and for us it is really OK, because my husband lived to Croatia until war...especially for him, and for me, Serbian people were minority in B____, and all my neighbors were Muslim and Croatian, and I never thought about them in that way...just people.*

There was a recognition that other refugees were not personally responsible for the events that unfolded: *because that woman isn't guilty because I'm here and my*
parents lost house; she is innocent, especially since others too had been forced to flee and all were victims of circumstances beyond their control: nobody is...especially people here...they're not guilty for that, otherwise they would be there.

**Prejudice**

Although they themselves did not subscribe to ethnic prejudices, participants did concede that segments of the refugee population from the former Yugoslavia harbored anger and resentment and would try to exert pressure on participants. One participant explained it this way:

I, myself, I don't care, but I know many people who care...I understand everybody, you know, and maybe they have difficult, bad experience in the war... I know other people who want to keep company only with Muslim or only with Croatian, or only with Serbian...because some of them can tell you, "Why you go there and speak with them, they are Croatian, or Serbian or Muslim."

One participated recounted how her young daughter encountered ethnic prejudice from other pupils from the former Yugoslavia when she started school in Canada:

*My daughter say me when she started here in school, she said first child who help her, it was Canadian. In this school was five children from my country, but they don't recognize my daughter and they don't like because she is Orthodox. She is very strong; she don't say first, you know, and children ask, and she don't shame, she said, "I'm Orthodox." She say me first day, "I come*
here because I'm Orthodox, I think here don't have people divide, people don't divide here like that, " but first day school she have questions like that.

Although participants continued to subscribe to the values of tolerance and commingling that had prevailed in their prewar society, they admitted that the aftermath of the war had had an effect on them:

*I think it is harder (to mix) after all that...you think that you could hurt somebody’s feelings by just watching the news from Belgrade. You know, its much harder now, things got so complicated over there...I see that people group in their religion...especially here when I go to playground and there is so many people from my country. I know they are there and when I ask them for name of your child and they instantly know...it's not so natural as it would be before. But I don’t take care of that...its here, but its not that bad. Things are not very bad, because you can still talk with people. But I think everybody feels more...its easier when people are from your...I don’t know. But its good. When we have children, we talk about them and...we don’t have to...because those things that start happening, happened over there. You can’t really discuss them, why discuss them: we didn’t want that to happen, nobody that I know wanted...so why discuss that.

Those of Serbian ancestry felt that the western media was prejudiced against all Serbs and that they had been misrepresented in the media, especially during the war in Kosovo:

*I am so, so disappointed because of media. All media from the beginning of 1991, first years when war started in Slovenia and Croatia, it was all against
Serbs and all lies, lies, lies that I can't explain to you; ah, it is injustice, because they didn't watch everybody same, because a lot of people are not guilty, for sure, all people. But media was the worst...only one side and especially during the war over here; we were crying all everyday, especially when I watch...

I can't read newspaper because too many lies and too many lies to tell everybody that it is good thing that they are bombing...I always can cry when I remember how many kids are there in Serbia and how many kids had to go through all that bombing, detonation, everything. I always think of my kids, my older son can't listen lighting and once...he was so scared. But I can't imagine there the bombs...so many people, friends and relatives, are there, so we can't enjoy here...and I think that all Serbs all world is made from media so bad guys and it is not true.

Who Am I?

Old identities crumbled as the society that had shaped them crumbled, leaving some participants without any defining national identity: I didn't belong to any religion or to any nationality when I lived there, because I was Yugoslav...now for me a little difficult to distinguish, I can't distinguish...for religions and nationality: I didn't care about that. And now that the former Yugoslavia did not exist, being Yugoslav meant identifying with a country that was gone. Some participants tried to resolved the dilemma by taking sides, but soon found that people could not be so easily grouped into neat categories:

I discovered actually now it is not white and black, because you have nice people, your friends, who are on different side, the other side. Why on this side? Nobody
ask you to be, you know, it just happened that you are here...if I'm Croatian...I didn't have any influence on that because its your situation...its my fate. Why I need to be in higher position or lower position because of that?

Others resolved the dilemma by not identifying with any group: I never belonged anywhere...in one hand its good, in one hand its not, but I think for me, for my personality, its good. But not belonging could also be a lonely place to be:

I don't have this feeling of belonging to someone...and sometimes I wish I could say, “Oh, I am this or that” and that would solve everything: I would go to this church or that church and I would be happy, you know go to demonstrations or whatever, but it is not like that, and I can't do that because I'm not. And I was raised really kind of Yugoslav, so my Jewish things was ...here there is a big Jewish community but they are something completely different, I don't feel I belong...so you know, I consider that I am depressed because of that, but that's the fact...

**Becoming Canadian**

One way to resolve the dilemma was by embracing life in Canada: we have Canadian citizenship, we are so proud, since becoming Canadian gave some sense of belonging: what is the most important to us is that we don't feel like immigrants here; ...we feel like, when we came here from the beginning, we feel that we are like everybody here. But this solution did not work for everyone: that doesn't mean that I forgot all about my country or...Canada will never be...I will never be a Canadian, you know although I have Canadian citizenship.
Forging an Identity

Once the old categories have broken down, people found themselves questioning who they were and where they belonged. Identities that had once been taken for granted were called into question since old, familiar assumptions no longer applied. Changing realities put people in the position of having to consciously forge identities for themselves rather than merely accepting those that had been assigned to them. Creating one's own identity in the face of shifting categories and rising nationalism involved an inner journey of constant questioning and reformulation, and was a matter of consciously choosing who one was and how one defined oneself:

(Being from Yugoslavia) *its part of me and I don’t cut that part of me; I can’t and I don’t. But first, I am from mixed marriage, half Croatian, half Serbian...and if you ask me at that time, I would say that I was Yugoslavian. And when war started, I asked myself, who I was, because I kept telling that I wasn’t Croatian, and I wasn’t Serbian, I was half-half. And when we moved to Belgrade I asked myself who I was, and maybe I was more Serb, because we moved and my father was Serb and we accepted Orthodox Christianity more than Catholic, and I was more mature and I choose to be that: I knew who I was, but I had to choose; I had to choose because I couldn’t be Croatian, and everybody knew that you are what your father is. Then I learned to be something, I was nothing, Yugoslavian, Yugoslavia didn’t exist any more, then I couldn’t be Yugoslavian, then I learned to be something and to accept myself, not cut Croatian, part, not at all, but...when I learnt to be something,
then the other thing was to learn to get rid of it. First I was nothing, then I
was something. I had name, then I learnt to overcome that: not to be just
Serbian, not to be just Croatian or half-half...but to be more than that. I had
my heritage, then I can be human being. I was human being in the beginning,
but I had to...go back to be something, then to overcome that. Because at that
time it was so big nationalism everywhere; with Croatians, with Serbs, with
Muslims, suddenly all people were very big and proud of something
that...there is not something so much to be proud of. Then when we came here,
it was some new level. I was from Yugoslavia, I was nothing, something,
overcome something, and when I came here I realised that I didn't overcome
so many things because I wasn't exposed to different things. And now I learn
to accept everybody.

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to bounce back, to recover from adverse experience. In the
literature, resiliency is attributed to biopsychosocial factors (Fine, 1991), a mixture of
physical predisposition, psychological temperament and social skills interacting with the
environment (National Advisory Mental Health Council Behavioral Science Task Force,
1996). But this does not tell us how individuals experience their own survival and how
they explain the changes in themselves. Participants had lived through a multitude of
difficult events: experiencing war; witnessing atrocities, living in fear and deprivation
under siege; forced dislocation and loss of home and possessions; struggling to survive;
and leaving home and family to rebuild lives in an alien country. I was curious how
participants felt their experiences had changed them and what factors had given them strength. At the close of my conversation with each participant, I asked: “How has your experience changed you? What helped you to endure?” I received a variety of responses: a sense of shared experience; reordering priorities; finding meaning; being uncompromisingly honest; standing up to injustice; being involved in life; having realistic expectations; and a positive attitude.

**Shared Experience**

The experience of being victims of war and becoming refugees was one shared with others: *whole country is like that...a lot of people around us lived like us.* This sense of shared experience helped give perspective to what individuals were undergoing:

*There were so many people that, not in Belgrade,, but who had to be in some refugee camps and horrible, horrible places, so my situation I can’t really complain when I compare my situation, you know, it was more psychological; you know, when you have food on your table, you can survive....there were so many people with horrible, horrible stories, so we were pretty lucky I guess...*

There was gratitude that they themselves had been spared: *thank God we are all alive* and that family members had not been killed: *when somebody gets killed in your family, oh its not so easy; ja, we are lucky that everybody are OK, especially as there were so many who died during the war: so many of my friends, they lost family, they lost...people died during the war, illness, or they were killed.* Compared to death or illness, loosing one’s home was not so terrible: *“OK, we are healthy, now, we are OK, we*
have to take care of ourselves. However, when you hear of people that were more lucky than you, loss and deprivation were felt more keenly.

There was also a sense in which participants tried to find meaning by connecting their experiences to a larger communal experience of *diaspora* shared by other refugee populations (Clifford, 1997, p. 286): Jews being transported during the Second World War, Russians or Chinese struggling to survive as their countries were caught up in war.

**Reordering Priorities**

Before the war, participants described themselves as being concerned with acquiring possessions: we were all, most of us, trying to buy furniture to furnish your house, to have a summer house or a winter house, or this and that. But as a result of the war, many participants lost everything, and found that their attitude toward material possessions changed radically and that their priorities changed.

**Material possessions.** Participants found that they could survive without possessions they had once thought indispensable to their lives:

*I thought I would never, and I think this is perhaps something for me in my life, that I could never get apart from them, you know, but I did and I survived, so you can actually live without; probably your life is not the same quality or whatever, but you survive.*

**Changing priorities.** Loosing treasured objects changed participants attitude to material possessions: *maybe because we lost everything and this material factor is not that strong like maybe for other people here;* and quality of life gained priority over the accumulation of material wealth: *you have a choice...if you want to keep your job and*
make career or if you want to spend more time with your child. Compared to loss of life, loss of possessions was not of prime importance: some people lost their lives, that you can’t really get back; and possessing material objects does not compare to possessing life: we started to think that everything what is material is not important, just life, only life, this is the most important what we have.

**Developing Faith**

Along with a new appreciation of and gratitude for life, participants reported that their war experiences had given them a new sense of the meaning of life, a growth in their religious faith:

*I felt me in the war... in the war I was alone with me and nothing was around, and I said there is nobody who can help, I am by myself, alone in whole cosmos; and I felt such loneliness because there was nobody who can help me: hopeless, absolutely hopeless. I have never felt this. It was a bad experience. And then I read Bible, I saw its something, I understood that there is someone who maybe can help, just one person, this is someone that you cannot see and touch, but exists...*

Another participant described how her faith grew over time:

*I started my journey. I was, how to say, not angry, but I didn’t accept Christianity at all at first... then after so many years, in Belgrade actually, I started exploring Christianity, mostly that Orthodox vein, and I started to read Bible, then little by little I developed my road.*
Not everyone found strength and consultation in religious belief, but philosophical views of the world changed:

*I think I don't think about stupid things, you know, I am just focused more on my life, on my baby, on my work, on my life, and that's it; I don't have actually time to be depressed, or you now, to dream about things, what to do with this, what to do with that, I really don't have time. Really, I cut certain...activities I had in my country, you know.*

**Uncompromising Honesty**

Participants became more realistic and down to earth in their approach to life:

*one of my friends told me that I am so realistic and so cold for him, because he is too romantic...and when I speak with him, I try to put him on the land, on the ground.*

An uncompromising and reflective honesty was not just reserved for dealing with others, but with oneself as well. One participant, reflecting on what gave her strength during her journey of exile, described how she forced herself to examine her own ideas and prejudices:

*My spirit, in my spirit my commitment to break wrong rules and to establish right rules...breaking prejudice, breaking wrongly made rules or opinions, ideas; it helped me because if I had hard time with something, that I would think about.*

Another participant explained she preserved her sanity by forcing herself to confront the realities of war, no matter how brutal:
I try to have experience of the war, I try to be aware of everything, even if is rude; I try to see with open eye, just see and accept again; when you go out and you see killers and you see death and you see everything this is happening, you say: “That is reality.” You have to do, because if you don’t look, you don’t know what is truth, what is not...

Living with Dignity

As a result of the war, participants found themselves the victims of injustice: loosing their homes, becoming displaced people, being forced to live under conditions of siege, witnessing atrocities, and being the victims of discrimination. There was little they could do to change the larger picture, but they could and did adopt strategies that enabled them to fight back in small ways and, in so doing, maintain a sense of dignity and preserve a sense of justice. One participant contacted a human rights organization which helped her win a discrimination case; another preserved her sense of freedom by reminding herself that although her body was trapped, her mind remained free; a third refuses to return to her former home until she can face her old acquaintances with pride and dignity.

Realistic Expectations

Expectations of what one was going to meet in the host country helped a great deal with adjustment and gaining strength. The more realistic and informed people’s expectations, the greater the ease of transition:

She (a consular official) was giving information that don’t expect too much
from Canada. She was honest, that is what helped me a lot. My expectation wasn’t so high as majority of people from former Yugoslavia. That helped me to...love Canada more than other people maybe and to get even more that I expected, because expectations wasn’t so high, so high.

Involvement in Life

The purpose of my research was to learn more about the experience of being a woman refugee from the former Yugoslavia. In order to render findings manageable, of necessity research has to focus on a particular aspect of human experience and neglect others. But human experience is more complex and multifaceted than any one study of it, and research on refugees has been justly criticized for labeling people (Meucke, 1992). Although I was aware of this and thought that I subscribed to the notion that people were more than the categories we impose on them, it was still a surprise, and a salutary one for me, to be reminded by one of the interviewees that her status as a refugee was not the defining characteristic of her identity. I felt caught up short, and was forced to rethink my attitude, my unconscious assumption that the refugee experience, because it was my focus of interest and therefore at the forefront of my thinking, was the major influence in participants lives. “All correct interpretation must be on guard against arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought, and it must direct its gaze ‘on the things themselves’” (Gadamer, 1997, p. 266). The interchange broadened my understanding of what it means to be a woman refugee: it means to be a woman, one of whose experiences is that of being a refugee.
In reply to the question what had changed her the most, the participant said: to get baby, that really changed me. Her life had gone on, and in her own estimation, the shaping influence of her life was not her refugee past, but the present, the experience of giving birth and of mothering a child. All other experiences paled before this one. A continued involvement in life, a focus on the daily changes that time brings, and a refusal to let the past define the present were therefore sources of strength.

**Attitude**

The attitude with which refugees approach their lives in a new country has an important role in shaping their adjustment. One participant commented that a lot of people from my country are so arrogant, and this attitude made their adjustment difficult. They longed to return home. In contrast to them, she described her own determination to make a success of her new life, stemming from her family’s strong desire to escape and to settle in Canada: we try all the time to see better side of everything; so it is not same as we expected before, but we are happy, it can’t be, and nowhere is ideal. Another participant commented: I think, you know, be optimistic, it help.

Disillusionment with the events in the former Yugoslavia also helped participants have positive attitude to life in Canada:

I was like fed up and they kept like killing each other, and its a never-ending story, so I think that Balkans its not a place to raise your kids; there is no future for them. So maybe that had something to do with it, my trying to, you know, accept this society and this country. That doesn’t mean that I forgot all about my country, or Canada will never...I will never be a Canadian, although
I have Canadian citizenship, but I am here now and I'll do my best to make my life better...

Resiliency, buoyancy, the ability to bounce back, to resurface after being pulled under: theories attempt to define it, are able to categorize elements that help or hinder it, but there is still a mysterious quality to exactly what it is in the human spirit that enables us to transcend the circumstances of our lives. Talking to participants, I gained a greater understanding of what their experience had meant to them and what they understood as the elements that had helped them, but the core still remained a mystery. A mystery that enables a woman to undergo siege, see her hometown destroyed by war, have a frightening escape from the war zone, suffer prejudice, seek vainly for a stable base in Europe, finally settle in Canada, do menial work until finding more satisfying employment, and after all this say in all sincerity: I was born under a lucky star.
CHAPTER SIX

Crossing Thresholds

Introduction

The last two chapters chronicled an encounter with the topic as a journey from peaceful pre-war existence, through war, escape, exile, immigration and a new life. Within this cycle of interpretation were smaller cycles as themes coalesced around a particular experience, such as living under siege. Cycles also included pauses for reflection on the etymology of a word or on the meaning of a particular experience. As I now contemplate the topic as a whole, I wonder what “insights, metaphors and frameworks can emerge that may suggest new ways of seeing the subject matter” (Wachterhauser, 1986, p. 33). In conducting such a dialogue with the text (Gadamer, 1997), I seek to reach an ever-deeper understanding of what the topic reveals. Is there an overarching theme or metaphor that could give a new perspective on the topic? The metaphor of a journey is dominant, and an apt one. But this journey is also marked by a series of thresholds, boundaries that separate one state or condition from another: a liminal space, from the Latin limen: threshold.

The liminal or threshold world is the world of the “in-between,” a space in which movement is both a leaving behind and an entering into where the beyond “begins its presencing” (Bhabha, 1994/2001, p. 5). It is a transitional space, from the Latin transire: to go over (Pollard & Liebeck, 1979/1994), hence transient, transitory, transition, all words that reflect and describe the refugee experience. The liminal space is also a space
also a space of transformation; where the horizon of one’s understanding meets the emerging horizon of the unknown. The horizons fuse, and our world is changed.

In their journey from their old home to a new one, refugees cross a series of thresholds: from peace to war; from home to homelessness; from stability to transience; from social order to social chaos; from belonging to alienation; from one country to another; from a familiar culture to a foreign one; and from one identity to another.

**The Threshold Between Peace and War**

As the war approached, a young woman left her home in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina. All the roads to the town were closed except one and she was worried that her family might be without electricity or without milk, so she decided to go and stay with her in-laws. She stepped out of her house carrying her infant son, a bag of diapers, and an umbrella *because it was a rainy day*, expecting to return in a few days. She never saw her home again.

The step that she takes over the threshold of her home is momentous, a step across the border between two worlds: the world of peace and war, the old life and the new: *very difficult to imagine...how big difference from previous and new life was*. Life in peacetime was rooted in a stable community, surrounded by friends and neighbors and expectations were that not much would change: *I actually saw my future pretty clearly*. This period is characterized by a state of innocence: *we were spoiled children before war*.

When the young mother steps across the threshold, she enters the liminal world between peace and war, between childlike innocence and the knowledge of atrocity and betrayal, between social order and social chaos, between a settled, secure life and the
instability of refugee life, between rootedness and homelessness, between having an identity, *I was Yugoslav*, and a sense of alienation: *I don't feel I belong*.

Participants were soon caught up in events beyond their control as their society disintegrated into civil war. Although signs of political instability had been present for some time, inflation had risen and the number of well-paying jobs diminished, participants would not allow themselves to believe that was could erupt: *nobody could believe that it could be war*. When the war did start, participants were shocked and found it difficult to believe that the war was real: *you think it is happening on TV or that you are just watching something*. Soon, however, civil society ceased to exist and the world was in turmoil: *there is no rule, there is no government, there are so sure...like civil laws*. Participants came face to face with brutality, injustice, danger and death. Innocence was lost: *we lived a nice life...and because of that we couldn't imagine life like we had after can exist...and terrible, terrible this life*. Life in the war zone became a daily struggle for survival, searching for food, heat and water while living under bombardment and being terrorized by outlaws and criminals. People managed as best they could to maintain their physical and mental health, even finding humor in their situation: *you need to find something funny in this situation, you know, it was so crazy actually*.

**The Threshold Between Home and Homelessness**

People trapped in the war zones did everything they could to escape. But escape from the war zone involved becoming a refugee, entering a state of transience and homelessness. From being integrated into their society, participants entered a state of superfluity: society doesn't need refugees. In new and alien surroundings, families
struggled to survive and to care for their children: *at that time you couldn't find job, or if you could, it wasn't enough for just living.* In the countries of the former Yugoslavia, rents were high, jobs were scarce and inflation devalued the currency. The strongest economy was that of the black market: *you don't mind breaking the law, you can make money.* Participants found that supporting themselves and their families was a constant struggle and they began to think of emigrating: *it is better to come on another place.*

**The Threshold Between One Country and Another**

Once participants realized that they could no longer make a life for themselves in post-war Yugoslavia since *economically and in every way we couldn't stay in that place,* they began to look to other countries where they could settle. Initial crossings were close to home, to Greece or Slovenia, but eventually participants crossed the ocean to Canada, since Canada provided the opportunity of permanent settlement.

Emigration meant leaving the support of family behind, marking a transition from support to isolation and causing great heartache: *I don't know how long we will be homesick; we are older and older and still homesick.* Participants missed not only their families, but also the fabric of their former lives, their friends, their culture, and their homeland. Having crossed the threshold of a national border, they were now faced with crossing into a new culture: learning the language, the work habits, the social customs and mores of Canadian society.

Participants went about creating a new life for themselves with energy and determination. They attended language classes: *I study, study, study hard.* They were willing to make a transition from professional work to menial jobs, waiting tables,
cleaning houses or working in day-care until they could find employment more suited to their skill level. They also created support networks among themselves which helped them navigate their new surroundings.

The transition from one culture to another was a shock for many. The former Yugoslavia had been a socialist country with a European lifestyle and great importance placed on friends and family. Canadian society, with its emphasis on long work hours and its more reserved style of relating, was difficult for many: they work long hours, people don't have time for each other, they only have time to be with their kid and family. Making friends with Canadians was a difficult enterprise, especially as Canadians were seen as more reserved and harder to get to know: hard it is to make friendship with Canadians, because we are not same mentality. At the same time, Canada was appreciated for its social stability, its acceptance of multicultural groups and for the economic opportunities it offered: I am happy because I am here, really.

Family life was affected by the change. Participants struggled to combine the best of both cultures in raising their children, wanting to maintain their language and customs, in part so children could communicate with their grandparents. At the same time participants wanted their children to be able to succeed in Canadian society. Fathers took on new roles, attending births and helping with childcare. Mothers who stayed home with their children found themselves isolated, without the help of extended family. The greatest support for families came from other immigrants from the former Yugoslavia: I feel much better when I have somebody from my country, especially when we don't have family here.
Liminal Identities

Our sense of self is created by our interaction with our environment. The experience of civil war shatters the society in which we live, as well as the anchors that we use to define ourselves: our community, our relationships, our home, our possessions (Zulueta, 1993). Identity has been defined as "an internal sense of personality integration and continuity that encompasses one's life history, accrued identifications and values and relationships with others" (Sands, 1996, p. 169). As society disintegrates due to war, so our sense of ourselves disintegrates as well.

Participants suffered a series of devastating losses and had to struggle to survive in atrocious conditions. This struggle drew on inner reserves of ingenuity and strength of spirit some didn't know they had. As a result of their experiences and the effort to forge a sense of meaning from what they had undergone, participants changed their priorities and their sense of identity. Although economic stability and a secure future for their children remained a priority, participants found that material possessions lost some of their importance as other values became dominant, such as gratitude for being alive, the importance of family relationships, development of religious faith, or an uncompromising honesty.

The process of transition carries within it the implication of transformation. This transformation is apparent in participants' sense of self. The strife in Yugoslavia forced people to examine their allegiances to their ethnicity and how they defined themselves. This created confusion, since many participants came from a mixed background or were married to men from a different background: my family have many mixed marriages.
Participants had thought of themselves as Yugoslav and then found that they were being categorized by ethnic background and many had not thought of themselves in this way: *if you ask me at that time, I would say that I was Yugoslav, and when war started I asked myself who I was, because I kept telling that I wasn't Croatian, and I wasn't Serbian, I was half-half.* A once cohesive identity became fragmented.

In Canada, participants found themselves between two states of being: being Yugoslav and being Canadian. By background and heritage they were Yugoslav, yet the country that had shaped them had fractured into new nations, and their lives no longer took place there. Yugoslavia was where participants were from and where friends and family lived, but participants’ daily lives where no longer embedded there. In Canada they were newcomers, recent immigrant who did not feel a Canadian identity, although they were grateful for the opportunities Canada had offered them. National identity was in flux, a transition not yet completed: participants were no longer purely Yugoslav, yet not really Canadian. One participant stated: *that's why I like Canada...there are so many immigrants from all over the world; we don't feel like immigrants here...from the beginning we feel that we are like everybody else.* But another stated that she felt alienated from both her home and from Canadian society: *I don't feel I belong.* Resolving the dilemma of identity and belonging is an individual struggle yet one that all refugees have to face. The most satisfying solution seems to be the development of a new, liminal identity: Yugoslav-Canadian.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Implications for Social Work

Introduction

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a relatively new research methodology in the field of social work. The method involves a journey of ever-increasing reflection (including self-reflection), and understanding of the topic, through an examination of the relationship of the parts to the whole and the meanings imbedded therein. At the end of the journey, it is appropriate to evaluate what has been learnt.

The Hermeneutic Phenomenological Method

Hermeneutic phenomenology aims to elucidate lived experience and to reveal meaning through a process of understanding and interpretation. One of my reasons for choosing this method was that previous studies have been criticized for objectifying and pathologizing refugees, and ignoring the strengths of refugee women (Camus-Jacques, 1989; Muecke, 1992). The choice of the hermeneutic method allows the experiences of the respondents to be presented in a direct and evocative manner, encouraging the reader to enter imaginatively into the experiences described. In so doing, the method provides a vehicle for deepening our understanding of refugee women as people living full and complex lives. The method also allows for the researcher to reflect on the meaning of the experiences, thus providing an added dimension of understanding. This was accomplished though the use of metaphor, the examination of the etymology of words, and drawing connections between the part: the young women who stepped out of her home with her child and her umbrella; and the whole: the myriad images evoked by this
incident, which coalesced into a variety of meanings embodying the whole experience of becoming a refugee.

The method also allows for the examination of projections and reinterpretations, as when the researcher was confronted with her own unacknowledged assumption that being a refugee was respondents’ defining experience. The open-ended and exploratory nature of the method also allowed the uncovering of participant’s own interpretations of their experiences, in which it emerged that they saw themselves as women whose lives had been shaped by, but not limited to, their refugee experience. They experienced themselves as people, not as refugees.

Given the method employed and the small sample size, theoretical constructs cannot be developed from this, nor can findings be generalized to a larger population. However, while keeping these limitations in mind, the study can be examined for findings that deepen our understanding of certain aspects of the refugee experience, and that suggest directions for furthering social work knowledge, education and practice.

**Contribution to Social Work Knowledge**

This study contributes to the literature on refugee women and increases our understanding of their experiences, hopes, fears, losses, disappointments and successes. Refugee women have not been extensively studied, and refugee women from the former Yugoslavia have not been the subject of much research in social work. This study therefore contributes to our understanding of the Yugoslav situation, its impact on women and the experiences of refugee women both in the former Yugoslavia and in the Canadian context. The study makes explicit the danger of objectifying and categorizing people for
the purpose of research, and reminds us that peoples lives are richer and more complex than the categories we may impose on them.

The findings highlight the importance of the first six months of settlement as a time of adjustment. The study indicates that this period is not necessarily a “honeymoon” phase as defined in the literature (Adler, 1975; Beiser, 1991; Herberg, 1993; Lin, Masuda & Tazuma, 1982; Oberg, 1960; Tyhurst, 1982), but a time of recuperation, where no new or demanding activities are undertaken. Findings appear to further reinforce the thesis, discussed in the literature review, that women adjust more easily than men to the immigrant experience, at least in their own estimation. The study also highlights the plight of young mothers who are isolated in their homes and unable to socialize or participate in language classes. The study also illuminates how Canadian society is viewed and experienced by newcomers. Findings further uncover strategies of resilience developed by participants in order to survive their experiences, strategies such as placing their experience in a larger, shared context; revising priorities; developing faith, facing reality with uncompromising honesty; strategies of resistance, involvement in meaningful activities, reordering expectations and developing a positive attitude. The study therefore deepens our understanding of the strategies refugee women use to strengthen their resilience.

Finally, the study also highlights the complexity of the struggle for identity experienced by people whose society has disintegrated, and who are faced with recreating categories by which to define themselves.
Implications for Social Work Education and Practice

The major implication of this study for social work education and practice is the reminder that respondents saw themselves as people, and social workers need to remain vigilant in their view of refugees as people living full and complex lives, and not to fall into the trap of categorizing them as “refugees” or “immigrants.”

In terms of service delivery, the study highlights the need for refugees to have time to adjust and recuperate from past experiences, and points out that the first six months of settlement may not be productive ones. This suggests the need for programs that provide opportunities for socialization and some orientation to the new society, without placing excessive performance demands on individuals during the first six months of settlement. Language training programs need to incorporate the needs of homebound young mothers, providing transportation and daycare services along with language classes. Opportunities for socializing with Canadians need to be created, since respondents complained of a lack of opportunities to meet Canadians.

In order to strengthen multicultural content and practice, social work education needs to invite speakers from other cultures, not only to teach about their immigrant culture but to teach workers how Canadian culture is experienced and viewed by newcomers. This study revealed some significant differences in priorities and in styles of socializing between Canadian and Yugoslav culture. One of the traits of an effective multicultural social worker is insight in one’s own worldview (Chau, 1990). Inviting speakers to comment on how Canadian culture is viewed by newcomers would enrich
social workers understanding of their own culture and contribute to their skills as multicultural workers.

**Suggestion for Future Research**

This study has raised some issues that merit further research. First, respondents reported positive experiences in the former Yugoslavia. Further research could examine whether other refugees from the former Yugoslavia shared such positive experiences or if their view of their society was different, and if this impacted on their experiences as refugees. Second, respondents stated that women adjusted more easily than men to the immigrant experience. This corresponds to findings in the literature. However, to date, no research has examined the extent to which this statement is true and generalisable, and what the possible causes are for the difference between men and women. Third, further research needs to be conducted on the differing experiences of refugees during the first six months of settlement, since the experiences of this small sample of respondents appears to contradict the theory of a “honeymoon phase.” Fourth, this study highlights the need to explore the topic of resiliency and the creative ways newcomers have found to overcome their negative experiences. Fifth, further research needs to be conducted on identify recovery in the face of the traumatic loss of home, when a culture is destroyed by civil war.

Furthermore, the literature review highlighted the need for further research to explore strategies for overcoming loss and cultural dislocation for those unable to return home, the effect of immigration on women’s self-esteem, the interplay between immigrants and host society and the strategies employed by the host society to adapt to
demographic changes as a result of the influx of newcomers. Studies reviewed on the
cross-generational transmission of trauma were also inconclusive and the topic merits
further research.

Finally, it is hoped that this study will encourage other social work researchers to
adopt a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, in their efforts to deepen our
understanding of the fascinating and complex topic that is human experience.
REFERENCES


Immigration and Refugee Board, Canada (1994). *Annual report for the year ending December, 1992.* Ottawa:Author


Letter of Intent Regarding Participation in the Study

Dear Participant,

I am a doctoral student in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary and as part of my degree requirements I am conducting a research project with women immigrants and refugees from the former Yugoslavia.

The purpose of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of women immigrants and refugees who came to Calgary as a result of the war in the former Yugoslavia. The information will be gathered through informal conversations with women about their lives, their situations, experiences, thoughts and feelings.

Should you agree to participate in this inquiry, I hope that you will permit me to tape record our conversations. The tapes will be transcribed into written documents and then analyzed. Another meeting will then be scheduled with you to go over the transcription. I want to make sure that I have fully understood your experience as you told it to me. This will give you an opportunity to approve or correct my understanding or to add new information.

Although you will be under no pressure to talk there is the possibility that upsetting issues may come up during our conversations. You are free to end the interview and/or withdraw from the project at any time.

The tape recordings, typed transcripts and any notes I may take will be kept in a locked cabinet in my office at the University of Calgary. The tape recordings will be coded so that your name does not appear, and the key to the code will be kept in a locked
drawer in my office. A final synthesis and interpretation of the data gathered from the interviews will be incorporated into a final dissertation. In this report, your anonymity will be preserved and identifying information will be omitted or disguised. At the end of the study, the tape recordings, transcripts and notes will be destroyed.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, you may withdraw from the study at any point, and the tape recordings and transcripts of your interview will be given to you. If you agree to participate in this study, please read and sign the attached consent form. Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project, and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigator, sponsor or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

If you have further questions concerning matters related to this research, please contact me: Margaretha Wilcke, Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary at (403) 220-5942. If you have any questions concerning your participation in this project, you may also contact my supervisor, Professor M. Rothery at (403) 220-5033.

Your participation in this research inquiry will be greatly appreciated and it will help others to understand more fully the experiences of women from the former Yugoslavia. I also hope that this inquiry will offer you something as you reflect on and share your experiences, and that you feel listened to and respected. I also hope that you
will feel free, as a participant in this inquiry, to ask questions, make comments and offer suggestions.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Margaretha Wilcke

Attachment.
APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Dear Margaretha Wilcke

I agree to participate in your research study on the experiences of immigrant and refugee women from the former Yugoslavia in Calgary. I understand that the records of our conversations will be kept confidential and that my anonymity will be preserved. I may ask to read the final dissertation or those sections that are relevant to me. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and that the tapes and transcripts of our conversations will be given to me. At the completion of the study, I understand that the tapes, transcripts and notes of our conversations will be destroyed.

_________________________________________  ________________________________
Signature of Interviewee                       Signature of Researcher

_________________________________________
Date                                           Date
APPENDIX C

Demographic Information Form

No. _____

Date: ________________

Name: ____________________________

Alias: ____________________________

Address: __________________________

Phone #: __________________________

Marital status: ______________________

Children: _________________________ Ages: _______________________

Home in Yugoslavia: __________________________

Number of years in Canada: ______________________

Status: Refugee _____ Immigrant _____